

In 2014 I was arrested and charged for various sexual offences that I had committed online, I had recently turned 18. After a year of court I was placed on the sexual offenders register for life.

The events that lead to my conviction began when I was a child, when I was born my mother suffered Post Natal Depression and was unable to feed or hold me, I'm unsure as to whom looked after me but it wasn't my mother, my earliest memories are of the hallway in the house we lived in, I was sat there whenever I did something wrong which must be pretty regularly as all I remember is that hallway. Most of my childhood my Dad worked night shift and Mum worked during the day so they weren't around as much as they could be, so from the ages of approximately 6-8 years old, I was abused by my next door neighbour's son on multiple occasions, I don't remember much of how it happened but what I do remember is what he did. I then began exhibiting overly sexual behaviour as a kid and acted out what was happening to me with others, I tried to tell my parents what was happening, but I was placed into counselling at CASA now CAV, and treated as the perpetrator. The worker had suspected something deeper was going on, but nothing was ever spoken about.

After completing this therapy I had entered high school in 2009, I was bullied for being gay and at the time I had no clue what being gay even was, I come from a small town and an even smaller school, and as I began to learn what it was I began questioning myself. Throughout my first two years at high school I became depressed, angry, and self-destructive. I would sneak alcohol to school, self-harm at school, and pretty much any other bad behaviour you could imagine. I was suspended so many times I lost count, my parent refused any treatment as they thought it would affect my future in the military, as that was their idea of treatment.

In 2011 I meet my former music teacher, I had been making and sending my music to producers and that's how he found me. He messaged me on Facebook, saying that he wanted to meet me at the Battle of the Bands I was attending, when he met me said he could offer me a scholarship, recording opportunities, and work, I felt uncomfortable and anxious, but I put that down to being socially awkward and uncomfortable with people. I was 15 years old when I began lessons with him, the first time I went to meet him alone was at the academy, it started out relatively normal, I was again anxious, and moving my hands (I rapidly touch my fingertips together when I'm anxious), he saw this and instantly asked me to continue what I was doing with his hand in between mine, this sticks out to me still, I don't know why. [REDACTED]

During this period, my home life was falling apart all I could do to make my parents notice and care about me was by cleaning, cooking and looking after my two siblings, I continued cutting myself, and confiding in people on the internet, one of whom was my music teacher. I was becoming ever more confused and depressed about my sexuality and being bullied so I decided to talk to them, my parents. The response I got was along the lines of you won't be gay, you won't be bisexual, you are straight. My whole childhood, it was instilled in me that you love your parents, and you respect your elders. My parents never reciprocated the love I had for them, they were distant and I could never come to them with my problems, and their problems were made ours. Any expression of individuality, and self-discovery were swiftly shutdown, nothing was good enough, "do your chores and maybe you'll be a good son".

Not long after this, in 2012, I left home and moved in with my grandma, quit school and began working and studying with my music teacher full time. However, this also took a turn after about a year of working and studying with him, one lesson he suggested an Alexander Technique massage, I've always had a thing about being touched by people, but I was a kid I hardly had the word power to express it without being rude, he kept pushing, and eventually I acquiesced. He asked me to remove my top, and pants if it was more comfortable, I became tense, he noticed this and told me to relax and lay face down on a sleeping bag and pillow. He then proceeded to massage me, I don't remember the order in which he massaged me, but his hands were on my butt and very close to my groin straight away. He kept saying relax but I couldn't, it felt so long, but once it was done I left, he usually would take me home, but I walked back to my grandmas.

The way he treated me was never the same, and I eventually stopped going as much. Shortly after, I moved out of my grandmothers and into my first share house, where I began smokeing marijuana and experimenting with drugs. Marijuana made me numb I don't have to feel when I'm high. At the same house was my first of 2 unsuccessful attempts on my own life, I took a large amount of prescription pills then when into a rage, when I came to in hospital I was in my underwear surrounded by a mental health nurse, psychiatrist and two uniformed police officers, they explained that I had armed myself with a knife, barricaded my room and proceeded to cut myself, the policed busted down the door and it took 5 officers to restrain me (I'm a small guy, I have never weighed more than 65kg).

After this episode, I became homeless as the older male who I was living with failed to pay the rent, I was working at the time, but no one would give a 16 year old a house, one day before becoming completely homeless an aunty decided to take me in, at this point I hadn't heard from my family since I had left home. She took me in and helped me moved into a caravan park, after this I never heard from her again, everyone just expected me at 16 to just get how live, without any guidance. I was a 16 year old with an unstable mind set, a drug addiction, and money. So inevitably I fell behind in the rent and bills and stopped going to work, I was using the money I had to buy weed for my friends and myself, I would let them stay in the caravan with me, when I ran out of money I ran out of friends, I became more depressed and attempted suicide again.

Eventually, in late 2013 I had managed to pay my rental debt and after doing so I packed two bags and booked a one way ticket to Byron Bay, I was leaving my old life behind and starting anew. However, this never went to plan, I lost all money in Sydney at a tampered ATM, I arrived in Byron broke and homeless. So, I hitch hiked back to my hometown and began sleeping in a park, this is when an older friend who I had met several years earlier found me and took me in taught me everything I now know, she got me through everything, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for her. She became the loving mother figure I needed, she still treats me as her own.

However, my mental health had declined in the years previous having had being homeless, socially isolated, abused, and used. I was of the opinion everyone would use me and leave me, so I just stopped having relationships to avoid any pain whatsoever. This is when I became more active online, and as I did, I became accustomed to talking with people online, it started as a way to make a connection, then it evolved into a place for me to explore my sexuality, personality and confidence. I was messaging whoever would respond, I was a teenager figuring out how to flirt and be confident online without the fears of being rejected in person.

