



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

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KATRINA FAYE MUNTING

I, Katrina Faye Munting of [REDACTED], in the State of Tasmania, teacher, do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

- 1 I make this statement in my personal capacity.
- 2 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.
- 3 I consent to being identified in this statement for the purposes of section 194K of the *Evidence Act 2001* (Tas).

BACKGROUND

- 4 I am a 38 year old woman living in Tasmania. I have a loving husband and family, and I am passionate about my work as a teacher. At present, I work outside the Tasmanian State school system. I have been teaching for 17 years. My husband is also a teacher.
- 5 When I was a teenager, I was groomed and sexually abused extensively by my teacher Peter [REDACTED]. This occurred between 1998 and 1999, when I was aged between 14 and 16 years of age. Some parts of my experience are the subject of ongoing civil litigation involving Peter [REDACTED] and the State of Tasmania, and for this reason I have outlined my experiences at a high level only.

MY SCHOOL YEARS

- 6 I was a studious young person. I enjoyed school, and I had ambitions to be the first in my family to go to university. I had a reputation as a reliable student and a 'good girl'. I had a strong group of friends. I was happy.
- 7 Peter [REDACTED] was a teacher at my school. He had a relaxed attitude, and tried to be friendly to lots of people. I remember that he ran [REDACTED] camps with his students, based from his own house and on sites on the East Coast of Tasmania. He was very friendly with his senior students in years 9 and 10.

- 8 I don't know when he 'chose me' as his victim. I went to school camp with my friends, which Peter attended as a supervisor. It was a camp for a group of year 9 Extended students. We were all intelligent and studious young people. He was very accommodating to everyone and engaged with us in a very friendly, familiar way. In retrospect, and as a teacher, I view his behaviour as being too familiar. For example, he brought his dog with him which proved an attraction to the students, particularly the girls. He used his dog to easily initiate conversation and be in close contact with students. In break times, he would consistently be with groups of predominantly female students and engage in the students' personal conversations, rather than being with other staff. He would lay on the grass with groups of students to chat. He would give predominantly female students the job of 'watching' his dog. He was overly interested in the private lives of my peers and he was not concerned about how it would look for him to be having one-on-one conversations with students over the duration of the camp, which I observed him doing openly. In retrospect, I am concerned he was attempting to work out who would be an 'available' victim.
- 9 A few months after this camp, I was undertaking some school work called 'independent investigations' and my tasks required assistance. Peter was not my teacher at the time, but he assisted me with that work. At the start of the time that we worked together, he would 'accidentally' touch me. For example, he would brush past me when we were working together in a confined space. Over time, the touching became less accidental, and more sexualised. It was not just brushing of arms or hands anymore, he was now touching my breasts or legs. Initially the change in his behaviour was subtle and happened over a number of lessons. I did not realise it was becoming sexualised at this time. It was only when he started touching my breasts and buttocks quite deliberately, in a confined, secluded area neighbouring the classroom (the preparation room) did I realise it was definitely sexualised and not right. I was shocked and did not know what to do. I froze and allowed him to do as he will. As time progressed and the abuse became more intense, I increasingly realised how wrong it was; however, by then it was all too late to 'get out'.
- 10 After that time, he started to make ways for us to be alone together in the area. He would then instruct me to go to certain places within the

school that were secluded and abuse me. Some of his conduct during this period was summarised in the sentencing remarks of [REDACTED]. Now produced and shown to me and marked **KFM-1** is a copy of the sentencing remarks.

- 11 While I was still in year 9, in 1998, I was singled out along with my best friend to go on a camp run by Peter [REDACTED] which was otherwise attended only by year 10 [REDACTED] Stage One students (an extension program). It was unheard of for year 9's to attend a year 10 camp. Nonetheless I attended. He abused me while I was on the trip. This was only a few months after the initial 'accidental' touching.
- 12 During school holidays between 1998 and 1999, the abuse continued. He took me to his house and abused me. I had to lay on the floor of his ute as he drove me to his house. He spoke to me a lot over the phone as well. He insisted that I call him, so that my parents would not answer the phone if he called my house.
- 13 I returned for school in 1999, now in year 10. The abuse continued as it had before. About half way through term 2 of 1999, a senior teacher (who was also my teacher at the time) took me aside while I was in the library with my class, and said that it had been noticed that I spent a lot of time with Peter [REDACTED] and that it was not normal. I ran from the room in tears and cried my eyes out in the toilets. I thought that the floodgates of hell were about to open. I thought that I would be in trouble from Peter [REDACTED] my parents and the school.
- 14 But I was not in trouble. It didn't seem to be reported. No one told my parents. Nothing happened at all. However, it had frightened me. I was fearful of the impact of what was going on becoming known more broadly. I had ambitions to go to university and to further myself, and I saw all of this being in jeopardy if people found out about what Peter [REDACTED] was doing to me.
- 15 I felt blamed for the abuse, and I felt that it was my responsibility to fix it. I now know that I was not to blame — but that is how it felt at the time.
- 16 Peter [REDACTED] continued to pursue me. I couldn't refuse him entirely, but I would start making excuses about why I could not respond every time he summoned me. I started avoiding being in any space where he could do anything. The abuse became less frequent. Eventually, I stopped responding at all.

