

Newsletter

Spring-Summer 2021

Lifeboat Geelong

Vision

A Just, Compassionate,
Accepting and Kind Society.

Mission

To bring help and hope to
survivors of Church or
Institutional related sexual
abuse.

Values

Dignity of each Person
Justice
Compassion
Mutual Trust.

Objectives

Lifeboat Geelong achieves its
mission by:

- Providing Practical,
Emotional and Financial
support.
- Enabling survivors to re-
engage into their community.
- Providing Information and
Support for Survivors to
access Education and
Employment opportunities.
- Providing opportunities to
succeed and develop self-
esteem, self-worth and
dignity.
- When necessary facilitating
referrals to appropriate
professionals advocating on
behalf of Survivors



Lifeboat Geelong

F O U N D A T I O N



Here is a happy news story. Recently a couple in Bendigo decided to pay off all the lay-bys in their local toy store as an act of kindness to people who could not afford to buy toys outright for their children for Christmas.

World Kindness Day was celebrated on November 13 to promote the importance of being kind to each other, to ourselves, to the world and to help everyone understand that compassion for others is what binds us all together.

Lifeboat Geelong has adopted a new vision statement that includes the word 'kind':

'A Just, Compassionate, Accepting and Kind Society.'

Kindness is more than simply being nice and considerate. It is about being selfless, caring, friendly and generous, and it is demonstrated by our actions. When we are kind to others through acts such as a smile, a wave, or a nice word, we pass along hope and make others feel better about themselves and life in general.

Researchers have found that when we witness kindness, we are inspired to be kind, not only to others, but also to ourselves. Being kind can have benefits for everyone involved. People who demonstrate kindness to others have better cardiovascular health and report lower levels of stress.

How do we be kind to ourselves? Try not to judge yourself for not being perfect. Don't hold yourself to impossibly high standards. Accept that you will make mistakes and avoid criticising or putting yourself down. Seek after people and activities that have a positive effect on you. Accept yourself as you are.

People with PTSD may struggle with self-compassion and being kind to themselves in their daily lives. This can lead to destructive behaviours. Actively and diligently practicing self-care and being kind to yourself may help survivors to thrive.

This newsletter highlights the personal accounts of survivors who are practicing being kind to themselves through meditation, support groups and creativity.

Australia's eSafety commissioner has confronted Facebook officials over leaked documents which showed the company knew about its Instagram platform having a toxic impact on youth mental health for years.

Commissioner Julie Inman Grant spoke to the tech giant's executives last week to discuss "allegations that have surfaced" after the Wall Street Journal revealed the company was aware it makes "body image issues worse for one in three teen girls" as early as 2019.

Explosive claims from a trove of internal communications found the company had extensive research which detailed the crushing impact on youth mental health including that "aspects of Instagram exacerbate each other to create a perfect storm".

Another presentation noted that teens "feel 'addicted' and know that what they're seeing is bad for their mental health but feel unable to stop themselves". Clinical psychologist Ash King said social media can be a beneficial tool, but society had a "duty to our young people" to teach them digital and social media literacy.

"You won't chuck your child in a pool without giving them swimming lessons," she said. "You can't let an eight-year-old go mental with an iPhone without teaching them how to understand social media and how it makes them feel."

Newtown resident Rachel Smith, 24, said growing up at a time when Instagram was gaining popularity had a major impact on her self-esteem and body image. "It was like if you don't get over 100 likes what is the point of the post," she said.

"You are pitted against other girls for likes ... (and) you get stuck with that competitive nature in real life as well."

'Herald Sun', Wed. Sept.29

REFLECTIONS FROM FR KEVIN DILLON

The 2015 Oscar-winning movie, "Spotlight" has a powerful, pivotal scene in which "Boston Globe" journalist Mike Rezendes yells to his investigative reporter colleagues; "They knew!!" He is referring to the discovery that Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston was well aware that some (in fact 70!) of his priests were child abuse offenders, yet did nothing about it. (Law subsequently resigned as Archbishop). ** (see below)



If we become aware that some practice for which we are responsible is causing harm - indeed significant harm - to others, then we become responsible for that

harm if we choose to continue that practice (whatever it is) without attempting to curb, reduce or eliminate the harm.

As we all try to negotiate restrictive and often contradictory regulations as to how we live our lives (open golf courses, but locked toilets!), the ongoing awareness of the negative impact of social media communications comes as no surprise.

