



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 16th days of February 2007 and the 5th day of March 2007, and the 4th day of September 2007, and the 12th, 13th days of November 2007, and the 2nd day of January 2008, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Mark Frederick Johns, State Coroner, into the death of Jacqueline Moyra Wood.

The said Court finds that Jacqueline Moyra Wood aged 17 years, late of 33 Markham Avenue, Enfield died at Flinders Medical Centre, Flinders Drive, Bedford Park, South Australia on the 9th day of June 2002 as a result of raised intracranial pressure due to hepatic encephalopathy related cerebral oedema. The said Court finds that the circumstances of her death were as follows:

1. Introduction and reason for Inquest

- 1.1. Jacqueline Moyra Wood was 17 years of age on the date of her death in the Flinders Medical Centre on 9 June 2002. A post mortem examination was conducted by Dr Linda Shen on 12 June 2002. Dr Shen gave the cause of death as raised intracranial pressure due to hepatic encephalopathy related cerebral oedema and I so find.
- 1.2. Miss Wood had been admitted to the Women's and Children's Hospital on 5 June 2002 in the early hours of the morning. Later in the morning she revealed that she had ingested some 90 odd paracetamol tablets on the evening of 3 June 2002. She was transferred from the Women's and Children's Hospital to the Flinders Medical Centre for consideration of a liver transplant to deal with fulminant liver failure. She

had also been admitted to the Women's and Children's Hospital on the evening of 3 June 2002 (the date of the ingestion of paracetamol tablets as subsequently revealed by her) and kept in overnight, then released on the morning of 4 June 2002 from that admission. During that (first) admission she made no mention to any clinician of having ingested paracetamol tablets, although she was admitted for vomiting and treated for gastroenteritis overnight.

2. **Miss Wood's first admission to the Women's and Children's Hospital 3-4 June 2002**

- 2.1. Dr David Thomas, Director of Medical Training at Women's and Children's Hospital gave evidence that he first saw Miss Wood on the morning of 4 June 2002 on the ward round for that day. He stated that her presenting symptoms appeared to have resolved and that she had not vomited while in hospital nor had she had diarrhoea. The symptoms of the previous night had abated and when he saw her on the morning of 4 June 2002, Miss Wood was walking around the ward asking when she could go. At this time, the clinicians had formed the view that Miss Wood's vomiting of the previous night had reduced the efficacy of her epilepsy medications and that as a result she had had some kind of seizure the previous evening and was postictal. Dr Thomas stated that the presentation as seen by him on 4 June 2002 was not consistent with a person who had consumed 92 paracetamol tablets the previous night. However, he pointed out that that the first manifestation of paracetamol overdose is liver failure and it takes between 48 and 72 hours for liver failure to manifest itself in such a situation. He stated that non-specific vomiting early on might be consistent with paracetamol overdose, but in the absence of a history to that effect, it is not possible to diagnose. Of course, Dr Thomas had no information about paracetamol ingestion when he saw Miss Wood on 4 June 2002.
- 2.2. Dr Thomas next became aware of Miss Wood's case on 5 June 2002 when she was in the Intensive Care Unit at the Women's and Children's Hospital and was showing signs of liver failure. By that stage she had made the disclosure that she had taken paracetamol and the clinicians had diagnosed that she was in fulminant liver failure. She was then transferred to the Flinders Medical Centre for consideration for a liver transplant procedure. Tragically, Miss Wood died before a transplant could be performed.

3. Dr Tara Parsons

- 3.1. Dr Parsons is a medical practitioner and was a registered medical officer in the Women's and Children's Hospital during the nightshift of 3-4 June 2002. She stated that she saw Miss Wood at 2315 hours on 3 June 2002. Miss Wood stated that she felt as though she had had a fit that night. Dr Parsons asked Miss Wood if she had taken anything apart from her epilepsy medications. Miss Wood denied this. Dr Parsons was able to take an extremely good history from Miss Wood. She inserted an IV cannula to re-hydrate Miss Wood and took blood for testing of her epilepsy medication levels and electrolytes. She did not request paracetamol levels to be undertaken as she had no reason to suspect a paracetamol overdose at that time. She diagnosed poorly controlled seizures and likely gastroenteritis. She believed that the gastroenteritis had reduced the efficacy of Miss Wood's epilepsy medications thus leading to poor control of her seizures. Dr Parsons decided to admit Miss Wood overnight and give her intravenous therapy to re-hydrate her.
- 3.2. As I have already stated, Miss Wood died in the Flinders Medical Centre on 9 June 2002.

