



Speech

Ribbons of Reflection – Burnie & Launceston

28 August 2026 and 4 September 2026

Robert Benjamin AM KC, Implementation Monitor

On 26 September 2023 I sat quietly in the public gallery of the Tasmanian Parliament when, in a rare joint Parliamentary sitting, the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Greens and many independent members, witnessed the tabling of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. This Parliament unanimously agreed to implement all of the 191 recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, the outstanding recommendations from the 2017 National Royal Commission, the recommendations made by Professors McCormack and Smallbone into education and the review by the Department of Health into the Launceston General Hospital. Many here were also present.

Among those recommendations was the establishment of an independent Implementation Monitor to oversee and publicly report on progress against these commitments. Since that time, the five recommendations of the final report of the Weiss Independent Review into former police officer Paul Reynolds were referred to my office in May 2025. In August this year, the recommendations from the Woolcott Review were also referred to my Office.

These combined recommendations, including multiple sub-recommendations, constitute the framework and roadmap for massive social change designed to prevent child sexual abuse and support survivors of those terrible crimes.

I first met Daisy during the Commission of Inquiry, and I last met her at this event in 2024. Sadly, Daisy passed away shortly after that 2024 event. It is for Daisy, her bravery, dedication and determination that we meet here and work hard to make the world safer and gentler for those who follow.

My job is to oversee that massive change and to hold a mirror to policymakers and those who implement the policy, to ensure that the promises made in September 2023 and the hopes of Daisy in her advocacy, are genuinely met. But ultimately, success is not measured by whether recommendations are completed. It is measured by whether children are safer, whether risks are recognised earlier, whether concerns are acted upon, and whether victim-survivors experience less harm when they seek support, accountability or justice.

So, what does that mean in practice?

My office oversees and analyses the work being done to put in place this complex and difficult social change. I can tell you that I can see green shoots emerging and that change is happening.

My 2024-25 Annual Report was an audit and there was no significant endeavour by me to analyse where government and its agencies had succeeded, or otherwise. This year's report involves monitoring each and every one of the recommendations, reviewing the actions that have been taken, and evaluating progress against evidence provided by agencies.

To support this process, through my Framework, I have established a status ladder, that enables me and the agencies to clearly identify where each recommendation stands. The status ladder ranges from not commenced, to in progress, substantially progressed, complete and, finally, embedded change. This framework will paint a comprehensive picture in relation to the progress of most of the recommendations. Importantly, this approach and the work of my Office will help distinguish between activities that have just been completed and those that have resulted in lasting organisational change.

As I only received the formal responsibility to undertake monitoring of the Woolcott Review a few weeks ago, that work will be a major focus in the upcoming year. At the same time, in the next 12 months, I will undertake some deep dives into areas which I identify as needing much closer analysis. I will listen to non-government agencies, survivors and others to identify and prioritise areas of focus.

In terms of ascertaining the impact of the changes in practice, I have placed several questions in the whole-of-government annual survey this year to better understand and analyse what is happening on the ground, and I'll repeat that in two years', four years', six years' time and beyond. Hopefully, that will provide a visible measure of success or otherwise, whether the culture of the State Service is shifting, and whether it demonstrates embedded change over time.

Katherine Fordyce asked me to address several questions:

1. Are the risks of child sexual abuse being recognised earlier?

The answer is probably. With the Independent Regulator, the Children's Commissioner and the new Act, plus the consciousness in the community, government and Parliament – there is seemingly an appetite to make sure that we are alert to problems and act quickly. Whether that is embedded or not is still a question to be answered.

2. Are those concerns acted upon?

At a mechanical level I think the answer is clearly yes. The jury is still out, however, on whether it is in the hearts and minds. Some reports are encouraging, while others suggest that more work is needed. It will be interesting to review the annual report of the Working with Vulnerable People Registrar. From what I have heard, it is going well but I would like to see empirical evidence to support that view.

The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) is working thoughtfully and effectively in terms of both child protection and youth detention. However, the reforms are significant, and their impact will need to be assessed annually over the next three to five years. I intend to report on this each year and hopefully hear from you to ensure these changes remain on track and having a meaningful impact.

I have no doubt that organisations such as Laurel House, along with survivors, will continue to provide valuable feedback on the reforms, both positive aspects and the areas where further improvement is required.

3. Is abuse interrupted sooner?

Child sexual abusers remain in the shadows and by their nature are hard to identify and prosecute. The community and community organisations are alive to this, to the extent never before seen, and to the nature and danger of the crimes. However, I am concerned that the extent of the abuse and its nature are not readily understood by the broader community.

4. Are victim-survivors less likely to experience further harm when they seek support, accountability or justice?

I believe there is a lot more work to be done in this area, particularly in the criminal justice system. The system has remarkably changed since the times prior to the Commission of Inquiry. However, there is much more to follow.

In this area, I read almost all the sentencing remarks of the Supreme Court of Tasmania. From my observations, the judges are much more nuanced and thoughtful in the way they address sentencing and acknowledge the trauma, experience and further harm of those who have been abused.

The establishment of the Arch Centres has made a substantial difference, both by improving the accessibility of support services and by influencing the approach taken by investigators when complaints are made. While these developments are encouraging, ongoing attention is needed to ensure that all reports are treated appropriately and that barriers to engagement with law enforcement continue to be reduced.

Any prosecutions for child sexual abuse need the approval of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). While conviction rates are relatively high compared to other States, that may be indicative of hurdles being set perhaps too high. I am having discussions with the Tasmanian Sentencing Advisory Council as they develop material to assist in better understanding the nature of the crime of child sexual abuse and the measurement of the work undertaken in those areas so that we can, as a community, enable survivors to see accountability through the criminal justice and broader justice systems.

5. Whether the current investment in prevention is recognised and properly funded?

Prevention is going to be one of the key areas of focus for my Office over the next 12 months. It may be an area for deeper dives, better understanding and improved funding. I have no doubt that I will receive submissions that the funding is inadequate. Keeping governments focused on this area will be a real challenge, despite their strong support at the present time.

I am an optimist. Daisy's warmth and advocacy for change are contagious, and through my Office I hope that those characteristics of Daisy are continued.

With her optimism, born out of hope, I believe that significant changes have occurred since the Commission of Inquiry report was delivered in August 2023. However, we have much more to do. The COI was a start or continuance of the journey, and there are many more changes to make.

We have an obligation to those who have been abused, and a duty to protect children from harm, to act when concerns arise, and to support victim-survivors in their healing and recovery.

Our work should be the legacy of the child, David, and the woman, Daisy.