## TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

# COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS 

At Hearing Rooms 6A and 7A<br>Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, 38 Barrack Street, Hobart

## BEFORE:

The Honourable M. Neave AO (President and Commissioner) Professor L. Bromfield (Commissioner) The Honourable R. Benjamin AM (Commissioner)

On 14 June 2022 at 9.33am
(Day 11)

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Ms Ellyard, I'm going to make some orders first.

During previous hearings I explained that it will sometimes be necessary for the Commission to make an order which restricts the publication of certain information. The Commission is committed to being open and transparent respecting the preferences of victim-survivors and considering the impact that evidence from these hearings may have on the wider community.

This week the hearings are focused on a particular institutional setting, namely out-of-home care. The Commission recognises that evidence this week about vulnerable families, young people and children may be distressing, including for those who are working in the system and who are trying to do the right thing.

In this context the Commission's general approach this week will be to avoid identifying particular communities, carers, families, young people with children.

Our first witness today is a victim-survivor who, after careful consideration, would prefer not to be identified. The Commission respects that preference. In order to protect the identity of this victim-survivor and other relevant people, the Commission has decided to make a restricted publication order.

The Commission makes this order because it is satisfied that the public interest in the reporting on the identities of certain people who may be discussed during this hearing is outweighed by the preference of the victim-survivor and relevant privacy considerations.

I will now briefly explain how the order will work. The order requires the use of a pseudonym; this means that the witness to whom Ms Ellyard will refer will be called "Faye" rather than by their real name. The order requires that any information in relation to Faye's identity be kept confidential. This means that anyone who watches or reads the information given by Faye to the Commission must not share any information which may identify Faye or the people who will be referred to as "Allen Brady, Louis Brady or Ruth Brady". This information is not limited to their real names and may include other information which may identify them such as where they live or work.

In order to protect Faye's identity she will not give evidence personally; instead, I will invite Counsel Assisting to read her witness statement. A transcript of this evidence will be available in due course.

I make the order which will now be published. I encourage any journalist wishing to report on this hearing to discuss the scope of order with the Commission's media liaison officer. A copy of the order will be placed outside the hearing room and is available to anyone who needs a copy.

Yes, Ms Ellyard, I decided to read this prior to your opening just in case there are members of the press here so they will know what is to follow. So, Ms Ellyard.

MS ELLYARD: Thank you. Commissioners, for this week of hearings I appear with my learned friends, Ms Darcey and Ms Rhodes, to assist you by calling evidence and making submissions on the topic of the out-of-home care system in Tasmania and how it responds and identifies the risks of child sexual abuse.

I would like to begin by paying respect to the traditional and original owners of this land, the Muwinina people. I pay my respect to those who have passed before us and acknowledge today's Aboriginal people of Tasmania who are the custodians of this land.

The Commission's terms of reference call on it to consider child sexual abuse in institutional settings and out-of-home care is one such institution.

For the purposes of this week, a reference to out-of-home care means the formal care that is arranged or provided by the Tasmanian Government to children and young people who are assessed as being unable to live safely at home. It includes foster care, kinship care, sibling group care, residential care and therapeutic services.

Children living in out-of-home care will have been placed there by the state and will ordinarily be under the guardianship of the Secretary to the Department of Communities, or what used to be called state wards or wards of the state.

It is important to note that in the past an important and a common form of out-of-home care was orphanages and children's homes. The Commission is very aware that some children who lived in those institutions experienced abuse, including sexual abuse, and that the effects of that abuse have been profound and lifelong.

Because those bricks and mortar forms of institutions are no longer part of the out-of-home care system in Tasmania, and because the Commission's purpose and focus is to consider the system now and how it can be improved into the future, the stories of those who lived in orphanages and children's homes won't be a focus of this hearing but those stories which the Commission has heard and received about the experiences of children in those settings are an important part to the background of the evidence that we will hear.

Children who are placed in out-of-home care will usually have lived through a range of difficult and traumatic experiences in their family of origin or in the care system. Children in out-of-home care include an overrepresentation of children with Aboriginal heritage, children with disabilities and children with other potential vulnerabilities. Many of these children are at risk of falling out of sight of the broader community; they overwhelmingly come from circumstances of disadvantage as do their families of origin.

Sadly, the Commission has seen that some children represent the second or even third generation of their families to be in care. In many cases they will be children who do not have access to the advocacy of their parents or who might be less engaged at school, and so, children in the out-of-home care system rely on that system to meet their needs and to protect them from the risks of harm including the risks of child sexual abuse. These children need a system which protects them. One of the questions to be asked this week is whether the system does sufficiently protect this cohort of highly vulnerable children from the risks of child sexual abuse, in the light of evidence which suggests that, despite a decade of ongoing reforms, some children are still at risk and some of those children are being significantly harmed in out-of-home care.

The other question that we will consider this week is
how the system responds when children in out-of-home care do experience child sexual abuse. We'11 explore the policies and practices that are in place to respond to allegations and how the system can be improved to support children who are sexually abused, including how the system can ensure that children receive appropriate therapeutic supports to assist them to recover from the abuse that they've experienced.

The community may not be aware of the process by which children come to be in out-of-home care. Children in out-of-home care in Tasmania are placed there after a process which will ordinarily begin with a notification or a referral to Child Safety Services through the Advice \& Referral Line about which the Commission has previously heard evidence. The notification will suggest that the child is "at risk".

Under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, a child will be at risk if they have been, are being or are likely to be abused or neglected, or where their guardians are unable or unwilling to prevent the child from being abused and neglected.

After a process which will have involved investigation by Child Safety Services and an application to the court, a child can be made subject to an order which places them under the guardianship of the Secretary. Such orders will be made by the court where the court is itself satisfied that the child is at risk and where the court is satisfied that the order is necessary to ensure the care and protection of the child.

Once the child is under the guardianship of the Secretary, the Secretary is responsible for decisions about where the child will live, their education, their medical care and other aspects of their lives. They must consider the best interests of the child in making decisions about them and must provide for the child's physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional development.

As the evidence will reveal, the Secretary meets that obligation of providing for children under guardianship by way of a system which has both governmental and non-governmental components. Some out-of-home care is provided by the state, other care is provided under contract by non-governmental organisations and we'11 hear
further evidence today to explain that process in detail.


#### Abstract

The National Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse made, amongst its many observations, the observation that the safety of children in out-of-home care should be a priority. Children in care have been forcibly removed from their families of origin and placed in the care of the state to ensure their safety, so the prevention of abuse in out-of-home care must be a primary concern for the state.


The National Royal Commission also found that, despite reforms to the sector, there are still weaknesses and systemic failures that continue to place children in care at risk of sexual abuse from three different directions: firstly, from adults within the child protection system such as foster carers or residential care workers. Secondly, from adults outside of the child protection system or placement, including through child exploitation, and thirdly, at risk from other children in the system, perhaps another foster child or another child in the care placement who engages in harmful sexual behaviours.

Turning briefly to each of those three sources of risks for children. The National Royal Commission found that most adults in the out-of-home care system are hardworking and committed individuals who provide children the supports that they need, and no doubt that is also true in Tasmania. But, the nature of out-of-home care means that children are exposed to the potential risk of child sexual abuse from adults within that system; from foster carers and their families, from child safety staff, from staff in the non-governmental organisations that are contracted by the Department of Communities to provide care. This means that how staff are recruited, trained and supervised, what Codes of Conduct guide their work practices, how other staff are supported to note and report concerns about boundary blurring and investigations, are all important ways in which the risk of child sexual abuse from within the system can be managed and avoided.

Adults outside the out-of-home care system also provide a source of risk to children, often through child exploitation. Child sexual exploitation is where children are coerced or manipulated into engaging in sexual activity in return for something, perhaps a gift of alcohol or money. The perpetrator often initially grooms these
children online. Sadly, there are adults who actively target children in out-of-home care, particularly children in residential care. Some of those adults use social media to make less visible initial contact and develop connections with children which then evolve into so-called "relationships" which might not be recognised at the time for what they are - inappropriate and abusive.

The National Royal Commission in its work identified that even Child Protection staff and out-of-home care workers and police can misunderstand child sexual exploitation and misidentify it as "adolescent sexual experimentation", or normal behaviour for children in out-of-home care, or a "free choice" that's being made by the young person.

The Commission will recall in week 1 of its hearings you heard evidence from Associate Professor Tim Moore that children in care, particularly in residential care, often live in a dehumanised and sterile environment in which no-one says that they love them, no-one hugs them. Such children are desperate for connection and that makes them vulnerable to adults who might make them feel special but who then lead them into problematic and exploitative situations.

The common factors for children who are sexually exploited in out-of-home care include, firstly, having experienced child sexual abuse on their family of origin, or having a history of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours themselves in their family of origin.

Across Australia there have been some well-published and well-publicised instances of child exploitation of children in care. One of those instances was a case which horrified the Tasmanian community. Just over a decade ago now a child was subjected to serious and prolonged sexual exploitation while she was under the guardianship of the Secretary. Some of those responsible were later convicted and imprisoned, but the relevance of that awful case for the work of this Commission is the process failures within the Child Safety Services system, the system through which the Secretary was exercising parental responsibility for that child which led to the sexual exploitation being able to occur. Those process failures were the subject of internal and external reports at the time and some of the many reviews which have been conducted into the child
safety and out-of-home-care system in Tasmania.
Turning to harmful sexual behaviours as the third potential source of risk for children in out-of-home care. As the Commission heard in week 1, harmful sexual behaviours includes a range of sexual behaviours carried out by children which are beyond their developmental age appropriateness and which can involve coercion or violence and which can be directed towards peers, younger children or adults. And in fact this form of child sexual abuse is the most prevalent and it can be very difficult to manage in the out-of-home care setting because of the increased presence of children in out-of-home care who have trauma histories, including histories of child sexual abuse which makes them at increased risk of either engaging in the behaviour or becoming victims of it.

The National Royal Commission found that there are organisational features of out-of-home care settings which appear to increase the risk that children will engage in harmful sexual behaviours in care and those organisational features include normalising force as a part of male sexuality; the attitude that girls are responsible for defending themselves against abuse; a culture that normalises sexual aggression as part of normal sexual conduct or experimentation; a culture of silence regarding sex and child sexual abuse in out-of-home care services where child sexual abuse is not discussed with children; lack of adequate training for staff to differentiate between what is age appropriate behaviour and what is abusive sexual behaviour between peers; a lack of reporting; placing child sexual abuse victim-survivors and those who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviours in the same placement; having a higher ratio of men to women in young people's residential care facilities; placing young people with adjustment difficulties together; and finally where a hyper-sexualised culture has developed during the sexual abuse histories of children in the placement.

The Royal Commission made recommendations for increasing the safety of children and protecting them from this kind of abuse; it included adequate screening, authorisation and training for carers and staff; ongoing supervision and training on how to keep children safe; adequate monitoring and supporting of out-of-home care placements; regular visiting; creating opportunities to talk with children on their own; directly observing carers
and their interactions with children, and establishing residential care as a safe, supportive and therapeutic environment for children with complex needs staffed by skilled and experienced workers.

Turning from what's known and been revealed in the work in other places, I turn to frame the size of this issue for Tasmania.

In April 2022 there were just over 1,000 children living in out-of-home care in Tasmania and that seems to have been a number that's broadly consistent in recent years. Most children were living in home-based care, that includes kinship care and foster care, with a small number in residential care.

The information provided to the Commission of Inquiry by the state indicates that between January 2013 and July 2021 - that's an 8.5 year period - there were a total of 439 allegations received of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care. Some children were the subject of more than one report, so those figures represent 299 individual children who were the subject of at least one report. 439 allegations over 8.5 years equates to, on average, 52 allegations a year or one allegation per week, and of course we know that child sexual abuse is underreported both at the time and even many years later.

Of the 439 allegations made over that period, 289 related to girls and 150 to boys. 122 of the allegations related to children who are Aboriginal. 120 of the allegations related to children who had a disability, and in both cases the true number may be higher because not all files recorded that information about the child who was alleged to have been harmed.

So, what these figures received from the state indicate, that roughly one in every 36 children in out-of-home care is the subject of at least one allegation of child sexual abuse. To understand those figures provided by the state better those working for the Commission have selected 22 children for a deeper file review. That review included being provided with the relevant Child Safety Service files for those children, including case notes, reports and reviews, and that process enabled the Commission to form a clear picture of the pattern of issues and outcomes for those children.

From those 22 cases, four have been selected to serve as case study examples in the course of this hearing. The case study examples raise themes of harmful sexual behaviours, sexual exploitation, the recruitment and support of carers, the need for therapeutic responses for children who have experienced trauma, the proper resourcing of the Child Safety Service system, and the inherent complexities of the cohort of children who live in out-of-home care.

Those case studies have been de-identified to protect the children involved; they'll be used to examine the ways in which the systems did or did not respond to meet those children's vulnerabilities and needs. What those case studies will show is that this is a highly complex and challenging area of professional practice; there are sometimes no clear answers to the issues with which carers and Child Safety Officers are confronted, but the case studies will also show examples of children being exposed to preventable harm because the systems didn't respond as they should have when clear risks of sexual abuse were present.

Important evidence relevant to this week's themes was given in week 1 by a number of witnesses, including Dr Burton of TasCOSS, Ms Sonya Enkelmann, Associate Professor Tim Moore, Dr Michael Salter, Professor McDermott and $\operatorname{Dr}$ Malvaso. In particular, some of that evidence was about the Child Safety Service and the policy structures which guide its work. It's important to note that, of course, the Commission is not inquiring into the Child Safety Service more generally, but the evidence is that there are aspects of that structure's work and operations which directly affect how well the out-of-home care component of the Child Safety Service system can work to protect children.

Dr Burton gave evidence of observation made by TasCOSS members about the out-of-home care system and its intersection with Child Safety Services. Members working in that sector believe that Child Safety Service officers are very overloaded and overstretched. There are workforce issues about training staff, the turnover, recruitment and retention. The combination of the lack of staff training and the high workloads, in Dr Burton's assessment, meant that there was a very high threshold for reporting and
responding to child sexual abuse.
Dr Burton said that member organisations of TasCOSS are ready to implement the National Standards for Child Safety and to work under a consistent broad framework that includes accreditation for carers, a Carers Register and a Reportable Conduct Scheme, but they need guidance and support from the government to develop and implement a consistent and robust structure for their operations.

Other witnesses this week will pick up that theme of the importance of standards, the absence of sufficient monitoring of the quality of care provided to children in out-of-home care, and the extent to which the system tolerates a level of risk for children in out-of-home care which it would not tolerate for children in the broader community.

Ms Sonya Enkelmann's evidence was that the Department of Communities has a reputation for being closed and defensive with a crisis-driven and reactive approach. She observed in her time there a hesitancy for genuine open consultation and a focus on maintaining control of the message. She concluded that there were some wonderful outcomes being achieved in out-of-home care because of what she called sterling individuals and the relationships that they had developed, but that those good outcomes weren't because of the system.

She concluded that in some circumstances there was inadequate support for carers, that children were not routinely and consistently provided with therapeutic support so that they could form healthy attachments. In the case of residential care where children are not in a home environment, the continuity of well qualified workers was important so that children could form meaningful relationships.

Ms Enkelmann noted that case managers are people that children wanted to have a safe relationship with, but many children and carers never or rarely saw the case manager because of the case manager's high workloads or because of the high turnover which made it difficult to form relationships of trust.

Ms Enkelmann thought that case managers were themselves at risk of vicarious trauma because they were
unable to provide the services and the job that they wanted to do with the resultant burnout and a high turnover of staff because of stress.

Ms Enkelmann noted that out-of-home care workers, who she saw as incredibly dedicated and committed, had unsustainable caseloads too, meaning that they were essentially restricted to crisis work. Ms Enkelmann's view was that the inability of the system to meet the child's needs and to support the carer to understand the child's needs meant that the child became more vulnerable to harm so that the out-of-home care system itself had the potential to become abusive.

Ms Enkelmann told you in her evidence that her work at the department had included work on the development of out-of-home care standards, a model for Family-Based Care and continuous improvement frameworks, but all of that work appears to be part of a long line of recommendations that have been made or work done but that hasn't been implemented.

Again, many of Ms Enkelmann's observations will be echoed in other evidence that you will hear this week; evidence about the demanding nature of the work in this area and about the ways in which under-resourcing, a lack of training and support and gaps in policy are all combining to place children at risk or to result in inadequate responses when they do experience harm.

There will also be evidence about what is perceived by some to be an adversarial relationship that develops between Child Safety Services on the one hand and foster carers and advocates on the other, and a concern being expressed that sometimes it's a delicate balance to be struck between advocating for a child and falling foul of the powers that be in Child Safety Services with potential consequences for the child being removed or future advocacy being less successful.

All of this evidence raises questions of both policy and culture. Recalling the evidence of Professor Palmer and $\operatorname{Dr}$ Guerzoni in week 1, the question to be posed is: does the out-of-home care system have a culture that is focused on the safety of children and do its policies and practices serve that goal?

The evidence to be called this week will reveal that the out-of-home care system as part of the broader Child Safety Service system has been under review and subject to change for over a decade. These reviews have included reviews both from within government and from external agencies like the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Between 2011 and July 2021 there were nine relevant reports, all of which made recommendations; many recommendations were accepted by the government. When one looks to those reports, many of the themes emerging from them are the same themes that are going to emerge this week: lack of support for carers; poor recruitment practices; insufficient training and support; inappropriate placements; children being permitted to live away from placement; inadequate monitoring of children and of out-of-home care providers, including of their funding arrangements; poor record-keeping; poor information sharing; the lack of accreditation, registration and licensing systems for out-of-home care providers; poor support for children's own participation in decision-making process; and poor compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principle, coupled with an overrepresentation, as I have said, of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

The evidence will be that there have been new systems introduced and new initiatives planned, but the strain on the system and on the workforce remains, and it appears there may continue to be an absence of clear and consistent policies and standards to guide and direct Child Safety staff, foster agencies and carers in the important work of protecting children from child sexual abuse and responding to child sexual abuse where it occurs.

The Commission heard in week 1 about the importance of Child Safety Standards and Reportable Conduct Schemes. Although both are foreshadowed, neither are yet in place in Tasmania. Work on standards for out-of-home care has been in train for some time but there are no finalised standards in place.

Such standards have existed at a national level since 2011 and many other national non-government providers comply with them, including ones who work in Tasmania and in other states.

The Commission has heard from witnesses who have been
engaged to work on new initiatives, like Ms Enkelmann, and programs to improve Child Safety responses about the way they've been sidelined or about how those programs have not been implemented.

Turning to the question of how we can hear the voices of children this week. A number of expert witnesses have already told the Commission about the importance of listening to children and of systems being designed with a child's perspective in mind, and so it's important of course that the Commission's own processes follow that model and ensure that voices are heard.

In week 1 of the hearings the Commission heard from Associate Professor Tim Moore about his work engaging with children and young people in Tasmania to explore their perceptions of safety within institutional contexts. Professor Moore and his colleagues interviewed children from each of the institutional contexts that are being considered by the Commission, and that included children who had experienced living in out-of-home care.

Professor Moore's final report is not yet available, but the comments made by children who participated in the study about what made them feel safe or unsafe in out-of-home care are powerful. Their perspectives highlight what the National Royal Commission has said about the risks which children in out-of-home care face and I want to take the opportunity to quote from some of the things that those children have said.

Firstly, it's important to note that some children had positive experiences of Child Safety Services workers. A 15-year-old girl who lived in out-of-home care said:

> I think most of them are doing well. They
> will advocate for your situation and they
> will talk to you, make sure you're okay.
> Obviously, if something's going on they are
> most of the time good at helping. When I
> was not in a very good place I was talking
> to my carer at the time and she went to my
> Child Safety Officer and by Child Safety Officer got me into Headspace and it worked out in the end.

Another child, also female aged 15 , said:

Before it was quite stressful because we didn't have a good caseworker. Our new worker does her job really well and we are in contact with her most of the time.

However, other children consulted in the study reflected on the impact of not having a worker available. A 17-year-old boy said:

I didn't even know my caseworker back then.
I don't have one now. I'm on an order but
I don't have one. Child Protection have
not assigned me a caseworker, I haven't got
one, but I've got someone higher up who's
trying to fill those shoes but you're not
doing the same job because you're not
seeing me.

Some children had experiences of not being heard when they expressed concerns. A 16-year-old boy said:

I remember saying $I$ wanted to go to a
different house because $I$ was being
assaulted by a peer, I don't want to be
here.

And he said:

I said to my carers, I'd be like, please don't let the peer come back.

And the carer said:

It's going to be fine. It wasn't. They should actually listen.

Some children reported that they 1 ive with amazing carers who care for them, support them and protect them from harm. For those young people the carers needed to not only be warm and caring but also to be able to deal with the trauma and the behaviours that the children might be engaging in because traumas had not been appropriately treated and resolved.

Some children interviewed reported that workers were able to take quick and decisive action when they had
concerns and to move them to another house if that was appropriate, but this required that they had access to their worker and that the worker believed them and that the worker took their concerns seriously and that other care options were available for them and that wasn't always the case.

One 17-year-old girl said:
I tried to tell people, "This isn't working and this is what they're doing" and they didn't believe me because my foster carer said that $I$ was being a little hoodlum and I'm stealing. I was doing this, I was stealing food out of the cupboard because they didn't feed me.

The introduction of the role of the Child Advocate as a position inside the Department of Communities was seen by some as helpful. One 17-year-old girl said:

I had met the Child Advocate through a group that we did, so I knew her and I texted her and I was like, "This isn't okay", and she was like, "Sure, okay", and then she dealt with those two times that I needed here. She will get you out of an unsafe situation immediately. If there's an actual problem she does this detective thing where she dives deep in the case and as soon as she finds something wrong she rectifies it, and because she's a bigger person they immediately snap into action and do what they need to do.

But I think it's scary if you don't know her. She's a very higher up person. It's scary to contact someone like that especially if you're 12. Imagine you've never heard of her and someone says, "Oh you should go to the Advocate." As a young child you're like, "Okay, how do I do that?" Normally you would ask your parents or the adults but if the adults are the people you're having trouble with, then you know you can't rely on them.

The young people who Professor Moore spoke to believed that sometimes the system felt that it was fine to move a child from an unsafe circumstance and thereby reduce the risk, but they didn't necessarily appreciate what the child or young person needed to heal.

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& \text { A } 17 \text {-year-old female said: } \\
& \text { It's weird because the system, you expect } \\
& \text { it to know how trauma works but the way } \\
& \text { they act suggests that they don't. The way } \\
& \text { they act is that six months of therapy will } \\
& \text { fix you, or as soon as you move out of that } \\
& \text { dangerous situation the triggers are gone. } \\
& \text { But that's not how it works. That's not } \\
& \text { how a kid's mind works. That's not how } \\
& \text { anybody's mind works. It's going to } \\
& \text { linger. That's going to stay with that } \\
& \text { kid. }
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That same young woman spoke about the absence of support and understanding for their past experiences and how she had to manage her trauma alone. She said:

> People just need to let things out, and some people let things out through family and friends, but some people don't have those people, and some people have just such complex emotions that they need to see a therapist. It's just reminding kids of these emotions and helping them through them will probably stop the violent behaviours.
> She went on to say:
> Sometimes I just feel like I can't turn my emotions off, and my brain just goes into rational mode. That's how I got through it. I compartmentalise a lot and I shove things down and then six months later I'll start crying about the really scary things that happened because, yeah, I have done a lot of mental gymnastics to try and deal with what I've been through and I'm starting to unravel them, but it's really hard to unravel a triple hexagon in my
head.
The Commission will recall that in week 1 we heard evidence from Professor McDermott about his review which had identified the absence of suitable mental health support for children in care and plans for a new CAMHS service to meet that need. Those interviewed by Professor Moore echoed that evidence about the need for that service.

One young man who'd experienced significant childhood abuse and unresolved trauma which he felt led to his mental health issues recalled that because of an absence of support he was placed involuntarily in hospital.

He said:
I ended up going to hospital because I had suicidal thoughts because of my trauma and my pain and my stress from everything that had happened. They don't give a fuck about trauma; they just label you with something and throw you in a ward.

Placement decisions, where children were placed, is another theme that emerged in the discussions that Professor Moore had with young people. One child said:

I was in a placement with these kids. They had never been in care before. And one of them, I think she was 13 , she was quite violent and aggressive. And it was shocking to me because she was such a lovely girl most of the time. And then if she got angry, it just happened and you wouldn't expect it. I think if you already have a child in your care that is not stable or sensible you shouldn't put other children there that have a background with people like that. You just shouldn't put a kid there full stop.

I wasn't scared of her being able to hurt me, I was more scared for her safety. She would try to run away. And their parents were very violent. If they found them, they would not hold back. I feel bad for their situation. But at the same time I'm
also in a bad situation, so $I$ need to be able to feel safe where I'm not having to be constantly anxious about what might happen next.

A 15-year-old girl in out-of-home care.
I expressed the gratitude of the Commission to the young people who participated in Associate Professor Moore's work. Of course, in addition to those young people the Commission has also heard directly from victim-survivors who have told their stories in meetings with the Commissioners, or who have provided evidence in submissions and confidential witness statements and we know that all those perspectives will be brought to bear in how the Commission frames its findings and its recommendations.

As we embark on the coming week of evidence and picking up on remarks made by the President, we acknowledge that this will be a very distressing time for many people for many reasons.

