

Community Impact Statement of the Phoenix 11

The Community

We are 11 survivors of child sexual abuse that was recorded, and in many instances, shared on the Internet. We make this statement on behalf of ourselves as a community of our own, as well as on behalf of all individuals whose sexual abuse was recorded whom we have not yet met.

We believe that this statement also reflects the views of that broader community because each of us is a member of that community.

We understand that in a legal context, images and videos of a child being sexually abused is referred to as "child pornography". In this statement, we will refer to it as "child sexual abuse imagery" as we believe that is a more accurate term to describe the material that we know was created of each one of us.

We first met each other in the United States in February, 2018, due to the efforts of lawyers and counsellors who have helped some of us, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection Incorporated, and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

We met again in Canada in July, 2018 and at that meeting, we agreed to put forward this statement as a collective, in order to provide the courts with information about the harm or loss that the members of our community suffer in varying degrees when the offence of "possession of child pornography" is committed.

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Each of us has reviewed this statement, and each of us agrees that this is representative of our experience. The harm or loss that we are about to describe reflects what we experience when an image or video of our own abuse is possessed by a particular offender, and we are all confident that such harm or loss is experienced by other members of our community when it is their sexual abuse material that is a part of a particular collection.

This statement has been prepared in writing, and also been recorded in video format for presentation in court.

Who we are

We cannot use our legal names when making this statement for our own safety and to protect what privacy and dignity we have left. To provide a context, to assist the court in understanding a little about the 11 survivors who are collectively making this statement:

- All of us were born before 1997, and are now adult women, and all of our ages range from 20-33 years.
- All of us are "identified" victims, which means our identities are known to law enforcement.
- For all but one of us, the primary person(s) who committed the sexual abuse against us was convicted of such abusive acts.
- 4 of us were sexually abused and photographed by one person:

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- 2 by our father
 - 1 by our stepfather
 - and 1 by our uncle
- 8 of us were sexually abused by more than one person
 - for 5 of us, our primary abuser was our father
 - for 3 of us, our primary abuser was our stepfather
- For 7 of us, the images and videos of our abuse have been distributed on the Internet, And we know this because each of us have received notice, through a legal process that is set up in the United States, that our images have been found in collections of individuals arrested in the United States
- For 2 of us, the images or videos of our abuse were sent to at least one other individual but we have not yet received notice through the legal process in the United States
- For 2 of us, there was no evidence in the case against our abuser that the images or videos he made of us had been sent to anyone else or posted online

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- 9 of us have sought therapy, on more than one occasion, to deal with the ongoing impact that the creation, and distribution, where applicable, of images and videos continue to have on us
- 7 of us have hired lawyers to represent our interests when dealing with certain issues that arise due to the fact that the sexual abuse we endured as children was recorded
- 4 of us are now mothers
- All of us are survivors
- All of us are victims
- All of us are survivors of our ongoing victimization

Emotional Impact

We want everyone to know that the "possession of child pornography" is not a victimless crime. We are some of the children who are seen in those pictures and videos, and we are the ones who are struggling to survive our victimization every single day.

We want the court to understand that we have all worked very, very hard to put the sexual assaults we suffered as children behind us. But because the sexual

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assaults we endured were also recorded, and for most of us, shared with other people, we can never really be free.

Our childhood sexual abuse is a public fact. The existence of our child sexual abuse material - and for most of us, the sharing of it - keeps the succession of our torture going. We all believe that our imagery can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, anytime, which means we are forced to live our lives in a perpetual state of vigilance and fear.

Those of us who know the material depicting our abuse is online worry about being recognized by those who have seen the material whenever we are out in public. Those of us who do not know if the material depicting our abuse is online worry that it will one day turn up online and destroy the lives we have built.

Those of us who are parents worry constantly about the safety of our children – we do not feel our children are safe unless they are with us, and only us. Our concerns about their safety, online and otherwise, are amplified and we find ourselves being hypervigilant, given the reality that we have to deal with every day.

All of us, whether the imagery of our abuse has been distributed or not, worry about whether people we know have seen it or could somehow find it if they tried. This impairs each of us socially, and makes it difficult to form relationships or feel like we are part of a community.

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For us, every image, every video, is a serious violation of our dignity and our privacy. What may be a still image – a point in time – to the viewer - is a small part of the horrific abuse we endured.

Many of us have either changed our names or use a pseudonym online or in real life.

At least two of us cannot enjoy the benefits of social media as we have been stalked in that medium by people who have seen images of our abuse, and there are others of us who are either reluctant or refuse to have social media accounts for fear that the account may be linked to the child sexual abuse imagery that was made of us.

Some of us either try not to spend much time at all in public places, or if we do attend public places, we have to take precautions such as wearing baggy clothing, a hat, or neutral colours. We dye our hair, we change our look - whatever it takes to make us blend in and not attract attention. We want to stay in our own bubble.

Some of us can be triggered by something as simple as a camera click, the sight of a camera, the taking of pictures (like for school or work) or being asked to be part of a group picture—triggers that sometimes can be debilitating in a world where everyone is recording everything. Sometimes, even a flickering light in a store or a classroom can be enough of a trigger of the trauma.

