

Royal Commission into Family Violence

I have read the 'terms of Reference' and the Issues Paper and wholeheartedly support the goals of The Royal Commission Into Family Violence, and will endeavour to suggest ideas and assist in any way possible. I apologise in advance if my submission isn't structured correctly, however I felt it important to submit my personal experience and thought on the issues that need to be addressed. Please forgive the improper structure or any errors, as I've found it difficult to document and have not had time to structure it properly and reply to each issue as set out in the Issues Paper. I have however endeavoured to reply to the individual questions I have thoughts and experience with. I have also included other issues which I and many others, including professionals, feel very strongly need to be addressed.

My Personal Story As A Victim And Survivor of Family Violence.

My name is [REDACTED], I'm a [REDACTED] year old female currently unable to work and on a disability pension due to suffering from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of Family Violence at the hands of my mother and father (a [REDACTED]).

The physical, emotional and psychological abuse began when I was aged [REDACTED] and continued until I was aged [REDACTED] when my mother finally separated from my father and we moved to another address.

I have been beaten with cricket bats, coat hangers, and a variety of other household items that were in the vicinity when my parents flew into an uncontrollable rage. I went to a private school and always did exceptionally well until the abuse and physical violence became so severe that it affected my schoolwork and friendships.

My father and mother had threatened to murder me several times and my father certainly tried. The adrenalin my body was producing certainly saved my life a number of times although this constant release of adrenalin and being in a life threatening situation has had devastating effects on my physical health. Desperate to get away from the severe violence, I absconded several times in order to get away from the abuse, staying in squats, with friends, and at one point living inside a freeway bridge on an overpass with an old mattress and candles for light. The police were called several times to our house in the midst of a violent attack by my father on several occasions, however they refused to protect me and even went so far as to imply I was "a troublemaker" or "unruly teenager" and BLAMED me for my own abuse.

I was removed from home at age [REDACTED] by the Department of Human Services and placed in foster care. DHS came to my school and interviewed my school counsellor who I was now having to see on a regular basis, interrupting my classes. I was covered in bruises so they decided I needed to be placed in foster care as my father had told DHS that he would kill me if I remained at the house. By this time I was so severely depressed that I found it incredibly difficult just to get out of bed and attend school. My foster family were very kind to me and understanding of the trauma I had

been through. After staying with my foster family I lived with my cousin, her husband and son for a period of time as it was a lot closer to my school.

I later moved back home with my parents under the eye of DHS who paid regular visits. My father's excessive drinking continued, and so did the violence and abuse. I was still severely depressed and finding it difficult to keep up at school and complete assignments. I was having regular anxiety and panic attacks by this stage especially after the violence and I found it difficult to breathe properly.

It was around this time that DHS and particularly the case worker from DHS, [REDACTED] started making my life even worse than it already was. They refused to leave me alone and her behaviour towards my father was, in my mind, questionable and suspicious. I later requested my DHS and Family Court file under the Freedom of Information Act as I felt there was something suspicious about her manner in regards to my father. [REDACTED] later I received a huge file with over 300 pages although several of the pages were missing and I was told they were not going to be released to me due to protecting certain people's privacy. I noticed a very high number of phone calls between [REDACTED] and my father and felt something odd was going on. Her overly friendly manner towards him and her hostile manner towards me convinced me that my father had managed to con her with his lies and charm. He was very convincing socially. I have been angry about this for years and am even more disgusted that she is still working for The Department of Human Services in Victoria.

I would like it known that not once in the [REDACTED] year period I was being violently abused was my mother or father ever charged with a crime, had an intervention or restraining order taken out against them on my behalf, or received any kind of reprimand or warning about their physical violence and abuse of me. My extended family (aunts, cousin, etc) were interviewed by DHS and their accounts of my parent's behaviour towards me and the violence were documented in court reports for the Family court. As is apparently common in child abuse cases, I was the only child targeted and abused by my parents, my two younger brothers were not targeted at all. I was the family scapegoat. See <http://www.angriesout.com/grown19.htm> for an excellent article on scapegoating, which is a form of abuse often experienced in cases of family violence and child abuse.

