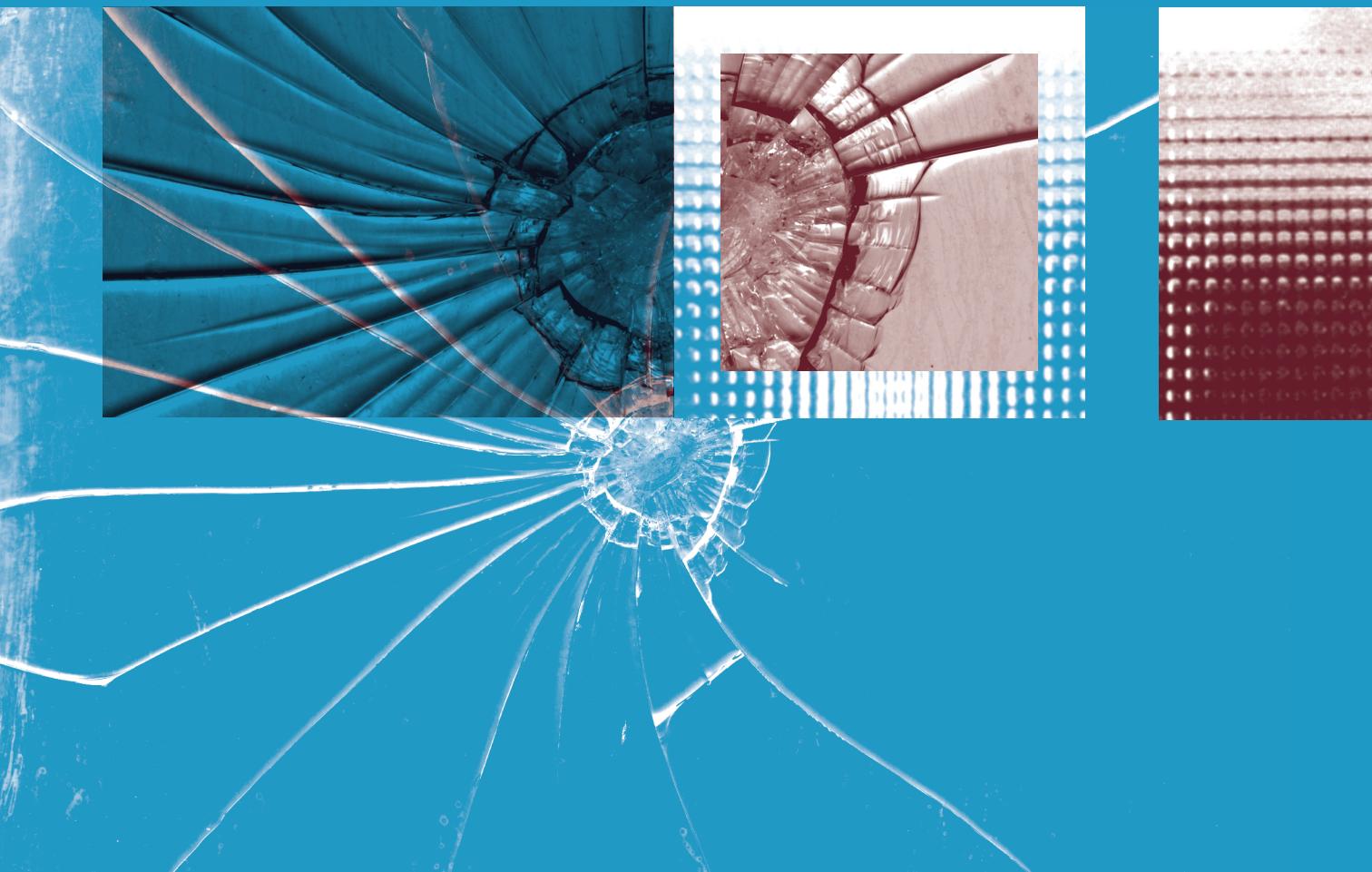
