

PURPLE RIBBON

Raising the awareness of

PURPLE RIBBON MONTH

by Jan Watson from the Purple Ribbon Consultancy, Wyong

The Purple Ribbon Project, began in the Gold Coast area in 1994, aims to establish the month of July nationally each year as "Purple Ribbon Month". During the month people are asked to wear a small purple ribbon as a protest against the extent of child abuse in our community. The colour purple was chosen as it is a spiritual hue signifying compassion.

Throughout the month, organisations in the community are encouraged to run or participate in events which will help educate people and break the silence about child abuse. The Wyong Council in New South Wales has used its staff and facilities to create signs for display in council buildings and has provided financial support for the purchase of purple ribbon and pins for distribution to citizens. The local hospital pink ladies have used their spare time to cut and pin thousands of ribbons, and the council conducts seminars, workshops, hypotheticals and forums on the issue of child abuse throughout the shire.

For the last three years, adult survivors of child abuse have compiled a survivors' book of poetry which has been published by Wyong Council, and they have also prepared and updated a list of local therapists who work with adult and child survivors of child abuse. The local media participates also, with articles and information about events broadcast, televised or published regularly throughout the month.

Public support has grown in the six years the project has been running and, while the ribbons are free, the increasing amount

of donations and feedback received each year is evidence of the concern the public feels about this long hidden issue. The campaign has won awards for Wyong Council at local government conferences, where it has been recognised as a potent way of bringing the shame of child abuse to public attention.

In July 2000, the project was adopted by a number of other councils in New South Wales. The aim is to have the project recognised on a national level, as only by breaking the silence on child abuse will we be able to fight and eliminate this evil in our society. To this end, in April 2000, I approached all Federal Members of Parliament and Senators and as a result the Purple Ribbon Project was observed in Canberra as Purple Ribbon Day on 28 June, as Parliament is in recess during July. All Adjournment speeches that day from both parties were

"Purple – a spiritual hue

about child abuse and six Members (three Labor and three Liberal) have subsequently formed "Parliamentarians Against Child Abuse" – a bipartisan organisation dedicated to raising awareness of child abuse and working to address the issues which are of paramount importance in protecting our children, now and in the future.

While acceptance of Purple Ribbon Month by many councils in New South Wales is a good start, it is our intention to continue to work towards the project being adopted annually on a national level.

Purple Ribbon Month serves a worthwhile purpose in helping to raise awareness of the effects and extent of child abuse in our community. It makes it possible for participation to be at a "grass roots level", involving everyone in the community from the Mayor to the smallest children in kindergarten, as well as the mums and dads at home. The feedback we have received has always been very positive with many people stating that "this should have happened years ago"!

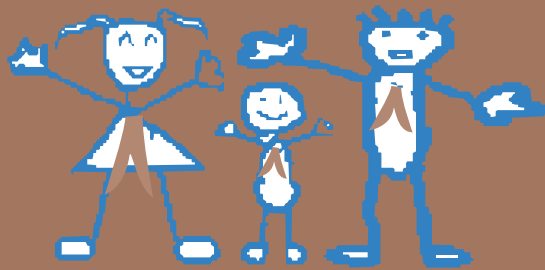
I would like to encourage people to approach their local councils or form their own committees to observe Purple Ribbon Month actively in their areas, and let it be known that the community will no longer tolerate this crime being perpetrated on our children.

For more information about Purple Ribbon Month contact Jan Watson at watson@fastlink.com.au or at PO Box 524, Wyong, New South Wales 2259.



MONTH

child abuse



Logo designed by Brooke (9) and Jake (11) Samuels

REVEALING IMAGES PROGRAM

by Kerrie Moynihan from the Purple Ribbon Committee, Wollongong

One of the projects run in Purple Ribbon month is the Revealing Images program which run by Advocates for the Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA), a national organisation for survivors of abuse. The program, which was steered by myself and Jill Darville commenced with a grant from the Wollongong City Council which enabled the establishment of separate art workshops for men and women.

The workshops were offered at no cost to survivors of child abuse and were publicly advertised. Criteria for participation was based on personal interest alone with individuals with little or no artistic experience being the focus of groups. The workshops were facilitated by local artists Jasmine Hurst, Susan Levy and John Marsh, and culminated in the official launch of Revealing Images.

signifying compassion"

The final works produced in the workshops were then displayed at the Wollongong City Art Gallery throughout Purple Ribbon Month. The gallery generously donates time and space, allocating the exhibition as a primary part of gallery events during the year. Displaying the art works of survivors of child abuse became an integral part of the campaign in raising community awareness. Personal experiences were highlighted and those adults carrying the effects of trauma were given the opportunity and space to tell their stories.

The growth of Revealing Images has been propelled by the acclaim its artworks have received from community members with over 800 people attending the exhibition launch in 2001. The most notable part of the evening were the reactions from the artists themselves who had expressed a part of themselves and their experiences through photography, painting, models, computer generated art and mixed media.

The positive response from the community was not only rewarding for participants, but also served as an acknowledgment of the experience and impact of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, and domestic violence in children and adults. The diversity of materials used by the artists reflected the multitude of these experiences. Rather than being an expose of the horrors of child abuse, the exhibition was a celebration of the strengths and courage of the individuals who chose to speak out in evocative visual landscapes, and continue to survive.

The guest book for the 2001 event was saturated with praise for the artists and the integrity of a regional art gallery that could support such important work. The exhibition gave the community a view of a side of life that is so often shunned by our society and reminded many that these too are the voices of children who cannot yet name the horrors of their abuse. These images are those that so many children will know as they struggle to cope in adult life. For the participants, the images also confirmed the extent of abuse and it gave those who have suffered alone, the knowledge that there are many who can walk with them. Individuals suddenly found solace, support and unconditional understanding that in many cases could not otherwise be found.

Artwork produced by this year's Revealing Images was again displayed at Wollongong City Art Gallery. I have emerged from this year's program as an organiser and participant with an enormous sense of pride in this initiative, and in the courage of those who gave it a go – those who, in connecting with others, have touched a part of themselves forever scarred by experience and memory. It is my hope that this initiative will go on and the images that are revealed will send a message out to the silenced, and set someone free.

To find out more about Revealing Images, contact Kerrie Moynihan at kaptain@hotmail.com



Artwork by Kerrie Moynihan
Photography by Jill Darville

Artworks and photography by Jill Darville