
From:
Sent: Thursday, 12 November 2015 8:33 PM
To: Advocacy and Support
Subject: Re: Submission to the Royal Commission on issues related to advocacy and support and/or therapeutic treatment services.
Attachments: Heal for Life - OUR MODEL OF HEALING.docx
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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██████████ I am writing to you after a great deal of thought and deliberation about an organisation I am involved with, Heal For Life (HFL).

I am a survivor of serial sexual abuse during my childhood years, and am alive today only because of God's grace and the help I received from the wonderful healing program at HFL. In the years that followed, I trained as a Peer Support Volunteer in order to be able to help others as I was helped. ██████████

Over 5,500 people have been helped with healing and virtually 100% have described the program as "life-changing", "very positive" and "positive" and echoes the comments from the thousands of people whose lives, including mine, have been transformed by this wonderful, safe, and successful program.

To put HFL's achievements into perspective, in 2013 there were some 176 adult guests who attended healing weeks (plus young women and children). At the close of the adult programs guests were invited to complete an anonymous survey. Not one ticked "sorry I came" or "poor". 64.8% of adult guests rated the program "life changing", with 29.5% "very positive", and 5.7% "positive". That adds up to 100% - an outstanding achievement, recognised internationally. The HFL program is well proven and in fact the University of Newcastle is supporting PhD research to prove scientifically the effectiveness of the HFL programs.

I attach a link to some of the thousands of testimonials received, many from Health Professionals involved in Trauma-Informed Healing:

<http://www.healforlife.com.au/health-professionals/testimonials/>

To further highlight our view of the effectiveness of our programs, CEO Liz Mullinar recently attended a major "International Trauma Conference" held by the Australian Childhood Foundation, which had about 2,000 attendees, and numerous speakers – of whom Liz was one. She felt that the service HFL is providing is in the top echelon of what any organisation is currently providing.

The Heal for Life Model has been subject to extensive research. Dr Christine Edwards has told us Heal For Life is probably the most researched mental health program in Australia. Studies conclude our programs have beneficial outcomes and we are proud of this. We will continue participating in extensive research over the next five years to provide further evidence of the success of our work. Learning will be applied by incorporating new knowledge and research into practice to further improve the effectiveness of our programs.

Here is a link to some of the research:

<http://www.healforlife.com.au/health-professionals/research/>

There are currently two separate research projects being conducted by two Ph. D students from the University of Newcastle. Results will be published when they are complete.

I ask as a survivor of serial sexual and emotional abuse, for you to help in whatever way you can to support the work of an organisation that seeks only to help survivors of abuse and trauma to heal. Run by survivors, for survivors, with professional supervision, it provides a safe place for that healing.

I attach for your further information an outline of the HFL Healing Model.

Thank you for accepting this submission and I earnestly ask you to get HFL involved in the healing process that this country so needs.

Yours Faithfully

OUR MODEL OF HEALING

Our Model of Healing:

Our programs are run by survivors of child abuse, for survivors of child abuse. We believe that survivors understand other survivors best. Our guests appreciate being supported by people who truly understand the pain, confusion and suffering that comes from childhood trauma. We carefully select and train survivors, who are dedicated to their own healing, to 'walk alongside' our guests.

Safety. We recognise it is vitally important for survivors to feel safe. We cannot heal unless we feel safe. Confidentiality is strictly upheld and we strive to ensure each guest feels safe at all times.

All trauma is equal. Science has shown that trauma affects the brain. the level of impact is dependent on many different factors . We judge how bad the abuse was by how much the person has been affected not by the label given to the abuse.

Living in Community. We aspire to live as a loving, healthy, functioning community. Guests, peer support volunteers and facilitators join together in all aspects of the healing week, including spiritual reflections, preparing and sharing meals and community work.

Understanding of Power / Authority. We recognise our abuse has made us very sensitive to power. All people are treated equally and with respect. All members of the community are treated equally and we do not 'tell', advise, try to 'fix' or 'control' anyone.

Survivors take responsibility for their healing in order to regain their own power. Our guests refer themselves to our programs; when they want to come, **not** when others want them to! Each person is encouraged and expected to be responsible for their own actions, emotions and behaviour. Guests are supported to develop their own insights, make their own decisions and choices and realise they have the answers within themselves.

Survivors connect with their trauma for effective healing. Scientific research supports what we, as survivors, have intuitively known: to facilitate healing we must unlock and express the emotions that we 'shut down' when we were traumatised as children to enable us to survive. Our guests are lovingly supported to re-connect with, and re-empower the 'child' part of themselves – the part of themselves that felt the pain and can still be carrying the memories of their trauma. While it can be a relief for survivors to tell their story, be heard and believed, our primary focus is the acknowledgement and expression of the emotion associated with trauma.