For some years, people, especially young people, have been and are spending more and more time on social media. The companies providing social media, of course, are making a fortune. Great for them, but what of the harm - of which they would be well aware - to people of all ages, but especially the young and vulnerable?

The article at left, published on Wednesday, noted: "the company (Facebook) knew about its Instagram platform having a toxic impact on youth mental health for years."

That's more than a report. It's an accusation. "They knew!!!" If this is true, the responsibility of this trillion (yes, trillion) dollar company is beyond measure.

It is to the credit of the Australian eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant that this challenge has been laid at the feet of Facebook executives. Please God it will not be ignored.

**Google: Spotlight 2015 "It's time. They knew and they let it happen". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7nIABqFC20>

BEATING HURT AND TRAUMA: CALMING MEDITATION

A Personal Experience

There is no future with trauma. It takes over everything. You've got tunnel vision. You only see what's in front of you and you're totally reactionary. Everything is there to hurt you. Everything is a threat. You're navigating a wild forest full of nasty things that are there to kill you. No joke. The little old lady down the street can be a threat. This is what trauma is. It's pure, absolute animal behaviour - and the majority of civilised society does not and cannot understand this.

Trauma makes you read too much into things and situations. Sneaky self-contaminating thoughts make you believe the falsities are true; that you are bad, that people have bad intentions, that everything is wrong. A totally distorted self-image arises. How do we get away from this insanity and hell? Me? I've usually just gone surfing where the lulling of the ocean's waves cradle me like a child - as well as providing excitement, inspiration and physical health - but I'm nearly 50 now and it's harder to surf. Alcohol's an illusion. There are other solutions. Medication works - but personally I see it as a Band-Aid and thus not too different to alcohol and like alcohol it should not be abused or overused. Good social relationships and loved ones are definitely important. Not all of us have that. Perhaps you've been ostracised. Maybe you don't think you're worthy and you've pushed people out of your life or excluded them.

Healthy living with good food and daily exercise is vital - as it is for anyone. All the different things we do for wellbeing are like arrows in your quiver. This is overall wellbeing. It's all integrated. Each component is like a pillar. You need at least a few of these wellbeing pillars to be well developed to prop you up. When you get a few pillars stable it's easier to work on the other pillars. Like most new endeavours it is the first steps that are most challenging. With trauma it gets hard to see the long term benefits of taking care of yourself. It's often compounded by depression. It takes a bit of effort to get the ball rolling. Support from friends and family and a therapist work well. We need people around us. Did you know the original meaning of the English word 'hell' means to be alone?

I think there's a wellbeing pillar we in the west tend to overlook. I think we don't pay a lot of attention to our minds. It is our minds that perceive the world. The world doesn't exist if we don't see it and perceive it. It is our mind that takes everything in. Some scientific study thinks the mind is not the brain. Knowing better how our mind works helps us set filters that stop the manic and destructive, trauma-related thinking from hijacking us. It helps us slow down and see people and places through a less irrational and more stable lens. It helps us see the good things in life. When we achieve this to some degree we exude more positivity and people (and animals) reciprocate more positively creating an overall, more positive world. Ongoing discipline is key.

There are lots of spiritual connotations with meditation. While spiritualism is not important in everybody's lives it plays a role for me but it's not necessary to gain calm. Secular meditation aimed at calming the mind works wonders. Meditation is like any activity in that we choose how deep we want to go and how hard we want to work. It becomes easier and you get better over time just like with physical training. Me? I jumped in pretty deep and spent nearly half a year getting tuition from Buddhist monks and nuns.

Like someone choosing a gym instructor for physical fitness I chose to go to experts to learn meditation. I was up early most days to meditate and had evening sessions as well as meditations throughout the day. Through the day I would sometimes sit and close my eyes for a minute or so and this was enough to ground me or to focus on a task or a problem. I would meditate for a couple hours a day and sometimes six or more hours. I had a morning stretching/yoga routine as well. I changed my diet I and stopped drinking and lost 15kg. I exercised more often and aimed to get at least a half hour of cardio in my exercise a few times per week.

Once I started a pattern it became easier. Friends gave vital support while I was undertaking these changes. Meditation is a very, very personal thing. Ultimately you're alone when practicing and this can be very daunting. Some of us have kept the pain and problems covered up (all people, in fact) and meditation threatens to release this pain. Trying to keep faith in the simple goodness of god, nature and people can give strength when things get hard. Speaking with your close and loved ones helps a lot, too.