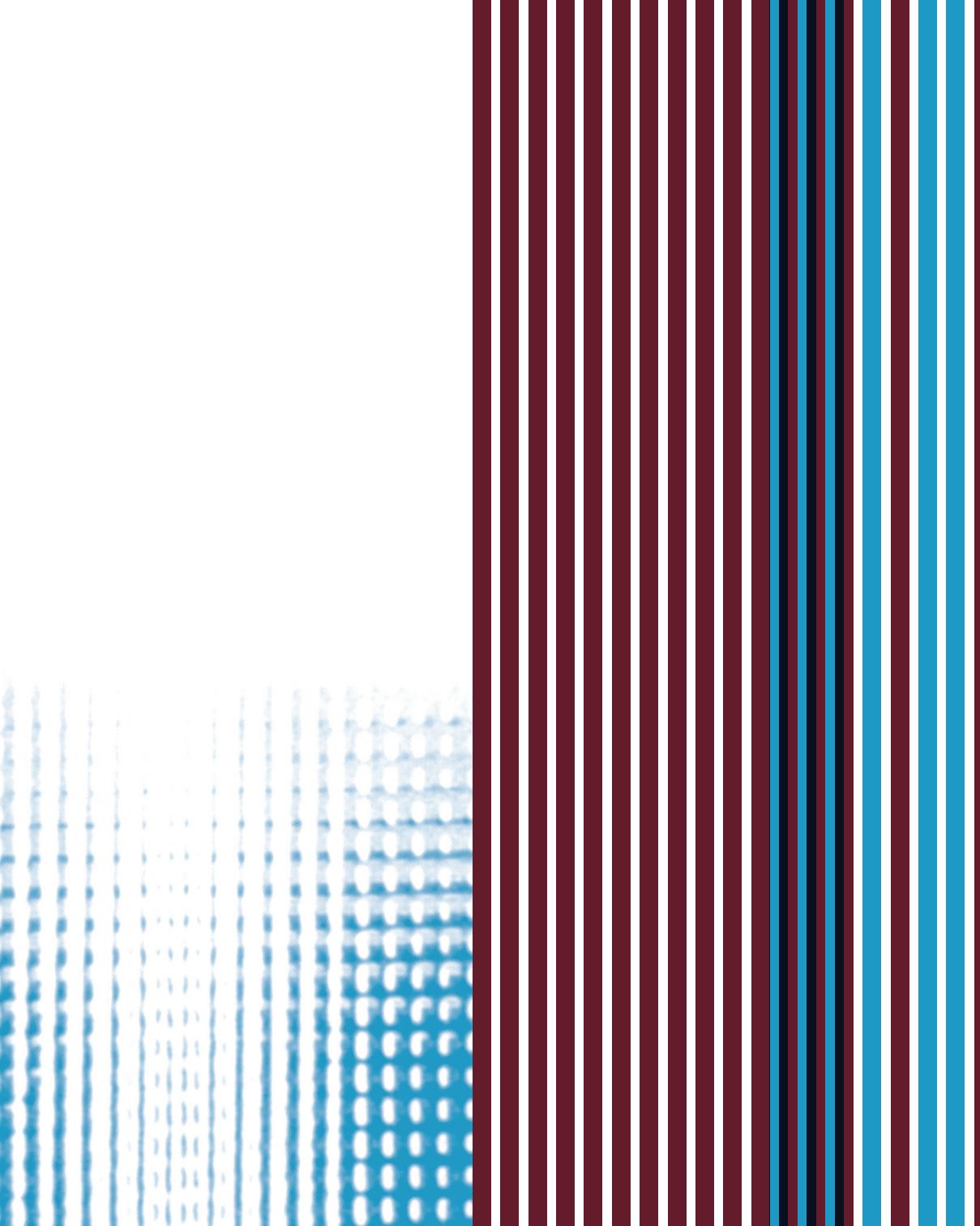