Firstly, it will be a distressing time for survivors of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care, it may bring back intrusive and painful memories for them.

Secondly, it may be very upsetting for parents whose children are in out-of-home care to hear about the experiences of other children who were not kept safe. It may make them worry about whether those awful things have happened to their children and about whether they can be confident that their children will be protected from harm.

Thirdly, it can be expected that staff in the department who already feel under pressure and whose role is a difficult one even in ideal circumstances, will feel uncomfortable at this degree of external scrutiny of their work, even though the focus is not on individuals, but on systemic issues which affects the safety of children and staff.

Fourthly, foster and kinship carers and the organisations which support them may feel that their hard work and commitment to caring for vulnerable children is being undervalued or dismissed or tainted by association with examples of poor practice.

It's not our intention to cause anybody distress. We recognise that these are very difficult conversations and that the work done by all in this area is professionally and personally challenging. The vicarious trauma which many staff and carers carry with them is real. We recognise that decision-making and staff behaviour can be influenced by that trauma, as well as by the supports and processes that surround their work.

In calling the evidence this week we recognise, too, the efforts of many working in the broader child safety system and out-of-home care system. There can be no doubt that many children are safer in their kinship or foster placement than they would otherwise be, and there's no doubt that many children in out-of-home care are thriving, supported by carers, Child Safety Officers, therapists and other supports in their local community. There will be children who grew up in out-of-home care who were protected from harm while in care, whose concerns were responded to appropriately and who were supported to heal from past trauma. But at the same time the evidence will be that the system has failed to prevent sexual harm to some children in state care and that it has failed to respond to sexual harm when it has occurred.

There can be no doubt that the system needs to be improved and that the many reviews and innovations proposed over the last decade have not achieved that improvement.

Recalling the evidence of Professor Palmer from week 1, an organisation that is designed to prevent child sexual abuse needs to be what he called a "high reliability organisation". It needs to be an organisation that welcomes analysis and examination of near misses. It needs to empower staff to recognise and act on signs of grooming, exploitation and abuse. It needs to foster a culture where it's okay to discuss the risks of child sexual abuse and where children are encouraged and supported to come forward if they have been abused; such a system will be better for children, it will be better for carers and it will be better for staff.

Turning then to the structure of the evidence this week. Today, after hearing the story of victim-survivor Faye who, as the President has indicated, has elected not to give oral evidence but who has given permission for her statement to be read, the Commission will hear from the
current Executive Director of the Children and Families section of the Department of Communities, Ms Claire Lovel1.

Ms Lovel1's evidence will set the scene for the week by describing the current structure and operation of the out-of-home care system, the respective roles of government and non-governmental organisations and how child sexual abuse allegations in out-of-home care are received and investigated.

After Ms Love11, the Commission will hear from Dr Robyn Miller, the CEO of MacKillop Family Services and the former principal practitioner in the Child Protection Division of the Department of Health and Human Services in Victoria. Dr Miller's evidence will describe best practices in keeping children safe in out-of-home care settings, including the importance of educating and supporting carers, having child-centred systems and conducting deep dive reviews for children in care.

Then in the final session for today we will hear from Dr Kim Backhouse of the University of Tasmania and Dr Julian Watchorn of the Foster and Kinship Carers Association of Tasmania.

On Wednesday we'11 consider the particular risks of child sexual abuse for vulnerable children who are in or who could be in the out-of-home care system. Jodie Stokes from Anglicare will give evidence about young people who are at risk of homelessness but who may not be receiving an out-of-home care response.

Heather Sculthorpe, the CEO of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre will give evidence about some of the particular needs of Tasmanian Aboriginal children and the structures which could best serve them.

Her evidence wil1 be followed by the evidence of Professor Muriel Bamblett and Mr Richard Weston, who wil1 describe approaches in Victoria and New South Wales for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

We will then hear from two witnesses, Caroline Brown and Jack Davenport, about their experiences and observations of the out-of-home care system in Tasmania, and then in the afternoon expert evidence on the causes and treatment of harmful sexual behaviours will be given by

Dr Gemma McKibbin and Ms Jenny Wing.
On Thursday we'11 look again to other jurisdictions, in this case Queensland and South Australia, about their models for effective oversight and advocacy for children in out-of-home care. We'll hear from a witness who was sexually abused in foster care by a foster family member and by another member of her local community in circumstances where Child Safety Services were largely absent from her life although she was in the Secretary's care.

Then we'll hear evidence from a number of representatives from foster care agencies regarding the systems and processes which they use and those which they are required to use by the department to protect children from the risk of sexual abuse. There will also be evidence on Thursday from Tasmania Police about the powers and responsibilities of police in disrupting child sexual abuse and investigating allegations of sexual abuse.

Finally on Friday we'll hear firstly from a victim-survivor whose experiences of sexual abuse in out-of-home care contributed to his trajectory of juvenile and adult criminal offending. And then evidence will be called from three key office holders in the governmental structure relevant to out-of-home care: firstly, the Child Advocate, a position created three years ago in response to one of the reviews that I've mentioned; secondly, the Commissioner for Children and Young People who carries out systemic monitoring of the out-of-home care system; and finally, the Secretary of the Department of Communities who will answer questions arising from the evidence heard this week and from the case reviews that the Commission has conducted into cases where there were allegations of child sexual abuse, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviours.

The Secretary's evidence will also be an opportunity for the Commission to understand the current progress of reforms which have been announced or which are in train, including the proposed transfer of the Child Safety Services into a new Department of Education, Children and Young People.

The Secretary's being called not only because he's the head of the department which provides or contracts for the provision of out-of-home care, he's the guardian for nearly
all children in out-of-home care. He's their parent. And whether the system permits him and the community to be confident that the children in his care are safe and protected from child sexual abuse is the ultimate focus of this hearing, and we will welcome his views and responses to the matters that are raised during this week's evidence.

If the Commission pleases, I'll now call on Ms Rhodes to introduce and read into the transcript the evidence of Faye.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you, Ms Ellyard. Before Ms Rhodes does so, I just wanted to remind any journalists and others who are present that there is an order in relation to the evidence of the person "Faye", and that the order will be posted on the door of the hearing room.

MS ELLYARD: As the Commission pleases.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you, Ms Rhodes.
MS RHODES: Thank you. I'm reading from the sworn statement of the person known as "Faye". There have been some redactions made to the statement to protect her identity and potential other victims.

I'd first like to thank Faye for trusting the Commission with her statement and for allowing me to read it into the record:

I grew up as part of a large family. My siblings were all older than me. After an event neither of my parents were in a position to care for me or my siblings for any extended period.

I was placed in foster care for the first time when I was young and moved in and out of foster care from this time. I would go back to one of my parents between foster placements. My parents weren't in a position to look after us.

In the mid-90s when $I$ was in late primary school my sibling and I were placed with a foster family in Tasmania. The foster parents were named Ruth and Allen Brady.

Another sibling was placed in a different foster home and I don't recall what happened to my other siblings.

Ruth and Allen were older parents at the time, they had a nice home. I would describe them as being well off. They had lots of food. It felt comforting being in a home with all of these things after growing up so poor. Their parenting style was strict but offered stability and structure. This stability was very different to what I had experienced with my own family and was something I needed at the time.

The Bradys had biological children, they were all much older than me. Their son's name is Louis Brady. Louis was an employee in the local area, he lived independently outside of the Brady family home. We would visit Louis occasionally for the day but our initial relationship with him wasn't close.

At some time during the mid-1990s Louis was fired from his position at the workplace. I wasn't told why, but I was told by Ruth that "they're saying he's done things but he hasn't done them". As a result Louis moved back to the Brady family home. I later learned that he was fired from his role because he had had a relationship with someone underage.

When Louis moved back to the house there must have been some sort of red flag raised with Children and Youth Services. Three staff from Children and Youth Services visited the house and had a conversation with my sibling and $I$ in the presence of Ruth. They told us that Louis was moving home and asked us how we felt about it. They then asked us what we wanted to do. I don't recall them telling us why Louis had been fired from his role. Both my sibling and I told them that we wanted to stay in
the home.
Up until this point Ruth and Allen provided us with stability, warmth, food and other things we didn't have in our own home. We hadn't been told what had happened with Louis and didn't understand the implications or risk of him coming to live in the house with us. We were children. We should have been removed from the house by Children and Youth Services, at least until the allegation in relation to Louis had been resolved.

I recall that Children and Family Services told us that they would visit us regularly after this, but they didn't.

In the late 90s, when I was aged less than 15 years old, Louis gained the friendship and trust of my sibling and me. He would always act cool around us, often going against Ruth, allowing us to do things and taking our side. Louis was just this cool adult, that's how the relationship developed. We liked him. Looking back now, I can see that he was grooming us.

Louis would do things like wrestle me on the ground in front of everyone and when he did this I could feel his genitals pressing against me. He would play with us, try to get really close to us and kiss us. This was the first stage of abuse and it got worse from there.

My sibling and I shared a large room as our bedroom. There was a partition between us which separated our beds and gave us privacy from each other. All of the other bedrooms and living areas within the house were elsewhere. This set up and location of our room provided Louis the privacy to come from the rest of the family and do what he wanted.

He started to come to our room and sexually
abuse me before I went to sleep. I can't recall exactly how many times this occurred but it was quite a lot. I don't want to provide any more detail of the sexual abuse in this statement.

One night in the late 90s I woke up in the middle of the night and I could feel someone's presence. I looked for my digital alarm clock and couldn't see it. I then felt Louis unbuttoning the shirt of my pyjamas. The top buttons were already undone and I could feel him going for another. I could smell alcohol on his breath, I was terrified and remember my heart beating really fast. I woke up, Louis left. I don't remember why he left, I just remember him walking out. I was in early high school when this occurred, so would have been less than 15 years old.

What happened that night was my breaking point, I was so terrified and angry. I didn't want him to do these things to me so decided that $I$ wouldn't speak to him. For the week I completely ignored Louis. It became this big joke across the house that I was an immature child not talking to him. Louis and Ruth were literally laughing at me about it.

One morning around a week later I saw my sibling play wrestling with Louis on the ground. They knew I wasn't speaking to Louis and that something was wrong so I became really angry and upset with them for playing with him. I said to them, "Stop, you've got to stay away from him". They asked me if something had happened and I said yes. I didn't tell them everything but told them what had happened a week earlier. After this we made a pact to never leave each other alone with him again.

My sibling decided that they would take it upon themselves to tell Ruth about what had
happened. They told me to go to school and said that they would deal with it. After I had been at school for a short time I was told by one of the duty students that I needed to go home. Our house was only a short distance from the school so I was able to walk back.

When I got back to the house Ruth asked me what had happened. I told her what had happened on the night Louis woke me and she responded by saying, "Oh, is that all?"

I had two conversations with Ruth that day where I told her what happened. The second conversation occurred in the lounge room and I told Ruth that Louis had touched me on the vagina. She just laughed at me so I ran to my room crying.

The third conversation occurred at the dining table. On this occasion Allen was in the kitchen and was able to hear what I was saying. After I described the abuse Allen said words to the effect of, "This has happened too many times. It can't be a coincidence, they must be telling the truth".

Children and Youth Services came shortly after this and took me from my home. I assume Ruth and Allen had called them. Before we left, I wasn't given a chance to pack any of my things, they just took me. I recall that around a week later Children and Youth Services got Ruth to pack my things and send them to me but she kept a whole heap of my stuff. I went from having things to not, as a result of Ruth withholding my things after I had made allegations against her son.

It was awful. Children and Youth Services should have packed my things and taken them with me. After leaving the Brady house I went to live with another person. She was a brave woman to take me in with everything
that was going on. I don't recall her getting any support from Children and Youth Services, nothing that $I$ was privy to anyway.

My sibling stayed with the Bradys for a time after I left. I don't understand why, but my understanding is that Children and Youth Services let my sibling stay. I don't recall where they moved to after they left the Brady's house.

I believe that Ruth either knew what was happening and ignored it or was in denial. Allen worked nightshift so he was completely oblivious. Prior to being placed with the Bradys I had always been paired up with another of my siblings. My other siblings would often be placed separately but that sibling and I were always together. We were close and I was heartbroken not to be placed with them this time. I recall Ruth later saying that she didn't want them there. There was only ever female foster children in the house. It seems odd to me that a parent would request only female children in the home.

After $I$ was removed from the Brady family I believe that Children and Youth Services continued to place female children in the home. It is shocking to me that they continued to put young girls in the house despite my allegations and the clear risk Louis posed.

After I was removed from the house, Children and Youth Services encouraged me to make a statement to the police. They came and spoke to me at my house and I went through what happened. I don't recal 1 much about this process but $I$ remember Children and Youth Services were present along with some police officers. They told me that even if I didn't want to proceed with the charges it would be useful to have my statement if I decided to proceed in the
future.
Initially I was going to go forward with the police charges but a week or so later I decided not to proceed. It was all too hard and I was torn because of my affection towards Ruth. I was missing her as a mum. After I dropped the charges I arranged to meet with Ruth through Children and Youth Services but she never showed.

I was referred to the Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) and received some formal counselling. I recall that the building I went to was cold and dark and I didn't feel comfortable. Because I didn't feel comfortable, I didn't want to talk about what happened. I'm not sure if the barriers were due to the environment or were existing internal barriers that I already carried. I was so young and vulnerable and I just didn't feel comfortable. I also wanted to be cool and not acknowledge that this sort of thing happened to me.

Around the mid-2000s I was contacted by a member of police or another representative of the state who asked me if I wanted to be involved in the court case against Louis Brady. I was told that there were four or five other girls making complaints against Louis; this included a child who had spent time with the Brady family before I did and a girl who had also lived with the Brady family. I was told that that person was aware of my abuse so had alerted them to $i t$.

I provided a statement to the police, which was awful. I went into the police station to make my statement. Prior to making the statement I had been told by someone that I had to recall three separate incidences of abuse for Louis to be charged with maintaining a sexual relationship with me. I went in to provide the statement with
this in mind.

When $I$ recounted the first time $I$ was sexually abused by Louis the person taking my statement said, "Oh, is that all it was?" This has really stuck with me, I felt like I'd been judged. While the first incident $I$ had spoken about was minor in the scheme of what happened to me, it was still significant and confronting for a child to experience.

I went on to recall the other abuse that $I$ suffered. The process of taking the statement, which was handwritten, took a long time and the way it was done made me feel like I was intruding on their time. There needs to be a better way of victims' statements to be recorded.

After making my statement to the police I don't recall being offered any counselling or support. I didn't have much to do with the police after this.

Louis was charged with maintaining a sexual relationship with a minor in relation to his abuse of me. He was also charged with offences relating to the abuse of other girls. In the lead-up to the trial there were two Crown prosecutors that $I$ dealt with: the first one $I$ felt comfortable with, he talked me through the process and was familiar with my statement. I shared intimate details with him and we developed a good relationship.

Then the week before the trial it all changed and a new prosecutor was appointed. When this happened $I$ felt like $I$ had to rehash all of my intimate information. It was uncomfortable and re-traumatising. I didn't feel supported. While I accept that the prosecutors, have huge workloads, the sudden change to someone I didn't know so close to the commencement of the trial really rattled me.

I recal7 going into the prosecutor's office at some point having a statement put down in front of me and being asked to read it. The statement $I$ was given wasn't mine, it was a statement of another witness who had been severely sexually abused from a very young age. I only read a few lines but it was in graphic detail and was harrowing to read. What $I$ read has stuck with me even many years 7 ater.

When we realised I'd be given the wrong statement the prosecutor didn't really say anything, he just apologised and handed me a copy of my statement.

I would have 7 iked a bit more interaction with the prosecutors in the lead-up to the trial. They briefed me on the day about how to act in court but it was a lot to take in at once. The trial was the first time $I$ had faced my abuser so $I$ was petrified. It was almost impossible to focus and retain information in that situation. There needs to be someone to support and guide victims as they go through that process from beginning to end.

I gave evidence in court and found having to relive my abuse so publicly very traumatic. I didn't have much contact with other victims as they wanted to keep our stories separate. Ultimately we lost the court case, I don't really know why.

Shortly after the trial was concluded the prosecutor called me and left a message to tell me the result. That was the last time that $I$ heard from them. I didn't receive any follow-up to check how $I$ was doing or to see if $I$ had any questions about the decision. There was nothing from the prosecutor and nothing from police. I was shattered with the result, especially given it had taken so much effort to go through the process. I had always believed that my
abuser would be held accountable and go to jail. This added to my trauma.

To not be offered any support afterwards felt like I was being told, "Thanks for your time, see you later". I don't know what has happened to Louis and I don't know where he lives. He tried to add me on Instagram about three months ago. I was sickened by the fact that he thought we could be friends; it just re-affirms to me that these people feel 7 ike they can get away with anything.

I haven't accessed the National Redress Scheme. I have thought about it but feel like I don't want to get paid money for something like this. I am who I am despite what happened to me. I don't really want to be paid for it. To me, it almost dismisses what has happened. I want to be part of the conversation and make change rather than just be paid money and move on.

Children and Youth Services should have done better. They had a clear red flag yet they kept us in that home. In these situations they should not be asking children who don't understand risk what they want. Children and Youth Services needed to make the decision.

If there is any risk to a vulnerable child, that child should be removed from the environment. I accept that it would have been traumatising for them to remove me and my sibling from the home, but it would have been far less traumatising than the abuse I endured.

They had the opportunity to protect me, but they didn't. They also failed to visit us more frequently, which they said they would. If they had have followed up I may have disclosed the abuse earlier.

Another issue with Children and Youth

Services is the high turnover of staff. There is no continuity for children in care. It's difficult to build trust when you are constantly speaking to different people.

There needs to be more support provided to victims through the court process. I wasn't supported. The court process and facing my abuser was almost as traumatising as the abuse itself. It's a long process which, for me, was drawn out over one or two years. There needs to be a single person that provides support throughout the whole process from the time you make your statement to the time the trial was complete. I didn't have that and often wouldn't know what was going on when there were gaps in the process. The government should be leading the way on this and providing the best support available.

There should be support provided in schools for children who are victims of abuse. Children attend school every day and often take these issues to school with them. Teachers need to receive training so that they are equipped to support children in these situations.

I had teachers who I spoke to about Louis but they weren't equipped to deal with the sensitivity of it. All teachers need specialist training and knowledge as children place their trust in different teachers. Staff with expert knowledge could also be placed at schools to provide a higher level of support.

That's the statement of Faye.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you, Ms Rhodes, that was a very moving statement. Yes, you can stand down now and we'11 call our next witness I think - oh no, morning tea. We'11 have a short break, sorry.

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Commissioners, the next witness is Ms Claire Lovell, I'll invite her into the witness box and take the affirmation.
<CLAIRE LOVELL, affirmed and examined:
[11.05am]
<EXAMINATION BY MS ELLYARD:
MS ELLYARD: Q. Thanks, Ms Lovell, feel free to take a seat. My I ask you, please, your full name?
A. Yes. Claire Lovell.
Q. What's the present position that you hold?
A. I'm the Executive Director of Children and Family Services.
Q. In the Department of Communities?
A. In the Department of Communities Tasmania, yes.
Q. How long have you held that role?
A. I've been the Executive Director since late last year, 2021, and prior to that - that's a newly-formed position; prior to that I was the Director of Children and Family Services from 2019.
Q. What was your career trajectory that led to you taking up that role first as Director and then as Executive Director?
A. I started working for the Child Safety Service, or as it was then the Child Protection Service in 2004 as a Child Safety worker. Since then I held positions as caseworker, leadership positions since around 2006, including team leader positions, clinical practice consultant and educator; the manager of that team as the state's senior Clinical Practice Manager. I also spent several years in around 2013/14 in a policy area within the department, still focusing on child safety policy.
Q. So, it sounds like you've held, on your way to the present role, most of the roles in the hierarchy that sit below you?
A. Some. Yes, some.
Q. And, given that you started as a Child Safety Officer, do I take it that you have a background in social work or in other form of Allied Health?
A. Yes, I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree. I graduated from the University of Tasmania in 2001 majoring in sociology, and at that time $I$ was also a volunteer family support worker working with parents with young children who needed extra support.
Q. So, you studied in Tasmania and your professional career has been in Tasmania?
A. That's correct, yeah.
Q. And overwhelmingly within the Child Safety Services system?
A. Almost entirely, yes.
Q. Thank you. Now, you're here today in your capacity as the Executive Director to answer some questions about matters which are contained in one of the statements that the Secretary, Mr Pervan, has made; in particular, Commissioners, his statement in response to the request for statement 23. Ms Lovell, that statement's not yours, but do I take it that you've had the opportunity to become aware of the contents of it?
A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. It's got a lot of attachments which perhaps you haven't gone to in detail, but many of those attachments are themselves documents that are generated from inside Child Safety Services?
A. Some, yes.
Q. And if at any point $I$ ask you a question that falls outside the scope of your knowledge, please tell me.

Firstly, to set the scene for Child Safety Services and where it sits in the broader framework of the Department of Communities. You've mentioned that your role is a recent role as an Executive Director, you were previously a Director. Could you outline for us, please, the executive structure of the Department of Communities, who do you report to, who reports to you?
A. As Executive Director of Children and Family Services I report to the Deputy Secretary of Children, Youth and Families and they in turn report to the Secretary of Communities Tasmania.
Q. Are there other reports to the Deputy Secretary other than you?
A. Yes. The Director of, I think, Custodial Services.
Q. So the work of the children and families branch then sits alongside the work of Custodial Youth Services?
A. It does.
Q. And the two Executive Directors report to the Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth and Families?
A. The other is a Director, I'm an Executive Director of my portfolio, and I'm also assisted by a Director.
Q. Thinking about what falls within your portfolio, we're examining out-of-home care, but that's just one component of what your role involves. Can you summarise for us your areas of responsibility?
A. Yes, certainly. So, within my portfolio I am responsible for the operations of the Advice \& Referral Line, so the manager of that service reports - reports to the Director. I should start by saying, between the Director and myself, we collectively support and supervise a team of managers across the portfolio.
Q. Of course.
A. Because that's a new arrangement, we are adjusting as we go so I'll try and describe those differences, but together we're responsible for the operational direction for those services. So, they include the Advice \& Referral Line, the Child Safety Service, the Intensive Family Engagement Service, out-of-home care, adoptions, permanency and after care support.
Q. Thank you. As I understand it, there's a degree of overlap between parts of those services so that, for example, thinking about out-of-home care which is our focus, children in the out-of-home care component of your portfolio will also be sitting in the Child Safety Services component because they're subject to protective intervention by the Secretary?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Can I turn then to ask you some general questions about how out-of-home care operates in Tasmania.
Commissioners, for your purposes I'm starting at paragraph 74 and following of Mr Pervan's statement, but I'11 ask Ms Lovell about these things, I'm sure she knows the answers.

Firstly, to put it at a very high level of generality, the out-of-home care system in Tasmania is funded by the government, it's a publicly funded activity; is that right? A. Yes.
Q. And it's partly provided as well by the government, the government is itself a provider of out-of-home care services?
A. Yes, it is.
Q. In other cases it contracts with non-governmental organisations to provide for foster care?
A. Yes .
Q. Or other kinds of out-of-home care?
A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. And so, when we think about the out-of-home care system, we are talking both about the frontline providers of care which could include department providers and non-governmental providers: yes?
A. Yes.
Q. But we're also talking about what $I$ will term the back-of-office functionality which is staff members within Child Safety Services who work directly to facilitate out-of-home care?
A. Yes.
Q. At paragraph 81 and following, Commissioners, in the statement Mr Pervan gives some evidence about the out-of-home care system. As I understand it, Ms Lovell, the out-of-home care department of Child and Family
Services reports to you or perhaps through a Director to you?
A. Yeah. So, the teams within Children and Family Services who directly deliver support to Family-Based Carers, they report to a statewide manager of out-of-home care adoptions, permanency and after care support, and that person reports directly to me.
Q. We understand from the information provided by Mr Pervan, is that, there are a total of 23 departmental officers who work in the out-of-home care component of Child Safety Services?
A. Yes.
Q. Comprising 17 Child Safety Officers, three practice leaders, two managers and a unit coordinator. Does that match your understanding?
A. Yes.
Q. When we talk about the 17 Child Safety Officers, they're Child Safety Officers working in out-of-home care rather than in some other branch of Child Safety Services? A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. As I understand it, some of these positions are new?
A. Yes. So, working alongside the statewide manager there is an additional manager position which has been recently created, and that position focuses on business coordination; so, the way that we manage carers' approvals and making sure that our data on households is correct, and it's primarily focused on safety and compliance with approval conditions.
Q. That business coordinator role's referred to at paragraph 87 of Mr Pervan's statement. Is that a role that's focused on those carers who are directly engaged by the department as opposed to NGO providers, or is it both? A. It's very early in its implementation, it's a temporary position, so what we are doing at the moment is making sure that the data that we hold is correct but also working with the other providers to make sure that the data that they have is input correctly into our system so that we have the most complete picture possible around current approved households.
Q. And when we talk about "data" can I ask you to unpack a bit, what kind of data and information are we talking about?
A. Yeah, so information about care households, so Family-Based Care is stored in the Child Protection Information System, which we refer to as CPIS. So, household information would include who the carers are and their information but also the children who are placed with them. That's where we would store information around, so case notes relating to the work of these out-of-home care workers, the out-of-home care workers within Children and Family Services, so that's where they store their records associated with their responsibilities.
Q. Is the creation of this role the result of a view that perhaps data quality or accuracy wasn't where the
department wanted it to be?
A. Certainly, yes, data quality, inaccuracy, but also our responsibility to make sure that people who are caring for children still comply and continue to comply with basic approval requirements.
Q. Thank you. At paragraph 92 of Mr Pervan's statement he provides some figures both about the number of children in Tasmania who live in out-of-home care and the proportions of those children who live in care provided by non-governmental organisations or directly by the government. As I understand his evidence, just over 70 per cent of children in out-of-home care live in placements that are provided directly by the department; is that right?
A. Yes, the department is the largest Family-Based Care support provider.
Q. And the balance of the children is about 28 per cent live in placements that are organised by non-governmental organisations?
A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. Who have been contracted to provide those services by the department?
A. Yes.
Q. Is the engagement and contracting of those non-governmental organisations part of the work done in the area of the department for which you are responsible?
A. It occurs within the division but not directly within my portfolio.
Q. So, the people who do that work don't report to you?
A. There's only one person who does that work in Children Youth and Families, the manager of strategic commissioning, and that person also undertakes commissioning work for other parts of the division, which can include custodial services, also Youth Justice - which, I should add, has recently been added to my portfolio, but also to new strategic project work, yep.
Q. That sounds like they'11 be very busy?
A. Yes.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Q. So that one person who's doing the strategic commissioning role, do they also have
then the oversight role in terms of ensuring that their non-government providers are complying with contractual obligations, that they're fulfilling everything that they said they would do in terms of how they would provide care?
A. No, not entirely. There's very, very limited
oversight that can occur by that one person.
Q. Who does it?

