



## WELCOME TO THE SEPTEMBER 2012 EDITION OF THE LAUREL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

The Laurel House Newsletter is produced and circulated amongst clients, service providers and the community to raise awareness of the services available at Laurel House. It is also a venue to give advanced notice of upcoming groups and projects for survivors. There will also be a number of articles about Sexual Assault, stories from survivors, and links to other services for your information.

You can also view this newsletter on our website:  
[www.laurelhouse.org.au](http://www.laurelhouse.org.au)

During 2012 we plan to provide readers with information on belief and the importance of believing victims/survivors of sexual assault

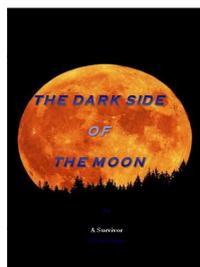
### About Laurel House

Laurel House offers a wide range of services to all members of the community, including victims of recent rape and sexual assault (both adults, children and their families and support people) adult survivors of child sexual abuse (historical sexual abuse) community education to any group, school, or organisation, and professional training to service providers in other agencies. We also offer debriefing and supervision to professionals working with victims/survivors of sexual assault.

Our Organisation offers outreach services to women, men and children within the 63 telephone region of Tasmania. These areas currently include Deloraine, Westbury, Longford, Campbell Town, St Marys, St Helens, Bicheno, Beaconsfield, Exeter, and Georgetown, with services to Scottsdale available as the need arises.

Telephone support is available to other rural areas.

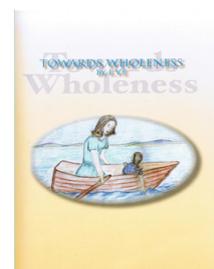
### Books



Laurel House has 2 books available for purchase

*Dark Side of the Moon*, which documents a survivor's journey through life so far; and *Towards Wholeness* a condensed account of the author's own recovery process.

Please contact the Laurel House office on 6334 2740 or email [admin@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:admin@laurelhouse.org.au) for further information or to order your copy.



# Announcements...

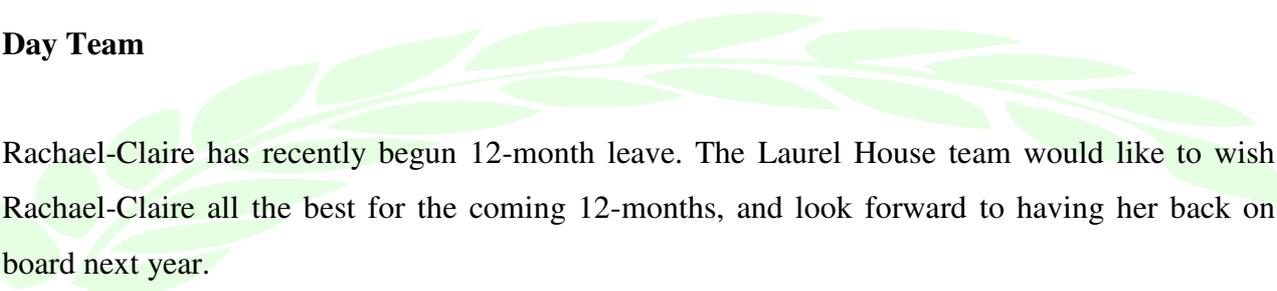
## On Call Workers

Laurel House is currently on the lookout for workers to join our On Call Team. Laurel House On Call workers are on duty from 5 p.m.—8.30 a.m. Monday-Friday, and offer a 24-hour service over weekends and public holidays.

We have recently welcomed Nicola to the Team, and look forward to working with her in the future. We also farewelled Mel, who has been an integral member of the Team since 2010.

If you would be interested in joining the Team, or if you have any questions, please contact Jacinta on 6334 2740 or [admin@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:admin@laurelhouse.org.au)

## Day Team



Rachael-Claire has recently begun 12-month leave. The Laurel House team would like to wish Rachael-Claire all the best for the coming 12-months, and look forward to having her back on board next year.

Laurel House is also currently on the lookout for a new member of our Day Team.

