



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse


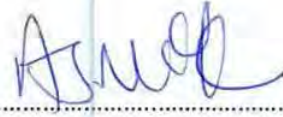
**Statement**

**Name** Jack Charles  
**Address** Known to the Royal Commission  
**Occupation** Retired  
**Date** September 2015

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. In preparing this statement, I have been shown documents relating to my abuse at Box Hill Boys' Home, Victoria. Where I refer to a document in this statement, I have used the document reference number, which appears in the top or bottom right hand corner of the document to which I refer. I have not independently reviewed the Box Hill Boys' Home, Victoria documents from which these documents have been drawn.
3. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.
4. This statement has been prepared on the basis that the Commission will issue a Notice to Produce under *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 2(3A) for the production of a signed copy.

**Background**

5. My full name is Jack Charles and I am 72 years old.

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6. My mother was a Ward of the State and was 15 years old when she had me. When I was about four months old I was taken from my mother as part of the assimilation program and was made a Ward of the State. I was then sent to the City Mission, a home for babies in Brunswick, Victoria. I have no memory of life at the City Mission.
7. When I was too big I was then moved to Box Hill Boys' Home (**Box Hill**). I lived in Box Hill from around 16 November 1945 to around 6 August 1947 when I was transferred to Cardinia Children's Home in Geelong.
8. On or around 19 January 1949 I was returned to Box Hill. I lived there until I was discharged to the care of a private family on or around 7 June 1958. In total I spent 12 years in Box Hill. I used to call the woman whose care I was in "mum", but I think she took me in as I was a source of income. I was very religious at this time but she wasn't, and so I used to sneak out on Sunday nights to attend Methodist services.
9. I met my mother when I was 19 years old when she was living in Swan Hill and spent three weeks with her. My mother was significantly affected by alcohol and was ill-equipped to explain to me what had happened when I was taken. She also told me I had five siblings.

**Box Hill Boys' Home**

10. My earliest memories are of being in the babies' home in Box Hill. I was often forced to sleep on the veranda because I was a bedwetter. I remember that it was freezing cold at night and I would look up at the poplar trees which looked like people and were frightening. Down the back were tall pine trees which I would climb, and long grass which I would play in. A group of us would sometimes sneak out of the big white building in our

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pyjamas and explore. I remember a water tower that stood like a sentinel over the premises.

11. I remember I was eventually moved to the young boys' dorm at Box Hill, which was known as Number Three. I think it was for boys aged between six and ten years. I didn't suffer any abuse here, though nor was I shown any love or guidance by anyone. I was only provided with a bed and food. There was no emotional support given to me in the home, although I remember a member of staff named Mrs Johnson who was very kind to me.
12. When I was about 11 or 12 years of age I was sent to the dorm for older boys, known as Number One. I was smaller and younger than most of the other boys in this dorm. At the end of the dorm was a little bedroom where Mr Sangster (**Sangster**), the member of staff in charge of the dorm, slept.
13. While I was at Box Hill I went to the state school located on the grounds of the home. I wasn't very good at school. The teachers mostly shoved me out to do the gardens. I became an expert in growing Chrysanthemum, for which we won awards. I was fortunate in some ways as there was a teacher there who I think saw me and thought I wouldn't have much when I left there and gave me elocution lessons, as well as teaching me about handling money and so on. Because of his influence I left the home quite well-spoken. At the same time this was an example of me being singled out for special treatment, which often happened, and was often quite hurtful.
14. For most of my time at Box Hill I was the only Aboriginal child there. I think that because of this I was regarded as an "item of interest" and especially vulnerable because I stood

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out. I suffered a lot of racism and was always called "Blackie" and told that blackfellas killed Captain Cook.

15. I think I was put in Box Hill as a social experiment to see how well I could be assimilated.

I certainly think the home "whitewashed" me. I left Box Hill a devout Methodist and without a sense of my Aboriginality.

16. A few months before I left Box Hill some Aboriginal boys arrived, one of which was REDACTED

REDACTED, or "REDACTED" as he came to be known. I came to learn later that REDACTED was my

REDACTED. He also suffered sexual abuse in Box Hill.

17. Corporal punishment was common place in Box Hill and I was given a really hard time.

Sangster once bashed me into the gym wall. If you were naughty you were made to put on boxing gloves and fight a bigger kid. I can't remember one occasion when the smaller of the two kids came off better. Frequently we were hit around the head with a closed fist. The day I left Box Hill I was given six cuts of the cane by Major O'Brien. I learned that this was because, some years earlier, I had been out in my PJs and dirtied them, so I put them under the school building.

18. As well corporal punishment the boys were often violent to one another. On one occasion

I attended a funeral at the Box Hill cemetery for a friend, who was a teacher. I was crying at the funeral and because of this some boys bashed me in the cemetery grounds.

