

UNDER Section 20 of the Inquiries Act 2013
IN THE MATTER of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in
State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

**PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT OTAGO'S SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO
NOTICE TO PRODUCE NO. 518**

5 October 2022

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TO: The Chair and Commissioners

Introduction

1. My name is Jo Marie O'Neill (formerly Jo Marie Rowe). I am the CEO of Presbyterian Support Otago (**PSO**).
2. I have been in this role since September 2019. Before taking up this role, I was CEO at Mornington Health Centre – a position which I held for 5 years.
3. I am a Christian, but I am not a member of the Presbyterian clergy.
4. I am authorised by the Board of PSO to provide this response.

Limitations

5. I will do my best to answer the questions that have been posed as part of this notice, but I must acknowledge some limitations:
 - (a) **My limited involvement with PSO** – I have only been involved with PSO since September 2019. I have no personal knowledge of any events before that time and am therefore reliant on any available documentation. Although I have helped resolve any complaints of abuse which have been made recently, I am only able to give evidence on some historical matters if I have found out about them in the last few years – through my contact with survivors or from available documentation.
 - (b) **Time available** – I was served with this notice by the Royal Commission on 12 September 2022. I have had a limited amount of time to review a significant amount of information and prepare this response.
 - (c) **Absence of historical documents** – I refer to PSO's submission on Notice to Produce 1 – that outlined some of the difficulties that we currently face with historical documents.

Looking back

From 1950 until present day, please explain:

1. **With the benefit of hindsight, what are the biggest mistakes PSO has made that enabled abuse against children, young people and vulnerable adults in the care of the faith to occur? Why were these mistakes not identified and addressed sooner?**

6. PSO began operating children's homes because of a perceived need to help struggling families, and to ease social issues in the community. With hindsight, providing for the care of children was not the way families should have been supported. However, I understand it was in line with what was believed as good practice at the time.

7. In times past, individuals who were married, part of a church, or who were involved with community objectives were believed to be upstanding and suitable to be involved in the care of children (as is seen in 'Making a Difference: a Centennial History of Presbyterian Support Otago'). This belief is naïve. While some of those people may well have been suitable to be involved in the care of children, it is someone's attributes, not their status, which determines that.

8. As I was not there, I cannot specifically comment on how abuse occurred at PSO. However, I can provide some general observations from the information available to me.

9. It is clear that from 1950 until PSO's last home closed in 1991 that there was no reporting system in place for the Board or Management to monitor children's care or accusations of abuse at the Children's Home. There does not appear to be any complaints process – evidenced by a formal recorded process (which we now have) or proper engagement, evidenced by allegations being made and properly investigated (as would also happen now).

10. Training for staff (and those who might monitor the care being provided) also appears to have been lacking, as was the understanding of how children exhibiting trauma might present so staff could take more proactive steps, rather than waiting for children (or others) to report abuse.
11. It is also not clear if there was any external State Agency review or audit of care standards in any of the PSO homes. As with most social service providers the focus appears to have been on maintaining financial viability rather than considering the possibility of abuse.
12. It would also appear from the records that PSO did not have robust recruitment processes. There is certainly a different culture now around compliance with employment law and best practice when it comes to recruitment, interview, reference checking, selection, and appointment processes.
13. We think the biggest mistakes were not having the activities described above in place and working well, the organisation was too trusting and did not question behaviours and attitudes. Instead, the organisation tended to have accepted the word of individuals employed or working at the institution, particularly those with standing. While the cultural norm at that time, it was and is unacceptable.

2. With the benefit of hindsight, what are the biggest mistakes PSO has made in relation to responding to reports of abuse? Why were these mistakes not identified and addressed sooner?

14. With the benefit of hindsight, I think the biggest mistakes PSO made were:
 - (a) Not having a proper reporting process in place, supported by training for staff and a culture of encouraging people to raise concerns.
 - (b) Responding to complaints initially with hesitation or disbelief, being too trusting of staff and not questioning behaviours and attitudes.

The intent of the Presbyterian organisation was to 'do the right thing' and because of this I think, historically, people struggled to believe that anyone given authority to assist in this endeavour was capable of abuse. As a result, I think that, initially, complaints were handled in a way which included hesitation or disbelief. Six complaints have been received by PSO since 1970 - all have now been either withdrawn or settled. The most recent case was a gentleman that experienced abuse from another child resident who was older than him. I was able to be present with him and hear his story and offer a sincere apology for what he went through. It was PSO's role to keep him safe while away from his parents and this did not happen. A payment for recognition of harm endured was offered and accepted.