If you are interested in finding out more, or applying for the Counsellor/Educator position, please contact Jacinta on 6334 2740 or [admin@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:admin@laurelhouse.org.au)

## Community Education

Laurel House workers are currently involved in developing and delivering community education programmes for schools in Deloraine, Lilydale, St Marys, Smithton, Queenstown, Roseberry, and Burnie.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Community Education programmes offered by Laurel House, or if you would like a programme to be tailored to suit your organisation, please email [counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au)

# Children's Voices

## Their Experience of Professional Interventions

“The problem with these people is that... They don't want to hear the truth because the truth is so much harder to understand and so much longer than a lie about the truth.” – 12-year-old female

### Introduction

How do children feel about the various professionals who are part of the child protection system and who may become involved when a child has been abused? These professionals may include child protection workers, police, counsellors (psychologists, psychiatrists or social workers, or family court counsellors), school counsellors and people working within the legal and court systems. Depending on the nature of the abuse and the particular family situation, any one of these professionals may be the first to become involved with the child and/or the family. The responses of these professionals may be different depending on their role within the child protection system. For example, a protective worker may focus on the protection and welfare of the child, while the police may be more concerned about collecting evidence for the prosecution of an offender. This chapter presents children's views of how they experienced interventions by certain professionals.

### General comments on professional interventions

#### *Just not helpful*

This 12-year-old girl believes that some professionals are not helpful, they find the truth too hard to deal with and they therefore tend to side with adults rather than listen to the child:

“The problem with Miss [children's court counsellor]...was she didn't want to believe the truth and that's always the problem with these people, they don't want to believe the truth, they just want to believe the easiest side, the side that is easiest to, that is the simplest, basically...so then they get paid and go on to the next on and just pick the simplest out of that. They don't want to hear the truth because the truth is so much harder to understand and so much longer than a lie about the truth.” (12-year-old female)

She seems to have a definite view that a professional's role is to listen to a child:

“I mean, people like that are supposed to listen, they're not supposed to sit there and tell you what you're thinking or what you're feeling, because that's what she was doing, just sitting there and telling me what's right.” (12-year-old female)

Another young person was also unhappy with the way the report was made to child protection services by a sexual assault counsellor. She felt unprepared, not consulted and overlooked:

“I just wished to hell that the girl that I was seeing took time to explain things to me...maybe speak to me first about what [child protection] was, why she wanted to contact them. Maybe we could have worked something out, rather than [for me] to just get this phone call out of the blue saying well, you know, someone else is involved now. (18-year-old female)

An 11-year-old boy said that the first counsellor he saw 'knew nothing':

“I had two [counsellors]; one before that was very, didn't know nothing. I forget the name...because it was like six years ago or something. She just didn't know much about counselling and all that. We'd talk about it and then she'd [say], righto, see you tomorrow, something like that.” (11-year-old male)

#### *I've heard it all before*

This 18-year-old young person describes in some detail how important the response from a professional is when a child is talking about or disclosing details of abuse:

“Um, another huge problem I have...er...is...you know, you start talking about a particular abuse or incident that happened, it's something that you've never talked about and you know, it's painful and all that, and...it's huge for you to get it out and you just...you know, think oh shit,

and the person at the other end goes, oh yeah, well okay, we're going to have to do this, this or that, and that's okay, we'll do whatever. I mean they just kind of treat you like they've heard this a million times before, they've become immune to hearing these sorts of things. (18-year-old female)

She makes it clear that responses that minimise the abuse are quite shattering:

“I think it's really important that, when I reveal some incident and they just sort of blow it off, or whatever, it feels like a kick in the teeth, like it's not that big an issue because they've heard bigger and worse this and that and whatever. It's so important no matter how many times you've heard that kind of thing happening, that you treat it like it's a first time.” (18-year-old female)

#### *He's too difficult to deal with*

This 13-year-old boy felt that some professionals tend to reject children who are classified as too difficult to engage with:

