

## Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) Submission to the Mid-Scheme Review of the National Redress Scheme



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## About Relationships Australia Victoria

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a community-based, not-for-profit, secular organisation that has been supporting Victorians since 1948. Our vision is for positive, respectful, safe and fulfilling relationships for all Australians.

RAV offers a diverse range of clinical services including counselling; therapeutic case management; family violence prevention, support and recovery services for men, women and children, including men's behaviour change programs; parenting programs; group programs and family dispute resolution (mediation). RAV is a Registered Training Organisation and delivers accredited training courses and professional development workshops.

Services are delivered through 17 principal centres, a Central Office and several additional outreach sites across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. RAV has over 70 years' practice expertise in delivering services and programs for individuals, families and communities affected by family violence, child protection issues, high conflict family law disputes, relationship difficulties, mental health difficulties and extreme climatic disasters including droughts, floods and bushfires.

RAV provides a range of services that are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) to support people who have complex needs, including due to trauma. Our specialised trauma and family mental health services include our:

- Redress Support Services for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse
- Forced Adoption Support Service, which offers counselling, information and referral to those affected by past forced adoption practices
- i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Services (Bairnsdale), which delivers early intervention services to and supports children and young people aged under 18, who are at risk of, or affected by, mental illness, to stay connected and engaged in education and social activities.
- Counselling and Support for People Affected by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.
- We have recently taken on the management of Open Place, a support service for Forgotten Australians, which includes the Open Place Redress Support Service. For the purposes of this response we are referring only to the specific RAV Redress Support Service experience as it is a retrospective view on the last two years, and in future submissions we can integrate the experiences of the Open Place Redress Support service.

## Introductory Comments

Since 2013, Relationships Australia Victoria has been one of the DSS funded providers in Victoria of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse* Support Services and continues to support survivors since the implementation of Redress Support Services. During this period, we have provided face-to-face and telephone support to survivors, their families and others who were affected by institutional childhood sexual abuse.

This paper responds to the Open Letter by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, who has been appointed to conduct the independent review of the Scheme, due at the second anniversary of the Scheme.

We have based our submission on the themes listed on the Second Anniversary review webpage, including:

- what you think about the application process,
- your experience accessing a support service,
- what you thought about the Redress decision,
- your experience accessing counselling,
- your experience accessing a direct personal response, and
- anything you want to share, good or bad, about the Scheme.

We base our submission content both on the direct feedback and stories from the clients we support through the Redress process, and from our perspective as practitioners, and service providers. We therefore acknowledge the knowledge, wisdom and experience of our clients that have largely informed our views, represented in this submission, and note the honour and privilege that it is to represent them.

## What is Not Working in the Scheme and Recommendations

### 1. The Traumatic Nature of the National Redress Scheme Application Process

Survivors who have presented to RAV's Redress Support Services have all experienced severe sexual trauma and psychological harm due to abuses perpetrated against them while in an institution in their childhood. Such experiences have lifelong impacts and irrevocably change the course of a person's life and development. Survivors who have applied for Redress have reported significant negative psychological and physical impacts, which they consider to be directly caused by having to think/talk/write about their experience as part of their Redress applications. These negative impacts include increased depression; increased flashbacks; lack of concentration and motivation; insomnia; anxiety; dissociation; hyper-arousal; and night sweats, as well as physical symptoms such as migraines, stomach aches and the worsening of pre-existing autoimmune conditions.

Based on these survivor reports, our Redress Support Services observe that the process of completing a written Redress application, which requires detailed descriptions of the incidents of sexual abuse and their impacts, is causing significant harm. There is a growing body of literature<sup>1</sup> and practice-based evidence to suggest that re-telling traumatic experiences may not be in the interests of trauma survivors, and that a trauma-informed approach needs to focus on establishing safety and stability in the survivors' internal and external environments, drawing on body-oriented, mindfulness-based approaches. This is in alignment with advice from the Blue Knot Foundation, which states that attempts to "process trauma (retell) in the absence of ability to self-regulate can precipitate overwhelm and re-traumatisation"<sup>2</sup>.

