



## **Submission - October 2023**

### **State Government of Victoria**

Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools.

# LOUD fence Inc

Submission to the Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools.

## Introduction

The original LOUD fence is the front of the former 'St Alipius Christian Brothers School' located in Victoria Street, Ballarat.

It was started in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse's **Case Study 28: Catholic Church authorities in Ballarat** which sat in Ballarat from Tuesday 19 May to Friday 29 May 2015.

As the media reported on the full details of the abuse and its cover up, including the silencing of child victims, their loved ones, the victims as adult survivors and whistle-blowers – the Ballarat community found its voice in the form of ribbons tied to fences marking places where abuse had taken place.

The LOUD fence Face Book page became a place for victims, survivors, their loved ones and the broader community to further show their support and voice their calls for justice for the harm experienced within so many different institutions across Ballarat. It became apparent early that the Catholic Church was not the sole responsible institution as victim-survivors recounted their experiences in other faith-based schools and orphanages, public schools and orphanages and the Ballarat Fire Brigade (Country Fire Authority).

Through social media, community events and ribbon tying, LOUD fence has become a safe space for victim-survivors to tell their stories and so over the past eight years, a broad variety of victim-survivor groups have connected to the LOUD fence movement. This has included child sexual abuse victim-survivors of the Beaumaris and surrounding communities. For more information about LOUD fence see our website <https://www.loudfence.org.au/>

Given LOUD fence Inc's connection to the Beaumaris survivors and its connection to so many adults with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse, it would like to make the following submission to the **Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools**.

This submission will respond to the questions posed to organisations where LOUD fence Inc feels it can make a lived experience informed response.

## Submission responses

**Please share any ideas to improve the effectiveness of support services for adults who have experienced child sexual abuse at government schools.**

LOUD fence Inc would like to see developed a nationally consistent support framework for adults who have experienced child sexual abuse and for this framework to be implemented in all government schools.

LOUD fence Inc has developed the **LOUD Response Model** as a multi-faceted approach to responding to instances of child sexual abuse within an organisation or educational institution. Its

purpose is to provide a framework for the response and in turn, support for children (0-18 years of age), adults and the communities impacted. It has been developed in response to the wide-ranging impact that child sexual abuse has on communities – past, present and emerging.

It also reflects the **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**, Recommendation 13.7 in which State and Territory governments should provide nationally consistent and easily accessible guidance to teachers and principals on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in all government and non-government schools. Through the development of our Response Model, LOUD fence Inc is seeking to address inconsistencies in both government and non-government schools regarding reporting, recovery, healing, and incident documentation.

It has been developed to be used when responding to matters of historical abuse and is highly focused on the responses and supports that can best facilitate recovery for victim-survivors, their loved ones, and the wider community.

The key elements of the framework are based upon the acronym LOUD to promote connection, compassion, and care for all involved throughout the processes of reporting, recovering and re-evaluating decisions and next steps for the ongoing health and well-being of all involved.

In summary the LOUD Response model aims to provide opportunities to:

- **Listen** – to the needs of victims, survivors, children (0-18), loved ones, staff and the wider community.
- **Openness** – be open to discussions, challenge old practices and be open to change.
- **Unite** – unite as a community, enabling friends, peers, and colleagues of all ages to gain support.
- **Develop** – develop plans for care, change, action, future goals, memorialisation.

The LOUD Response model is person-centred, trauma informed and designed to provide:

- Choice and control to victims, survivors, their loved ones, staff, colleagues, peers, fellow students and friends through this empowering approach.
- Opportunities for personal choices regarding requests for acknowledgement, apologies, memorialisation, and community events such as ribbon tying as acknowledgement for what has happened.
- Educational institutions lead recovery and empower all involved from the start.

LOUD fence Inc would like to work collaboratively with the Victorian Government and other institutions, organisations, and educational bodies to further develop and implement our LOUD Response Model (Attachment 1).

#### **LOUD fence Inc would like to see improvement in the access for victim-survivor and community-led support.**

LOUD fence Inc has been facilitating a safe and welcoming space in Ballarat under the banner of 'LOUD Space'. The space has allowed victims, survivors, their loved ones, and friends to participate in creative art workshops, music workshops, gentle exercise and peer support connections via The Survivor Hub.

Local wait lists for counselling via organisations and professionals are long and can be as lengthy as 12 months meaning support is rarely provided at critical points to support recovery and healing. Survivor and community led activities are an option that could be better utilised but they require funding support for activities, coordination, and volunteer training.

