

# Abusing Children for a Living :

## Protecting children from abuse by professionals

### PART ONE

Chris Goddard

Five years ago, in one of my first contributions to this space at the back of what was then called *Australian Child and Family Welfare*, I wrote a piece on the abuse of children by those in positions of trust and responsibility. The article, 'What you see depends on where you stand, what you want to see and what you want to tell others you have seen', (Goddard 1988) was prompted by two events in my life.

The first was someone sending me a copy of *The Battle and the Backlash: The Child Sexual Abuse War* (Hechler, 1988). Hechler writes about the abuse of children by people, usually but not exclusively men, in child care centres, schools, hospitals and churches. When the abuse is brought to the attention of the organisations, Hechler claims the responses are invariably similar:

The organisations involved appeared to be concerned with limiting the damage to their own image and protecting themselves rather than protecting vulnerable children. In few cases are there procedures in place to deal with the abuse of children by the staff of such organisations.

(Goddard, 1988:18)

Hechler notes that few such cases appear to reach a satisfactory conclusion. One reason, he suggests, for inadequate responses and resolutions is the inability of the child victim to 'demand competent service' (Hechler, 1988:26).

The second prompt for that article was that a number of people had contacted me asking for advice on how to deal with sexual abuse of children by priests, teachers and foster parents.

While it took several years for the extent of child abuse to be recognised, for the understanding that children were sexually abused as well as physically abused, it has taken many more years for the world to acknowledge that some child abuse is perpetrated by adults in public positions of trust. In other words, some abusers are adults that are trusted by other adults to care for children.

Unfortunately, it is clear that some perpetrators use their professional standing to help them gain access to children and abuse them (Bulkley & Eatman, 1988; Burgess et al., 1988). Even more unfortunately, it appears that the organisations that employ such child molesters are still extremely reluctant to admit that such abuse occurs. As Newberger and Newberger point out:

When we are confronted with sexual abuse, especially abuse by a powerful professional, all too often every interest but the child's seems to take priority.

(1988:66)

Finkelhor and Williams suggest that such cases raise a number of questions:

How can children be abused without their parents knowing or suspecting? Is it possible that children could be fabricating or embellishing stories of sexual abuse? Should an adult be charged with or convicted of a serious crime solely on the word of very young children? Is there any way to screen out child abusers from the ranks of....employees?

(1988:9)

These questions are insufficient. There are others that require answers: Why are parents, who do know or suspect that their children are being abused, treated so badly when they attempt to report? Why do services appear to be

more concerned with protecting the perpetrator rather than protecting the child? Why do such cases so often deteriorate into direct personal attacks on the parents (or professionals) who are trying to stop the abuse?

*Why are parents, who do know or suspect that their children are being abused, treated so badly when they attempt to report? Why do services appear to be more concerned with protecting the perpetrator rather than protecting the child?*

This article is about the courage and tenacity of one woman who came to see me several years ago claiming that her child was both sexually and physically assaulted by his teacher. At considerable cost to herself and her family, she has refused to ignore the abuse her child suffered. Over the years I have had sporadic contact with her, offering advice and support, for what it was worth. I admit that on several occasions I have half hoped that she would give up the battle, such was the cost to her of waging it. She did not give up and our community owes her a great deal for her ability to hold fast in the storm that was created around her. For reasons that will become apparent in the interview below, her tenacity must be screened by anonymity. She knows who she is, and many of the people who stood in her way will know who she is. This article and interview are dedicated to her.

**CG:** When did you first suspect that something was happening?

**Mother:** My son was telling me things that the teacher was doing that didn't make sense to me or him.

**CG:** How old was your son?

**Mother:** He was 7 and in Grade 2. The year before in Grade 1 he had spoken to me about this teacher and he didn't like him, because he acted smart and he made fun of his work and I remember thinking I wonder who he is and I looked up in the Phone Directory to see if he was a local teacher, because he was a district reliever and his name was not in the book. Nothing else seemed to come up for my son that year, and I didn't know whether he disliked him because he was a bit rude or a bit intimidating so I let it go.