On a day in May of 2014, while I was living with my mother figure when I was arrested and charged with 20 charges relating to messages I sent online to other males age 14-16, there are 7 survivors of the messages. All the messages I sent began as a hi, developing further into me wanting some form of connection, then further into sexually explicit conversation, where in one conversation with one of the survivors suggested other people who he thought was questioning their sexuality to message. Of all the charges, three of them relate to explicit images of my underage self, the rest were words that never occurred. In two of the messages I would ask to meet up, hang out, smoke marijuana and have some form of sexual interaction that would never occur. Behaviour that I am ashamed of, I thought I could make people like me with what I had and what I can give, but that's not the way the world works. All I wanted was to be loved by people because I can't love myself, and this is why I sought fulfilment online from everyone males, females, older people, younger people, I just wanted to know people in the world loved me.

After being arrested, I lost my job, and I had to leave my mother figures as she has two children, and I didn't want my charges to affect them. However, she read the brief and knew everything, she stuck by me as much as she could, she and the kids went through the DHHS child contact process, so I still have them in my life, they are my family, which funnily turns out we are related through marriage. After this, all I wanted to be was dead, I felt such horror and shame in my actions, and I began cutting again and shortly after ended up in a Psychiatric hospital for several weeks coming out on a cocktail of meds and a misdiagnosis. I was discharged with minimal support, I got myself a tent and slept at a powered tent site for 12 months while my case continued.

I plead guilty and still went to 12 months of court costing the system thousands of dollars, I really don't remember many details of my court case, my lawyer was hopeless, rude, incompetent and forgetful, and through my case fighting cancer. Most of my consultations involved sitting in his office crammed to the roof with manila folders, silently, while he read my documents, grunting. I had no understanding of the legal system and my rights as a client, this was my first engagement with the law, and I met the system alone, no one could help because of the nature and stigma of my charges.

On the day of my sentencing, the thing I remember most vividly was the judge saying he did not want to hand this sentence down, the act is unforgiving, and that he wished me well. I was sentenced to a period of life on the Sexual Offenders Register as well as a Community Corrections Order where I was to complete 100 hours of Community Service, I had turned 19 one month prior.

While completing my community service, I was also preparing to go to university, I completed a Certificate IV, and at the time I was living in a transitional house renting it through a community housing service. I was in the same town and being called a "pedo", scum bag, threatened with violence, everything. So, after completing my certification I moved to Melbourne and started a university degree, which I completed and passed, I had stable housing in a share house where I disclosed my offending to my housemates, they were more than understanding, and my mental health was relatively stable because I was focused on my degree.

When I finished my degree, my mental health began to decline steadily, being a RSO I struggle to get work, so I then decided to run a business from home which also failed and my mental health declined even further, I went into a period of total isolation, not leaving the house for 6 months, living off government benefits. This is when the officer investigating my music teacher tried to make contact and I refused to respond, at the time I wanted nothing to do with it, I knew he had been charged I saw the EFAS and saw the officer's name.

After living with my housemates for just over two years, they all decided to go their separate ways, I decided to keep the house and try new housemates. Within 3 months two housemates stopped paying the rent and bills, physically assaulted myself and another housemate which inevitably lead to the landlord deciding to sell the property. After nearly 5 years I was homeless again, moved back to my mother figures to care for her as she suffers from several chronic health conditions. When I came back, I decided to reach out to the officer leading the case against my former teacher, told her everything and to my amazement she offered help, and she didn't rest until she knew I was getting help. It turns out she was there when I was arrested in 2014, this officer went out of her way to get me into counselling and find legal help, she is the reason I'm writing this letter. When I sought counselling I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and I've been receiving treatment for the last 12 months. I care for my mother figure everyday as her health has deteriorated, and I've been seeking legal help for the better part of a year.

The story ends here really, but it continues to write itself day by day, I'm almost 25 now and still on the register, two of my charges is made applying for an exemption order impossible, legal aid refused to help, a community legal centre referred me to a major legal firm which I'm still waiting to hear the final outcome of, but even still, I'm a RSO and at this point will be for the rest of my life, I'm unemployed, homeless, and single. At no point am I trying to justify my actions, what I did was wrong, however I do not believe that the punishment matches the crime. My next door neighbour will never be charged, and my music teacher after abusing multiple young males only received 7 years in prison. My crimes are seen in the same light as a serious sexual predator, and I'm subject to the same treatment. However, in the years of being a RSO on multiple annual interviews, discussions with service providers, lawyers, housemates, and friends, people share the same view, why the hell are you on this for life. During my final court date when the judge was handing down the remarks, he wished the act wasn't so serve as I was sentenced me to life on the register. Every day I think about my actions and how they effected my community, and if feel terrible for what I've done, but I'm unable to show my community I'm sorry, I want to make it better.

If in my lifetime if I could see changes to the laws regarding sexual offending, here is what I would like to see.

1. Mandatory counselling
2. Judicial Discretion
3. DHHS institutional Reviews
4. Violent Offenders Register

When I was charged, I was ordered to complete 70hrs of community service, and ordered to continue my the mental health treatment I was already receiving, having court mandated counselling would work to benefit the system, as weekly counselling would ensure offenders are monitored, mental health and other issues can be dealt with. With judicial discretion judges would be able to hand down sentences that reflected the nature of a crime, as opposed to handing down categorised sentences based on combinations of each category. DHHS, is a government body with child protection as one of its core functions, however DHHS is not used to its fullest, they should be conducting yearly reviews into all institutions with child participation, following up immediately and swiftly to all complaints. Finally, I wish to see a violent offenders register established, as to encompass crimes of a violent nature where if someone commits crimes of violent nature they be place on a violent offenders register.