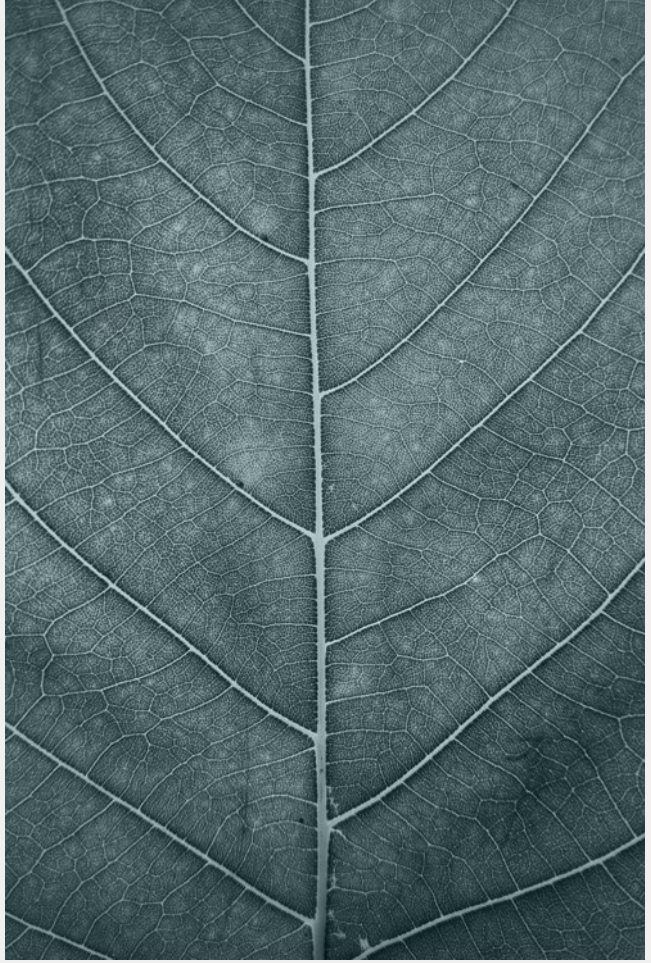


Think of an evaluation you've been part of or commissioned.

Now ask yourself:

- Who decided what questions mattered?
- Who decided what counted as evidence?
- And who decided when the evaluation was done well?

Epistemic Justice: victim survivors of child sexual abuse as co-evaluators

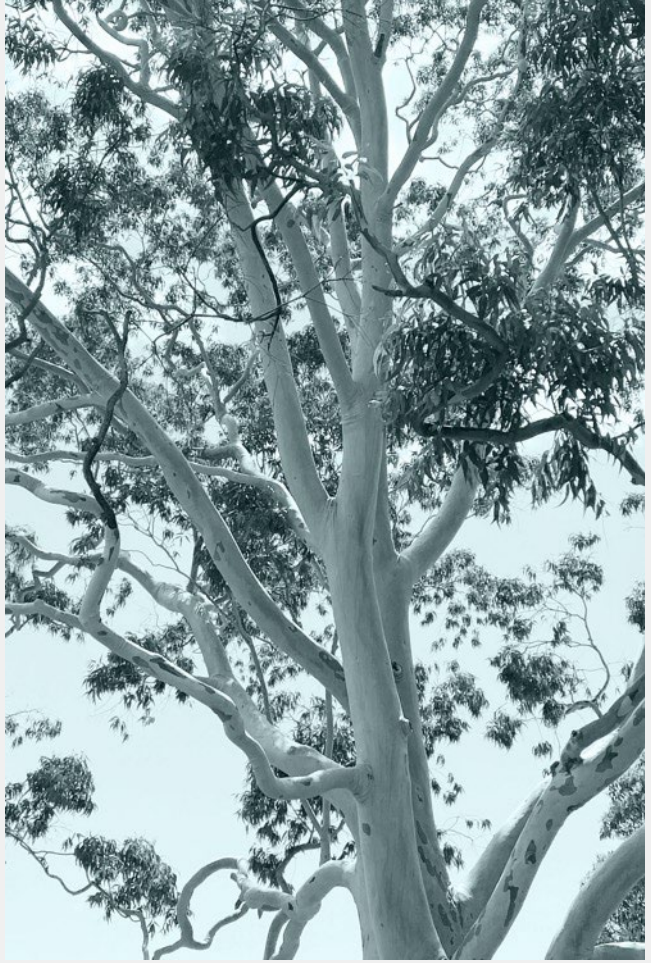


September 2026

Angela Obradovic, Malika Reese and Nic Vogelpoel

Day Four Projects

National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that we are meeting on Larrakia Country and recognise Larrakia as the Traditional Custodians of the Darwin region.

