

### SAFE saved me by Abby.

Self-abuse can and will finally end once you become honest with yourself, then make a decision and commitment to want to stop what you do to hurt yourself.

I was told that there was no reason for me to do what I did from my parents, family and church members, doctors, nurses and anyone else who wanted to judge someone they did not know. No one had any idea what had happened to me. I was just acting like a spoiled little brat who needed a good slap. I was 'attention seeking', 'manipulating to get my own way', 'ungrateful', 'self-centred and selfish', 'jealous', and so the list goes on.

Reality is that I was scared, frightened, hurting and feared for my life and that of my baby brother. Who would believe anything I said when they viewed me the way they described me above? Who would believe me over an elder of the church?

I was 7 years of age when the news that I had a sibling on the way was announced. I remember feeling oh so excited with the thought of a baby sister or brother to play with. Mum struggled with being pregnant and had to rely on members of the church to help with transport and caring for me.

A couple from the church decided it would be best if they did most of the caring that was needed for me by picking me up for church and dropping me home. Many times I would stay over too. The reason was to give me consistency.

Well, I got that alright. The abuse started in the back room of the meeting room with fondling and touching and progressed to full on oral, vaginal and then anal penetration, once I started menstruating, and lasted over a period of 8 years.

I became a 'delinquent', running away from home continuously from the age of 13 and I finally ran away to never return home at 15. I was homeless and lived on the streets. No fun, yet better than what I came from. I met many other people with similar stories. Ended up on drugs and selling my body for the next fix. Believe me there is no glamour to the prostitution I knew, it was not a choice it was a necessity and the punters knew it and treated you as such.

It was on the street that someone was looking for me and one night, from a distance, I saw who it was. My perpetrator had come for more. It was time to get out so I just got on the first train at Flinders St and ended up in Gippsland. It was rather a culture shock to say the least. I ended up in the cells the first night of arrival and was rushed

to hospital because I was fitting and convulsing due to coming down from some heavy shit I had in the city.

I was referred to a GP who referred me to the methadone program and this SAFE program. Not thinking very highly of counsellors and social workers – do gooders and rescuers who knew nothing, I was pretty uncooperative about keeping my appointments and especially for a SAFE program! I was thinking that they would make me go cold turkey and think they could save me from myself.

It took 3 times before I actually got there and for me it was 3<sup>rd</sup> time lucky! All this woman could do was smile at me as she showed me through the place. We even stopped to get a coffee to take into this snug little room with bright pictures and amazing sayings all over the walls and ceiling. Everywhere you looked it was bright and beautiful, as she was.

We started to talk about why I was there and I started to feed her my normal bullshit which got met with “There is a reason why you do what you do to yourself and generally, it is something that has been beyond your control and not your fault.”

No one had ever told me that they believed there was a reason why I did what I did, let alone that it was not my fault. She sat there and listened as I spluttered bits of this and that out. I was in shock that someone believed in me.

Then came the reality of the whole issue and it was like she was in my head. She seemed to know what I was thinking, feeling and talked about being honest with each other and me with myself. It was all a bit weird and a tad confronting what this woman seemed to know. I did end up making another appointment with her and actually turned up and on time!

After several meetings and discussions she explained this program that was going to start in 5 weeks and I signed on the dotted line. More of a shock to me than her though.

I started the SAFE program and never looked back. I’m not saying it was easy. No way! It was hard slog and there were many times that I thought I would never reach that crack of light at the end of the tunnel, but the group were there to share, care and cheer you on. It was their support that allowed me, with my doctor’s help, to get weaned off the methadone.

The SAFE program was a journey to find myself, the real me, inside of me. It healed me from the inside out. The program set you up with other ways to soothe yourself instead of using self-abuse to hurt yourself. When we revisited childhood we were prepared with a huge choice of different tools to use instead of hurting ourselves.

By the time I had got to the SAFE program, I had lost my dignity, self-respect, self-worth, trust and belief in myself and humanity. Each week in group we worked towards regaining, reclaiming and rejoicing in the real hope that we could achieve whatever we set our hearts to.

SAFE helped me to contact and reconnect with my family who then supported me through the process of bringing my perpetrator to justice. Justice did prevail even though it took so many years.

It does not matter where I have been in my life; the fact is that I am not there now because of Annie and the SAFE Central recovery program.

I would recommend this program to any person who wants to stop hurting themselves. If I can do it, the sky's the limit! Try it, before you deny it!