



Providing Heartstrength
to Adult Survivors of
Childhood Sexual Abuse

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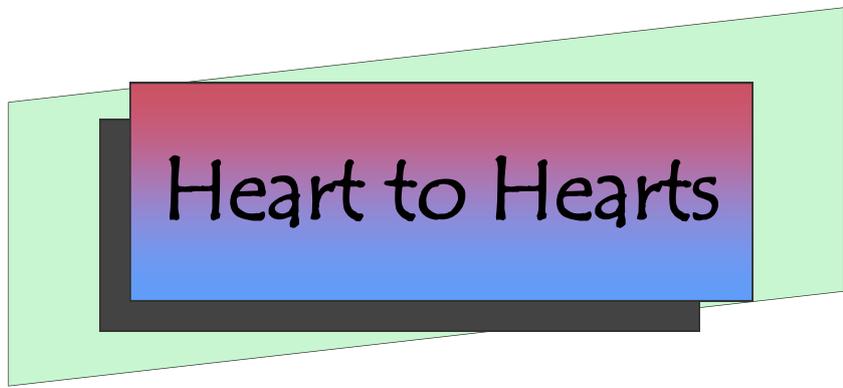
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Issue 40

Summer 2016

A Message from our new CEO...

Hello everyone and welcome to the last newsletter for 2016! Wow, I can hardly believe that we are just days away from Christmas and the festive season. It has been a challenging year here at Heartfelt House and yet we also have so much to be grateful for and many special people deserve our appreciation and acknowledgement for their support. So let's get started!

Firstly, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the wonderful founder and previous Executive Director, Vicki Atkins. You will be dearly missed and you remain the heart and soul of Heartfelt House. We wish you all the very best in your new adventures and every success in all your future endeavours! Vicki, you have left big shoes for me to fill as the new CEO of Heartfelt House!

My name is Kate Loubet and it is a great honour for me to lead and serve a wonderful organisation. I bring with me over nine years of experience as a group facilitator at Heartfelt House, as well as extensive experience in working with survivors of abuse and trauma. I have also worked with clients in areas of domestic

violence, child protection and in the court ordered post-separation program. On a personal note, it was my French husband's love of all things surf that brought us to live in this beautiful part of northern NSW. We are raising two smart, athletic and albeit sometimes moody teenage daughters and as a family we share a love of gastronomy and desire for wanderlust as we explore and discover new gems that exist in this gorgeous part of the world.

Many who know me say I am also defined by my curiosity and thirst for new knowledge and learning. I buy more books than I can finish and my idea of a workout is reading until my arms hurt. I fundamentally believe that if you are not learning new things, you stop doing great and useful things. So I am here to do great things and I hope you will join me on this new journey!

However, there is a serious side to this new appointment. Heartfelt House is in a critical stage of development as the funding providers have advised that we can no longer exist as a stand-alone organisation. The goal moving forward will be to expand our networks and working relationships and build on supportive collaborations within the community sector. My main focus and aim will be to lead Heartfelt House into the future as we seek to secure funding beyond June 2017.

Heartfelt House stands on a strong foundation of love, support and dedication from a wonderful team of facilitators, board members, volunteers and the local community.

Thank you to our facilitators who are passionate, caring and

bring a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Thank you to our board members who are generous with their wisdom, time and commitment.

Thank you to our volunteers who are the unseen angels: the bakers, the card makers, the gardeners, the local support groups and the fundraising committee.

'The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others.'

My deepest gratitude, and a warm heartfelt house thank you, for your work here is invaluable.

Next I would like to send big heartfelt congratulations to our final two groups for 2016; Luna Lilies Group 34 and Rose Blossoms Group 35, who have completed their 18 week course 'Taking the First Steps'. We are very proud of the ten brave and strong survivors who have shown courage and commitment to the program and their path toward healing. Thank you, for allowing us to accompany you on this journey. We look forward to seeing you next year at your Group Reunions.

Things are moving fast as we draw to a close what has been a year of transition and change. As we reflect on the year that was, I encourage you to take time out and take time in for a good dose of healthy self-care. Allow space for your mind, body and spirit to replenish, recharge and regroup.

The team at Heartfelt House wish you a safe, peaceful and Merry Christmas and we look forward to seeing you in 2017.

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A Survivor's Story

I am a very capable person but I just never reached the full of my potential.

When I first joined Heartfelt House and became enveloped in the atmosphere of utmost care for me, for who I am, I found out how much my previous existence had just been a movie running on its own barely making it to the Red Carpet and definitely not ever in the running for a Logie, but maybe a Best Actress now and again. I always, always knew that there was something not right with me. I always, always found it difficult to connect with other humans who weren't children or the elderly. There are big gaps in my development in many areas that I can see so plainly now. I can clearly see how the way I had learnt to pattern up my life just hadn't allowed for the complete growth as a fully functioning human being. My patterns and protective behaviours became so entrenched in my psyche that even by weeks 4, 5 and 6 I was still struggling with the denial that was ruling my life.

