



Providing Heartstrength
to Adult Survivors of
Childhood Sexual Abuse

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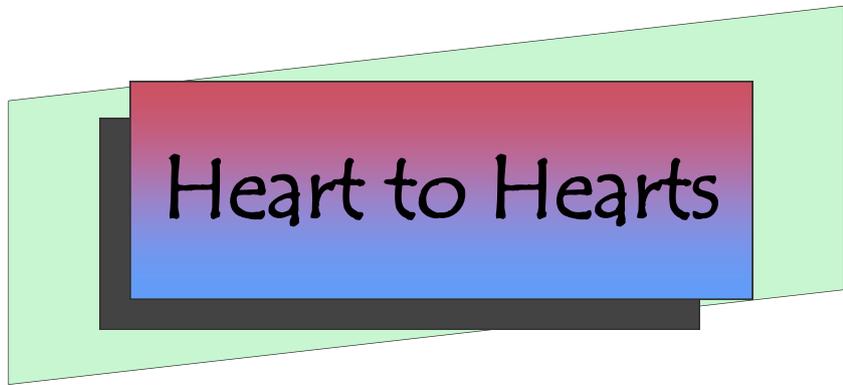
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Issue 47

November 2018

A Message from our CEO...



The long awaited and much anticipated **National Apology** to survivors of child sexual abuse was made in October by the Federal Government . It was a historic day that will hopefully be the beginning of much needed reparation, healing and recovery for survivors. We are sending our heartfelt thoughts to those affected . We welcome the announcement of new investments to implement key recommendations from the Royal Commission to improve therapeutic services and support for adult survivors. We are hopeful this will translate to HFH receiving ongoing, long-term, and adequate funding for our services.

Congratulations to group 40 the **'Golden Wombats'** for finishing their 18-week journey of self-discovery, healing and embracing a bright future.

Group 41 **'Braveheart Diamonds'** are only a few weeks away from completing their Taking the First Steps program and we wish them the very best for their 'graduation' in December.

The honours research thesis undertaken earlier last year has now been completed and submitted to **Southern Cross University** for grading. Thank you to the seven participants who contributed to the project titled : *'How does attending a specialised group therapy program impact on participant's social network?'* . Social network analysis and thematic analysis were used to explore factors that contributed to or hindered participants' social support. Data was analysed with a pre-and post-group attendance comparison, which showed positive outcomes for participants. This research will be used to provide evidence-based outcomes for *Taking the First Steps* program to increase opportunities for future grants and funding .

HFH is the 2018 recipient of the **Northern Rivers Community Fund** grant of \$10,000. The great news was received one day after the National Apology and we were so happy we cried! The grant will contribute to our next group starting in February and will help cover part of the cost of two group facilitators' fees to provide that service. The NRCF has been very supportive of our work and we say a big thank you to its committee and directors for choosing us this year .

Thank you to **Ballina Lions Club** who presented us with a donation of \$2100, from the proceeds of the

Ballina Fun Run held earlier this year. Thank you very much Ballina Lions for your continued support.

And on a sad note for HFH, we say a very special and heartfelt thankyou and goodbye to our wonderful

Program Development Coordinator **Heidi Tornow** . Heidi leaves us to enjoy her retirement and time with her

grandchildren. Heidi has been instrumental in the success of *Taking the First Steps* program as a co-author and group facilitator for the last 12 years. Her level of knowledge and understanding of the effects that childhood sexual abuse has on survivors qualifies Heidi as an expert in the field of trauma and child abuse. Her compassion, empathy and insight will be surely missed at the House. We are grateful for the services Heidi has provided to hundreds of survivors and their families through her work over the years, with her genuine care and interest in the development of the program. We will miss you and we are sad that the joyride of working with you has come to an end. Congratulations on your retirement. Best wishes to you Heidi from the Team at Heartfelt House.

We are moving to electronic news! Our new website will contain a link to our newsletter, so please let us know your email address if you haven't already done so. You can also keep up with our latest events, like our page and follow us on Facebook.

Thank YOU, our dear readers for your ongoing support and we are wishing everyone a peaceful and a safe passage into 2019, from the Team at Heartfelt House



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Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 9am-3pm

A Survivor's Story

Hi,

You don't know me but I feel like I know a little about you, I was you not that long ago, Let me guess, you are trying this as one last attempt but you already have doubts it's as amazing as what everyone tells you?

