

Newsletter

Winter 2021

Lifeboat Geelong

Vision

A just, compassionate and understanding society

Mission

To bring help and hope to adult survivors of Church-related sexual abuse.

Objectives

The Lifeboat program aims to achieve its mission goal by providing assistance in the following ways:

- Offering support and practical help using volunteers.
- Making referrals to appropriate professionals.
- Advocating on behalf of adult survivors of church related sexual abuse.
- Providing information, encouragement and practical support to enable survivors to re-engage into the community.
- Providing opportunities for people to succeed, developing their self-esteem, self-worth and dignity.



Lifeboat Geelong

F O U N D A T I O N



In this edition Fr Kevin highlights the challenges experienced by survivors taking legal action, and then we hear from some survivors who demonstrate resilience and bravery as they try complementary therapies to help them live with PTSD. Patrick shares his search to make sense of depression. And we have a beautiful poem of love written to a survivor by his wife.

Please feel free to share this publication with anyone who would find it beneficial. If you do not wish to receive any future editions, you can easily unsubscribe by contacting Lifeboat Geelong.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and we welcome any ideas for future issues or contributions from survivors, which can be anonymous.

REFLECTIONS FROM FR KEVIN DILLON

This is the front page of the weekly bulletin of St Simon's Parish, Rowville, published in a printed version and posted on the parish website (www.stsimonsparish.com.au) on August 1, 2021. It was written by Fr. Kevin Dillon, following the reports in the media, within three days of one another, of two separate court judgements awarding major damages to victims / survivors of the same paedophile priest, Kevin O'Donnell. The courts were presented with evidence that Church authorities had known about O'Donnell's crimes as far back as 1958, yet the offences to these survivors had occurred in the 1970's.

When multiple allegations of sexual abuse of children by Catholic Church personnel first came forward five decades ago, claims for "compensation" were rare. As well there being "beyond belief" for most people, how could such offences against children be "compensated"?

People whose lives had been ruined in their childhood years were faced with disbelief by church authorities and in many cases even their own families, then later being re-traumatised as endless legal interrogation and psychological/psychiatric examinations were made.

When so many allegations became legally proven or at least accepted by church authorities, the apologies came. Then two Parliamentary Inquiries (in Vic. and NSW) and an Australia-wide Royal Commission found that any false allegations were a tiny rarity, there were more “apologies”.

But when victims sought recognition of the damage they had suffered - for 2, 3, 4 decades and more - the legal defences and strategies designed by Church lawyers to crush victims were utilised to the full, even when the perpetrators had been in prison for many years.

A letter of “apology” to one victim even stated that should the victim seek damages in a civil court, the offences which had been accepted by the Church would still be “strenuously defended” in court.

Reports of two quite separate recently “settled” cases in which Kevin O’Donnell was the accused perpetrator indicate a combined “settlement compensation” of more than \$3 million. Such was the result of the strategy of “strenuous defence” of the indefensible.’

Church leaders regularly remind the public that they have apologised. Indeed they have, and rightly so But what is needed a practical and genuine *contrition*. Contrition is deep sorrow and an unconditional acceptance of responsibility for whatever has happened and caused harm.

In the long, drawn-out, horrific saga of church related abuse of children, genuine “contrition” is incompatible with “strenuous defence” against victims - in or out of court.

So what would Jesus say? Simple. He would say “Treat other people the way you would like to be treated yourself”.



Photo by Pete Rogers

SCHOOLS ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR PAST FAILINGS

A number of schools are owning their past and attempting to make amends for past failures and actively support survivors. The principal of Xavier College announced recently that Old Xavierians who have been hurt through abuse will have access to counselling and support services from the In Good Faith Foundation (Richard Baker, The Age 24/7/21).

Melbourne businessman Richard Jabara, an Old Xaverian who was sexually abused at school said the establishment of a support network would help former students who were yet to tell their stories, giving them a safe place independent of the school. Richard, who is now an ambassador for the In Good Faith Foundation, says that saying it is OK to bring sexual abuse into the open is something he supports 1,000 per cent.

Richard was the catalyst for a permanent memorial to be placed at Xavier College in 2015 as a reminder of past abuses and in hope of a better future. Richard is pictured below with Clare Leaney (right), CEO of the In Good Faith Foundation and Xavier principal William Doherty at the Kew school, in front of a permanent memorial to acknowledge the victims of abuse.



CREDIT: PENNY STEPHENS, THE AGE 24/7/21

The wording on the memorial is:

“Xavier College acknowledges that some students have suffered harm and abuse in their time at our school. The College acknowledges its past failures in this regard. To those whose experiences have been painful we offer an apology. Xavier College commits itself to creating a place of learning that is safe and welcoming for present and future generations of students. May all who come to this place find a welcome and an opportunity for growth in knowledge and wisdom. May those students who have experienced pain and hurt in the past now find recognition, healing and peace.”

“I have come that you may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Richard says he “is always grateful for the help and support from Lifeboat. Many victims feel alone. Their voice not heard. Lifeboat let us know that there are people who care. Will walk alongside them. Feel their pain and suffering. And above all make victims feel valued again as a person to find hope to stay alive.”

Pete Rogers, a survivor who went to school at St Michael's Parish, Ashburton, was instrumental in a plaque being laid at the school in recognition of the abuse that occurred there. The official recognition ceremony has been postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions



The Peppercorn Memorial at De La Salle College, Kinnoull Campus was laid in March 2021. The In Good Faith Foundation and the Trustees of De La Salle Brothers worked together with survivors to create this plaque.

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES AND PTSD

In the Lifeboat Geelong Autumn issue, Pete Rogers spoke of the benefits of art therapy, and shared some of his artwork. Another member of Lifeboat has started art therapy, and he said after his first session that he thinks it is just what he has been looking for.

Even after psychiatric and psychological treatment, survivors still may experience fluctuating mental health, which impacts on their ability to function in the community. There is more research emerging about the benefits of complementary therapies such as art, music, narrative writing and exercise that tap into a person's emotions and thoughts when words fail.

Art Therapy facilitates expression of unconscious and conscious thoughts and feelings (National Centre for Biotechnology Information). The aim is to manage behaviours, process feelings, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase self-esteem.

Music therapy facilitates expression of unconscious and conscious thoughts and feelings. (National Centre for Biotechnology Information, Brain Line). It is used as a way to manage stress and cope with difficult situations.

Narrative writing can start the process for people to acknowledge what happened to them and help them to find a voice and make sense of a traumatic experience (Smyth & Pennebaker).

Physical activity can lead to a 30% reduced risk of becoming depressed, and staying active helps those who are depressed recover (Walking for Health UK).

Please contact Lifeboat Geelong if you would like to investigate complementary therapies further.

Nature as therapy



Growing roses and taking photos of them is another creative outlet for Pete Rogers. He has over 100 different varieties of roses in his garden.

'Gardening adds years to your life and life to your years.'

(Author unknown)

If we spend time in a green environment, then we reduce stress, improve mood and come away self-reporting improved wellbeing.

(<https://www.thrive.org.uk/how-we-help/what-we-do/why-gardening-is-good-for-our-health/why-gardening-is-good-for-your-mental-wellbeing>)

Music as therapy

'Upbeat music can make you feel more optimistic and positive about life. A slower tempo can quiet your mind and relax your muscles, making you feel soothed while releasing the stress of the day. Music is effective for relaxation and stress management.'

(<https://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room/releasing-stress-through-the-power-of-music>).

The benefits of busking to Bob are twofold. Not only does he make a bit of money but he finds that playing music is good to reduce stress. Listening to a wide variety of music is also good for his mental health.

Sally is in her 70's and is learning the piano. She is enjoying the challenge and says it helps her relax and she feels better in herself.

SANDRA'S ODE TO RUSSELL

Singing and playing music has also been a key part in the lives of Russell, a survivor, and his partner Sandra, especially since they were involved in a serious motor vehicle accident over a year ago. Sandra is still in rehabilitation. Russell brings his guitar into the rehabilitation centre where Sandra is currently living. Sandra has a beautiful voice and singing with Russell has been integral to Sandra's recovery from the accident. Sandra wrote the poem below for Russell before their accident.



Photo by Pete Rogers

*Regret is just a word we say
Changes nothing at the end of the day
The past is the past, what's done is done
Regret never really helps anyone
If you never have anything to say sorry for
You can't move on, open the next door
The sun comes up and no matter what you do
So keep on smiling, love will see you through
The older we get, time goes so fast
No time for regrets for our deeds in the past
Live for today and whatever comes your way
To know that you love me, is all you ever need say
Smile when you find me in that place in your heart
With a promise of love that nothing can part
Embrace every sunrise and sunset you see
I promise you they will all be with me*

NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME FREE COUNSELLING SERVICES

The National Redress Scheme offers 20 hours free counselling, with the possibility of extension, to people who are eligible to receive redress (i.e. people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse). People do not need to have accepted any other services from the National Redress Scheme to be eligible for counselling.

The name given to the consortium of 18 services providers who provide support and counselling to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse in Victoria is 'Restore'.

DEPRESSION: WHAT IT MEANS AND IS TO ME

Getting my head around it. How it makes me feel. Searching for a meaning, a definition that explains me and how it has formed me

Patrick Caruana



Photo by Patrick Caruana, who finds that photography is a creative outlet that helps him manage his depression

I live with PTSD, Depression and Anxiety. The diagnosis was made around six years ago but I have lived with these feelings that I couldn't understand or articulate to others for most of my life.

My conditions stem from abuse that I survived at the hands of Catholic Clergy from the age of five until sixteen. The Church has acknowledged that the abuse took place and that validation has been important and enabled me to start to heal. The acknowledgement of the courts was important, but as most survivors will tell you, it is the acknowledgement BY the perpetrators of what they did THAT starts the healing process.

Through sessions with, in the first instance, an amazingly perceptive clinical psychologist I was able to acknowledge two things. Coping with the after-effects of a traumatic event or situation can lead to depression at any age, and in my case since the first abusive action that I survived I had been sliding into depressive episodes all my life. It helped me understand many of my behaviours and the way I live my life.

When I am in a depressive state I feel like I am in a zone. It's almost a state of meditation, of removal from reality. When I used to run in the High School Cross Country races or ride my bike for long distances I would feel something similar. With others I feel like I am the only person who can feel this way. No one "gets" me or understands me. Social events "sink me" and reinforce my feelings of worthlessness.

Even though I have great family and friends, I can feel like I am unworthy. I love these people and I know that my "absence" of soul and of interaction has hurt them. This creates a perpetual cycle of further withdrawal which makes me feel even worse and so it goes.

People struggle to understand that while everyone around you is happy, or on the surface your life may appear to be "perfect" all you want to do is just cry alone. You struggle to acknowledge people in your life, your partner, your children, your colleagues, your friends and your family. This struggle is heart breaking, because for me I was empty, a shell. My physical presence was there, on the couch when my children wanted my attention, my interaction, but I was a zombie, in my own world. I wasn't angry. I was sad but I couldn't understand why I was. Why I was so low?

I try to follow mindfulness and live in the moment as much as possible but sometimes it's just too hard and I struggle on those days to even get thing done. When I was working fulltime I had to push myself and it helped and like that perpetual motion machine those achievements of work helped me do other things. Now without that impetus, it's harder. That being said, I use lists and it is satisfying to cross an item off the list and move on to the next thing. Photography is a creative outlet for me that helps me manage my depression.

So these are my thoughts about depression and how it affects me and how I live with it. I hope that by finally getting these thoughts into words, I may help others struggling to work it out for themselves.

To those living with someone who has depression, you are their rock and their foundation. Your love and patience is cherished by them.

Believe Me!



This photo by Patrick Caruana is symbolic of his search to understand depression. There is light at the end.



LIFEBOAT'S LADIES LUNCH

Eighteen ladies attended the first Ladies Lunch in Geelong at the end of June. The Sandstone @ Co Café provided outstanding meals and service and kindly let us stay after closing time. Trudy, the Lifeboat's Client Support Officer in Melbourne bought three ladies with her from Melbourne.

Ladies took the opportunity to meet other people who have had similar experiences. Besides survivors, some ladies who attended were mothers of survivors, which has many challenges. We hope that people will develop informal networks of support through these lunches or dinners.

Janetta (pictured) received an unexpected birthday cake, and we enjoyed embarrassing her by singing 'happy birthday'.

We plan to have more ladies and men's gathering in the near future, in both Geelong and Melbourne.

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