4. Allegations of Sexual Abuse Against Kevin Rose

- 4.1. At the time of her death Miss Wood was a child under the guardianship of the Minister for Families and Communities pursuant to an order made by the Youth court on 27 July 1993.
- 4.2. Miss Wood was a resident of the Enfield Community Unit, a residential facility for young people run by the Department of Families and Communities. All of the evidence at the Inquest pointed to the fact that she was preoccupied in the months leading up to her death by allegations she had made approximately twelve months earlier of sexual misconduct against her by a person called Kevin Rose. Kevin Rose was the partner of one of Miss Wood's foster carers, Barbara Cowell. Miss Wood had been placed with Barbara Cowell from late 1998 until April 2001. It was during a period of respite from that placement in April 2001 that the allegations against Mr

Rose were first made by Miss Wood, although they had allegedly occurred over the preceding two years.

- 4.3. A document entitled 'The Life and Death by Suicide of a Child in Care of the State: Jacqueline Moyra Wood (1984-2002)' which was compiled by Ms Cowell and two other women, Mona Blackley and Peggy Rollins, was admitted as Exhibit C27 in these proceedings. According to this document, the allegations against Mr Rose were vehemently disputed by Mr Rose, Ms Cowell and a number of other persons, including a previous foster carer, Peggy Rollins and Miss Wood's paternal grandmother Mona Blackley, the co-authors of Exhibit C27.
- 4.4. I took the view at the hearing of the Inquest that the truth or otherwise of the allegations made by Miss Wood was not an issue for determination by me. Furthermore, I took the view that the question whether the evidence in support of the allegations was sufficient to justify the prosecuting authorities in laying charges against Mr Rose was not an issue that could properly be addressed or should properly be addressed at the Inquest. I made this plain in open Court at the commencement of the hearing in order to avoid any misapprehension about that question on the part of Barbara Cowell, Mona Blackley or Peggy Rollins, or any other person who may have wished to agitate that issue during the Inquest.
- 4.5. However, I made it clear that the fact of the allegations made by Miss Wood against Mr Rose was a relevant issue to the extent that it may have resulted in pressure upon Miss Wood in the months leading up to her death, being pressure that may have caused her to decide to take her own life by the ingestion of paracetamol tablets.
- 4.6. Miss Wood left no suicide note. She suffered from an intellectual disability. The question whether she intended to take her own life was an open question at the beginning of the Inquest. Nevertheless, the question of pressures operating upon Miss Wood during the period leading up to the ingestion of the paracetamol was still relevant even if the ingestion of the paracetamol was a 'cry for help' rather than an act of intentional self-harm. For that reason, a considerable amount of evidence was adduced in relation to suggestions apparently made to Miss Wood that the allegations were false and should be withdrawn, and also to conversations she had with members of the Department of Families SA and prosecuting authorities concerning whether she should persist in the allegations.

- 4.7. According to a letter dated 29 July 1997 from Dr Stephen Ward, Psychiatrist, to an employee of Family and Community Services, which is contained in a case file of Dr Ward admitted as Exhibit C13 in these proceedings, Miss Wood was referred to Dr Ward by Dr Tony Sabato, a paediatrician, in 1992. Dr Sabato had been treating Miss Wood for epilepsy. Dr Ward developed a view that Miss Wood was a ‘severely damaged child’. She exhibited anger towards her step-father and ambivalence to her then foster mother and foster family interrupted by periods of intense aggression towards her then foster family. At other times she sought ‘intense physical intimacy which could involve sexualised behaviour’.
- 4.8. There is a considerable amount of evidence on the very large number of files maintained by Families SA in relation to Miss Wood that she was the subject of sexual abuse while in the care of her natural mother and step-father, Mr Steve Hayden. It was this abuse which caused Dr Ward to describe her as a severely damaged child. That description was clearly very apt.
- 4.9. In addition to this early childhood sexual abuse, she had the additional disadvantages of suffering from epilepsy, and having an intellectual disability. Thus, there were formidable hurdles for Miss Wood to overcome in her life.
- 4.10. Miss Wood had two major foster placements during her period under the guardianship of the Minister. The first long-term placement was with Ms Peggy Rollins, to whom I have already referred. Miss Wood was placed with Ms Rollins for a period of approximately six years ending in late 1998. The second long-term placement was with Ms Cowell. That placement began in late 1998, and continued until April 2001. As I have already stated, Miss Wood was living in the Enfield Community Unit at the time of her death, having been a resident in that facility since January 2002.
- 4.11. There is no doubt on reviewing the very extensive archive of material contained in the files created by Families SA over the years that Miss Wood was in the Minister’s care, that a great deal of effort was devoted to Miss Wood’s case by a number of people, each of whom had her best interests at heart. I note that Ms Rollins in particular wrote extensive notes about every aspect of Miss Wood’s development during the period of Ms Rollins’ foster parenthood. These notes were forwarded to social workers and other professional carers.

