

**SOUTH WESTERN CENTRE AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT**

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To the Royal Commission into Family Violence,

As the Manager of the South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault Service (SWCASA) in the South Western area of Victoria, I participated in the local professional consultations offered by the Royal Commission into Family Violence on 27th April 2015.

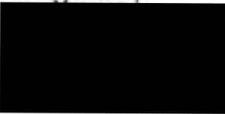
At this meeting, one of the problematic service delivery issues I spoke about was the current unresolvable issue of children who are referred to SWCASA for service by Child Protection Services with an unsubstantiated investigation, but for whom it has been identified that there is a family member who remains living in the family home or who has continuing access to the referred child, and that there has been a disclosure of sexual assault made against them.

While the SWCASA philosophy is of believing disclosures of sexual assault made by all people including children, I understand that Child Protection Services operate on a different threshold of needing to 'substantiate allegations'.

My experience has been that in such instances and without a substantiation, Child Protection may then refer the child to a CASA service, but as the child is understood by the CASA service as being in continuing unsafe circumstances, i.e. is in a continuing situation of not being protected and opportunity for sexual assault against them is ongoing, this then means that child is ineligible for CASA service. CASA also holds a view that any 'therapeutic' service provided by another source in such circumstances would actually be contraindicated for the child, with the provision of safety from ongoing sexual assault being the primary and essential intervention at this point in time.

CASA service would then be appropriate once a safe environment for the child is ensured.

Regards,


Mary Clapham
MANAGER
South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault