

Snapshot: Investigation into a former youth worker's unauthorised access to private information about children

In February 2021, a former youth worker, Alexander Jones, was convicted of sexually assaulting a child we refer to as 'Zack'. The media reported that Jones had improperly accessed sensitive information about Zack and other children. It was also reported that the Department of Health and Human Services misled Victoria's Information Commissioner about the actions it took in response to the data breach. We investigated these allegations and looked into how Jones was granted a Working with Children clearance given he was the subject of child protection concerns in other states.

Key findings

- Jones's gained access to confidential information about vulnerable children through his role at Melbourne City Mission.
- Jones deceived Melbourne City Mission about his employment history and qualifications and was never qualified to work with children.
- Jones's access to confidential information should have been revoked when he changed jobs in July 2017. His account was accidentally left active until October 2018.
- The Department of Health and Human Services managed some aspects of the data breach poorly and incorrectly informed Zack's mother that Jones had accessed information about Zack and her family.
- The Department didn't inform some of the people whose data had been breached until mid-2021.
- Working with Children Check Victoria was unable to deny Jones a Working with Children clearance, or revoke it quickly, due to limitations in its legislation.

Recommendations

This report made four recommendations including amending the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic) to allow Working with Children Check Victoria to:

- obtain and consider all relevant information about a person's risk to children
- reassess a person's clearance on its own initiative
- refuse applications and suspend or revoke a person's clearance where a person poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children.

By the numbers



48

people were identified as having their privacy breached by Jones after he left Melbourne City Mission



11

of these were not contacted about the breach for years



27

further affected people were identified during the Ombudsman's investigation



18 months

between the first child protection concerns about Jones and his Working with Children clearance being revoked

Final word

'The sexual assault of a child by a former youth worker, a person once placed in a position of trust, is inherently shocking ... Some painful lessons have been learnt. For the safety of our children, more needs to be done.'

Deborah Glass, Victorian Ombudsman