You are frightened, to open up, of being in a group, of telling your story but you're also frightened of what emotions will come out, stuff you've bottled up for so long, will they be too big when they are released? Will you end up worse than you are now?

And what if people find out?

Does any of this sound familiar, that was me at the beginning, I had never spoken my whole story out loud let alone to a group, in fact my friendships had all faded and I felt so alone in this world.

I'm not going to tell you what to do or what to think,

I'm not even going to tell you to go in with an open mind, and I'm not going to tell you to go easy on yourself.

What I'm asking you to do, from one survivor to another, is to go in with no expectations, go in as yourself, as broken as you feel, as undeserving as you think you are, just go, one foot in front of the other and walk through those doors. Guess what's on the other side?

Love, so much love that you are wrapped in it as soon as you arrive. So pour yourself a cuppa, have some cake (go on, it looks so yummy doesn't it!) and just let yourself feel the love from the people, from the place, from the homemade goodies.

This place is like nowhere else on earth, it's our little slice of heaven where we can breathe, where our walls start to come down and where we are supported through every emotion, every tear.

It's where we learn to laugh again, where we learn that for all the bad, there is still good, and for where we finally find our voice and are listened too without pretense, without judgment.

And guess what, I have 5 new friends! Friends who understand the very depths of my pain, who really understand, because they have been there too.

You never have to pretend to be anything because they get you have bad days, they know when to sit with you in silence, they know when to hug you, they know how to hear what you're saying without you speaking a word.

And the facilitators....they are angels here on earth, helping to heal even the deepest wounds. I've never met such beautiful kind hearted souls who know how to support and love you through anything you say or do, and they give really great hugs!

I'm not going to tell you what you'll be at the end of the 18 weeks, as I still have a lot of work to do but I'll let you in on this...

Your heart and soul will have begun to heal

You're going to be wrapped in so much love and support

You'll be smiling and laughing

You will NEVER be alone with this again

You are so brave, I know.....you don't believe me yet do you?

But you are...., you are a brave shining soul who has taken the courageous first step from stepping out from the silence, for taking back what the perpetrator took from you and with this letter I send with you my warmest wishes, my most loving hug and a sister to link arms with, to stand side by side and reclaim our lives.

With all the love in my heart,

A wombat whose heart is beginning to heal.

To all the beautiful people who are Heartfelt House. Thank-you very deeply for allowing a space for me to heal, grow and develop compassion for myself. From the beautiful gardens as we walk to the door, the amazing cakes and chocolates and fruit that greet us each week. The warming candles as we wander through the house. The crocheted blankets we wrap ourselves in when feeling vulnerable. The kind and caring facilitators who help us grow. The people who keep the space clean and fresh. The silent team of people looking after the administration side of Heartfelt House. To you all I offer my heartfelt thanks for your contribution to the physical space and the program itself.

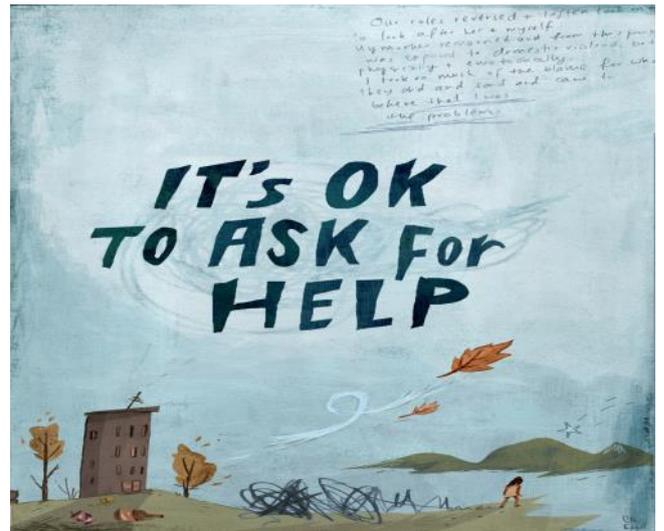
With love L.x.

Being part of Heartfelt House has been a wonderful warm experience where I could be present in the reality of my childhood with acceptance and understanding and without shame. In large part those feelings of warmth came from all the hidden support.