Life hasn't become perfect. It has been hard to remove the self-contaminating thoughts of worthlessness and live a 'normal' life (though, what really is a normal life?). My goal was to learn how to slow my thinking down and find some calm. From there I could better synch in with the gears of the working world. It hasn't happened yet. It may never. I've become slack. I'm drinking too often again. I don't socialise much though I'm better than I was. Being transient has made it hard to keep a routine. I know I

will continue getting better at it. The positive results may not be noticeable. Nonetheless the meditation has been important for me and always will be.

You can find meditations to do online and they're all worthwhile to some degree. I recommend joining a group and getting some instruction. As is the same with starting physical exercise you can learn some counterproductive habits and an expert's help is good to have. Like with any teachers it's worth trying a few people 'til you find someone you gel with. There are some basics for most meditations. You don't have to sit cross legged. It is important to have a straight back. You can sit in a chair that keeps you upright. I avoid couches because the softness can make it too easy to drop off to sleep while meditating. Perceive your spine as a stack of coins and balancing them by pulling them gently upwards from the crown of your skull. It's good to try to sit cross-legged but many westerners are not so flexible in the knees. If you're not used to this sitting posture aches and pains can start screaming out at you. For me the most effective meditations were when I stopped feeling my body pains though this came with time. I have some back injuries so I sit on the ground with my back straight against a wall or I sit in a table chair. Try to gently tuck the chin in. Have your lips relaxed and slightly apart. Keep your tongue lightly pressed against the roof of the mouth just back from your top teeth. Try to breathe from the nose. Try to take relaxed, tummy breaths using your diaphragm. Try to feel the breaths up and down your whole torso rather than just using the chest cavity to breathe. Your whole body can feel like a pulsating bellows or a gently resting sea sponge depending on how you breathe. It can be very calming or very stimulating. We want calm.

Focusing on the breath is fundamental to all meditations. Meditation might seem like a waste of time but I want to tell you it's worth putting aside some time or times throughout the day for meditations. I end up making better use of the day and having better relationships if I meditate even if only for a minute. We can drink or use drugs to keep the thoughts and memories at bay. Meditation helps stop being burdened with your problems though the gains are long lasting and far more sustainable than avoidance activities like drinking or gambling or even thrill seeking. It's sort of like an investment. I've found that I get more out of life from meditation.



There are always flowers for those who want to see them.

Henry Matisse

THE CALMING AND RELAXING EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

Pete Rogers

I have been meditating for the last thirty years. Before we go forward let's go back in time. My grandparents had one of those old Arabian Rugs with the beautiful colours in it. I can remember as a child getting lost as I looked at the patterns and colours of this beautiful rug. Is that Meditation? I can remember sitting in the church at primary school age. I couldn't understand the Latin Language but as the Pipe Organ played and the smoke of the incense floated like a fog about the church the little bells rang. Where was my Mind? In Dream Land my mind wandered. I imagined I was racing my bike around the aisles of the church and as I was racing some part of me was wanting to be a Champion. Oh I can remember it now; I was always the winner. I wonder why? I was the only one in the race. Is this Meditation?

Let's jump to the age of my early thirties. I was Depressed. Life was a Struggle. No Meaning. No Direction. Two kids, a mortgage and a wife. It was suggested to me I take up Yoga. It had to be Hatha Yoga. The church frowned on Yoga but Hatha got a little green light. Don't tell them we chanted, even worse don't tell them a Catholic couple are running it. The exercisers were great, but those Chanting Words spooked me. I struggled to even say them in my Head. Was this a form of Brainwashing I asked myself? After a time I began to relax into the whole yoga scene gently I began to chant in my Head only. Then in time I let the words begin to flow forth from my mouth. I felt I was safe. Nothing profound happened. My Mind began to become calmer and clearer. No Madness. In time I was getting confident more relaxed and energy flowed. Was this Meditation?

From this experience a simple form of Meditation Began. As the years went on I learnt that Meditation needed at least 30 minutes. 30 Minutes I shouted inside my head with disbelief and shock. Always up for a challenge I asked how I should start. A Wise man said try 3 minutes. I set the oven timer for 3 minutes. I took up my position sitting on the bedroom floor pillow behind my back I sat. My mind raced. A slight panic began. The voice within raced; you won't last. I tell you honestly I wanted to run. Finally the alarm rang

what a relief. I raced out of the bedroom slowly a normal breathing returned and my breath calmed. This routine went on for some time. My former wife was struggling with the new routine. Especially if the oven was needed. A wise thought came. Get a Timer Pete. Try a different room and time. From then on Meditation became part of my daily life.

