

Australia Human Rights Commission  
National Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell  
Subject: Submission

Dear Commissioner Megan Mitchell,

I congratulate your Organisation for this Inquiry and if I may say, it is at least 45 years over due. I have personal experience with dealing with suicide as I personally attempted suicide in

My suicide attempt was not due to something happening over night. I was bullied on a daily basis at school and then in the work place. My work place experience of being bullied went way over the top compared to my school life. The reason why I was bullied is due to the way I spoke (I had a cleft palate) and also to the way I look.

Prior to my suicide attempt I sought help from health professionals including a plastic surgeon. I was advised at the time, that there was nothing wrong. I mean, they couldn't work out that I had a cleft palate.

However a couple of years later, I finally got my cleft palate repaired (as a result of my suicide attempt). While this did help my speech, I didn't get any speech therapy so as to improve my speech. By the way, I had speech therapy to the age of 5 (in ) and once I reached this age, the program stop.

I was fortunate enough to meet a wonderful woman and I got married in . We had three children, a daughter and 2 sons; unfortunately our first son died due to complex heart and other health issues. He was 9 days old; this was in .

In our 2<sup>nd</sup> son was born. was born with 2 holes in the heart, repaired at 14 days old. You may wonder what this has got to do with this Submission. Well, when was 5 years old we took him to the Hospital to see a geneticist to see what was wrong with . It was here that I was to learn that I had Velo Cardio Facial syndrome – I was 43 at the time. Hence the reason the way I looked and also having a cleft palate. This answered many questions. Also, was diagnosed with the syndrome, while it is most likely that our first son had it as well.

Due to the meeting with the geneticist I was also referred to the Craniofacial Unit at the hospital. The plastic surgeon agreed that I needed to have some plastic surgery to my face and he also advised that my cleft palate needed to be repaired for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time as the first operation was not done properly.

While the facial operations were subtle, they didn't completely eradicate bullying in the work place. During my time with a aviation company (mainly fly in fly out operations) I was bullied again. This was the worse I have experienced since . As a result, I thought about committing suicide once again. However, I sought help with a local Anglican minister and he provided some good advise; also being married to a wonderful woman and that we had two lovely children I decided not too.

After two years with the aviation company I eventually left. It is interesting to note that since 2000 that there has been a lot more tolerance in the work place and in society itself.

In \_\_\_\_\_, I eventually put my efforts into promoting Velo Cardio Facial syndrome

\_\_\_\_\_ and I am now helping other families whose children have the syndrome. More information on the syndrome can be found on [www.vcfsef.org](http://www.vcfsef.org).

Finally, I hope that this inquiry will not be a waste of time and that something positive will come out of it. I personally believe that the Commission should recommend that: schools; universities; health professionals; companies; public service; Churches etc should all be trained in recognising the signs of someone thinking of committing suicide.

I thank the Commission for what is being done.

Yours truly,