When survivors come to our service, it is difficult for us, as support workers, to apply a trauma-informed approach, as we are required to support people to re-tell and then re-read their traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuses in order to complete Redress applications, which can trigger the childhood trauma experience for our clients.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman, J. L. (1998). Recovery from psychological trauma. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 52(S1), S98-S103; Fisher, J. (2017). Twenty-five Years of Trauma Treatment: What Have We Learned?. *Attachment*, 11(3), 273-289.

<sup>2</sup> Kezelman, C., & Stavropoulos, P. (2012). Practice guidelines for treatment of complex trauma and trauma informed care and service delivery. *Sydney: Adults Surviving Child Abuse*.

We have also had first-hand accounts from clients who were not aware of the psychological and psychosomatic impacts that the process of completing a Redress application would have on them. These are clients who came to our service after they had already completed their Redress applications independently, and then engaged afterwards with our Redress Support Service.

Recommendation 1:

- The National Redress Scheme needs to provide greater clarity and consistency as to the level of detail that is or is not required from applications, in relation to experiences of sexual abuse, and its impacts.
  - It is recommended that the Scheme request as little detailed information as possible around the incident/s of sexual abuse, and that applicants are not penalised for providing brief descriptions.
  - Clear guidelines should be released and incorporated into the beginning of the application form, to provide guidance on the level of detail survivors are expected to provide, and the impact of this on the outcome of the Redress application. Such an approach would empower survivors to decide how much detail they choose to share based on their emotional and psychological wellbeing, rather than making decisions out of fear of being penalised for providing less information than is required.
  - When considering survivors who may complete the Redress application independently without a Redress Support Service, include a list of common emotional and psychological impacts of the application process on the front of the application form, to support informed consent for all survivors embarking on the National Redress Scheme process. (as well as referral numbers and support services which are available to Redress clients and the general public).

## 2. Our experience in delivering a Redress Support Service

Our experience of delivering Redress Support Services to our clients has been meaningful and fulfilling work. It has been a privilege witnessing our clients receive a positive Redress outcome and receive recognition and acknowledgement for the abuses perpetrated against them. Our clients have frequently reported positive feedback to us regarding the support we have provided them throughout the Redress Scheme process.

Key themes and learnings have emerged as we have provided the Redress Support Service. These include:

- a. The importance of a trauma-informed-care approach, accompanied by trauma-counselling and the provision of psycho-education regarding the impacts of trauma;
- b. The need to take the time required to safely support clients throughout the entire Redress process, and to address their presenting needs;
- c. Managing the tensions between providing a safe, integrated service, and managing the service demand;
- d. The diversity and complexity among our client cohort, with many clients presenting with numerous intersecting needs and psychological challenges, which often become exacerbated through the process of completing the Redress documentation;
- e. The need for a holistic and integrated approach to service delivery.

These key themes are outlined below.

## **2. a. Trauma-informed-care, trauma counselling and psycho-education:**

RAV's experience of service delivery aligns with best-practice literature on the provision of trauma-related services. This literature speaks to the stages of trauma recovery, and the need to establish stabilisation before progressing to recall of trauma memories<sup>3</sup>. We have experienced the importance of completing the application alongside comprehensive trauma-informed counselling and support and ensuring safety and stability prior to beginning Part 2 of the application in which the experiences of childhood sexual assault are outlined. Self-fragmentation, activation of the fight-flight response and re-traumatisation are very likely during memory recall if a client is yet to have established the skill of dual awareness, or how to track where they are within their window of tolerance<sup>4</sup>.

Part of establishing stabilisation is the provision of psycho-education, in which the impacts of trauma are outlined to the client, and they are able to identify their experience of trauma symptoms, and the tools and strategies they need to manage these symptoms<sup>5</sup>. The subject of child sexual abuse for the survivors raises traumatic memories and may re-trigger fight-flight-freeze responses, related to the childhood sexual abuse. The challenge facing survivors when having to reveal details of the childhood sexual abuse perpetrated against them cannot be underestimated.