I have repressed most of my memories of the severe violence although I do remember a few specific incidents, like my father attacking me with a cricket bat, and a time when I rang home from a friend's house to let my parents know what time I'd be getting home. My father answered the phone and launched into an abusive tirade accusing me of breaking the [REDACTED] Stereo and letting me know there would be hell to pay when I got home. Sure enough, he laid into me in a rage and attacked me violently. [REDACTED] later, my mother looked behind the stereo and found the cord had come out of the socket at the back. I hadn't touched it, let alone broken it. My father frequently came after me in a drunken, violent rage screaming that I was a "fucking bitch" and a "fucking whore" or "evil". I also remember him calling my mother a "fucking bitch" on one occasion and a family court judge in [REDACTED] gave him a stern lecture about calling the mother of his children a "fucking bitch". It was the only time I have witnessed him being reprimanded about his abusive behaviour.

Incidents like these were a regular occurrence for me living with my parents. I recall one occasion where my mother violently attacked me with a bunch of coat hangers on my bare skin. I remember curling up in a foetal position on my bed trying to

protect myself from being beaten but the force of her brutality ensured I was bruised and bleeding from the wire cutting into my bare skin, and leaving red welts all over me. I could do nothing right by parent's standards.

I remember countless times where my father flew into a violent rage and came chasing after me to violently attack me and I would have so much fear for my life that the adrenalin gave me enough strength and speed to get up the stairs to my bedroom, shut the door as fast as I could and remove the inside handle of my bedroom door and take the metal opening mechanism (a little metal rod) out from inside the door handle in a matter of seconds. If I'd not been able to, or if he had managed to catch me, I have no doubt that I would not be alive today, such was his psychotic rage and violence.

The Department of Human Services and particularly case worker [REDACTED] (a completely un-empathetic woman who should not have been dealing with a traumatised child) started causing more problems for me than I already had and I found her harsh, rude, and hostile manner and total lack of empathy or understanding very distressing. I ended up having to get my own legal aid lawyer at the age of [REDACTED] to go to court and try to remove DHS and [REDACTED] from harassing me and traumatising me further. As I was only [REDACTED] and had no idea how to get the help I desperately needed at the time, my school counsellor [REDACTED] organised the legal representation for me through Legal Aid Victoria. I had an excellent lawyer who managed to get DHS out of my life. This was the only time in [REDACTED] years that an adult had done something constructive for me when I needed their help. I cannot emphasise enough how traumatic these four years were for me having no support or action from any adult. My school counsellor was ill-equipped to deal with a completely traumatised child experiencing severe abuse and failed to help me psychologically or emotionally at all, although she was the only adult who implemented action and organised the things I couldn't do for myself because I was a [REDACTED] year old child.

The violence only ended when my mother finally made the decision to leave my father after seeing him running around the house in a psychotic rage screaming that I was "evil". Apparently that was the moment she decided to leave him. I still had to endure living in the same house as him for another [REDACTED] months though while the house was sold and assets divided.

Finally when I was [REDACTED] years old, my mother was able to buy a house and I was free of the violence for the first time in [REDACTED] years. I wasn't in fear for my life constantly, but the damage had already been done. I was suicidal, and so weak I couldn't get out of bed. I was completely debilitated, had trouble bathing myself and getting dressed, making food to eat, I couldn't attend school and I was put on anti depressants (Effexor XR) by my family GP, who was aware of the family violence but diagnosed me with major depression.

I was so physically and mentally unwell that it took me [REDACTED] to complete my VCE even though I have a high IQ and was a talented student who received high marks. I only managed to get my VCE certificate because my school principal was extremely understanding of what I'd endured and how sick I was as a result of it. I got my VCE certificate even though my attendance was less than 30% for year 12 as I was so physically and mentally unwell.