I tried different style and breathing techniques. During my dealing with my Abuse Journey I used Meditation to allow memories to surface to help put the jigsaw pieces together. This also helped in Therapy and the healing Journey that continues. I spent time in Monastic life where we chanted and sang five times a day. Is this another form of meditation? I meditated for a few years with the Brahma Kumaris community, another form of Meditation. With the introduction of iPads iPhones and the iTunes Store there are many different styles with different music and chants to meditate with and choose from. At times I use my iPhone with headphones to meditate. I have a few different meditations to choose from. You don't need a Guru to teach you how to meditate. All it requires is a willingness to try something new and the discipline to stick with it. My latest Technique is called a Nana Nap. Every afternoon I lay on my bed headphones on press the button on my iPad and listen to a Guided Relaxation by Peggy Cappy for 20 minutes. This can be the best part of my day. I am a Healthier, Calmer and Relaxed Person through the Discipline of Meditation. Does Meditation work for Me? Yes Indeed. You have nothing to lose, only a Practice to Gain.

Om Shanti.

ROCK ART



Religion is full of symbols & people hold symbols in their hands but someone else has named the symbols & made them be it a cross rosary beads or maybe an Angel.

Take a rock from the ground it's natural it holds its own energy no symbolism just natural & unique.

Next time you're trying to solve something hold a Rock of your choice.

Now if you can encourage this person to paint a rock or just hold one they like, it becomes there symbol. It can then be held in anxious times.

Pete Rogers

SQUEAKY: MY ROCK

Patrick Caruana

Squeaky’, fifty-six years old and still going strong.

Battered and bruised, his love is eternal.

His shoulders are the strongest I have ever had to lean on.

He has been my salvation, silently listening to me, drying my tears with his fur and keeping me warm in the coldest and darkest of times.

My first toy. My most precious toy. He has been the constant, my rock. When I was abused by clergy, priests and nuns, betrayed by those meant to teach us, care for us and protect us, not hurt us, HE listened when I told him how frightened I was. He knew that I couldn’t tell my parents because back in the 1970’s it would have been too hard for them to believe they had been betrayed by those that were, in their eyes, Gods.

Because of that abuse, my mental health was damaged. I didn’t know it at the time or even understand what was happening in my head at that time. It was the black dog building his kennel in my mind and Squeaky would knock it down. In Primary school I would rush home from school, change out of my uniform, and give him a huge hug and he would draw out the pain and hurt of the day. I could feel him draw it out of me and light would shine.



In secondary school the black dog’s kennel was complete. He had a split level kennel, half in my mind and half in my room. Squeaky, from his hiding place in my wardrobe, would try to get rid of the kennel in my room and still have energy to draw out the pain from my heart when I got home. He had more strength than a phalanx of Roman Centurions.

For many years Squeaky fought a lone hand against my demons, my black dog. His presence a perpetual support, wherever he may have been living. His cupboard, my parents’ home, his spirit was always there.

There were those who should have understood my pain, my hurt, and my confusion as to why I was like I was, but they didn’t. However, Squeaky never abandoned me.

In 2011 circumstances conspired to force me to open the box containing my abuse and face it head on. To face the last living abuser and to put my complete trust in the legal system and its servants. My mental health and my life spiralled downwards but Squeaky was there hiding in his wardrobe but still supporting me, always there, his little head sitting still for me to spot and recover.

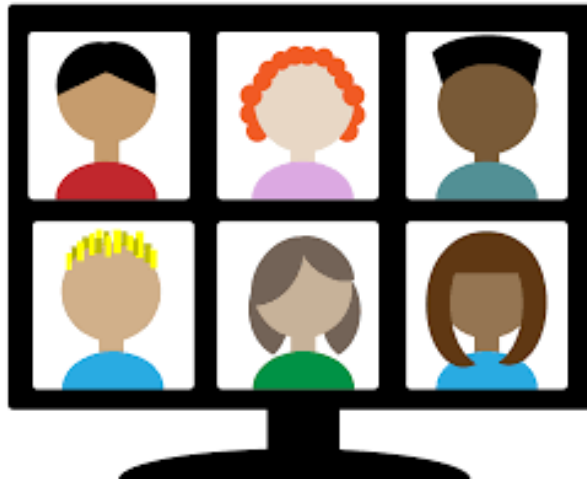
Now I live on my own once more and Squeaky is still there, my guardian. Proudly he sits on my bed because I need him now more than ever and he doesn’t mind that I was forced to make his house in a robe or cupboard because like the best of friends he knew that it wasn’t my heart making him live there but an unreasonable world. Now he is proudly on his guard post like a Beefeater protecting his King.

