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MEDIA RELEASE

A National Disgrace

VALID congratulates the producers of last night's 4 Corners on exposing a national disgrace – the prevalence of abuse and neglect in services for people with a disability, and the failure of governments to effectively address it.

We also congratulate the people with a disability and family members who had the courage to speak up about their horrific experiences.

Since 1989, VALID has been supporting people to speak up about abuse and neglect, yet the problems have continued. We believe they are a reflection of the many problems that have been allowed to develop in the service system, including poor staff recruitment and training practices, casualisation of the workforce, lack of professional expertise and, in some agencies, poor management and a 'cover-up' culture.

In 2012, VALID called for a Royal Commission into abuse and neglect, a call which has been continually rejected. While we have welcomed and contributed to the Senate and the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiries, we continue to despair at the lack of significant national action. If it has to take a Royal Commission to bring about change, then what are we waiting for?

The prevalence of abuse and neglect in disability services undermines the confidence of all families in the capacity of the service system to provide quality services that are safe and reliable. Nowhere is this problem more evident than in the care and support of people with autism and intellectual disability, who sometimes displays behaviours of concern. In our experience, the system's practice of housing clients with challenging behaviours together, and failing to provide proper person-centred planning and support, is one of the main factors contributing to abuse and neglect.

The failure of governments to fund individualised support for individuals who need their personal space and individualised care has created a wicked problem from which there is, for many vulnerable people, no escape.

Last night, Anne Malia and Maria Thomas told the stories of their sons' horrific experiences. Both Anne and Maria regularly attend VALID's Behaviours of Concern Peer Action Group, where they, along with over a dozen other families, are battling to bring about change. Almost every member of the group has a similar story to tell about their experiences with a service system that has been correctly described as 'broken'.

They tell their stories reluctantly, but in hope they can help shape the future of the service system. They pray, as we all do, that the lessons they've learned will be heeded by those in the NDIA who are inheriting that broken system.

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