(c) Not having proper training in place to help staff identify potential abuse so they could raise concerns or help others to do so.

15. It would also appear that much of the response to complaints was been driven by the CEO at the time, and their perception, knowledge and understanding of the complaint, and/or the situation described GRO-B

GRO-B

16. The last children's home managed by PSO closed in 1991, and PSO no longer has any responsibility for the residential care of children.
17. Family Works is the social arm of the organisation and provides some services for children which are managed by qualified individuals who receive supervision, are directed by policy, and are registered and monitored by their governing body. In addition to this, all staff receive Ministry of Justice and Police checks.

Looking forward - prevention/response/monitoring and oversight

3. What are the most important changes that need to be made by PSO to protect children, young persons and vulnerable adults in the care of the faith from abuse?

18. All children's homes under PSO were closed by early 1991.
19. Family Works offers social support and counselling to tamariki, rangatahi and whanau. However, that support is not "faith-based care" because, as stated above, no individual is taken into direct care by Family Works, nor is any service provided governed by any individual's faith.
20. PSO is committed to providing a safe and appropriate environment for anyone who accesses its services. As set out above, policies, processes and procedures are in place to ensure appropriate review and risk management for those using our services. They are regularly reviewed and, if needed, updated, particularly when there are relevant legislative changes. These policies, practices, procedures and case notes are also regularly reviewed externally by Government Departments. Any complaint received is recorded and a process for enquiry with the client followed through and signed off by the Manager, kept in a file and viewed as a part of the Ministry of Social Development audit process.


4. What are the most important changes that need to be made to the way PSO responds to reports of abuse?

21. PSO has made significant changes to the way in which complaints are handled. There is a complaints policy and procedure for the organisation which all complaints progress through and which ensures each individual is treated with respect and care. All complaints are discussed at governance level and reported on as they occur alongside everything identified through the investigation with appropriate confidentiality restrictions in place. We specifically provide timelines so that complaints are acknowledged promptly and so that the complainant knows they are being taken seriously, and a date for response is provided so individuals can be assured their complaint will not drag on or be ignored.

22. PSO works to minimise risks of abuse across all services with legislative compliance expectations running alongside policies, practices and procedures which are monitored and reported on. Though some policies are specific to areas (eg: Enliven and the care of vulnerable adults policy, Family Works and monitoring services and staff supervision policies), all policies are shared across the organisation by an intranet system, with learning shared from all situations (individuals details are protected in this educational process).
23. Complaints are not viewed from a defensive standpoint. Instead, they are seen as an opportunity to learn and develop our staff and to increase safety and protection for clients. Developing and continuing to grow these changes and opportunities are important in part of our process. The CEO takes responsibility that all complaints are reported on a regular basis to the Board.
5. **What barriers to disclosure continue to stop survivors from reporting abuse? How do you intend to reduce or eliminate these barriers?**
24. PSO believes barriers to disclosure for survivors included: employees being unaware of the potential of complaints, the process for complaints, and how to manage individuals who came forward. Along with this, having the ability to lay a complaint which required a face to face or over the phone contact was considered a significant barrier. This was because a survivor may feel they need to explain themselves or their experiences to a stranger who may not have the skills or appreciation to support them. We think the fear of not being listened to, believed or humiliated could be potential barriers to survivors coming forward. PSO now does all it can to lessen these fears but we know that the experience for everyone is different and we are continuing to learn and adapt our processes through ongoing training but also by reflecting on different survivor experiences.
25. PSO has implemented training and support for staff, including the direction of policies to ensure complaints go to the correct place. Supervision and review ensures all staff have the ability to talk through any issues or concerns they have, and to allow learning on an individual level. An 'open door policy'

for the CEO (currently me) ensures anyone who indicates they would like to lay a complaint can have direct access to the CEO without the need to explain themselves prior to this contact. I have received complaint and privacy training to support the process for complaints.

26. PSO have also created a separate page on the website for anyone wishing to receive contact from the organisation about anything related to the Royal Commission's work.
27. The following page can be privately completed and is forwarded directly to the CEO (or Family Works Director in the CEO absence), for swift follow up:

About - Jobs - Services - Get Involved Resources - News Contact - Donate

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The Royal Commission

We acknowledge the hurt and pain that has been caused in the past to some in our care. Our Christian faith and values will guide us as we walk the long road with survivors to a place of healing.

Please [click here](#) for more information about how we are working with the Royal Commission.

