

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Rudi Dobson

1. I, Rudi Dobson, residing at [DPA], make this statement to provide the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) with details requested on the case against Clifford Whitely.
2. The facts stated in this witness statement are within my knowledge, information or belief. I have identified the source of any facts which are within my information or belief. This statement has been prepared following discussions on the telephone (at a time of social isolation due to COVID-19).
3. I am self-employed. I also serve as an elder (religious minister) in the Birmingham, [DPA] Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.
4. At the relevant time [Mother], and [PR-A42] [DPA] [DPA] were attending congregation meetings [DPA].
5. On the evening of 25 February 2019, I received a telephone call from [Mother]. She told me that her adult daughter [PR-A42], had just told her that about ten years earlier she had been sexually abused by Mr Whitely.
6. [Mother] informed me that this was the first time she had heard of any allegation of this nature against Mr Whitely. Indeed it was also the first time any of the elders in our congregation had heard of any such allegation against Mr Whitely. To my knowledge, Mr. Whitely had no prior convictions and he had not been previously accused of child sexual abuse.
7. At [Mother's] request, I and another elder in our congregation, David Clifford, met with [Mother] at her home that evening (25 February 2019) to support her in putting the

allegation to [DPA] Mr. Whitely. I reassured and reminded [Mother] that she had the absolute right to report the allegations to the police.

8. That same evening (25 February 2019) I received a telephone call from [PR-A42] and her adult sister [Sibling]. I listened to them and sympathised. I very clearly recall telling them that they both have the absolute right to report the matter to the police. [Sibling] told me that they intended to report the matter to the police.
9. On 26 February 2019, David Clifford and I telephoned the Branch Office for guidance on how to respond to the allegations we had heard the previous evening. Shortly before or after that call, I received a telephone call from [PR-A42] who informed me that she had already reported the matter to the police.
10. On 27 February 2019, Mr Whitely was arrested and released on bail. He was restricted by the police from [DPA] being in any home where there were under-16-year-olds present.
11. The Branch Office directed us not pursue our Scriptural determination of whether Mr Whitely should be disfellowshipped from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses until after the police had sufficient time to conduct their criminal investigation. In the meantime, we removed Mr Whitely as a congregation elder and as a charity trustee.
12. Mr Whitely has not attended any meetings with our congregation since the allegations were brought to our attention on 25 February 2019.
13. After learning of the abuse of [PR-A42] we offered pastoral support to her and [Mother]. On each occasion [PR-A42] was joined by a female confidant of her choosing, either her mother or her sister. On these occasions we did not ask [PR-A42] about the details of the allegations nor did she volunteer that information. Instead, we tried to listen to [PR-A42] and provide her reassurance and support based on comforting passages from the Bible.
14. On 15 March 2019, an ecclesiastical judicial committee composed of three elders in our congregation met with Mr Whitely and decided that same day that he should be disfellowshipped from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

15. On 24 July 2019, I received an e-mail from the police asking for documents relating to the disfellowshipping of Mr Whitely. In subsequent correspondence with the police, we disclosed that the congregation did hold a relevant document (summary) which summarised information the ecclesiastical judicial committee received from Mr Whitely in this matter. We explained that the document was a confidential religious communication and, as such, we would need either the consent of Mr Whitely (which we later learned he declined to provide) or a production order authorising us to disclose that document without his consent.
16. On 1 October 2019 the Court decided to grant the production order because it judged that in this case the need for the information in the police's investigation would outweigh the duty of confidentiality. In compliance with the production order, we immediately disclosed the summary and the police confirmed receipt on 3 October 2019.
17. On 13 March 2020 I was contacted by the police who informed me that Mr Whitely had pleaded guilty and was remanded in custody for sentencing.
18. Mr Whitely's actions are deplorable. The damage he has done: DPA especially to PR-A42 is devastating. My sincere sympathy is with PR-A42 and the extended family.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

SIGNED:

DPA

Rudi Dobson

Dated: 6 July 2020