During this time my mother informed me she had been "psychologically

brainwashed” against me by my father and that he was emotionally, psychologically, financially and physically abusive towards her during the course of their marriage, including punching her in the face and breaking her nose when she was pregnant with my youngest brother.

My mother was finding it virtually impossible to be financially responsible for [REDACTED] children who were living with her full time. My father refused to pay child support or child maintenance payments to my mother and did not share custody at all. I urged her to seek legal advice and go back to court again in order to be able to afford living expenses for myself and my brothers.

I also sought legal representation regarding the abuse I had suffered from my father and for ongoing living expenses and university expenses. My mother’s lawyer and my lawyer joined forces and worked together. My barrister managed to get my father’s lawyer to agree to pay a lump sum of child maintenance for each child - \$ [REDACTED] each, even though neither of my brothers were ever abused. This was due to the fact that his lawyer instructed him to settle by doing this after he saw the Family Court Documents and DHS Case File documenting his abuse of me so I wouldn’t open a TORT case against him. I don’t feel I ever got justice or that he was ever held accountable for his actions and the damage he did. I found this court process took a very heavy toll on my physical and mental health and I found it extremely stressful and draining at the time.

With the child maintenance payment I could now afford to pay for my university or TAFE diploma, and I was accepted into one of chosen Diploma courses at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] but struggled due to the excessive work load and my lack of energy. I moved out of my mother’s house with friends and I eventually dropped out and went to do a Diploma in [REDACTED] at [REDACTED], however I had the same problem and struggled with the excessive workload and caring for myself. I eventually became so stressed and burnt out that I was forced to drop out. The state of my mental and physical health began to deteriorate again and my GP referred me to a specialist psychiatrist who specialised in treatment-resistant depression.

My illness has been so debilitating that I’ve been unable to work or study ever since and I’ve struggled to maintain any kind of normalcy in my life, despite receiving specialist treatment from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (for treatment resistant depression). Under his treatment I have been through the cycle of trying numerous anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications and combinations to no avail, as well as receiving therapy from him. I experience night terrors of my parents violently attacking me and trying to kill me, where I wake up to the sound of my own screams, sopping wet due to being drenched in sweat.

My hormonal and adrenal system has been so adversely affected due to my experience of violence for a prolonged length of time and being in a constant state of hyper vigilance that I barely have the physical energy to care for myself. Normal tasks like showering, cooking and cleaning are a huge effort. I have isolated myself from my friends and don’t see any of my family as I have such a lack of trust of other people and fear of them, that they are going to harm me. When I have a good day, I try to create artwork (specifically [REDACTED]) to sell online, although I find it difficult to concentrate or motivate myself, even when I do have the energy. I have been on the highest dose possible of Effexor and Xanax for some time now yet it has failed to help my depression and anxiety and has left me feeling completely hopeless.

At the beginning of this year, and after my psychiatrist had conceded that I was completely traumatised by what my parent's had done to me, I found an online support group for adult survivors of child abuse and was recommended a groundbreaking book by Judith Herman MD 'Trauma & Recovery'. It detailed everything I had experienced in my life, and what I was still suffering from and I finally understood myself and why I was struggling so much. I showed my psychiatrist and he agreed that I was suffering from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (a relatively unknown and untreated illness in Australia). He agreed that because my brain was not properly developed at the time I experienced the violence and trauma from my parents, and because it was over a prolonged period of time and was constant, that my brain (specifically my hippocampus) had shrunk, and my adrenal and hormonal systems were adversely affected due to the constant release of cortisol into my system over a prolonged period.