None of us want this imagery to have ever existed at all. The fact that they exist means we can't escape what happened to us.

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We cannot put it in a box and shove it away in the same way that we might do if there were not a permanent record of what took place.

All of us wish there was a way that our child sexual abuse material could be permanently destroyed but are powerless to make that happen. The material was made without our consent, and is seen and kept without our consent.

We are outraged that someone could want to see this imagery, and each of us feel that we are violated and re-victimized every time imagery of any one of us is accessed or stored by another person. Just because "possession" is not a physical act of abuse does not mean it is not abuse and that it is not harmful to us. We suffered physical and other pain in order for that imagery to exist.

We know that child sexual abuse imagery is often used to groom and normalize the sexual abuse of other children. It shatters us to think that our imagery may be perpetrating violence against children. We did not want to be there; we had no choice. We suffer every day when we think about those children.

It both saddens and angers us that there are people who take pleasure from looking at our sexual abuse imagery. That there are people who actually want to keep it, look at it, and masturbate to it. That there are people who claim not to understand that we are real people, with real feelings, and with real lives that have been taken from us.

The images and videos of our child sexual abuse are permanent markers of the most painful and traumatic experiences of our lives. It is a constant barrier to us

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healing and moving on with our life. The mere existence of our imagery is enough to invoke feelings of intense fear in each and every one of us.

Each time we learn that another person has been arrested or convicted of "possession of child pornography", it is a jarring reminder of our continued vulnerability and of our sexual abuse that we were forced into as a child.

Such news can cause physical illness and trigger anxiety and even panic attacks about whether or not our images were on that person's computer, coupled with a frustrating sense of powerlessness to do much about it if they were.

We are emotionally impacted by the possession of child sexual abuse imagery not just because we know that an offender may possess imagery of us, but also because we are part of a community of people who have actually been sexually abused and had that abuse recorded and used to pleasure others.

It is difficult to convey in words the visceral, sickening feeling we get when we think about the fact that the offender may have had imagery of other children we have not yet met and who may currently be experiencing the horror we did as children.

It is infuriating, as victims of this type of victimization, to be repeatedly made aware that there are people who will find and keep photos and videos of children they do not know and have never met, in the most horrible of circumstances, and not understand that they have no right to see or have such material—ever.

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Even if a person who is caught with this material does not possess imagery of one of us, the sad reality is that our entire community is being violated and exploited on a continual basis by the relentless seeking out of child abuse imagery by offenders all over the world.

If there were not people wanting to look at and possess this kind of imagery, our abuse may not have ever been recorded, and it certainly would not be out there now for people to see.

Our victimization journey may have started with the person who abused us, but the part of the physical abuse is over, and now we have to deal with the fact that we keep being abused over and over by people who watch, seek out, and keep imagery of children being sexually abused.

Physical Impact

Each of us has struggled and had to cope with different physical problems that we believe relate back to the sexual assaults committed against us at a time when our bodies (and our minds) were way too young to handle it.

We were robbed, as children, in so many ways – one of which is being able to experience physical pleasure and intimate connections with our partners today.

All of us suffer - in varying degrees - from different stress related conditions, such as complex PTSD, insomnia, nightmares, seizures, panic attacks, and migraines, related to the existence and continued circulation of our imagery.

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For those of us who know our imagery was distributed, we know that these stress-related conditions and underlying medical conditions are made worse by, and can be triggered by the certainty that others are seeing and keeping photos and videos of us.

In fact, we find these conditions can get worse when we learn of yet another offender who has been found to be in possession of our imagery.

For those of us who do not know if our child sexual abuse material was distributed, it has been our experience that these stress-related conditions are tied to the sometimes debilitating fear we have that there will come a day when our child sexual abuse material will be seen online.

Economic Impact

Most of us have been impacted economically, in varying degrees, because of the imagery that was made. For most of us, the impact includes costs such as counselling that may be received to cope with the possession of the recording by others, for example; while for others, the counselling might be to cope with the fears that the recording may somehow come out.

Most of us struggled in school due to the ongoing anxiety caused by the imagery, and/or from the physical effects of stress, and some of us were not able to finish high school at all.

Some of us have lost days of work from being triggered by a notification that yet another offender was caught with images of our abuse, while others have lost

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days due to the emotional turmoil that can be triggered whenever a news story about a “child pornography” arrest is reported or discussed in our presence.

Some of us deliberately avoid occupations that would have us working with children because children often remind us of how vulnerable we were and still are. Some of us deliberately chose work environments that kept us under the radar and less likely to be noticed or identified by those who have seen our imagery. Some of us have had to go on social assistance.

The crimes we survived remain a part of who we are. Their impacts are unending. Our childhood – our innocence – so much of our life - was stolen from us.

We feel that we may not be able to grow in our full potential because of the need to protect ourselves and our past. The need to be guarded in so many ways.

We long for the day when we can be released from the chains that the imagery has placed on us and our future.

So please think of us when making decisions about those who possess child sexual abuse imagery and consider the profound social, economic and personal price that has been paid and will keep on being paid by tens of thousands of survivors who are just like us.

Please hear our collective voice on behalf of the survivors who live among us.