- 4.12. Furthermore, the various employees of Families SA who had responsibility for Miss Wood also made extensive notes of their observations. There is no doubt that Ms Kathy Forwood, the Social Worker with principal responsibility for Miss Wood from the period 1997 until her death, made extensive and comprehensive efforts to further Miss Wood's welfare and interests.
- 4.13. Ms Forwood gave evidence at the Inquest. Evidence was also given by Ms De La Mater who was a Youth Worker employed within the Enfield Community Unit. Another Youth Worker at the Unit, Mr John Burton also gave evidence. I heard from Dr David Thomas, Paediatrician who treated Miss Wood at the Women's and Children's Hospital, and Dr Tara Parsons who also provided treatment at the Women's and Children's Hospital. I heard from Detective Brevet Sergeant Michael Bavey, who gave evidence in relation to the investigation of the sexual abuse allegations made by Miss Wood. Ms Maxine Joy, Child and Family Therapist, gave evidence of counselling which she provided to Miss Wood in relation to those allegations. Ms Barbara Cowell gave evidence of her knowledge of the circumstances leading up to Miss Wood's death, as did Miss Wood's natural mother, Beverley Wood. I heard from Dorothy Parsonage, the Senior Practitioner at the Enfield Office of Families SA, and from Penna, Director, Guardianship and Alternative Care Unit of Families SA. Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs, of the University of South Australia, gave evidence about matters pertaining to the foster care system. Finally, I heard from Professor Graham Martin, psychiatrist and Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Queensland, who provided an expert overview for the benefit of the court.

5. Kathreen Forwood

- 5.1. Ms Forwood gave evidence of her role in managing Miss Wood's case on behalf of Families SA. She had extensive experience as a Social Worker for Families SA and was responsible for the care of ten to fourteen children including Miss Wood. She aimed to visit each child in her or his home every two to three weeks and speak to the foster parents. Her object was to give support to the foster parents and to maintain the placement if possible. As part of her role she was required to speak to the child regularly, and take the child to appointments and arrange access by the natural family.

- 5.2. Ms Forwood gave evidence that during 2002, when Miss Wood lived in the Enfield Community Unit, she was able to visit the Families SA office quite frequently because the office was relatively close to the Unit. A considerable amount of attention was being paid during this period to programs to enable Miss Wood to make the transition to adulthood as her eighteenth birthday was approaching in November 2002. Once she achieved the age of eighteen years, she would no longer be under the guardianship of the Minister, the order subsisting only during Miss Wood's minority.
- 5.3. Ms Forwood gave evidence that Miss Wood was taking significant quantities of medication for her epilepsy. This condition was a source of constant concern to Miss Wood, and as already stated, she regularly visited Dr Sabato for epilepsy treatment. Ms Forwood gave evidence that Miss Wood had had extensive psychiatric therapy from Dr Ward earlier in her life.
- 5.4. Ms Forwood described the efforts made to secure employment and accommodation for Miss Wood upon her attaining her majority. At the Enfield Community Unit, Miss Wood was required to participate in programs that would provide her with skills and knowledge in household management, self care, budgeting, shopping and other life skills.
- 5.5. Ms Forwood gave evidence that Miss Wood was increasingly anxious in the months before her death about the fact that there was expected to be a prosecution of Mr Rose in which Miss Wood, as the complainant, would be required to give evidence. Miss Wood also had a complicated social life and for a time was 'juggling' two boyfriends at once. Furthermore, Miss Wood was, in Ms Forwood's opinion, rather preoccupied by the fact that with the approach of her eighteenth birthday, she would no longer be under the guardianship of the Minister with the relative security that provided.
- 5.6. Ms Forwood said that Miss Wood's family – an expression by which she encompassed the natural relatives of Miss Wood, and also her foster carers – made it plain to Miss Wood that they did not agree with the steps that she was taking in relation to the allegations against Mr Rose. In Ms Forwood's opinion, they created considerable difficulties for Miss Wood in this respect.
- 5.7. Ms Forwood stated that there had been one or two incidents of self-harm committed by Miss Wood in the past. On one occasion she took an overdose of her epilepsy