However, victim-survivors should not be restricted to participating in group activities specially designed for them. More could be done to build awareness of the impacts of child sexual abuse and the importance of victim-survivors feeling safe and supported to participate in activities of their choice. More could be done by providing training for trauma and complex trauma for people who facilitate activities, and volunteers in the many community interest groups and associations across Victoria – this helps to build trauma-informed organisations and communities.

**LOUD fence Inc would like to see an improvement in accessing government financial assistance for victims and their loved ones to access support.**

The financial impact upon victims and their loved ones seeking therapeutic support is significant, in many cases survivors and their loved one's report being able to 'pay' for a few sessions but rarely enough to for them to make headway towards recovery. There needs to be better support provided to all who are seeking recovery and healing services to understand what is available and how to access what is needed and the financial support to ensure the right services can be accessed for the right amount of time. Too often we hear people having to make choices about essential living costs and therapy costs. This is unacceptable given many victim-survivors experience financial hardship due to the impacts of complex trauma on maintaining or obtaining employment.

**LOUD fence Inc would like to see a clear, consistent approach to accessing support services including easy guides on how to find a range of different supports and how to engage with the support needed.**

The Royal Commission, and many other reports over recent decades, all acknowledge the harm caused by child sexual abuse and the ongoing complex trauma that so many victim-survivors live with every day.

Whether schools are dealing with a current or historical incident of child sexual abuse they have a moral responsibility (above their legal responsibility) to provide care and support for those who have been impacted. This must be a timely response from school leaders and should be inclusive of all who have been affected and impacted both within and outside of the school itself.

The offer of support and therapy should be personalised and consider what works best for the person, loved ones or the community. There are many trauma informed counselling and therapies that are known to help child sexual abuse victims through their experience as children and as adults. What is offered by schools should include creative therapies such as art, music and dance, it might also include animals, yoga and gentle exercise are also known to be effective.

For many adult victim-survivors complex health issues and addiction issues see them bouncing from crisis to crisis, many experience homelessness and significant mental health challenges that make it difficult for loved ones to support them. A holistic approach should be taken when offering support and coordination and management should be available if wanted.

**LOUD fence Inc would like to see a National Information Hub as 'one place' for support agency and therapy directories, information on how to report child sexual abuse, how to seek redress etc.**

Currently in Victoria it is difficult to navigate the many pages on different government department websites that are set up to guide people with their many different needs when it comes to seeking support, seeking redress, reporting child sexual abuse and legal advice.

A National Information Hub (or Victorian hub) would better support people who are trying to make sense of what has happened recently or historically and provide victim-survivors, and their loved ones' greater agency for making choices and decisions.

Not all victim-survivors are in scope for the National Redress Scheme, and it doesn't try to address broader issues for individuals, families or organisations who may be considering how they respond and support an incident of child sexual abuse, current or historical.

The hub could also provide information about how to talk to children about child sexual abuse and guidance for schools, sporting clubs and all organisations who deliver services or recreational and hobby activities for children.

**Please describe best-practice, evidence-informed approaches to appropriately support healing for adults who have experienced child sexual abuse at government schools, their families, friends, loved ones, other supporters, and affected communities. For example, a formal apology, memorialisation, or other activities.**

'Loud Fence is getting louder...One of the darkest legacies of these crimes was to drive its victims out into a wilderness of guilt and self-destruction. But this gesture (tying ribbons to a fence) says in the simplest of ways the community recognises the wrong and is with you now. (The Courier, 2016, 1 February, The power of a message of community hope.)

Over recent years LOUD fence Inc has been approached by several schools and the Ballarat Fire Brigade (Country Fire Authority) for the purpose of using ribbons and a loud fence as part of their acknowledgement to victim-survivors of the harm caused by their institution. These LOUD fences have been central to a public acknowledgement and apology by the institution and a memorial that is seen to be gentle and fluid in the way the ribbons move and respond to wind and weather. Ribbons are extraordinarily hardy and can last for several years but they also require care over time – meaning a LOUD fence continues to drive conversations about what happened at a particular place as fences are replenished over time.

A LOUD fence may not always be the right memorial for an institution, but LOUD fence Inc encourages institutions to consult with victim-survivors, to listen deeply and to encourage creative ideas for memorials that continue to engage people and communities over time. Please see the following two case studies as best practice approaches to creating memorials.