Of great significance is that a majority of clients entering our service are disclosing the institutional child sexual abuse for the very first time, prior to accessing our service at RAV, as witnessed by a professional helper. Many clients have never engaged in specialist trauma counselling and have not had the opportunity to face the traumatic impact of the childhood sexual abuse.

Some clients have come to our service after they have completed the Redress application without any support. These clients have reported that the process of completing the Redress application was so destabilising for them, that they have become suicidal, turned to drug and alcohol use to cope, had difficulty maintaining work, faced increased interpersonal conflict, and have experienced disassociation and flashbacks. It is not to say that if they had received support with us these issues would not have arisen, but more to highlight that it may be unsafe and even devastating for survivors to undergo the Redress process without support, and also to emphasise the costs and impact of completing this application in survivors' lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Lebowitz, L., Harvey, M. R., & HERMAN, J. L. (1993). A stage-by-dimension model of recovery from sexual trauma. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 8(3), 378-391.

<sup>4</sup> Rothschild, B. (2017). *The body remembers volume 2: Revolutionizing trauma treatment*. WW Norton & Company.

<sup>5</sup> Rothschild, B. (2017). *The body remembers volume 2: Revolutionizing trauma treatment*. WW Norton & Company.

## **2. b. Taking time:**

The opportunity to engage with the survivor and slowly unpack the story with trauma informed counselling has ensured that our practice has been safe for survivors. The pace that we set collaboratively in relation to how the details emerge about the Redress application, has been central to our program model, as the survivor is not feeling pressured to detail their abuse in a rushed manner.

We therefore stress that it is not in the client's best interest to complete the application quickly and without holistic counselling within a longer-term service framework.

We have also identified several different stages in which a client may need support. These stages include:

- In the process of deciding to apply for Redress,
- the process of completing the Redress application,
- on submission of the Redress application,
- during the phase of waiting for the Redress outcome and
- on receipt of the outcome of the Redress application.

Clients come to us at each of these stages, and clients often return to our service when the next phase of the process arrives.

**A case example:** One client came to our service when they were deciding to pursue civil litigation or Redress. Through the process of 6 counselling sessions, also addressing some family violence issues, the client decided to pursue the civil litigation process. The client then returned to our service 6 months later, having changed their mind and wanting now to apply for Redress. We then supported the client with 10 more counselling sessions to complete the Redress application, and to offer psycho-education about the impacts of trauma and to develop strategies and resources to manage these impacts. At this time, the client was also suffering chronic health issues, so referral support to assist with this problem was also offered. The client then returned to our service 9 months later, having received an outcome for their Redress application. The client once again faced family violence issues and financial challenges in knowing how to manage the money they had received from the application. At this time, 10 more sessions were provided to assist the client.

We do not believe there is any other ethical or professional way to provide this service other than to offer a mid-term, trauma-informed, counselling and holistic-based model of delivery.

## **2. c. Managing the service demand:**

We acknowledge the tension that exists between ensuring equity of service delivery for all who enquire about our service, while also ensuring that clients receive the comprehensive and emotionally safe support that they need.

With growing awareness regarding the Redress Scheme there has been an increase in the number of referrals we are receiving, particularly throughout 2020 to date. To manage the service demand, we have therefore needed to establish a waiting list. From our experience, we have found the average number of sessions required to be 20 sessions, to provide trauma-informed and counselling-based Redress Support. There is also the challenge of case closure when clients remain in need of counselling support after the Redress application has been submitted. There is a lack of accessible counselling services in the community, which are trained to deal with the impacts of child sexual abuse in clients' lives.



While we make efforts to link clients up with other community supports and services, this lack of service availability presents challenges when attempting to close clients' cases ethically and safely.

We believe that in order to provide the level of care required for these vulnerable clients and to meet the demand in a timely manner, increased funding is required. This will allow us to address our waiting list and expand our reach to more clients in the community, who may be unaware of the Redress Scheme and the opportunity to receive support to apply for the Redress scheme.