medication and on another she injured her arms. The overdose occurred on 8 January 1999.

- 5.8. Ms Forwood gave evidence that Miss Wood was capable of exaggerating her symptoms in order to obtain attention and referred to an incident on one occasion when she insisted upon being transported in a wheelchair but shortly after was seen to be able to walk. On another occasion, Miss Wood insisted that she was going blind but no abnormality was found on medical examination.
- 5.9. Ms Forwood gave evidence that she was very surprised when Miss Wood made the allegation of sexual abuse by Mr Rose over a period of two years when Miss Wood had never mentioned this abuse to Ms Forwood herself during that period. Ms Forwood had expressed the hope that Miss Wood might have told her about the issue during that period but added that there were many factors that condition young people against disclosures.
- 5.10. Ms Forwood gave evidence that Miss Wood never said to her that Miss Wood knew that the allegations were false. However, she did say that she was worried about the need to give evidence against Mr Rose because her family did not agree with this course of action and Ms Cowell did not agree either. As a consequence, Ms Forwood believed that Miss Wood felt very alone and felt that her biological father might separate himself from her. Indeed, Miss Wood said he had made threats to that effect.
- 5.11. Ms Forwood stated that the Department – Families SA – attempted to be extremely careful not to influence Miss Wood in any way in relation to her allegations against Mr Rose. Ms Forwood stated that she never told Miss Wood that she had to continue to maintain the allegations, and never told Miss Wood that she would be in trouble if she did not maintain them¹. Ms Forwood stated that Miss Wood was very uncertain, from time to time, as to whether she would maintain the allegations or withdraw them. Ms Forwood was quite clear that Miss Wood understood that this was a matter entirely for her own choice.

6. Contentions of Ms Cowell and Ms Wood's father and other members of her family

¹ It was alleged by Ms Cowell and members of Miss Wood's family that she had been subjected to 'pressure' by employees of Families SA to maintain her allegations against her will.

6.1. These contentions are summarised in Exhibit C27, the document prepared by Ms Cowell, Ms Blackley and Ms Rollins. According to Exhibit C27, Ms Cowell had another foster child as well as Miss Wood. That foster child was a young boy of thirteen years called Dennis. At that time Miss Wood was sixteen years old. According to Ms Cowell, Miss Wood was jealous of Dennis and made a number of allegations that Dennis had made sexual approaches to her, including physical approaches. On 23 April 2001 Miss Wood went for respite care to a Barbara Wilkins, a former short-term foster carer. While she was away Dennis said to Ms Cowell that he was tired of Miss Wood making allegations against him, and stated that if Miss Wood returned he would seek another placement. Ms Cowell stated that in early May 2001 the matter was resolved by the termination of Miss Wood's placement, Dennis being allowed to remain with Ms Cowell and Mr Rose. Ms Cowell asserts that Families SA told Miss Wood that Mr Rose had cancelled her placement. This, according to Ms Cowell, caused Miss Wood to seek revenge against Mr Rose. It was for this reason, according to Ms Cowell, that Miss Wood made the allegations of sexual misconduct against Mr Rose. In other words, according to Ms Cowell, these allegations were fabricated by Miss Wood in order to avenge herself against Mr Rose. Ms Cowell and Mr Rose maintained that Mr Rose had a heart condition as a consequence of which he would not have been able to have performed the acts alleged against him by Miss Wood.