No time limits. We encourage our guests to stay with the process of healing throughout the week and guests decide what is right for them from our program. Our guests are lovingly encouraged to continue their journey of healing when they leave and are invited to return to us as many times as they need to. We do ask they leave a three-month period between healing weeks to achieve maximum benefit.

Mutual learning. We use all opportunities to learn from each other. It is understood that guests, peer support volunteers and facilitators are all survivors of child abuse and childhood trauma and everyone has the responsibility to grow and learn throughout the healing week.

Unconditional love, acceptance and understanding. At Heal For Life survivors are heard, believed and validated. We express our love and compassion for each other and share our feelings each day.

Connection with a higher power. Heal For Life is run on the teachings of Jesus (equality, non-judgmental, caring). However, our guests are encouraged to explore their **own** spirituality. People of all faiths are welcome and we believe that connection with a source of 'Higher Power' is an important factor in an holistic healing model.

Our Philosophy of Healing:

- The Heal For Life Foundation believes that every person has the innate ability to heal from childhood trauma and abuse.
- Our innovative healing programs are based on the latest neuroscience research, combined with our own anecdotal and intuitive knowledge. All of us who devised the program are ourselves survivors of childhood trauma and child abuse.
- We consider it essential for each person to be in control of their own healing journey, as each person knows best what they need to do in order to heal.
- We see healing as holistic i.e. involving body, mind and spirit.
- We believe feeling loved accepted and validated is essential for a person to heal.
- We believe that those of us who have suffered child abuse or childhood trauma are the most able to understand and help others to heal.
- All people, regardless of race, religion, gender, culture or sexual preference have the right to heal.

The Objectives of our Healing Programs:

By the end of this Healing Week, we hope our guests will be able to:

- Find and establish a safe place, either in reality or in their imagination.
- Recognise the importance of feeling safe.
- Be in touch with their 'inner child' and recognise the importance of this relationship for their own healing.
- Love, re-parent and re-empower their victim 'inner child'.
- Demonstrate by the way they speak and act that they are beginning to love themselves.
- Actively engage in, and take responsibility for, their own journey of healing.
- Actively counteract feelings of shame or guilt by fully appreciating that childhood abuse was not their fault.
- Use knowledge of the effects of trauma on the brain to explain how the changes in their own developing brain have affected their emotional and behavioural patterns.

- Use knowledge of their attachment style in childhood to understand and begin to change their current relationships with others.
- Demonstrate developing skills in the use of new tools that can help when in crisis or when entering a challenging situation.
- Demonstrate increasing self responsibility in daily living which shows respect for the interconnectedness between physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health.
- Apply the principles of Transactional Analysis so as to improve relationship with self and to counteract negative parental messages learned in childhood.
- Continue to practice setting appropriate boundaries with self and others.
- Feel confident to apply what they have learned during the healing week to their situation when they get home or their day to day living.
- Laugh more often and find more joy in living.

Strategies for the Healing Programs:

The following strategies are used in delivery of our programs:

- Educate guests as to the importance of safety and of having a safe place.
- Provide the resources for creative expression to allow guests to connect with the right side of brain e.g. use non-dominant hand to paint, work with clay.
- Help guests to connect with their 'inner child' via visualisations.
- Explain to guests in each workshop the importance of loving the 'inner child'. Let the guests discover for themselves what happens when they give time and love to their 'inner child'.
- Ensure the community life aspect of the program is functional and non-abusive.
- Empower the guests by encouraging them to make their own decisions in relation to healing and future action.
- Active listening.
- Explain fully to the guests in Tuesday's workshop why children cannot be responsible for what happens to them.
- Teach attachment theory to the guests so they can understand their relationship with others.
- Teach the effects of trauma on the brain so the guests can understand themselves.
- Teach tools so the guests can know how to help themselves when in crisis.
- Do daily labour so the guests can learn how to work regardless of feelings and so they can recognise any dysfunctional attitudes towards work which may impede them in life.
- Teach the guests Transactional Analysis so they can understand themselves and others, and understand how their childhood has affected their attitude towards themselves and others.
- Explain boundaries every day and revise on Friday so guests can learn the importance of boundaries in every aspect of their lives.
- Facilitators and volunteers role model behaving in a loving manner towards each other and so demonstrate by action self-love.
- Ensure the support team look after themselves too, nurture themselves and take time off to self-care when allocated.