

Abuse victim speaks out

TIM HOWARD

A victim of twice convicted paedophile John William Hardy wants more victims to tell their stories to help them deal with their trauma and to ensure he stays in jail for the rest of his life.

Hardy, 71, was convicted in Adelaide earlier this year on charges of molesting five young boys on Kangaroo Island between 2002 and 2019. He was sentenced to 15 years jail, with a 12-year non-parole period.

In 1991 Hardy was jailed after he was found guilty of molesting at least 15 boys in Maclean.

One of those Maclean victims is James de Dassel. He was just seven years old when the abuse started.

Mr de Dassel, now in his 40s, runs a successful business and is a father of two young children.

He wants to make sure Hardy can never harm any more children, but he also wants victims to know the relief they can find through telling their stories.

"It's important people in the Clarence Valley know that since Hardy was released from jail in the late 90s he has been abusing children again, this time on Kangaroo Island. And now he is in jail again," Mr de Dassel said.

It emerged in evidence in the South Australian trial that Hardy may have abused at least 25 boys during his period in the Clarence Valley, but Mr de Dassel said it was likely to be many

more.

"In my opinion the number of victims could be in the triple figures," he said. "No-one knows for sure when he started abusing, and I know for a fact many of his victims have not come forward to tell their story."

He said NSW Police were keen to hear from Hardy's victims even though decades had elapsed since his NSW conviction.

"I know of three NSW victims who have given statements to police," he said. "If he ever gets out of jail in South Australia, he will be arrested the same day and extradited to NSW to face more charges."

"He should never be out of jail again."

Mr de Dassel has had his own mental health issues and has suffered from depression and anxiety.

"I have shared my story many times with close friends and family and have sought therapy form professional counsellors over many years. I think that has been really important for me, he said."

The damage caused by Hardy goes deeper, as his older brother, Paul, was also abused by Hardy for many years.

After a long struggle to come to terms with his experiences, Paul de Dassel lost his life in a state of psychosis, devastating his tight-knit family.

While he's determined to make sure Hardy remains behind bars, Mr de Dassel said he wanted victims to know the therapeutic value of telling their stories and



James de Dassel.

getting the horror of their experience out into the open.

"I know there's a stigma about being an abuse victim for many adult men," he said.

"There are a lot of people out there battling drug and alcohol addictions, mental health and depression or worse, taking their lives like my older brother."

He said the act of speaking out was the first step in taking control of the trauma that stayed inside them.

"It's always with you, it will never go away, but having someone listen to your story makes it real," he said.

"It can be anyone. They don't have to go public to the media. It can be a family member, a close friend, a police officer or a counsellor."

He said it was important for victims

to realise there was no shame in their experience, that the perpetrator was wholly responsible for what occurred.

"You've got it inside your head, going round and round and round," he said.

"It affects your whole life, your work, your friends, relationships, intimacy."

"When you have someone listening to you tell those terrible things it's like having someone share your burden."

Mr de Dassel said Hardy came into his family's life when they moved from Canberra to Maclean in 1982 to take over the BP Service Station and caravan park on the edge of town.

Hardy was a resident in the park and very quickly began to ingratiate himself into

the family's life.

"Dad had to stay in Canberra for a few months to finish off some building projects, so it was up to mum to run the business and look after 7 of her 8 children who were still at school," he said.

"When John Hardy would come over offering to take a couple of the kids camping or fishing, it seemed like a godsend," he said.

Hardy seemed the perfect neighbour. He was employed as a council ranger, was a member of Apex and had a truck and a boat.

"It was a perfect set up for him, he could take kids away camping or driving in his truck and it would have seemed ok," Mr de Dassel said.

"He had his own boat so he could take kids out fishing. That was part of his grooming."

Mr de Dassel was at a loss to know how parents could identify offenders like Hardy, who replicated his grooming behaviour when he settled in Kangaroo Island soon after he got out of jail in NSW.

"It's a hard one. The kids that he was grooming and abusing were only 6, 7, 8 years of age; at that age we trust all adult figures as though they're our own parents, and maybe what is happening has the approval of our own parents. At that age we see someone that is trusted by our parents as someone that we can find trustworthy."

"I can't tell you how many times I was abused, but it happened many many times over

many years."

Mr de Dassel said people needed to be aware paedophiles were more prevalent in the community than people suspected.

"Paedophiles are rampant in the community, it's something rife in communities across the planet," he said.

Mr de Dassel would be happy to see an online register of paedophiles so parents could check up on people who were spending time with their children.

"I don't know how you spot them," he said. "That's their craft, to be able to operate in the community without drawing attention to themselves."

But he warned the danger was more often close at hand.

"It's not a stranger grabbing a kid and taking them away in a car," he said. "Mostly it's a family member or a friend of the family."

But he said there was some positive signs as community attitudes change.

"Attitudes are changing, people are becoming more understanding of victims and encouraging abuse victims to tell their stories," he said.

"More people are speaking out so they can get the therapy they need to help them get the quality of life they deserve."

Letters	14	Travel	62	Wines	70	Classifieds	76
TV Guide	35	Business	63	Cooking	71	Trades & Services	78
Rural	37	Motoring	64	Puzzles	72	Community	80
Real Estate	59	Gardening	68	Stars	74	Sports	84
Entertainment	60	Health	69	Funerals	75	Next Edition	August 4

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