7. Position of Detective Bavey and Ms Forwood and other officers of Families SA

7.1. Detective Bavey gave evidence at the inquest. In late 2001, Detective Bavey received a letter that was sent by Miss Wood's paternal grandmother, Mona Blackley. It contained a letter written by Miss Wood. The letter² is written in a childlike hand and contains a number of spelling errors. However the gist of the letter is that Miss Wood writes, 'I thought I get them back so that way said that and all the lies about him raping me and touching me when he did not do it'. This amounted to a withdrawal of a lengthy statement that had previously been made by Miss Wood to police on 17 May 2001 which set out in detail her allegations against Mr Rose³.

7.2. Detective Bavey interviewed Miss Wood on 19 February 2002 in relation to the letter referred to above. She told Detective Bavey that on the morning of 25 November

² Exhibit C10d

³ That statement was admitted as Exhibit C10b.

2001 she went to Ms Blackley's home and Ms Cowell was there. She told Detective Bavey that Ms Cowell wanted her to drop the charges against her partner Mr Rose. Miss Wood told Detective Bavey that Ms Cowell suggested that she write a letter, and that Ms Blackley handed her a writing pad and a biro. Ms Cowell told Miss Wood what to write, dictating the words which were then written down by Miss Wood. According to Detective Bavey, the letter referred to above was identified to him by Miss Wood as being the letter which she wrote at the direction of Ms Cowell and Ms Blackley. Miss Wood told him that Ms Cowell and Ms Blackley promised Miss Wood that she would be permitted to go back to Ms Cowell's to live in return for having signed the letter. A statement to this effect was obtained by Detective Bavey and a copy of it was admitted as Exhibit C10e in these proceedings.

7.3. Ms Forwood gave evidence that she never said nor heard anyone say anything to Miss Wood to the effect that there would be adverse consequences for Miss Wood if she did not maintain the charges against Mr Rose. Ms Forwood said that Miss Wood speculated to her about whether she should stop the process because she felt that she was losing her family. She was thinking about it. However, Miss Wood never said to Ms Forwood that she wanted to exact revenge on Mr Rose or Ms Cowell. She never said to Ms Forwood that she made up the allegations in order to get revenge for terminating the placement. Ms Forwood summarised her evidence by saying that she never saw anything that caused her to think that Miss Wood was under pressure to maintain the allegations against Mr Rose.

7.4. Detective Bavey stated in evidence that his attitude to the whole matter was that if Miss Wood did not want to go ahead he certainly would not put any pressure on her to do so⁴. His position was that he simply wanted Miss Wood to make a decision for herself. He stated that on more than one occasion he told her that if she did not wish to go ahead she did not have to. Later in his evidence Detective Bavey stated:

'Her options were explained each time. I think that she made those decisions of her own, on her own. I think she took on board what her options were and later decided, 'Yes, I want to go ahead' and then later down the track she would like the matter withdrawn again, so I don't think, thinking back now, that she really knew what she wanted to do.'⁵

⁴ Transcript, page 260

⁵ Transcript, page 262

Detective Bavey also stated, 'She never at any stage said to me that the allegations were untrue'⁶.

7.5. The following passage summarises Detective Bavey's position:

'Q. But I think your evidence is that your own belief is that neither SAPOL nor anyone from the DPP exerted any sort of pressure on Ms Wood to continue with the proceedings.

A. I believe that no pressure was intentionally placed on Jacqui to proceed.

Q. And to expand on that, are you saying that Ms Wood herself may have considered that she was under some sort of pressure or obligation to proceed.

A. I'm sure she was.'⁷

7.6. Ms De La Mater, Youth Worker at the Enfield Community Unit gave evidence to similar effect. She stated that she believed that Miss Wood was considering withdrawing the charges against Mr Rose because of emotional blackmail being applied by her family, particularly her father, who was threatening to disown her as a daughter. According to Ms De La Mater, family members told Miss Wood that they had become ill because of her allegations. Ms De La Mater stated emphatically that Miss Wood never said that she was considering withdrawing the charges because her allegations were false. She said that she herself never put any pressure upon Miss Wood to press ahead. Ms De La Mater stated that she and the other workers provided support to Miss Wood, and that was all.

7.7. Mr John Burton, Youth Worker at the Enfield Community Unit stated Miss Wood would refer to the impending Court case every two or three days. He stated that he saw his role as standing by Miss Wood and his advice to her was that she should tell the truth. He stated that Miss Wood was 'consumed' by the process, and he spent time trying to divert her attention to other matters.

