

Blue Knot Day Opening event, Parliament House Canberra
ASCA President, Dr Cathy Kezelman

Monday 27 October 2014

Justice McClellan, thank you so much for being here today and for your further insights into the work of the Royal Commission. On behalf of ASCA, I would like to express our appreciation to you, your fellow commissioners and your team for working so tirelessly, strategically and compassionately to chart of new future for Australian children, the adults they become and generations still to be born.

Senator Bilyk and Mr. Wyatt thank you and PACAN for hosting this event, the opening event of ASCA's annual Blue Knot Day, a national day in support of the 5 million Australian adults who have experienced childhood trauma and abuse. Minister Dutton, Members, Senators, staffers, invited guests, fellow survivors and friends.

Blue Knot Day is not just another national awareness day. It is a day which pertains to every Australian. One in 4 Australian adults lives every day with the impacts of childhood trauma and abuse. We all know someone – if not our self then a friend, a neighbour, a work colleague. They may not have told us; they may still be living in silence. But for many, a childhood of abuse has sabotaged the ability to learn, to work, to love, to feel, to be part of the community and for many, to live, at all.

Every year, on Blue Knot Day ASCA acknowledges an individual who upholds its principles: raising awareness, tackling stigma, fostering hope, promoting recovery - a person who furthers the needs of adult survivors.

We are delighted to have the recipients of this award for the last 2 years, Maggie Dawson, and her husband John and Detective Chief Inspector Peter Fox, and his wife, Penny here today. Sadly this year's recipient was unable to attend at the last minute because he was called to do the work for which he is being acknowledged today – fighting for justice for survivors of child abuse.

So it is with great pleasure that I announce the recipient of the Blue Knot Award for 2014, John Ellis. John, a survivor of clergy abuse, had a 12 year battle seeking personal justice and now in his role, as a lawyer and legal advocate he continues that battle for other survivors. His steadfast determination, integrity and recovery, despite it all, are an inspiration. Thank you, John.

ASCA envisaged Blue Knot Day as a day for all Australians to unite in support of survivors, to acknowledge the challenges but also to celebrate the strengths. Today is a day of hope and optimism. We have a Commission. And we have extensive irrefutable research that shows that with the right support recovery is possible. And that is the theme of Blue Knot Day 2014. But to facilitate recovery, society must be ready to hear, listen and act. And health practitioners and services must receive the right trauma-informed training, so they can appropriately support survivors on that road to recovery.

ASCA is playing an ever-increasing role on that road. And we would like to thank the Federal government, for supporting us in that role, for providing funding for our 1300 line, online services and training programs.

To show you a little of what ASCA does I'd like to provide you with a snapshot of research from our 1300 professional support line - a specialist service which now operates 9-5 EST x 7 days/week. This service offers counselling, education, support and referral options to survivors and those who support them personally as well as professionally.

In a recent analysis of de-identified data from 4,000 individual people contacting our line within an 18 month period we looked at how being abused as a child can affect people. We found, as has other research, that mental health and relationships suffer most. 85% of respondents reported mental health impacts; 50% impacts on their relationships with their immediate family; 35% on their relationship with their partner; 23% on their relationship with friends; 18% reported impacts on their parenting; in 34% physical health was affected; 18% had battled suicide; 12% reported impacts on employment; alcohol abuse 15%; illicit drug use 11%; 6% criminality and gambling, 1%. 72% reported multiple impacts with 53% reporting 3 or more categories of impacts. In a line which delivers short-term support these impacts are undoubtedly under-reported.

The terms of the Royal Commission relate to child sexual abuse. However child sexual abuse is rarely, if ever, the only form of abuse. In ASCA's research, in fact, 47% of people reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse and we have seen that in testimony before the Commission. The violations, degradations, neglect and brutality experienced by so many. Sadly there are multiple ways in which a child can be traumatised and there are also many places in which children are abused. While the Royal Commission is focussed on Institutions, our research found that 90% of abuse is perpetrated by a family member or family friend while 65% of abuse occurs in the home itself.

The Royal Commission is shining a searing light on the scourge of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. While critical in its own right it also provides the socio-political climate for us to prise open the once sacrosanct domains of the home, family and neighbourhood. One simply has to look at the research to gain but an inkling of the individual, family, community, health and economic costs of childhood trauma and abuse. The cost of not providing the right support is chilling.

That's why I'm delighted to introduce our next speaker, the Minister for Health and Minister for Sport, the Honourable Peter Dutton MP. Funding from the Department of Health under the e-mental health initiative has contributed not only to ASCA's crucial 1300 service but also to the development of its online services including a series of videos. There are 5 videos in the series, each attuned to a different target audience, either affected by child abuse or working with survivors. In less than 4 months since the videos have been available they have been viewed 2,500 times.

Before welcoming the Minister to the podium I would like to show you a couple of minutes of footage from video for survivors and, in so doing, acknowledge the courage and generosity of those who contributed.

Thank you all, for being here to show your support for survivors, ASCA and for Blue Knot Day. With your help, recovery is indeed possible.