“there was only a couple [of psychologists], but like, half of them were just stuffing me around, like all they wanted to do was just do their stupid, dumb job or something, but they didn't actually really care about me. It was just like...oh, you know, you know, he is too, you know... why don't we just forget about him? And...they didn't have to do that, you know, you don't do that to people. Well, in my book, you don't anyway.” (13-year-old male)

#### *Being believed*

The importance of professionals believing children and letting them tell their story is eloquently verbalised by this 12-year-old girl who feels very angry at the reaction of this counsellor:

“It was weird, I didn't have a choice [about counselling]...it was ordered by the court. I didn't want to go 'cos I had people before who didn't believe me. Professional people have said, like I'm mentally unstable and that Mum's telling me all this stuff and it's all in my head. Well, we went to see this person...she started telling me, oh this happened and that didn't happen, and my mum could hear me from in the foyer crying, and here's me sitting in front of...and she just told me what's what...and that I wasn't abused and that all this in my head isn't real but my mum's been putting it in my head. She was telling me what I thought and I was just saying, that's not it. (12-year-old female)

#### *Courts should 'have their bloody consideration right' and listen to kids*

Some children believed that there should be an opportunity for courts to hear what children have to say. This boy is critical about the fact that the courts do not make provision to accommodate a child's testimony:

“because the courts didn't listen to me when I was young. They didn't even want to put me in court, you know, little do they know what happened to me, you know. You know, it is sort of unfair when you think about it, hey?” (13-year-old male)

He is scathing about the inadequate response of the court to the abuser:

“As far as I am concerned, and sorry for saying this, but if you ask me...you know the system is well and truly stuffed. Because like, you know, he could just get married or something and do the same thing, Well, I reckon what should happen is that the umm, people in the courts should have the bloody consideration and...I reckon us kids should have the right to be listened to, when or whenever we need to be helped, and when we are in danger.” (13-year-old male)

He goes on to say that counsellors should be allowed to represent the child in court and that the legal system should make allowance for this:

“Yeah, actually I reckon they should get, get the authority from the police...if you believe what the kid is saying, that the person who is actually doing it, can actually get charged straight away for what he has done. And the person, the counsellor should go to court with them [the child] and represent them to the judge and jury, and if the kid doesn't know exactly what to say – you know, tell him, making him say the main stuff, what has happened, and you know, and let the counsellor say the rest, because he or her [the child] starts getting too emotional.” (13-year-old male)

#### *Professionals come and go*

Several children were seen by many different professionals:

“Yeah, I had about a hundred of 'em, probably. No, not a hundred, but...yeah, a few.” (13-year-old male)

“Well, there was a whole range of agencies involved in this. Yeah, and between that time there's probably been four or five counsellors and probably psychiatrists that Mum and Dad sent me to.” (18-year-old female)

#### *A different kind of counsellor*

This 11-year-old girl describes her first experience of a counsellor:

“this counsellor had a Maltese terrier and she was actually more talking to Mum and Dad, but I was actually getting my own counselling with the dog, I was talking with the dog [laughs]. I had all my feelings bottled up into this box and I had to draw the box and then we burnt the picture and that sort of, it then sort of made me, well, sort of relieved. Which I know sounds really weird because I burnt this picture of something and it sort of made me a little bit better. (11-year-old female)

This 18-year-old young person viewed her experience with the school counsellor as very positive:

“I built a pretty good friendship with her [the school counsellor]. Up until then I had never sort of talked to anyone about really anything, it was fantastic to have something that I could go to talk to, and the thing is we didn't just talk about the yucky stuff, I could just go in there if I was feeling a bit down and we'd just talk about whatever, gardening, dogs, whatever. So, it was something.” (18-year-old female)

Taken from *The Truth is Longer Than a Lie: Children's Experiences of Abuse and Professional Interventions*, Neerosh Mudaly and Chris Goddard, 2006.

# Lack of trust in the legal system keeps sex assault victims silent in Victoria

**Katie Bice**

**Herald Sun**

**September 09, 2012**

More than half of sex assault victims in Victoria don't report the crime because they fear the legal system, a new study reveals.

The survey of Victorian victims found 66 per cent worried about not being believed and 52 per cent said they lacked confidence in the legal system.