We acknowledge their enduring connection to Country, culture, community and knowledge systems, and pay our respects to Larrakia Elders past and present. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

Acknowledgement of Victims and Survivors

We seek to honour the lived and living expertise of all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, harnessing all ages, cultures, abilities and backgrounds, and commit to substantially addressing the harm of child sexual abuse, now and well into the future.

We recognise that there are children and young people today who are experiencing sexual abuse and dedicate ourselves to doing all we can to promote their effective protection and care.

Context

- The **National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse** was established in 2021, guided by a key recommendation (9.9) of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017). It's purpose: " to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment".

- The evaluation was conducted between October 2024 – June 2026.

- A Lived Experience Advisory Group was established to ensure victim-survivors' perspectives shaped the design, implementation and analysis of the evaluation. A Steering Group (with lived experience) and a Delivery Group (including lived experience) governed the evaluation.

- **Day Four Projects** appointed an independent evaluator.





Agenda

1. Acknowledgment of Country
2. Acknowledgement of Victims and Survivors
3. Welcome, framing and ground-setting
4. Proposition 1: Nothing about us, without us
5. Proposition 2: Epistemic justice
6. Proposition 3: Beyond advice to synthesis
7. Practical starting points
8. Closing reflections

Process: Reflection and interactive dialogue - sharing what we've learned along the way for us all to reflect on.

Expectation setting: This is not a conventional evaluation paper nor a model, it is about different kinds of knowledge, and challenging our own assumptions about what counts as evidence.

Nothing about us, without us



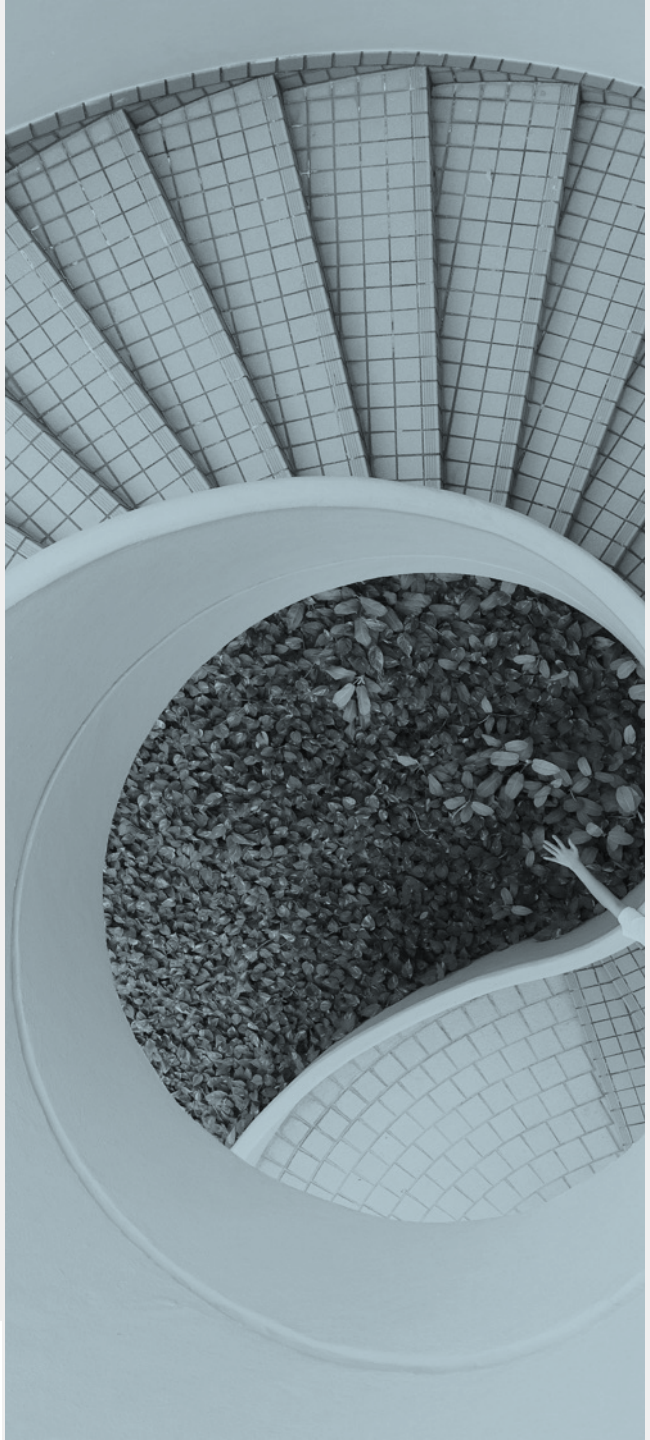
Moving from evaluation ***on*** **people** to evaluation ***led*** **by people** with lived experience fundamentally reshapes:

- evaluation questions
- evidence and how its collected, including co-interviewing
- analysis and meaning making
- definitions of rigour and maintaining independence
- not just ethically, but epistemologically.

What we did



- Generating Key Evaluation Questions
- Developing data collection tools and processes
- Interviewing, note-taking, focus group facilitation
- Analysing data, making meaning
- Maintaining independence and rigour through clear and transparent roles



"Bearing the costs of leadership - Leaders hold themselves first and foremost accountable to the communities most affected by injustice. Balancing this with institutional demands creates ongoing tension and cost, yet this moral clarity anchors the integrity and direction of their work".

- On Our Own Terms: Emerging insights report (Cataldo et al., 2026).

What this meant methodologically



Renegotiating fixed beliefs about ‘rigour’

- Balancing methodological credibility *and* epistemic accountability
- Changes to how respondents engage in evaluation, what they say, who they say it to, what words they use
- Dismantles the ‘myth of neutrality’
- Individual and collective
- Participant-evaluator – navigating between roles of consulting, participating and leading, and responding

Epistemic justice

Lived experience leadership in evaluation challenges entrenched assumptions about who gets to ask questions, whose knowledge and analysis counts, and how institutions respond to new forms of evidence.

Epistemic injustice*:* occurs when someone is wronged specifically in their capacity as a knower.

Testimonial injustice: occurs when someone's testimony is given less credibility than it deserves (often due to identity prejudice)

Hermeneutical injustice: occurs when it is not possible to understand or communicate your own suffering because the words for it do not yet exist. When this happens, the person suffers twice: once from the experience itself, and again from having that experience rendered invisible i.e., the conceptual tools to make sense of this experience haven't yet been developed.