#### **2. d. Diversity and complexity:**

In addition to the need for services to offer trauma-informed counselling that is emotionally safe, our service also addresses a diverse number of complex needs through our complementary case-work approach, alongside the counselling. While some clients present with stable lives, and few trauma-related counselling needs, and just want to focus on completing the Redress application promptly, the vast majority come to us with a range of complex needs. These intersecting needs include family violence, suicidal ideation, mental health issues, relationship issues, social isolation, unemployment, disability, homelessness or affected by drug and alcohol use, among others. Our case management provision enables us to refer clients to specific services to address these needs, and the important process of finding and linking clients to appropriate services also requires time and care, to ensure the approach is person-centered and empowering.

#### **2. e. Holistic:**

Keeping these aspects of diversity and complexity in mind, we have developed a holistic approach to our service delivery, that addresses the numerous layers of support needs that our clients have. We undergo systemic, holistic case assessments and develop person-centered case plans collaboratively with our clients. We conduct a review at every 6-10 sessions, and re-assess the case plan goals, and decide if further service is required. These case plans include goals around the Redress process, counselling needs, and other case management related tasks to support people's holistic wellbeing and recovery.

### **3. Where our clients have accessed our service, feedback regarding access to support services, and referring agencies**

A high percentage of referrals stem from Knowmore Legal Service. We also receive some referrals internally from Relationships Australia Victoria counsellors, from Relationships Australia services in other states, and a small number of referrals from the National Redress Scheme. We have also received some self-referrals.

Knowmore, are the primary referring provider to our service. We have received positive feedback from clients regarding Knowmore Legal service. Our staff have also found the staff at Knowmore Legal Services to be highly collaborative, supportive, and positive to work with, allowing us to form collegial support networks for our clients between our services.

We have recently instigated a clear referral process for referring agencies, in which our clinical intake practice is based on a trauma-informed approach, in which we ensure client control is prioritised. We do this by emphasising the need for informed consent and the provision of clear service information for a client's prior engagement so that they understand what our service is about. We also encourage clients to self-refer and to be in control of the information that is shared with our service, and from our service to other services. Finally, clients have reported to us that they experienced a seamless process when engaging with our services and team.



## 4. Client feedback on the Redress decision

### 4. a. Overall Feedback:

First, we want to make clear that most of our clients are yet to receive a Redress outcome. However, among those who have received an outcome, most have found receiving their offer of Redress to be a positive experience, as it has represented closure to them.

We have been transparent with our clients regarding the Assessment Matrix used by the Redress Scheme, and this has allowed our clients to set their expectations regarding the outcome in a realistic way. Accordingly, there has been minimal disappointment regarding the monetary acknowledgement amount to date.

There was an instance of misinformation in which a client reported to us they had been informed by the National Redress Scheme that they could continue with our service by using the counselling funds within the Redress outcome. This was incorrect and caused some distress.

### 4. b. Feedback about the process of receiving a call from the NRS regarding the Redress outcome:

Some clients have expressed anxiety with the process of learning of the outcome of Redress. A client shared with us that she firstly wasn't prepared for a time when the call might come through for an offer and the person sharing this information was not the case manager who had been previously engaging directly with the client. Specifically, for Aboriginal clients, it is important to feel as though the story stays with one person. If a client is also prepared, they could feel more empowered to have a support person present, to use their resourcing to be grounded and be ready to receive the information shared in the phone call.

In one instance, one client did not feel there was any warning about the call from the Scheme, to allow them to be prepared for this significant news. They required this preparation to be psychologically grounded and emotionally prepared to process what was being expressed.

Another one of our clients felt that the gender of the person providing the offer was not considered, and the client was triggered by hearing a male voice. The voice was unfamiliar and not the same person that they had engaged with previously. The client preferred the NRS case manager to be the one to call them, which would provide a relational, person-centred and trauma-informed approach.

### 4. c. Lack of transparency about processes that could disadvantage survivors:

- A client might be able to request a review of an offer, however when this goes to another assessor, it might be possible that the client could receive a lower monetary offer and the client does not have the choice to choose between offers.
- A client might also receive an offer, however if this is rejected, or a client wishes to resubmit an application after an offer is made, there is lack of awareness that this is no longer an option to re-engage with the Redress Scheme.

