

EARLY GENERAL NEWS

## Some secrets should never be kept

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RECOVERY from childhood sexual abuse is possible say three sisters who survived the ordeal of abuse.

Joy Milton, Karen Carr and Amanda Porter shared their story for this week's national **Blue Knot Day**, an Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA) event that aims to raise awareness about childhood abuse.

The women have been supporting **Blue Knot Day** by "yarn-bombing" trees and posts along the foreshore and Tasman Terrace.

"Yarn-bombing in blue seemed like the obvious choice," Mrs Carr said.

She said she and her sisters were on the path of recovery after suffering sexual abuse as children.

Their abuser was a family member, someone they all trusted.

"He abused us, but he was always in our circle of trust and all the while he was grooming our family to believe the same," Mrs Carr said.

Eventually the girls had the courage to tell their parents just enough to identify the abuser.

Their parents chose not to discuss it with the girls again in case it upset them, but did their best to protect the girls while also trying to protect the family's reputation.

The family carried on as usual and attempted to portray a normal family to keep the secret from their community.

Mrs Carr said it was a common misunderstanding or belief that sexual abuse ran in the family and people who had been abused were likely to become abusers.

"We didn't want anyone to think our father could be an abuser and we didn't want anyone to think we too could be abusers."

They were torn between wanting contact with their cousins, aunts and uncles, and struggling with their acceptance of the abuser.

Mrs Milton said they had always felt the extended family blamed them for the disruption of their "normal family" and never understood them even though they claimed to.

Still after all these years memories of the abuse remain in their minds.

"He has haunted us," she said.

"It is frightening to think that through our efforts to protect our family reputation we may have risked the safety of other children."

Until recently the women had never shared even among themselves the explicit detail of their personal horrific experiences of abuse.

Mrs Milton said they had always imagined they would never be believed even by each other and lived alone with the guilt and shame.

"When we finally found the courage to share we were amazed at the similarities and since then our strength and our relationship has grown immensely."

Now that they are recovering they are beginning to understand that it is not their fault.

"Since we have begun to share our story we have grown stronger, our self esteem has improved and we are appreciating everyday things so much more.

"This year we have met some wonderful people who, along with our parents, have supported us in our endeavour to spread the awareness of child abuse."

Mrs Porter said they had chosen to share their story in the hope it would encourage others to begin their own journey toward recovery, and at this point they did not feel anger or hate.

"We are clearing our guilt but still struggle with blame, shame and deep, deep sadness."

After discovering numerous survivor groups they decided to raise awareness of ASCA and other groups like it that support sufferers of abuse.

She said they were working hard toward becoming survivors instead of victims.

"Becoming a survivor means we can no longer feel responsible for protecting the perpetrators and the ones close to them," Mrs Porter said.

"A victim continues to protect the perpetrator and a survivor no longer protects the perpetrator; it's as simple as that."

They also hope to encourage families to have the conversation with their children about staying safe, as forewarned is forearmed.

"It is difficult to face, but we believe everyone must explain to their children that they can't trust anyone.

"Children must know if it doesn't feel right to tell someone and if that person doesn't believe them, tell someone else."

She said denying the existence of child abuse, shrouding it in secrecy and blaming those who speak out simply replicated the secrecy, silence and betrayal caused by abuse.

"The world is often not kind to those who speak out and there is little doubt that our family has faced enormous challenges.

"Child sexual abuse is shameful, but the shame belongs with the perpetrators and those who protect them, not the victims and whistleblowers."