

Untangling the knot of child abuse Blue Knot Day, October 27th, 2014

Australia to unite in support of five million adult survivors of childhood trauma

Australia, August, 2014: The last Monday of October is ASCA's annual *Blue Knot Day*. This year, on the 27th October, Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA), asks all Australians to unite in support of the estimated five million Australian survivors of childhood traumaⁱ.

Blue Knot Day, ASCA's National Awareness Day, provides hope, optimism and pathways to recovery for the one in three adults affected by childhood traumaⁱⁱ.

Following the release of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse's interim report in June, ASCA President, Dr Cathy Kezelman, said the significance of this year's *Blue Knot Day* is growing, as the issue of child sexual abuse has never been more prominent.

"The complex needs of adult survivors of child sexual abuse have long been ignored at great individual, societal and economic costs. Only now are we seeing the start of a coordinated response from government and services - yet there is much more to be done. As the spotlight remains on the issue of child sexual abuse, now is the time to rally together to applaud how far we have come and to raise vital funds needed to expand primary prevention.

"In Australia, one in three girls and one in six boys have experienced child sexual abuse in some form during their lifetimeⁱⁱⁱ. Research shows that the lack of professional education in this area is costing our public health system billions of dollars with misdiagnosed trauma. The economic impacts of children abused, is estimated to be up to \$40 billion from a single year of abuse^{iv}," she said.

This year *Blue Knot Day* will focus its attention on the education and training urgently needed for frontline practitioners who see people with issues related to underlying trauma, in all its forms, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, neglect and domestic violence.

Dr Kezelman added: "The Royal Commission's findings revealed it takes survivors an average of 22 years to tell someone about their abuse^v. This demonstrates the challenges for us all to identify, acknowledge and respond to issues of childhood trauma abuse. The *Blue Knot Day* initiative aims to raise awareness of the importance of education and training for practitioners and make this a topic that individuals and the wider community can talk about more openly.

“*Blue Knot Day* will be supported by a week long effort, which will allow the Australian community to hold their own local events and purchase the symbolic blue knot, via the ASCA website. With your support we will reduce the impact of childhood trauma and foster a healthier community, assist survivors to reach out for help and bring hope and optimism to those affected.”

Acclaimed singer, ASCA ambassador and survivor, Rose Parker said: “Untangling the impacts of child abuse can take a lifetime. This *Blue Knot Day* we are encouraging those affected to reach out for support. There has never been a better time for those who have suffered to speak out and be acknowledged, supported and appropriately assisted on their road to recovery. We know that with positive relationships and the right professional help, recovery is not just possible, but probable.”

ASCA urges individuals, as well as organisations and workplaces, to get involved by donating to *Blue Knot Day* at <http://www.givenow.com.au/blueknotday>. By visiting the website the community can get involved with the *Blue Knot Day* events that help adult survivors reconnect with their families, friends and communities.

All funds raised will help support the primary prevention work of ASCA through professional training for healthcare professionals and services, education for the community and support for survivors of childhood trauma and abuse.

The full range of activities and details held during Blue Knot week (October 27th – November 2nd) will be added to the website over the coming weeks.

To get involved please visit www.asca.org.au/blueknotday

Statistics on childhood trauma and abuse in Australia:

- An estimated five million Australian adults have experienced childhood trauma^{vi}.
- In Australia, one in three girls and one in six boys is sexually abused before the age of eighteen^{vii}.

Ignoring this health issue has a societal and economic cost:

- Overseas studies show that when health practitioners identify and acknowledge the prior trauma of patients experiencing childhood trauma, there is 35% reduction in visits to doctor’s surgeries and an 11% reduction in visits to emergency departments^{viii}.
- Recent Australian research found that adults with a history of childhood abuse suffer from significantly more health conditions, incur higher annual health care costs and are more likely to harm themselves. The results suggest that child abuse has long-lasting economic and welfare costs. The costs are greatest for those who experienced both physical and sexual abuse^{ix}.
- Australian studies show that child abuse survivors are almost two and a half times as likely to have poor mental health outcomes, four times more likely to be unhappy even in much later life and more likely to have poor physical health^x.

- Global research shows that 76% of adults reporting child physical abuse and neglect experience at least one psychiatric disorder in their lifetime and nearly 50% have three or more psychiatric disorders^{xi}.
- Global data found that 90% of public mental health clients have been exposed to multiple physical or sexual abuse traumas. Without intervention, adverse childhood events (ACEs) result in long-term disease, disability, chronic social problems and early death^{xii}.

Help and support is available from the ASCA professional support line on 1300 657 380, 9am-5pm Monday-Sunday.

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Media Contact: Louise Proctor louise@launchgroup.com.au 02 9492 1000 / 0452 574 244

About ASCA: www.asca.org.au

ASCA is the leading national organisation supporting the estimated five million Australian adults who are survivors of childhood trauma, including abuse. ASCA provides hope, optimism and pathways to recovery for adults.

At the forefront of pioneering trauma informed policy, practice and research, ASCA has been instrumental in supporting the work of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and people engaging with it. This includes the training of key workers and practitioners.

In 2012 ASCA released Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery, a global first in setting the standards for clinical and organisational practice. ASCA is a founding member of the national Trauma Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group.

Formed in 1995, ASCA provides a range of services including professional phone support with trauma informed counsellors, a referral database, advocacy, research, workshops for survivors and their supporters, along with education, training and professional development for workers, organisations and health care professionals.

ⁱ Estimated from a range of key sources placing the figure at 5 million adult survivors of childhood trauma.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse, Interim Report, vol. 1

^{iv} Taylor, P., Moore, P., Pezzulo L., Tucci J., Goddard, C. and De Bortoli, L. (2008). The Cost of Child Abuse in Australia, Australian Childhood Foundation and Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia Melbourne

^v Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse, Interim Report, vol. 1

^{vi} Estimated from a range of key sources placing the figure at 5 million adult survivors of childhood trauma.

^{vii} Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse, Interim Report, vol. 1

^{viii} Cambridge University Press 978-0-521-88026-8 - The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic Edited by Ruth A. Lanius, Eric Vermetten and Clare Pain

^{ix} Modelling the Relationship between Child Abuse and Long-Term Health Care Costs and Wellbeing: Results from an Australian Community-Based Survey* REBECCA REEVE and KEES VAN GOOL; ECONOMIC RECORD, VOL. 89, NO. 286, SEPTEMBER, 2013, 300–318

^x Draper, B., Pfaff, J., Pirkis, J., Snowdon, J., Lautenschlager, N., Wilson, I., et al. (2007). Long-Term Effects of Childhood Abuse on the Quality of Life and Health of Older People: Results from the Depression and early prevention of Suicide in General Practice Project. JAGS

^{xi} Harper, K., Stalker, C. A., Palmer, S., & Gadbois, S. (2007). Adults traumatized by child abuse: what survivors need from community-based mental health professionals. Journal of Mental Health 1-14.

^{xii} Childhood Experience Study (Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente, see www.ACEstudy.org) and The Damaging Consequences of Violence and Trauma (see www.NASMHPD.ORG). Chart created by Ann Jennings, PhD. www.annafoundation.org