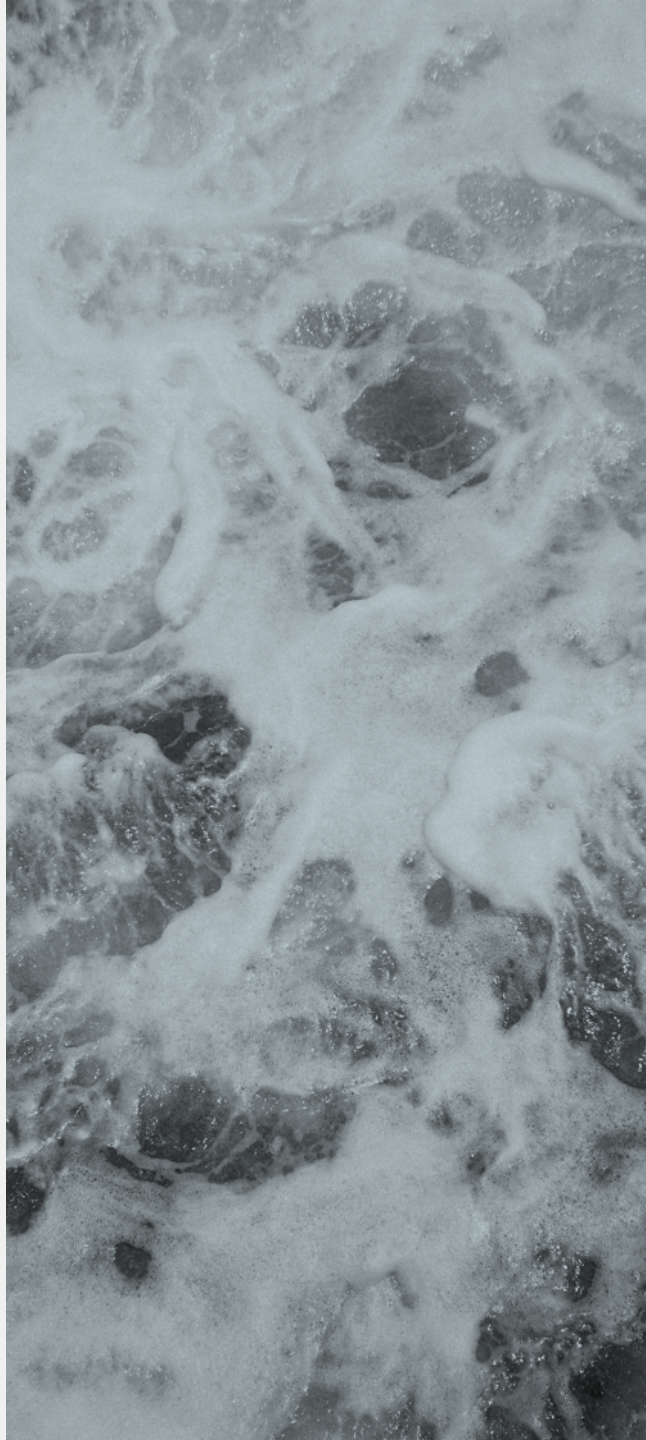


Survivor knowledge is routinely discounted, and evaluation frameworks often lack the concepts to adequately represent survivor experience – not just survivor perspective, but ways of seeing and being in the world that are through the lens of survivor experience.

"*People with lived experience know this pattern well. Their expertise is often welcomed as testimony but doubted as evidence."*

- *Centre for Mental Health, UK*

"Epistemic justice" is about creating conditions in which all knowers are treated as credible, and where marginalised knowledge is incorporated into the conceptual commons.





What this looked like in practice

- Developing a new practice and knowledge base institutionally – incorporating testimony, experience, hope and curiosity
  - LE as co-evaluators, not just respondents
  - Institutional leadership
  - External evaluators with deep experience in LE and collaboration

- Rebuking the singularity of Lived Experience, and acknowledging the overlapping layers of CSA

Challenges we encountered and things we tried

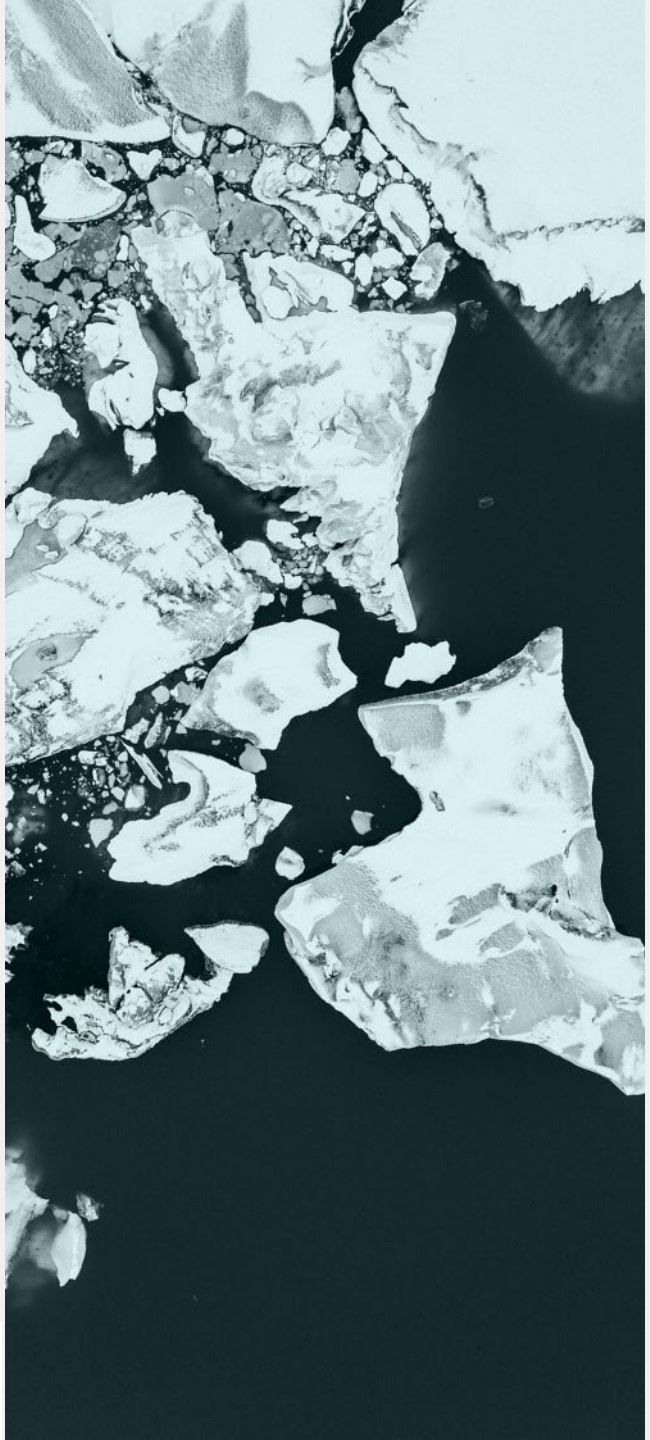
- Opaque power imbalances persisted, trust takes time to build
- Accountability needs of government framed some of the inquiry, before LEAG involvement
- Scope of influence and multiplicity of viewpoints, sense makers – we challenged whose expertise counts, whose is sought, and importantly, about ‘what’.
- Emotional and intellectual labour

