

# THE SALVATION ARMY AND ITS RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Since the start of this year, a Royal Commission has been investigating how institutions, among them The Salvation Army, have dealt with allegations of child sexual abuse. Later this month, the commission will begin public hearings in Sydney, warning that many of the stories of abuse and mistreatment of children will be shocking. In an open and honest article, Australia Eastern Territorial Commander **Commissioner JAMES CONDON**, with **Major PETER FARTHING**, reveals how the Army, sadly, has a tainted history with child abuse, how it now has strong policies in place to protect children, and how it is working with victims to bring healing from past wrongs

In January 2013, Quentin Bryce, the Governor-General of Australia, appointed a six-member Royal Commission to investigate "Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse". What is the commission's role? To inquire how institutions with a responsibility for children have managed and responded to allegations and instances of child sexual abuse. It is to investigate where systems have failed to protect children, and make recommendations on how to improve laws, policies and practices.

So far, more than 200 people have told their story in private sessions across the country, and more than 2500 people have shared their story with the Royal Commission over the phone or in writing. In Sydney on Monday 16 September, the commission will commence public hearings. "Many of the personal stories which the commissioners received report a level of abuse and mistreatment of children which will shock many people," Royal Commission chief executive officer Janette Dines has revealed.

The commission has issued more than 100 summonses to a wide range of organisations, requiring them to produce documents. The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory, comprising NSW, Queensland and the ACT, has received four summonses.

Because this commission is so important, and because The Salvation Army may well be involved in public hearings, I want to bring you up to date on our story.

## Abuse

Let's begin with the obvious question: has child sexual abuse occurred within The Salvation Army? I am sad to say that yes, it has occurred.

Let me say that the figures I will mention relate to all the complaints we have received over the years. A person may come to us today, reporting abuse which took place as long ago as the 1950s, or they might report abuse which happened recently. So these sad instances are spread over a long period.

It grieves me to say that the territory has received 38

complaints of child sexual abuse within the orbit of corps. The alleged perpetrators include seven Salvation Army officers, 12 soldiers, and some 22 others associated with corps.

Tragically, The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory has received a much larger number of complaints from men and women who were resident in Salvation Army children's homes. I have to tell you that no fewer than 139 men and women have approached The Salvation Army with allegations of sexual abuse against them while they were in our care. That is a cause of great shame and regret to us.

We have also been approached by a significant number of men and women who complain of other types of mistreatment while in our care.

They recount stories of physical violence, verbal abuse, deprivation, and cruelty. So it is at times a very sad story indeed.

All up, 72 people have named officers as the person or persons who abused them while they were in our care.

## How we responded

The Royal Commission is investigating the manner in which institutions responded to allegations of child sexual abuse. So how has The Salvation Army responded?

It is a mixed story. During the 1990s a tremendous shift occurred within many Australian institutions, as much stronger policies for child protection began to be implemented. This happened within The Salvation Army, as it did elsewhere. Since then, the Army has generally responded strongly whenever child sexual abuse was reported.

In the years before that, however, our responses were not always so effective.

There is no substitute for strong policies which protect children and require reporting of every incident of abuse. Such policies simply were not in place when The Salvation Army was operating children's homes. This absence had enormous consequences.

I am very sorry to say that a number of people have told us how they reported abuse to the manager of their homes, but were not believed. In fact, quite a few were punished for claiming such a thing.

We now know as well that the worst sex offenders were often the best liars. Some of them actively "groomed" the organisation, presenting themselves in the best light, cultivating leaders, and denigrating any who could be potential witnesses against them.

Within the boys' homes, a small number of serial offenders

managed to survive long enough to do tremendous damage. Nine men have been reported as perpetrators by a total of 54 care leavers. Eventually, five of those men, all officers, were dismissed. But The Salvation Army recognises the tragedy that abuse was able to persist.

## Child protection today

Thankfully, The Salvation Army today has in place strong policies for child protection.

If you want to work with children in The Salvation Army today, you must undergo a Working With Children background check. You must be trained in our Caring For Kids/Safe Salvos procedures. We hold awareness workshops for new workers and refresher workshops for existing workers. Approximately 700 people participate in these workshops each year.

We have a Code of Conduct for all workers. We have strong policies which require all personnel to respond properly to even a suspicion of child sexual abuse.

At territorial headquarters we have a dedicated team in our Professional Standards Office. The team includes a territorial child protection coordinator and an integrity coordinator, among others. The Professional Standards Office provides oversight for child protection. It also offers expert guidance whenever issues arise.

We also have a strong policy, contained in what we call a "minute", which sets out how corps must manage sex offenders who

wish to attend. This policy is not optional - all corps must comply fully.

So we are confident we have implemented sound policies to protect children.

Do incidents still happen? Sadly, yes, they occasionally do. Sexual predators will try to gain access to children. Certain other adults, while not predators, may offend against children if left alone with them. So we need to be firm with policies. For example, two adults must be present when children are in a room, a bus or a car.

Let me repeat: all allegations of sexual abuse against children must be reported to a divisional headquarters. Policy guidelines on reporting to government authorities must be followed. It is not for us to assume, "They have moved on now", or "They deny it", or "They no longer work with children", or "This is only mild misconduct", or "This person has changed". We must always report.

Over the past decade or so, The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory has made numerous reports to the police and child welfare departments in NSW, Queensland or the ACT. Some of these cases involved allegations of abuse within the Army. Others related to abuse within the home environment or in other locations.