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Sorry, have you finished your question?
COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: No.
Q. That's not surprising for one role doing strategic commissioning for a department. Is there someone who's charged then with the oversight of the contractual obligations and, I guess, the quality assurance?
A. Yeah, that responsibility is currently spread to different positions in different ways. So, some of that oversight occurs at the child level, through the Child Safety Service, then we have other processes such as, the Australian Childhood Foundation are contracted to review the care provided to children in residential care settings. So our division receives reports in relation to that, myself and the Deputy Secretary receive that information, but some of that information also goes to the Child Safety Service at the child level.

We also have the non-government providers, they're required to provide monthly reports which are also reviewed.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Thank you.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. Sorry, I have a follow up with that one too. So, the manager of strategic commissioning, I think you also said had some responsibility in the Youth Justice area as well?
A. Yeah, yep.
Q. So, they're involved in the strategic commissioning role and the oversight of - the oversight of Youth Justice? A. Not the oversight. So, things like developing and revising funding agreements for contracted services, so it's not just limited to out-of-home care services; that can include the services used by Youth Justice which are more like targeted youth support services.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you.
MS ELLYARD: Q. We've made the point, Ms Lovell, that the out-of-home care workers within Child Safety Services form an out-of-home care team which works alongside other teams of Child Safety support officers who perform other functions in either assessment or case management. Could you summarise for us, please, the Structure of Child Safety Services of which the out-of-home care team is a part? A. Yeah. So, our out-of-home care teams, there are three teams around the state - south, north, west and north. We also have the equivalent for the Child Safety Service, so they're co-located with the general Child Safety Service staff, usually the response and case management teams who work with children who are on orders but also in the assessment and family preservation stage.
Q. You've mentioned a number of things there and I just want to unpack them. So, you've mentioned case management: that's a team that work with children who are on orders that have placed them in the custody and/or the guardianship of the Secretary?
A. Yeah, multiple teams within each service.
Q. There's also teams who carry out initial assessment work where referrals are received through to the Child Safety Services from the Advice \& Referral Line? A. Yes.
Q. And, as part of that work there are Child Safety Officers who work with children and families who may have been referred but who ultimately won't go on to be part of the statutory system?
A. Yes .
Q. At paragraph 37 of Mr Pervan's statement he makes reference to the practice guidance in relation to - I'm sorry, it's attachment 37 to the statement of Mr Pervan the six domains against which action is to be taken, or the six domains within which children are entitled to feel safe and protected. I'm sure you know them, but just for me to summarise them. The six domains, as I understand, are: being loved and safety, being healthy, participation, having material basics met, learning, and having a positive sense of culture and identity. Is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. What's the origin of those six domains and what's the way in which they inform, in particular, the way in which the out-of-home care system is run?
A. So, those are the six domains of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework; that framework was developed, I believe, around 2018, or possibly developed before then but that's when we began to implement it. It's been well implemented within the Advice \& Referral Line and guides their work, and gradually since that time it's also been implemented in various ways across the Child Safety Service and that work is continuing. It's also used within other agencies, including the Department of Education and non-government service providers as well, so it gives us one framework for understanding the holistic needs of children and young people but also their families.

So, the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework works well for us alongside the Social Wellbeing Model where we're gradually - we're gradually changing the way we view children and their safety and wellbeing as something that is just them, to something - how can I explain this well? Let me find my words. The premise of the Social Wellbeing Model is that we can't look after children and young people and respond to their wellbeing needs without responding to the wellbeing needs of the adults who care for them. So, that can be their natural family or their care family, but we need to be responding to the needs of both simultaneously.
Q. And that's a transition from what, as I understand it, was a previous model where the child was perhaps viewed somewhat in isolation from their environment?
A. Yes, it's also known as a Child Rescue Model where focus solely on the protection of children rather than understanding a child's needs in the context of the family who are ultimately responsible for caring for them.
Q. And not to suggest at all that there's anything wrong with a focus on child wellbeing, but child protection is a well understood concept which recognises that there are circumstances where children do need to be protected. I wonder, can you speak to the way in which these two issues might potentially be held - a bit in tension - a focus on wellbeing on the one hand and a focus on potentially protecting on the other?

I ask the question, Ms Lovell, because the Commission's heard some feedback about the extent to which the change of language might have been accompanied by a change in risk assessment processes and a change in the way statutory intervention occurs.
A. Maybe it's more helpful to speak about safety rather than protection, but safety is certainly one very important element of the wellbeing framework: it hasn't been lost and it never will be lost. But being loved and safe is as important as the other wellbeing domains. To focus on one to the exclusion of others doesn't serve children or families well.
Q. So the move to the wellbeing model, I take it, isn't accompanied by any changing of the level at which statutory intervention might be contemplated for a child?
A. No, not the level of statutory intervention, but I think the way that we respond to families is changing.

Prior to 2018 when the Advice \& Referral Line came on board it was a different model, it was a different approach. I guess even though the mantra has always been that Child Safety is everyone's responsibility, it actually wasn't. We had mandatory reporting which meant that anyone with a concern for children, they had an obligation to report that which was fine, but there was less emphasis on their other responsibilities/capabilities around how they could also keep children safe and well.
Q. So, would I be right in understanding that what you're identifying there is perhaps a greater - a model which contemplates a greater sharing of responsibility for children's wellbeing amongst the various community or governmental parts that interact with the child rather than it sitting solely with Child Safety Services?
A. Child Safety Service can't alone keep every child safe and attend to every domain of wellbeing for every child in Tasmania; that's just not possible. I know that there is a belief or some frustration by many professionals in the community - some professionals in the community - that they experience pushback. Pushback is not what the Advice \& Referral Line or the Child Safety Service are striving for: we are trying to build capacity in the community to respond to the safety and wellbeing needs of children. So, building capacity can be done through providing supports, advice, education, resources, those types of things. I guess we want to empower every person in the community to
do what they can to keep children safe and well.
Accepted, there are some cases where that's not going to be possible and statutory intervention is absolutely necessary. They're the children where referral is made through the Child Safety Service for further involvement, but even there our response is not to take over, it is still to share that responsibility as much as we can, to involve other professionals and to involve informal networks for children so that they have a solid network around them who can respond to their needs; it still acknowledges the Child Safety Service isn't the only answer.
Q. The Commission's heard, perhaps picking up on something you said then, Ms Lovell, of cases where people describe placing a call to the Advice \& Referral Line to raise what they regard as a safety issue relating to a child and being asked in response, "Well, what have you done about it?", and experiencing that as, to use your word, a pushback when they understood that they were handing it over to the experts.

Perhaps it's a communication issue, but it does seem that they might be right, that from time to time they're being asked to take action themselves or being invited to take action themselves rather than just handing it on? A. And I think that the wording that you used there is important because, if people think that they're handing it over to the Child Safety Service, then I think that's where there can be a misunderstanding and some frustration because, although the Child Safety Service can take a lead in particular issues, responding to particular issues, you can't hand a child over; the child still exists, the child still has wellbeing needs and we rely on the professions and the informal networks around a child to continue on playing their part.

One thing that is different is that the Advice \& Referral Line is no longer what Child Safety intake was, which is a passive receiver of reports and information and allegations. The new process is far more interactive. The Advice \& Referral Line prefers phone calls for that reason so that they can actually interact with callers and that can be so that we can really dig for detail so that we can really fully understand what's going on for families, so we can understand the complicating factors that we're dealing
with so that we can understand their strengths, so that we can understand what needs they have that have been met well and needs that remain unmet, and the reason for that is so that we can make - we can take the right action, we can make the right referrals that are actually going to be helpful for them.

So, the Advice \& Referral Line seeks to assist families rather than just receiving information, screening that information to see whether it meets a threshold for the Child Safety Service. This is what the old intake did, it really was screening to see whether something met a threshold; if it didn't meet the threshold the response was closure. But for the family it didn't meet their need; that left them potentially with no resolution to the issues that they were facing, so those issues were left to recur and exacerbate, often to the point where - well, certainly to the point where the Child Safety Service received multiple notifications and the situation was so dire then that statutory intervention, often in the form of removal, was required. That's also known as "system churn"; it also leads to extreme cumulative harm for children.

It was far from ideal. I think that we have taken a really positive and brave step in saying that we - we need to do better by children and families, we need to understand and respond to their needs. This is the public health approach that we're striving to integrate. It's been a hard push.
Q. So, I think what you're identifying there, Ms Lovell, and I'm not doing justice when I paraphrase it, is that, whereas perhaps under the old model there was a kind of a binary response if you rang the intake line: it was either accepted or it was closed. Now, the cases that might previously have been closed have the opportunity to receive assessment or supports or referrals of different kinds that will meet the families' and the children's needs where those needs fall under the level of statutory intervention? A. That's correct.
Q. A word that we haven't used yet in relation to this but I think it's what you're talking about when you talk about meeting the threshold for intervention is the concept of risk; of course, the statutory criteria for intervention in a child's life relates to risk. Has the way in which the department approaches the concept of risk changed as
part of this movement to a wellbeing framework?
A. I don't think the department's concept of risk has changed, but I think we're becoming more sophisticated in the way that we manage risks, so really trying to understand what that risk is and who is best placed to help the family to respond to that. So, just because there are risks present for a child doesn't mean that that automatically needs to come through to the Child Safety Service because some of those risks and many of those risks don't relate to child abuse; they relate to families with unmet needs and children who are experiencing enormous challenges, challenges with their mental health, for example; families struggling to get the support that they need to respond to their child's disability issues, those are really complex needs. Those families don't necessarily need the investigation approach used by the Child Safety Service; they're not abusing their children, they're doing their best but they need the support of multiple services in our community.
Q. And this, of course, goes to that part of the definition of "risk" that talks about parents being willing and able or unwilling and unable to keep their child safe, and what you're identifying is that there are a cohort of parents who might be willing, potentially not able but able with supports, and those are parents whose children shouldn't enter the statutory system, they can be protected outside of it?
A. That's correct, yes. Another example are matters where there has been abuse of a child but where one parent is willing and able to keep their child safe and they may be supported through the Family Law Court to be able to do that. That doesn't need to come through to the Child Safety Service necessarily for statutory intervention because there's already someone taking the right action and the Family Law Court is an appropriate avenue for supporting those parents who are willing and able to protect their child.
Q. Thank you. I want to turn then to trace the pathway that a child will take to end up in the out-of-home care system. Commissioners, paragraphs 97 and following of Mr Pervan's statement covers this.

Firstly, as $I$ understand the evidence, Ms Love11, a child wil1 reach the out-of-home care system through, if we think about the present position, firstly being the subject
of a referral or a wellbeing concern made to the Advice \& Referral Line which finds its way to Child Safety Services?
A. Yes.
Q. There will next be ordinarily an assessment and perhaps a period of time during which an investigation is undertaken?
A. Yes.
Q. It's made clear in Mr Pervan's statement that the removal of a child from his or her family is the option of last resort?
A. Yes.
Q. And so, a child who ends up in out-of-home care would expect to have had at least some period of time where Child Safety Services sought to investigate whether the child could be supported to remain at home perhaps using the kinds of supports that you've just been discussing?
A. In general there will be some cases, though, where all of that is fast-tracked. So, in circumstances where the child is at immediate risk, Advice \& Referral Line can make an immediate decision and on the same day that matter can come through to the Child Safety Service; on the same day we're working alongside Tasmania Police, and on the same day that child may enter care as a result of what's happened or --
Q. So sometimes it'11 happen very fast but it'11 happen because an assessment, albeit at sometimes a very speedy assessment, identifies that the last resort option is the option that needs to be taken?
A. That's right, that's a response to immediate risk.
Q. Mr Pervan describes in his statement the process by which - and perhaps leaving aside those extreme urgent cases - the process by which decisions are made to seek a court order for a child and the way in which there's internal consultation within the department about that process; can you explain that process to us, please? A. Yes, so we have multiple family preservation attempts and some really positive outcomes within the Child Safety Service. So, the Child Safety Service doesn't just do assessment and case management, it's not that simple. So, from the beginning of the involvement of the Child Safety Service they're working with families to understand the
parents' willingness and capacity to resolve risk issues which are present for the child; they're also working with other networks of people who can also be part of a safety plan around that.

So, we continue on with those efforts, that may be through the Intensive Family Engagement Service or it might be within the Child Safety Service directly. If we reach a point where that is not working because the parent is demonstrating that they're not willing or not able to engage with that process and the risk remains or the risk is actually increasing for the child, it's at that point that we will need to apply for legal orders under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act.
Q. And there's an internal committee, as I understand it, that is involved in the decision-making about whether or not that point for court intervention has been reached? A. Yes, there's a court application advisory group and that comprises senior practitioners and managers from that local Child Safety Service.
Q. And so, thinking again about a child whose trajectory has brought them into the out-of-home care system, that child will have been the subject of the processes that you've described, an application to the court and an order made by the court, and ultimately for children who remain in out-of-home care for any length of time, most likely an order placing them under the guardianship of the Secretary? A. Yes.
Q. And then simultaneously with that court process, as I understand it, an assessment is being made of where the appropriate placement for the child will be?
A. Yes.
Q. As I understand it, that's a process as described by Mr Pervan that involves a number of different bodies and consultation between both government and non-governmental providers of foster care?
A. Yeah.
Q. Can you explain that process to us?
A. So, the first thing that happens when a child needs to enter care or even before a child needs to enter care the Child Safety Service are actively seeking family, extended family for the child or kin who can provide that care, so
that's the first option.
If there are no kin that can be identified, that are willing and able to provide care, then we next look to foster care. So, the out-of-home care teams within each service are involved in both of those things, so they support the assessment of kinship carers, but they also support - they receive requests for placement with foster carers and they progress that by reaching out to the non-government sector to see which provider is able to accept the placement, and they also look to our own foster carers.
Q. You mentioned that the first option to be considered if a child couldn't live with their immediate family would be to look for a family placement or what you would call a kinship placement. What's the assessment process for kinship placements? There's lots of evidence in Mr Pervan's statement about assessments and training for arm's-length carers, but what's the process for kinship carers?
A. Yes, so that's a three-part process. So, the first part, keeping in mind that kinship placements are often rapidly required on the same day or potentially even during the night if it's an after-hours matter, so the first stage is very brief; it's screening to make sure that the person is willing, able, and that they're a safe person. Then the Part B is more comprehensive and the Part $C$ more comprehensive again.

So, the first part, the Part A tends to be the Child Safety Officer, often in the response team or an after-hours worker. But then the support of out-of-home care comes in to complete Parts $B$ and $C$ which is a more comprehensive assessment; it's really looking at the needs of that child and that carer, whether or not it's a vital placement, but also how we need to support them so that that's a success.
Q. I can imagine that if the question is, will this child be safe with their aunt until Monday morning when court opens, that's one thing, and the suitability of that carer might be very foundational about appropriate accommodation and things of that kind. But longer term what's the assessment that's done of the proposed kinship carer to satisfy the department that they are an appropriate person to take on care of a child perhaps on behalf of the

Secretary?
A. So certainly there's safety screening, so as well as having to hold the current Working with Vulnerable People registration, there's National Police Checks undertaken, and reference checks to make sure that they're safe people. We can also refer to our own Child Safety information systems, both systems, to see what history they have; not necessarily looking to screen people out but to fully understand any issues that they have experienced and how that might impact on their current and future care.
Q. Are kinship carers expected to undergo the same training programs that foster carers are required to undergo?
A. No, they're not, no.
Q. Are you able to speak to the reason for that different approach?
A. Yes. I'm not sure that that is the right approach, I'll start by saying. I think that kinship carers do also need to have - and I also don't know that "training" is the right word - they need to have the understanding of issues that are likely to present for the child and for them in being able to care for the child. So, I don't --

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. Just to interrupt there. One question: you talked about the assessment that's done by the kinship carer, what about assessment for other members of the household?
A. So the other members of the household, the same applies that --
Q. What, they have a police check, for example, or they're not required to have a Working with Vulnerable People registration check, are they?
A. All members of the household over the age of 16 are required to have the Working with Vulnerable People registration.
Q. Right, and how does the department or the contracted provider know about changes in the household? Are they required to notify about changes in the household, so a member of the family who wasn't there comes back, for example?
A. Yes. So, carers are required to notify us of changes to their household, but also when our staff undertake reviews they will be asking that question around not only
has the composition of your household changed but who else frequently visits the home, who else is the child frequently interacting with.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you.
COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Q. While we've interrupted. I was just wondering if you could actually outline, in the Part A and the Part B screening, Part A, what are the basic checks that you do do for the immediate placement?
A. Never having - or not having completed one myself since, probably 2006 perhaps, I'm not familiar with the exact forms. I know that they are annexed to Secretary Pervan's statement. What I do know is that they are very basic checks for Part A, so I think that that can actually be as basic as checking with Tasmania Police in the middle of the night, for example, on an after-hours job to see whether this person, whether there's any history of offending or other intel which would indicate that this person is unsafe. Then I know that the very next things that we have to do, the next business day if they haven't already got a Working with Vulnerable People Check, is to apply for that, and also to complete the paperwork for the National Criminal History Check.
Q. Would you check the departmental records at the same time as you're checking the TasPol records in Part A, would that be the next business day?
A. Yeah, I imagine it would be a fairly superficial look to satisfy Part A, so having a look at the summary of history, but I think as we get into Parts $B$ and $C$ it would be a far more in-depth look at anything that we have on file and what that actually means for this family and this child.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. Do you have any data on the time that it takes to go through the second part of the check? So, a child is placed with their aunt overnight, then there would have to be - if the proposition was that the child was going to stay there, that there would then have to be some other form of checking, the more detailed check you're talking about. Do you have any data on how long those processes take between moving the child from - possibly moving the child from the emergency situation to staying permanently with the family or for a period of time with the family?

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Q. To process Part A to Part C to complete the assessment, do you have a timeframe, a KPI around that?
A. No, I don't think there is a timeframe - well, I may be wrong, I don't believe there is a KPI, I believe that it should be done as soon as possible. I haven't heard of any concerns about those timeframes. I have heard that there is sometimes - there certainly is sometimes a dispute around the appropriateness of kinship placements. That can be a really difficult issue to navigate because, as well as needing to ensure that the children are safe and they're stable wherever they're placed, we also have principles that we're applying with regard to sibling placements, keeping children with their family and community in general and then the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. So, it's very hard to have a policy decision that, if a family looks like this it's a no; if a family looks like this, it's a yes. It's not that simple, it has to be made on a case-by-case basis taking into account the details specific to that child and that family.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Thank you.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you.
MS ELLYARD: Q. Just one further question on this topic of kinship placements, Ms Lovell. As I understand it and as your evidence is and perhaps consistent with the Act, if a child can't live with their immediate family the preference would be that they remain with extended family or otherwise connected to their culture or community, but I take it that sometimes it's not a binary thing of, you can't do that and therefore you move on to the foster care option. There might be situations where the question is, having regard to the needs of this child, what's the best option? There's the foster carer option and there's a family option and they need to be weighed and a decision made about what will be best; is that right?
A. Yes, sometimes those two options are compared and there needs to be a decision about what's best.
Q. Thinking particularly about the Aboriginal Placement Principle which you mentioned. Mr Pervan gives some evidence about this at paragraph 111 and following of his statement and the Commission has received some evidence about differing perspectives about the extent to which that placement principle is given meaningful effect in the
decisions that are made about the placement of children.
From your perspective are there any barriers to the Aboriginal Placement Principle being able to be given full effect in Tasmania and, if so, what are they?
A. There are some barriers. I don't think that we apply the principle as well as we could; some of that, some of the reasons for that are practical reasons, but some of them are our own maturity as a service in the way that we respond to the needs of Aboriginal children. I think that there's a lot that we can do, even - I think there's a lot more that we can do from the very beginning of our involvement with Aboriginal children starting from the Advice \& Referral Line, to understand who their networks are, to reach out to their community members, to actively involve them in planning and decision-making.

It's not good enough to apply the principle by tokenistically asking at the time of placement of an Aboriginal organisation, "Do you have any carers?", because the Aboriginal organisations aren't Family-Based Care providers so the answer's likely to be "no". Unless the child is able to be placed with kin, in which case we can you know, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is applied, but I think in general we need to be making active efforts at the earliest point which is as soon as we receive that first contact.

We do have the Aboriginal liaison officers in the Advice \& Referral Line now which is incredibly helpful. I think that, once a family is transferred through to the Child Safety Service we still have a long way to go in that really meaningful engagement in planning and decision-making.
Q. Some of the evidence that the Commission is going to hear later this week from another jurisdiction deals with the fact that the placement principle - I mean, it's called the placement principle, but it's not just about where you decide to place a child after the decision's already been made to remove them, it's actually a principle that's meant to be infused through the entirety of Child Safety's contact with the family; it sounds like you would agree with that?
A. I thoroughly agree with that, yes. We do use the language "active efforts" in Children and Family Services because I think that does embrace that need to be actively
making efforts at every point, not just to consult with Aboriginal organisations, but to let the Aboriginal community step in and take the lead to the fullest extent possible.
Q. Thank you. Can I turn then to some questions about who are the people who will be sitting around or working around a child who is placed in out-of-home care. Firstly, as I think we've already discussed, any child who is in out-of-home care will be part of the caseload of a Child Safety Officer; is that right?
A. Ideally, if they have a Child Safety Officer. If their Child Safety Officer is on leave or if in fact that position becomes vacant, it tends to be the Practice Leader for that team that takes responsibility. But, yes, the children are allocated to a team.
Q. I see, and then it's a matter for each team how they allocate children amongst the available staff?
A. That's correct, yeah.
Q. So, in addition to the Child Safety Officer that the child will have by virtue of being on an order, will the child also have a case manager inside the out-of-home care team?
A. No, they don't have a case manager in the out-of-home care team. The out-of-home care teams provide support to a household, so they're primarily working with the carers rather than the child.
Q. When you say they're working with the carers, does that mean they're working with the carers when the carers are directly engaged by the state as opposed to non-governmental providers?
A. So, each of the non-government providers will support the carers that are - Family-Based Carers are all volunteers so it's hard to describe how they're engaged, but yes, they each provide support to the carers who are engaged with their respective service.
Q. So, the 72 per cent of children who are in a placement organised directly by Child Safety Services, out-of-home care section, will be living in a home where those carers have an allocated caseworker from inside the out-of-home care team?
A. The household, yes. The carers have an allocated worker, yes.
Q. In the case of the 28 per cent of children who are living in foster placements or out-of-home care placements organised by a non-government organisation, that function of who supports the carers will be fulfilled by the non-government organisation?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Once a child's placed in out-of-home care then, what's the role of the Child Safety Officer? What's the role that they are doing? I can imagine it's one thing for a child who's still living at home or who is being actively monitored whilst they go through the assessment process, but once a child is perhaps the subject of a long-term placement in out-of-home care, is there a continuing role for their Child Safety Officer and, if so, what is it?
A. So children where there is an interim Care and Protection Order or where there's a likelihood that they're going to remain in care beyond the assessment phase, they are transferred through to case management teams. So, case management teams, the child will be allocated to one of the Child Safety Officers within that team. They take responsibility for managing the Care Team for that child, which includes developing their case and care plan and holding care team meetings within the child's network; that's their case coordination role. They're also responsible for a lot of decisions for the child, the day-to-day decisions and plan - I guess, the ad hoc issues that come up every day and every week for children that aren't included in detail in the case and care plan are the things that they need to be responsive to.

They're also responsible for visiting children, also in many cases still working with families, whether that be through supporting contact arrangements or supporting families through restoration processes.
Q. So, would it be fair to say that the Child Safety Officer is the parent representative where the parent is the Secretary; they're the person through which the Secretary is exercising, at the moment, his parental obligations towards the child?
A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. But they do so in part by coordinating a Care Team? A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us - and we understand from Mr Pervan's statement that every child in out-of-home care will have a Care Team and meetings that are convened for the purposes of establishing and reviewing a care plan. Who, other than the Child Safety Officer, will be in the Care Team for a child in out-of-home care?
A. I should clarify that we're working toward every child having a Care Team.
Q. Okay?
A. So, this is a relatively new approach, and it's an approach that we have attempted to implement during the COVID outbreak as well, so we're experiencing more staff vacancies than usual, but we are gradually building up to every child having a well-functioning Care Team.