In Grade 2 he started to say that this teacher was tickling him and other children and my son didn't like it. And I said 'Keep away from him'. Then A said, 'He wanted me to sit on his knee'. And I said 'Say NO, don't sit on his knee'. And then he told me about other boys who seemed to be favourites who sat on his knee. And I thought, 'Should I ring their mothers?' As it was, I had moved to this school when A went into Prep and I was pregnant with B and was really sick, then had a baby, so I didn't get involved with the school. After hearing this and becoming a little concerned, but at that time the baby started to get very sick and with these extra demands I did not take the matter up.

**CG:** So how long was it between the first time your son saying directly things were going wrong and when you actually did something?

**Mother:** I had a horrible gut feeling that there was something really evil about this teacher because A told me about a play with costumes and this teacher tore his costume up and threw it in the bin. When I asked why, A said 'I don't know'. And he told me how Mr. P. would stand him up in front of the class and get the other kids to make fun of him, with comments such as 'you're a grumble-bum' and let them laugh at him. Then the teacher would say 'I'm your

friend'. I thought there is something not right about this man. Then A would say, 'He's not like the other teachers'. But he wouldn't disclose anything about him touching him inappropriately. I tried to get round it without putting the words into his mouth, so that I would know for sure before I did anything. Not that I really knew who to go to, because the year before I had trouble with the school (with another vindictive teacher) which showed me that the Principal was there to support the teachers and not the children.

**CG:** The first you heard was that the teacher was singling your son out, frightening and terrorising him, exposing him to ridicule. When did you then hear that more was going on?

**Mother:** A wouldn't say anything. I suggested moving schools because I thought that might solve it. He wanted to stay home from school, he was always uncomfortable in the morning with pains in the stomach and he was having nightmares. He was saying Mr P. tells these horrible stories. Because I had a sick baby, I would say I will put B to sleep and then we'll talk about it. By the time I got B to sleep, A would be asleep. I thought 'Maybe it's not as bad as what he's presenting to me'. So one side of you is hoping that you have got it wrong, and the other part of you is a bit frightened about what is going on. So you are wanting to make a wise decision. By the sound of things, it appeared to me that this teacher was out to molest little boys; it was always boys. Then a couple of things put me off. At the end of that term this teacher became engaged. At this stage in my life, I knew nothing about paedophiles or about any organised activities. I was a typical ignorant mother or member of society who really didn't know what was going on in this area, the sub-culture we have. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I just had this awful gut feeling that there was something moving into the occult. I mentioned to my husband about the child sitting on the teacher's knee, and my husband, who doesn't think badly of anyone, attributed it to 'a friendly teacher' activity. I was uncomfortable about it, but I had nothing definite to pin it

down to at that stage, and also because I had little confidence in the Administration of the school. I knew they would say I was lying, (and I was right). At the end of term, I attended a football match and met a mother, who reported that her little girl commented that Mr. P. only liked the boys and it was only the boys who sat on his knee. After that I asked A questions, and it all came out.

A little friend (boy) came round to play with A and I asked 'What do you think of Mr P.?' And he answered, 'He plays games'. I asked, 'What sort of games?' And he said, 'Tickling games'. And I asked, 'Does he touch you anywhere he shouldn't?' And he said, 'Yes'. It was then I realised that there were more children involved than my son. I suggested to another little boy to report it to his mother. It involved Prep, Grade 1 and Grade 2 because he was their reading teacher. I also found out that his past reputation was known. The Principal knew what was going on, and that made me really angry.

**CG:** How did you find that out?

**Mother:** Because they told me. The Acting Principal actually told me that they knew about him and were uncomfortable with him in the school but couldn't do anything about it.

**CG:** Did they say why they couldn't do anything about it?

**Mother:** Because of the laws of evidence basically.

**CG:** Your son described in detail how this man was touching him. Did he go any further than that?

**Mother:** At that stage that was all he told me.

**CG:** And then his friend backed it up with similar reports. What did you do then?

**Mother:** I told my husband to go to the Principal, who lived out of town. So he went to the Acting Principal, who lived nearby and reported it. My feeling was that I had been stabbed through the heart and you couldn't take the knife out. I couldn't live with it, so I thought we had to do something.

**CG:** What did the Acting Principal do?

**Mother:** He did nothing. I expected him to come to see me, if he cared, and show his concern. So nothing happened. He didn't come, he didn't contact me within 24 hours. I was in an emotional/spiritual agony over it all and couldn't sleep. The Acting Principal told my husband that they were waiting for the Education Department to do something. I was not satisfied with this. So I rang the police to find out what they could do. And they put me onto the Community Policing Squad, who asked to take a statement from A, if he was willing. (He was 7 years old). He was willing to talk so long as he could tell me, his mother, and I would repeat to the authority. I felt this was reasonable for me to stand as a go-between for my child. Then I went back to the Principal and I reported the other things A had been telling me about what the teacher was doing, eg, lifting the children up upside down and letting their pants slip in front of the class, gruesome stories he was telling in class, with quite bizarre parts like people being chopped up etc. So the children (6-7 year olds) were upset and nervous.

Then when A told me these things, he asked me 'Are you my real mother?' He asked a couple of times, and I replied, 'Of course, I am'. And he said, 'Mr P. told me that when I was born, my mother was killed and you're another mother'. I thought 'What a clever trick to try to destroy the child's confidence in the person who knows him best'. Was it to isolate him, impose himself as the child's best support? Then Mr. P. threatened him not to tell his mother otherwise he would bash him over the head with a cricket bat with spikes. He had his box of sporting equipment there. He would lift the children up by the head, his hand at the level of their ears, half a foot off the ground, causing severe pain in the neck. A local doctor told me it was like hanging the child. My son, seven years later, is still suffering with neck and back pain because of this treatment. He pushed A into the stationery cupboard and shut the door to frighten him. He physically hit other children. He was using physical

violence and threats to frighten them, telling lies about their mother, telling horrific stories. I wish I had known all this and I would have recorded it, but at the time I did not realise we needed the child's evidence in such a clinical way when I first heard all this.

**CG:** The next stage was the police interview.

**Mother:** The policeman who came was a young constable and appeared rather upset about this. He was sensitive and nice to the children. He went to the other families and asked if he could chat with their children also. These children had very similar stories.

**CG:** Do you know how many other children he interviewed and over what period of time?

**Mother:** Within the next few weeks he questioned about 7 children in A's class. This did not include those children in other classes. The teacher was also Physical Education teacher and used the Phys. Ed. room. He would take the children in there. I think he was kissing a little boy, who subsequently couldn't stand his own father to kiss or touch him. I heard twice how he asked a younger boy, 'Are you a good boy like your big brother?'

I became very concerned that this teacher was being supported and protected and put back in classes. And so many teachers since have come to me and said that he was a known paedophile and they knew about it.

**CG:** After the policeman questioning the children, what happened next?

**Mother:** After the school holidays, the policeman rang me to tell me that they weren't going to do anything else, because the children were too young. I said, 'That's just dreadful'. At that stage, when I told the police, I had handed it over and was not going to do anything further, because we had given them the facts, and left it to them to protect the children.

**CG:** So the C.I.B. said that because the children were so young, there was no further action they could take. The teacher was still teaching at the school?

**Mother:** The only action taken was moving the teacher to another school.

I have copies of notification received giving reasons for the action.

An official inquiry was not conducted following the advice of the police. We are not proceeding with charges. However investigations were carried out by the Acting Regional Director of Education and the Victorian Teachers' Union.

The teacher was removed from the area because of this and, as I found out, children had disclosed similar information about this teacher from 2 prior schools.

**CG:** What did you do after the police declined to act?

**Mother:** The whole town was talking about it by this time, and I decided the only way to find the truth was to disclose it all and talk to as many people as would listen just to find out what was going on, so as to get some support for the children.

**CG:** What was offered to your child in the way of help?

**Mother:** Nothing.

**CG:** The only assistance you had was an interview with the police. How many interviews were there?

**Mother:** One.

**CG:** Was there any medical examination offered or other assessment of your child?

**Mother:** No. I then thought, if the Education Department were not going to act upon this on behalf of the children, and the police were not going to take any further action, then the only way to prevent further abuse was for the public to know. I then contacted all the mothers (of those A had reported as involved).

**CG:** What sort of reaction did you get from them?

**Mother:** A variety of reactions. I offered a meeting at my house for the mothers. Some came, some others who were concerned about the behaviour came. The Senior Education Officer at that stage had heard I was to hold a meeting. He became very concerned and he requested to attend the meeting. I said No. What he did was to arrange another meeting just prior at the school to try and exonerate the Education Department and he asked me to come along. I declined.

**CG:** What sort of meeting did he arrange?

**Mother:** He tried to call all the mothers there first to claim the Education Department had done everything they could. And the mothers who went reported to me what had gone on. These mothers were angry because the Department had done nothing. There was one mother who was most upset, who subsequently withdrew from the trial, who went round the house three times prior to the meeting before she could bring herself to come in. So distressed was she.

The outcome of the meeting was that one mother was trying to rationalise the situation, by saying that the teacher had some good points. There was further information about this teacher from mothers whose children were not involved but basically it was left to me, possibly because I was older than most of them and I had had a lot more experience with difficulties, which I had faced during my life and I had no other problems, except a sick baby, whereas many of these mothers had other domestic problems. So I was looking to see what I could do, to find some way through this so that I could get some answers and not the problems.

**CG:** In regard to a sense of time here, from the time you first heard that something was happening, when was that meeting?

**Mother:** From the meeting I started to learn about community attitudes. I wrote a letter to the School Council presenting my views about the abuse of children within the classroom to see what sort of response I got. I have no doubt that they all believed by then what had happened, but they did not want it exposed the way I was doing it.

**CG:** Why do you think that was?

**Mother:** Because of instructions from the Region to hush it up. One of the teachers advised me of this. I was threatened with libel.

**CG:** Who threatened you with libel?

**Mother:** The Education Department advised me that I could be up for libel for speaking out. They sent the police around to me. The Community Policing Squad came to warn me to

be careful of libel, which made me angry. Because if this was happening, shouldn't they be caring about the children, the most vulnerable members of society, not threatening me. Shouldn't we all be working together? What a ridiculous attitude! So it was then that I decided to find out what libel is. My aim was to get support for the children, more than anything. So I decided to contact a Clinical Guidance Officer, who had been recommended. He was supportive and would have done a lot but he wasn't allowed to.

**CG:** Why?

**Mother:** Because the school didn't want him to.

**CG:** So are you saying that one of the reasons the children didn't receive any counselling was because the whole intention was to hush it up?

**Mother:** Yes, they use all the tricks to hush anyone up. And I said, 'I will not be quiet'.

**CG:** This was 6 years ago. So the Counsellor couldn't do anything. What did you do then?

**Mother:** After failing to get any action with the School administration, the police, the Regional Office of the Education Department, and the School Council, I was given an address in the Education Department in Melbourne. I wrote a letter and did not realise at the time that it was the beginning of a lot of letters. I was worried because of all the threats I had received just what was going to follow. And I thought, 'I have to keep my eyes on the children and no-one is thinking about them'. And because you asked about A's signs and symptoms, he became very withdrawn, he was fearful.

**CG:** How long after disclosing to you was this?

**Mother:** Once he started disclosing he started to relax a little and these nightmares went on for a couple of weeks and I decided to keep him home from school, because of his sleeplessness and anxiety, believing he would be better at home relaxing until he was more comfortable and I could even teach him myself. My only problem was the sick baby.

**CG:** So he was becoming withdrawn?

**Mother:** Yes, but what would happen, is at night time he would become afraid. I put a mattress on the floor for A to sleep next to the baby, so he could talk and I could listen and he could feel safe. He imagined he kept hearing footsteps of Mr. P. coming to get him. Gradually he told me more, even though I was getting a bit blasé after all this. Once walking home from football, he asked me quite out of the blue, 'What's in those little balls? Mr P. squeezed them and they really hurt.' This is how, over time, he disclosed more of what this teacher did to him.

So because the police wouldn't take a statement from me, (they should have at the first complaint), until Dr. T. got involved, I had 12 months to get the story bit by bit. As the child felt like he wanted to tell me, I just listened. Such as about the rubber patch on his knee, a lumpy thing that he would press up into the back passage and A drew it for me. I sent the original to Dr. T.

**CG:** So bits and pieces came out over the 12 months from time to time as the child had it in his mind and talked about it. What happened during this time, what was your response to your letter to the Education Department?

**Mother:** They said they had taken action by removing the teacher from the school, they had placed him at another school and they had monitored him.

