

WITNESS STATEMENT OF TREVOR THOMAS

I, Trevor Thomas, say as follows:

- 1 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

My experiences with mental health issues

- 2 I am 64 years old and I live in the country. Looking back, I've probably had depression since I was about 18 or 19. Back in those days, nobody spoke about issues like mental health. I was not formally diagnosed with depression until 2013, when I was 58.
- 3 At the end of the 80's and early 90's, I really struggled. My mum got cancer and died, my marriage fell apart, and my dad suicided (his brother, my uncle, had also died by suicide).
- 4 I got together with my wife, Chris, in 1991.
- 5 In about 1994, another uncle died by suicide. I was pretty close with him, and that knocked me about. I continued to battle away with my mental health. I had a few businesses that went wrong, I changed jobs a few times, and then I was out of a job. In 2007 I got myself a job at Kraft Foods as a production worker and I've been there ever since. I've worked shift work most of the time I've been there, which really batters with me and my mental status.

Experiences in 2013 and 2014

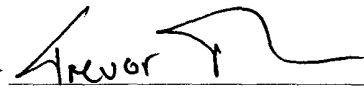
- 6 My experience with the mental health system really began in around 2013 when I was really unwell. I met a social worker through Chris. She was helping Chris as a support person. I would be home some days because of my shift work, and I would often spend my time in my chair in the lounge room not doing much. The worker said to me at one stage that she thought I should go to the doctor.
- 7 I went to my local GP. This was about October 2013. He put me onto some antidepressant medication and told me that I needed to see a psychiatrist. He made some enquiries with a mental health service and told me I couldn't get in to see the psychiatrist, located in Cobram, until 6 February 2014.

- 8 I wasn't feeling good at all. My employer had the ~~EAP~~^P program available for employees, so I rang the ~~EAP~~^P line and within 8 hours I got a phone call from a psychologist in a particular town who would see me. I saw her two or three times. She introduced me to meditation.
- 9 It was about September 2014 when I decided to hand in my leadership role at work. A couple of workers spoke to me the wrong way at work and I went home and said I just can't go to work. I remember telling Chris about two huge trees that were beside the road on my way home from work and that if I just hit them, then it would all be over. I just wanted to die.
- 10 It was about a month later in about October 2014 that I asked Chris to take me to the hospital. We had a lot going on at home and I felt like I was going to die. I was turning 60 that November. I had it in my head that I had to make 60 because my two uncles were 58 and 59 when they died by suicide. My family history of mental health plays on my mind. I've had eight people in my immediate family suicide, and I worry that genetics is part of the reason I struggle so much.
- 11 Chris took me to the hospital and I told them I was suicidal. I sat in the ED until around 10pm. There was a psychiatric nurse who was nice but told me that I had to be taken home because they didn't have a bed.
- 12 I sat in the ED and then Chris told me that she was leaving me there, and she did. I had no idea what was happening. I sat in an office in the hospital and it took ages until they said they had a bed for me. I was given a bed in the mental health wing, and I stayed there for 3 or 4 days. I don't remember seeing a psychiatrist while I was there.
- 13 I hated staying at the hospital. It was closed in, and I didn't like being around many of the other patients who seemed be drug-induced.
- 14 From there, I went to a PARC. It was a nice place with about 10 units, all self-contained. There was another section of the PARC that housed people with more serious mental illnesses.
- 15 I had my own bathroom with a lounge room, kitchen, dining area and all amenities, and I did my own cooking.
- 16 I spent 6 weeks at the PARC before Christmas, and then went home. I'd been home five days, and we had family issues to deal with at home, and things didn't turn out well. I then spent another 3 weeks at PARC after Christmas.
- 17 The PARC stay was good. I felt like it did what it was supposed to do in that it settled me and I felt okay. I could sign out of the PARC and walk to the centre of town. I would

have coffee at my favourite shop and I was within walking distance of the supermarket. Chris would come down and visit. I had a few overnight stays at home. I saw the mental health nurse and I was seeing a psychiatrist in the PARC and my own private clinical psychiatrist nearby.

- 18 The staff were great, but there was no on-site psychologist or mental health nurse. They were more like support workers. One would come fishing with me, and they had me gardening. The mental health nurse who came to see me would come from the base hospital.
- 19 During my stay at PARC I started meditating. I had picked up the local newspaper one day and I noticed an open day at a place that ran meditation groups. I started going on Monday and Thursday nights. I'd walk around there. I did that for a long time, until I went back to work in October 2015. Shift work kind of ruined my ability to attend, and I had trouble meditating on my own.
- 20 After my stay at PARC, I kept on seeing my local GP, who is fantastic, and my clinical psychologist. I also got some support from a support worker for about 8 months.
- 21 When I was due to get back to work I was sent a form that I had to fill in about whether I was fit and ready to return. But the form didn't ask questions about my mental health. It was about physical health. It asked questions like whether I could lift cheese or stand for 8 hours. I said I can't fill this in – it's not relevant to me. If I ticked it all then it would be like I was okay, and I wasn't.
- 22 I went back to work in October 2015. We had more family tragedy when my younger brother died from a heroine overdose, which knocked me back again.
- 23 After October 2015 I was okay but then I had a bit of an episode – I was going downhill fast. I went to see a psychiatrist, and I saw his registrar. I was prescribed a medication and it made me horribly sick in the stomach. I was always burping and I felt a burning session. I always complained my kidneys were tender.
- 24 I've been off work since early February this year. I've been struggling for a while. I tried to get in to see a psychiatrist, and I was told that it was a 3 month wait. There just doesn't seem to be enough psychiatrists around. My GP said to me he would organise for me to see a psychiatrist through Telehealth. So within 3 weeks I saw a psychiatrist in Sydney. My GP clinic set me up with a laptop and I spent 40 minutes talking to him. I clicked with him. He now is changing my medication.
- 25 I am on a mental health plan, and currently using my sessions to see the Sydney psychiatrist via Telehealth. The psychiatrist shares his notes with my local GP and so I feel like they are working together to help me.

26 I now meditate three times a week. I attend the local place that I used to attend when I was at the PARC.

sign here ▶  _____

print name Trevor Thomas _____

date 2/7/19 _____