Thank you for all the background work. The cakes especially went to the heart (via the hips!). Thanks so much



Fall
in love
with your
life



Fundraising Night Coming in 2019

AUCTION OF PROMISES DINNER

ST BARTHOLOMEW'S HALL, ALSTONVILLE

SATURDAY 9TH MARCH 2019 AT 6.30PM

Alstonville Anglicans are holding a charity auction on Saturday 9th March. And we would very much like you to join us. The evening will be great fun. The main event is an auction of promises - anything from a few hours help in the garden to a holiday overseas, and everything in between - and the bidding will be hilarious. We will have a wheel of fortune and also a silent auction. There will be a full supper (bring your own refreshments) and light entertainment of various sorts. So there will be lots to enjoy.

In aid of Heartfelt House

*St Bartholomew's Ministry Hall in The Avenue,
Alstonville, Saturday 9th March 2019 at 6.30pm*

If you have a skill or gift which you could offer as a promise for auction, or to go into the silent auction, please call Carol Vidal (670353), or Johnny Sernberg (0411 724440).

Put the date in your diary and invite your friends. We can make up a table for your party. Tickets are \$15 and will be on sale from the beginning of January.

A special Note from Heidi

Auf Wiedersehen Heartfelt House

After 12 and a bit years at Heartfelt House it is my turn to do what I have asked many of you in the past: to write a letter expressing what it was like to be here/attend the group. It has been an amazing, fantastic, heartwarming experience for me. I cannot possibly list all the learning that has taken place for me. But I can honestly say that 99% of what I know about surviving a most horrific crime I have learned from the more than 250 beautiful women that I had the privilege to meet and accompany on their journey to well being. And what a humbling experience it's been; to sit with you in your pain and sorrow, anger and relief, sadness and (sometimes black) humour!

Thank you for allowing me into your world;

for trusting me even though you might have felt triggered and unsafe when you first met me;

for some of you letting me be the first person to hug you;

for allowing me to hold onto that tiny flame of hope until you felt ready and strong to carry it yourself;

for accompanying you on your at times painful journey of discovery- how I loved seeing the light bulbs go off in the room when understanding and awareness occasionally literally hit you and lightened up the room;

for sharing those deep, scary secrets with me;

for letting me nudge you this little bit further, even though you feared it might break you;

for being a witness in your quest for knowledge, understanding and building new highways in your brain;

for inspiring me with your incredible strength, coming back week after week even though the chance of hurting, crying, FEELING was pretty real;

for allowing me to observe and be part in the incredible transformation you embarked on AND coming back to share your new found capacities and adventures, some of you years after completing the group program;

Thank you with all of my heart.

I also want to thank and highlight the riches that our volunteers have brought and continue to bring to Heartfelt House. Years ago I tried to put the importance, not the impact your kindness is having on survivors into a manual that was designed to guide other services to become a heartfelt service. I likened you to a tapestry made from a myriad of colourful, sparkling threads, creating a strong safety net which supports everyone at Heartfelt House. I was trying to work out how many slices some of you have baked during my time here and I reckon there are several bakers who have created more than 85!!!!!! Wow!! and still going strong!! YUMMY! I told every new applicant not to embark on any weight loss diet while attending Taking the First Steps and all new staff that eating cakes was one of the inevitable aspects of working here.

One of the 'perks' of my job has been the pleasure to pick flowers each week and I'd like our gardeners to know that the walk through the garden early in the morning has given me untold joy and strength.

And our fundraisers, the people who use their creativity (and courage) to initiate and see through all sorts of wonderful events to bring that so much needed extra bit of money, who will organise a garage sale that would never fit into any garage- it took over most of our grounds! Who will give their time generously in creating events like theatre plays or special movie openings, fun runs, Melbourne cup days, sporting events and choose Heartfelt House as the beneficiary.

You all showed our survivors that they are not alone and that there is a heap of people out there who do CARE and don't want anything in return!

And then there is our board. Some of you have been with me on that heartfelt journey all the way to today. Your commitment (for some of you it translated to attending 100 meetings and more), heart and mind have been for me that solid, unwavering, compassionate support, giving us structure and something to lean on..... and there have been several times over the years when I needed to lean on you and was the recipient of your kindness and thoughtfulness. I often felt you walking beside me, without you actually having to be here!

Thank you and please, if you can, continue to give.

And last but definitely not least my amazing team! I decided before starting to write this not to mention any names, for the sole reason that I would absolutely hate forgetting someone. I felt and feel a strong connection to all of you, I have learned so much and felt safe and supported, held when I needed it and inspired by you all. Everyone of you gave something to me that I will treasure and hold in my heart- it's been such an incredible adventure being here with you.

Thank you for your gifts, your trust, your ideas, your support and friendship.

The best thing for me about Heartfelt House has been and is that I never felt I was coming to work, had to go to work. I drove close to a quarter of a million km's to be here and trust me there's no way I would have done that without wanting to be here, to be part of this incredible community and organisation. My wish for the future is that that beautiful heart that is living here will continue to beat loud and strong, so that all survivors who haven't heard it yet will be guided to come to Wollongbar to embark on their journey of discovery, growth and healing...*Blessings to you all und Auf Wiedersehen*

Education from the Heart

Self-Care tips that may help survivors over the holiday season

The holiday season — with the busyness and expectations it brings — can be a particularly stressful and emotional time for adult survivors. Some survivors may experience feelings that are overwhelming such as anxiety, fear, anger and grief. Others may experience feelings of depression and disconnection. It is important to remember that these feelings are common and can be managed with some pre-planning and support from others.

One way to achieve this may be to create a micro self-care package for yourself and have strategies in place early. Think about what things you need to keep yourself safe and look after your wellbeing, health and happiness. Some things to consider:

- ♥ it's ok to take time out for yourself to rest, to repair, to reconnect, to restore and to rejuvenate
- ♥ It's ok to let the people in your environment know you need time out
- ♥ it's ok to ask for help and support before it all gets too big—you know the signs when you start to struggle
- ♥ it's ok to set limits and establish boundaries with your family and friend ahead of time, so be honest with yourself how much you can do and still enjoy the time

If you don't want to participate in the family celebration, explain your feelings to a family member who understands and who will stick up for you. Be sure a knowing relative or friend is with you for support at family functions who will help you to leave if you are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. Have a plan for how you'll excuse yourself if things become too intense such as a code word or a signal.

If you think you'll be alone over the holidays, find healthy ways to occupy yourself, such as volunteering at a community centre or homeless shelter. Take time out and go for a mindful walk in nature, focus on what you smell, see, hear, feel and taste, this may help you feel grounded. Practice mindfulness, deep breathing exercise or do an activity that helps you to feel connected, present and relaxed.

Use an affirmation such as a positive note to self:

The best gift I can give my self is taking the time to practice self-care with compassion and patience.

Self-care is not selfish but a vital act that is part of my wellbeing and happiness.

The organisations below will be available for support over Christmas and New Year:

Lifeline – 131114

Blue Knot – 1300 657 380



Board Report

Well it has been another huge year for HFH and as we race to towards the end of 2018 let's take a little time to reflect on all the amazing work we have achieved this year.

We have received a number of one off grants that will ensure we can continue to offer groups for survivors into 2019. Plans are well under way for recruiting new facilitators and securing additional funding through Victim Services NSW.

We will unfortunately be saying good bye to a number of long serving HFH Board members and Staff. Jan McMullen who has served on the HFH Board on and off since the birth of HFH has now resigned. Jan has been a group participant, a group facilitator, a fund raising champion and a Board member and her insight and thoughtfulness will be greatly missed. Our Secretary Julia Adlington is also stepping down from her position as Secretary which she has held for the last 10 years. She has been a part of the Board for the last 13 years and her calmness and critical thinking will be greatly missed.

We also farewell Heidi Tornow our Program Development Co-ordinator who has guided HFH groups and participants for the last 12 years as a passionate advocate for survivors of child sexual abuse. It is impossible to imagine where HFH would be today if Heidi had not joined the team. I know she has worked tirelessly to ensure that the HFH group program was the best it could be and that as many survivors as possible could attend the program. Her dedication and commitment have been inspiring. On behalf of the Board, I wish Heidi every joy and success as she embarks on this new direction in her life.

Fortunately, Kate and the Board have been working hard on developing an operational plan that will serve us well moving into the future. We have a clear vision for the future and plans to continue fostering positive relationships with other community organisations that will allow HFH to continue to ensure we deliver gold standard care for all group participants.

2019 promises to be a year of change and new opportunities for HFH. I am excited to see how we will respond to the challenges that will face us with new team members, board member and new group participants. I would like to wish everyone involved with HFH a relaxed festive season.

We Thank YOU!

- ♥ **Our participants and their family, friends and supporters**
- ♥ **Our volunteers**
- ♥ **Our external supervisors**
- ♥ **Our Executive Board**
- ♥ **Our Team**

- ♥ **Our professional partners**
- ♥ **Our community members**
- ♥ **Our private donors**
- ♥ **Our 100 Hearts Club members**



Australian Government
Department of Social Services