### **Memorial Case Study 1:**

#### **Ballarat East Fire Brigade**

20-22 Barkly Street, Ballarat East. Victoria 3350

From around 2018, ribbons had been tied to the Fire Station fence acknowledging historical victim-survivors of child sexual assault. The abuse had been perpetrated by a then CFA staff Officer, at the Barkly Street location in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In 2019, the Brigade made the decision to replace the chain mesh fence (where ribbons had been tied) and reinstate a timber picket fence as previously installed in line with the heritage of the building. As part of this decision, the Brigade also sought to engage and consult with victim-survivors to ensure they were heard and considered in the fence transition.

Staff and survivors met to discuss the best way to acknowledge the victim-survivors of past child sexual assault.

There were ongoing consultations with the victim-survivors, Maureen from LOUD fence Inc, Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assault staff members and a local survivor-advocate.

It was decided that a section of the fence with the ribbons tied, would be removed and later embedded into the new fence.

A plaque was placed on the fence with the wording created, in collaboration with the Brigade victim-survivors.

An event was held on 14th September 2019 on site with victim-survivors, the community and dignitaries attending.

As part of the acknowledgment, a victim-survivor shared their story through a speech including a moving poem titled - **4 Little Ribbons** (Attachment 2).

All current CFA members wore coloured ribbons on their lapels on the day and ribbons were available to be tied to the fence by those who attended. The ribbons remain on the fence to this day. They are replenished regularly by unknown people.

The CFA published an account of the event on its website <https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/cfa-acknowledges-survivors-of-historical-child-sex-abuse> including a photo of the memorial itself



The plaque reads:

*These ribbons are a symbol of respect for, and represent the voice of, survivors who suffered child sexual abuse through a connection with the Ballarat Fire Brigade. We honour their bravery and acknowledge their pain and suffering. CFA apologises for what occurred and stands with the survivors, their families and the Ballarat community. We are committed to hearing process, to learning from the past and to being an organisation where all children are safe.*

In an article in the local Ballarat Times (<https://timesnewsgroup.com.au/ballarat/news/fighting-fires-and-sharing-history/>), Captain Mark Cartledge provided this insight of his experience of the importance of engaging with victim-survivors for the creation of a memorial at the iconic Ballarat Fire Brigade site.

*All his firefighting and road rescue achievements aside, Mark said one of the most impactful moments during his time with CFA was working with survivors of child sex abuse through a connection to Ballarat Fire Brigade in the 1970's and 1980's.*

*"It was important to me for both CFA and the brigade to recognise the strength of survivors," he said. We did this through the construction of a permanent plaque and 'loud fence' at the Ballarat Fire Station."*

*The genuine connection with survivors and compassion displayed by Mark did not go unnoticed by senior leaders, with his sustained and authentic leadership the driving force behind a poignant plaque unveiling in 2019.*

*"I thought I was just a Captain trying to make a positive change for the brigade and the wider Ballarat community – when I really think about it, what it's done has actually created change for CFA as a whole."*

## Memorial Case Study 2:

### City of Ballarat

#### Continuous Voices Project

The City of Ballarat's recent announcement that it *'will soon be home to Australia's first sexual abuse survivor memorial for Continuous Voices.'* (Ballarat Courier, 3 November 2023) is testament to the Ballarat community's determination to be a global leader when it comes to the acknowledgement of victim-survivors and the importance of always having a voice and no longer being pushed to the side. Council's Continuous Voices Community Reference Group represents the voices of many victim-survivors who participated in therapeutic creative art activities that have informed the brief for a national design competition. For more information on the process for engagement with victim-survivors go to the Creative Ballarat – compassion through creative arts website <https://www.creativeballarat.com.au/continuousvoices>.

LOUD fence Inc has been a long-standing member of the Reference Group and has been able to represent the many victim-survivor voices that it is connected to. This has led to a design brief for the competition is meaningfully informed and will lead to the selection of a design that can acknowledge the past but look to a different future.

LOUD fence Inc would like the Board of Inquiry to note and understand how important acknowledgement through memorialisation, both small and large scale, is to victim-survivors. We are not proposing ribbons are a central theme or part of any memorial but cannot speak strongly enough to ensuring the processes for engaging with victim-survivors are robust, far-reaching, and varied in approach. It must be a meaningful opportunity to engage in deep conversation and creative thinking to inform any memorial design and be open to the potential for healing and recovery.