So, a Care Team at its best will include the child, first and foremost, child or young person; their Child Safety Officer and other representatives from the Child Safety Service if necessary. Also professionals, so people from the Education Department. If they've got a particular health professional, if they've got a counsellor. Anyone, I guess, who has a responsibility in attending to the domains of wellbeing formally is invited to be part of the Care Team.

Also the child's carer is really important in the Care Team; they're the person that spends the most time with the child and provides their day-to-day care, so it really is essential that carers attend. Ideally, we also have parents attending if that's possible, if they're willing and able to do so, and also other informal networks and supports for the child.
Q. You said that you're working towards every child having a Care Team. Thinking about the perhaps around 1,000 children who are in out-of-home care right now, what percentage of them right now have a Care Team?
A. I don't have that data in front of me at the moment, but I would be very cautious in putting a number to it because, as I described, at best that's what the Care Team will look like. But we have some care teams where technically you can tick the box and say that the child has a Care Team, but it's very limited. It might just be the Child Safety Officer and the person from the school, and maybe one other - and maybe the carer, something like that; it's very limited.

So, we're working on building them so that they do have all the people, but we're also working on building the plans to reflect the wellbeing domains and making sure that what that Care Team are working toward is achieving the goals for the child as informed by the child. So, some care teams, they have a group of people, but their scope is still quite narrow and they're looking at day-to-day issues rather than the long-term planning that children need.

So the two things that we're working toward - well, two of the main things that we're toward with care teams is making sure that the right people are involved and making sure that the plan has a broad enough scope so that it's actually an active way of working toward achieving goals for children.

Another important thing that we're working toward with care teams is power sharing. So, before Care Teams, it really was that the Child Safety Officer was the go-to person that held the responsibility for making all the decisions and determining what the plan was for the child. Some of those things, obviously, would be at a higher delegation, so the Child Safety Officer needs the permission of a Practice Leader or manager to make those decisions, but the power was held within the Child Safety Service. So, what the Care Team approach seeks to do is share that, recognising that there is a range of expertise around how best to achieve goals and there's a range of support that the child is going to need; it doesn't all sit with the Child Safety Service.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Q. Ms Lovell, just to be clear in my mind. Is it 72 per cent or 100 per cent of the 1,000 children we're talking about at the moment has a Child Safety Officer? Is it 100 per cent or just 72 per cent? And I'm talking about the ones - I think you said 72 per cent of the children are in care through the state?
A. So, 100 per cent of children, so every child, regardless of who their out-of-home care provider is --
Q. So each child has a Child Safety Officer?
A. They ought to.
Q. They ought to. Do they?
A. No, because there's vacancies in the Child Safety

Service.
Q. So, what percentage do you know don't have a Child Safety Officer?
A. I don't know the figure for that as of today, and it fluctuates from day-to-day. What I can say is if they don't have a Child Safety Officer, they're still allocated within a team. So, there is an officer responsible for them, but it won't be to the same level of support and supervision as a child who has an allocated worker who is present at work.
Q. But that's to be taken - there's two different teams you're talking about: there's the aspirational Care Teams which you've been talking about?
A. Yes.
Q. Then there's the teams in the north, the north-west and the south. Is that the case?
A. Maybe I'm confusing things because I'm --
Q. That's why I just want it clear in my mind.
A. Yeah, yeah. I am talking about two different types of teams. So, putting Care Teams aside and talking about Child Safety teams, they're part of the structure within the Child Safety Service. So, each region has, for example, case management teams. The south is a big region, it has quite a number. There may only be - I think there may be two or three in each of the north and north-west. They each have around six, five or six, Child Safety Officers reporting to one Practice Leader. You'll have two teams who each report to one Practice Manager above that. So, those teams are responsible. They are really the guardian's delegate. They're responsible for the child's case management.
Q. From a child's point of view, the child will know that - should know that somebody cares for them, and that would normally be the Child Safety Officer?
A. Yes.
Q. Now, that safety officer will be away on leave from time to time, be away sick and perhaps need to change from time to time.
A. Yes.
Q. But you would know, would you not, roughly how many

Child Safety Officers you have?
A. (Witness nods.)
Q. And you'd also know roughly how many vacancies you have?
A. Yes.
Q. Are you able to give me those figures?
A. Yes. So, the establishment for the Child Safety Service - I actually can't give you the figures because the establishment includes the Advice \& Referral Line and that sort of thing, so it really is quite confusing. But the average caseload for the Child Safety Officers should be around 15 children each. But what we find is that the more vacancies we have, and I think at the moment we're sitting somewhere between 26 and 30 vacancies, obviously that number then increases because we have vacancies.
Q. I'm just thinking from the perspective of the child who's gone through the trauma of the events leading up to a removal, the removal itself and settling into a new family of some description: the person who would provide the most - the best level of safety and protection for that child at the present time is the Child Safety Officer? A. Absolutely.
Q. But that seems to be fairly under-resourced at the moment; would that be a fair comment?
A. Yes. I don't know that it's a matter of resourcing, but we're experiencing a challenge in being able to appoint people to Child Safety Officer roles. We are unable to fil1 all of our vacancies through our recruitment strategies, so we really are having a workforce planning problem that's persisted for some time now. Despite different strategies being used to try and fill that workforce, it's not successful. This is the challenge that we are faced with, that we don't have enough applicants who we are able to appoint to these positions. It may be in part because there's a limited market in Tasmania, we're competing with other agencies, government agencies who are also recruiting people with the same or similar qualifications, but also in the non-government sector.

There's been a lot of investment in recent years in Children and Family Services sector as a whole and I think we're competing for a very limited pool of people, so that's a challenge, but also within our own workforce,
inadequate workforce planning perhaps has led to a structure which means that we have quite a high number of more senior positions. So, when we hear statements about high staff turnover, retention issues, burnout, in many cases what's happening is that the frontiine is continuously being promoted up and the next level is continuously being promoted up. So what that does is a draw straight up off our frontline, leaving vacancies in Child Safety Officer positions.
Q. And I guess a lot of those are filled by fairly inexperienced officers?
A. Yes.
Q. Which then adds to the issues that you have to address?
A. It does add to the issues. We also provide as much flexibility as we can. We obviously support promotional opportunities, we support people to have flexible work arrangements for family and other reasons, we support people in their career progression to take leave without pay and take up secondment opportunities, we support people to purchase leave for their wellbeing: all of these things we support but all of these things, the flow-on effect is vacancy on the frontline.
Q. You're extraordinarily experienced in this, because you started off in 2004, I think you told us, as a case support officer. So you've got 18 years of experience. How do you think it can be solved, if it can, because you said it was a longish-term problem. What do you see? If you had your druthers and it was said, "All right, how do we fix it?", how do you fix it?
A. The frontline staffing issue to make sure that every child has a Child Safety Officer who is present and available for them. That issue. Yes. I think that we need to be strategic in our workforce planning. I think that resourcing does come into it; I don't think that we do have enough staff to meet our obligations, but I also think that of the staff and the resource that we do have, it hasn't been effectively managed.

So we have undertaken a review to inform workforce planning strategy. We have very recently appointed a workforce planner. There's some immediate issues that we can deal with, but we need to have long-term strategy in place also. So, some of those things include developing a
relief, a proper relief pool. We've tried relief pools before; they don't work unless the relief people are permanent people and that's actually the job that they want. It can't be an entry pathway for fixed-termers, because as soon as a permanent position becomes available, we lose our relief worker and we're back to square one. So we need proper relief arrangements.

We also need to be doing long-term planning with the University of Tasmania and other learning institutions so that we have a supply of qualified workers, but I also think that we do need to diversify our workforce. We place a lot of responsibility on the Child Safety Officers to be everything to everyone, and I don't believe that's necessary. There's been some progress there; some of the positions that have been created over the years are to tackle that very issue.

So, we've had coordinators appointed. We've had unit coordinators to support the teams with administrative functions. We've had support workers who are, effectively, case aids who can support the Child Safety teams. I think there's more that can be done there. I think the greater diversity we have in the workforce, the less pressure that there is on the Child Safety Officer to be doing things other than their core duties. And part of their core duties really should be that direct relationship with that child, knowing them, being their go-to person, being available.
Q. That would be one of the really major factors to provide the Child Safety if the child was at risk or felt they were at risk or something had happened, they knew that they could contact a person?
A. Yes.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. So we know that there is a dearth of Child Safety Officers and you've talked very eloquently about that. You also said, I think, that not all children have a Care Team and that some Care Teams are pretty limited. They are basically maybe a Child Safety Officer and one other person. So, what's the gap there? Can you talk about that a little bit?
A. Yes. So, there has been really positive progress with Care Teams, and some where I - I often have cause to look in the information system and look at what sort of Care Team arrangements there are for children, and they range
from being really impressive, really good, a good group of people who are having really robust child-focused conversations and developing really good plans.

But then we also have at the other end of the spectrum children who don't have a Care Team at all. Their Child Safety Officer, perhaps their case is allocated to the Practice Leader because there is no Child Safety Officer, or the Child Safety Officer's only just picked up the case and hasn't formed that Care Team yet.

And then we have everything in between. So, what we need to do is keep taking these incremental steps until every child has a good Care Team, because that's the way that we want to - I don't really like the term "case management", but really that's what every child deserves, to have the right group of committed people.
Q. Would you have a figure for the proportion of children who don't have a Care Team?
A. No.
Q. A rough estimate?
A. That's something that I'd have to take on notice. As I mentioned before, I could give a figure, but it would be a tick-box figure, because we can tick the box for a child having a Care Team, but if that's only two people and they're only needing to talk about the issues that happened last week in their residential care placement, that's not really a Care Team, that's a couple of professionals coming together and being almost reactive or supporting each other in the day-to-day. I'd need to see that there's actually goals that the child has been involved in developing and other people, and that the group are working toward achieving those goals for me to be satisfied that that's an effective Care Team.

I also think that for a Care Team to be considered effective for an Aboriginal child, it must have representatives from the Aboriginal community on it. So, I'm quite loath to give a figure that misrepresents our progress, but what I can say is that I - myself and the principal practice managers within our service are completely committed to making sure that we get there.

There's certainly challenges in establishing Care Teams beyond the practical challenges though. Some of
those in your introductory statement about the culture within the Child Safety Service, that certainly rings true. It's very difficult for Child Safety Officers to get Care Teams off the ground when there is a history of conflict, not just between the various parties, but between the various parties and the hostility, almost - well, indeed, hostility toward the Child Safety Service itself. It takes a lot of preparation to get that off the ground and it takes a lot of stamina to run it. If anyone's ever run or facilitated an extremely difficult conference, it's like the Child Safety Officer being asked to do that for at least 15 children and then do it multiple times. I believe that once we can overcome that first stage of extreme tension, hostility, past grief, everything that comes to the fore in the Care Team, once we get past that first hurdle, every time it gets easier.

But I can see why there is some - I don't know whether it's a reluctance, whether it's an avoidance, whether it purely is just the challenge of dealing with all of that complexity that can take quite a long time for the Care Team to get off the ground and running.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you for that.
COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: $Q$. When you look at the numbers you gave me, and I've always got check my arithmetic - it's not my strong suit - but if I multiply 26 , you said you run between 26 and 30 Child Safety Officers vacancies at any time?
A. Yes.
Q. I multiply that by 15 , that's about just under 400?
A. Some of those vacancies include other parts of the service.
Q. Oh, right.
A. Yes, so other parts of the portfolio, like Advice \& Referral Line. And yes, I believe that some of them are actually support workers and the like. They're not all Child Safety positions.
Q. Right, because I'm going from there to there, not going above it, looking at the problem, going across. Thank you.
A. However, there are significant vacancies across the Child Safety Service, in some regions more than others, and
those vacancies are also exacerbated by leave, and particularly COVID-related leave. At the moment, those services are, and one in the north in particular, is under enormous strain and has been for some time, which means that there are children who don't have a Child Safety Officer and haven't had for some time. So it's a very serious issue for our service and not one with a quick fix, unfortunately.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: $Q$. Ms Lovell, while we're on the issue of the vexed issues for Child Protection, and I think it's important that we understand this so that we don't, as an inquiry, unduly criticise the frontline when they're doing everything that they can in a tough working environment.

Thinking back on your two decades of involvement within Child Protection, would you care to make any observation around whether the complexity of families has changed or whether the demands, the volume of demand on the Child Protection Service has changed in those two decades?
A. I don't know that the complexity of families changed. I think our understanding around the issues and the ways that we need to respond has changed. I think the demands on the child safety service increased. I think - I know that we struggle to keep up with reasonable community expectation around the services that we deliver and the safety and quality of those services.

We know that we can't keep up with that demand, and I guess that's part of our reform difficulty; that we acknowledge that we're not doing well in relation to one aspect; we commit to doing better, we have a strategy around how to do that, but it's immediately superseded by the next area where it's determined that we're failing, and so on and so on.

So I guess it's not that we're not progressing and improving, but that is - I ask myself, "Why are we only just now developing a learning pathway around sexual abuse, around preventing and responding to sexual abuse?" But then I think back over the last decade of the different waves of focus that we've had, and it's because we've also been responding to the findings of child death inquests, so we're focused on infants. You know, our understanding of cumulative harm has emerged - thank you - so we have a focus on that. We're adopting a new practice framework,

Signs of Safety, a new way of engaging and working with families more effectively, so we focus on that. Family violence, that's been a recent focus as well.

We can't do everything at once, so the expectation on us - we certainly agree that we need to improve in all of those areas. That's what continuous improvement is about. But we can only do so much at once, and the more things we try and do simultaneously, it seems, the more that our efforts are diluted and we don't do anything as perfectly as we would aspire to. That's been my experience.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Thank you.
MS ELLYARD: Q. Commissioners, can I move to ask Ms Lovell some questions about the care concern processes? So bringing the focus, Ms Lovell, to circumstances where allegations of child abuse of one kind or another might be made. And I recognise that Mr Pervan's statement indicates that there are new processes in train, perhaps picking up your point, everything's changing. But right now as I understand it there are two potential pathways for the investigation of concerns about the wellbeing of a child in out-of-home care: one's a quality of care review and one's a serious abuse and neglect investigation. Is that right? A. Yes.
Q. And thinking about - and the policies that are attached to Mr Pervan's statement, and allegations of sexual abuse are allegations that would ordinarily fall into the category of the severe abuse and neglect investigations?
A. Yes.
Q. Although it does appear from the materials about quality of care reviews that whether or not there are proper responses to harmful sexual behaviours in the home might be one of those borderline issues that can sit in either category?
A. Yes. At the moment, because we deal with such small numbers of either form of concern, there is scope for myself and the Director to assist with making that call. And while that's happening, I would make the call that anything relating to sexual abuse of children be dealt with using the investigation approach and a degree of independence, not as a quality of care concern issue.
Q. Thank you. I wanted to ask you now some hypothetical questions - and these are pure hypotheticals, they are not linked to any particular case - just to help understand how those processes might work and the way in which, right now, a child who's alleged to have experienced one or other form of sexual harm in out-of-home care might be dealt with.

Can I take as a hypothetical example a child who's living in an out-of-home care placement that's directly arranged by the department who is observed at their primary school to be displaying problematic or harmful sexual behaviours, and of course it's unknown what the origin of those behaviours are.

Assuming this is a child who does have a Child Safety Officer, how would you expect that the Child Safety Officer will find out about those behaviours, as the starting point?
A. The Child Safety Officer's highly likely to hear about those through the school, so someone from the school will report it. They may report it to the Advice \& Referral Line, but they're more likely to know that the child's allocated in the Child Safety Service and make contact with that Child Safety Officer directly.
Q. So, the school wouldn't, for example, contact the out-of-home carer, they would contact the department? A. No, the school will contact the Child Safety Service. Yes, they're mandatory reporters and - yep.
Q. But again, thinking about them, they're mandatory reporters but at the same time the Secretary is this child's parent. So as I understand it, though, the notification will come to the Child Safety Officer in their capacity as the receipt of a mandatory notification, not because they're the delegate of the child's parent?
A. Both.
Q. Both?
A. Both, I believe. I think it would be really unlikely that a professional from a school would make contact with the out-of-home carer or the care provider; they're far more likely to contact the Child Safety Officer. They do contact the Child Safety Officers when they have concerns for children in a school context.
Q. And once the Child Safety Officer receives that report
from the school, that child $X$ has been observed to be displaying harmful sexual behaviours in school, what would be the expectation of what the Child Safety Officer did? A. So this actually isn't necessarily a care concern scenario. So, our care concern procedures cover more when the allegation is related to the carer, so something that the carer has either done or omitted to do. But when we receive concerns about children who are in out-of-home care generally, so observations like that where there's no alleged person believed responsible, that would still be a Child Safety assessment, which is very, very similar, it goes into the same system, into the Child Protection information system and it still requires assessment. It just means that we're not necessarily focusing straight onto the carers and either the quality of care that they're providing or an allegation that the child's been abused or neglected by them.
Q. So in that respect the response would be the same for a child who wasn't in out-of-home care; they're displaying harmful behaviours at school, there's a mandatory notification to the department, but there's a completely open mind about the source of those behaviours and whether or not the child is a victim of anybody?
A. Yes, so we need to gather information to establish that, so that goes into the system as a notification, a self-generated notification by the Child Safety Service which triggers an initial assessment; it certainly triggers consultation with more senior staff from that team or more broadly in the service and then the assessment follows. So, depending on the circumstances, it might be different who we consult with and whether there's a report made to police if we believe that there's abuse that's occurred. It might be that we have a secondary consult with a specialist service like Laurel House or the Sexual Assault Support Service to understand more about the behaviour that's been observed. It may be that there's a conversation - it's likely that a conversation needs to be had with the child to understand more of what's going on for them.
Q. Do you mean this is a child who has a Care Team? Would there be a role for a Care Team in responding in this circumstance?
A. Yes.
Q. You indicated that perhaps because of the small
numbers you and the Director who works underneath you have the capacity to have some direct involvement in this, but what's the level of supervision or oversight of that process to make sure that it's being done appropriately and that the child's interests are being appropriately understood and responded to?
A. So, assessments within the Child Safety Service are managed by the managers of those regional services, so there is consultation that occurs within that service, but I'm certainly not the delegate, that doesn't come to a statewide level.
Q. So, sitting as the Executive Director, what's the process by which you feel comfortable, if you do feel comfortable, that a child who displays behaviours in that way would end up getting a response that was appropriate? A. At the moment I have to trust the Child Safety Service and the professionals who work in that service to do their job, and their job is to assess and respond to allegations of abuse and neglect for children. So, the sorts of matters having - the sorts of matters that I would become involved in and be notified of are the ones where there's been an allegation that the carer has caused harm to the child or may cause harm to the child; they're the ones that are escalated to me via the management reporting line.
Q. Perhaps if we take then a second hypothetical example. Let's say that a child makes a disclosure that a child living in out-of-home care, let's say a placement where the carers are supported by a non-governmental organisation rather than directly by Child Safety Services. The child makes a disclosure that they've been sexually touched by a carer's friend, someone associated with the carer, perhaps not necessarily the carer itself, and that's a disclosure that's made to a therapeutic person working with the child. Again, what's the process by which the department - you would hope the department would find out about that and what's the process of investigation that would follow? A. Yes, it's a similar process, only I think that scenario that you've described would constitute a care concern. So, when we know - when it's alleged that it relates to the out-of-home care context, then that's when it goes in as a care concern and that's where there's a care co-ordination meeting held almost straight away with a group of practitioners from that service who make a determination, firstly as to whether or not it's a quality of care issue or an investigation of abuse issue. There's
referral to the police immediately when we receive that information, so then the protocol between the Child Safety Service and Tasmania Police also kicks in where we use a joint approach to responding to these matters; the police taking the lead in the criminal investigation and the Child Safety Service taking the lead around the safety of the child during the period of that investigation.

The Care Coordination Group will also consider the best way to approach it even within those two streams, including what support the child might need, who's going to be the person that meets with them and has the conversation with them, what support do the carers need in working through this process, the sequencing of events, those types of things, so that's dealt with through a sequence of care coordination meetings within the service.
Q. Ultimately, leaving aside the question of processes that might be followed in the police and so forth, there's got to be an assessment of whether the child's at risk in that placement?
A. Yep.
Q. And whether the child should be removed from the placement?
A. Yes.
Q. And who makes those calls? You've talked about the sharing of power but there's still got to be a responsibility, I take it?
A. Yes, that's our responsibility to determine whether or not the child's safe where they're living or whether they're going to need to move to an alternative placement and that delegation currently sits with the Director.
Q. Is there a risk framework or tool that assists the Director in making that decision about whether or not a child in a particular circumstance is at risk and should be removed even though the removal itself might cause harm? A. So at the moment the Director receives a briefing, it's normally a written - well, there is always a written briefing because that's what goes into the information system as the record but there's also a conversation - at least one conversation around that, that's a really significant decision to make for a child.
Q. It's what might be called a kind of an exercise of
structured professional judgment, and I'm keen to know what the structure is against which those decisions might be being made. Is it the risk framework, is it some other policy document?
A. Yes, at the moment there's the Tasmanian Risk Framework but there's also the Signs of Safety Approach. With these matters I - the briefing includes the perspectives of everybody involved and a description of the risk in accordance with the Tasmanian Risk Framework generally. So, it will speak to the immediacy, the severity, the pros and cons to either scenario, the attempts that have been made to - well, to either resolve the issues so that the child can remain where they are, or the fact that that's just not feasible, the level of risk's too high and it's completely unacceptable and the recommendation will be that there is no other option to secure safety for the child other than to have them move placement.
Q. Can I ask a hypothetical of a very different kind. This is a hypothetical, assume that the child is living in an out-of-home care placement where the carers are directly supported by the department and a Child Safety Officer becomes concerned about whether or not their colleague, the colleague working directly with that family, is becoming too close or perhaps forming a personal or inappropriate attachment with the child, perhaps taking the child out on their own, something of that kind, and has a concern that proper boundaries are not being maintained between the worker and the child.

What is your expectation of what that person with the concern will do about the concern and how the concern would be investigated?
A. Sorry, it's a staff member?
Q. Concerned about a colleague?
A. Concerned about a colleague, yeah, they report that to their supervisor and the very first thing that any supervisor within the Child Safety Service or Children and Family Services more broadly do is contact People \& Culture.
Q. What does People \& Culture then do?
A. People \& Culture step in straight away and provide guidance around the steps to take in raising that concern with the person involved. I receive a briefing very
quickly in relation to those matters. We look for any other relevant information, because often there is other relevant information that's not - you know, it might not be the first observation or complaint that speaks to this concern. People \& Culture will, if need be, they'11 prepare the minute for the Secretary to make a decision about employment direction and potentially having a staff member stood down.
Q. And what's happening for that child while that process is going on, focused on the --
A. The first thing we would do is interrupt so that that staff member doesn't have any contact with that child. We're fortunate that we haven't actually been faced with this scenario on very many occasions at all, so we don't have any current reports that we have people in our workforce who have or may sexually abuse children, I'm satisfied of that at the moment, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be responding to other observations around conduct that may lead to the abuse of a child or even lead to a culture, the sorts of cultures where abuse can occur.
Q. Thank you. I note the time, Commissioners, but with the Commissioners and the stenographer's leave I'll just raise the last brief hypothetical and this is perhaps a hypothetical with two parts, Ms Lovell.

One of the themes that's going to emerge in some of the evidence this week is a theme of older children, and when I say "older children" I'm talking about children perhaps 15 and above who are not in placements, who may not be subject to orders at all but who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and perhaps exposed to the potential of harm including the risk of sexual exploitation. We're also aware of cases of children who are on orders who absent themselves from placement, run away and are hard to protect in that way.

Can I ask you this question and perhaps you can answer it either way, either a child who's in the system but not in their placement or a child who hasn't been brought into the system.

Say a child is engaging in risk taking behaviours, they're running away from their placement, they're associating with older males, they're displaying behaviours, having new clothes and gadgets that strongly
suggest that they're at risk of or are being exploited. Thinking firstly about a child who is in an out-of-care placement, what are the responses that are available if and when the department becomes aware of that behaviour?
A. In the opening statement that you made today, all of the observations within that rung true to me about the risk of exploitation for these children and why that happens.
So I think that preventative measures around making sure that that child does have secure networks. If we make those observations and that prevention hasn't been taken our first response needs to be making sure that they can access safe people: safe people so that they can disclose, safe people who can help them to get to Tasmania Police, safe people who can provide them with a safe place to stay and interrupt that exploitative or abusive behaviour; that has to be our first step to try to build as much safety as we possibly can for children and young people; to make sure that they have a placement where they can come to at any time of day; to make sure that they know, wherever they are, that they can call someone who will come and bring them to safety and find them safety: that needs to be our response.
Q. What about if this is a child who isn't currently known to Child Safety Services who isn't on an order but who is running away from home and engaging in all those behaviours of concern, do you accept that they would be capable of meeting the definition of a child at risk? A. I believe that they are children at risk, yeah.
Q. And that they could well be children who might be appropriately assessed to enter the statutory system, including potentially an out-of-home care placement?
A. The difference is that children who enter the statutory system do so because they don't have a parent who is willing or able, so for some of those other children who aren't in the statutory system, yes, they're at risk but the willingness and ability of their parent, either at that present time or in the future, is untested, so I think for a lot of those children the efforts are around identifying whether or not there's a way that their family or someone or some people within their network can be supported enough to achieve enough safety for them. I don't think that it's an automatic, every child who's at risk needs to enter the statutory system because in fact they'11 be at just as much risk potentially if that's where they're at, those problems will still be present for them whether there's a Care and

Protection Order or not.
Q. Some of the evidence that the Commission has received suggests that the experience of non-governmental
organisations is that for a child at the age of 15 displaying those behaviours and not on an order, they're highly unlikely to be taken into the system and placed on an order because of a perception that they're reaching an age where they can self-protect or self-select. I wanted to ask you, firstly, are you familiar with that perception that we've heard about and do you think there's any accuracy in it?
A. I am familiar with that perception, yes. I think we're talking about a wicked problem, a problem that's been around for a long time, I don't think that there are any easy answers. So, I think in the services who are involved with children who are in that situation that you described, who are not living with their parents, they're still young, they're in their early-to-mid-teens, they're drifting between people's couches and shelters and sometimes going home, I think that they're highly vulnerable.

But I think as a community our efforts need to be geared toward achieving stability, responding to their wellbeing needs, getting them to a point where they are safe, identifying safe people, building their capacity to protect and care for that child.

I don't think - I see that it's tempting for people who sit with that sense of risk and responsibility when they're faced with these children, I can see that it's tempting for them to say, if only, if only Child Safety would open its doors these children would be safe. But that's not the fact, we'd still be relying on those services to do exactly the same thing. There's not a lot that Child Safety having orders - the order itself can't bring safety to these children who are at risk of exploitation.

One of the things that we need to be doing is interrupting and tackling the issue of the exploitation itself and that largely sits with Tasmania Police to do so, and I know that they have a commitment to that. I guess we need to find ways to be supporting children to engage with young people to engage with those processes so that we can disrupt that. We need to be finding ways, preventative measures to support children to avoid - to at least be able
to understand and ideally to avoid those scenarios.
I don't think getting a Care and Protection Order fixes the problem. I think the Child Safety Service has a role to play but, as I said much earlier, it can't be the only service that protects children, it can't be; it can't do it alone.

MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Ms Love11. Thank you, Commissioners. That's the evidence, with my gratitude to the stenographer who's carried on beyond the designated time.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you very much for your evidence. Thank you, we'11 now have a break for 1 unch, thank you.

LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Ms Ellyard.
MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Commissioners, the next witness is Robyn Miller and I'11 ask her to come into the witness box and take the oath or affirmation.
<ROBYN MAREE MILLER, sworn:
<EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MS ELLYARD:
MS ELLYARD: Q. Thank you, Dr Miller, please feel free to take a seat and put the Bible down. Can I ask you to tel1 the Commission please your full name?
A. My name is Robyn Maree Miller.
Q. And your present professional address?
A. Is in South Melbourne, in Cecil Street, South Me1bourne.
Q. And your present professional occupation?
A. I'm the CEO of MacKillop Family Services.
Q. Dr Miller, you've made a statement to assist the work of the Commission which was signed by you on 9 June 2022. Do you have a copy of that statement with you? A. I do.
Q. I understand that there's a matter of clarification that you'd 1 ike to raise in relation to paragraph 33 ?
A. Yes.
Q. So I'11 just draw your attention to paragraph 33. You refer there to the introduction of what's called the Safer Children's Framework and its implications for the Best Practice Case Practice Model. What's the clarification that you'd like to make?
A. I'd like to clarify that the Safer Model is actually a particular framework for Child Protection only around risk assessment, it hasn't superseded the Best Interest Case Practice Model and the resources are still relevant. It's a very new development and there's not a lot of information available, so I have clarified it with very senior people today, and the Best Interest Case Practice Model is across Child Protection, the non-government services and out-of-home care and remains the overarching practice approach or practice model within Victoria. Safer is a component of it just for Child Protection and that's around risk assessment, but the principles that are in the Best Interest Case Practice Model remain the same for the risk assessment component as well; it's just a more granulated guide for Child Protection.
Q. Thank you, Dr Miller, so with that clarification made are the contents of your statement otherwise true and correct?
A. Yes.
Q. I take it from what you've said, is that there is still benefit from the Commission in hearing from you in considering the best practice case model because it continues to be used in Victoria and continues to be a useful reference point?
A. Absolutely.
Q. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Ms Ellyard, just to avoid any potential perception of conflict, I just wanted to acknowledge that I was involved with Dr Miller in developing the Specialist Practice Resources that sat under the Best Interest Case Practice Model.

MS ELLYARD: Yes, thank you, Commissioner Bromfield.
Q. Dr Miller, you've indicated that the role you
currently hold is the Chief Executive Officer of MacKillop
and I do want to come to that, but first perhaps by way of exploring the breadth of your practical experience, you indicate in your statement that you started your professional career as an individual, couple and family therapist, and part of your professional background is that you started as a social worker and as a family therapist. You then moved from there, as I understand it, to work firstly in the Child Protection system in Victoria; is that right?
A. Yes. Yes, I had 10 years from 1980 in the field as a family counsellor working in family support, and then worked in Child Protection in after-hours, and then went to family therapy studies and then worked as an individual and family therapist after that clinical training, and then went into the department in 2006 as principal practitioner, becoming chief practitioner, that was a new position created to lead practice at a senior level, and then to the Royal Commission as a consultant and then to MacKillop in 2016.
Q. Thank you. In the course of your 30 years of professional life you've worked directly with families, including families perhaps facing some of the challenges that the Commission has heard arise for the families of children in out-of-home care?
A. Absolutely. So, I have specialised working with the most marginalised populations and particularly with areas of child abuse, sexual abuse and family violence. So, the whole trauma field was something that was very important to be aware of.
Q. And similarly, the work that you've done directly with families included families where there were allegations or experiences of child sexual abuse?
A. Yes, right throughout my career.
Q. And then your role as the principal practitioner or the chief practitioner at the department in Child Protection at the Department of Health and Human Services in Victoria, can you summarise briefly please what your role was there, perhaps with particular reference to issues of child sexual abuse?
A. Yes. Well, prior to going into the department I was part of a specialist team at the Bouverie Family Therapy Centre which was part of La Trobe University, and we were charged with working with families where there had been intrafamilial abuse or the sexual abuse of children by a
trusted adult. That included sibling abuse and intrafamilial abuse is the most frequently occurring form of sexual abuse. Based on that work I did a lot of training for the department and a lot of supervision and consultation and I was also in private practice, I was half time at Bouverie, so my experience had grown.

As I said, I was at Bouverie for 14 years. For ten years - before I went to Bouverie and during my family therapy training I was doing after-hours Child Protection work which meant that I had a knowledge of the statutory system. I had also worked with sex offenders, so the offending. We were one of the only teams that worked with victim-survivors, the non-offending parents and the offender where appropriate. So, we'd worked with a very specialised team doing that work and therefore we were asked to train many others.

In that context then they developed - in 2005 there was a big reform in Victoria, the Every Child, Every Chance. The Executive Director at the time approached me to - because of the broad experience I had saying they wanted somebody who would be a practice leader rather than a manager or a director, but to work very closely with the operational directors to raise the quality of practice. So in that role it became clear that there was a very great awareness of the lack of knowledge around children with problem sexual behaviours, particularly in out-of-home care, and that was one of first requests that I had actually.

So it was a broad role where it was envisaged that I would work with the most high risk cases in the state, report to the Minister on enquiries and particular reviews of complex cases. So, I would also be asked then to train, and I initiated that development of the Best Interest Case Practice Model because there was new legislation and there was policy, but there weren't the practice documents that were enough to bridge the gap.

So, the Best Interest Case Practice Mode1 was written from about late 2006, 2007, 2008. It was first published in 2008; it became clear then that we needed more detailed practice resources for frontline people, so I approached the Australian Institute of Family Studies and some specialised consultants to co-author with me some of these practice guides, and as Commissioner Bromfield has said,
that was a unique partnership because what we were able to do was develop cutting-edge research and put it into practice terms that were relevant in the here and now, if somebody was doing a home visit today. So, it was translating the knowledge from research into practice and useful resources.
Q. Perhaps it's a very obvious question, but assuming that Child Protection practitioners have all been to university, they're all trained as social workers, they bring in existing knowledge to their work, what's the importance of a practice guide of the kind that you developed?
A. The work is so complex that no two-year or four-year social work degree or psychology degree could possibly equip you to understand the knowledge that you need to have around sex offenders, around child development, around the impact of trauma at different ages and stages, and in fact that was one of the first guides that we wrote, the Child Development and Trauma Guide.

It was really important that, particularly Child Protection, but also Family Services and out-of-home care understood the brain science that was emerging, and there'd been a great increase in knowledge in the field from neuroscience and the impact of violence, the impact of sexual abuse particularly, which had been known for decades, but what the brain science actually documented was the impact of abuse and neglect on the developing brain and how that cascaded into every other part of the child's development, including how they learned to read and write.

So, what we had to do was really try to help build the confidence, and this notion of the impact of neglect had also been "neglected", excuse the pun, but in Child Protection and particularly in the Children's Court there'd been a focus on, you know, injury to the child that you could see. Whereas the impact of chronic neglect and the impact of witnessing, experiencing - because children don't just witness, they literally feel it, the impact of violence, and family violence is ubiquitous, we know that that impact of the adrenaline or adrenaline cortisol that floods the child's body when they're in a state of terror or fear and that they sense that from their parent. And when sexual abuse is happening, and there is a correlation between offenders - the only thing that correlates with sex offending is that the offender is more likely to be violent
in the home, but not always. So, what's not well understood and why Child Protection work is needed, more practice resources, was to actually develop the very specialised forensic sort of work that you need to know about how do offenders groom, for example, and what can be quite counter-intuitive. You know, "Oh, but the child went to him. The child sat on his knee". Well, yes, that's because the child's brainwashed to do that in front of professionals because the offender is so skilled at silencing the child.

So what we had to train people in was the whole dynamics, what we call the dynamics of sexual abuse, and it's not common sense, you know, it actually requires training. And then, how do you apply that to a home visit? And when you're a new graduate or even someone who hasn't had recent experience it's asking - it can be dangerous not to have well-trained and well-supervised frontline practitioners because you can miss things, and even the best of us don't always get it right, you know, so it's about helping to raise the quality because you equip people with a culture of learning and resourcing their learning by distilling the very large volume of research and theory that's around into chunks that people can make sense of quickly in the moment.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. Can I ask about, you talk about practice models and that goes, as I understand it, well beyond sort of broad policies; it's really almost how to? A. Yes.
Q. What do you do when you're talking to a child, what do you do when you go to visit a child in the home, what do you do when you're talking to, for example, a carer if you're trying to work out what's happened. Have I got that right? Have I understood what you've said?
A. Completely.
Q. So it's a much more sort of down to earth material about what to do in certain situations, which is of course supported by research. Have I got that right?
A. Correct, yes.
Q. Thank you.
A. And really it's not just the knowledge, it's how do you translate that into the skill, how do you actually help a mother, and particularly Child Protection who are obliged
to tell people that the information the family give may be used, you know, taken to court within 24 hours, which freezes. So, how do you actually use your warmth, your humanity to get the foot in the door, help the family to relax enough and help the children to feel safe enough to talk to you: it's very sophisticated, important work.

So, you're right, it's not just the knowledge, it's the practice, what we call the practice skills, and that's around how you join with the family, how you build rapport very quickly, and then develop a sense of engagement with them around a shared purpose, whether it's one visit or it's around your whole intervention with the family, what are the goals, what are we on about, what's our joint purpose for being here today, and also how can we help the family with issues that we might not know about, so it's around their needs and wellbeing, not just the immediate risk.

MS ELLYARD: Q. Dr Miller, as I understand the answer that you've given, the Best Interest Case Practice Model doesn't just involve that kind of really practical detail that the President has asked you about, it also assumes supervision so that workers aren't just given this model and told to apply it, they're continually supported and given the opportunity perhaps to receive supervision and reflection on their work; is that right?
A. And that's what we did, we built a whole team over time where we brought in more skilled practitioners who had clinical training, and by that I mean more specialised therapeutic training around these skills that could integrate the skills and the knowledge into these very confronting frontiine presentations. And so, a lot of those people - there's often a division, sorry, I should say, between Child Protection and mental health and then the community services, and really you need all of those therapeutic skills, I think, when you're working in Child Protection to understand the complex dynamics in families.

So, I trained in family therapy which I find to be an invaluable base; that was very complementary to social work and psychology training that I did, but it was very much around your practice skills and refining those, and that's the training that we built with bringing in different therapists who were also brave and able to deal with the more confronting aspects of Child Protection work that you don't have to necessarily deal with if you're in a clinical
setting like a hospital or mental health.
So, we built a team of what we call principal practitioners who would provide what we called reflective practice, and that is a more clinical case review, a team approach where there's more time to reflect on the complex work: what people are seeing, what they're feeling about the work and what they're doing, and building that in a more structured way is what we did in Victoria around throughout that decade and also building an operating system where more experienced Child Protection practitioners, instead of staying in the office as the manager, would actually become - we built a system of practice leadership so that each team would have a practice lead as well as a team manager.
Q. And what was the impact as you observed it of this approach on, firstly, I suppose the quality of the work that people were able to do and secondly perhaps on issues relating to staff wellbeing and retention given that this, as we've heard, is a very difficult area of work?
A. We also brought in coaching and what we found at a certain point was an improvement in the retention of frontline practitioners. So, in Victoria there was a many of the managers had been there a long time, so there was high level of retention, but it was the frontline that there was a turnover and you're always going to get that to a degree in nursing or teaching as well, but it was higher. So, we were able to decrease the turnover, and I'm confident that there was morale increased as well.

We also brought in a Graduate Diploma in Child and Family Practice and we trained Child Protection, Family Services and out-of-home care providers and Aboriginal agency workers as well together in a group of 25 or so with a consortia of universities, so it was paying people to have that higher degree. So it was a Graduate Diploma, and then we trained the supervisors in - sorry, it was a Graduate Certificate in Child and Family Practice Leadership, and then we trained a more senior cohort in Child and Family Practice Leadership, and that was really training them on how to be good supervisors; how to do live supervision, go out on the most serious cases.

So my role in the department was really trying to model and, because I did do the work with frontline practitioners on the most complex cases, would go to court,
and that was quite unique that more senior Child Protection managers generally - generally speaking, some would - but generally didn't go to court. So, we were able to build a greater sense of the expertise.
Q. Thank you. I wanted to turn but I'll pause in case there's other questions, to ask you some questions arising from your work at MacKillop, but were there any other questions that any of the Commissioners had about the Best Practice Model and the evidence that's been given about that?

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: I didn't have a question on the Best Practice Mode1, and I'11 see, Ms Ellyard, if you get to it but if we don't I wanted to ask some questions about the engagement with Victoria Police.

MS ELLYARD: Yes, and I am certainly coming to that, Commissioner Bromfield.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: And I'11 be quiet.
MS ELLYARD: Q. Dr Miller, you've indicated that the role that you hold now is as the CEO of MacKillop Family Services, and at paragraph 17 of your statement you indicate the areas of work in which MacKillop is engaged which, relevantly for the work of this Commission, include children, youth and family and in particular, MacKillop is a substantial provider of residential care services in Victoria?
A. Yes.
Q. At paragraph 35 and following of your statement you reflect on the evidence about the increased risk of child sexual abuse for children in this high level cohort of children in out-of-home and particularly residential care and I wondered perhaps if you could speak to that.
Paragraphs 36 and 37 , for example, speak to what is known about the cohort of children who live in out-of-home care, particularly residential care and what are the assumptions that need to be built into any system that's going to be caring for them?
A. Yes. Well, one of the first things I did at MacKillop was start to think about prevention of sexual harm to children in out-of-home care, particularly residential care, and having spent 18 months at the National Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual

Abuse, one of the great concerns was the greater risk for children in residential care and indeed in any form of out-of-home care of harmful sexual behaviours from other young people or from sexual exploitation.

And part of my previous role as chief practitioner was really leading greater teamwork with police and Child Protection and agencies around identifying sexual exploitation where adults are preying on young people in care and there's some sort of exchange of gifts or money or whatever to manipulate the young person, and this was a huge problem.

So from 2007 I'd been involved in training and trying to raise awareness of the harm and having a zero tolerance approach rather than a harm minimisation approach, and the Royal Commission did allow - there was a series of roundtables and allowed the notion of sexual exploitation to be a form of child sexual abuse, and where institutions needed to be more proactive in preventing.

So coming then to MacKillop, with that experience and fire in the belly really I was able to get some money from our board to form a partnership with the University of Melbourne to design and develop a pilot. We initially called it Respecting Sexual Safety. The young people told us that was a ridiculous name in no uncertain terms and then the whole notion of power, the power how they trick how offenders can trick young people. A 14-year-old boy was really articulate with me around the name and he talked about how they take your power away because they trick you and they make you think they're your friend and then later you look back. So, this whole notion of Power to Kids rather than power to the sneaky offender, so hence the name.

Gemma McKibbin was the post doc researcher from the University of Melbourne, we piloted it in four houses, so a development and evaluation over four years, and I knew the importance of having an evidence-based process and starting to develop the evidence. You know, we call it evidence-informed. To get the evidence-based tick you've got to do a whole lot of other work and we're doing that, the evaluation and research is ongoing. But I knew that there was nothing else that had particularised a prevention program for children. We'd done the international review at the National Royal Commission, so it was, what can we
do?
And, you know, the duty of care that we have as providers of care: if we say we do this work, we need to do it as well as we can, and we know the problem, what are we doing about it? So MacKillop has really embraced this and we've now scaled it up to all of our houses. We have 65 homes in total, we've trained all of our staff, except for the new people starting this week, I'm sure, but it's taken time and effort to really insist upon that during COVID, not allowing the barriers to get in the way.

And, not only that, we've trained all our directors and managers, coordinators, therapeutic practitioners, so we're all singing off the same song sheet.
Q. This is part of the Kids Program that you describe at paragraph 46 and following of your statement, and as I understand paragraph 48, Power to Kids has three distinct although complementary prevention strategies and I want to ask you briefly about each of them.

The first strategy is whole-of-house respectful relationships and sexuality education. Can you tell us, what does that mean in practice and what's its significance?
A. What we know, and alongside the work around Power to Kids we've also been doing deep dive case reviews and we call that Outcomes 100. That name came from looking at, what are the outcomes of our practice and how do we improve? We did deep dive reviews, and 100 was the number that we did, the first 100, because at that time MacKillop had 100 young people, we've now got 153 in residence with us. This started in June 2018, and I was already doing consultations and reviews. What I said was, we need to do this for every young person in residential care and do it systematically, and what we gathered then was a very strong database.

What we found was that there was a much higher proportion of risk than what was realised when you aggregate it. Subsequently - so that report was published two years later in 2020, and then we've subsequently done three other audits, and we now have a very strong three time points to follow up the Outcomes 100 and the incidence rates or the frequency, if you like, of the risk factors of sexual abuse have remained relatively constant, so I have
much greater confidence in talking about the incidence of the problem.
Q. The three prevention strategies, the first one is respectful relationships and sexuality education?
A. Yes. So what we've found is that the incidence of severe family violence was very high, somewhere between 80 and 90 per cent. So, the understanding of what is a healthy relationship and the relationship dynamics was really poor. The average number of placements was somewhere between 10 and 20 placements, two of our kids had had 56 placements before coming to MacKillop. Between 10 and 20, so the instability, and the pattern is generally kinship, being passed to family members; foster care, that will breakdown; then another foster care, that will breakdown; respite care; foster care; maybe back to kinship; then finally into residential care. So that whole notion of trust is often lost, and the sort of embarrassing conversations you'd have to have with kids around sex ed, everybody thinks it's somebody else's job or they've got it at school but the kids have missed a lot of school and they've changed school.

What we've found, and we've known this for years in the field, that the public agencies are very poor at sex education and yet we've got adolescents growing, and of course that's a big deal for adolescents that whole sexual development and what is a relationship and what is a healthy relationship. What does consent mean? What is grooming? So, we go into that. So what we said, it's a whole-of-house, so if you think of the triangle it's the first sort of intervention, if you like, is that whole-of-house education.

And we're targeting sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviours and dating violence, and those three problems are frequently presenting and they're frequently connected and it's not surprising when you understand the background of the children.
Q. Then the second element that you've described at paragraph $48(\mathrm{~b})$ is the missing from home strategy. Can you talk to us about the significance of that strategy?
A. Yes. So, Barnardos Research in the UK, who were way ahead of Australia in this field of sexual exploitation and identifying risks and putting in place systems, identified that missing from placement was a key red flag to - as an
indicator of sexual exploitation. And what we've said is, the system can become way too desensitised to that notion of kids - we used to say "absconding" but that's got a sort of criminal tone to it, we don't say that, we say missing from placement or away from home.

What we've done is broken that down. So, in the audits now we do at MacKillop, we ask, are they missing from placement and going to places that are not known? Are they going out at night for short periods? Are they associating with persons of interest? Or picked up by unknown people in cars? Are they provided with gifts and money by unknown people? So what we do is break it down and so we ask much more detailed - you know, the better you are at asking the right questions the more improved the quality is of information.

So from all of our audits there have been 32, 33, 31, 32 per cent across the different time points have exhibited harmful sexual behaviours at some point; that's young women and young men, so it's roughly a little bit under a third.

The prevalence of intrafamilial abuse. In that first cohort of 100 cases we found 48 per cent. But if you go to the subsequent ones where we've just - we haven't collated all the information from the panels, it's around 24 per cent, but we know it's much higher if you dig deeper into their history, and that's child sexual abuse before coming into care.
Q. Have you observed from the kind of careful audits that you've been doing and the quite targeted questions to reflect on about children's absence from placement, is that work then reflected in a reduction in the number of children who are absent from placement and exposed to harm? A. Yes, yes. The way we use that information is to absolutely target those young people with a much tighter care plan, engagement, constant reviews, weekly reviews, and we've halved the young people, that's our latest, that are missing from placement. So, from where we started with that first initial audit, we've halved that.

Part of what we found was that 43 per cent of young people were known to have been a victim or at very high risk of sexual exploitation before coming to MacKillop. At the point where they're in MacKillop's care, and this was the first Outcomes 100, so this is from 2020; that was
still the case for 22 per cent.
So, in one area, what we're doing now, we've continued to innovate and try different things. We now have the Director meeting weekly with the direct carers of those so in one area, in Victoria metro region, there were eight young people regularly missing from placement, we've got it down to four. And part of that is that the Director, much more informed about the detail, will ring the head of Child Protection in that area or ring a senior police person, and so we're more able to get the nimble change and be more interventionist in stopping that, or think about a circuit breaker or take them away, or find that grandmother, or what will motivate them to stay home? Maybe it is setting up the sibling contact. Where's the brother that's 19 that we haven't heard of, how do we find them? Where's the money for brokerage dollars to take them out to buy new clothes and actually create something for fun? So anything that will build engagement and rapport. So, when we're able to do that sort of creative work that you have to do with young people, to give them a good enough reason to begin to trust you, instead of wanting to go out and get the $\$ 100$ and the drugs from the offender.
Q. Then the third, and I want to ask you some questions about the significance of - what you've just described is really a multisystems response that isn't work just done by MacKillop but work done by a range of agencies, but just to finish off this question of the three prevention strategies of Power to Kids. The third one you've identified is a sexual safety response which I take it might itself include a degree of multisystems responses?
A. It's absolutely based on a multisystem response, that's correct. So, we can't do it on our own, we have to have police involvement otherwise it's a tug-of-war, and the Child Protection and non-government sector will lose because offenders have enormous power and mobile phones have made access to young people.

The online grooming actually increased during COVID. And most young people will have an iPhone and offenders will often give phones to kids, so the young people at greatest risk will often have three or four phones and we'll take them from them if they'll allow us but that's often a vexed issue. The houses aren't locked, you know, they're locked at night but young people - so we have to use a power of relationship to try to stop them from going
out.
Police on the other hand and Child Protection have greater powers. So, in Victoria Child Protection can issue a harbouring notice or drive for an intervention order. And, I've been absolutely involved in making that happen both within my role in the department and at MacKillop. We've been able to disrupt, with the help of police, the offender from the grooming process.

And police, we call it disruptive policing, but it's where the paradigm is around safety for the young person and stopping the offender: you might not get a sworn statement and a criminal conviction around the sex offence, but you might well help this young person to have a very different trajectory in life and keep them safe and get them back to school, and we've been able to do that again and again, but you need to have police at a local level who will be supportive. Drugs are often involved, criminality is often involved. There's different models for understanding the technique of the offender, the dangerous boyfriend, sometimes there is violence and sheer bullying and harassment and the young person's terrified to get out of it.

More often it's the sort of, the promise of attention and, you know, party-party, and he loves me and, you know, he might be 40 and have friends that he's manipulating the young person to have sex with so, there's different forms of it and it can be incredibly difficult for a young person to trust a carer, so what we're saying to the carers in all of those three strategies the whole skill base is around brave conversations, and noticing and then initiating and also sharing information with Child Protection and with the police. So, residential carers will often have a number plate, they'll often have a lot of information from the other kids who will tell us what the one we're worried about is doing; we'11 often have names.