This has significantly affected and impaired the physical functioning of my body, leaving me in a state of exhaustion which has debilitated me so much that I still find it hard to care for myself, let alone retain any sense of normalcy in my life. It has also affected my sleeping pattern, my self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of self, my relationships, my ability to socialise, work, study and many other aspects of my life. I have developed hormonal problems such as PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder) as a result of the violence I endured and am now also being treated for Adrenal Fatigue (also as a result of the violence I endured). I am currently receiving a disability pension and am having trouble affording my rent, bills, and food, let alone the treatments and therapy I need to recover. I don't drive and therefore have to live in [REDACTED] where rental prices are very high, and also so I can see my therapist on a weekly basis.

My current psychiatrist ([REDACTED]) has agreed that anti depressants are making no difference for me and that I need specialist EMDR treatment by a therapist who specialises in childhood trauma and CPTSD, however I can't afford to see one and am also having a lot of difficulty finding one in [REDACTED]. I am also receiving treatment for Trauma Induced Fibromyalgia and taking the strong painkiller Oxycodone for the physical pain I experience in my muscles and the migraines that result from this. As a result of the family violence I endured, I feel disconnected from other people, unable to relate to them, or trust them. I cannot handle any stress whatsoever and if I'm triggered by something, I either lash out in anger or dissociate and am unable to cope. I have no support network and have been unable to maintain a relationship with a partner due to the psychological impact the abuse has had on me. I have been suicidal on countless occasions over the past [REDACTED] years and I still live in fear that I will not be able to keep myself alive or care for myself in the future.

Neither of my parents, in particular my father has ever been held accountable for the abuse and violence he inflicted on me for several years of my life. This still leaves me with a heavy sense of injustice to this day.

IN REGARDS TO THE ISSUES STATED IN THE ISSUES PAPER:

Question One:

Are there any other issues the Royal Commission Should Consider?

Yes. I feel very strongly that the Royal Commission needs to specifically address the treatments, therapies, and availability and access to support for ADULTS who need lifelong therapy and specialist treatment as a result of prolonged Family Violence. I see it as a glaring omission from the issues needed to be dealt with, despite the latest neurological and medical research confirming and making known the horrific and lifelong effects of prolonged child abuse and violence on children.

If my story has not convinced you how detrimental the effects of family violence are on a child and that they are lifelong and debilitating effects, please research just how many others have similar stories and are in a very similar situation as adults. Addressing this aspect of Family Violence would save countless lives and if proper and necessary treatment were made available to adult survivors of childhood trauma and family violence, it would have a dramatic effect on individual lives, suicide rates, and the number of people needing to be on a disability pension because they are unable to work. At the present time, there has been very little if any help or understanding available to adult survivors of childhood trauma and severe family violence, leaving them isolated, helpless and hopeless and unable to function normally in society. I am also currently being treated with anti-depressants (Effexor XR), anti anxiety medication (Xanax), Amphetamines (Dexamphetamine) for concentration and adrenal fatigue and exhaustion, and several specific vitamins which are known to help these. My life is still a daily struggle and I am having to focus completely on self care and various psychological therapies such as mindfulness to help myself.

I have since found an excellent resource online, a website, blog and social media page written by a 'Lily' (a pen-name), a fellow Australian survivor of childhood abuse and trauma who was also diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She has over 20,000 followers on her Facebook page alone and many of us, including myself rely on her heavily for ongoing support, information, and understanding as there is such a severe lack of information or support out there for adult survivors of child abuse and survivors with Complex PTSD as a result of it. Her dedication, support for other survivors, incredible amount of resources and amount of up to date and new research on the disorder and effects of prolonged child abuse, violence and trauma experienced by a child NEED to be taken into account and understood in order to address the vastly different needs and much more severe effects of abuse and violence on children, rather than adults, when dealing effectively with family violence. I beg of you to look at her website <http://www.healingfromcomplextraumaandptsd.com>, and her research and links to studies by international specialists in neuroscience and experts on childhood trauma and abuse which are only now being understood by professionals in the field for the first time. Her website is both recommended and endorsed by Mental Health Professionals and she has given me permission to share her research and website in my submission to the Royal Commission. I think once you understand the impact of prolonged child abuse on an individual, you will then begin to understand the cycle of abuse and the greater and devastating effect it has on our society. Without getting to the root of the problem and understanding it, it is very difficult to have any change in society as a whole, therefore I think it's imperative to focus on the abuse of children and the effects of it.