addressing abuse of power
in human services and faith communities

ESTHER CENTRE

justicemaking





History of the Esther Centre

In 1994 Rosalie Parish, St Mary's Catholic Community South Brisbane and Catholic Social Response combined resources to undertake a project. This project was named Project Esther. In the Old Testament Esther was a prophet who by "breaking the silence", in the face of fear and power, prevented the slaying of the Jews as ordered by the King. Her story was seen as a role model for addressing violence in faith communities.

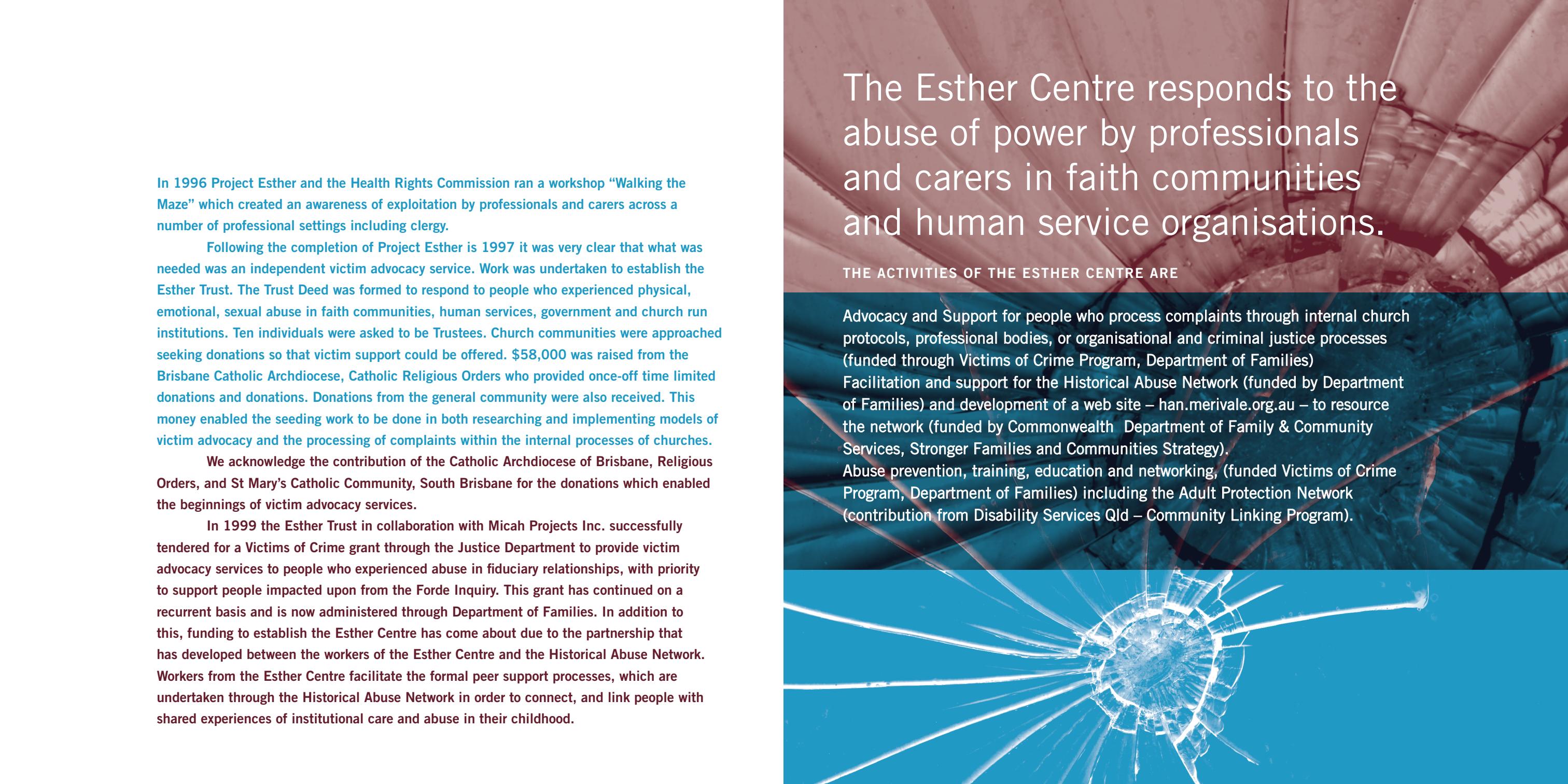
The aim of Project Esther was to be responsive in preventing and addressing the impact of violence and abuse within Christian communities. During this project many people contacted the worker about clergy abuse and abuse in institutions run by government and church.

In 1996 Project Esther and the Health Rights Commission ran a workshop “Walking the Maze” which created an awareness of exploitation by professionals and carers across a number of professional settings including clergy.

Following the completion of Project Esther in 1997 it was very clear that what was needed was an independent victim advocacy service. Work was undertaken to establish the Esther Trust. The Trust Deed was formed to respond to people who experienced physical, emotional, sexual abuse in faith communities, human services, government and church run institutions. Ten individuals were asked to be Trustees. Church communities were approached seeking donations so that victim support could be offered. \$58,000 was raised from the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese, Catholic Religious Orders who provided once-off time limited donations and donations. Donations from the general community were also received. This money enabled the seeding work to be done in both researching and implementing models of victim advocacy and the processing of complaints within the internal processes of churches.

We acknowledge the contribution of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, Religious Orders, and St Mary’s Catholic Community, South Brisbane for the donations which enabled the beginnings of victim advocacy services.

