

# 2019 Submission - Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Mrs Renee Pickles

### **What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian community's understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?**

"There must be research completed on the damages the [REDACTED] and other such cults has on children and adults. It has only been recently that the group has come under scrutiny and survivors have begun speaking up. Prior to this, [REDACTED] shunned and silenced victims. There are approximately 15,000 [REDACTED]s and the cult is damaging those born in, including children, resulting in mental health problems and high levels of suicide rates- both those in and those shunned by family. The Australian Royal commission also uncovered 1800 victims of child sexual abuse within the organisation that has not been reported to police. The Victorian Government must investigate current [REDACTED] practices as they are contributing significantly to mental health issues in Victoria and Australia wide. "

### **What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent mental illness and to support people to get early treatment and support?**

"Victorian schools already have reportable conduct laws where teachers must report children at risk. These same teachers must be educated on the dangers of children indoctrinated and taught to shun and disconnect with society. As a [REDACTED] child, I suffered emotional abuse, as I was prevented from associating with non [REDACTED]s and was made to believe all my school friends would be killed at Armageddon. This indoctrination, and fear of non [REDACTED] later prevented me from seeking assistance from authorities, fearing they were out to get me. Teachers need to be made aware of [REDACTED] kids who are at risk of disconnection, isolation, and fear of people in authority, as it will prevent them from reaching out for help, as I did. "

### **What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?**

"Suicide rates are 5-10 higher in ex [REDACTED] survivors. Ex [REDACTED] are shunned and often kicked out of their homes, often losing all connection with family, and sometimes losing their jobs if working among [REDACTED]. This results in high levels of mental illness, depression and desperation leading to suicide. [REDACTED] also have immense trauma re-integrating into society, after they had been made to disconnect for so many years. Many [REDACTED] commit suicide as they find re-integration too traumatising and lose hope doing it alone. "

### **What makes it hard for people to experience good mental health and what can be done to improve this? This may include how people find, access and experience mental health treatment and support and how services link with each other.**

"There is very little known about how to manage once exiting a cult. Ex [REDACTED], are shunned and often kicked out of home. They are often uneducated and on low income (it's a requisite of [REDACTED] to avoid higher education), they are also dealing with the trauma of being separated from family and community. They also face difficulties in dealing with trauma of identity loss, loss of belief systems. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and other cult survivors need to be helped to

re-integrare back into society. How to feel safe talking to non-believers. Once I had left, I still believed for 5 years that non-█ were dangerous. So it prevented me from seeking help. We were also taught psychologists were dangerous and taught falsehoods. If I had been helped straight away, I could have sought therapy earlier rather than try to deal with it alone. █ need help to find mental health experts and treatment, by being helped to see that it is a safe and healthy option, not something that would get them further into trouble."

**What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?**

"Lack education is a main cause of poor mental health. For example, █ are taught that only the bible can heal, and prayer. This ignorance leads to many mental health issues being untreated among █ as well as █ who have residual beliefs after many years of indoctrination."

**What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?**

N/A

**What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?**

N/A

**What are the opportunities in the Victorian community for people living with mental illness to improve their social and economic participation, and what needs to be done to realise these opportunities?**

N/A

**Thinking about what Victorias mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?**

"There needs to be research into the effect of cults such as █ have on the mental health of children and those raised within it. It needs to look at the impacts of trauma █ suffer after leaving this religion, which shuns and ostracises members who leave. It needs to provide support for those exiting a cult, by helping them to reintegrate into society. "

**What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?**

N/A

**Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?**

"Please look up the damage that the █ has caused, includes multiple mental health issues among survivors, high suicide rates and many cases of hidden child abuse. Please help the █ community. xx"