”The toll of Lived Experience Leadership is profound: emotional, psychological and social. Leaders often carry harm and absorb conflict, paying what some describe as a ‘lived experience tax’ – a cost rarely acknowledged or compensated by institutions."
(Cataldo et al 2026)



The institutional response

- Skilled in receiving evidence that confirms existing frameworks, in forms that hold value
- New forms of evidence require institutions to change, not just to listen
- Shifting from credibility = independence → change = reciprocity, humility, power-awareness
- Governance, resourcing, time, and care
- Testimony requires being heard, in our own words



In pairs

In an evaluation you've been involved in — as evaluator, commissioner, or subject — whose questions shaped the evaluation design? What questions weren't asked? Who decided what counted as evidence?

Turn to the person next to you for a brief sharing.

Beyond advice to synthesis

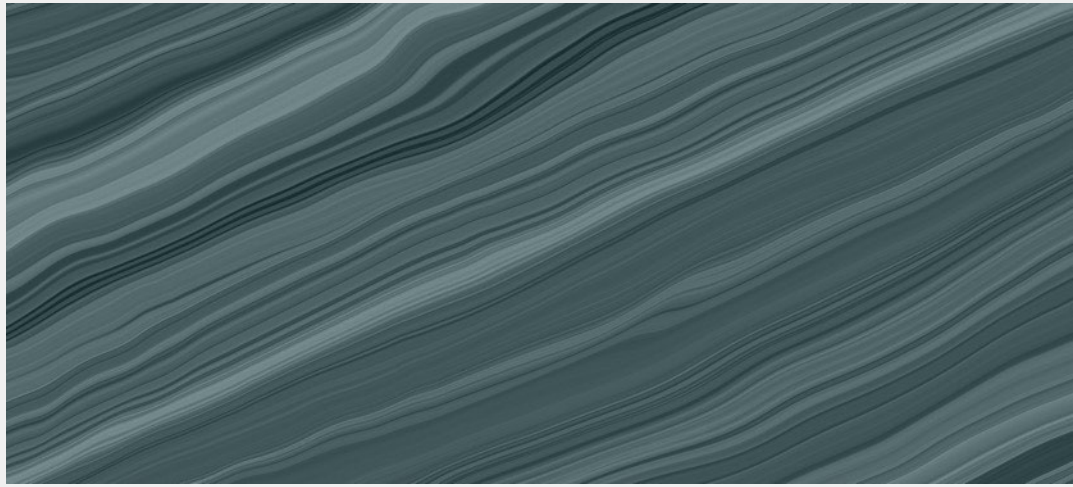


Lived experience cannot simply "advise" evaluation processes, it must be integrated as a distinct way of knowing that transforms the whole evaluation.