**Sexual abuse by Alexander Sangster at Box Hill Boys' Home**

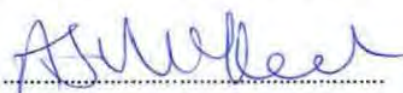
19. The member of staff who was in charge of Number One dorm was Sangster.

20. Sangster had his way with me on several occasions. For a time my bed was directly opposite Sangster's room. I estimate that he abused me around 20 times but it may have

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been more and I remember it being frequent. He would come over to my bed at night and masturbate me under the covers. He would also put his finger into my anus. This was very painful and would make me feel disgusted.

21. Sangster would also do humiliating sexual things to us involving measuring how many six pence could be placed along our erections.
22. I would also regularly see Sangster taking one or two boys at a time into his room with him at night. He never took me into his room.
23. Sangster also used to stand and supervise us in the shower. He would stand there fully dressed with very beady eyes and used to sweat a lot while he was watching us showering. I felt very uncomfortable, intimidated and disgusted by this behaviour. This would be a daily occurrence. The boys would say things like *'look, that bastard's looking'*. The older boys would keep their bums to him and hide their cocks. Sangster would respond to our attempts to hide ourselves by telling us to move our hand so he could see everything. The older boys would often laugh at him but the younger ones usually did what he said. I don't think it's any wonder that I tried to make myself smaller when I was exposed to him.
24. I believe all the boys in the dorm knew about Sangster's sexual abuse and that all had either been abused by him or had witnessed others being taken into Sangster's rooms, although nobody spoke about it. It came to be seen as a routine part of life.

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**Sexual abuse by others at Box Hill Boys' Home**

25. I was also sexually abused by Major O'Brien. He abused me in a number of ways. He would play with my penis and the first few times it hurt my foreskin when he pulled back on it. He would make me perform oral sex on him. He also buggered me.
26. I expected that Major O'Brien was also abusing other boys, although I never heard screaming coming from his bedroom.
27. I tried my best to keep out of the way of Sangster and Major O'Brien. Whenever I had free time I'd hide. This is why, for instance, I'd climb the pine trees down the back of Box Hill – to hide from my abusers.
28. I was also frequently abused by other boys at Box Hill after I moved to Sangster's dorm. I feel I was regarded as an item of interest as I was the only Aboriginal boy in the home, and I was smaller and younger than most of the other boys. As such certain boys would regularly have their way with me. They would say things like '*Let's see what colour spunk he has*'. Most of the abuse happened under the dormitories. They would threaten me with beatings unless I did what they wanted and I was frightened of being bashed if I tried to refuse. Once Sangster came down there are caught them in the act.
29. I am unable to remember the names of the boys who abused me under the dormitories. Most of the time it would involve masturbating me or forcing me to do the same to them. On about five occasions, however, I was anally raped by other boys.

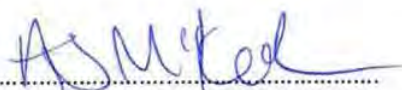
**Historical reporting of the abuse**

30. At no time when I was a resident at Box Hill did I believe that I could report the sexual abuse that was inflicted upon me to anyone at the home or to the police. We boys

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believed that if anyone spoke up they went to Bayswater, which we'd heard was much worse than Box Hill. You'd hear things about boys being transferred if they were cheeky, like *'he had a go at Sangster, he's gone to Bayswater.'* No one felt like they could come forward or do anything about what was happening to us.

31. I believe that the staff at Box Hill would have been well aware of the sexual abuse occurring between the boys. It was a very common occurrence and happened because we weren't properly supervised. I believe the older boys were doing to me what Sangster was doing to them. I believe that sexual abuse had become a part of the culture in the institution.

**Contemporary reporting and class action**

32. Since leaving Box Hill I lived my life thinking that the abuse I suffered there had been left behind in a dark world. I never considered reporting the matters discussed above to the police or to The Salvation Army.
33. Everything was then dredged up again when I was serving a jail sentence in Loddon prison in 2006. Some other prisoners approached me and asked if I was Jack Charles and told me they had been in Box Hill also. They said they knew I was from Box Hill and told me that there was a class action. When they mentioned the name Sangster it blew my mind and really opened a can of worms as I'd gone through my life to that point thinking my life at Box Hill was in the past. The men said that I would be the perfect person to lend credence to the claims against Sangster and Major O'Brien, and asked for my phone number, which I gave them. The lawyer running the class action then contacted me and I became a part of the process. I only decided to seek legal advice after I was told that other wards of the

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state were making claims and was contacted by the lawyer as up until this point I didn't know I could do anything about the abuse I had suffered.

