

Exhibit 130 A

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under

Exhibit 130 B

QCPCI

Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

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## Background

We had considered fostering for quite a while. My husband & I married in [REDACTED]. We each had [REDACTED] living children [REDACTED] in total) & went on to have a further [REDACTED] together. 4 of these have been diagnosed with high functioning autism & display what some term challenging behaviours.

As 5 of our children have reached adult status (all educated, working, in stable relationships etc) we had some empty beds (and rooms) in our house & thought now is the time.

We applied through our local agency, [REDACTED] Outside Home Care [REDACTED] and started the process. It was a difficult process for me as the Department of Child Safety had some concerns about my background. Not that I had done anything wrong. Their concerns included:

- I had been assaulted by a neighbour as a young girl & not disclosed to my family
- My ex husband had been investigated (& cleared) of suspected abuse of my children & I had chosen to have more children with him
- My ex husband was convicted of child sex offences (10 years after we divorced, during which time we had no contact)
- My (autistic) father was often emotionally & physically abusive when we were growing up
- My daughter was assaulted by a male friend (aged [REDACTED])

We worked our way through these concerns & did our initial training and were approved to foster in July 2011. Our certificate when it arrived stated that we were Enhanced Foster Carers. We had no idea what this was about so we rang & were told that given our experience with challenging behaviours we were ideal EFC carers as there was a real shortage of people who could do this.

## First Placements

The day we were approved we were offered an initial placement of a 10 year old boy with autism on a respite basis. This worked well & we were offered a regular monthly arrangement with him. This was something we all looked forward too as he fit in well with our family. We still maintain a good relationship with him & his kinship carers, despite the Department not allowing us to continue with his placements.

I just want to add that in our experience the general practice is (for privacy reasons) carers are not given access to the referrals or information on it. The information required is read to us.

Within days of approval we were offered our first permanent placement. This was a (then) 8 year old boy who had "escalations" & showed some "sexualised behaviours such as swearing etc". He was living in a residential placement & had been apparently for a number of years. We met with the boy a couple of times a week for a couple of weeks & he seemed ok so we accepted the placement. This placement lasted for 2 months and caused our family an incredible amount of trauma.

Our family was subjected to emotional, mental & physical abuse - including threats & physical attacks, & destruction of our property - on a daily basis. This abuse started when he woke & only abated when he decided he was tired & wanted to go to bed. Added to this we were threatened by the child's biological mother. He was also in the habit of running away and on more than one occasion we had police involvement. We were also subjected to high level sexualised behaviour including high level swearing, exposure of his genitals & explicit sexual comments relating to sexual acts between family members (& as it turns out engaging in forced sexual activity with one of our children).

During this time we did not receive any support from the Department or our Child Safety Officer. When we asked for help or support, we were generally told the CSO was 'too busy' to respond. We only saw the CSO during the placement a total of 4 times. 3 of these were at external meetings relating to the placement & the 4<sup>th</sup> was on an occasion when we had called for assistance as the child was threatening us with a metal bar. The CSO attended with our Agency coordinator. During this visit the child alleged we had broken his night light, so the CSO came into our home to check (& confirmed it was NOT broken) before leaving without a word to us & with the child still in a highly challenging state.

As we were inexperienced, untrained & obviously naïve, we persevered for 2 months as we were led to believe that this was not unusual behaviour for foster children & we were told we were doing a good job. After 2 months my husband & children were showing obvious signs of trauma – not sleeping, changed behaviour at school & home, anxiety etc & the decision was made to terminate the placement.

We notified the Department that due to trauma we had to terminate & were told that we would have to keep the child for at least 4 weeks as they could not find a placement for him. Our agency offered to pay for youth worker assistance from 6.30am – 8.30pm to assist us. We also had youth workers come in to watch all of the children so that my husband & I could have a night off.

A couple of days following this night out we were contacted and told that our 7 year old autistic son had made 'inappropriate comments' to the child. We agreed to investigate as we had not been present & found out that after the child had made very explicit remarks about sexual act between my husband & son, my son had retaliated with "is that what your dad does?".

We were taken to task & instructed to "stop our son' from making these comments, & to keep the boys separated.