- 17 By this time I was 16 years old and in year 10. I was still scared of him. He was angry and he continued to pursue me. Through most of year 10, Peter did not teach me, however in Term 3 of 1999, he was one of my teachers. It was only during this time that my grades declined. I felt this was due to spite from him. All of my other marks remained high.
- 18 What should have been the best years of my childhood were destroyed by Peter.
- 19 I was deeply scared about what had happened, and ashamed. I tried to put it out of my mind and just focus on my studies.

DISCLOSURE

- 20 I found I could not keep what had happened buried. I disclosed some (not all) of the abuse to my boyfriend, . He was two years above me at school, and was in first year university when I told him some of what had happened. I couldn't bring myself to reveal it all. I hoped to reveal enough to have Peter removed from his position of authority as a teacher.
- 21 and his father approached the school on my behalf and told them what had happened. I believe that Peter was given the opportunity to resign, which he did.
- 22 and his father instigated and attended all meetings with the school on my behalf. I was too ashamed to speak to anyone at the school regarding Peter and his abuse. In the initial meeting, the principal took the complaint seriously and handed it on to the Department of Education's Grievances Officer. We were informed that this officer had met with Peter and put the alleged abuse to him. Peter immediately commenced sick-leave. After approximately two weeks, the officer and Peter met again and Peter resigned his position. We were told this was an admission of guilt and he would never teach again. My parents were not contacted at any time – not regarding the concerns and chastising I was given in Term 2 1999 (as stated in paragraph 13), not when the abuse was brought to the attention of the principal in February 2000, and not when Peter resigned later in 2000. So far as I am aware, the police were not informed at any point that a student had been

sexually abused by one of the Department of Education's employees on its premises.

- 23 After he was removed, I was never informed about any investigation into what Peter had done. So far as I know, there were no inquiries made to determine the extent of what Peter had done. I received no support for the psychological issues that arose for me then, which have persisted. Again, I threw myself into school-work, and I tried to avoid thinking about what had happened to me.
- 24 My mental health was up and down over the years, but began to decline steadily. I sought psychological support. With that support, I came to realise that I couldn't really make further progress in my healing process unless I disclosed what had happened to the police.
- 25 One day, after I obtained information from the principal at my current workplace, I felt up to making my report, and I went to the police station. I found the police station quite frightening. I went to a small room that I think was usually used to interview suspects. It was small and bleak and not very comforting.
- 26 However, a friend of mine (who was a police officer) was on shift, and so I decided that I would have a very preliminary discussion with her about how the process would work. I found this really helpful, and her support was wonderful. She gave me the names of the people that I needed to speak to, and she made sure I was aware that if I didn't feel comfortable with the Detective I was asked to speak with, I should ask for someone else.
- 27 I left the station that day, and I processed what I had been told. I was not given any referrals for professional support after this discussion, just the support of my friend and my husband. I had the names and contact details for the next step in the process for when I was ready, as this needed to be done through CIB. I was quite uneasy and emotional at work after my preliminary discussion, and I spoke to the principal at my school about what had occurred, knowing that he had recently dealt with similar complaints. He was really supportive and suggested a police officer that I should contact. I then decided to contact the police to start the formal process to make a complaint.