So the importance of Child Protection then having a central network, a database, and police, is really important because one area of Child Protection might be looking after that particular geography but the offenders go across geography and across regions. So, what we found in Victoria in the department was the importance of a template where we pulled together key information that was held centrally. I was chief practitioner at the time, I
co-located two members of my team with the Sex Offender Registry people, so we were able to all of a sudden put the jigsaw puzzle together much more quickly to work out the patterns and the networks of offenders because they would often pass the names around.
Q. We're going to have a break in about five minutes, Commissioners, because this is quite a long session. But before we have that break, Dr Miller, you've touched there in your answers not just about the significance of the relationship between carers and the police but also about the role of Child Protection.

At paragraph 21 and following of your statement you gave some evidence about the proper balance or the sharing of responsibility that works best in your view where a child is subject to a Care and Protection Order that places them in the guardianship of the department but is living and being cared for day-to-day by a non-governmental organisation. I'd be grateful if you could speak to those paragraphs: what do you see as the proper balance of responsibility, is there someone who always has to be in charge? Where does responsibility ultimately sit for the safety of children living with your organisation but whose parent is the state?
A. I think the answer is both/and. The agency has a duty of care to do everything you can and we take that very seriously at MacKillop.

From a statutory point of view the case management responsibility might sit with Child Protection, and any child in residential care in Victoria is on Child Protection Order. Sometimes the case management is contracted to the NGO and sometimes it's not, it sits with Child Protection. Either way, though, Child Protection would have what we call a contracting team that oversees, has regular reporting in, and would do the court work, and there's a different part of the department called the Placement Coordination Unit, because residential homes are state funded.

Agencies have so many "targets", they're called, and there's often a very difficult process, where you know somebody might be at risk even from another young person within the home, so for example harmful sexual behaviours, or the recruitment, they may not be acting out sexually against that young person but they may be exposing them to
pornography or to this network of offenders, so you have this contamination effect, if you like, between the peer group within the home.

So, the importance then of, at times you might need to change placement; that necessarily means a funding discussion and where's another place? So, the department are generally holding the funding of all the different agencies who provide residential care and there's a wicked demand problem and it's often incredibly complicated and vexed and, you know, it can often feel like an impossible situation to find the right placement and juggle the competing needs of a group of young people.

So we advocate strongly the department do their very best and, you know, there's funding issues where we want to set up a contingency which is a one-to-one placement for a young person, so there's a lot of dialogue and negotiation.
Q. One of the things you identify at paragraph 26 of your statement is thinking back to the time that you were the chief practitioner, was that sometimes if you were called in to perhaps mediate a difference of opinion between a provider and the department you would observe that perhaps sitting at the bottom was lack of information, lack of good data collection and sharing.
A. Often one of the - and this comes from international research from Eileen Munro and many others who have written internationally about Child Protection decision-making, that heuristics operate - short quick decisions have to be made, and what can happen is that people get on a train track and think they know what's right and actually exclude out conflicting information.

So the key point is to - is that professional humility, that remains curious, remains open, and not feeling like you've got to be the expert and that you're initial risk assessment back in January is going to remain the same in June, for example. But new information will inevitably come to light, it didn't mean you got it wrong back in January, it just means that you know more now.

So the risk in any sort of practice decision-making is that you can go to one polarity or the other, that you'11 be overly optimistic, you'll look at the strengths in the family, the protective factors, "Oh that'11 be fine. No, no, the grandmother's right, but we didn't factor in that
she's now got diabetes and actually the offending boyfriend of the mother's is due out of jail". So, these - what we call, you have your static risk factors but then the dynamic risk factors, and you've got to be able to open up and stay curious and revise, constantly review and update your risk assessment.

MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Dr Miller. Could I invite the Commission to stand down just for five minutes. This is the halfway point in the session, just to give everyone a break.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Yes, we'll stand down for five minutes.
SHORT ADJOURNMENT.
MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Commissioners; thank you, Dr Miller.
Q. Dr Miller, I understand that you heard just the end section of the evidence of the witness before you, Ms Lovell?
A. Very briefly, yes.
Q. One of the things that Ms Lovell gave some evidence about in response to my questioning towards the end of her evidence was about some observations that have been made to the Commission about a cohort of children, perhaps aged 15 and above, who are without effective guardianship and might be homeless or at risk of homelessness and whether or not they were a cohort of children for whom there ought to be a Child Protection response, and Ms Lovell's evidence was that, although she saw a role for Child Protection she didn't necessarily accept that placing a child of that age on an order would do much to solve the problem of the risk that the child was at, and I'm paraphrasing her evidence.

I'm interested in your perspective from the Victorian context on the role that Child Protection can play perhaps in the lives of older children who are starting to be mobile and express their views and taking risks, and whether there is a job for Child Protection in addition to the work that might be done by other agencies?
A. I do think there is a role for Child Protection. I think that Child Protection needs to be resourced to be able to perform that role and the advantage is that because I agree that it can't be just Child Protection,
that that order of its own can be quite impotent.
The agency that is caring for the child is the one forming the relationship. So, what we know from research and from practice is that the key component of a good outcome is the quality of that relationship, and the ability for your carers to stay calm, to be non-judgmental, to welcome them home even it is 3 in the morning and they're substance affected, you know, to be non-blaming but to be able to de-escalate violence, to withstand the anger, the fight/flight response that comes from the past trauma, and to stay with that warm approach that you matter and it's our job to keep you safe.

And, not only that, to help you have a good life, and what are you interested in, what's your schooling, what TAFE, what can we get you, what apprenticeship, you know, whatever it is that's going to create meaning.

So the agency has a huge role. The police absolutely have a huge role, because obviously they've got the power to work with the persons of concern or the offenders. Together, you know, the system's saying the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The role Child Protection plays in Victoria, and indeed in New South Wales, we have 20 of our homes in New South Wales and I'm very familiar with their Joint Protocol and we're doing a lot of work with the police as well in New South Wales who are very open to developing that partnership.

The Child Protection advocacy is really important together with the CEOs and the work that NGOs can do on their own. Child Protection have that statewide remit so there's more power, if you like, in the joined up advocacy with police to try to work out the joint protocols to get into each region's own response. So, it is that integrated response that really makes a difference, and the research in the family violence field is the same, the integrated response, and the tipping point for change is when the system works together.

And, as I said, Child Protection can initiate some Children's Court proceedings where we were able to initiate intervention orders. Children's Court magistrates were very helpful with that, and police and Child Protection
together going to court on some of those civil orders had greater potency.

So, it's not a simple answer; for me it's about the both/and, and at 15 when they've had such trauma and, you know, of our 153 children in residential care at the moment roughly about 35 per cent live with disability; about 80 per cent, over 80 per cent have a diagnosed mental illness. We're dealing with very, very traumatised young people who've experienced horrors, you know, beyond most of our knowing right at that crucial developmental age. So, they might be 15 or 16 or 17 , but they're completely behind the 8-ball in terms of being able to discern who's a safe person and they're entirely vulnerable to people who are offering them the immediate gratification of money and drugs.
Q. This raises a question which we've heard some evidence about and I asked Ms Lovell to comment on it and we'll hear more about it, the extent to which it does occur and, if it occurs, whether it's appropriate to give children aged 15 and above the power to vote with their feet and to take the view that they can self-protect by finding a place to live so that they don't need to come into the out-of-home care system or they can self-select to live away from placement and their wishes should be respected. You've touched on this in your statement but could you tell us your view about that?
A. I would be very concerned about - I didn't, I wasn't privy to all of the Director's evidence --
Q. Of course, yes.
A. -- so I don't want to comment on that particular statement, but what I can say generally is that 15 , 16-year-olds in our residential care homes with such instability, such trauma, such complexity, if they're missing from placement frequently, they're in trouble, and frequently it is an offender. The research is in and our practice evidence is in about that.

You know, I've personally been on a number of visits where the brainwashing that occurs - I remember one young woman screaming at me, "He's the only one that loves me". And she was hiding, we were visiting the home, she was hiding, he had put her in the roof. She was texting a friend and one of the other friends told us that's where she was so we got police to go in and that's where they
found her.
But it wasn't until we were able - and we had a secure welfare capacity so we were able to - it's very difficult to get children in, there's only ten beds in the state for young women and ten for boys in Victoria, but a placement there, where we were able to get the phone off her. She was able to be detoxed. She had a sexually transmitted disease, which is a real issue for kids. There were, you know, all sorts of medical problems with her as well. But it wasn't until we were able to detox and then absolutely flood her with warmth, with engagement, withstand her anger and vitriol, and then gradually bring in some key people for her it was her grandmother - and we were able to begin to - and she herself later said, "I think I got caught up in a cult". Now, it wasn't a cult, he just brainwashed her like offenders do. But he'd groomed her to such a degree, and he was fuelling her with drugs which was - you know.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. So, the points that you've made in favour of orders are the ability to do things like call in the police which then means you can intervene in those other ways and the ability to detect people who are doing this in a systematic way around the state, which if you do it all on the basis of a sort of voluntary basis, you can't do it. Have I understood you correctly?
A. Correct. You can't aggregate up the knowledge around offenders and networks. Even Child Protection couldn't if they were just working regionally, which is what used to happen. What I was able to do was to advocate and say, we need a central database.
Q. Yes.
A. And collocating Child Protection senior people who had that central - the templates would come in from all the regions to one spot, and then we're able to correlate, hang on, that name came up in the east and he's also actually in Warrnambool. Then we were able to work out - the kids were on the train lines. Some offenders were giving kids E-tickets from Tassie actually or from Sydney. So, they would give the kids on a phone the E-ticket and they were getting on planes to be exploited. Shocking stuff. So, it happens and what we were saying is, zero tolerance, we needed police to help us intervene, but as an agency caring for a young person, unless you were very strong you wouldn't have access to that level of advocacy or to the joined up intelligence.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: $Q$. And it sounds like the secure welfare placements were a last resort but an important component of your toolkit of responses to combat that brainwashing when the young person really couldn't be separated from the person exploiting them?
A. Correct, yes. So that, the opportunity to have a contained, safe environment - what we found interestingly young people relaxed and you often then saw the little girl who wanted to cuddle up with a soft toy, who might have been, you know, swearing and acting like a 30 -year-old when she's 15 out in the world, you know, rejecting the placement, running amok, if you like, but with offenders pulling the strings. And often saying, "Bring your mate. I need your friend. What's the matter, you didn't bring your friend?" So what we need to understand is the recruitment of other young people in care, that happens.

The other side of that is, young people putting themselves on apps, on these mobile phones, you know, one's called Grindr, there's a range of them, where they've learnt to - you know, I can make a sort of sex video, I can do this or do that and get money, and the money's generally for drugs or for clothes or whatever, you know.

So, it's a complex dynamic where the young person is not trusting any adult in their life, and I have learnt and been manipulated that I can do this and I can get money and I'm in charge. So, the dynamics of it psychologically are often around a re-enactment of trauma. You know, as a little kid they were done to, they were victimised, now I'm going to be in charge, I'm the boss. That's another whole complex area.

MS ELLYARD: Q. Perhaps picking up on that, can I ask you about, some of the materials that are going to be considered this week relate to the risks of harmful sexual behaviour and the risks that some young people might pose to other young people in placements.
A. Yes.
Q. And the question of how decisions can be made about placements that will serve the interests of highly complex young people, and I'm conscious that you may have some reflections from your experience at MacKillop on the way in which to plan for placements and the placement of children in homes where they're not going to be vulnerable to
exploitation from other children.
A. And look, this really relies on your staff being trained and attuned and well supported, well supervised. What we've found is that there was a difference in the funding models, that about a third of the placements were considered therapeutic, would have extra funding for a therapist to be attached to that home, which is up to four young people being housed together with rotating staff on a roster; so that's what we mean by residential care.
Sometimes the homes are two-bed and we've advocated and we have now more two-bed and sometimes with extreme behaviours the department will fund one young person, it's often called a contingency or an unfunded placement. It's because things are so serious that's the only way, or they've harmed other young people in care so it's too great a risk and it can't be managed.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Q. It sounds like you've got pretty good triage facilities there. You talked about that central point so that people who knew what they were doing, whether it's police, Child Protection, NGO, and presumably the courts are also informed courts in Victoria, aren't they - and I'm not critical of the local courts, but they're specialist Children's Court, aren't they?
A. They are, the Children's Court is considered a specialist court and those magistrates hear those matters.
Q. Then you've got the secure welfare facility, with a limited number of beds, but you can focus significant resources on those particular children with their particular problem?
A. Yes.
Q. And then, once you get over the hump, you can then send them down, or send them across - send them down is the wrong word - but send them across to trained staff in not so intense facilities but let it go from there. Is that what you're saying?
A. That's right. So partly it's the more complex the young people - and really there's no difference, what all our research from MacKillop has shown, that there is no difference in the complexity and the needs and problems of the young people in the therapeutically funded homes compared to the standard residential homes; that in fact there was no difference. So, we've been advocating strongly for a pricing review of the residential care funding, because the staffing - to get the staffing and the
supports. So, MacKillop has actually self-funded therapeutic support for every home now and that has meant a greater awareness of - and we've increased the training dramatically. So the supervision, we're much stricter, the training, but you've still got a turnover so you can never say, you know, it's always a dynamic that - you know, and new information will come to the surface that you might not have known when the young person was referred into that particular residential home.
Q. And the exquisite trauma that these young people go through is just - I can't think of any circumstance where a child would be in out-of-home care where there wasn't some significant trauma in the background. I've struggled to imagine a case where there wasn't trauma?
A. Absolutely, Commissioner, they've all had horrific trauma. Not only that, the loss and grief of lost parents, lost siblings.
Q. That's a significant trauma in itself?
A. Absolutely. Lost places that they loved or, you know, they might have loved a particular school, a teacher, you know, a pet they've left. So, when they're taken into care - and the courts have a very high threshold around the risk that needs - you know, there needs to be - Child Protection, most children involved in Child Protection stay at home, of course, and Child Protection does a lot of unrecognised work to support families, and so, it's only a very small percentage actually end up in out-of-home care. So, things are very serious to get to that level.
Q. We heard some fairly poignant evidence this morning about a child who was removed but all of her possessions were left behind and the impact on her of the loss of those possessions which to some it wasn't much but for her it was huge because that was all she had.
A. Part of that healing from trauma is to form what we call a - have a coherent understanding of why I'm in care and what happened, and why my mum couldn't or why my dad, and where are my things, where are my photos? So part of what we've done as an agency is trained about a thousand of our workers in what we call therapeutic life story work. So, what we've done is a number of different things to try to skill up the carers so that we can be more helpful and more compassionate to the needs of young people and not get caught up in reacting to the aggression that's usually there at the beginning; you know, the kids come in with a
pretty tough sort of fight response, fight/flight, and that's a trauma response; they're wired to survive so they're running on adrenaline, so they're easily triggered, so we have to have staff that aren't reactive to that, you know, they don't know how to stay calm, dinner's going to be on the table at six; we really care about you; oh, you like getting your nails done, what can we find, so some way to engage and have some warmth so you can begin then to turn it around.

I was in Sydney on Friday and two girls I lost sleep over seriously, two of our girls in Sydney, sexual exploitation and drug taking: one of them's got a job now she's very proud about and she got employee of the week at Hungry Jacks, and the other one is back at school, had her school uniform on, we had a recon - so, you know, it is possible with really warm, resilient, down-to-earth staff that will go the extra mile; but that means you've got to support those staff, you know, if they're injured or the victim of that aggression, and how do you help them to do the repair work. So, we train everybody in therapeutic life crisis intervention, TCI, which is, how do you de-escalate, how do you use your body, how do you not raise your own voice, how do you stay calm, how do you not get in their space, how do you prevent the violence occurring?

It's a very skilled, sophisticated body of work. Good quality therapeutic work is extraordinarily complex, I think they deserve a medal.
Q. And for the kids there is an opportunity, a chance?
A. And the kids love them and they'11 come back, yeah. We have community meetings, house meetings. Many of the kids have never learnt to sit at a table to have a meal together, the meal table's been a war zone, you know. So, helping them bit by bit understand that you can create a safe place. So, the Sanctuary Model is something we train everybody in that helps everybody at MacKillop, even the gardeners and the guys doing the finance to understand trauma and why the kids will smash the car occasionally, you know. So that question of what's happened to them rather than what's wrong with them and how bad they are. You know, let's have a compassionate understanding, what's happened to them. But not just understand but actually, how do we intervene to turn it around to change things?

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Q. Dr Miller, can you remind me
again what year you became the CEO of MacKillop?
A. 2006 .
Q. 2006? 2016?
A. Sorry '16. I'm going mad. 2016.
Q. So, 2016, and are these all things that you've implemented in your term as CEO?
A. The Sanctuary Model was already at MacKillop. So, the previous CEO did a marvellous job and had embraced the Sanctuary Model since 2012. So that whole notion of - we had - the department brought in the Sanctuary Model in 2008 and I was part of that, and it was something that attracted me to go to MacKillop, because I knew they had already embraced that trauma-informed practice.

The therapeutic crisis intervention, the power to kids, the therapeutic life story work, HEALing Matters, all these other things were brought in subsequently, and the principled practice - we've, you know, got a staff of about 30 now, clinical people. That's all grown as we've realised the need for it, and the board have accepted my recommendations and we've found ways to fund it.
Q. Can I just check: in Victoria, would you consider overwhelming demand and shortage of appropriately qualified workforce to be a challenge?
A. Overwhelming demand, absolutely. Workforce is absolutely an issue for every agency. And it's not just recruitment, it's retention. Occupational violence in residential care is a big issue, and we've worked very hard to reduce that and to support staff who may be injured psychologically or physically.

So, we've introduced evidence-based things in the last five years called EMDR, Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing, so we're doing that with our staff, which has had a real impact and helping them to have more skilled intervention at the point after an assault or after an episode where things have blown up to help them to not be injured by that and just come back to work the next day.

The importance of having - when we say
"trauma-informed", it means you're actually using a range of different strategies to help your workforce to stay in the work.
Q. The reason I asked these questions is, it can be easy when you're listening to someone who's gotten a long way advanced in a journey to think, "Well, I'm all the way back here. How can I ever get to there? It's too hard, you don't understand how hard it is." I just wondered if you had any reflections that you might offer on how you implement to actually see change at the frontline, how you create the space to be able to do this work when you're dealing with overwhelming demand and workforce shortages and critical incidents and all the things that come with working in out-of-home care?
A. One staffing group, one child at a time. And that's why the importance of those deep dive case reviews, the importance of training, the importance of not just supervision but group reflective practice. So it's a range of things. The focus on work health and safety.

MacKillop have an institute where we've received funding philanthropically to offer Power to Kids, the prevention program, nationally. We've now got 14 agencies and we were - South Australia were very much - highly motivated to improve the quality and safety of residential care, didn't have the funding around the clinical support. We've been training them in the Sanctuary Model, which they've really embraced: they're seeing change. Similarly, we're training all of their residential care homes and teams in the Power to Kids. So, that's a system that's embraced it. We've actually had some enquiries from Tasmania, which we're certainly supportive of providing.

So that, I think it's about taking step 1, step 2 , step 3. And local people on the ground have the best ideas; it's not all top-down. You know, it's really engaging people that are closest to the kids and their families.

The big thing, too, is making it culturally safe, so for Aboriginal young people or children from culturally and linguistically diverse groups to really - we've tried to very much tailor it to the individual cultural norms: that's the Power to Kids and Sanctuary. Cultural safety is one of the pillars.

So, there's no one magic bullet, but you start somewhere. And there's a lot of goodwill from the staff that I'm sure are on the ground right now, and it's about working together to work out the first step, or the next
step. And part of it, can I say, is about resourcing: you do need funding to develop the training and the positions so that you have the clinical and the operational like this (indicates) hand-in-glove, rather than a consultant once a month saying, "You ought to do that", and the staff saying "Well, you come and live my life," you know, "and try to answer the phone, cook the tea and have a therapeutic conversation and write the notes." It's really hard.

So it's about understanding deeply what the work is in out-of-home care, residential care. But also foster care; we haven't talked about that. But we've trained up our carers in the Power to Kids, and they're really clear that they lacked information on the brave conversations and how do you talk to kids about the eSafety, the online grooming, and how do we talk about consent? So, all of these things really - foster careers need it, too.

MS ELLYARD: Q. Could I perhaps ask a question, Dr Miller, which invites you to reflect on the basis of your recent experience at the department as well as your current experience at MacKillop. You've talked about change perhaps one child at a time. Some of the evidence that we have in this week is that there's been a constant process of change in the Child Safety Service in Tasmania, constant reviews, constant new models coming out and on one view the change literally has never stopped so that any document isn't in place very long before it's subject to potential change.

Now, of course there should always be improvement, but I'd be grateful for your reflection on how one balances improvement with some kind of stability for the workforce and for the children who are being cared for by the workforce?
A. I think part of it is celebrating and noticing the good practice. The media love a salacious story, but wouldn't it be lovely to have a profile on the front page of the change that child protection workers are doing today in Launceston or Burnie, or - you know, the difference they're making. Because they are. So noticing the strengths, noticing the brave, amazing practice that is on foot today - I'm sure it is - and then you build morale and you get good people wanting to stay in the work.

How do you actually get sophisticated supervision that is noticing and is able to do the family - and notice the
family's strengths without being punitive and mother-blaming, understanding the impact of the mother's experience of family violence on her parenting capacity; are we at the point where she just can't do it or actually if we put enough supports into the family - so how do - you know, you can't just fund child protection as a system; you need to be able to fund your family supports adequately, and train those workers who can regularly do the work to support the family so that they don't need the statutory order anymore.

So you then also then need to work out, how do you get your children that are in out-of-home care back home? Because an awful lot of kids can go home, if we worked enough, not in having the battle in court around the conditions of the court order, but actually in getting a conciliation and getting the parents to understand, okay, what are the goals, what do I need to do to get that kid home? Because we know from that first six months that the children are in care, that's your best shot at getting them home. If you can engage the family, that's where the motivation is.

So if you think systemically, you can't just think about funding child protection or residential care; you've got to think about funding your whole system and also training people at TAFEs and universities to want to do the work, and that means raising the morale and the profile and having a greater community respect for those heroic people who do it day-in and day-out.
Q. And so, in the context of Tasmania where, on the evidence that I understand the Secretary will give later this week as foreshadowed in his witness statement, where there's a very large number of pieces of work in train, no doubt all with good intention, but one could imagine that the net effect is that those doing the work as Child Safety Officers and in the foster care system have a degree of uncertainty about what the rules are and what the guides are and how they should conduct themselves. I'd be grateful for any comments you have on, again, how to balance that, the need for reform which may well be necessary, with the need for some kind of predictability and stability in the system?
A. I think the more regulatory and - so, it's a very delicate balance, because you want to raise a standard. The young people and families have been harmed to such
a degree, and the children need to be given best practice. To do that, you've got to have your smartest and your brightest and your most compassionate skilled workers stay in the work and model how to do it. Because you can have all the training and read all the books, actually doing it in practice is the real skill. And people learn, actually, most from watching and seeing and doing it with. So, the role plays that you do at uni and all of that, yes, but the actual sort of practice experience is what makes a difference.

So we, for example, in residential care we shadow shift people. We've now got therapeutic trainers that go into houses, you know, where we've got really troubled times happening, and model, how do you do this. And getting the directors in. So, I talk about visible leadership. So, the whole shift in Victoria was actually saying, your most experienced people need to be nipping in the bud the problems. Rather than dealing with complaints in the office and being office-based, get out and do the hard yards frontline for your most complex cases or where you've got recidivist issues happening.

So, I strongly believe that that makes a difference and relieves some of the anxiety of new graduates who can then become more rigid in their thinking because they're so anxious about getting it wrong. So, if you don't have a period of consolidation - and I know that other states are talking about this as well. There's been so many enquiries, so many recommendations, it's overwhelming the system. And often, the funding isn't commensurate with the expectations. And they're getting, damned if you do and damned if you don't. "You're stupid you didn't take that child; you should have known." But then, "Oh, you're taking the children." You know? "You're kidnapping the kids." So, this sort of polarity around how Child Protection is viewed is really very difficult, and Child Protection practitioners, by and large they're human rights workers. You know? They're going out because they strongly believe children have rights to be safe. And people can be Pollyanna about families, but horrific cruelty happens in families and we're naive if we think that it doesn't. Equally, most families don't want to hurt kids. Most children belong back in the family.

So overwhelming the child protection system with every child wellbeing issue is not going to get a system
anywhere. So building up your family support structures so that they can be proactive and engage with the difficult-to-engage families is a really important part of how you keep children as a community safe and thriving.