In 1999 the Esther Trust in collaboration with Micah Projects Inc. successfully tendered for a Victims of Crime grant through the Justice Department to provide victim advocacy services to people who experienced abuse in fiduciary relationships, with priority to support people impacted upon from the Forde Inquiry. This grant has continued on a recurrent basis and is now administered through Department of Families. In addition to this, funding to establish the Esther Centre has come about due to the partnership that has developed between the workers of the Esther Centre and the Historical Abuse Network. Workers from the Esther Centre facilitate the formal peer support processes, which are undertaken through the Historical Abuse Network in order to connect, and link people with shared experiences of institutional care and abuse in their childhood.



The Esther Centre responds to the abuse of power by professionals and carers in faith communities and human service organisations.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ESTHER CENTRE ARE

Advocacy and Support for people who process complaints through internal church protocols, professional bodies, or organisational and criminal justice processes (funded through Victims of Crime Program, Department of Families)

Facilitation and support for the Historical Abuse Network (funded by Department of Families) and development of a web site – han.merivale.org.au – to resource the network (funded by Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services, Stronger Families and Communities Strategy).

Abuse prevention, training, education and networking, (funded Victims of Crime Program, Department of Families) including the Adult Protection Network (contribution from Disability Services Qld – Community Linking Program).

The Esther Centre as an organisation affirms the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

The Declaration is based on the philosophy that victims of the abuse of power should be adequately recognised and treated with respect for their dignity. Victims of abuse of power are entitled to access judicial mechanisms and prompt redress for the harm and loss suffered. They are also entitled to receive adequate specialised assistance in dealing with emotional trauma and other problems caused by the victimisation.

Definitions

“Victims of Crime” are defined as persons who individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental right, through acts or omission that are in violation of criminal laws, and or acts of omission that constitute violations not of national criminal law but of internationally recognised norms relating to human rights.

“Victims of Abuse of Power” are defined as persons, who individually or collectively have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions (or systemic arrangements) that do not yet constitute violations of national criminal laws but of internationally recognised norms relating to human rights

The term “victim” also includes, where appropriate the immediate family or dependents of the direct victims and person who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimisation.

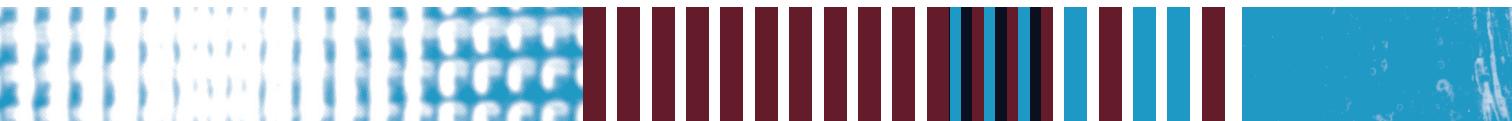
The term “professional” relates to any person in a helping or professional role either paid or unpaid, within organisations, faith or church communities or private practice. A carer is any person paid or voluntary who is undertaking their role through an organisation. Family members can also be carers and in a position of trust for a family member who is vulnerable due to illness, age, or disability.

The nature of the abuse or exploitation may be one or a combination of the following: **physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, financial, or spiritual.**

Sexual abuse or sexualised behaviour refers to any contact, bodily movement or verbalisation that uses sexual expression to control or intimidate or gain consent of the less powerful person in the relationship. The acts involved may be either overt (that is involve actual physical contact of a sexual nature) or covert (as in pornography, sexual innuendo, or inappropriate disclosures of a personal nature regarding sexual matters). The person victimised may be either an adult or a child, female or male, and the same or opposite sex as the abuser. The terms “sexual abuse”, “exploitation” and “harassment” are often used to describe different forms of sexual contact.

Abuse of power by a professional or carer is

1. The misuse of power and authority, with the professional or carer using their position and power to meet their own needs rather than the needs of those to whom they are providing professional service or care.
2. Vulnerability and trust are exploited, as the professional or carer takes advantage of the needs of the other person.
3. It involves a violation of the professional or carers role which is to work according to the best interest of the other person.
4. Meaningful consent is lacking. In order for meaningful consent to occur their must be mutuality, choice and equality as well as the absence of fear.



In working with organisations and faith communities to redress abuse and exploitation The Esther Centre has incorporated the justice making principles developed by Rev Marie Fortune, Centre for Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence, Seattle to inform the process of negotiation and redress with appropriate authorities responsible for the employee, volunteer or carer who has violated the rights of another person in their care.