Now, I feel stronger and more able to face my demons as a fully equipped adult and not as a frightened child. The support and compassion that I have received throughout the program has given me power I never thought I could have or use. I have begun to feel less shame, guilt, anger, frustration and abandonment and these negative emotions are being replaced by kindness, trust in others, belief in myself as an individual, compassion, I am beginning to find the real me in there that I was born to have a right to and I am getting it back.

Knowing and believing that none of the abuse was my fault was a big turning point for me.

The amazing fact that an 18 week program can have such a big positive affect on people who have all been to the end of their tethers at some point in their lives, in the most positive and genuine way is testament as to the effectiveness of the Heartfelt House Program.

All of the new awareness and the feelings that accompany this can be at times daunting and overwhelming. However, with the dedication of facilitators and all others concerned and the carefully structured activities presented at group sessions you are guided to find what is right for you. There is no preaching or judgement and because you know everyone is facing similar struggles it takes the load off. As you get to know your group friends the bonds you make are not fraught with any hidden agendas, no needing to be anything but our authentic selves and to heal as such.

I would recommend this program for anyone who needs healing from child sexual abuse. I see its loving wings touching all of us that have suffered.

I would be very interested to see development with programs targeting people who surround the survivors. There are so many that just aren't aware of the far reaching effects of abuse, including health practitioners and Educators, just as there would be a better chance of people getting help earlier and not waiting till they are 53 as I have to finally find the help I really needed.

From the heart of survivors...

Dear Valued Friend,

Thanks for the love and support you have given me and my group over the past eighteen weeks while I was doing the course at Heartfelt House.

The beautiful slices and biscuits were yummy, the flower arrangements and the ambiance of the candles made it a relaxing and soothing environment to be in.

It all made us feel welcomed, valued, nurtured and loved.

It is a great job you're doing for us all.

Thank you – Jx -

Welcome to choosing self-love in the deepest form for yourself. Being in a group of women who are consciously choosing to heal from childhood trauma & abuse is very powerful, nurturing, supportive, loving, healing and a felt sense of belonging, is everything I felt in the program I attended. Every week was so different and exactly what I needed to hear and learn about. It was a bit scary at first for me, and as the weeks went on I was more comfortable within myself and the group.

Education from the heart

Creating Safety for those Difficult Family Gatherings

Staying Safe may sound very simple. Look right, look left, and look right again before crossing the road. Staying safe becomes complicated when we add a few things to the mix. For example, Christmas and New Year with our families and extended families. OK, we've done that before, we can do it again, can't we? Let's add complexity to the mix. You are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse or you support a survivor, something that sounds so simple, has now become Mount Everest.

Safety is often a huge issue for survivors of CSA. For some there is 'no place that is safe' (survivor 2012) while others go to great lengths every night to ensure that each window and door in the house is safely locked, often checking two or three times. If non-survivors asked themselves, where do I feel safe, most would probably say it is in their home, however this does not apply for many survivors of CSA. This doesn't come as a surprise when we look at statistics of child sexual abuse:

Approximately 85% of children who have been sexually abused, knew the perpetrator/s and trusted him/her; the majority are relatives or close family friends with the abuse taking place in a familiar setting, such as the family home. The Child Protection Council (1993, cited in Bravehearts Inc. 2009:10) claims an even higher percentage of 95%! It has been established, in 72% of cases, the abuser was the natural parent! (Kezelman, 2009 in Breaking Free)

Family gatherings happen with tradition dictating that this is a time when all family members **should** be together in the spirit of Christmas. It can be a difficult task for anybody, but for a survivor who is expected to attend family gatherings in the house of the perpetrator/s, surviving the ordeal of triggering contact and conversations some say is to 'fake it until you make' (survivor 2016). How do you care for yourself? How are you going to manage to stay safe when family gatherings include the perpetrator/s of the childhood abuse? Who are the safe people in your life?

A first step to becoming more aware of what makes a safe person could be to think about what kind of behaviours prove that this person makes you feel safe. They have demonstrated that they are reliable, stick with what they have promised to do/say or letting you know when plans change. Another indicator could be that they have shown that they are respectful in their communication with you:

- ♥ Giving you the space that you need to express yourself;
- ♥ Supporting you to make your own choices rather than making decisions for you;
- ♥ Being able to listen to what you have to say rather than speaking over the top of you;
- ♥ Making suggestions rather than prescribing what must be done;
- ♥ Using an appropriate tone and volume when speaking to you;
- ♥ They are speaking with you, not 'at' you;
- ♥ Acknowledging your personal space and displaying non-threatening body language;
- ♥ Some feel safer if the person they are talking to is making eye contact, while others feel safer with no eye contact.

