



**Commission of Inquiry into
the Tasmanian Government's
Responses to Child Sexual
Abuse in Institutional Settings**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SAM LEISHMAN

I, Sam Leishman of [REDACTED] Hobart, in the State of Tasmania, do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

- 1 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 2 I consent to being identified in this statement for the purposes of section 194K of the *Evidence Act 2001* (Tas).

Background

- 3 I grew up in the Hobart suburb of New Town, the youngest of five children. My parents had a happy marriage, and provided a nurturing family life where we were all well provided for, and encouraged to be independent. Our family home in New Town was a busy, sometimes chaotic hub. Our family home was always welcoming, and the door was always open.

My experience at high school

- 4 In 1978 I began high school as a Grade 7 student at New Town High School. During the first year of high school, a science teacher Darrel Harington (**Harington**) began to gain the trust of both myself and my parents. For example, he took particular interest in my music activities, and began learning a musical instrument to play in our school band. He took part in our 1978 high school musical production. Outside of school, he began taking private piano lessons from my own piano teacher and began singing in my church choir.
- 5 Towards the end of 1978, when I was 12 years old, Harington became sexually abusive towards me. It continued for some 12 months until Harington was transferred to another school at the end of 1979. By this stage, I was 13 years old. I did my best to hide my guilt and shame. I was terrified that someone would expose what had happened, but I desperately needed help. I was broken, isolated and miserable. I thought at the time that I was equally responsible for my teacher's behaviour towards me, and that I had encouraged it. I believed that I had done something to cause Harington's behaviour, and that he would never have behaved in that way but for me or something I did. I felt that all of my misery as a child and teenager had been my own doing, so I continued to keep the secret of what Harington had done to me.
- 6 I only came to truly understand what Harington had done to me, and that it was abuse, later in life. The way I came to tell my story, and all that followed is set out below.

Telling my story and the criminal process

- 7 In 2014, when I was aged in my late 40's, I heard about the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the **Royal Commission**). I looked at the website and I began to realise that my own experiences as a child were not uncommon. I thought that my experiences might fit within the scope of the work of that Royal Commission and I decided to assist it by telling my story. Up until this point, I never thought of my high school circumstances as abuse. It took the Royal Commission for me to see things in a different light. By speaking openly and honestly, I was able to view Harington's behaviours objectively and I began to put things into perspective.

- 8 In October 2015 Harington pleaded guilty to multiple charges against several complainants, including myself. We were all aged between 12 and 15 years of age at the time of the abuse.
- 9 My experience with the Royal Commission, Tasmania Police, and the Tasmanian justice system was an overwhelmingly positive one. I grew to make sense of my past and speak honestly about childhood events which I had struggled with for so long.
- 10 My experience making a victim impact statement in the Supreme Court of Tasmania was one of my very proudest moments where I, for the first time, spoke up in defence of the 12 year old child that I once was. I was able to defend a child that had been confused, ashamed and bullied to the point of despair – forced to manage the most complex of emotions in isolation.

My experience seeking to engage with the Department of Education after the criminal process

- 11 After Harington was sentenced, I waited, expecting the Department of Education (the **Department**) to make contact. I thought they would offer a liaison person. I thought they might show some interest in my circumstances or wonder about my welfare.
- 12 There was no contact from the Department. I therefore made contact with the Department myself initially by writing to the then Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Training, The Honourable Jeremy Rockliff in a letter dated 20 November 2015. In the letter I wrote that I had become aware that during the period of abuse it was evident that other teachers were not oblivious to Harington's behaviour. I wrote that I expected the Department of Education to show some interest in the case, and that I needed to be heard and understood.
- 13 I wanted to engage with the Department to understand how Harington had been transferred between schools, and what happened to the various complaints that I believe were made about him.
- 14 Eventually a representative of the Department's Legal Services Unit advised me in a letter dated 23 August 2017 that any questions that I had about Harington, and about his conduct in the Department before and after his offending against me in 1978 - 1979 could only be released if I made a Right to Information request – and that I would need the consent of Harington for those records to be released.
- 15 I was left feeling completely stymied by the process. I didn't feel like my welfare was a priority for the Department.

The change I would like to see

- 16 The process for victims to engage with and obtain information from the Department needs to be much clearer, with fewer barriers. It also needs to be focused on the needs of the individual victim-survivor. People like me need answers – even if they are not easy to hear.
- 17 I hope that by speaking about my experiences, this can lead to a change to the way in which the Department engages with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse from within the education system in Tasmania. It is my hope that Commissions of Inquiry, solicitors and formal processes don't need to get involved to encourage the Department to constructively engage with people like me, who have already suffered so much.

I make this solemn declaration under the *Oaths Act 2001* (Tas).

Declared at Hobart in the State of Tasmania

on 15 March 2022



(S M LEISHMAN)

[Signature of witness]

Before me:

