



Providing Heartstrength  
to Adult Survivors of  
Childhood Sexual Abuse

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# Heart to Hearts

Issue 48

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## A Message from our CEO...

Welcome everyone to our autumn edition. The start to the new year has been active with state and interstate travels. HFH is attracting greater peer-recognition as a valuable stakeholder in the provision of services to survivors and their families. In Brisbane I attended a co-design workshop hosted by Griffith University of Criminology. We discussed the role of the National Centre for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, as recommended by the Royal Commission. Various speakers and organisations were represented on the day. We looked at what are the most important actions the Centre should take to meet the needs of survivors and communities. We discussed a potential model of governance and key principles and values that the Centre should adopt.

I also travelled to Canberra to attend a workshop hosted by the Healing Foundation to discuss key strategies in the establishment of the National Office of Child Safety again, as part of the Australian Government response to the Royal Commission. Discussions centred around the role of the National Office in raising awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, as well as action to be taken to meet the needs of survivors, communities and services.

I was a finalist in the 2019 NSW Regional Woman of the Year Awards and attended the presentation in front of over 400 people in Sydney. The finalists were also invited to attend a reception hosted by His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley. A special thanks to Tamara Smith MP, for my nomination. It was a great honour to represent HFH in a setting that recognised the work of many talented and amazing women who are positively contributing to their respective communities. Thank you for your votes and although I was not the winner, I take away an experience full of hope, gratitude and appreciation.

In the next few months we have some projects that we will be working on as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting adult survivors and their families. We are committed to establishing a new group service for male survivors, as we have noticed an unmet need for many in this area. We appreciate the gravity of this project and will be calling for expressions of interest for professionals in the community for highly qualified group facilitators.

We are also working toward submitting an application to the Blue Knot Foundation professional database as a trauma-informed referred service. This will involve an internal assessment process.

Group 42 'Rainbow Galaxy Voyagers' have started their 18 week journey and they can be proud of their dedication and commitment to healing.

On a final note, the HFH and Southern Cross University research project completed in 2018, was awarded 1st Class Honours. Heartfelt gratitude to the research participants, my supervisors and my mentors for their wisdom, and my family for much needed good times away from the project.

**Namasté**

## Heartfelt House contact details...

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**Website: [www.heartfelthouse.org.au](http://www.heartfelthouse.org.au)**

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 9am-3pm

## A Survivor's Story

"Taking the first Steps" has been the best therapy I have ever participated in my 53 years of life; since starting with psychological therapies on and off since I attempted suicide at 21, with one-on-one therapy.

The group therapy with knowledgeable, sensitive and supportive psychologists and facilitators has truly changed my life. The group setting with other sexually abused adult survivors had made the experience of dealing with all my traumatic issues with compassionate like-survivors, who could share and understand my pain and know I was not alone, as they too knew exactly what I was feeling. We could share our stories without feeling judged, being reprimanded or not believed, in a safe and caring environment.

I found out about HFH from my GP. Putting name and ph number on a yellow stick-it note in my wallet, it was starting to look worn, as I would handle it often, but just return it to my wallet. When finally, I took a deep breath and courageously called that number, because I was facing again traumatic experience of being unsupported and abused by my husband now-a copy of my childhood perpetrator, which brought back all my traumatic memories I had tried so hard to block away in my distant memory.

When I called, I was supported immediately and was on the phone for an hour or more, which was done out of her kindness, no she was not being paid by me and she also offered me to call whenever I just even needed to talk and I did at times.

Furthermore, she would call me at times to see how I was coping with my life and checking in on me regularly until one day I was offered a group placement for the programme. I had to be ready to commit and have the strength of courage to face my traumas and deal with them.

I was a little hesitant and shy on my first day, but the design of the programme truly made me feel comfortable with my group.

The group members have become my peers, supportive new friends. Together we learned to deal with our traumatic sexual abuse and the awareness of how it has affected our whole life and to help each other in every session and at times also outside our sessions.