34. Prior to joining the claims process I never considered approaching The Salvation Army directly to report the abuse I suffered at Box Hill. I shied away from the Salvos completely in the years following Box Hill. I hated the uniform.
35. It took me a few months to decide whether to join the action. Before I joined the lawyer said to me *'Jack, you were a Stolen person but lumped in with the Forgotten Australians, abused as they were, and your identity was confused. You are a significant player as so many boys remember you.'* I found these points persuasive and decided to become a part of the process.
36. I remember feeling a sense of regret and embarrassment with myself for bringing my legal claim. I have some gratitude to The Salvation Army for feeding and educating throughout my childhood. The puritanical streak they helped instil within me made it hard to accept that it was a good thing. Ultimately I felt good about doing it. Coming to learn of other people's stories and their similarity to mine was important to me. I realised that I could be open about things that had caused me a great deal of embarrassment and shame.
37. My only recollection of the process I went through to receive my compensation was a meeting in the legal precinct one day, where my team was in one room with me, and their team in another. At no time did The Salvation Army make any approach to me, and nor did I approach them directly. They did not offer me anything in the way of counselling or pastoral care.

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38. I was happy with the sum I received in compensation, though I feel no amount of compensation is enough. I wanted to get rid of it as quickly as I could and gave most of it to my family.

39. I received a letter of apology from The Salvation Army [TSAS.349.006.0011]. I took it as an apology for the "alleged offences" and am very unhappy with that position.

**Impact**

40. I feel strongly that the abuse I experienced at Box Hill had a significant effect on my life. I live with the experience hanging over my head. The process of coming forward and speaking about my abuse is difficult but, cathartic. It is difficult to talk about it, but I believe that "needs must". I am lucky to be well-read, cognisant, and a well-spoken public figure. Nevertheless I believe there to be untold damage caused by the experience of sexual abuse that drives much of my behaviour to this day.

41. The experience has had a very negative impact on my sexual identity. I grew up thinking that sexual abuse was normal. I didn't understand the difference between consensual and non-consensual sex as all I had experience at Box Hill was forced sexual interaction. I left Box Hill a "sexually confused soldier of the cross".

42. I have been left wondering whether the abuse I suffered at Box Hill had an influence on my sexual orientation. I find it very difficult to reconcile my life as a gay man with my role as an elder in the Aboriginal community. It causes me much anguish to know I have produced no children.

43. As a young man I had a relationship for five years with a man named Jack who I loved. Our sexual relationship was impacted upon by our experiences of having each been sexually

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abused. We were inhibited because we were unable to conceive of some sexual acts as separate from the hurting of one another. Now, I won't allow a person to show affection or interest in me, and consider myself doomed to walk alone.

44. I find I am very sensitive to hurtful comments. Recently on a film set I was being helped by a young man who took me by the hand. Another person on the set said something like *'You leave that young fellow alone, Jack!'* I know the comment was meant in jest but I was seething with anger and very hurt. I've had similar experiences in other productions I have been a part of. It's made me feel as though I was being perceived as either a threat or something to be set up.

45. I have become paranoid about people's impressions of me. My nephews and nieces don't visit me or wish me well on Christmas. I avoid going into friends' homes. I attribute this self-consciousness to the experience of sexual abuse and racism at Box Hill.

46. I have attempted suicide many times in my life. I also had an addiction to heroin for much of my adult life. I started acting when I was 19 and think that I owe my life to having found the theatre.

47. I still have sleepless nights, where I get up, have a cup of tea and watch the dawn approach. This has been especially since hearing other stories and seeing media about the activities of paedophile priests. A lot of bad memories were lost to me but are starting to come back.

48. I have struggled with a feeling of inferiority throughout my life. I attribute this to the way I was always treated as inferior in the home because I was black and thereafter because I had been in a home.

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49. I also bear physical scars from my time at Box Hill. I have an uneven bone structure and one shoulder is higher than the other. I think this is because of the time when Sangster threw me into the gym wall.
50. I have never been interested in availing myself of counselling. After leaving Box Hill we had to counsel ourselves and were given no support and left to wander alone. This pisses me off. I have always doubted the veracity of counsellors, and always think the best comes from those with shared experiences. As such, I believe I can counsel others but cannot be counselled. I have believe in the expression "physician, heal thyself." I lived through 32 years of addiction, and I healed myself. I believe I can do this by employing the full extent of my aboriginality. When I was in prison I took part in the Marumali Indigenous Healing Project. This was the beginning of my journey to realising that when I left prison I would become a player in the humanities, and it relit the embers of my dreams to lead in my community.
51. My dream is to establish the Nindebiya workshop in Collingwood / Fitzroy, where homeless indigenous people would come and learn to make items. It would include a

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metal workshop, silkscreen studio, and pottery facilities. It is intended that it function as a community hub, a place where homeless people can come and work.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 23/9/15

Witness: [Signature]

Date: 23/9/15

ALISTER MCKENZIE  
SENIOR MANAGER  
VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL  
LEGAL SERVICE