### National Survivor Day

Tuesday 14 November 2023 will mark the second National Survivors' Day <https://www.nationalsurvivorsday.org.au/> which aims to:

- Acknowledge the profound harm caused to Survivors and the community by sexual assault and institutional abuse
- Support efforts towards de-stigmatisation, and public acceptance of the work undertaken by Survivors and advocates
- Work to improve responses to Survivors and all those impacted by Sexual Assault and Institutional Abuse

LOUD fence Inc has collaborated with the In Good Faith Foundation (IGFF) in the establishment of this important day.

LOUD fence Inc would like the Board of Inquiry to consider how the National Survivors' Day could be used in schools as a meaningful way to acknowledge historical abuse and send the message to a school's victim-survivors that we see you, we hear you and we believe you.

Celebrating this day is an opportunity to engage with the school community about child safety conversations, working with children about their voice should they be at risk of sexual abuse in any setting.

This can be a day to be embraced for education, acknowledgement and healing, and an opportunity for schools to show leadership within their local communities.

LOUD fence Inc since its creation in 2015 has focussed on finding the ways that resonate with victim-survivors to amplify their voices and it will continue to do so into the future, for **'every ribbon has a voice... just listen!**

## Attachment 1






**WHAT IS THE 'LOUD RESPONSE MODEL' ?**

The LOUD Response Model has been developed as a multi-faceted approach to responding to current and historical reports of child sexual abuse within an educational setting. For many victim-survivors of historical child sexual abuse an important step in healing and recovery is acknowledgment by the institution where the harm was experienced. It is important for them to be assured that what happened to them will not happen to children now.



School leaders and communities engaging with victim-survivors offers the opportunity to right past wrongs in a meaningful way, to build trust and confidence that the school is a safe place for both its current and former students.

The model uses the acronym LOUD to connect and care for victim-survivors and the school community more broadly. It uses simple trauma-informed practices that can be put into action simply and quickly. It keeps children and people at the centre and encourages community leadership through **FOUR** pillars of action.

 <b>Listen</b>	 <b>Openness</b>	 <b>Unite</b>	 <b>Develop next steps</b>
<p>The first pillar of the LOUD Response model is LISTEN.</p>	<p>The second pillar of the LOUD Response model is be OPENNESS.</p>	<p>The third pillar of the LOUD Response model is UNITE.</p>	<p>The fourth pillar of the LOUD Response model is DEVELOP NEXT STEPS</p>
<p>For the victim-survivor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen with compassion and empathy – not sympathy</li> <li>• Listen to all voices and be aware of who may not be being talking</li> <li>• Listen without judgment</li> <li>• Listen, don't solve</li> <li>• Sit on your hands if need be</li> <li>• Have someone else take confidential minutes/notes to ensure you are fully present</li> <li>• Critically reflect on what has been heard and use learnings to inform your words and your actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open to change</li> <li>• Open to new ideas</li> <li>• Open to challenge old practices and ideas</li> <li>• Open to owning history</li> <li>• Open to the concept of NO more silence</li> <li>• Open to creating safe spaces to speak</li> <li>• Open to being trauma informed (using practice) when holding meetings and conversations</li> <li>• Open to creating safe spaces for brainstorming actions, responses and next steps</li> <li>• Open to acceptance and belief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't allow the situation to enable further fractures</li> <li>• Unite as a school community</li> <li>• Unite with the loved ones of victim-survivors</li> <li>• Unite with peers, colleagues, and the school board</li> <li>• Unite through shared action</li> <li>• Unite through care and compassion</li> <li>• Unite for change</li> <li>• Unite for acknowledgement, healing and recovery</li> <li>• Unite for the safety of future generations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop self care tools and wellbeing plans for individuals and community</li> <li>• Develop outlets for voice</li> <li>• Develop action plans for change</li> <li>• Develop timelines for implementation of actions</li> <li>• Develop commitment to change and action</li> <li>• Develop the future of your organisation.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>www.loudfence.org.au</b></p>			



## Attachment 2

# 4 Little Ribbons



4 little ribbons. What do they mean?  
1 little girls and 3 little boys  
But so much more.

Childhoods destroyed  
Hearts broken  
Lives changed  
Full of pain  
But so much more.

Friendships formed  
A united voice for all.  
Anger, confusion, hurt and pain  
The only voice for some.

4 little ribbons help me feel I'm not alone,  
But sadly, there are more.

4 little ribbons the truth is out,  
Why now I hear you ask?  
The time is right for us and for some it's yet to come.

We are not to blame,  
We did nothing wrong.  
Pretty or not, we were innocent all along.

Finally believed.  
Finally heard.  
4 little ribbons.

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