1. **Truth Telling:** giving voice to the reality of abuse
2. **Acknowledge the Violation:** hear the Truth, name the abuse, and condemn it as wrong
3. **Compassion:** listen and provide support to the person disclosing
4. **Protecting the Vulnerable:** take steps to prevent further abuse to the person and others
5. **Accountability:** take steps to assist in the confrontation of the abuser, and seek redress
6. **Restitution:** make symbolic restoration of what was lost, give tangible means to acknowledge the wrongfulness of the abuse and the harm done, and to bring about healing
7. **Vindication:** remove the blame or responsibility for the abuse.

Advocacy is the process of negotiation with official bodies to respond to and hear the needs of those who have been harmed – not 'speaking for' but intervening on behalf of those who have spoken but are not being heard.

Who do advocates through the Esther Centre support

Advocates provide support to

- adults who as children have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and systemic neglect in institutions run by Government and Churches
- adults who in seeking professional assistance have had their vulnerability and trust exploited through physical, psychological, financial, emotional, verbal or sexual exploitation and abuse by the professional or carer

The role of the Advocate

An advocate is a person who

- actively assists and support individuals to process complaints through the criminal justice system when a crime has occurred, the civil justice system, the professional body or authority which is responsible for the professional e.g. health rights commission or a church authority, and the organisation for which the professional or carer was employed or undertook voluntary work.

The advocate is not a counsellor, therapist, spiritual adviser or friend. Nor does the role include being a judge, jury, decision-maker, mediator or lawyer.

The advocate's role is to

- listen
- provide information about the options a person has
- respect the options which a person chooses, even if this means not undertaking a formal process
- be well informed on the options available
- assist individuals and families to locate other supports
- speak on the behalf of a person when the person cannot speak on their own behalf
- plan and attend meetings as required
- clarify goals, problem solve, suggest options
- model appropriate boundaries
- document and locate information
- provide institutions and authorities with models for a fair process when these are absent

Advocates are guided in their work by how individuals themselves want to deal with their experience. It is critical that people are not re-victimised by advocates or others by going against what an individual decides.



Advocacy and support workers at the Esther Centre assist people who have experienced abuse to explore their options for re-dress.
 ©1989 Walk-In Counselling Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (adapted)

Historical Abuse Network

The Commission of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (1999) concluded “That over the years significant numbers of children in the care of the State in Government and non-government institutions have been subjected to repeated physical, emotional, and sexual abuse... Key commonalities among these abuses included abuse of power, a betrayal of trust, reluctance by authorities to acknowledge or deal with abuse, protection of the institution and the abusers... In addition to these we found in a number of institutions a failure to provide for the basic human needs of children... which had a profound impact on their later lives.

We conclude that although it was individuals who perpetrated each act of abuse... some measure of responsibility must be taken by those in charge of the institutions... members of religious organisations... staff and management of Department of Children’s Services... successive state governments... and society. As a State, we must face up to past wrongs and make proper redress.” (abbreviated page xiii conclusion of Report)

In response to the Commission of Inquiry, an Historical Abuse Network for people who have experienced abuse in institutions, foster care and detention has been formed.

Peer support

Historical,

adj. 1. relating to or concerned with history or past events. 2. dealing with or treating of history or past events. 3. pertaining to or of the nature of history: historical evidence. 4. pertaining to or of the nature of history as opposed to legend or fiction.

Abuse

n. 1. to use wrongly or improperly. 2. to do wrong : act injuriously towards. 3. to revile; malign. 4. to deceive. 5. wrong or improper use; misuse. 6. insulting language. 7. ill treatment of a person. 8. a corrupt practice or custom; an offence. 9. deception.

Network

n. 1. to form possibly advantageous associations with other people.

MACQUARIE DICTIONARY

- THE AIMS OF THE NETWORK ARE:**
- TO MAINTAIN A VOICE SO AS TO CONTINUE DIALOGUE REGARDING THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FORDE INQUIRY
 - TO SHARE AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION
 - TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER
 - TO RECONNECT AND CREATE SUPPORT GROUPS FOR EX-RESIDENTS OF EACH INSTITUTION AND FORMER CHILDREN IN CARE AS REQUESTED
 - TO PROMOTE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND ENSURE RECOGNITION OF THE CONTINUED DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE OF EX-RESIDENTS AND FORMER CHILDREN IN CARE.



ESTHER CENTRE

ADDRESSING THE ABUSE OF POWER IN
HUMAN SERVICES & FAITH COMMUNITIES

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An activity of Micah Projects



**Queensland
Government**

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