I cannot bear the thought of another child or adult to have to battle to survive through

the hell I've endured for the past ■ years with no help or no understanding and no effective or appropriate treatment or empathy with professionals who don't know how to diagnose or treat them. Even my doctor is surprised I'm still alive. I have a very clear understanding of why the suicide rate is so high in those who have experienced childhood abuse, childhood violence or childhood sexual abuse - it is fatal. This absolutely needs to be understood when addressing issues and proposed solutions to family violence. The difference in severity and outcomes of PTSD and C-PTSD on children vs adults who have endured trauma or family violence or abuse, also needs to be understood and recognised. Presently there is a severe lack of resources for children experiencing family violence and NO resources for adults still suffering from Complex PTSD as a result of family violence, physical abuse, etc, endured when they were children. This is in desperate need of change.

Children experiencing family violence need their own separate advocate who understands the mental, physical, and emotional effects of the trauma the child is or has experienced. In the past ■ years, I have seen no change or evolvement in the systems that are supposed to be in place to protect children experiencing family violence and what is in place is completely inadequate. I have seen a change in the community's and society's views towards domestic violence and violence against women, however these campaigns and education completely neglect children and the effects of family violence on children.

It has taken ■ years of desperately struggling to keep myself alive before I was finally diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of Family Violence and severe, prolonged childhood abuse. I cannot stress enough, how angry it makes me to have begged for help from so many different doctors and specialists over the years, and to be diagnosed with simple "Major Depression" and ignoring all the other symptoms I was experiencing, despite knowing my history of family violence. After finally being diagnosed correctly and diagnosed with an illness that covers ALL of my physical and mental problems, I am finally, for the first time in my life, beginning to understand myself. Not only that, but it has only cemented in my mind just how inadequate and appalling the help and protection and care from the systems in place that were supposed to protect me were and still are. Currently, there are no specialist treatment centres for adult survivors of childhood abuse and trauma with C-PTSD in Australia, and very little information for professionals in order for survivors suffering from CPTSD to receive adequate treatment or have any chance of recovering. As there are so many of us, I find this completely unacceptable. There is also no awareness, education or information regarding this for the general public leading to further stigmatisation and isolation of victims and survivors.

The Australian website, <http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au/complex-ptsd> has a very limited and frankly un-comprehensive explanation of CPTSD. Another Australian website <http://www.posttraumaticstressdisorder.com.au/complex.html> at least describes the reality of treatment for CPTSD.

“Treatment of complex PTSD frequently requires more than simple trauma-focussed therapy. Therapy often involves a range of treatment strategies, from practical coping skills training through to cognitive restructuring. Trauma-

focused approaches may feature later in therapy with Complex PTSD. Many individuals with Complex PTSD will often receive input from a range of professional services, including psychiatrists and psychologists, during the recovery process. Issues such as mobilising effective social support can be as important as specific psychological or medication treatments.”

An online search for a professional therapist specialising in CPTSD brings up no one. There are only specialists or treatment centres specifically for PTSD which is significantly different and much easier to treat. There are services for children being abused or who are experiencing family violence (I don't know the effectiveness of these), however there are no services or support for adult survivors of severe child abuse and family violence.

I also think there needs to be special government funding for the specialist treatment and therapies needed for adult survivors of prolonged child abuse in order for them to be able to afford to live and have access to the treatments they so desperately need. This includes alternative therapies such as meditation and yoga which have been proven to help dramatically in cases of childhood trauma.

Currently, I am renting a flat alone as I can't cope with the stress of living with another person/s and due to my Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, I am unable to work so I receive a disability pension. I cannot afford the various specialist therapies I need in order to recover both physically and psychologically/ mentally and become a functioning and productive member of society. I can't even afford three meals a day. Often I only have one.

