

**Submission to:**  
**The NSW Sentencing Council -**  
**Good Character in Sentencing Project**  
**Submitted by:**  
**Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia [FACAA]**



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**26/01/2025**



## **About the Author:**

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Adam Washbourne is the Founder and President of the charity group Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia. He founded the charity in July 2010 to fill a gap that he recognised within the community and to bring about an end to an issue that has plagued our nation for far too long now.

Adam has a Diploma of Community Services (Welfare) specialising in child trauma counselling and has worked in the field for the past 13 years since completing his degree. Adam is also a Martial Arts Instructor and has been teaching children how to defend themselves for the past 18 years.

Adam has worked for various community centres, mental health facilities and martial arts schools. He currently counsels for FACAA and teaches for KMA Martial Arts in Liverpool, N.S.W, one of Australia's premier martial arts schools.

This submission was prepared by Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia [FACAA].

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## **About Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia**

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We are a charity formed to empower survivors, to raise awareness and to bring justice back to our legal system.

Our vision is to see a world where child abuse is no longer a plight our children must face.

The core values which guide FACAA are:

Integrity above all.

Always show empathy and compassion.

Respect the journey, every survivor's path is different.

Never lose the passion that hardens your resolve.

FACAA has been working actively for the past 15 years to end child abuse within Australia. We run several programs all with our goal of ending child abuse in mind, such as survivor's healing programs, educational and legal reform programs, anti-domestic violence programs, anti-bullying programs and a social media awareness campaign with over 135,000 followers on our main Facebook page alone, making it one of the most successful social media campaigns of its kind in Australia.

FACAA is a national organisation that has full deductible gift recipient status as a registered charity. We have volunteers and clients from every part of Australia, and we have members from all over the world.



## **Introduction**

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FACAA do not pretend to be lawyers so this submission will not have chunks of legislation to present arguments. We are the voice of the victim-survivors and as such our submission will largely feature the thoughts and feelings directly from the victim-survivors.

FACAA were proudly a part of the original legal reform campaign which stopped child abusers from being able to utilise character references to have convictions overturned.

Now we are proudly backing the call to have character references removed for child abusers all together. Simply put character references do not apply for child abusers and as such should have no bearing on their sentences. There should never be a reason for a child abuser to receive a reduction in sentencing, and character references should be no exception.



## **Recommendations**

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1. Immediate abolishment of character references for anyone convicted of child abuse crimes.
2. If character references remain applicable in child abuse cases there needs to be stringent checks and balances to ensure the reference still applies and the person writing the reference is fully aware of all the crimes the person has been convicted of and still feels the character reference is applicable to avoid having another case like we saw with Jeffrey “Joffa” Corfe being able to use an out of date generic character reference by the reverend Bill Crews.



## **Explanation of Recommendations:**

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### *1. Immediate abolishment of character references for anyone convicted of child abuse crimes.*

We believe in the immediate abolishment of character references for anyone convicted of child abuse crimes for several reasons.

The first reason being how re-traumatising it is for the victim-survivor to hear references referring to their abuser being someone of good character. Imagine enduring the trauma of being a victim-survivor of child abuse, being brave enough to face the judicial process, to succeed and get a conviction, only to then sit in court and hear a virtual parade held in the honour of the person who abused you. The impact of being forced to hear these character references on victim-survivors cannot be understated.

Many FACAA lived experience court support clients have told us that it was just as bad, if not worse, than being cross examined, and called a liar by the defence team. At least they know that the defence team are only doing their job, but the people writing these glowing character references about someone who has been convicted of abusing them, are not there to do a job, but literally there to get their abuser a lesser sentence.

Secondly, no matter who someone was or what they have done before being convicted of child abuse, is irrelevant. They chose to commit a heinous crime that affects the victim survivor, and often their family and friends, for the rest of their lives. No matter what someone else's opinion of them is, their good deeds in life can never outweigh their bad or lessen the impact on their victims.

In fact, quite often their so-called good deeds, or good character are a byproduct of their efforts to gain positions of power over children. To groom adults into allowing them access to unsupervised interactions with potential victims, and to deceive and obscure their true intentions.

Therefore once someone is convicted of abusing a child, a crime which requires planning, grooming and lying to everyone in their social circles to succeed, what they were perceived as being.. is irrelevant.

Predators lives are built on deception and pretence, to take the skills they've acquired to help them be a successful abuser, and use them to reduce their sentence is an affront to all victim-survivors. They were never a pillar of the community, a member of their local church, scout master, footy coach, all round good guy who helped the locals. They were predators who groomed people into believing they were good community members, certainly not someone deserving of a reduction in their sentence.

With that in mind it is our firm belief that character references, which by definition refer only to what someone's character appeared to be before they were convicted of child abuse crimes, should not be applicable to child abuse cases as they are entirely irrelevant, and based on deception.

Two of the principals of sentencing are deterrence against future crimes being committed and maintaining a high public opinion of the criminal justice system.

We at FACAA have been in court to witness firsthand as character references transmute prison sentences into suspended sentences. How could a suspended sentence in a child abuse case, possibly be a deterrent for future crimes to not be committed? Trust me when I say, our social media awareness campaign has taught us that the public's opinion of our criminal

justice system is at an all-time low, thanks largely to the shockingly light sentences handed down to child abusers.

Without these flawed character references the convicted child abusers would have been sent to prison, where they belong. They wouldn't have received a suspended sentence, which would have acted as more of a deterrent and would have therefore lifted public opinion of the criminal justice system.

Child abusers are often master manipulators and expert groomers. Therefore, we at FACAA believe that all character references that have been written in their favour could be seen as being coerced and manipulated. Making them unacceptable due to the rules on the writing of character references clearly stating that they must not be coerced.

*2. If character references remain applicable in child abuse cases there needs to be stringent checks and balances to ensure the reference still applies, and the person writing the reference is fully aware of all the crimes the person has been convicted of and still feels the character reference is applicable. To avoid having another case like we saw with Jeffrey "Joffa" Corfe being able to use an out-of-date generic character reference by the reverend Bill Crews.*

Should, for some reason the NSW Sentencing Council choose to ignore the sheer weight of public opinion thanks to campaigns like FACAA's and like the #YourReferenceAintRelevant campaign, then we at FACAA strongly recommend that the loopholes in the character reference system be closed.

The main loophole that we have seen exploited is the one that saw Jeffrey "Joffa" Corfe, the famous Collingwood football club supporter, who was able to use an out of date (6 years old) and generic character reference by the Reverend Bill Crews. The



foundation later rescinded the character reference entirely due to the nature of Joffa's crimes. Coming from a hero of the children like Bill Crews, this character reference no doubt held significant weight and was a large part of the reason Jeffrey Corfe received a non-custodial sentence, despite being convicted of horrendous child abuse crimes.

A simple registration process for all character references would take care of this problem (abolishment of character references for child abusers would work even better and be even easier to implement). The judge needs to have confidence that the character reference is relevant, current and still applicable. Once the character reference is submitted the judge could ask the author to appear before them and swear to the currency, validity and relevancy of the character reference. This would prevent future character references from being generic and not applicable.



## **Conclusion**

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Sentencing for convicted child abusers is a blight on our society. It does not act as a deterrent to future crimes, it does not meet societal standards, and it does not give the public trust in the judicial system.

Child abuse is simply the single most unjustifiable crime in the entire criminal justice system. You can justify murder, theft, violence in extreme cases, but with child abuse there can be no justification, no "I needed to do this to feed my family" or "I had to because I feared for my life". The abuse of our most vulnerable, the most innocent members of our society has no justification what so ever.

To allow a sentence for this most heinous of crimes, to be lessened by a reference, often based on a façade built by an

abuser to hide from detection, is an insult to every victim-survivor.

Character references for convicted child abusers must be removed. We must show with our actions that we acknowledge that you cannot be both a child abuser and a good person. This will speak loudly to our victim-survivors that they are being heard and go a long way in allowing sentences for child abusers to reflect societal expectations, and to act as a deterrent for future crimes.

We at FACAA would like to thank the NSW Sentencing Council for taking the time to read our submission and we sincerely hope it was helpful and within the scope of the audit.

For any further information please feel free to contact the author directly on [REDACTED], or my personal email address [REDACTED]



## **References**

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To collect the information for this submission FACAA conducted dozens of interviews over email, inbox and zoom. To protect their identities and not risk breaching suppression orders some of the cases have been de-identified.

A very big thank you and reference needs to go to the volunteers of the FACAA social media awareness campaign. TC Robinson, Genevieve Elliot, Kellie Roche and to the many brave survivors who have contributed their experiences to help bring about positive changes, without them this submission would not have been completed.