**CG:** So as far as the Education Department was concerned, that was that.

**Mother:** I thought nothing I said or did would make any difference.

**CG:** So where did you go from there?

**Mother:** I thought I should make parents aware that this is happening and that they should listen to their children. I did look at protective behaviours and at having that put into the school. Again it is very much putting it all back on the children, with little responsibility for other people, but it is a vehicle for adults to become more aware.

**CG:** But protective behaviours can be taught by the very teacher who is interfering with children.

**Mother:** Exactly. But I thought that it is worth considering what is offered and from my experience I would evaluate it. I became more informed about what was happening, and noted what was in the media. Which is how I met you and then made contact with Dr. T. He was the most instrumental in getting action because after his involvement, they made up a brief.

**CG:** How long after this did you meet me?

**Mother:** Towards the end of the year. They brought out Lesley Hewitt's paper and a day seminar on that, which I attended. I met F. and a solicitor and was advised to write everything out in a time sequence. Which I did. That was my statement, that twelve months after my child made a statement to the police, was accepted by the police as a statement of first complaint. I was eventually cross-examined on this statement before the accused teacher so he heard my complaint. This took place at the County Court in 1991 (but not before a jury). Then I was referred to a friend, a solicitor, who understood the psychological damage and showed some anger about the situation. He explored all avenues for me and put it down in writing, which I could think over and decide what to do. He said, 'Because you have been threatened, get everything through freedom of information that you can'. He dictated things over the phone and I contacted the Education Department and the police to get anything relating to the case to protect myself. That took a lot of time. At this stage A started talking about lying down on the road and wanting to die, or to take a pill and forget it, I thought we can't ignore that. I think I'll ring F and talk to her because she's so sensitive to children. I went to see her a few times, and she saw A and us as a family. Then she moved so that finished our relationship.

I didn't go ahead with any civil proceedings because it took so long to get everything, the solicitor had moved to Melbourne by this stage. He and his boss had agreed to give me any advice free of charge if I wanted to go ahead with proceedings. Then they handed it over to another

solicitor, who was not agreeable to that and his attitude was 'That's life'. So I did not go ahead with this arrangement.

**CG:** What about the criminal proceedings, how did they actually get started again?

**Mother:** Nothing happened with the criminal proceedings until 1990. A detective rang me just after I felt we had got back to normal and the boys seemed to be coping well and we could get on with life. It was all over for me. There had been further allegations about this teacher from his next school. The detective reported that the Brief from the previous action, had been shredded. So I was asked to help the police.

I had a lot of documents from Freedom of Information, and I had vowed I would help anyone who needed help. So I agreed. So I handed over all my documents to the CIB to photocopy. The detective on the case laid charges against the teacher on the 1986 children's statements as the boys were now 12 years old and were able to give evidence. This took place about July 1990, with a statement from another child at the current school where this teacher was in 1990. The aim of the police was to corroborate the children's evidence by using similar evidence from children who had never met. The latter group of children were really traumatised and boys and girls were involved by this. At the Committal hearing it was also disclosed that presumably the teacher had been moved from a former school because of the same allegation.

**CG:** The extraordinary thing is that your case was reconstituted solely because they got more information from the next school and they then decided your case was worth pursuing.

**Mother:** The detective claimed that in 1986 they didn't care. But now (1990) he said he would press on and he acted in a capable, intelligent and organised manner. I asked A if he would go to Court and as A had by this stage worked through it all, he agreed. Of the other boys involved, there was one who had gone overseas, one had a very nervous mother and another who hadn't disclosed in 1986

because he didn't know that what this teacher was doing was wrong. This brings up another serious concern. That this teacher is teaching sexual abuse, and teaching how to intimidate and to threaten. These children may practise it on themselves or their peers. Later on, there are repercussions in terms of creating abusive people and if no-one wants to stop it, I am very concerned. These children are not told it is wrong, they are not supported when they are emotionally, physically and sexually disturbed, and they may be creating all sorts of very severe social problems for themselves, their families and the community.

We all have a part to play. No-one can say 'It's not my problem' because it is going to be their problem whether they want it or not. I have gone through all the emotions, I can understand why kids set fire to schools, bash principals and teachers because they are trying to tell us something because no-one will really sit down with real concern and listen to them. And explain to them what is right and what is wrong.

