

Witness Name:
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated:

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of ANBU UK

I, Vanajah Srinivasan , will say as follows:-

1. I am the Director and trustee of ANBU UK. ANBU (*Abuse Never Becomes Us*) was established in Toronto, Canada in March 2016 by its founders Jenny Starke and Tharshiga Elankeeran, both are registered professionals in social work and psychotherapy, respectively. Both recognised the need and importance of dialogue around CSA in marginalised communities such as the Tamil community, both also survivors themselves. ANBU UK was then established by Vanajah Srinivasan, following a period of Vanajah working remotely supporting the ANBU Canada team. ANBU UK formally became a UK registered charity in May 2018, registered charity number: 1178540.
2. ANBU UK envisions a future where Tamil people who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse can find their voice. Our mission is to provide healing and empowerment through holistic support, resources and advocacy on behalf of Tamil people impacted by childhood sexual abuse.
3. We aim to deliver this through our 4 pillar approach:
Connect with Tamil people that have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse, supporting the healing process and providing a platform to be heard. Connecting with the Tamil community through a structured outreach sessions to create awareness and open dialogue on childhood sexual abuse.
Create resources and holistic support material to empower survivors using in-house expertise. Explore innovative ways of reaching the diverse communities using traditional and non-traditional approaches.
Community. Engaging with existing partners in the community complementing activities by integrating ANBU principles, so together we can strengthen the Tamil community to enable active participation in the healing process.
Compassion. Underlying in all our work is to act with compassion and empathy, we aim to provide a supportive space where survivors are listened to, believed and have access to support.
4. This year ANBU started delivering intervention activity in the community through the Transitions and Wellbeing Project, funded by the National Lottery community funding,

- providing group art therapy, group yoga and psychoeducational talking groups for survivors of child sexual abuse.*
5. *ANBU UK also advocates and aims to share its knowledge to the Tamil community through university outreach workshops, workshops in the community such as elderly groups and Tamil schools. Due to ANBU UK being in its infancy, it also signposts survivors and anyone that is interested to the appropriate services if that service is not provided by ANBU UK.*
 6. *We have delivered most of our outreach work in collaboration with other community organisations, largely with university Tamil societies and other CSA charities. ANBU UK also took part in a 'Healthy Mind, Happy Life' event held in Lewisham Sivan Temple on the 20th August 2017. Hosted by an organisation called Jothy Helpline, a Tamil speaking helpline and counselling service. Here we delivered a presentation on what CSA is and its impacts, distributing child safeguarding leaflets, all in Tamil. Right now, ANBU UK has yet to formalise any links directly with religious organisations. It is something we are very keen to explore further in the future.*
 7. *ANBU UK has not undertaken enough outreach activities with religious organisations to understand fully how far religious organisations understand and respond to sensitively to child sexual abuse, or how far religious organisations have implemented training and/or other awareness raising in respect of an understanding of sexual abuse, or understand how far religious organisations have policies, practices and procedures to manage child protection within their organisation.*
 8. *We have not assessed any child protect measures directly with any religious organisations and would be very supportive of any assessment of this kind. Right now we are unclear on the following:*
 - *if there are child protection guidelines in place/ones that public spaces can have access to in religious organisations.*
 - *if there are training or screening for child protection at the moment within religious organisations.*
 9. *Without any formal through investigation into the religious setting space, it would be difficult for ANBU UK to comment on specific structural or organisational features, however, having said that, it is not clear that any obvious structural or organisational features exists that support effective child protection measures within religious settings.*
 10. *There are challenging cultural and language barriers that exist within the Tamil community more generally which can deter dialogue and disclosures within the Tamil community on CSA and child protection. We have recently put together actual text to describe what CSA is, since there is no actual terminology in the Tamil language. A common concern we heard from survivors of CSA we've interacted with is their prospects of getting married and having a family in the future if they have experienced CSA which can impact disclosures, if this involves a culturally significant organisation like a temple/church/mosque then we can perceive this as an even bigger reason to not disclose the abuse.*
 11. *From our time working with the Tamil community, we would say we have some way to go to shift perception in even acknowledge abuse, and even further for sexual abuse. The Tamil community is a small, reserved group with a history of trauma from civil war violence in Sri Lanka and intergenerational trauma, along with other common migration integration challenges. The 'go to' response for CSA is to keep quiet or keep any abuse within a close family network. There is then little knowledge on CSA within family setting which can cause denial and harmful perceptions around the abuse which*

discourages disclosure within supportive networks. We have seen little appetite right now in the community to report abuse regardless if it involves any external organization or entity. However, this is changing as we work more closely with community and as CSA/sexual abuse becomes more discussed in the mainstream.

12. Going forward, ANBU UK would encourage a culturally sensitive approach to regulation that is consultative and inclusive. With the information we have, we would consider an external body more appropriate.
13. ANBU UK would support an Independent culturally sensitive service or/and an Independent culturally sensitive regulatory or scrutiny body. However, we would encourage this is explored with cultural sensitivities in mind, if this is a state body, it should be appropriately placed and designed to work with the community and not as a disconnected authoritative body.
14. ANBU UK would support standardised practices and policies across the board, including informal groups such as the informal education setting (tuition is common for the Tamil community and is unregulated- we receive the most disclosures from tuition service providers).
15. We would also add and encourage care is taken to avoid 'imposing' such conditions, we urge sufficient time is given for consultation and engagement with organisations to ensure changes are understood and the importance of them, avoiding any negative perceptions around regulation, obtaining community endorsement.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

DPA

Dated: ____ 17th September 2019 _____

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