So, it's almost like that notion of "child protection is everyone's business". So what happened in Victoria was training up the Family Services sector in risk assessment; that was really important. And saying, "Actually you can carry a whole lot more risk." And that has happened, so that whole child first development of a joined-up intake in getting the child family support services to share an intake to talk to each other in local areas, so you have more of an area-based system, more along the UK lines of a local authority system, you know, where you have an area. And so, police are part of that as well, with the sexual abuse issues.
Q. The Commission's received some evidence or reflections from some non-governmental organisations who I think would say that they find the idea of sharing in the risk challenging, that they have a concern that risks that are at a level that ought to sit with Child Safety Services are being shared or pushed back on them. As I understand it, in your view it is possible for some risks to be shared as between Child Protection Services and other community organisations?
A. It's not only possible, it's absolutely necessary. You shouldn't have Child Protection as the narrow eye in the needle that families that really need the most intensive support have to come via child protection. What we developed was a community-based response, and community-based child protection workers who could do some of the more complex cases where you are, you know, "Are we on the cusp?", "Is it too dangerous?" You know, what other protective factors are not necessarily the strengths in the family. The strengths might be the mother loves the children, but the risk factor and the likelihood of harm are so strong that that's overwhelmed, you know? So, the complexity of that risk assessment, you need to be consulting and have that fresh information. So, there might not have been a charge for the family violence, but there might have been 10 police call-outs, yeah, that didn't result in a charge. Well, those 10 police call-outs are really important information for the experience of the children.

And, you know, families aren't always forthcoming about the truth of the matter, so kids can be exposed to horrific stuff, and if there's drugs. So that whole sort of nuance where Family Services might be involved, but actually the parents aren't engaging; there's no evidence of change. And that's been over a period of time; you've got a baby there, you've got children, you know? You need to have the capacity of the community service agency to have Child Protection jointly visit with you and help with that very complex decision-making.

If you have everything through Child Protection, it's an unnecessary overwhelming of the statutory system so that the most forensically dangerous cases don't get the attention because the whole system's swamped by wellbeing cases that could be dealt with by community services.
Q. The last question that $I$ wanted to ask, $\operatorname{Dr}$ Miller, is to revert back to the question that Commissioner Bromfield flagged and that you've already touched on, which is the way in which foster care providers and residential care providers can partner with police to disrupt sexual offenders. I'm aware that you have some experience with this both while you were a principal practitioner in the department and more recently in Geelong, I think, in part of your work with MacKillop. I'd be grateful if you could explain to us how in practice that partnership between MacKillop and the police operated, and the changing mindset that perhaps was involved for police?
A. Absolutely. We were able over a period of three years, through that partnership work, the joint, work, which is ongoing, but it was a particular police sergeant who was fantastic, who absolutely respected the work of the residential care providers, you know, the carers. And there was a network of drug-dealing, sex-offending parents, actually, who were then recruiting kids. They lived - the houses were in close proximity. Over a period of three and a half years, there were 14 offenders that were remanded, which is quite extraordinary.

So the paradigm shift with policing was around helping the kids to be safe rather than getting a criminal conviction for the sex offending. What we found, though, was actually both were achieved through that joined up work with Child Protection as well. And in Child Protection, what we've done is develop over the years a sexual exploitation Practice Leader in each area. So, someone who
had that portfolio, who was training up new child protection workers, who held the overarching dataset, who was liaising with the sex offender unit. So those positions still exist. So they operated out of the office of professional practice that I headed up and they still remain in place operationally around Victoria, and that expertise that we recognised was needed in each area. So, in Geelong that Practice Leader in Child Protection was terrific as well. So that you had the trifecta: You had the Child Protection, the police and the agencies working like this (indicates).
Q. In practice, as I understand, it in the end it did result in a number of criminal convictions or remands, which presumably meant that children made statements and gave evidence?
A. They did.
Q. But it didn't start with the aim of getting evidence from children?
A. No. So the old days was police would say, "Look, come back if she's prepared or he's prepared," because boys get sexually exploited as well, and that's often even further underground. The frequent response we used to get was, "Is he or she prepared to make a sworn statement?" "No? Well" - and they're usually not - "Call us when they are." Which meant NFA, no further action. What we are able to do is say, "Look, they might if we're able to build rapport," or, "If we could get you to" - you know, "we know he's driving an unregistered car. There's unpaid fines." Police would do the old knock on the door, the disruptive policing, so there was often - and then bit by bit, we'd come to - you know, we'd have police every week coming to our homes for dinner in plain clothes, shooting hoops with the kids. We got them to come on camps with the kids. They do a whole lot, so they build a relationship, build a rapport. It's surprising how quickly the kids will talk if they trust the person. And they might talk then because they don't want that friend getting into the same trouble.

So the camaraderie and partnership between the three systems is so important, and then of course getting education involved so that the kids aren't excluded from school because of bad behaviour, but how do we get them back into a positive trajectory, get them a part-time job? All of these things matter as well. The mentoring programme for Aboriginal kids. So, it's not just one thing
or even the three systems; you've got to think holistically. And often, the leverage for change was the family.

The other thing I just wanted to add, going back to the previous question you asked me about the system, we had a program and have a program called Cradle to Kinder, it's now called Family Restoration and Preservation, in Victoria. The department in Victoria and South Australia collected the data around unborn Child Protection reports, found that within one or two years, 28 per cent of those reports ended up in care, those babies: 28 per cent.

We were funded to do outreach in three different areas initially, now nine different areas, to have an integrated casework and therapeutic - family counselling and casework together outreach, not expecting them to come into our office, but we go out. So I talk about, you know, family therapy around the kitchen table or in the car while you're getting the child immunised and finding the birth certificate and helping mum to get the confidence to go to the doctor to get a GP referral to get the depression treated. You know? It's that sort of thinking holistically about what's getting in the way of the good parenting.

Over four years, we were able to reduce that figure to 11 per cent. That's why I'm so passionate about the need to think holistically about the system.
Q. And to start as early on as possible in the life of the child who might otherwise be at risk?
A. Absolutely.

MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Dr Miller. Thank you, Commissioners. I'm looking at the time but if there are any questions for Dr Miller?

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Q. I just have one quick question. We are going to be looking at youth detention, I wonder whether MacKillop has had anything to do with dealing with kids who are already in the system, you know, in the youth detention centre. We might want to find out some information about that, about you applying the principles that you've talked about in that context?
A. Yes, we absolutely do. We run a programme called Multi-Systemic Therapy psychiatry, MST. Again, that's
about having the trained people, well-supervised, smaller caseloads, working outreach intensively around the family, intensively for six months, with mental health embedded in the team, a psychiatrist embedded in one day.

I can give you the statistics, but the police - one of the criteria for entry into that program is, you know, at the pointy end. Kids that are involved in criminal networks, guns, knives, what have you, and complex mental health. And we've been able to reduce between 80 and 90 per cent no new arrests; between 90 and 100 per cent after six months at home. So, some of those kids started in residential care. But what often happens, when they go home there's no support for the family. So it all - the merry-go-round starts again. What this was, was an intensive intervention to support the parents and the kid and the school and the siblings and the next door neighbour - whoever is relevant to the family - to do the work to understand what the pain is about, what the rage is about, and how do we actually get them onto a different trajectory. That's very skilled work, but it's possible.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you.
COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Q. I had a final question, too, and thank you for your evidence. You've talked about the need for therapeutic care. You've talked about it from a human rights perspective. You've been doing it; I wonder if you had any reflection at all as to whether there's any cost benefit to providing therapeutic care?
A. Absolutely. If you think about the cost when young people leave care, we know that the system down the track will be paying for it anyway in terms of police, emergency health services, mental health services. You know, we've got philanthropic money also to run adolescent violence programs because of the increased risk of becoming a violent offender down the track. So it absolutely pays off.

The targeted intervention for children with harmful sexual behaviours, the evidence is in: most young people don't go on to adult offending. But if you look the other way, adult sex offenders, most of it started in adolescence, yeah? So, the intervention works. It's about skilling up, training the right people, supporting them to stay in the work, so there's absolutely - and there's many different ratios, but if you spend $\$ 1$ - the Heckman

Equation: if you spend $\$ 1$, you save $\$ 17$, I think it is, down the 1 ifetime. So there's very different ratios that very clever economists have come up with, but I think unequivocally the evidence is in: if you invest early, you will save money. The state will save money. So, even if you didn't care about the people and the children, you just cared about balancing the books, it's smart economics.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Thank you.
MS ELLYARD: Thank you, Commissioners, I ask that Dr Miller be excused.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you so much, Dr Miller. That was really very, very helpful. We'11 take a 20 minute break.

MS ELLYARD: As the Commission please.

## SHORT ADJOURNMENT

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you, Ms Darcey.
MS DARCEY: Yes. Thank you, Commissioners. Our final session today is a panel of two members from the Foster and Kinship Carers Association or FKAT for short, Dr Kim Backhouse and Dr Julian Watchorn. If Dr Backhouse could be called first, she'll take an oath.
<KIM MARIE BACKHOUSE, sworn:
<JULIAN HUXLEY WATCHORN, affirmed:
<EXAMINATION BY MS DARCEY:
MS DARCEY: Thank you. And if I could start with you, Dr Backhouse. Would you tell the Commissioners, please, your full name?

DR BACKHOUSE: Kim Marie Backhouse.
MS DARCEY: And your current occupation?
DR BACKHOUSE: Part-time CEO at the Foster and Kinship Carers Association.

MS DARCEY: And Dr Backhouse, is it the case that you've provided a statement which you affirmed on 8 June 2022 for
the assistance of the Commission?
DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, that is correct.
MS DARCEY: Do you have a copy of that statement in front of you?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, I do.
MS DARCEY: Are you satisfied this the contents of that document is true and correct?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, I am satisfied.
MS DARCEY: Dr Backhouse, in that statement at paragraphs 3 and 4 and then later at 12 and 16 you outline your qualifications and background. Would you mind providing us with a summary of those qualifications and background for the Commissioners?

DR BACKHOUSE: Sure. You?
MS DARCEY: Where you like. Just look at me, perhaps, and then you can - thank you.

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, by way of background, I have a bachelor of laws from the University of Tasmania; a masters of business administration from the University of Tasmania, that was part of a consortium of Australian management schools at the time; I have a diploma from the Australian Institute of Company Directors; I have a doctorate of philosophy with corporate governance, innovation and superannuation as the theme there; and more recently I have an honours masters of employment and labour law from the University of Melbourne.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. In terms of the different roles you've held throughout your career, which I think you'11 find at paragraphs 12 to 16 of your statement, are you able to detail some of that for us, please?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes. Obviously, I don't mention everything in there because I've worked in top tier law firms in Melbourne and had other roles, but just for the purposes of currency, I've been an academic at the university for many years in the School of Business and Economics and more recently within the Law School. And, because of the
part-time nature at the Foster and Kinship Carers Association, I was able to do that and take on other part-time roles that presented themselves. And prior to that I was Assistant Ombudsman across various jurisdictions from 1999 through to 2006.

It's also mentioned that $I$ took leave from FKAT and was the Executive General Manager and more recently a Royal Commission 1 ead from 2018 to 2020 at Possabi1ity.

MS DARCEY: Thank you, and Possability is an agency; is that correct?

DR BACKHOUSE: That is correct.
MS DARCEY: A foster carer agency. I should be specific.
DR BACKHOUSE: We've actually had children in special care packages versus having foster carers there.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. If I could turn to you,
Dr Watchorn, could you tell the Commissioners, please, your
ful 1 name.
DR WATCHORN: I'm Julian Huxley Watchorn.
MS DARCEY: And your current occupation?
DR WATCHORN: I am a clinical psychologist.
MS DARCEY: Dr Watchorn, is it the case that you have provided a statement also affirmed on 8 June 2022 for the assistance of the commission?

DR WATCHORN: Yes, I did.
MS DARCEY: You have a copy of that statement in front of you?

DR WATCHORN: I do.
MS DARCEY: Are you satisfied that the content of that document is true and correct?

DR WATCHORN: Yes, I am.
MS DARCEY: Would you mind please just detailing for the
commissioners some of your qualifications and your professional background?

DR WATCHORN: I undertook a bachelor of science in psychology at UTAS and then a PhD in clinical psychology. And since that time, I have practised as a private clinical psychologist here in Hobart. I previously acquired - maybe 50 per cent of my work was forensic in nature, with the Family Court or Child Protection matters. More recently, I've stopped doing that. And since 2015, I've been working with the foster carers association and for a brief period when Kim was on leave I was acting CEO. More recently I am involved in training and support services for foster and kinship carers, including now informal kinship carers.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. Just before we hear about the specifics of the positions that both of you have at FKAT, Dr Backhouse, are you able to tell the Commission, please, what the role of FKAT is and what it aims to do?

DR BACKHOUSE: Okay. I did mention it in the statement, but just really quite briefly we're to provide support, training and advocacy for all foster and kin carers and informal kin within the State of Tasmania.

MS DARCEY: We have heard some evidence about this this morning, but if you could just identify the types of foster and kinship care that operate in Tasmania, and I think you'11 find that at paragraphs 19 to 24 of your statement, that would be very useful.

DR BACKHOUSE: Would you like me to read those out?
MS DARCEY: If you could just perhaps note firstly the types of family care, so what we'd term family care?

DR BACKHOUSE: Okay. We've got short-term foster care, and that's provided for children and young people while their family situation is being assessed. And the length of stay can be from a few nights, and it might be a few nights in emergency care, through to 12 months. And at the end of the short-term care, the child or youth may actually - they use the terminology now - "restored" to the family, or they may have an option of being placed in long-term care.

Long-term foster care is provided for children or
youth who need a stable, nurturing, supportive home until the circumstances of their family may change or reach adulthood.

Then we've got respite care. So that is provided for children for short periods of time; it's actually at the request of the child or youth, but in practical terms sometimes foster carers may actually ask for that respite care as well. Whenever possible, respite carers give a commitment to be regular respite carers for the same children for 12 or so months, so there's that consistency in their life.

I'11 just move on to kinship care. So kinship care is a formal arrangement where foster care is provided by a member of a child or youth's family. So it might be an aunty, an uncle, a grandparent. In the child protection system, kinship care must be explored before other placements are considered. And then we go on to specialised care, which is sibling groups, residential care, therapeutic services. And I'm happy to discuss that if you'd like me to.

MS DARCEY: Okay, look, we might just come back to that. So, who does FKAT represent in terms of the carers? Do you represent people who are department carers and agency carers, or just one or the other? Do you represent informal kinship carers, for example?

DR BACKHOUSE: That's a really good question. Our membership base cuts across foster carers, kin carers and informal kin more recently. By default the department has an arrangement that departmental carers are members of the association unless they opt out, and then we have arrangements with some of the service providers that their carers become members upon actually joining their service provider unless, once again, they opt out of being a member. So, I'm not aware of a situation where they've opted out, so we have a large cohort of membership at FKAT.

MS DARCEY: Okay, thank you. In terms of your role, are you able to briefly describe what your day-to-day responsibilities are?

DR BACKHOUSE: Okay. So, I have a mixed role that can range from briefing Ministers, sitting here today, spending time out with carers with care concerns, which is a big
issue. Also, organising events and training right down to writing newsletters, so it can go from a purely administrative role to quite senior around systemic issues and trying to encourage change within the sector.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. For how many hours are you formally engaged or retained by the department?

DR BACKHOUSE: Through FKAT I'm formally retained 25 hours a week.

MS DARCEY: In terms of being available to your membership base?

DR BACKHOUSE: The reality is, there's access by members to FKAT 24/7, and the reality is I've done more than 25 hours in this role when I'm actually - got the permanency in that role. It's something that, if there's an issue or a crisis it tends to go towards the afternoon, early evening or on weekends, so FKAT likes to be available to all carers in the state that require that support advocacy at the time.

MS DARCEY: Are you the one who's holding the phone, to put it colloquially?

DR BACKHOUSE: I do have the phone with me all the time, apart from when I'm on leave and that's given by the Chair of the board to answer those calls.

MS DARCEY: And so, FKAT does have a board?
DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, it does.
MS DARCEY: How do you interact or interface with the board?

DR BACKHOUSE: So there's a diversity of board with community members and foster carer membership, that's via the constitution. Part of the board is, there's an executive in the constitution that's made up of the President, which is Chair, Treasury, Secretary, and Public Officer, and so, there is regular meetings by the executive that we talk about systemic issues or what's going on in terms of the strategic direction of the organisation, care concerns, themed areas. But in terms of the reporting, I report to the Chair via the board and I have a weekly
meeting with the Chair of the board and have always done that in that role to talk about what's most pressing.

MS DARCEY: Excellent. And, Dr Watchorn, would you please explain the work that you do?

DR WATCHORN: With FKAT? So, it's been main1y in the area of training and support. So, I developed a range of training programs. The most significant one was a trauma-informed care two half-day workshop that I conducted with foster and kinship carers. I also provide support, most often in more significant matters such as care concerns, and I liaise with sort of senior staff in the department around some individual matters like the care concerns, but also some systemic issues as well.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. I understand that you're also the Chair of the Family Based Care Providers' Group. Can you please describe to me what that group is and how it ...

DR WATCHORN: It's been around for a number of years. I joined approximately two and a half, three years ago as a member representing FKAT, but in the last few years I've taken on the Chair position with that. So, it composes of representatives of the department, so senior staff from the department, and also senior staff or CEOs of the service providers in the non-government sector as well. On top of that there's also a representative from CREATE, and there has been a representative from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council.

MS DARCEY: We'11 come back to some of the work of that group a little later. I'd like to now, if I may, take you both to the very beginning of the process where a child enters into the out-of-home care system. We've heard evidence earlier in the public hearings that a child will be brought into the system under the provisions of the Children, Young Persons and Their Family Act generally because there's a concern that a child has been exposed to serious harm through abuse or neglect or is at significant risk of such harm within their family of origin. Would you both agree with that as a general proposition?

DR WATCHORN: Yeah.
MS DARCEY: And in your view and from your experience do you think that the department at that point in time would
know or be able to hold the knowledge of the full extent of the harm or the trauma that a child might have been exposed to at the time that the child enters the system? What sort of visibility at that point will the department have about that child's circumstances?

DR WATCHORN: If I could comment, obviously there's a threshold and so the Advice \& Referral Line is one where they hope there's initial engagement that might not lead to a situation where there's some more significant intervention undertaken. So, one might hope in that process that information is gathered over a period of time, but my experience I guess from the foster carer's
perspective is that often they're given little or no information in regard to the child or young person's history, and particularly their trauma history when they come into care.

MS DARCEY: Are there any standardised screening tools for trauma symptomatology or even screening tools to investigate the general health and wellbeing of the child when they've --

DR WATCHORN: There's a range of tools but I don't think any are being used in any regular way.

MS DARCEY: Do you think that there is a place for comprehensive screening of a child at that very initial point of intake?

DR WATCHORN: I think it's fundamental, particularly looking at health-related issues. I gave an example of having children who have been in care who are struggling at school and then it's become identified six or 12 months down the line that they have hearing or sight problems and then maybe their behavioural challenges were as a result of that.

If you consider that the threshold for them coming into care is fairly significant, there's a high expectation that most children or young people coming into care have suffered trauma, and there needs to be an assessment of that, and probably an expectation or a responsibility to attempt to address that as early as possible.

MS DARCEY: Are there any barriers that you can see to that sort of assessment being undertaken?

DR WATCHORN: Financial barriers probably, I think a major one.

MS DARCEY: In terms of the timeframes that we might be talking about with having to organise a child into a placement, could that be a potential barrier or can these assessments be done as soon as possible?

DR WATCHORN: No, they'll take time. I think if we look at the availability of Allied Health professionals it's quite a challenge $I$ think in the state to actually have a response undertaken in a timely manner.

I guess in defence of the department, there may be many occasions where they have little or no information or the family of origin is not willing to provide information in regards to the child and their history, so it is a challenging concept, but I often deal with children who come to me privately who have obviously had a history of trauma and, if there was more information it wouldn't be the guesswork of trying to understand what has occurred. Often you can make assumptions and they're probably fairly accurate in regards to some of the triggers and the causes of the trauma, but the more information one accelerates that, but might also precipitate more immediate therapeutic services for these children and young people.

MS DARCEY: Do you think that it might also assist carers to understand whether that child is likely to be successful as a placement with them?

DR WATCHORN: I'm not sure, could you --
MS DARCEY: Sorry, that was a really bad question. In terms of the information that a carer has when they first take a child into their home, how important is it that they understand whether that child has a trauma history or whether that child has some kind of other particular need?

DR WATCHORN: I think it's paramount. It may be that they argue they don't have the information immediately available, but if a child with trauma suddenly moves into a strange environment it's going to be very challenging for them and possibly triggering in many ways. An example might be that they're sensitive to a raised voice so the carer may not recognised that a slightly raised voice
triggers them into a fairly significant response. They may have sensitivities to foods, there may be a whole range of things that, if the carer was more informed, they could approach it more sensitively and minimise the distress for the child or young person when they come into care.
Because often we see for many of these children and young people person there's two traumas, one is the trauma of the family origin and then the trauma of being moved out of that into a new family environment.

MS DARCEY: In situations where the department does have information about a child, have you ever seen or heard of the department withholding that information from the carer on the basis of privacy, for example?

DR WATCHORN: There's been a frequent reporting from carers that the department will say, "We can't provide that information to you because it's confidential", which is a bit of a sad state of affairs really. Obviously, there may be information that is of necessity confidential, but I think a lot of information would be highly relevant both to the carer but to the child's wellbeing.

DR BACKHOUSE: And I have one example, if I may?
MS DARCEY: Certainly.
DR BACKHOUSE: A carer some years ago complained that it wasn't mandatory in Tasmania to report that the child had Hepatitis $C$ and --.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: I'm sorry, I missed that?
DR BACKHOUSE: Hepatitis C.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Sorry, I didn't hear that, yes, thank you.

DR BACKHOUSE: And they understood that they didn't have to report that and so that caused some great concerns to the carer and the caring family that that information wasn't disseminated at the time.

MS DARCEY: Look, correct me if I'm wrong, but would it be fair to say that, right from the start of a placement, there is potentially tension between the department and the carer surrounding the provision of background information
about a child?
DR WATCHORN: Is there potential - a conflict, did you say?

MS DARCEY: Is that a potential source of conflict between the department and the carer?

DR WATCHORN: It can be, yep.
MS DARCEY: Are there continuing points of tension, do you think, between carers and the department?

DR WATCHORN: It's frequently reported from carers that there's often a conflictual relationship between carers and Child Safety Officers.

MS DARCEY: I think at paragraph 48 of your statement, Dr Watchorn, you talk about a conflictual culture and a perception that perhaps, whilst lessening, has existed that carers act in the role of the babysitter. Would you be able to expand on that?

DR WATCHORN: It's a statement that we receive from carers frequently and I think the term may not be used by Child Safety Officers, but their actions and responses to concerns give them that impression. So that if, for example, a carer has concerns that they wish to raise about the child or young person with the Child Safety Officer they can often get a strong pushback and conversation that would give them suggestions that their - that is not their role: they're there to care for them, they're not there to advocate for them. Whereas I see the opposite, I see them as probably the most significant advocate for the child or young person.

MS DARCEY: In paragraphs 108 to 112 of your statement you also talk about having heard carers being referred to as "too emotionally attached to the child". What are your reflections on that?

DR WATCHORN: As I state in my report, I'd be very concerned if they were not emotionally attached to the child. So, we do get this regular - we on regular occasions have feedback from carers where statements have been made to that effect, "You're too personally involved or you're too attached". And that also comes in when
children maybe leave care with a carer as well; there's often a tendency to prevent an ongoing relationship between the child or young person and their previous carer.

MS DARCEY: Would that kind of culture also flow through in a situation where a carer is looking to become a legal guardian of a child and, through that process of the departmental approval of that carer into that much more permanent role?

DR WATCHORN: Transfer of guardianship has been a very difficult topic for a long period of time. Carers often report it takes a long time for it to happen, or it doesn't happen. More recently there's been some reforms in regards to the criteria around transfer of guardianship but they're not currently - they haven't become public information. But my understanding is that it's a more complex nature now, which I think is good in one way, it's more sensitive to a whole range of factors. The concern I have is that the complexity of it means that it may be very difficult for foster carers or kinship carers to meet the requirements of those items on the sort of checklist, if you want to call it that, for transfer of guardianship.

MS DARCEY: Ms Claire Lovell, the Executive Director of Children and Family Services, provided some evidence to the Commission this morning; she was talking about, at one stage, the fact that the department is working towards every child in the out-of-home care sector having a Care Team around them, and she was talking about the ideal look of this team or composition of this team, and she noted that ideally the team would comprise of the child, the Child Safety Officer, another representative from Child Safety Services, perhaps an educator with knowledge of the child, other Allied Health professionals of relevance and the carer of the child.

Do you have any views about the utility of a Care Team that would be comprised in that way, and do you have knowledge of the Care Teams that are actually in operation at the moment?

DR WATCHORN: I think Care Teams are a concept that's been around for decades with child safety: this isn't a new concept. Care Teams decades ago had that composition, maybe not the foster carer, but teachers, parents, representatives from Child Safety. I guess the concern
that we have and this is reported from foster carers, is that not every child has a Care Team or a care plan. But I think that what they're making steps towards is recognising foster and kinship carers as a more significant party in that. Whereas in the past, particularly from the surveys we've conducted, is that often if there is a Care Team meeting, they're unaware of it; if there is a care plan, they haven't been shown it. So, historically the reports to us have been that they have not been included in any of those sort of processes generally.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. Just going back to the issue about the level of emotional attachment that a carer might or should potentially have with a child and some of the anecdotal evidence we have about Child and Safety Services staff's view about that. Do you think that Child Safety Officers are properly trained in trauma-informed approaches to care?

DR WATCHORN: I don't think they are. I'm hopeful with this model that we're developing and hoping to roll out that not only foster carers but out-of-home care staff, support staff, and Child Safety Officers complete the training and have a better understanding of trauma, and particularly recognising what might be behind behaviours, because behaviours can be a sign of a range of different difficulties and, without a good knowledge and sensitivity, we may make assumptions that are incorrect and react to behaviours in an insensitive way.