8. Maxine Joy

8.1. Maxine Joy, Family Therapist, gave evidence as to her interactions with Miss Wood. She stated that Miss Wood was referred to her by Kathy Forwood in June 2001 for counselling in relation to the alleged sexual abuse. Ms Joy considered that Miss Wood felt intimidated and had fears for her safety unless she withdrew the

⁶ Transcript, page 272

⁷ Transcript, page 284

charges against Mr Rose⁸. She considered that Miss Wood felt love for Mr Rose and saw him as a father figure⁹. She stated that Miss Wood never told her that the allegations against Mr Rose were untrue¹⁰. Ms Joy said she never informed Miss Wood that she must press ahead with the charges. Ms Joy stated, quite correctly, that such a thing ‘would be terribly unprofessional’¹¹. Ms Joy said that she was impressed by the fact that Miss Wood never said that the allegations did not happen and that she always had the desire to maintain that position. At the same time she desperately wanted support from within her own family¹².

8.2. Ms Joy stated that Miss Wood never expressed threats of self-harm to her. Ms Joy never saw Miss Wood as being suicidal¹³. She did appreciate that Miss Wood was quite desperate for her family but she really wanted justice and would vacillate between these two positions¹⁴. Ms Joy stated that if she had been told by Miss Wood that that she was under pressure either from the DPP or the police to continue with the charges against her will, Ms Joy would have raised this with the appropriate authority and advocated on Miss Wood’s behalf¹⁵. Ms Joy stated that she was shocked by what she regarded as Miss Wood’s suicide and stated that she did not see it coming.

9. Professor Briggs – Pressures on the Foster Care System

9.1. Professor Briggs expressed the opinion¹⁶ that Families SA should not have placed Ms Wood in the Cowell household bearing in mind what Professor Briggs asserted were previous unsubstantiated allegations of sexual abuse against males by Ms Wood. Professor Briggs said that against that background it was inappropriate to place Ms Wood in a house in which a male or males was already living. However, she acknowledged that this was probably a situation that was forced upon the department in the sense that the demand for foster carers is greater than the supply, and few foster carers are prepared to accept adolescents into their care.

9.2. Professor Briggs also expressed the opinion that the university courses undertaken by social work students do not place a sufficient priority on children and child welfare.

⁸ Transcript, page 290

⁹ Transcript, page 291,294

¹⁰ Transcript, page 296

¹¹ Transcript, page 303

¹² Transcript, page 304

¹³ Transcript, page 316-317

¹⁴ Transcript, page 317

¹⁵ Transcript, page 318

¹⁶ Transcript, page 384

She acknowledged that Families SA has created its own postgraduate diploma to fulfil that perceived gap.

- 9.3. Dorothy Parsonage, the Senior Practitioner in the Enfield office of Families SA had ultimate responsibility for the department's care of Ms Wood as she was in charge of the Enfield office in which Ms Forwood was working. She acknowledged¹⁷ that the preferred placement for Ms Wood would have been in a household without males. However, she said that the department did not have many choices in that respect thus acknowledging the shortage of placements to which Professor Briggs alluded.
- 9.4. Nancy Penna, the Director of Guardianship and Alternative Care Unit in Families SA made a similar acknowledgement¹⁸. She said that at the time of Ms Wood's placement there were occasions when demand for foster carers exceeded capacity. Alarming, she stated that situation has not improved, but has become significantly worse. She stated 'the demand far exceeds the capacity' and that the department has not been able to keep pace with the number of foster carers for the demand that exists.
- 9.5. Ms Penna acknowledged some comments by Professor Briggs that there was an inadequacy in the way the information was provided to foster carers at the time of Ms Wood's placement with the Cowell's. She stated that the department's policy in that regard has changed and systems are now in place to ensure that as much information as possible is provided to foster carers¹⁹. Ms Penna also provided information about the department's diploma course to which I have already made reference and the court was provided with a copy of the course outline²⁰.
- 9.6. It is clear that some improvements have been made since Ms Wood's tragic death in the foster care system. However, it is also clear that extreme pressures continue to exist in the system with demand exceeding supply. Ms Penna informed me the amount of money paid to foster carers to support them in caring for foster children in South Australia is the second lowest amount of such payments paid by other States of the Commonwealth. However, it appears that these issues are gradually being

¹⁷ Transcript, page 494

¹⁸ Transcript, page 505

¹⁹ Transcript, page 506

²⁰ Exhibit C36c

addressed as part of the Keeping them Safe in Our Care policy which was launched more than a year ago²¹.