When our program was completed, I was so grateful to have in my life now a supportive network of new friends who can honestly understand and relate to me.

The group setting has facilitated this support network whereas one-on-one therapy ends, and I again was alone to try and move on. Over time I would relapse with issues as my life changed with my growing family and dealing with each stage of my life. But now with my support network of new, understanding friends and knowing I have HFH there when I need to talk to someone, the best help that keeps on giving, literally keeping me alive and happier. I now know I will cope with any new situation as I can always call for help and know they are always there if I need them. The programme has been so inspirational, I feel, I can move on confidently as a huge cloud has been lifted and I no longer need to feel shame, guilt or hide myself away. I can now face the world freely with internal peace.

Anna

Heartfelt House is life changing and we need more of this work being done throughout Australia and the world. The prevalence of childhood sexual abuse is frightening and extremely disturbing. More needs to be done to protect our children. The damage this abuse causes is overwhelming, long-term, and it robs people of their self-worth and leads to self-destructive behaviours. Please support this crucial work so it can reach more people who are suffering as I was.

The Heartfelt House program is intensive, incredibly well supported and very carefully designed to lead participants gently step by step through the first stages of recovery. The facilitators are extremely highly skilled and every staff member at Heartfelt House is supportive and professional. No child deserves to be sexually abused and no adult should have to go on living a life ruined by the effect of that abuse. Heartfelt House plays such an important role in giving survivors hope and a pathway to recovery.

## **IT News**

You can now see our new website full of the latest news, events and photos.

**We can be found on  
[www.hearfelthouse.org.au](http://www.hearfelthouse.org.au)**

*You can also follow us on Facebook for updates*

Help us go green by signing up for a paperless newsletter via our website or email us at [admin@hearfelthouse.org.au](mailto:admin@hearfelthouse.org.au)



## ***Workshop for supporters of survivors***

### ***Eyes Wide Open***, for family, friends, partners and adult children

*Heartfelt House conducts a 3.5 hour workshop for partners, non-offending parents, family members and friends of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.*

*It is designed to ...*

- ✓ *Educate about the impacts of child sexual abuse*
- ✓ *Educate about grooming and perpetrator tactics*
- ✓ *Dispel myths surrounding childhood sexual abuse*
- ✓ *Present changes in relationships as recovery progresses*
- ✓ *Present how to best support an adult survivor*

***NOTE - Registration is essential as seats are limited, Phone Heartfelt House on (02) 6628 8940***

*When: Tuesday 7th May 2019*

*9.00am: Registration*

*9.30-11.30: The effects Child Sexual Abuse, Dispelling myths, The grooming process*

*11.30-11.45: Morning tea (provided)*

*11.45-12.45: Recovery and Support*

*12.45-1pm: Discussion and Closing*

*Cost: \$65 (inclusive GST) per person, includes workshop booklet and light morning tea refreshments*

*Payment Options: Securely via Paypal on our website Or Cheques payable to Heartfelt House Inc*

*Or Direct Deposit to Westpac account - BSB: 032591 ACCOUNT: 180467 Please include your name and "workshop" in your transaction description*

*Please be aware that some of the content of the workshop may be triggering for people who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse.*

## A grateful heart from our participants

### 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 Lisa x.

Thanks to the wonderful cooks who have given us a taste of your love and appreciation through the food you have provided for the Silver Possums Survivors.

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



Dear Helpers

Working through the program at HFH has been life changing for me. To list all of the outcomes would be impossible as I continue to grow from this work. Certainly, I have more self-worth as a direct result of your input.

Knowing that there are people that care enough to create and maintain beautiful gardens and heart-warming food has helped me to realise I'm worth caring about.

Thank you doesn't seem like enough but I mean it from the bottom of my heart.

With warmth A.



Dear Volunteers,

Thank you for creating a beautiful environment through all your kind contributions.

Arriving by the winding path, through the cared for gardens, greeted by candles, flowers and fresh home baked cooking is such truly gentle and loving support for the heart.