**Recommendation 2:** Encourage a more trauma-informed approach to the Redress offer phone call

**Recommendation 3:** Increase transparency regarding the possible outcome of requesting a review, and the consequences of rejecting an offer.

## 5. Why have some people chosen not to apply or have withdrawn during the process:

Some clients who have chosen not to apply have done so as they have made the decision to engage in civil litigation instead, due to the possibility of a greater payment.

Sometimes we have people contact our service and then discover that they have already signed a contract with a lawyer to engage in civil litigation. At times, these people have reported being unaware as to what the NRS is. They have also not always understood the difference between the NRS and civil litigation, or the consequences of signing a legal contract to engage in civil litigation and what the civil process entails. Given the degree of confusion and lack of clarity of information, we question if informed consent was given at the time of signing the contract with the civil litigation lawyer. We believe that the process must be clearly explained to the client so they can understand the conditions of the consent process, and what they have signed up for.

## 6. Issues with counselling offered within the National Redress Scheme Compensation

Survivors have raised concerns regarding the limited amount of counselling funding offered after receiving their offer of Redress, and their fears of being left without required support once their funding has been exhausted. Survivors are concerned about the National Redress Scheme's decision-making process, which involves an allocation of a set amount of funding for counselling sessions based on the type of abuse a survivor experienced. This process does not comprehensively consider the impact of the abuse upon survivors' lives, nor does it recognise that the type of abuse experienced has no relationship to the impact of the abuse. For example, an applicant who experienced "exposure abuse" may endure lasting detrimental impacts upon his/her life and need extensive counselling over a substantial number of sessions, however such an applicant would not be eligible for this ongoing support as this type of abuse only qualifies for counselling funding up to the amount of \$1,250 under the Scheme, which could be utilised by six sessions.

**Recommendation 4:** The amount of counselling funding that an applicant is eligible for should not be linked to their type of abuse. Every applicant should be eligible for the maximum amount of funding.

## 7. Legal Issues Related to the National Redress Scheme

### 7a. Support During Civil Litigation

We have observed that survivors are being deterred from pursuing a civil litigation process for the abuse perpetrated against them, as there are no Redress Support Services available to support them through the civil route. An absence of such support impacts the ability of survivors to freely decide if the National Redress Scheme, or civil litigation is the best option for them. Survivors are cautious in proceeding with civil litigation due to the lack of support available.

**Recommendation 5a:** Survivors should be afforded the option of accessing emotional and therapeutic support through a Redress Support Services worker if they decide to pursue civil litigation. In order to meet the needs of this additional client group, Redress Support Services would require increased resourcing.

### **7b. Private Lawyers' Fees**

A second concern regarding legal issues relates to the private lawyers' fees/settlement policies. This risks taking advantage of survivors with extremely disturbing cases reported to us by other services and our clients, of private lawyers requiring contracts that allocate large percentages of the survivors' Redress payments to lawyers, should civil litigation be successful.

**Recommendation 5b:** We would recommend that the Scheme investigates this matter and takes all steps possible to prevent this from happening in the future. Additionally, we recommend that the Scheme increases the distribution of information to ensure all survivors are informed of the supports, choices and rights available to them. We also recommend that the government take steps towards preventing private lawyers from charging whatever fees and settlement arrangement they choose, and instead establish some regulations with limits on fees and settlement percentages paid to lawyers, in order to prevent survivors from exposure to exploitative litigation situations.

## **8. Issues with the Redress Application Process**

### **8a. Application Length**

Survivors have reported that the Redress application is "extremely long" and is a task that is too overwhelming to complete without assistance. Survivors have come to our service having completed their Redress application independently, and express feelings of shock at experiencing such significant negative psychological effects after completing the form. With one institution, the form is 44 pages long, and with additional institutions, the length increases.