Being safe and caring for yourself means finding support people in your family or in your life who are respectful of your boundaries.

Regarding Christmas and family gatherings, you have considered or you may have approached your family about making changes for yourself around family gatherings.

Change in and around traditions can become a mine field of relational angst. Long standing traditions that have been set by others and are held in place by key family members can be the cause of inter family arguments with little or no consideration for people who have new ideas and would like to introduce change. You may be thinking this is too hard, 'I'll just go with the flow, don't make any waves because the fallout is not worth it. I'm not worth it'.

'For years, I was loyal to everyone else but me. I survived my abusive childhood but I lost myself. I was a people-pleaser and couldn't say no. I tried to live up to others' expectations of me and did what other people thought I should do.'

You may convince yourself that this way is better for everyone else, therefore it will be good for you too. Yes, you are choosing to stay safe but at what cost to yourself? There is a sense of powerlessness in not being heard by others, and that can lead to the loss of 'our sense of self', who we are as

a person in relationship to significant people in our lives. We can take the easy road in dealing with family and difficult situations or we can use our voice to express our desire for our opinions to be considered and treated respectfully.

Is there an opportunity for you to change or do something different? Consider the possibilities for change and then imagine the changes playing out. How does that feel for you? Is there an opportunity to talk to your support person/s or your counsellor about making steps towards change, steps that include self-care and safety strategies?

Ideally there is a support person who is standing by your side in these situations. Preparing for family gatherings in advance allows you to take control of the situation. Planning safety strategies with your support person includes using your previous experiences to explore your best options, making better choices for your safety. Your plan could include small hand signals to your support person that indicates when you need them to enact your pre-planned exit. They will be able to leave the room, the conversation or the situation with you. This will enable you to enjoy the gathering - go on, give it a try – you deserve it!



Chapter One

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter Two

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend that I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in this same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter Three

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit ... but my eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter Four

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter Five

I walk down another street.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson

Board Report

After Vicki's departure the Board initiated an extensive search for a new Director. In mid-November we appointed Kate Loubet to the position. Kate is a social worker and has been working at Heartfelt House for the past few years. We are confident that Kate is the right person for the position and has the necessary understanding of the program to take it into the future. We welcome her very warmly.

Kate will be meeting with Board representatives shortly to map out the strategic priorities for the organisation. Networking with other agencies in the community sector is a priority so that we can build collaborative relationships that will support future funding applications. Local MP Kevin Hogan has indicated that the Minister is unlikely to approve any further extensions of our current funding agree-

ment which expires in July, so possible partnerships with other agencies are critical.

As some of you may be aware, our dynamic Board chair, Sharon Brodie, recently lost her husband in a tragic accident. Sharon has been our leader and our rock for quite some time. Her commitment has always been outstanding, to say the least. At this stage Sharon is naturally unsure what commitment she can make to Heartfelt House in 2017. Of course we are committed to supporting her through this terrible event and will continue to communicate with her. She is fully aware of our sympathies and we are providing whatever practical assistance and emotional support we can. The Board will continue to carry the tasks Sharon has so ably engaged with and we will update you further in the New Year. Stephen Wright

Thank you

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC
A Wonderful and Exciting
Movie Night

A Big Thank You to everyone who came to the Movie Night, which was made extra special with Nic and his family attending. We sold 93 tickets and had another three people donate the cost of a ticket. With help from Lismore Central Shopping Centre, BWS Cool Rocks - Woolworths and Mr Mozzarella the event made \$790.

Heartfelt House wishes you a very Merry Christmas and all the best in 2017. May your festive season be filled with love, laughter and much joy!



To the Angels that help keep HFH going - from beautiful flowers, to yummy cakes, to the fundraisers and volunteers, a heartfelt thanks. A very special thanks to the facilitators who week after week tirelessly help us through this massive journey. My fragile self is more confident and has felt the love and understanding this program offers. From my 1st entrance into the house where I was greeted at the door and made feel very welcome, candles burning, cakes offered, my broken heart felt held. I will never forget the kindness I felt, go raibh hice maith agat (is Gaelic - translated means thank you, may you have goodness)

A Big Heartfelt THANK YOU to the many individuals, families, and organisations in our community for your support throughout 2016 ... you are vital in assisting in our mission and your generosity means so much to all of us at Heartfelt House.

- 100 Hearts Club
Alstonville High School Interact Club
Alstonville Lions Club
Anglican Parish of Ballina
Anglican Parish of Lismore



- Bruno Ivan - Chartered Accountants
Ballina Lions Club
Catholic Diocese of Lismore
CWA - Alstonville Branch
Lismore Central Shopping Centre
Lismore Theatre Company
Rotary Club of Alstonville
Rotary Summerland Sunrise - Lismore
Tintenbar Upfront Theatre



THANK YOU