You have created an atmosphere of care and respect on every level that pervades the home - it's an energy I wanted to breath in and maintain as a way of life - to walk into the world within my heart.

## Education from the Heart

### What are the benefits of Group Therapy?

You may be considering group therapy and you may be wondering if being in a group could be of benefit to you? Based on research and evidence collected from Heartfelt House, group therapy aims to educate about the effects of childhood sexual abuse. It may provide its members with a unique relational experience as well as an opportunity for a meaningful and healing journey. One of the benefits of being in a group setting is that it can ease member's sense of isolation, alienation and loneliness. Groups may offer support to people who otherwise may not have a supportive environment around them. This setting can also allow an opportunity to hear from others with similar stories and may help some members increase their sense of belonging and connectedness.

Group therapy aims to instil hope for healing for participants who are at different stages of recovery by helping them to develop new social skills within a safe environment without fear or judgment. Whether it is grappling with anxiety, depression, dissociation, or other adverse effects, groups help relieve the sense of feeling alone. The sharing of challenges and strengths, can increase self-confidence and self-esteem, creating unity within the group while working on a common goal. Participants may also gain a sense of acceptance and peer-validation, which can further help to relive feelings such as shame and guilt. These experiences can increase awareness and aid in normalising feelings and behaviours.

Here at Heartfelt House, the group therapy program called 'Taking the First Steps' is a structured, non-residential 18 week professionally delivered course. Its design aims to support participants in their journey to healing and recovery by creating awareness and providing information about the impacts of abuse on survivors' daily life.

Group therapy is a shared experience that can offer many benefits to its members as it allows a space for self-discovery, can increase their sense of empowerment, help find their own voice, create a new meaning of their abuse, and learn healthy selfcare strategies.



Sanderson, C. (2006) *Counselling Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Yalom, I.D & Leszcz, M. (2005) *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. New York: Basic Books.

For more information about the 'Taking the First Steps' group therapy program please see our website, call us on 02 6628 8940 or email Kim at [info@heartfelthouse.org.au](mailto:info@heartfelthouse.org.au).

**Board Report**

It's a pleasure to write my first report to our HFH supporters as the new board chairperson. I'm very proud to support the work of HFH in providing opportunity for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to take their first steps to a pathway back to better health, relationships and ability to function fully in society.

Firstly, thanks to Sharon Brodie who has stepped down as chairperson, but luckily for us stays on as vice – chairperson giving us the benefit of her history of the organisation and vast professional experience in the field of sexual abuse. Jan McMullan has resigned from the board. Jan was part of the inaugural days of the board and has made a fantastic contribution over all those years ...Thank you to Brendan Bourke, our treasurer, who has also moved on. Stephen Foster has joined us as a new member and brings the wealth of his experience working in health in remote indigenous communities. Heartfelt thanks to all, as well as our other continuing board members who provide ongoing wisdom and compassion.

There are still several vacancies on the board that we are interested in filling with the right expertise. We have an ambitious program for HFH for the next several years. Our big goal is to secure stable and ongoing funding – both government and philanthropic - so that we can move away from concerns about the future. We also believe that working in partnership with the right organisations, our programs can be adapted to fit the needs of male survivors and young people. In particular we are looking for seed funding to develop and pilot these programs. Kate has been very active in the lead-up to both federal and state elections to reinforce the needs of survivors and the role of HFH among all aspiring candidates.

Joanna Palser, Chairperson

**We Thank YOU!**

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|----------------------------------|--|
| ♥ Anglican Parish of Alstonville | Anglican Parish of Lismore and Parish of Ballina |
| ♥ Alstonville Cricket Club       | Ballina Red Cross                                |
| ♥ Our private donors             | Lismore Ladies Benevolent Society                |
| ♥ Our 100 Hearts Club members    | Our garden maintenance team                      |
| ♥ Our friendly I.T. specialist   | Catholic Diocese of Lismore                      |



**Australian Government**  


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**Department of Social Services**