The research comes as:

Figures reveal that on average for every sex offender convicted at trial, another accused is cleared;

Prosecutors ask the Court of Appeal for an increase in sentences for rape, declaring the five-year average to be inadequate; and

Experts want juries given more information to help them understand the psyche of victims.

Professor Caroline Taylor, from Edith Cowan University in WA, said her study showed victims still feared encountering stigma and stereotypes both from the community and the justice system.

She said sex offences were marked by low conviction rates.

"Sexual offences are the least likely cases to result in conviction than any other crime," she said.

Those accused of a sexual offence are, I think, four times more likely to be acquitted than any other person accused of a non-sexual offence."

Statistics from the Office of Public Prosecutions show it continues to struggle to keep the conviction rate at trial above 50 per cent.

In 2009/10 it dipped as low as 38.5 per cent, despite the number of cases being resolved at trial increasing. The rate climbed back up to 56 per cent in the most recent financial year, the highest figure in almost a decade.

Prof Taylor said cases became difficult when drugs, alcohol or sleeping were involved and the people concerned were known to each other.

"The use of alcohol and drugs can affect memory recall thus making it very hard for the victim to give an accurate account of what happened," she said.

"There is also a perception that if a victim is drinking or using drugs that they are somehow deserving of what follows.

"The law says that a person so affected by alcohol or drugs is not capable of consenting and, of course, a person asleep cannot consent, so in law it seems fairly straightforward.

"But, of course, in the courtroom it is all blurred in terms of how it is teased out and presented."

Prof Taylor said there had been good law reform in the area but it was not filtering down into practice.

"We have a legal system that is adversarial and based on 'story telling' and rape myths, and rape stereotypes are alive and living very well within the legal system," she said.

Prof Taylor called on opinion evidence to be more widely used, allowing juries to learn the social and cultural factors affecting victims.

"Currently, defence lawyers have reacted very strongly to prevent this being introduced in court and many judges have supported them," she said.

"We really need to demand more accountability and transparency of judges and lawyers because they continue to stultify progress and work towards maintaining the types of stereotypes that continue to underpin rape cases."

## Useful Websites and Contact Numbers

### Children

Bravehearts Inc. [www.bravehearts.org.au](http://www.bravehearts.org.au)

Australian Childhood Foundation [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)

Kids Help Line [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

### Attempted Suicide and/or Self harm

Safe in Oz Pty Ltd. [www.safeinoz.com.au](http://www.safeinoz.com.au)

Time Out Programme [www.timeout.org.au](http://www.timeout.org.au) Mobile: 0407 102 140

Beyond Blue [www.ybblue.com.au](http://www.ybblue.com.au)

### Crisis Counselling

Laurel House [www.laurelhouse.org.au](http://www.laurelhouse.org.au) Telephone 6334 2740 or after hours 0409 800 394

Sexual Assault Support Service Hobart Telephone 6231 1811

North West Centre Against Sexual Assault Telephone 6431 9711

Lifeline [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) Telephone 131 114

Samaritans Tas Launceston Telephone 6331 3355 Rest of Tasmania 1300 364 566

24-hour Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Support—1800 Respect (1800 737 732)

Eating Disorders/Body Image—Tasmanian Eating Disorders Support Service—0439 189 886

## **Would you like to contribute to the Laurel House newsletter?**

Laurel House is looking for people to contribute stories, poems and artwork to the newsletter to share with survivors of sexual assault, family members and service providers. Items can be published anonymously if requested. If you would like to contribute something to the newsletter please send to:

[counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au) or PO Box 1062 Launceston, 7250. All items will be carefully considered and published in upcoming newsletters.

We would appreciate any feedback or suggestions that you may have as we continue to develop our newsletter. Please call us on 6334 2740 or email

[counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au)

### **Laurel House**

PO Box 1062, Launceston 7250

Phone weekdays 8:30am – 5pm

**(03) 6334 2740**

After Hours Crisis Line

**0409 800 394**

Fax: (03) 6334 4234

Email: [counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au](mailto:counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au)

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