This requires structural, relational, and methodological change, not just good intentions.

What it involved

- Present at all stages
- Hearing all perspectives, without synthesising or smoothing difference
- Learning about the spaces between words
- Inbuilt reflexivity
- Iterative learning, reflection and checking in



What it required of Day Four

- **Giving up authority**
- **Working more slowly**
- **Sitting with discomfort**
- **Holding transparent boundaries and structures for debate**

On advisory models and embracing influence

- Most approaches position lived experience as supplementary and the evaluator remains the epistemic authority
- Extractive processes must make room for collective uncovering
- Who's lived experience counts? is a persistent challenge in groups
- Beyond advocacy, learning new ways to influence, be heard and share
- Structural investment: time, money, training, ongoing support
- Willingness to hear findings that are different from what we expect

Five practical starting points

Involve Lived Experience from the outset: so that who decides what is being asked is shared.

Invest in structure, process, kindness, openness and shared intentions.

Invest in ways that protect autonomy and resist co-option

Allow time for trust and deliberation: this work takes time because it requires relationships to build before people feel safe.

Examine evidence hierarchies: think deeply about what counts as evidence, who gets to decide, and how you can move towards restorative approaches that recognise and address structural harm.

Create room to support lived experts to lead: from highly facilitated and structured to stepping back and dynamic.

Don’t mistake stepping back as relinquishing responsibility to hold the process and people through it.

Closing reflections



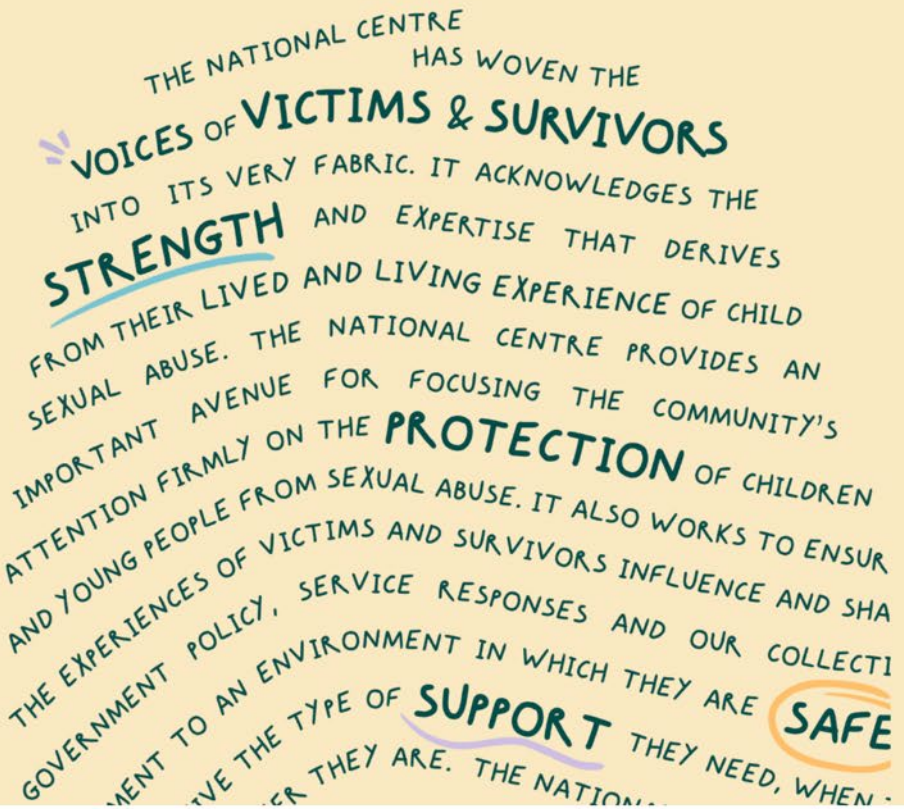
What's sitting with you from this session - a question, a tension, an insight, an epiphany, something that's settled or unsettled you?

National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse

https://nationalcentre.org.au/

A national call to action.

A once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the conversation on child sexual abuse.



The National Centre is a **symbol of hope** and an essential vehicle **for action** for victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

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