



1 September 2021

To The Honourable Marcia Neave, AO and Commissioners

I submit to the Commission Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, on behalf of Trauma Awareness Network Australia (TANA), as Co-founder and President. TANA is a grassroots Australian Health Promotion Charity for the prevention of complex trauma and mitigation of its effects. With our organisational objectives in mind, we applaud the Governor's Order for this Commission and align with the Commission's Terms of Reference in our mission:

- I. to better protect children through **community-wide education** at the grassroots level
- II. to **build the necessary foundations** for achieving best practice in institutional contexts and more broadly
- III. to eliminate or reduce impediments and address failures at a systemic level and, most significantly, we intend to
- IV. address and alleviate the impact of past and future child abuse through our work.

I have selected the relevant phrases in the terms of reference for the purpose of highlighting how TANA's submissions is positioning the core issue in the broader social context, beyond institutions, and incorporating them. People make up institutions. TANA proposes that an essential shift in community awareness must precede the cultural shift required for institutional violence against children to cease. Indeed, it is a culture of secrecy that has enabled child sexual abuse to thrive and therefore, it is a culture of openness that will end it. Our willingness to confront the issue; to talk about the fact of its existence and be clear about the lifelong impacts - from the scientific perspective - will allow us to overcome this abhorrent abuse of children. It takes courage to do this. We believe Tasmanian people have that courage.

As a grassroots organisation, TANA's submission to this inquiry is intended as an offer - to help implement a fundamental shift in community attitudes. We recognise that trauma-awareness *necessarily underpins* the success of all other initiatives, programs and treatments designed to improve the ability of government institutions to better protect against and respond to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. Put simply, this work is not the sole responsibility of the government, but our collective responsibility. TANA is designed for this task.

We are responding to the Commission's request to hear from individuals and organisations whose insights, experiences and ideas will inform the Commission's understanding of the current gaps in the Tasmanian Government's responses to child sexual abuse and will help to identify opportunities for change.

TANA - Who and why

TANA was founded, on Tasmania's North-West Coast, in 2018. I introduced two of my friends and local residents, [REDACTED], who I knew were committed to searching for a solution to the growing malaise we were witnessing in young people in educational settings (State institutions). We had a common passionate interest and decades of individual experience of deep inquiry into the underlying causes of the burgeoning mental ill-health epidemic and my conversations with them were almost exclusively on this topic for the 10 years I had known each of them. When we came together, with the express purpose of finding a way to contribute to a solution, [REDACTED] quickly confirmed, as she was reading the work of Bessel van der Kolk, that complex trauma was scientifically proven to be at the root of the problems we sought to address. Further intensive research strengthened our conviction and the World Health Organisation included Complex PTSD in their International Classification of Diseases, 11th Edition (ICD-11), in June 2018. At this time, no one we knew was talking about this publicly and we knew it was a difficult and uncomfortable topic, but absolutely critical that it be brought into the public arena. Our community forum, in January 2019, started the public conversation.

We have maintained a deep commitment to establishing a model for how to make complex trauma common knowledge, while recognising that removing the stigma around talking about child sexual abuse is a foundational step in prevention and mitigation. This Commission of Inquiry is obviously a part of this work.

We acknowledge that the effects of child abuse and neglect, at every level of society - past, present and historically - is something that must be understood before myriad valid practices for mitigating the effects will create population level change. Moreover, TANA's work is to help **build trauma-informed communities and a collaborative system of care** across Tasmania, focussing on post-traumatic growth in everything we do.

TANA Model

Our model includes a state-wide awareness raising campaign that utilises various forms of media, including films, music events and online gatherings. We have included community forums in our model, in every local government area, followed by a series of opt-in workshops for those who wish to deepen their understanding of the science of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and the science of resilience and thriving communities. This will be further developed into online training opportunities.

The people who attend these events and forums will be invited to set up their own local TANA groups - which we envisage in every region of Tasmania. These will become trauma-informed communities of care, that are the backbone of the model, specifically designed for building capacity for place-based collective impact at the grassroots level. People need to be equipped with the skillset necessary to contribute effectively to local

decisions that affect them, while learning to work with the government as a confident, respectful and responsible collective voice.

TANA has established a prototype for this grassroots level work, in Devonport, and are ready to begin a widespread implementation process. All we need is the funding. We are aware that a state of urgency is here, now. The TANA 2021-2024 Strategic Plan is currently being drafted and the Devonport group have collaborated to produce our Vision Statement:

‘using socially responsible science to cultivate trauma-informed, resilient people and practices, in our communities.’

There are two sides to this situation - children who are abused can become abusers. Victims can become perpetrators. Our prisons are full of our most traumatised citizens. We acknowledge that this is an issue of significant complexity and we are ready to be part of the solution.

As a solution-focussed organisation, TANA flips the victim orientation when looking at the issue of trauma. We have developed an empowerment model, so that ‘victims’ become ‘creators’ who are able to take responsibility for their future, despite their past wounding. We are focussed on addressing trauma for the purpose of removing the stigma and dissolving the shame that can debilitate victims throughout the lifespan and empower them with knowledge and skills to become pro-social citizens with a great capacity to help others in their community who were child victims. TANA intends to build the belief in people that they can become leaders in their local community who pave the path to a world where child abuse is unable to thrive.

Concurrently, we see organisation of a trauma-informed collaborative system of care, with Education, Health, Justice and Social Services (and others) working together to become truly trauma-informed. This is a four-stage process beginning with trauma-awareness, which generates trauma-sensitivity. When groups of people become trauma-sensitive, they respond differently and begin to develop the necessary changes in policy and practice. When this awareness changes behaviour that leads to ‘a new normal’, we can say we are a fully trauma-informed community. TANA can facilitate this.

TANA has always believed that Tasmania can lead the country in being the first trauma-informed state in Australia. We see that this work may be managed in partnership with the federal government, with Tasmania as a pilot.

We are currently in negotiations with a Commission for Children and Youth in the United States and are undertaking training for trainers to be the first to bring this to Australia. This training was developed in conjunction with the science of ACEs and a renowned communications institute who specialise in effective messaging that works. This has already been rolled out successfully with over 80 000 people trained in one state. TANA has this vision for Tasmania - of facilitating a growing team of trainers in trauma-awareness, in all areas of our community. In addition, we are partnering with a world leader in trauma-training who uses a model developed and approved by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association (SAMHSA) and a Professor of Psychology at a US

university. TANA intends, through these partnerships, to trauma-inform police, sporting clubs, teachers, health care workers, the grassroots and faith communities.

Mike Gaffney, MLC, has supported TANA's mission from its inception and read us into Hansard in his 'Reply to the State Budget' this week, stating that:

"TANA has the capacity to create real change...I hope that groups like TANA are given both the opportunity and the support needed to be able to provide authentic experiences and training for many, many Tasmanians."

Another prominent member of our community stated in 2018:

"TANA is an exceptionally important spoke in the standard of living wheel on the North West Coast ..."

TANA advocates for policies and practices for prevention of complex trauma, including child sexual abuse. Upstream prevention must include funding for building capability in our citizens. Policy change must recognise the importance of empowering the responsible citizens who want to build skills to uphold and reinvigorate fundamental human social values - especially those who want freedom from the traumatic experiences that bind them. This is a viable way to better protect children, to build the necessary foundations for achieving best practice in institutional contexts, to eliminate or reduce impediments and address failures at a systemic level and, most significantly, address and alleviate the impact of past and future child abuse.


TANA Co-founder and President