These days the black dog barks louder and louder and Squeaky corals him for me.

Squeaky is an old bear, a strong old bear, and at the moment he is fighting the black dog in a tough battle for me because I am almost out of fight myself. His will and his spirit is unbreakable. It needs to be to hold me up.

We all need our own Squeaky Bear to help us in our battles and on our journeys. I hope that you all have yours.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER ON ZOOM



For the past few months a number of survivors have been meeting with each other regularly on zoom, supported by Client support Officers Trudy and Anne. Survivors Michael Constable and Patrick Caruana have convened the groups. Michael worked as a facilitator for Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse, and was instrumental in implementing their proven processes in the Lifeboat groups.

The focus of the process is on sharing about our lives as we live them now, both the blessings and also the challenges, many of which we, as survivors, face in common.

The process helps to create a safe place in which mutual respect and confidentiality are agreed to by all participants, everyone gets the opportunity to speak if and as they are ready to. The structure of two or even three rounds helps this.

There are a few guidelines we all need to follow for the creation of this safe space:

- We agree to respect each other and to respect each other's' confidentiality. Not even without naming a participant, relaying their story is a breach of confidence, as outsiders may recognise who is being spoken of or think they do. We do not all know each other's' social networks after all.
- Participants speak only when ready to and will be given more than one opportunity to do so.
- We do not ask questions of each other within this process nor offer unsolicited advice: so no "So did you get some professional help", "Where/when was this?", "You should" It is also better that we do not offer comments on each other's' sharing as these can be misunderstood as judgements or an absence of positive comments be seen as disinterest or even disapproval, if others have had positive comments made about their sharing. However, "Something said earlier reminded me of something significant to me..." would be OK

The focus is on our ongoing lives, so no explicit stories of abuse: we are more than our history of abuse - becoming the designers of our futures rather than our lives being the result of our past might be an aspiration

in this process, but mainly it alleviates the isolation many of us have felt and can still experience - so it provides for the simple need of human nature for human contact and belonging - experiences we have commonly had too little of.

The first round of sharing is to talk about what we have been doing recently. This is not to highlight only positive experiences but includes the routine, ordinary or difficult stuff of life. Again as much as each of us is comfortable sharing. "I've haven't been doing much of anything really" or "I'll pass thanks" are perfectly ok.

The second round is to focus on what we've been feeling. Happiness, sadness, anger and fear are all ok to share. Anger needs to be toned down as it can trigger fear and reduce the felt safety of other participants.

Sharing and expressing anger is not forbidden, however, as it is common among many survivors, though many of us suppress it, not fearing to hurt others and/or to provoke hostility and judgement towards ourselves.

The end of each round is an opportunity for those who haven't spoken yet to do so. And it is of course still absolutely alright to say nothing. Sometimes too, someone who has spoken may have something prompted by another participant's sharing and be keen to talk of it. This is what can lead to a third round if time permits, but an additional sharing or so should be manageable.

The creation of this safe place is an achievement of all who are part of the group - even those who do not speak demonstrate the freedom to choose - and that's a pretty big issue for us all.

The groups are held fortnightly on Mondays at 7pm and monthly on Thursdays at 11am. Please contact Trudy or Anne if you would like to join these groups.

ARE YOU EXPECTING TO RECEIVE SOME COMPENSATION SOON?

Lifeboat is aware that some of our clients may be entitled to compensation in the near future. When you receive a large compensation settlement, it is advisable that you seek help to ensure that this payment will last you for the rest of your life.

Help is available through various Government and private organisations. We have several professionals on our Committee, who can help steer you in the right direction to find ethical, experienced advisers in the financial and accounting fields.

Please contact Lifeboat Geelong admin@lifeboatgeelong.com.au or your Client Support Officer, if you would like more information or support to access these services.



*We wish you the peace and joy of the
Christmas season and throughout the
New Year.*

TO MAKE YOU SMILE

Is it really
necessary for
the first square
of toilet paper to
be glued down?

What do we learn
from cows, buffalos
and elephants??

It's impossible to
reduce weight by
eating green grass
and salads and
walking.

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