## Past abuse allegations

How does our territory respond today to allegations of historic abuse - that is, abuse years ago? Here we have learned some lessons from the Truth and >>>

Reconciliation Commission which did wonderful work in South Africa after the collapse of apartheid. That commission adopted what is called a restorative justice approach.

Restorative justice is different to the normal justice model. It is based not on dispute, but on a willingness to engage personally. Restorative justice recognises the need for justice - but says there is another way.

Central to this approach is honesty. The Salvation Army must be absolutely transparent about its failures. It must admit all its wrongs. We have tried to do that. In a series of public apologies dating back to 2004, we have admitted that sexual abuse occurred, and that other terrible wrongs were done.

With that openness goes a second key ingredient. There must be a willingness to hear and receive a victim's story. We do this. When a survivor makes a complaint, we ask them to prepare a detailed statement of what happened. We will pay for professional help with writing the document. And one of our representatives will meet with the person and hear their story.

We then need to receive the story. It has to touch us. It is important that every incidence of abuse impacts The Salvation Army. Our Professional Standards people, and the committee which manages complaints, allow themselves to feel the impact of each person's story. The leadership of the territory is also aware of the reports.

Next, with a restorative justice approach, we do not demand high levels of proof. It would be difficult for many survivors to gain evidence for what went on, perhaps in a dormitory, 50 years ago. But we believe people. The Professional Standards Office conducts basic fact checks, but we are not in the business of challenging claims. We know abuse happened. Professional Standards has heard enough cases to recognise the typical patterns of behaviour. It is our Christian duty to bring a degree of healing, and that means we must accept people's word.

It is also our duty to apologise. People need to know we are sorry for the things done to them. The

Salvation Army feels deep regret for every instance of child sexual abuse, cruelty, verbal abuse, physical violence, and deprivation inflicted on children in our care. We are grieved that such things were done to children. These were failures, and wrongs. We must never tire of saying sorry.

So when our representatives meet with survivors of abuse, they offer a sincere apology on behalf of The Salvation Army.

While most survivors express relief at being informed they are unconditionally believed, many continue to struggle with the unanswered questions about their abuse. We seek to address these struggles by asking the victim, "What needs to happen to start making this right?" instead of telling them, "This is how we are going to help you".

Finally, restorative justice in our case needs a tangible expression of regret. So The Salvation Army makes what are called ex-gratia payments to people. And we also will fund the cost of counselling.

The territory makes payments out of surpluses from our humanitarian enterprises such as Employment Plus. We do not draw on any donated funds.

After a payment is made, there remain emotional loose ends. Our representatives seek to keep in touch, and offer ongoing support.

Of course I have been describing The Salvation Army's part in this process. The person who was wronged also plays just as significant a part in restorative justice.

Many approach the Army personally, while some do it with the assistance of a lawyer. Either way, they are willing to enter into the process in good faith. Rather than take a strictly legal approach, they are willing to engage with the Army. They do not pursue a payment of the highest order, but accept the amount The Salvation Army is able to offer.

Does this approach prove helpful? I am pleased to say that many people who have come to us have said our response has been helpful. That is what we want - to bring a little healing.

### The road ahead

I understand that some who read this article will be deeply upset because they, too, have been affected by abuse. If you were sexually abused through your association with The Salvation Army, please tell us. Contact the Professional Standards Office at our territorial headquarters. We want to hear from you (see [www.salvos.org.au/safesalvos](http://www.salvos.org.au/safesalvos), or phone 02 9266 9781).

Would you please pray for the men and women who have suffered in any way. Pray for those responsible for protecting our children. Pray for the Professional Standards Office, who do demanding work.

Also, please pray for the Royal Commission and its staff as they undertake a very difficult task.

As the Royal Commission does its important work, people may speak with you about The Salvation Army's response to child sexual abuse. Please listen respectfully. It is wise not to try to defend ourselves, or to minimise the wrongs done. What could you say? Here are some key messages:

1. The Salvation Army openly admits to serious past failures, and apologises to all who were harmed.
2. The Salvation Army today is responding to allegations of past abuse with compassion and honesty.
3. The Salvation Army makes payments to victims out of surpluses from our humanitarian enterprises, not from donated funds such as the Red Shield Appeal.
4. The Salvation Army encourages any person who was abused in any way to contact our Professional Standards Office on 02 9266 9781.
5. Today's Salvation Army has strong policies in place to protect children. □



God bless you,  
Commissioner  
James Condon

## ZERO TOLERANCE SEXUAL ABUSE

The Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse will inevitably focus at times on past abuse within The Salvation Army.

I want to reaffirm at this time our total commitment to our child protection policies. It is vital that all who work with children follow these policies, as spelt out in our *Caring for Kids/Safe Salvos* manual. In keeping with that policy, all allegations of sexual abuse must be reported to the authorities.

I also want to reaffirm our commitment to persons who suffered sexual abuse in the past within a Salvation Army corps or children's home. If you were abused, please tell us. Any persons who come forward with complaints of abuse will be received with compassion. A careful restorative process will then be followed.

If you feel you need to make a complaint, please contact us at our Territorial Headquarters.



**Phone:** 02 9266 9781

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**Mail:** Professional Standards Office  
The Salvation Army  
PO Box A435  
Sydney South 1235

**Commissioner James Condon**  
Territorial Commander  
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