

The first step towards national healing

The tragedy of child sex abuse in Australia has featured prominently in the media over the past week.

Desperate stories of children sexually assaulted in detention centres comes only weeks after the *Forgotten Children Report* was released by the Human Rights Commission outlining the incidence of sexual abuse in detention centres.

To add to the heartbreak, research by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education this week reveals that one in five Australian children have been affected by the drinking of others.

It is important that child sex abuse is widely covered by the media so that we have a full appreciation and understanding of the extent and scale of the problem. The Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse public hearings has certainly drawn attention to the widespread problem within Institutions.

I am concerned that, with so much attention and exposure given to abuse cases, our sensitivity and understanding of the real and immediate needs of survivors may be diminished.

The extent of the problem within our community must drive us to work hand-in-hand with all levels of government, religious groups and other institutions to find practical solutions for survivors so they have the chance to live a rewarding and fulfilled life.

The scope of the Royal Commission does not include the alarming rate of child sex abuse in domestic and community settings. Regardless of this, as a country we must remain fully committed to addressing child sex abuse - wherever and whenever the abuse occurs.

The first opportunity we have to show our commitment to survivors is in our deliberations regarding a national redress scheme for people who have been sexually abused in institutional settings.

This will require an inclusive and cooperative approach from everyone. For too long survivors of child sex abuse have had to rely, either on the good will (or not) of institutions, or the precarious civil litigation system.

It is now time to develop a generous and fair national redress scheme so that, at the very least, survivors of child sex abuse can receive some justice. It is incumbent on everyone working together to agree on a scheme that will provide the best outcomes for survivors.

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I know that many survivors hope the redress will go beyond sexual abuse and include, physical, emotional and psychological abuse. The government rejected this proposal by narrowing the Royal Commission's terms of reference to sexual abuse in institutional settings.

If we can establish a national redress scheme, where survivors recognise that they can receive generous reparations for the tragic events in their life, then we have taken a step in the right direction.

A step that is indicative of our values and an important first step towards national healing.

Francis Sullivan
26 February 2015
www.tjhcouncil.org.au