Contact Form

I would like someone from Presbyterian Support Otago to contact me regarding the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in Care.

First Name

Last Name

Contact Phone Number

Contact Email Address

(a) Record keeping

6. **What issues, if any, have you identified with PSO's record keeping policies and practice relating to reports of abuse? How do you intend to improve current record keeping policies and practice?**
28. As described in paragraphs 10 through to 28 of the PSO submission in the original notice to produce, a great majority of children's records were destroyed in late 2017/ early 2018 GRO-B. As PSO ceased to operate children's homes in 1991, all children's records were paper based. A number of records exist which relate to the children's homes, being photographs, thesis documents, missionaries' book notes, and registers of residents.
29. During 2018 the need to implement information systems that would be responsive to the changing organisation resulted in a program of work which continues today under an ICT project. Historically, all policies were kept in files. With the progression of the ICT project, all policies, and iterations of these are now kept electronically.
7. **There has been poor recording of ethnicity of survivors reporting abuse by faiths (and the State). What changes are you planning to make in relation to recording survivors' ethnicity?**
30. Within registers available of residents of the historical children's homes, ethnicity was recorded but inconsistently. PSO also acknowledges many residents had their ethnicity recorded incorrectly. As survivors come forward, PSO will ensure all entries and information relative to ethnicity is corrected in any records.
8. **Does PSO collect data about its members who have a disability or mental health condition? If not, what changes are you planning to make in relation to collection and/ or recording of such data?**
31. PSO does not have "members", though as a Charitable entity membership to the organisation is offered under its constitution. This membership is not associated with any care provision.

32. From the paper records available, PSO cannot locate any historical records of the period requested which detail disabilities or mental health issues of those in PSO's care or of survivors. If a survivor who comes forward finds this information relevant to their experience, PSO will record this.

(a) Governance/Rangatiratanga

9. **What do you consider is the role and responsibility of faith-based governance and management bodies in ensuring that Māori can exercise their rights as guaranteed by Te Tiriti o Waitangi in Aotearoa New Zealand? Does the answer change if faith-based governance and management bodies are exercising powers that the Crown has delegated to them or are funded by the Crown to deliver?**
33. PSO considers it essential to include Māori voices in governance. A position on the PSO Board to appoint a Māori representative exists and we are actively recruiting for it. Unfortunately, PSO has found it difficult to both attract and retain Māori in this role and at present, sadly, there is no Māori representative on the Board. PSO continues to actively seek representation and has engaged a Māori consultant provider to assist with recruitment to this governance role.
34. In 2015, Presbyterian Support New Zealand (**PSNZ**) - which is the federation body which includes PSO - established the Family Works New Zealand Trust. This included the establishment of the national roopū (group) within each PSNZ region. Their cultural advisors, Māori or a senior Māori practitioner were invited to be part of the group. The name of the group is Te Roopū Pā Harakeke. This is explained in more detail below.
10. **To what extent can tino rangatiratanga be exercised by Māori in PSO's governance structure? What needs to change to ensure that Māori can fully exercise their rights as guaranteed by Te Tiriti in the governance and management of faith-based institutions that care for children and vulnerable adults? How should such change be led and implemented?**

35. PSO no longer has children in its care (as defined by the Terms of Inquiry). However, we recognise we continue to provide services (though they are not residential) to vulnerable children and adults.
36. PSO consistently endeavours to ensure that Māori have a voice, and influence, in its governance, management and program direction. PSO understands that those receiving care should direct that care and be involved with the type and form of services available – it is therefore essential to PSO that we hear from Māori about Maori needs and the services that suit them and how those services should be delivered.
37. To honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, PSNZ, is advised and supported by Te Roopū Pā Harakeke. Its members are cultural competency advisors employed in each region and whanaungatanga and whakapapa to their region. They hui twice a year, to give guidance and collective voice to Te Manukura (national mouthpiece or Chair) and cultural advice to the National Executive Officer. PSNZ is then supervised operationally by a group called the National Executive Group (NEG), comprised of all seven regional CEOs, plus te Manukura o te Roopū Pā Harakeke. The NEG meet at least four times annually to support national objectives and advocacy.
38. PSO is presently working with a cultural consultant to assist in the creation of a cultural advisor role description which would be targeted at the needs of Māori in the Otago region and support a relationship with local rūnunga. This is a delicate journey as PSO acknowledges it has not historically done enough in the cultural space, as such it is even more important that we work with local iwi in the development and appointment of the role.