A few days after we requested to terminate the placement we were offered a referral for a sibling group of 2 younger children who displayed 'no challenging behaviours' & were told that we could offer placement for these children once the other boy was removed.

A week after we requested termination of placement we were advised that we were no longer able to have ANY placements including our regular respite boy as the Department had 'concerns about our care of the child' & that we were to be investigated. We were still expected to keep the child in question with us for a further few weeks until suitable placement could be found.

At this point we firmly instructed that the boy be removed from our home as we did not think it was appropriate that he remain in our care while the Department was claiming other children would not be safe with us. We packed his belongings are arranged for the Department to collect them that afternoon.

#### Sexual abuse of our child

A few days after this (on a Saturday) we had a disclosure from our 7 year old autistic son that the foster child had been coming to his room at night and using threats of violence to force him to engage in oral sex. He also allegedly threatened to kill our family if my son told anybody.

We attended an after hours medical centre for a referral that night & arranged an immediate emergency counselling session for our son for the following afternoon (& have continued with counselling). As soon as possible we notified the school (he had been displaying a change in behaviours for a while) & then the Department. Shortly after this we had a visit from the foster boy's case manager with another CSO from her office at [REDACTED]. They stated they had attended our boy's school & spoken with 2 of our boys & were wanting to speak to our 10 year old autistic daughter. At this point we learned that the Department had opened up a second investigation claiming that our natural children were at risk of sexual abuse from us as parents.

**This investigation of us as parents was unsubstantiated.**

#### MOC

After several weeks of contacting the Department with no response we called in FCQ & our FAST delegate to assist us. At this stage we had still not received any information about what the concerns were, how severe they were etc. After intervention from our FAST delegate we finally received written notification of the notification & what it was pertaining to. We were advised the Dept had several serious concerns & this was a MOC. With further assistance from FCQ we were finally offered an interview (nearly 3 months after the initial verbal notification).

In all the MOC took nearly 8 months to complete. During this time several Departmental policies were breached by ██████████ Child Safety Service Centre including having the CSO who was case manager investigating the MOC AND the alleged abuse of our children; breaches in timeframes for paperwork, interviews etc. Added to this the fact that the Department used alleged abuse of our children to allow them access to question our language impaired autistic children about our alleged abuse of the foster child.

Not surprisingly, all of the Departments allegations were substantiated despite the fact that we had written evidence to support our defence of the allegations. We were told that under the current system that was the end of the matter & we had no way of overturning the Department decision.

What should have happened next was that an action plan is devised so that all parties can move forward & work out what could have been done better (on all sides). Nothing happened for several months, despite our continued efforts to contact people & our continuation of training.

(It is our belief that the Department officers at ██████████ intended for our initial approval to lapse & then we would no longer pose a threat to them in regards to fall out from the harm inflicted on our children.) During this time we had a complete change in staffing in our agency. A new team leader, ██████████ ██████████, was appointed at ██████████ who took steps to lodge our renewal.

During this time there was also apparently another investigation in regards to our respite child experiencing harm or being at risk of harm that we had not been notified about. **This notification was also unsubstantiated.** Despite this the Department continued to deny permission for our respite boy to resume placement with us despite the fact that the child in question, & his kinship carer, openly requested placement with us. The boy had been (& continues to be) unhappy with his alternate respite arrangement & has been waiting for us to resume caring.

Following ██████████ taking steps toward our renewal, we received a letter from ██████████ advising of the Department's intention to deregister us as carers. We worked with ██████████ to draft & lodge a reply advising of our concerns and our intention to proceed to QCAT to appeal this decision to deregister.

Following lodgement of the letter, ██████████ was permitted to review our case with the Senior Practitioner from ██████████. 2 weeks later we were advised that we were again allowed (after nearly a year) to have placements again.

We had advised that we no longer wanted EFC placements & that we only wanted 0-5 year olds. The reasons for this were that we wanted to reduce any anxiety our ██████████ year old (now ██████████) may have about recurrence of assault, & also that we had a ██████████ month old baby of our own so were set up for baby care.

We also asked again about resuming our placement with our previous respite child.

### History Repeats

3 weeks ago we were told that we would be returned as Emergency/Respite carers with placements lasting no longer than 7 days. [REDACTED] stated that as we had only had the one (permanent) placement they wanted us to get 'more experience' & also to try out 'different placements to see what would fit with our family dynamic'.