10. Evidence Relating to Dorothy Parsonage and officers of the Director of Public Prosecutions

10.1. Dorothy Parsonage, Senior Practitioner, gave evidence that her policy, and that of the department, is not to discuss allegations of sexual abuse that have been raised by children in care with those children. She said that the children should be discussing those matters with the police and the DPP²². She also said that the proper course for a social worker to take if a child wishes to discuss this issue after specific allegations have been made and the police and the DPP are involved, is to refer the child to their therapist. She said ‘you have to be quite blunt and say we are not allowed to because the police don’t want us to speak to you then you refer them to the therapist.’

10.2. Dorothy Parsonage said that she had little contact with Ms Wood after the allegations were made against Kevin Rose and she emphatically denied ever putting any pressure on Ms Wood to proceed with the allegations²³:

‘No because the reality is I have seen children go through court appearances and the devastation it caused for them, so I would never have had any interest in forcing anything onto a young person that they couldn’t do easily’.

10.3. The court received affidavit evidence from the two DPP officers who had had contact with Ms Wood in relation to her allegations against Kevin Rose. Those affidavits set out detailed notes of meetings and telephone discussions with Ms Wood between November 2001 and May 2002. Both officers stated that at no time during their contact with Ms Wood did they put any pressure on her to proceed with the allegations.

10.4. I am satisfied that no undue pressure or influence was brought to bear upon Ms Wood by Ms Parsonage or the DPP officers. That said, she may have given a different impression to Ms Cowell, her mother and other members of her wider family. What is clear, is that Ms Cowell and those other persons were indeed attempting to influence Ms Wood to withdraw her allegations.

²¹ Transcript, page 517; 515

²² Transcript, page 464

²³ Transcript, page 487

11. Professor Graham Martin

- 11.1. A report was provided to the Court by Professor Graham Martin. It was admitted in evidence as Exhibit C19. Professor Martin is a psychiatrist with a special interest in child psychiatry. He obtained a Doctorate in Medicine at Flinders University in 1989, and his Fellowship of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists in 1981. He is the Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Queensland.
- 11.2. Professor Martin regarded Miss Wood as an intellectually retarded young woman with a mental age three to four years less than her chronological age. He thought that it was less than optimal that she was in the Enfield Community Unit with a number of other teenagers. He noted that the staff at the unit made excellent notations and tried to give supervision. He regarded the supervision which was afforded as appropriate for a teenager but was not so certain that the staff appreciated that Miss Wood was mentally younger than her chronological age. He was concerned that Miss Wood had free ingress and egress to the unit and that she could buy things – sometimes monitored and sometimes not. There were a number of unsavoury episodes taking place within the unit in the lives of some of the other young people. He considered that Miss Wood was struggling to keep her relationships with her family including her brother and father. Some of her contacts with her family were positive while others were negative and she was extremely confused by this²⁴.
- 11.3. Professor Martin stated that the allegations made by Miss Wood to police, whether true or not, would have been immensely stressful to Miss Wood simply by virtue of the fact that the allegations were made²⁵. Professor Martin considered that Miss Wood would have felt that she was living in a threatening environment. He noted that she had a lot of freedom and could go to the shops and had access to telephones. He believed that on most occasions when she left the unit she should have been accompanied. He acknowledged that she was a mere six months away from her eighteenth birthday when she would no longer be under the guardianship of the Minister and that the Department was mindful of trying to prepare her for this. He acknowledged that everyone who worked with Miss Wood did their ‘level best’ but

²⁴ Transcript, pages 218-219

²⁵ Transcript, page 220

believed that if she had been living in a natural family environment during this period there would have been more knowledge of her whereabouts²⁶.