While Redress Support Services are available, some survivors do choose to complete the application independently. We understand the intent of the National Redress Scheme was to provide a less cumbersome and more approachable process for survivors to gain acknowledgement and compensation for the sexual abuses perpetrated against them by institutions. It is positive to see the efforts of DSS in providing and promoting information about Redress Support Services and Knowmore Legal Service within the application form, on the Scheme's website, and through other marketing avenues. However, we also believe survivors should have the right to choose to complete the application independently and acknowledge that many survivors are choosing to do so. We therefore believe that the application form should be a more reasonable length, in order to offer survivors a Redress application process that is manageable and minimises harm as far as is possible.

**Recommendation 6a:** The National Redress Scheme should review the length of the application form, and wherever possible, shorten it to minimise psychological and emotional harm caused to survivors by having to endure an extremely long application completion process.

### **8b. Application Criteria For 'Extreme Circumstances'**

Redress applications are being assessed, in part, as to whether they meet the criteria for 'extreme circumstances'. Thus far, the National Redress Scheme has been unable to provide any guidelines as to the definition of 'extreme circumstances', resulting in applicants potentially inadvertently omitting information that may be crucial to assessing this point. As a Redress Support Service, we are unable to explain to applicants what 'extreme circumstances' means, and therefore we are unable to provide applicants with realistic expectations as to what they can expect when they receive the outcome of their Redress application. This lack of clarity places pressure on survivors to include more extensive information regarding the abuses perpetrated against them, due to fear of their application not qualifying for 'extreme circumstances', and consequently, their monetary acknowledgement amount being reduced. Without this clarity, it is difficult to apply a trauma-informed approach of minimising exposure to memory recall as much as possible, to decrease re-traumatisation.

**Recommendation for 7b:** The term 'extreme circumstances' should be defined, and the definition made publicly available.

### **8c. Applications Relating to Multiple Institutions**

Where an applicant has experienced abuse at more than one institution, and one of these institutions has not opted into the Scheme, applicants have two options available to them.

*Option one* is to apply to the Scheme with all accounts of abuse perpetrated by all institutions, inclusive of institutions that have not signed up to the Scheme. As the monetary acknowledgement amount due to the survivor is divided up based on the type of abuse among the perpetrating institutions, if one institution has not signed up, the portion that institution is required to pay will not be paid to the survivor. In this way, the amount received by the survivor will be reduced if the survivor decided to include an account of the abuse perpetrated by the institution who has not signed up to the Scheme.

*Option two* is to include on the application form only those institution/s that have opted into the Scheme. This would involve not mentioning any abuse experienced at the institution/s that has not opted in. While the amount due to the survivor through monetary acknowledgement is not reduced, the negative impact of this is to entrench the often-held belief by applicants that they have no opportunity to tell their story, to be heard and to be believed.

**Recommendation for 7c:** Applicants should be able to include in their applications, all institutions where they experienced abuse, and should receive all monetary payments for all abuse, regardless of whether institutions have signed up to the Scheme or not. Government should ensure that this occurs through whatever means necessary, including by compelling the institutions to sign up to the Scheme as detailed in Recommendation 2, and by negotiating an interim payment for survivors and recouping the payments from institutions who have failed to sign up to the Scheme at the time.

## 9. Issues with the National Redress Scheme Phone Line

We have received reports of survivors' concerns regarding their communications with the National Redress Scheme phone line and case managers. Survivors have stated that they have been dissatisfied with how some of the staff at the National Redress Scheme phone line have engaged with them. In one case, a survivor has informed the Redress Support Services worker of their experience with a staff member of the phone line, who allegedly stated that they did not believe the survivor's experience of sexual abuse to be true.

**Recommendation 8a:** There should be clearly communicated and accessible pathways for survivors to share feedback regarding any concerns they may have in relation to National Redress Scheme staff and services, without the fear of their Redress offer being penalised as a result.

**Recommendation 8b:** All National Redress Scheme phone line staff **must be** adequately trained in trauma-informed care, to support appropriate and safe communications with survivors who have suffered from trauma due to sexual abuse perpetrated whilst they were in the care of institutions.