- 28 I was then introduced to a really wonderful female detective. I wasn't ready to tell my story straight up. We had some email exchanges and one in-person meeting. I was cautious. The detective wasn't pushy and she was happy to take the time to build rapport with me. A few months passed, and the detective who I had come to know went on leave and I was handed on to another detective. I took the time again to get to know him, and I ultimately made a formal statement with his assistance. It was important that I felt believed and supported. Thankfully, while giving my statement I felt very supported. The detective demonstrated belief in all I had to say in my interview. The second detective in the room was a female; this helped.
- 29 It was empowering to be heard and believed. The detectives listened to all I had to say, did not interject, and posed clarifying questions rather than probing questions to maintain the front of belief. It was a really difficult process for me to tell this story I had been keeping hidden within myself for so many years. Feeling like I had 'lost control' of my story was devastating and I remained in contact with the detective regularly for progress updates. I could not 'let go'.
- 30 The matter was handed to the DPP, and Peter was charged. The criminal justice process was long and protracted. With every extra day, and every set back of having the matter proceed to its conclusion, a little bit more of me died.
- 31 All of the delays had a significant impact on my mental health. Having relived in fine detail the abuse I had endured, I was very fragile. There were still many adjournments, and my mental health continued to decline. I reached a point where I could no longer cope with life and I was on the brink of suicide again. I took all of my sick leave from work, and then into leave without pay. I was off work for about three months in total. In this time, I was to be admitted to a private hospital; however there were no 'free' beds. I was instead allowed to remain home on a strict daily regime.
- 32 The case was, at times, all consuming. It was so psychologically painful and emotionally draining at every turn. Each time there was another delay, another adjournment, or not meeting the next expected progress point, it tore me apart. I was so determined to not give up; however, the process drove me ever closer to suicide as I could not cope. This is not to mention having to see Peter at each session of the Magistrates Court and Supreme Court.

- 33 Having said that, I was well looked after by the Crown Prosecutor and the witness support staff. The support staff from Victim Support at the Department of Justice were excellent once I finally had access to them. The counsellor met with me as regularly as she could, at some points weekly, to help calm and reassure me about the process that was occurring and prevent me from giving in. She attended every court session with me, meeting me beforehand away from the court, then walking there together. She sat with me and held my hand in the court rooms as much as possible (given some COVID restrictions and witness box requirements). I still meet with her now every few months to discuss what has happened and what is next in the process.
- 34 The support staff at Witness Assistance from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions were also excellent. The woman I worked with was so kind and understanding of my anxiety surrounding every step of the process. She was the kind conduit between myself and the terrifying Supreme Court and lawyers. She organised and was present for all of my meetings with Crown Counsel, as was my support from Victim Support. She also arranged for a private session in one of the courtrooms at the Supreme Court. This allowed me to know what to expect when I attended; the 'feel' of the room, who would be positioned where, what I needed to do at each point, to practice sitting in the witness box prior to the hearing, and to practice my Victim Impact Statement in the same setting as would be required.
- 35 While I did not spend a great deal of time with the Crown Prosecutor, the time I did have was very productive. She was very kind, understanding and patient in all our interactions. She gave me a great deal of reassurance about what was going to occur at each point in the Supreme Court, and was very open when answering my many questions. I prepared my own Victim Impact Statement initially, which was then slightly modified by my counsellor at Victim Support to gain the standard format and meet the needs of the court.
- 36 Peter eventually pleaded guilty to some charges, but continued to dispute various facts. I was therefore subjected to cross examination as part of a 'disputed facts hearing'. That was a harrowing and mortifying experience. I felt victim-blamed by the defence lawyer. Peter sat metres away from me making dismissive noises and gestures while I was on being questioned by the Crown and the defence.

- 37 Overall I found my experience of the criminal justice system devastating, and I am not sure I could or would put myself through that again.
- 38 However, I felt believed by the Court, and this helped me. I found his Honour's disputed facts findings and sentencing remarks really helpful because they came from an impartial and authoritative perspective, and they recognised the pain and suffering I had been through.
- 39 Peter was ultimately sentenced to 3 years in prison.
- 40 I disclosed the abuse because it felt like I had to do that to survive. I am still feeling the significant effects of what happened to me to this day. I felt many of these effects as I got older, and as I came to have my own family. The mental health issues I have had have been debilitating, and I am filled with anger. I wonder if my mental health and anger would be the same if the abuse had been dealt with fully at the time, and I had received support and sympathy as a young person.
- 41 As an adult, I have since spoken to other teachers who worked with Peter somewhat before the time that I was abused. They have told me that they had concerns about how friendly he was with students, and about the camps that he ran. They didn't take that 'staff-room conversation' to someone more senior. I wish now that there was the kind of culture that would encourage the communication of these issues to more senior staff.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

- 42 Based on my experiences and my position as a teacher, I believe that we need to bring about real change, and to adopt proper interventions to:
- (a) identify and prevent grooming behaviour by teachers towards students
 - (b) respond to and 'call out' boundary transgressions by teachers before they escalate
 - (c) stop and report abusive conduct, and
 - (d) respond to abuse in a way that focuses upon the needs of the young person, with support, empathy and kindness.

