

Response to the Royal Commission on Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence
Submitted by: [REDACTED]

To:

Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Jennifer Adamson, Governor of South Australia
And Commissioner Natasha Stott Despoja AO

Introduction

This submission is in response to the Royal Commission's inquiry into domestic, family, and sexual violence. I am a [REDACTED] year-old who has experienced severe trauma and neglect, not only at the hands of my father who severely sexually and emotionally abused me, but also as a result of systemic failures by the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and South Australia Police (SAPOL). These failures placed me in harm's way, and instead of receiving protection and care, I was left to basically fend for myself.

In December [REDACTED], my mother was wrongfully arrested for [REDACTED] neglect, even though she had been caring for me through a long-term illness that saw me hospitalised for [REDACTED] months. The charges were later dropped, but despite this, I was forcibly placed into the full-time custody of my father—a person I had not lived with or spoken to since I was 10 years old due to the abuse. DCP and SAPOL made no attempt to question why I had been estranged from him for so long or whether returning to him was safe. They took these steps without knowing the circumstances of our estrangement, which had been critical to my safety.

After only a month of living with him, I reached my breaking point. At that moment, I came forward and told authorities about the ongoing abuse I had experienced. However, instead of being heard and protected, my concerns were dismissed. DCP and SAPOL decided within 48 hours that there was "no safety risk" or "need for protection," and I was left to navigate these challenges alone. I became homeless afterward, relying on friends for shelter until I was finally placed into youth homeless accommodation.

These experiences have left lasting emotional and psychological trauma. In this submission, I will discuss how my story addresses the terms of reference for the Royal Commission and offer recommendations for reform to improve South Australia's response to domestic, family, and sexual violence.

Prevention

The failure to prevent further harm was directly tied to the lack of inquiry into why I had been estranged from my father for six years. After my mother was wrongfully accused of neglect, no one questioned the risks involved in sending me to live with my father. This missed opportunity to prevent harm caused me to endure further trauma. The system could have intervened early if proper checks and investigations had been conducted.

Relevant Experience

I had not spoken to or lived with my father since I was 10, yet DCP decided to place me in his custody without asking why. If they had taken the time to understand the situation, the serious reasons behind our separation would have been clear. Instead, I was placed back into a harmful environment, with my well-being and safety being grossly disregarded.

Recommendations for Prevention:

- Mandatory Background Checks and Interviews: Before making any decisions about custody, a full investigation should be conducted to understand the reasons behind any estrangement, ensuring the child's safety.
- Risk Assessment Protocols: Implement strict risk assessments to ensure that children are not placed into environments where there has been a history of neglect, abuse, mistreatment, or estrangement.
- System Awareness: Caseworkers and law enforcement must be trained to recognise red flags, especially in cases where long periods of separation between a parent and child exist.

Early Intervention

Early intervention is essential to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable individuals, but in my case, this was handled poorly. When I finally came forward about my situation, DCP and SAPOL dismissed my concerns after a brief investigation, failing to offer me any protection. They closed the case quickly, deciding there was no need for intervention, even though I was at immediate risk.

Relevant Experience**:

I came forward to report my situation, but instead of taking my concerns seriously, they were dismissed. The investigation was closed after only 48 hours, and my reports were ignored. Left without support or safety, I ended up couch-surfing with friends until I finally got into youth homeless accommodation.

Recommendations for Early Intervention:

- Thorough Investigations: Every report of harm, especially by minors, should trigger a full investigation, including interviews with all parties involved and a detailed review of past history.
- Immediate Protective Measures: When a child expresses concerns for their safety, they should be immediately removed from the harmful environment and placed into secure and supportive accommodations.
- Strict Oversight: Cases should not be closed prematurely. There should be independent reviews before a case involving a minor can be dismissed, to ensure that all aspects of their safety have been considered.

Response

The response I received from DCP and SAPOL only worsened my situation and further traumatised me. When I reported the ongoing abuse, my claims were disregarded, and the authorities concluded that there was no risk to my safety. The case was closed without further investigation, leaving me without protection. I was effectively left to handle the situation alone, which led to me becoming homeless.

Relevant Experience:

When I disclosed what was happening, my reports were not believed. DCP decided that there was no threat to my safety and refused to take further action. I had no place to go and ended up staying with friends, and in 1 night-1 week emergency accommodation until I could find accommodation at [REDACTED] and eventually at [REDACTED] in Port Adelaide. DCP and SAPOL failed to provide any meaningful response to my situation, leaving me vulnerable for months.

Recommendations for Response:

- Victim-Centred Investigations: When minors report concerns for their safety, those reports should be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Dismissing concerns without proper investigation can put vulnerable individuals at risk.
- Mandatory Case Reviews: Cases involving minors should go through rigorous checks before they can be closed, and all reports of harm should be investigated in full.
- Continuous Monitoring: When children are placed in new custodial arrangements, there should be regular follow-ups to ensure their continued safety, and welfare checks should be conducted periodically.

Recovery and Healing

The trauma I experienced was heavily exacerbated by the way DCP and SAPOL handled my case. Not only did I have to cope with the harm caused by my father, but I was also left without any emotional or psychological support after my reports were dismissed. I was forced to navigate homelessness, uncertainty, and fear alone. DCP even disclosed my location to my father multiple times, putting my safety further at risk.

Relevant Experience:

Living in youth homeless accommodation, I continue to deal with the true terror of my father finding me. I now live in a constant state of anxiety and hypervigilance due to DCP informing him of my living situation, even after I expressed concerns for my safety. The system's failure to provide support and confidentiality has made my recovery basically impossible.

Recommendations for Recovery and Healing:

- Long-Term Trauma Support: Minors who have experienced harm must have access to long-term psychological support, focusing on trauma recovery.

- Confidentiality Protections: Survivors should have their privacy and safety protected. Sensitive information, such as their location, should never be shared with anyone, but in particular, those who have caused them harm.
- Safe Housing Solutions: Ensure that young people in similar situations have access to stable, long-term housing solutions that provide both physical and emotional security.

Conclusion

My experience shows the deep flaws in South Australia's systems for responding to family, domestic, and sexual violence. Instead of providing protection, these systems failed to believe me and left me in a dangerous environment. I was abandoned by the very institutions that were supposed to keep me safe, leading me to a path of homelessness and further trauma.

By sharing my story, I hope to shed light on the urgent need for reform. The system must be improved to ensure that every child is believed, supported, and protected. I strongly urge the Royal Commission to take action to address these failings so that no other young person is forced to endure what I went through.

Thank you for considering my submission.