I can't afford any kind of social life, let alone the alternative therapies such as meditation and yoga that have been strongly recommended as they are proven to be helpful.

Since being diagnosed with Complex PTSD stemming from childhood abuse at the hands of my parents, I have become aware of countless other individuals in my exact situation, isolated from everyone, with no support, and struggling to survive. I feel like we have been 'brushed under the rug' so to speak, and I find it both appalling, distressing and very concerning that this has not been addressed and an entire group of severely vulnerable, debilitated, and damaged victims have been all but ignored or forgotten.

Below are links taken from her website endorsed by professionals nationwide, to articles on the Lifelong effects of Childhood Complex Trauma:

Lifelong Effect & Impact of Childhood Complex Trauma

The lifelong impacts to mental health and physical health, caused by childhood complex trauma, are becoming more understood.

Research by the world's leading trauma experts and

neuroscience, is revealing the depths of the consequences of ongoing trauma and fear, within childhood.

Here are some links to provide education and validation.

Traumatized Children: How Childhood Trauma Influences Brain Development

by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

www.aaets.org/article196.htm

Childhood Trauma Leaves Legacy of Brain Changes **Time Magazine**

<http://healthland.time.com/2013/01/16/childhood-trauma-leaves-legacy-of-brain-changes/>

Childhood Trauma Wires The Brain For Fear **Dr Bessel van der Kolk - Psychiatrist and Trauma/Stress Expert**

<http://soundmedicine.org/post/childhood-trauma-leads-brains-wired-fear>

How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime **Nadine Burke Harris - TED Speaker**

www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_a_cross_a_lifetime

<http://soundmedicine.org/post/toxic-stress-childhood-can-lead-emotional-and-behavioral-problems-adulthood>

A BRIEF MENTION OF OTHER ISSUES I THINK NEED TO BE ADDRESSED AND OR IMPLEMENTED:

I have mentioned these in point form only because Question One in the Issues Paper is the main question I wanted to respond to and give my thoughts on.

* Question 21: As both a short term and long term goal of the Commission is the need for ongoing specialised, therapeutic treatment for children AND adult survivors of childhood family violence which have left them with damaged brains and Complex PTSD, unable to work and needing ongoing support, therapy and treatment. The desperate need for AFFORDABLE and ACCESSIBLE treatment, therapy, and support for all survivors of child abuse, including adults with CPTSD as a result of child abuse / family violence.

* After reading the Issues Paper, I am left unsure of whether the panel on the commission truly understands that Family Violence does not discriminate in terms of race, or social or economic status. In fact, having grown up in a violent household and experiencing violence on a regular basis and coming from an upper-middle class family, I found it was hidden a lot more easily for many years and when someone finally did intervene, it was hidden and denied due to the manipulative and deceptive nature of my father who had the ability to charm and convince anyone that nothing had happened/was happening. I attended one of the most prestigious private schools in Melbourne for much of my secondary schooling however no one intervened, noticed, or got me the help I needed when I was being violently abused. I was even BLAMED for my own abuse by the police. My teachers at school were completely unaware of what I was experiencing at home and treated me harshly and with no understanding when I was struggling at school.

* Wider and long term impact on the community and the individual. (20) The effects of prolonged and severe violence on a child's brain and the implications of this. A thorough understanding of the CYCLE of family violence and childhood abuse and a comprehensive plan to STOP this cycle from repeating.

*The need for a special and separate advocate for children not related to the DHS. The Department of Human Services and the lack of education/understanding from caseworkers of children being abused or experiencing violence is abysmal. A child being abused needs a specially trained and empathetic advocate to advocate on behalf of the child. It is NOT enough to remove a child physically and forcefully from a threatening or violent environment, there has already been psychological damage done which needs to be treated by a professional specialising in childhood trauma and abuse. Unacceptable treatment of victims by DHS workers and police further traumatises victims.