## 10. Issues with the Direct Personal Response Component of the National Redress Scheme

We have received feedback that the process to obtain a Direct Personal Response for survivors is unclear, and what is known about the process can be intimidating for clients. It is our understanding that clients need to contact the institutions themselves to request the Direct Personal Response they are entitled to following a successful Redress application. Redress Support Services such as RAV's, may support survivors with this process, however the role of support workers within Redress Support Services is not clearly defined, nor do they have any formalised authority or role to facilitate the process of obtaining a Direct Personal Response being given by an institution.

Overall feedback provided to RAV is that survivors are declining the opportunity for a Direct Personal Response, due to the lack of clarity regarding the process, and the associated fear and overwhelming feelings survivors experience when they contemplate contacting institutions directly themselves. It is also our understanding that the nature of the Direct Personal Response is to be discussed between the survivor and the institution and decided on a case-by-case basis. This assumes a degree of empowerment and stability of the survivor, which may be present for some survivors, but considering the traumatic impacts of survivors' childhood sexual abuse, this assumption may be an unrealistic expectation for others.

**Recommendation 9:** Increase the accessibility of, and safety for survivors, in pursuing a Direct Personal Response, by developing an action plan based on a consultation process with survivors about their concerns and experiences related to Direct Personal Responses. Formalised guidelines as to the expectations of institutions regarding what Direct Personal Responses may or should include, would also support more formalised discussions between survivors or survivor representatives/advocates, and institutions. These guidelines could present several clearly outlined options for how a Direct Personal Response could take place, and a survivor could be given the right to choose the option that best suits them. Institutions would be expected to follow these guidelines and options, to ensure Direct Personal Responses occur in a safe, ethical, and meaningful manner.

## What is Working with the Redress Scheme?

While most of our clients are still in the process of completing and / or submitting Redress applications, or are waiting for their outcomes, to date, we have had several clients who have received Redress outcomes. Each of these clients have been pleased with the outcome of their application and have experienced feelings of validation and acknowledgement from both the government and the institutions responsible for the childhood sexual abuse they suffered. Additionally, for several clients, the experience of the DSS National Redress Scheme in providing a formal avenue to be heard and acknowledged has been a positive and healing experience. The process of being asked about their experiences, and being heard, can be a powerful and edifying experience for survivors, and in and of itself, can provide some sense of compensation for the years and decades of not being believed, understood, and having the impacts of abuses perpetrated minimised.

We would also like to acknowledge the positive impact of the decision of the DSS National Redress Scheme to fund Redress Support Services, to assist people throughout the Redress application process. Our specific Relationships Australia Victoria Redress Support Services have resulted in significant positive outcomes for the survivors we support.

We have established strong therapeutic rapport and trust with survivors we work with, and these relationships have allowed us to facilitate increased emotional and psychological safety for survivors while they are completing Redress applications. Our service takes a trauma-informed approach, founded on the three stages of trauma-recovery. While appreciating the remarkable resilience and strength of the survivors we support, we also understand that due to the complexity and severity of traumatic experiences, clients often come to our service distressed and in significant emotional and psychological pain. We see our role as collaborating with the client to pace the Redress application process as per the clients' needs, and to also, as much as possible, minimise exposure caused by re-telling traumatic stories while simultaneously fulfilling the requirements of the application process.

We are happy to share that the survivors we work with have reported feeling supported by, and safe in our service, and having had positive experiences in their engagement with our service. This has assisted our clients to find the courage to deal with the National Redress Scheme application process.

Specifically, from 63 client surveys completed throughout the duration of our Redress Support Services, we found;

- 93 per cent of our clients have reported they felt listened to and understood by our service;
- 90 per cent of clients felt they are now better able to deal with issues that they sought help with because of our service support;
- 93 per cent felt they worked on and talked about what they wanted to work on and talk about; and
- 95 per cent of clients stated they felt satisfied with the service.

In summary, whilst we are suggesting that a number of areas could be improved now that the Scheme has been in operation for some time, providing an opportunity for feedback and review, we acknowledge the good intent of the Scheme, and some very positive outcomes to which we have been witness.

We are mindful that there are many thousands of people who have not yet chosen to pursue Redress and we look forward to being involved in any way that leads to greater knowledge of, and feelings of safety about accessing the National Redress Scheme, and ultimately healing and recovery for survivors.