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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Women’s Legal Services NSW welcomes the release of the report of Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Assault inquiry into the Bethcar Children’s Home.**

We represented thirteen women who were children in state care, placed in the Bethcar home, in the 1980s. They were physically and sexually abused. When they escaped and reported the abuse, they were not believed, and were returned for further punishment. These women are now suffering the long term effects of the trauma they suffered. Six of our clients gave evidence at the Royal Commission.

On behalf of these women we conducted litigation against the State of NSW. Throughout the six years that the litigation took its course, we came up against extraordinary obstacles. The Royal Commission’s report released yesterday has exposed the extent to which the authorities responsible for the abuse our clients suffered would go to avoid accepting responsibility for their actions. The Royal Commission found FaCS, Crown Solicitors and their barristers failed in their duties and obligations to the court.

For example; they did not disclose evidence that would have helped our clients demonstrate that their claim could be heard out of time; they made our clients prove they had been abused even though one of the abusers had already been convicted and gaoled; they set surveillance on our clients even though surveillance would be of no use in demonstrating psychological injury.

The evidence before the Royal Commission also revealed how litigious the approach was to impecunious, traumatised clients, and to Women’s Legal Services as their representatives.

As a result of the Royal Commission’s Inquiry the NSW Department of Community Services has undertaken not to dispute out of time applications for child sexual abuse. This is a significant recognition of the fact that many child victims may take years to become ready to speak about the abuse they suffered.

Community legal centres, and specialist women’s and Indigenous services, can benefit the whole community. This is an example of how one case can drive a change to the procedures of the government, and can prevent future wrongs, for all citizens. And it could not have happened without community legal centres properly resourced and assured of independence.

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