We were offered a placement of a sibling group of 2 boys aged 7 & 5 who "display hyperactive behaviours" & who had only recently come into care. The boys were with us for 8 days. During this time, for the most part, they were polite, helpful & compliant with only occasional (age appropriate) outbursts. The only issues we encountered were settling the boys at night. At this time they became difficult & required more supervision. They responded well to our 5 year old autistic son and spent most of the time outside playing in the yard – swings, trampoline, bikes etc.

At one time our [REDACTED] year old called me to tell me the two 5 year olds were 'being inappropriate'. They were engaging in what was described as investigative play (that we had been told was normal). The children were all sat down & we had a discussion about personal boundaries, safe touching etc. Apart from this incident we had no indication or concerns that the boys posed a risk to our kids.

The day the placement terminated (Tuesday) we had another sibling group placed with us. A six year old girl & her 10 month old brother. The placement was only for 4 days as we had our elder daughter's wedding on that weekend. During their stay, there was absolutely no issues or concerns & we were sad to see the kids go on the Friday. It was, from our perspective, a very successful placement.

The day following the boys leaving (Wednesday) we found out that the boys had been engaging in penetrative sex with our [REDACTED] year old. Our son does not realise that anything 'bad' has happened to him because the boys told him he would be their friend if he cooperated & this is a powerful motivator for him. Again, we immediately sought medical advice & began counselling (ongoing) to try to find a way to keep him safe without causing trauma to him by frightening him or making him aware he had actually been assaulted. We were directed to [REDACTED] for advice, resources etc regarding this.

Apart from taking steps to address this issue on our son's behalf, we were concerned on 2 levels. The first was that the boys in question had to have been exposed to abuse of a sexual nature to be so knowledgeable about it. The second is that if they could convince our son to engage in this behaviour within a week, then they posed a real risk to future children they were placed with. As before, we immediately (Thursday morning) notified the Department,

via our agency, about the disclosure from our son. We were astounded when, yet again, we find ourselves unable to take placements.

On the Sunday following the wedding, Child Safety after hours called because the children who had left on Friday were without a placement & they needed one urgently. We told them we were happy to help out & were told that the case manager would contact us to make arrangements to have them dropped off, or if we could collect them as they were still in [REDACTED]. Shortly after, the After Hours CSO called us to apologise and advise us that we would not be having the children placed with us. They claim it is because they needed a placement in [REDACTED] area. We have been offered no further placements in over 2 weeks.

We have been told by our agency that we need to have a meeting with [REDACTED] Child Safety Manager, [REDACTED], to determine what will happen from here & whether we will be allowed to continue as carers. We also face the very likely possibility of another investigation, placing extra stress on our family & our children.

We had told our agency that we only wanted 0 – 2 year olds as they posed no threat to our kids. [REDACTED] stated that she is 'more concerned that we would consider remaining as carers given that 2 of our children have been abused'. We were also told that we could not continue as carers as we were too high risk. They claim that 'because our kids were exposed to sexual abuse they are statistically likely to become offenders & any small children placed with us would be at risk'.

I would also like to add that my son had engaged extremely well with the little girl who was placed with us & at no time had attempted any personal touching. He was quite happy to play on her terms. The counsellor has said that he is 'chameleon' in his play – suiting it to the other persons lead – as he does not know how to play.

According to Bravehearts, the claim that our children are likely to become offenders is not factually correct & we feel it is an excuse to get rid of us & keep us quiet. It is only our gut feeling, but we feel that we are again being punished for coming forward & reporting sexual abuse that has occurred against our children by children placed with us by the Department.

I believe ours is not an isolated case as I have spoken to other carers who are too frightened to be named. Generally concerns are not reported because the carers are afraid of losing their other (foster) kids.

With a system crying out for carers, particularly carers who are not afraid to speak out when needed, we are left staggering by the abuse we & our children have suffered at the hands of Département supposedly dedicated to keeping children safe. For the safety of kids in care both now & in the future, & the safety of natural children of carers I am hoping that this can be looked at as part of the Commission.

Regards

[REDACTED]