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PAWS FOR THOUGHT

Flinders Pet's Justine Wallis, pictured with Indigo the French bulldog, and Rescue Hub Wollongong are teaming up for an open day fundraiser on Saturday to help the region's four-legged friends. "There are plenty of dogs out there that need a home," Ms Wallis said.

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Picture by
Robert Peet

STRONG VOICE Retiring MP revealed he is a 'survivor' of child sex abuse in his farewell speech to Parliament

Jones opens up on abuse

Glen Humphries

RETIRING Whitlam MP and former Edmund Rice student Stephen Jones revealed he was a "survivor" of child sex abuse in his farewell speech to Federal Parliament.

Mr Jones has spoken out about child sex abuse before, generally around what happened at Edmund Rice College, where he was school captain in the 1980s.

The Mercury understands Mr Jones' abuse was not

linked to the school. Mr Jones said in 2016 that the school felt like a "dumping ground" for paedophiles at the time.

"There was a whole bunch of them [paedophiles] at the time I was there," said Mr

Jones, who graduated from the school in 1983.

"Boys would [avoid them] in all sorts of ways. We would just talk amongst ourselves about it - 'don't get caught with this person or that person'."

Mr Jones attended Edmund Rice when Brother Michael Evans was principal and Father Peter Comensoli was parish priest.

Evans committed suicide before detectives could interview him about child

abuse allegations. Comensoli was jailed for abusing boys.

Mr Jones had not stated at the time that he himself had been abused, but he chose his farewell speech to tell his own story.

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NEWS

Jones reveals sexual abuse as a child

"I didn't want to be defined by it", says retiring Whitlam MP in farewell

FROM PAGE 1

He was speaking about the "great achievement" of former prime minister Julia Gillard in establishing a royal commission into child sex abuse.

"The royal commission was a really painful experience for survivors but a necessary piece of truth-telling and reconciliation," Mr Jones said.

"Survivors, including me, appreciate it - a point I've never disclosed because I didn't want to be defined by it and because I didn't want to detract attention from those who, unlike me, didn't have a voice or didn't have access to power to tell their story. There is power in being seen, being heard and being believed."

Mr Jones said it was an important step because "for decades the victims had been denied; their stories, if ever told, were contested, and they were told they were not true".

"When we established that royal commission we sent a message: 'We see you, we hear you and we believe you'," Mr Jones said on the floor of Parliament.

Investigations into Edmund Rice

What was happening at Edmund Rice was revealed by the *Illawarra Mercury* after a four-month investigation. In the initial report, six Wollongong men accused Comensoli and former Edmund Rice College principal Brother Michael Evans of sexual abuse and harassment.

The royal commission was a really painful experience for survivors but a necessary piece of truth-telling and reconciliation.

Stephen Jones

The allegations related to the men's time at Edmund Rice in the early 1980s and included Comensoli and Evans plying them with alcohol before the abuse took place.

In the case of Comensoli, that included watching

pornographic movies and then wrestling with the boys to allow him to grope them.

Shocking evidence of abuse in Wollongong

The royal commission heard that more than one in every nine Catholic priests

in Wollongong were alleged child molesters between 1950 and 2010.

"[Overall] 11.7 per cent of priests from the Diocese of Wollongong were alleged perpetrators," counsel assisting the royal commission Gail Furness, SC, said in her opening address.

The data stated Wollongong's history of abuse began in the 1960s, when 11.2 per cent of priests were alleged to be perpetrators.

By the 1980s, 14.1 per cent of priests in Wollongong diocese were the subject of a child abuse allegations, while in the 1990s it dropped

back to 11.3 per cent.

Speaking at the time, Mr Jones was shocked to hear such a high number of predators were active in the diocese for so long.

"I am surprised, because you hear lots of stories or you knew stuff growing up in this community, but to see it represented in statistics, it's chilling," he said.

"In the past, you've known that there was a series of perpetrators, or maybe a pattern at a certain school or diocese, but when you can see one in 10 priests in Wollongong over a period of time were involved in child

sexual abuse over many decades, it's just absolutely extraordinary."

Compensation for survivors

When the government acted on a royal commission recommendation and introduced a scheme to compensate victims of child sex abuse in Australia, Mr Jones felt it hadn't gone far enough. He said in Parliament this was a good start, but said more work needed to be done.

National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service
1800 211 028



Whitlam MP Stephen Jones has used his farewell speech to parliament to reveal he is a survivor of child sexual abuse. Picture by Sylvia Liber

Frantic search for anti-venom after Stanwell Park spider bite



TODAY IN HISTORY

Glen Humphries

The Mercury on February 13, 1995

Multiple bottles of anti-venom had to be rushed to Wollongong Hospital by police after a five-year-old girl was bitten by a funnel web spider.

Tegan Buchanan was bitten on the toe by the spider at her family's Stanwell Park home after putting her foot into an old boot.

She described the spider to her mother as being "as big as daddy's car".

Her family took her to the local doctor, who was out. They then went to Coledale Hospital, where there was no doctor nor any anti-venom.

There was also no anti-venom at Bulli Hospital and so parents Julie and Scott rushed to Wollongong Hospital.

"There were only two vials of anti-venom at Wollongong and she had used eight vials," uncle Larry Jamieson told the *Mercury*.

"They had to get the vials from everywhere and they were brought to the hospital with the help of police."

Mr Jamieson said the family was angry about having to make trips to several different hospitals.

"What it has taught us is that next time we will come to the major hospital in the area," he said. "The whole story about the hospital sys-

tem here being inadequate is alive and well."

Also in today's edition of the *Mercury*, the father of seven-year-old Bulli boy Beau Haines called for action after he was climbing a fence and the cord from his hoodie got caught on a paling, wrapping around his neck.

"Something has to be done before someone loses a child," Geoff Haines said.

"Beau was lucky because he was saved in time.

"I would hate to think what would have happened if someone wasn't with him."



After their daughter was bitten by a funnel web, a Stanwell Park family frantically rushed to multiple hospitals searching for anti-venom.