- 43 I believe that there are a number of steps we need to take to achieve the kind of change necessary.

Culture

- 44 It is critical that we create and foster an environment where teachers and people in leadership roles know what to do when they see the start of boundary violations which could turn into grooming behaviour.
- 45 An important starting point in shifting the culture is for us all to recognise the power that adults have over children. This means teachers and students, but can extend more broadly than that. This disparity in power needs to be emphasised in training at the very start of their career – while teachers in training are being inducted into the profession.
- 46 In my experience, child sexual abuse is not directly spoken about sufficiently by teachers, even in the context of mandatory reporting training which takes place every year. It feels like people approach sessions about mandatory reporting as though it is just another box to tick. People can seem bored by it, and there is a lack of engagement. I see this as something in the culture that we need to shift. We need to understand the significance of the issue and the devastating effect that abuse can have on people for the rest of their lives.

Training

- 47 As part of re-shaping the culture, we need to ensure that there is training provided to teachers about what grooming is, and the way in which it can operate. There are so many 'red flags' that teachers need to be trained to identify. In addition, I believe that there is no reason that children can't be taught (in an age appropriate way) to identify inappropriate behaviours as well. This is something that is not taught enough so far.
- 48 However, such training is of no use unless it is taken seriously, and to this end it needs to carry a sense of explicit urgency. I understand that teachers don't always see the full impact of abuse. But we need to know when to intervene, and what to do when something seems to be wrong, even if it is difficult to articulate.

Mentoring and access to expertise

- 49 In my experience, there are always teachers who don't get the boundaries right with students. This is something that should be pointed out to them before it escalates - perhaps in a performance review session or some other form of less formal feedback. I understand that this could be a difficult conversation to have with a colleague, but it is important to create a space where teachers can receive feedback about their interactions with students, and what is and is not appropriate.
- 50 I understand that senior teachers can be reluctant to raise issues of this kind with more junior teachers for fear of being misunderstood.
- 51 I think it would be helpful to have a person or a group of people who are really informed about and trained in how to approach these issues. I am not sure where these people could be located; whether they would be located in each school, or a central office that everyone could access. But I think it's important that real support from people who know what the school environment is like can be made available to teachers and students to provide support, guidance and training. People working in this role could be trained to understand the powerful position that adults have over children. They will need to spend sufficient time listening to and taking on the stories of survivors. No one understands what it is like more-so than someone who has experienced it first-hand.
- 52 I am aware that the phone line for mandatory reporting (the **ARL**) is available to call about concerns relating to a student. People tell me that when they have called the ARL they don't receive clear guidance about what to do. Instead some people tell me that the phone operator asks them to suggest what they would like the ARL to do. Personally, I have been required to mandatory report; the phone call itself was not a pleasant experience and this is without considering the reason for the call. Rather than being allowed to express my concern as it stood, I was interrogated, and asked more about who I was and how I fit into the 'story' rather than the details of the concern I had. There was no guidance as to what I should do next, what was likely to happen next, or notification regarding any interventions that had been taken. I think that the kind of support and guidance that I am talking about needs to be much

more focused on providing practical support at different stages, including support from the ARL.

- 53 Accreditation as a 'child safe school' is a positive step. However, I am concerned that much of this is focused on reducing risk to the institution because it focuses on structural matters, rather than focusing in on the culture or practice in the school itself.

CONCLUSION

- 54 Abusive conduct like my experiences destroys parts of you that will never come back. It has had a significant ongoing impact upon me. It impacts on my children, and the way that I parent them. It is so important that people recognise the harm that is caused by this behaviour and its lasting, intergenerational effects.
- 55 I have been so angry at what happened, and the lack of support that I received from the Department of Education. I really wanted to speak to the Minister for Education about everything I had been through. After writing once a week for 16 weeks, I was referred to speak with a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education. That was a good discussion and he listened well to my story, and he apologised to me, which I felt was important – although I would have preferred a proper, personalised apology from the Department of Education itself and a proper discussion with them so that they could hear from me personally.
- 56 I am hopeful that this Commission can bring about change that will mean that fewer young people have the experiences that I have had.

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

Declared at [REDACTED]

On April 5th 2022.

Before me