

IMPACTS OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE

a) The Rape by an Older Boy

- Feeling that I am a bad person because this bad thing happened to me. And because I am a bad person and have sinned I will go to hell and I will burn in hell. We were taught about 'sinning' in our Christian upbringing.
- I don't want to be in the same space with the male who did this to me. When I see him I can say hello but I don't want any more than this. At our last Retta Dixon reunion he came out and greeted my husband and me when we arrived. I thought how dare he, come up to me like nothing had happened. After he walked away I told my husband his name and said he's the one who raped me. We both had very different immense feelings. After hearing that Danila Dilba had counsellors there all I wanted to do was go up to him and say, come on you and I are going to go and talk about what you did to me. I didn't do this and think that I still need to do this.
- Not wanting to tell and keeping my secret for nearly 20years.
- Trying to hide from my husband that I wasn't a virgin and going through a very difficult time with him when I did finally divulge after being together for 10years. Feeling that I was 'sinning' every time we had sex while I wasn't married. My sexual life with my husband who I have been with since I was 15years has been seriously affected.

b) The Rape, Sexual Advances, Traps and Lures that came from Older Boys

- I have this thing in my head that Aboriginal males are not really interested in me as a person and who I am. They are only want to know me or talk to me because they want to get into my pants.
- I like to know and be prepared and aware of where danger may come at me from.
- I feel scared when alone at night and in spaces where I think someone could be lurking or hiding around a corner, behind a bush, wall, door or under a bed. I survey the area and things in the spaces I am about to move into. I plan and think out where to walk, what I am armed with and how to get myself to the safe place which is usually a wall or door at my back. I feel great relief inside my body when I'm in a safe space or when I know or see people who I know I can feel safe with.
- I jump and am jumpy sometimes when a males comes up behind me unannounced. One of my old bosses after realising this used to whistle as he approached me or came into my space unawares and this helped me.

c) Feeling Alone

Feeling alone and being alone is a space both as a child and as an adult that I am used to. I often feel alone and go into my own space and to a place when I need to just be. I know that my alone place is about me and it is the only space that I am in control of.

- Being consumed with guilt that I've let my brothers Kenny and Kevin down because they also were subjected to sexual abuses in the 'home. I didn't take care of them. As a Stagg family my brothers Kenny and Kevin, our sister Beverly and I didn't have our Mum and our Dad to turn to, feel that we belonged and know what it meant to be loved as children.
- Sometimes when things get too hard or difficult for me I go 'walkabout in my mind'. This can involve me being alone or with people or around me. It is where I go for peace and healing. Going 'walkabout in my mind' I can focus, feel I am in control, and channel my energy into putting myself at ease or to find peace. I know that when I come back from going 'walkabout in my mind', I will be out in the open and exposed.
- Those of us who have grown up in 'the home' either as children who have been sexually abused, been an abuser or a witness of sexual abuses have all been in this space alone as individuals, families and Retta Dixon Home kids.

d) Children were not safe and were not protected

- We as children lived our lives where there was no one person, God, nor the welfare system, government or institution that kept us safe and protected from the sexual abuses that occurred in Retta Dixon.
- There was a culture of sexual abuse that was a big thing and a horrible thing that happened to probably nearly every single child that grew up in the Home. It continued over the life of the 'home' and it was not stopped. It was kept silent, and by some not even considered as could possibly be occurring.
- This stuff that was happening was not right and was not Christian! All the prayers in the world and seeking forgiveness from God would not stop it, make it go away or make you feel you were not a bad person.
- The sexual abuses was another layer of the rude and almost brutal disregard and stronghold that individuals, governments and institutions had for us and over us as Aboriginal children. To me it is almost saying what you have or who you are as an Aboriginal identity is not okay and that is why you are in protective care and while you are in here don't challenge, talk about or even hope that anything will change for the better for you, because we know what is best for you and that is why you are in Retta Dixon.
- I have tried to use my own personal tragedies and negative experiences to be a good person, take a proactive role to be out there, be a positive role model and mentor to others. I want to empower others to be a positive advocate, voice and support for our more vulnerable people, children and families and to help in creating safe, open and honest places and spaces where sexual abuses can stop before they start.

REDRESS

- a) Formal apology accepting sexual abuses occurred, that it was wrong, and acknowledging the responsibility that individuals, governments and institutions had and didn't uphold to keep us children safe and protected while in care. The apology to be:
 - A formal and open apology to all the children as a group who grew up at Retta Dixon Home and who were exposed and subjected to sexual abuses in their daily lives.
 - A personal apology to me, Veronica Johns, for the sexual abuses that I endured while a child growing up in Retta Dixon Home and to every other individual who has shared their story of sexual abuse while in the care and protection of Retta Dixon Home.
- b) Financial compensation for myself and other individuals for the heartache and the ongoing resulting effects and impact of sexual abuse that we were subjected to while in the care and protection of Retta Dixon Home.
- c) Substantial counselling for individuals, groups and families to work through the heartache and ongoing effects and impact of sexual abuse while growing up in Retta Dixon Home.

DESIRED OUTCOMES FROM THE ROYAL COMMISSION

When considering what is required to achieve best practice for vulnerable Aboriginal children in protective care:

- Compliance of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and tools to support its application.
- The spoken, silent and unspoken stories of the Aboriginal child who is removed from their family, people, country, language and heritage and what they need in being nurtured, kept close, safe and protected to ensure their heart, mind, body, soul and spirit is strong and able to stay strong.
- Regular, ongoing and meaningful contact, connection and communication with their Aboriginal family and people and where they can feel proud and strong in their cultural identity, belonging and heritage. Where and as often as possible contact being on 'Country' which for some children and their families may be across borders in another State/ Territory.
- Culturally appropriate evaluation, quality assurance systems, tools, information and supports at both operational and policy levels.
- Identifying and utilising key Aboriginal groups and individuals in a real and meaningful way to advocate, support and inform the processes that see vulnerable Aboriginal children placed into protective care.
- The children themselves to be able to have a meaningful role, place and voice in the decision making processes to create safe, open and trusting relationships for themselves and within spaces and places that support and strengthen their social, emotional and cultural well-being.