MS DARCEY: Just in terms of the role of the Child Safety Officer and, Dr Backhouse, you might wish to contribute; are there any other aspects of that role or characteristics of that role which you think might make it difficult for a Child Safety Officer to make a meaningful connection with the child? Is it a time - do they have the time, do they have the capacity?

DR BACKHOUSE: From the feedback that I've received over a couple of years it can be very challenging for CSOs if there's, like, high turnover, if there's vacancies, if there's high absenteeism or low motivation within the department, and then the expectation of a high workload on top of that. I'm not saying that the KPIs within the department set a high workload, but when you can appreciate that those resources are not there, often those CSOs may be stretched to take within their domain extra children in
case management, so that can just create complexities for children and care plans and reviews that are being done.

MS DARCEY: Similar question but this time directed at carers and particularly new carers, do you think that generally they do have the skills to manage children who have experienced significant trauma?

DR BACKHOUSE: As a general rule, no.
MS DARCEY: Are you able to detail the initial training that a carer would undergo?

DR BACKHOUSE: Okay, so just from the outset I'd just like to say that there is various service providers in Tasmania and within those service provisions there's different requirements with training. There would be some minimum requirements that would be expected as a service provider from carers, and one of those $I$ would imagine would be first aid training and medication training, and then other service providers will have a suite of training.

So, I know with Life Without Barriers they had over 20 different short courses that carers could access that are wide-ranging from trauma-informed right through to, how do you identify sexualised behaviour

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Were they compulsory courses or were they voluntary courses?

DR BACKHOUSE: They're voluntary in most part. I would imagine that first aid and medication might be mandatory in terms of the service provisions, but I'm not aware of it being mandated in any registration or accreditation process.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Who would be required to pay that?
DR BACKHOUSE: That's an interesting question, Commissioner. So, it's my understanding that the funding that would go to the service provider would allow for training to be provided to the cohort of carers that are actually assigned to that service provider.

With respect to the department, the department has internal training that they provide, and also FKAT is funded to also provide training which we find over a period
of time that a lot of the departmental carers will access.
Once again, it's not mandatory training that's put up by us, but we encourage carers throughout the state to come along to trauma-informed training, first aid, training around aggressive behaviours, around self-care.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Are you able to tell us roughly what proportion of your budget the amount provided for training would be, by the department to you?

DR BACKHOUSE: I would say that around - I appreciate that I've done an oath here, so I would not want to misrepresent any facts --

PRESIDENT NEAVE: No, of course.
DR BACKHOUSE: -- but I would imagine it's around 40 per cent of the budget goes into training.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Dr Backhouse, if I'm understanding correctly, it's conceivable then that the Tasmanian Government is paying every agency to develop trauma-informed training; that each care provider could be developing the same set of training and the department developing it too. Is there potential for duplication in this model?

DR BACKHOUSE: In theory, yes, but in practice there's discussion through the committee that Julian chairs around what type of training is being available, and we've certainly been encouraging a transparency of a calendar of training for all carers in the state for some time that recently has gained some motion through this committee that we're on.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: And so, for example, if I was a carer with Key Assets, would I be entitled to access the Life Without Barriers training?

DR BACKHOUSE: That's an interesting question and a very sensitive one. So, my experience is that the service providers are very keen to sign off on training that may be provided by other service providers in the space.

DR WATCHORN: If I can comment on that. I guess the foster care - Family Based Care Providers' Group is trying
to facilitate a more collaborative approach to a number of issues, but this occurs in a competitive market and it's unfortunate that it is. So, they compete for carers, for recruitment, and there is some duplication, but we're hoping that there is some - if we moved to some more centralised training program such as TBRI that then is mandatory, that is delivered by the department but is mandatory for all foster and kinship carers, then we can have some standards of expectation in regards to skills and ability with carers and we're not having this slightly competitive situation.

DR BACKHOUSE: And if I can add to that, there'd also be consistency and a reduction in the duplication of any training.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: And presumably then some cost efficiency which, of course, you then talk to.

DR BACKHOUSE: Then redirected to other training that I think's important in the space such as self-care.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: And then, if you start getting the partnerships, which I think you were talking about earlier on, you can then focus the training on the needs of the child to meet their particular circumstances given the trauma they're going through; is that a fair assessment?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes. And I've certainly been advocating that, if we have a registration system of carers in the state whereby we also have accreditation, that if there's a suite of training that's required for registration, there might be the collaboration that one service provider may provide trauma-informed training and another provider might put on medication training, so that then also creates some diversity, it also creates some inter-peer support with one another and drives efficiency within the system.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: In your statement you say that the regulation is too light and that it needs better regulation to protect children and also probably to optimise the capacity of the carers to care for the children who they're looking after.

DR BACKHOUSE: Most definitely. When I came into this role several years ago I thought there would have been pushback by the carers around the state with respect to
accreditation and registration but it was actually welcomed by the majority of carers that I met face-to-face; that they would prefer to have regulations and standards that were mandatory; that they'd prefer to have an identification card that could be used throughout the state for various other things as well, such as maybe a reduction in transport costs, access to the pool, so it would cut across additional services for children.

MS DARCEY: Currently at the moment are there any criteria that new carers need to meet and, if so, how is that assessed? I'm thinking about the Shared Stories Model; is that still in operation?

DR BACKHOUSE: It still is in operation, and I was talking to one of the service providers last week and said that that was their way of assessing new carers that come in to be carers within this service provider. Julian, do you have anything else to comment on that?

DR WATCHORN: I guess if we talk about mandatory training, Shared Lives as mandatory training is part of an assessment and then selection process for new foster and kinship carers, so it provides some simple initial training and it provides a period of assessment and observation of the carers to assess suitability.

MS DARCEY: And how long is that period of observation of the carers?

DR WATCHORN: A few weeks, I think, I'm not sure exactly on the timing of it, and it can vary between service providers.

MS DARCEY: This morning Ms Lovell talked about a newly-created, although I believe it's a temporary management position, that as I understand her evidence has been tasked to audit data held by the department and other organisations relating to basic approval requirements for carers. Are you aware of what a basic approval requirement might refer to or be?

DR WATCHORN: I'm not sure, I think it'll be consistent with what we're talking about at Shared Lives. I'm not sure what it is, though.

MS DARCEY: Are there any known criteria or a checklist of
criteria, or a --
DR WATCHORN: I think in the Shared Lives there is, I can't remember exactly what's in there. So, it's really just an initial training and assessment for suitability. I think, hopefully, they will incorporate aspects of TBRI in this initial training and also aspects of TBRI that relate to carers' abilities but also their attachment style, so that we can start to look at how their attachment style marries with the child or young person and what might need to be worked on to improve that situation, because sometimes carers may be well intentioned but they may have issues regarding that that may be problematic in their ability to adequately and sensitively support a child or young person.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Ms Darcey, I believe that Ms Lovel1's evidence pertained to some fairly basic things, such as the carer being approved to have two children, or other people who resided in the house at the time of assessment: I think it was really very basic household information that they were trying to ascertain that it appeared wasn't on record or the records weren't being maintained for; does that accord?

DR WATCHORN: I couldn't say if that was consistent necessarily either between service providers. I think it would be a great step forward. I think that the use of data in assessing and even predicting situations of risk would be a big step forward.

MS DARCEY: We11, I do apologise if I've misrepresented what Ms Lovel1's evidence was and I appreciate you, Commissioner, pointing out your understanding.

Dr Watchorn, if we could perhaps just backtrack a little bit and talk a little bit more about the Trust-Based Relational Intervention Model that you've been talking about, and that information is provided in your statement at paragraphs 22 to 23 and then there's more information in Annexure 2.

Can you give a brief description of what that model's a11 about?

DR WATCHORN: It's a model that focuses on training carers to provide therapeutic care to children and young people,
and I guess it contrasts with a more traditional model where a child or young person, if there's any therapeutic work they come to see someone like me for an hour a week, and what they recognise is the work that needs to be done is in the home on those other, you know, 18 hours a day where there's more challenging behaviours and difficulties.

And so, it's a model I initially became aware of because it was adopted in New Zealand. There was a national adoption of this with some foster care agencies, and so, maybe five years ago we were initially looking at it and I had conversations with the department about that. I don't know if I need to go over the principles of it, but what's happened more recently is with the current statewide manager of out-of-home care, Lionel Walters. Him and myself have collaborated in developing initially a pilot program and more recently the department has shifted to be confident enough for us to start to - or for the department to roll this out more significantly than just a pilot program. The plan is that their training, train the trainer training is occurring with departmental staff and also staff from non-government agencies and then they'11 start to deliver that across the state to foster and kinship carers.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. So, how are these projects initiated? Is this something that you and Mr Walters have come across or developed yourselves?

DR WATCHORN: Yes.
MS DARCEY: So is this a change that's been driven from the bottom up, as it were, rather than --

DR WATCHORN: If I'm at the bottom?
MS DARCEY: Thank you.
DR WATCHORN: It's maybe not the bottom up, but it's there's certainly collaboration because I'm collaborating with the department, but it's been initiated externally to the department.

MS DARCEY: But as far as you're aware, there's no overarching plan that the department has which would drive the development of training of therapeutic models such as this?

DR WATCHORN: Not specifically.
MS DARCEY: Thank you. Just thinking about the sort of overarching or the systemic changes that might need to be made to actually give these very important programs that are being developed a chance to have maximum impact. If I could just take you back to the issue of training: if you don't have mandatory training, how effective is the work that you have already done on these programs likely to be?

DR WATCHORN: It's certainly hindered by it. Mandatory training gives us standards of expectation, but it also it's recognising that this model is a very suitable model for the sector and that the outcomes of making this mandatory is the wellbeing of children and young people at a time when they're at most distress, I guess, when they come into care. And my preference, and FKAT's preference, would be that the Department of Education also consider it as a mandatory training for teaching and support staff, because we often have a circumstance where foster carers report having difficulty communicating with the teacher of a child or young person and, if there was a uniform universal language and there was an understanding of the TBRI principles, then I think we'd have a - one is a more collaborative relationship between carers and teachers but also a more sensitive approach to children and young people in the classroom.

MS DARCEY: Is the idea that the training would be extended to both carers and Child Safety Officers and potentially to other agencies like the Department of Education?

DR WATCHORN: Well, the hope is with education. Currently the training is encompassing not just carers but also out-of-home care support staff and representatives of agencies, and I am expecting it to be also then Child Safety Officers and other staff will be also participating in it over time.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. The Commissioners have already asked quite a number of questions, but in terms of the concept of a carer's register, do you think, Dr Backhouse, that that is something that should be implemented in Tasmania?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, I think it's imperative for a whole it's multi-factorial the reasoning behind it, but if we're looking at it from a perspective - I was talking with the Chair of the FKAT board this morning and she was saying that she's aware - I'm trying to de-identify this - she's aware of a situation where a child was sexually abused by a carer in the state. Because there's no registration process, you're not able to deregister, that carer is currently caring in New South Wales, and so, they're trying to implement a mechanism where that particular carer can be held to account.

So, if we're looking at worst-case scenario, the registration system allows for deregistration, and so, we won't have a situation where a carer may shop around to be with a service provider if there was concerns raised.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Can I ask about that, because I thought carers had to have a vulnerable persons registration and that does have some interstate component in it now.

DR BACKHOUSE: It's my understanding, unless they've got something charged with the police, an employment-related issue can go under the radar without a registration system.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: (Indistinct words) charge, there's no conviction, just a suspicion - I don't mean "just a suspicion", but a concern and then they go to another state. So, really what used to happen in the past before we had a better system for tracking the Caring For Vulnerable People Registration and similar things in other states.

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: I see, thank you.
MS DARCEY: You've also mentioned, Dr Backhouse, that in your view there should be at least a Code of Conduct for carers in Tasmania. Why do you think that that is important?

DR BACKHOUSE: I think it's important particularly - once again for a lot of reasons. If you're a new carer that's coming into this sector and you have children placed with you, you may not necessarily know the responsibilities and accountabilities with your role as a carer, and so, in a
perfect world you're providing quality care, there's not any issues, you have an understanding without written down of your roles and responsibilities: that's well and good. But once you start to have a care concern and it's being addressed by the service provider via the department or the department directly with their carers it's too - it's too fluffy if you don't actually have it set out in concrete what your roles and responsibilities are.

Now, I've worked with the department in the past with a roles and responsibilities sheet so that that can be raised, brought to the attention of the carer in a care concern, but I think that it should be mandatory and it should be something that's widely published within the department and all service providers so there's absolutely no grey area whatsoever with that role and responsibility that that carer has with respect to that child and youth.

MS DARCEY: And, Dr Watchorn, you speak in your statement about the need for an overarching set of out-of-home care standards. Now, as I understand it that's a different concept to a Code of Conduct. Are you talking there about National Standards?

DR WATCHORN: Well, I'm talking about state-based standards that are consistent but the preference would be to be consistent with National Guidelines that have been around for a long period of time. And one aspect of that that I've pushed frequently is this need for early comprehensive assessment of children and young people when they come into care in a timely manner. There has been expectations within National Guidelines in regards to that, but I'm not sure if the department are meeting those National Guidelines.

MS DARCEY: Thank you. Just going to the care concerns process within the department, I understand that FKAT would be involved in that process in terms of representing the carer sometimes.

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, correct.
MS DARCEY: That would be correct? Now, I understand that there are two main types of concerns: one called a quality concern and one called a care concern, with the care concern being the more serious concern and having a definition that would be broad enough to include
allegations about severe abuse and neglect. Does that accord with your understanding?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes.
DR WATCHORN: Yes, it does.
MS DARCEY: Thank you. And that model of categorisation, if you like, Dr Watchorn, do you see any difficulties with that model or anywhere there can be improvement?

DR WATCHORN: There have been difficulties with that model that have led to the department seeking to review and create a more effective model in regards to dealing with care concerns. So, up until now there's been a two-tier system of care concerns. At the significant level is what's termed a "care concern" and at a moderate level is what's called a "quality of care concern". My involvement in those cases with working with foster carers and kinship carers has been that generally at the care concern level there's a thorough, transparent investigation undertaken by senior clinical staff within the department, that meetings are minuted, timelines are given to carers and it's conducted quite well.

What I have concerns though is the quality of care concern level of a care concern nature that is often informal, maybe undertaken by a team leader within case management, and sometimes there's little transparency and decisions are often made in a very immediate nature and sometimes without a more formalised investigation gathering information and interviewing the foster or kinship carer.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Can you give us an example of a quality of care concern? A typical quality of care concern?

DR WATCHORN: A carer has been observed at the swimming pool responding aggressively to the child that's in their care: that's an example of one that I've dealt with. So, a member of the public has then reported that to Child Protection and they classify that as a quality of care concern.

Now, what's often unknown particularly to carers is, what is on file? Has there been other information, any other concerns raised? And sometimes carers report to FKAT
that suddenly an issue is raised of concern and it's reported to them that it's of an historical nature but they've been totally unaware of any issues prior to the point at which they state that it's a quality of care concern and there's an intervention

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: And I suppose something like that can range from a stubbed toe to a verbal assault on a child, could it?

DR WATCHORN: It can. The concern I have is that it is very informal in nature and there is not a clear process. I've attended meetings where decisions are being made before the carer has even been interviewed, or there's been reports that this issue of concern is historical and therefore they see reason to remove the child from the carer.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: And that's it's not a reviewable decision, is it?

DR WATCHORN: No. And even in a care concern, if a carer wants to appeal a care concern, they have to appeal to the department.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Yes.
DR WATCHORN: So it's a - you know, and it's very rare for a carer to be willing, knowing that the difficulty that might occur with that to make an appeal on a decision of care concern.

DR BACKHOUSE: I have some feedback, if I may?
COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Sure.
DR BACKHOUSE: I'd like to see a parallel with contemporary industrial relation law in Australia. So, whereby, if an employee has allegations made against them it's made to them in a timely manner where they're afforded procedural fairness and natural justice. Very rarely do we see situations within industrial relations law where staff are brought in 12 months, 24 months, 36 months later with a whole range of work practices that the employer's displeased with.

So, often I receive feedback by carers where there may
have been one issue that has led to a care concern but there's an iceberg of issues under that that's not been raised with them.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: I guess one of the interesting things you'd want to think about is how that works in terms of the responsibility for the child and the need to protect the child in risk assessment, so I guess anything like that would have to be fairly prompt, would it not?

DR BACKHOUSE: That's right, prompt.
COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: And transparent and child-focused.
DR WATCHORN: And forensic hopefully in nature so that some knowledge of interviewing children in an atmosphere like that; understanding factors such as false allegations, what percentage of allegations prove to be false. And the priority has to be protecting the child or young person, but sometimes it's a more complex matter that needs a more sensitive approach to it.

DR BACKHOUSE: And sometimes I believe that the carers that I've dealt with are happy for that frank and fearless conversation with them about what they may not be doing correctly, but sometimes they are - it's unknown to them and that creates a level of anxiety and stress, there's delays, that would have to impact on parenting that child or youth.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: And that gets back to your earlier discussions, both of your earlier discussions about training so people understand or carers understand the environment in which they're working in terms of trauma, clearly trauma-impacted children.

DR BACKHOUSE: And I've been involved with quite a few care concerns where there's some pretty serious allegations put forward to the carer. I've never heard a complaint by the carer about what's been put up as an allegation, but what I've always heard complaints about is the delays: it's being unknown, they don't appreciate who they can actually request further information from, who they can appeal the whole process to.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: And that gets back to
Dr Watchorn's comments, I guess, about a transparent and
forensic process.
DR WATCHORN: Can I make a statement in defence of the department in this matter though? I had a lot of involvement with the reforming of this model. I don't know where that's at, but certainly these factors were being taken into consideration in a newer model that was more effective and transparent, and some of the information I provided to the department was, the model that they have in New Zealand in situations like this, which is a very transparent model, everyone has a clear expectation of roles and responsibilities, there's a clear timeline, and they have it as a flow diagram. A carer can see, okay, this is the process, this is what's going to happen sort of thing. So, I know I provided that to the department as there to consider in that process of the reform of this.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: In relation to the quality of care concerns, both of you spoke earlier about, I guess, the possible tension that can arise when carers are acting as an advocate for the child, and also the suggestion, unhelpful suggestion that they may have been overly emotionally involved - I believe that was your evidence, Dr Watchorn. Are either of you aware of those kinds of matters being raised in the context of a quality of care concern, so the carer's advocacy for the child being raised as a quality of care matter?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, I am aware of that.
DR WATCHORN: If I can give an example perhaps that has occurred on a number of occasions. A child or young person is having visits with their biological family and they come back quite stressed and affected by it; the carer raises concerns and the Child Safety Officer might say, you know, "That's distressing for them, like, it's stressful, but there's nothing wrong with that". The carer becomes more concerned over time, raises the issue more significantly with pushback, until such time as it becomes what might be termed a quality of care concern where they feel the carer is not willing to facilitate the child's relationship with their biological family, and that can be a point of significance where the department may remove the child from the carer.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: Thank you.

MS DARCEY: And in these more serious cases, do you think that there is a need for a mechanism of either review or perhaps a mechanism whereby an assessment can be made or an Arbitrator introduced?

DR WATCHORN: I've pushed with the department, the organisation, FKAT has, that we need sometimes an independent tribunal to if not undertake the investigation, is to assess the outcomes and to ensure that a fair, transparent and effective process has been undertaken leading to an appropriate decision that's in the best interests of the child or young person.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: I understand that has been advocated in some other reports, and I vaguely remember there was a Glenfield report. I'm trying to dig it out of my memory. Are you aware of any other states that have done that, had some external review process?

DR WATCHORN: I'm not aware, I'm not really aware of what's going on in other states to that degree.

MS DARCEY: I just had one last specific question for you. I understand from both of your statements that the department is no longer recruiting carers for the department; is that correct?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes.

DR WATCHORN: That's my understanding, yep.
MS DARCEY: That would indicate to me, and I'm not sure if you have any visibility on this issue, but would it be the case that a lot of departmental carers are getting older in years, having been with the department for quite some time?

DR BACKHOUSE: Most definitely. We did a survey some years ago that highlighted that there was an ageing demographic within the departmental carers and that there should be some significant succession planning being put into place now, as in, five years ago, to consider that huge gap with the retirement of a lot of the aged carers from this department.

MS DARCEY: Do you think that there are any implications of this for the safety of children within the system? Or
is it really an issue about attrition rates?
DR WATCHORN: The Family-Based Carers Providers' Group has raised the issue of the shortage of foster and kinship carers and also the difficulty in recruitment. So, service providers are struggling to recruit carers, so there is definitely a shortage of carers. And the implications of that are many. One initial one is in a perfect model, we match a child or young person to the appropriate placement and carer. We're nowhere near that option because we don't have enough carers to be able to do that.

So, we struggle to recruit carers. I think there's been, I guess, a lot of bad press around Child Protection, and so it may be that people aren't necessarily motivated to become foster or kinship carers, but I think at a time where we're short of carers, I don't understand why the department isn't recruiting, because it's a major issue that the Family-Based Carer providers group recognises across the sector.

MS DARCEY: Are there any other models of recruitment that you're aware of from other jurisdictions that might work in the Tasmanian context?

DR WATCHORN: We raised in the providers group the model that is present in Victoria where there's like a central portal for recruitment, and from that there's an equitable distribution of carers to agencies and with some level of matching of carers to placements. It hasn't been well received, I think largely because we're still in a competitive market, but I see that as very useful model, particularly in a sector that's so under-resourced, that we need to be looking at being more sensible in regards to not duplicating and not wasting money, I guess, in a sector that desperately needs more resources.

MS DARCEY: Thank you so much. I'd like to give both of you the opportunity to add anything that you'd like to at this point, and then I'll hand you to the Commissioners.

DR BACKHOUSE: I have a couple of points that I'd like to make. The first point is, in terms of the tribunal that's been mentioned, the tribunal could be used - have various terms of references, but where I see a big gap is where carers have come to me and said, "We've got an issue, the children or youth are being previously reunified with a
biological family on a weekend and there may be an uncle that's been involved with allegations of sexual abuse in the past; they're concerned about the safety of the child or the youth, and when a decision is made by the department that it's of no concern with this particular matter and they're really passionate about the fact that it is: they don't really feel that there's an opportunity to take that anywhere external other than to FKAT to try and advocate to be involved with respect to review of that decision. That's the first point that I wanted to make.

The second point that I'd like to make is, it came up in a discussion that I had with the Chair of the board with FKAT this morning and I think it's a really good one. It would be really good, and it might exist but I'm not aware of it: if there was an allocated person within the police department that, when there's allegations of child sexual abuse and carers are concerned, that they actually have a specific contact point within the police department.

COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: A specific contact for the carers or a specific team who does the investigation? Can you clarify?

DR BACKHOUSE: For the carer with respect to the child or youth, because sometimes you could imagine the forensic nature, it might take some time and they've got concerns or issues and often they might want to make a phone call to someone that's involved in the investigation and they might have the name of a particular person within the police department but they'd like someone that's been allocated and had training, trauma-informed training, other training involved and can appreciate the sensitivities at the time not suggesting that they don't, but that's been a request that I make to the Commissioners.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Just so I understand that, is that so the carer knows how to make life easier for the child as the child may go through some process?

DR BACKHOUSE: Most definitely.
COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: So it's so they know not to ask leading questions or not to --

DR BACKHOUSE: Most definitely.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Is that the type of thing you're talking about?

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes, and it might take some time, and the 13-year-old child's asking what's going on, where do they go?

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: How can they get that information?
DR BACKHOUSE: Yes. So, there's various places they can go to, but the feedback is, it would be very good if they could have a direct line into the police department to have that conversation.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Certainly not to protect the carer against any allegations --

DR BACKHOUSE: No, definitely not, because the child would be removed.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: To help them manage the child or assist the child through what may be a further trauma that they're exposed to.

DR BACKHOUSE: Yes.
DR WATCHORN: And an expectation of what's appropriate, what's appropriate to talk to them about, those sort of things as well so that they don't hinder any forensic investigation.

COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN: Yes.
DR WATCHORN: Can I - just a final comment from me?
MS DARCEY: Yes.
DR WATCHORN: The current reforms look very positive. There's a number of reforms going on in different areas and they're somewhat siloed unfortunately, but the sad state I get to is an oscillation between optimism and groundhog day, and I'm not sure which one I should be staying with. I get a sense that we've been through - like, I've been in this sector for 25 years and we've been through these peaks and troughs of changes and improvements.

My concern is that there needs to be a cultural change
otherwise the adversarial nature of the relationships will continue and any change will not be effective. There's been an us and them mentality both sides of the fence, from carers to child safety officers, and that's continued for a long period of time and I think that there needs to be a sensitivity around a more systemic cultural change to enable the long-term success, I guess, of any of these reforms that I think are positive that have been suggested.

MS DARCEY: Thank you very much.
PRESIDENT NEAVE: Thank you very much, Dr Backhouse and Dr Watchorn, that was very helpful, thank you.

DR WATCHORN: Thank you.
COMMISSIONER BROMFIELD: And thank you for the work that you do for the sector.

PRESIDENT NEAVE: Yes.
AT 4.40PM THE COMMISSION WAS ADJOURNED TO
WEDNESDAY, 15 JUNE 2022 AT 9.30AM


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