

Apology – Ashram Mangrove Mountain

On this our 40th Anniversary it is not sufficient to focus only on our many successes and positive developments but must, in so doing, also acknowledge past wrongs and, in particular, acknowledge those who have been individually hurt and made to carry heavy burdens and psychological scars that have resulted from those wrongs.

We of the Ashram community, administration and leadership collectively reflect on past mistreatments. We reflect in particular on those mistreated in the 1970/80's during the early years of the ashram, a time that has left a dark blemish on our early history; a blemish that must now be exposed to the light of day - for all to see.

Today, in celebrating our 40th Anniversary, the time has come for us wherever possible to correct past wrongs, acknowledging our failures and move forward with renewed vigour and energy embracing the future in a clear understanding that some of our community have been hurt and forever damaged. It is to them speak now.

We apologise for the lack of oversight which allowed weak minded people to assume unbridled authority and in so doing were allowed to inflict pain and suffering on those who selflessly gave of themselves in order to build the foundations of what we see here today.

We apologise to those who gave of themselves, of their financial resources, of their personal labour and who, when they needed understanding and support were ignored and shunned, then lost the community that their sweat, heart and spirit had help to start.

We apologise to the children who were beaten, intimidated, belittled and deprived of comfort and deprived of the innocence of childhood through a system that failed to protect them. This was their right and our duty and they were let down by some misguided view of what constituted discipline.

There were children who were made to feel that their attachment to their parents was wrong who were made to feel emotionally isolated and who were put down when they expressed themselves as best they could. To those children we are truly sorry.

We apologise to the children who were hit with sticks and suffered other physical assaults. Some were made to work extremely hard as punishment, some were physically isolated and deprivation of food. The 3 year old forced into a cold shower in the early hours for wetting the bed.

Some children were punished by denying them meals, others were neglected and not provided proper medical treatment for broken bones. Whereas others were made to walk barefoot in winter; to those we say sorry.

We apologise to the young girls who were sexually abused and made to feel that their compliance was somehow necessary for their spiritual development and then left

unsupported, and un-believed, at a time when they most needed our unreserved trust and support.

There were girls who were groomed and manipulated into freely complying with behaviour that ultimately was an abuse of their innocence and trust. To them we are truly sorry.

We apologise to the parents who in giving of themselves left their children in what they thought were safe hands only to spend the rest of their lives living with the guilt of their hurt children.

We apologise to the whistle blowers. They had the courage to stand-up, to be counted and were ignored, threaten, criticised, not believed and ostracised from their own community for no other reason other than speaking the truth.

There are those amongst us today who were there during those times. Some were unaware of the dreadful things taking place behind closed doors? Some were conditioned into compliance, brainwashed and or just felt powerlessness yet because of their association, have been unjustly left with the years of guilt for things they couldn't have done anything about; this is called survivors guilt. To them we say sorry.

For our future to be built on solid ground it must be built on openness and transparency and a recognition of your suffering and say sorry to you all without reservation or condition.

Since that time the Ashram has renewed itself. We have learnt from our mistakes and have ensured that these terrible times of 30 years ago, and more, cannot be repeated.

We have for many years now implemented matrix management system to ensure that never again can power be left in the hands of one person.

We have implemented best practice policies and procedures that allow anyone to raise a confidential grievance and know that there issue will be heard without judgement.

We not only meet but also exceed the NSW working with Children guidelines. Everyone who is a resident, whether volunteer or employee must be approved as someone who is safe to work with children.

These things in no way absolves us from our past but shows that we have learnt from it.

May the Haven to follows allow us all to heal and seek renewal and invigoration so together we might walk the path ahead as a community in shared spirit, forgiveness and understanding.