

Hari Om

I'm writing on behalf of the Working Together Task Force, a group that has formed to support Mangrove ashram in finding a way to acknowledge and support all who are affected by the abuses carried out under Swami Akhandananda's leadership.

In developing a direction for this, we are seeking to be honest and authentic in our approach, which means exploring various avenues. As part of this process we have sought guidance from the Royal Commission, from an HR consultant and just last week we had meetings at Mangrove with an organization called Real Justice (www.realjustice.org). We have also been communicating as much as possible with the survivors of the abuse, because we believe that the only way to make a difference is by trying to understand your feelings and needs, and by fostering positive relationships. This is a new journey for us, and we are still developing a map that is appropriate for this particular situation.

Real Justice is an organization that works with an approach known as restorative justice. It is an international movement that assists individuals and groups like us who seek sensitive, truly meaningful ways of healing and finding peace due to crimes that have been perpetrated. They help victims, their families and also those who committed the crimes to move past shame and into mutually supportive relationships. As such, we feel that there is much to be gained by engaging with their methods, which are inclusive, heartfelt and aligned with our principles and values.

We acknowledge that each person affected is at their own stage of a very personal journey. We have certainly learned this by hearing from people individually, whether through Facebook, email, letters, by phone or in person. The current Mangrove administration is committed to supporting healing and the search we all have for peace of mind and peace of heart. We sincerely and compassionately hope that you give us a chance to assist you. We do not know all the answers, but we are open to discovering them.

In light of our discussions, the Easter program has been adjusted to incorporate an extended workshop facilitated by Real Justice. It is open to all who wish to attend and we envisage an ongoing support process evolving from this workshop. The formal apology will not be given as such, as the feedback we had from those to whom we were making it was that they were not prepared to accept such an apology, and we therefore felt it was untimely. Therefore, the day is dedicated to acknowledgement and finding a truly appropriate way forward. The attached letter is being sent to Mangrove's Easter visitors and to teachers. It gives more details about what is now happening. We want you to know how we are communicating with our whole community.

We realise not everyone can come or wants to come to the Easter gathering. Please be assured that you can still be part of this. The restorative process is one that unfolds, it is not a fixed plan. We hope that you will let us know if you are interested in engaging with what we are undertaking – if so, we will work with you to find the way that is most appropriate for you. This does not end with Easter Sunday, rather it is a fresh beginning.

Sincerely,
Ahimsadhara for
Working Together Task Force