- 11.4. In this connection, I note a document contained on the Community Residential Care folder 'B' which was admitted as exhibit C15d in these proceedings. It contains an unsigned complaint to police of an episode which took place on Sunday 26 May 2002. In that complaint Miss Wood states that at about 11:30am that day she had been to the Commonwealth Bank on Main North Road. She was accosted by a man called Steve who grabbed her and pushed her against a brick wall. He pulled out a knife and held it to her throat. He then forced her to go with him to a coffee shop where he made her drink two bottles of passionfruit which allegedly had alcohol in it. He then produced a pipe filled with marijuana and, under duress, she smoked it. This statement, whether factual or not, was obviously believed to be factual by Miss Wood. It lends considerable weight to Professor Martin's concern that Miss Wood existed in a threatening environment with a lot of freedom of movement.
- 11.5. Professor Martin considered that Miss Wood was living in a miasma of doubt and possible guilt and anxiety²⁷. He noted that the existence in the unit was chaotic and that Miss Wood was friendly with a young woman in the unit who was the girlfriend of her brother with whom Miss Wood had a very complex relationship. This dynamic was in itself quite overwhelming in Professor Martin's opinion.
- 11.6. Professor Martin described Miss Wood as a very damaged girl with attachments to her family which were complex and difficult. She had numerous breakdowns with foster carers.
- 11.7. Professor Martin noted that Miss Wood had 'played around with the idea of ending her life' previously²⁸. He stated that in the days immediately preceding her death he thought Miss Wood was trying to escape the pain associated with the chaos she lived in. He interpreted the fact that Miss Wood did not tell people of the quantity of paracetamol she had ingested as indicative of an intent to die. He believed that Miss Wood would have been aware of the likely effect of an overdose of paracetamol and that Miss Wood knew what she was doing²⁹.

²⁶ Transcript, page 221

²⁷ Transcript, page 221

²⁸ Transcript, page 224

²⁹ Transcript, page 224

- 11.8. Professor Martin noted that Miss Wood did have extensive supports, in particular from Kathy Forwood.
- 11.9. Professor Martin rhetorically asked whether the overdose could have been predicted and replied to his own question that in the real world, probably not. He stated that even with all of his experience in dealing with young people he probably would not have identified Miss Wood's suicidal intent³⁰. Professor Martin noted that many young people of Miss Wood's age may think about suicide. He stated that fewer have a plan and fewer still tell other people of their worries. Fewer still then go and do something. Once a young person had actually acted, a pathway is open which can always be followed again in the future³¹.
- 11.10. Professor Martin made the point that any threats of self-harm by a young person such as Miss Wood need to be conveyed by the relevant workers to professionals involved with her care³². However, it seems to me that even if every instance of such threats by Miss Wood had been conveyed to Ms Joy or even Dr Ward if he had been available, Miss Wood's overdose probably could not have been prevented. Professor Martin himself acknowledged that he did not believe that he would have foreseen her suicidal intent.

12. **Conclusion**

- 12.1. In my opinion, no criticism should be directed at any of the workers at the Enfield Community Unit, nor against any of the staff of Families SA for failing to predict that Miss Wood might have a suicidal intent. In my opinion, Miss Wood obtained a considerable amount of support from all of the workers involved. She clearly felt a great deal of pressure in relation to the allegations which she had made against Mr Rose. Whether the allegations were true or untrue, they had been made. As Professor Martin said, that very fact gave rise to a continuing, building, pressure in her life. Tragically, it appears that she was ultimately unable to cope with this pressure and sought release by taking an overdose of paracetamol. I do not accept that any undue pressure or influence was brought to bear upon Miss Wood by any of the employees of Families SA, nor any members of South Australia Police nor the

³⁰ Transcript, page 232

³¹ Transcript, page 235

³² 'Necessarily, if a young person talks about killing themselves you don't just keep it at that individual local level and believe they're talking it through and giving you a hug is going to solve the problem. You actually do have to ensure that other professionals are aware, that issue has been raised, so that they can take it into account. Was it raised with Maxine Joy? Was it raised with Dr Ward? So this is not inappropriate but it's not enough'.
Transcript, page 237

DPP to press ahead with the allegations against her will. There is no doubt however that she felt immense pressure from family members and others to withdraw the allegations.

Key Words: Drug overdose; Epilepsy; Family & Community Services - Dept of; Intellectually disabled; Suicide; Supported Residential Facilities.

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 2nd day of January, 2008.

State Coroner