

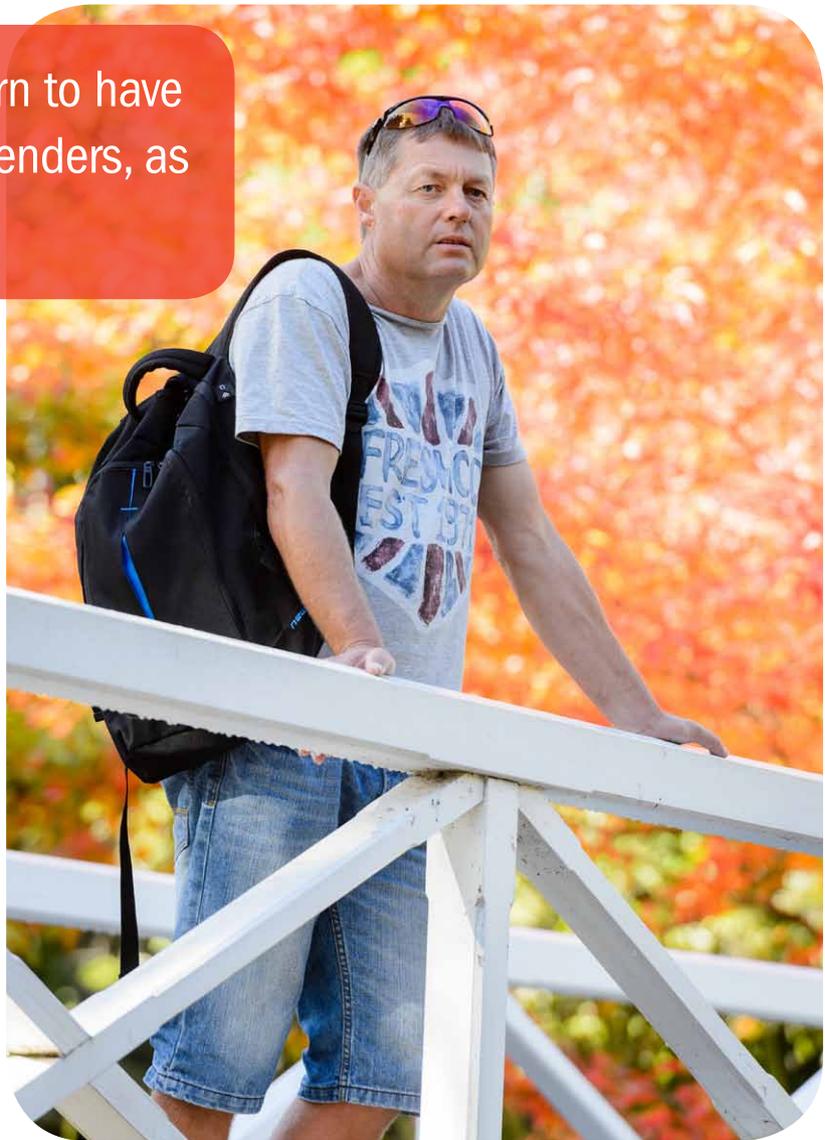


BRENT

STORIES OF
CHANGE

A hard
but worthwhile journey

“I think we need to learn to have compassion for the offenders, as well as the victims.”



For anyone to come forward, they have to get triggered. For me, it took 20 years of built-up, hidden emotions.

I remember I thought I was having a good day, no problems. I had a friend I was quite keen on, and I told her that I'd always kept a secret. She wanted to know what it was, so I went away and wrote it down without thinking. When I came back and read what I'd written, it hit me like a freight train. I was in shock for five weeks. It was the beginning of me coming forward.

Once I'd been triggered, it was like there was no turning back. You make choices, like going to the police, but it doesn't feel like a choice, because I was only focused on stopping the abuse happening to others. I had to stop it.

A position came up at work that I was encouraged to go for, but I was struggling. I really wasn't up to it at that time. I've worked for the same employer, on the same farm, since I was a teenager, and I've been incredibly goal-focused my whole life. I had some great role models as a

kid, like my employer's father, who really instilled that in me. And it's dominated my life, really. I was saving for my family and my mortgage, long before I had a family.

So when this trigger changed my life, seven years ago, it also changed my goals. I was no longer pushed at work, but I was driven to answer questions about myself for the first time in my life: sitting on that tractor, hour after hour, row after row, I wrote and wrote and wrote. Writing has given me confidence. I started writing this stuff, these free-flowing thoughts that came from within. I don't even know what I wrote half the time, but analysing myself, my behaviours, with time the answers started to come.

I'd spent my whole life quiet, reserved, shut down. I think that's what sexual abuse will do to you. I wrote down a list of new goals: inner peace, calmness, family, happiness, learning, a sense of



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achievement and most importantly achieving self-confidence. I feel like I’m only just getting to the point where I can fully focus on me. I’ve had to get a lot out of the way first: the police investigation, the counselling, the restorative justice and learning how to breathe through stress.

I’ve known my offender for most of my life. He’s always been a good guy, and a mentor. Honestly, today I don’t hate or blame him, as that sort of thinking only generates anger.

I think we need to learn to have compassion for the offenders, as well the victims. It’s a habit, a bad habit, and one we don’t accept but how do they learn to break it? For me that’s what the restorative justice process was about. It was about compassion, and it was also about him having a chance to be honest and encouraging him to give more names.

I now realise that I couldn’t force him to talk about, and admit things, he wasn’t ready to. It’ll come with time, as he works through his own journey. I still hope he’s getting the help he needs to do that.

I’m glad we have the system – some countries don’t – but I’ve also struggled with it. If I could change anything it would be finding ways to reduce anxiety. The system needs to find a way of better showing compassion to the victim too, during this long, confusing process. It was over a year and a half between the time I went to the police and the offender being confronted, for



example, let alone everything that came after. I’d often be left without contact for six weeks, not knowing what was going on. It’s small changes that would make a massive difference. I needed much more feedback from all the agencies working together. That would have helped my anxiety.

It’s something that absorbs your whole life. There was no-one else to help my wife, who is from Poland, get through it. We’d already been through a lot together, and she wanted to start a family, but I knew that I needed to deal with this first, even though I’d been wanting a family my whole life.





I don't know what got me through; you just get so far and you keep going. It's like doing a big race. The whole thing of trying to achieve something you don't think you can do. The truth is, coming forward has to be a victim's choice. We can scream, "Here's the help, here's the help," all we want, but we'll often just push them further away.

So I'd encourage anyone who might be in that situation to just write, like I did – you don't have to tell anyone at first, just write, because that might be all it takes to start the process of understanding. Come forward when the time feels right for you.

I guess in the beginning I didn't really understand the impact it was having. It is only when you look back 25 years down the track that you can see it. I was totally unaware I had a problem. I tended to just sweep the truth under the carpet and continue on with life. Talking helps, I've seen a counsellor and it gets easier to talk about. You need people around you with the tools to help deal with these life issues.

Mostly though I distanced myself and got into mountain biking and multisport. They were very individual sports where it was all about self-discipline and heading for the hills. And the exercise, it was the only thing that really helped my anxiety. My relationships tended to be short-term because I found it very hard to get close to people and let them find the true me.

It's been a pretty long, hard journey and you ask yourself "was it worth it?" But yes, it was worth it. Knowing that you are not going to be lonely anymore. Now I have a family and two lovely kids. Now I'm focused on looking after them and making it a good family unit.

My aim these days is have more balance in my life. I've never had a proper relationship in my life so that's all part of it too. It's about enjoying life now and living in the moment. Having balance in my life, including more happiness and enjoyment. ●

