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29 May 2015

Royal Commission into Family Violence
PO Box 535
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Dear Commissioners

Scouts Victoria welcomes the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

As a large youth movement, Scouts Victoria is committed to the welfare of young people and understands the impact of family violence on young people and their development. Family violence is not excusable, acceptable nor tolerable, with all people having the right to live free from violence and the fear of violence.

There is a role for community organisations to play in fostering a violence-free society, increasing awareness of family violence, supporting the victims of family violence and encouraging people to build respectful relationships. As a values-based educational organisation, Scouts Victoria is keen to be part of the solution, with some current and proposed initiatives included in our attached submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission which we hope aids in your work and contributes to a violence-free Victoria.

Yours sincerely

Brendan J Watson OAM
Chief Commissioner Scouts Victoria



Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Scouts Victoria

A Introduction

- 1 Scouts Victoria believes strongly that:
 - all people have the right to live free from violence and the fear of violence;
 - family violence is neither excusable, acceptable nor tolerable; and
 - as a values-based educational organisation, it has a significant role play in fostering a violence-free society, increasing awareness of family violence, supporting the victims of family violence and encouraging people to build respectful relationships.
- 2 In light of the Royal Commission's terms of reference, in this submission, Scouts Victoria deals with or explains the following: (1) the role of Scouts Victoria in dealing with family violence issues; and (2) some practical recommendations geared to improving responses to family violence in Victoria.

B Background

- 3 Scouts Australia is one of the 191 members of the World Organisation of the Scout Movement that has over 42 million members worldwide. In Australia Scouting operates as a federation with each State and Territory, referred to as a Branch, operating through its own entity either incorporated by specific legislation or under corporations or associations legislation.
- 4 Scouting is the largest youth organisation of its kind in Australia; and it is represented in most communities around the country. Scouting is an inclusive organisation with its members coming from a variety of cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. It encourages participation of youth members with disabilities. In Australia Scouting is a family-based organisation that provides 53,000 youth members.
- 5 Scouts Australia has over 14,000 adult volunteers who hold either uniformed leader roles or act in a support capacity in non-uniformed roles. Volunteers are usually parents of youth members. Scout volunteers are supported by a relatively small number of paid staff located in each Branch.
- 6 Turning to the local Branch, Scouts Victoria:
 - is part of a voluntary, non-political, educational movement for young people to develop their full emotional, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible global citizens, and as members of their local, national and international communities;

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- has approximately 18,000 youth members and approximately 6,000 adult leaders;
- provides a non-formal learning environment, in which dedicated adult volunteers play a central role, strengthening the capacity of young people to deal with present and future challenges;
- delivers sustained and stimulating educational programmes for the benefit of young Victorians;
- seeks to teach and reinforce values against the use of violence, including family violence;
- has a formal policy of zero tolerance towards bullying, neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse of any kind;
- has demonstrated a significant and transparent commitment to the protection of children;
- comes into contact, regrettably, with the victims *and* the perpetrators of family violence;
- seeks to protect and support the victims of family violence;
- has begun to develop and implement campaigns concerned with family violence; and
- seeks government and community support in tackling the causes and effects of family violence.

C Family violence – current activities, initiatives and plans

- 7 The tragic death of Tyabb Scout Luke Batty – a victim of family violence – prompted Scouts Victoria to re-assess its approach to family violence and related issues. The following paragraphs identify the activities, initiatives and plans arising from this re-assessment.
- 8 Scouts Victoria has appointed psychologists to provide counselling services to members. These psychologists are available at all times to assist members to deal with any crisis that occurs. Scouts Victoria is committed to expanding this service, among other things, as a means of supporting the victims of family violence.
- 9 Further, Scouts Victoria is investigating the establishment of making a telephone “hotline” available so that members can seek advice, information and referral concerning family violence issues. This service would be provided by a qualified third-party, but made specifically available to the Scouting community.

- 10 In order to raise awareness of family violence issues, Scouts Victoria has become a dedicated supporter of White Ribbon. White Ribbon is Australia's only national, male-led campaign to prevent men's violence against women and children. This support includes the following:
- The Chief Commissioner of Scouts Victoria, Brendan Watson OAM, became an official White Ribbon Ambassador in 2014. White Ribbon Ambassadors are men who recognise the importance of men taking responsibility for the prevention of violence against women and children.
 - In November 2014, all members of Scout Victoria's State Leadership Team wore black scarves with yellow and white ribbons. The peak of each such scarf carried a badge incorporating the logos of White Ribbon and Scouts Australia. The white ribbon signified and promoted White Ribbon. The yellow ribbon honoured the memory of Luke Batty – his favourite colour was yellow. Moreover, each wearer of this scarf took a pledge to affirm openly his or her opposition to family violence ("Pledge"). This campaign raised awareness of family violence issues and the mission of White Ribbon.
 - Scouts Victoria is planning to distribute a special woggle on which the words of the Pledge appear. This woggle will show unambiguously that the wearer has made the Pledge.
- 11 Given that Scouts Victoria's youth members attend weekly meetings throughout the school year, subject to one issue identified in paragraph 9 below, Scouts Victoria is well placed to educate youth and adult members regarding family violence issues. In this regard, Scouts Victoria is planning to incorporate specific modules and activities in certain educational programmes. For example, Scouts Victoria wants to ensure that adult leaders are equipped to deal with family violence issues as and when they arise at the local level.
- 12 For educational programmes aimed at youth members, particularly Joey Scouts (ages 6-7) and Cub Scouts (ages 8 to 11), Scouts Victoria is investigating other approaches to the question of the content of educational programmes concerning family violence issues. Obviously, for the education of youth members, a different approach is required. Scouts Victoria wants to ensure that the opinions of suitably qualified experts inform the development and delivery of any educational programme aimed at youth members.

D Recommendations based on practical ideas

- 13 In light of these matters, and with a view to improving the current system, Scouts Victoria recommends that:
- The State Government explore the idea of creating a record of extant court orders and other information relevant to the protection of

persons from family violence. If such a database existed, and if bodies such as Scouts Victoria had access to it, such bodies would have an enhanced ability to assist in protecting their members from family violence. As matters presently stand, Scouts Victoria relies on parents or carers to supply information relevant to the protection of members from family violence. If Scouts Victoria could obtain relevant information, it could put in place systems to protect the member in question.

- The State Government explore the development of a supportive framework from within which umbrella bodies such as Scouts Victoria can assist in tackling family violence issues (including the protection of members). Such a framework may assist the State Government to target effective programmes or initiatives for funding purposes. Such a framework may also enable or encourage improved co-operation between Government agencies, on the one hand, and not-for-profit bodies such as Scouts Victoria, on the other.

14 Further, given the matters set out in sections A to C above, Scouts Victoria would welcome increased financial support from the Government and other sources so that it can continue to:

- develop and implement targeted educational programmes;
- provide counselling and support services to youth members and others;
- train adult members and leaders to deal sensitively with youth members and their parents or carers in respect of family violence issues; and
- co-operate with Government departments and agencies, where appropriate, to deal with family violence issues.

28 May 2015