

Media Release



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The Salvation Army appearance before the Victorian Parliamentary Committee's Inquiry into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

A representative of The Salvation Army's Southern Territory appeared today before the Victorian Parliamentary Committee's Inquiry into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Captain Malcolm J Roberts (Legal Secretary) said that The Salvation Army has taken action to ensure that any abuse committed could not happen again.

"The Salvation Army is ashamed of the treatment many children placed in our care in our children's homes received. This should not have happened and was a breach of the trust placed in us; we are deeply sorry." Captain Roberts said.

"Since claims began to arise in the late 1990's, our primary focus has been to do all we can to help victims cope with the pain and suffering they endured. We have done this by listening to them and providing counselling and as appropriate, financial compensation.

"We encourage people, personally or through their lawyer, to come to us and tell their story. When a complaint arises our first instinct is to support the victim. "We complete a simple fact check to ensure that they were in one of our homes, what is known about the abuser, and a medical report. Aside from that we do not want to put the victims through an intensive investigation or adversarial process because they have already been through so much. We use our best endeavours to resolve the complaint in a caring and compassionate manner outside the court process.

"Importantly, we also encourage and actively support victims in going to the Police. Given claims are made by victims as adults, not children, it is ultimately their choice if they wish to make their abuse a Police matter. We assist in writing Police statements and in obtaining file information where possible. The Salvation Army has a policy of mandatory reporting of child abuse.

"Between 1893 and the mid 1980's, we operated a large number of children's homes around Australia. The Salvation Army was amongst the largest providers for children in these homes; some 30,000 to 35,000 children in Victoria alone. It is important to note that we no longer run such institutions," Captain Roberts said.

"We have received 474 abuse claims, 470 of which arose out of children's homes. All claims were reported to us by victims as adults, not as children, and the abuse occurred many years ago. Despite all the publicity about this Inquiry and the Royal Commission, we are encouraged that we have not received any new claims in the past twelve months,"

"The Salvation Army has since altered their practices significantly to ensure the safety of children within their care.

We have put in place a range of checks and balances where interactions between Salvation Army personnel and children are concerned. We require that every employee and volunteer who works with children have police checks and a Working with Children clearance. This includes our clergy (officers), who are required to have the 'Working with Children' clearance whether or not they work directly with children. This is over and above current state law," Captain Roberts said.

"We were also questioned today about conducting an official investigation of all Salvation Army children's home abuse claims. We have heard from over 400 abuse victims and encourage anybody with any information about child abuse at our institutions to come forward. We hear, and will duly consider, the calls for an official internal investigation.

"In the meantime we are very confident that the range of strict measures we have put in place makes The Salvation Army a safe environment for children," he said.

Captain Roberts said that TSA continues to offer support, counselling and compensation to victims. "While we cannot right the wrongs of the past we are doing our best to help these victims by way of counselling, an apology and financial compensation. We encourage anyone with information about abuse in Salvation Army institutions to come forward immediately."

Captain Roberts said that the ongoing Victorian Inquiry and the recently commenced Commonwealth Royal Commission were important steps in ensuring the protection of future generations of children in care.

"We believe that once the Inquiry and the Royal Commission have concluded their work and announced their findings, the Australian public will be more fully educated in the moral dangers which society presents to children, and that as a result – God willing – cases of child abuse will decrease," he said.

For further information or media comment please contact:

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