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Philip R. La Roche,^{BBSc LLB DipEA,}
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Friday 15 April 2011

The Panel,
Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry,
..GPO Box 4708,
MELBOURNE, 3001

Dear Sirs and Madam,

Submission to the Inquiry
Term of Reference Number 7
“THE RIGHT STUFF”


1. The effectiveness of any organization is enhanced by having people with “the right stuff”.
2. It seems to me that the right stuff for Child Protection Officers includes the ability to handle high case loads, the ability to do detailed paperwork, and a knowledge of legal issues and procedures.
3. I believe that some of the problems in Child Protection are caused by too many of the current Child Protection staff not having the right stuff, and that a restrictive employment practice that effectively recruits only social and welfare graduates (that is, people graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work [BSW] or a TAFE Diploma of Community Welfare Studies [DCWS]) is to blame.
4. On the one hand the Department of Human Services says that a degree in psychology is an acceptable alternative to a BSW or a DCWS, but on the other hand steadfastly rejects applicants who have not done 400 hours of “placements” (for “placements” read: working

unpaid at a welfare organization) in two separate placements. To do the 400 hours you have to do two “case management subjects”. Psychology students do not do case management subjects as part of their courses; BSW and DCWS students do. I am not even sure whether a person graduated with a psychology degree who may have accumulated 400 hours through volunteer work would be accepted.

5. The above is a ludicrous “catch 22”, and I suspect that it has been designed to keep out graduates in psychology (and other disciplines such as nursing) on the ground that they might be critical of social work ideologies. Whether that is the case or not, the study undertaken by psychology undergraduates involves detailed work, and it is the ability to handle detail that proves critical should matters proceed to a court – which brings me to my next point.

6. The current staff in Child Protection are demanding that they be better represented in court. Even though I have a Bachelor of Laws, I do not hold the legal profession in high regard. However, it is obvious that those graduated in Law will better see legal issues than the current staff and be better prepared for what happens in a court. DHS should recruit people with Law degrees to work as Child Protection Officers (such people can always be given a crash course in psychology if need be).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Philip R. La Roche". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "R".

(Electronic signature of Philip R. La Roche using Freeform.Used for attachments to emails.)