**CG:** Are you suggesting that this is a widespread problem?

**Mother:** I do. It has been going on. You don't need many teachers for it to be a serious problem. This teacher was a district reliever, he was moving from school to school. Over one term at one school, he would have abused many children, then he was moved to another school and the same thing happened and then another. Even if you have only 10 paedophiles in the Education Department, it is the best paedophile support group in this State. When I think about how they appear not to want to know about it, I feel angry enough to think that it is almost a criminal organisation and appears to be colluding with these men and women.

**CG:** Coming back to the Court case, your case is reawakened because of further complaints about the teacher, your son has agreed to give evidence...

**Mother:** And two other boys from his school, plus a boy from another school. I had very mixed feelings about my son giving evidence.

**CG:** Was your son given some help in giving evidence?

**Mother:** The policeman took him to the court and explained where everybody sat and said that you had to speak the truth and if you don't understand it, say so, and if you don't hear properly, ask them to say it again. He was very friendly about it and said that's all you have to do. This was 1990 and the case was not heard until 1991. The Defence delay it as long as they can with all sorts of technicalities.

**CG:** The solicitor representing the teacher was related to someone in the Education Department. Looking at the time sequence, in 1986 your son was being sexually abused at the age of 6; in 1990 it was decided that charges would be laid including charges in relation to your son, but the Committal Hearing didn't take place until 1991. Is that correct?

**Mother:** Yes, that's right.

**CG:** By which stage, your son was 12 and by which stage, half his life had gone by. This must have reawakened everything for him?

**Mother:** Probably, but he couldn't remember everything. Because some of the things I had previously written down, he couldn't remember, because he said, 'Mum you have a better memory than me'.

**CG:** How did he cope with this?

**Mother:** Quite well. The one thing that I didn't know how to handle, I didn't want him to have any fear or shame because he hadn't done anything wrong. The morning of the trial my husband refused to let him go, and we rang the detective to inform him of this. The detective said he would send a subpoena so we had to let him go. So my husband was really stressed and A said to me, 'I believe I should go'. My father was of the same mind as my husband, which one can understand as a normal response to protect the child.

**CG:** One of the things I have admired about you is I don't know if I could have gone through what you have gone through.

**Mother:** That's it. You don't know until you go through it.

**CG:** You don't know what your re-

actions will be, but you do know that one of your reactions will be to think about running away.

**Mother:** I don't run. I face things, but that's just me. I don't believe that you solve anything by running, you only run around in a circle. If it doesn't make sense to me I ask questions too and when people start getting uncomfortable I ask more questions. It has got to the stage now where I am fed up with it now. I've got right through it and I'm really starting to explode. Because now I believe I know enough to be well heard and to give a lot of suggestions and I want to know why if they won't listen.

**CG:** So let's finish the sequence.

**Mother:** Before the Committal, a man came to me and claimed to be a journalist. He asked me if I would give him some information on the Trial as he was going to be there. I was a little suspicious, not knowing his position but I thought in this situation I went through it with him. He had access to the Brief and was going through it.

**CG:** So who was this man pretending to be a journalist?

**Mother:** I suspect that he was hired by the Defence lawyer for Mr. P., probably a private eye, in some way helping the defence, because he taped my conversation and I know from the way the defence used things that were said in court, the only way he would have had it was from that conversation. [N.B. Please see 'Further Postscript' at the end of Part Two].

**CG:** So we get to the trial.

**Mother:** From the Committal Hearing (March 1991), which is recorded on tape, it is evident that the Magistrate believed the children had not lied and that the teacher should stand trial. The Defence attempted to take it out of the State because of the publicity, and they had it moved. (October 1991). The next tactic was to use the 'voir dire' to attempt to convince the Judge that I had set up the case and the children were colluding. The Judge decided to have one trial with the 3 boys giving evidence. The nervous mother did not turn up and it was suggested that certain Ministry officials

had advised her that it was not good for her child to be involved. This meant that the trial ran as 2 separate trials and 2 separate juries. The assault charges were dealt with at the Magistrate's Court and were struck off. And that left indecent assault which, with the legal technicalities, ruled out a lot of information for the jury. The verdict was 'not guilty'.

When I approached the Ministry Official, the response was then that the teacher would continue to teach but at another school. ♦

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