*Bystander syndrome and people who are aware violence is occurring but not reporting it. As part of an awareness campaign, we need a campaign to address "bystander syndrome" and shame people who don't report family violence and child abuse that is occurring to relevant authorities. My life would have been very different if my aunt, and several other people who knew and on several occasions witnessed the violence and abuse I was subjected to by my parents, had reported it. I would

like to see this campaign specifically highlight child abuse.

*Teachers and especially school counsellors need to understand the psychological effects of Family Violence and child abuse on a child and KNOW how to treat them or ensure they are referred to a specialist who DOES know how to treat them. Perhaps a mandatory course could be implemented.

* I was dismayed to read in the Issues paper only sometimes were abusers and perpetrators of family violence ordered by the court to undertake a program to change their violent behaviour. I cannot understand why this is not MANDATORY in ALL cases where an offender has been violent. Child abuse needs to be treated as what it is: A CRIME. Anyone who violently abuses a child should be held accountable. The fact that they are still not is very disturbing and only highlights the lack of understanding of the effects of child abuse on a child's undeveloped brain. I strongly feel the attitude of society towards child abuse needs to be addressed and acknowledged as the life-destroying crime that it is, and offenders need to be held accountable for their abuse. There needs to be a more severe deterrent to people who inflict abuse and violence on a child.

*The need for professionals specifically trained in dealing with TRAUMA (Complex PTSD) and traumatised victims including police officers, DHS workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors, the psychological effects of abuse and trauma and how to treat victims appropriately in order to not traumatise them further.

*I hope to see a thorough investigation into the lifelong impact of family violence / child abuse on children. Investigation into consequences and effects of family violence on children specifically i.e., drug addiction, suicide, murder, further abuse of others, crime, murder etc. The effect of prolonged violence, abuse and trauma is so much more severe and has far more disastrous and irreversible effects on a child than it does on an adult according to numerous studies from experts. On the whole, from what I've seen over the past ■■■ years, there has been no change in society's attitude toward child abuse. It is a hidden epidemic that is pushed under the rug by society because children cannot advocate for themselves and it seems that very few people bother to advocate for them, hence the sheer numbers of individuals with severe or debilitating mental illnesses caused by prolonged and severe child abuse. The fact that this country's own government is keeping children in captivity (detention) who are being abused only goes to show our society's attitude towards child abuse and how unacceptable it is. The report by Human Rights Commissioner Professor Gillian Triggs detailed the abuse of children in detention and clearly illustrated the horrific long term psychological and physical effects of this, however our government allows this to continue indefinitely. It's an outrage a national disgrace.

*Punishment for offenders and abusers and the ability to remove them from the premises in cases of child abuse. Changes to the legal system. Some form of justice for victims of abuse and for the offenders and abusers to be held accountable. I feel that our justice system is overly lenient with sentencing and protects abusers and offenders rather than protects the community. I don't think I need to point out why I feel that way or justify my belief as it would be obvious to anyone with knowledge of

cases in the justice and legal systems that this is the case and always has been. I think there need to be new laws introduced and harsher sentences, and also laws which allow abusers to be charged and held accountable or pay compensation to their victims. I also don't think there should be any statute of limitations on these cases.

*The need for child abuse and the effects of it to be reported in the media and seriously addressed publicly so society understand how horrific the consequences of it are. I have seen countless media reporting, articles and campaigns on family violence but the only emphasis seems to be on adult women, never children, who are even more vulnerable!

Lastly I'd just like to thank the Commission for inviting me to share my personal story and ideas on Family Violence, something that was denied to me through our justice system and throughout my life. I am more than willing to assist further if needed in any way I can. I know a significant number of other victims of child abuse and family violence who have been unable to write a submission, so I urge the commission panel to place special consideration and attention to the submissions of those of us who have managed to document our personal experiences and thoughts. Thank you.