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Support for Abuse Survivors

Ingrid Weiss Slikkers

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Support for Abuse Survivors

“I wish I had known the importance of educating my children about sexual abuse,” the young mom shared in tears.



▲ Ingrid Weiss Slikkers

“I didn’t feel I could say anything as a child because I feared no one would believe me,” said a young adult male, due to the perpetrator being a church leader.

Within the span of a few weeks came more stories and requests for support. Within days I was asked to present online in Australia for their national enditnow virtual summit. **Enditnow** (enditnow.org/) is a global initiative to raise awareness and advocate for the end of violence. It aims to mobilize Seventh-day Adventists around the world and invites other community groups to join them to resolve this worldwide issue. Abuse became the item on our meeting table at the International Center for Trauma Education & Care at Andrews University.

There were lengthy conversations about the issue of sexual abuse and the church. We discussed gaps in knowledge about initiatives and support available to lay individuals, and agreed that more needed to be done to support parents in educating their children. Through these hard discussions, I also knew I had interns facing the reality of situations where there was a failure to protect the innocent. I asked one in particular, Emma Vanderwaal, for permission to share part of our conversation:

What is the most devastating for you? The disbelief. Many survivors will take on the enormous task of sharing their stories, in hopes of finding justice or healing, just to be met with community members or loved ones saying that they’re not telling the truth. *We need to believe them!* The stories of survivors blew me away. They were full of so much grief and,

simultaneously, immense strength and resilience. God created human beings to withstand pain of this caliber, but only with the help of their communities. The beauty of community was shown as victims shared stories of friends and loved ones gathering beside them despite the disbelief and shame of others. In these times, loose promises like “I’m here if you need me” are truly tested.

What gives you hope? What gives me hope are the people who fight for this cause, for the end of abuse. **Enditnow** is a good example. What impacted me most about being part of enditnow Australia was the passion that participants and speakers shared about the topic of abuse in all forms. Unfortunately, I had not seen the same amount of discourse about abuse previously. As a member of Generation Z, many in my generation feel that important topics are not being discussed in our church. Being a part of enditnow Australia showed that this issue is important and a priority to older generations, making me incredibly hopeful for the future.

What do you want to tell readers? I hope readers will recognize the importance of talking about this issue openly and within a church setting. Talking about it is the first step to making change. I hope more individuals take the initiative to educate themselves and seek out available resources such as found here: <http://bit.ly/3IbtsiT>. We must remember that regardless of whether we have experienced abuse ourselves, we likely know someone who has. It is not just their issue, it is our issue! ■

Ingrid Weiss Slikkers is assistant professor in the Andrews University School of Social Work and executive director, International Center for Trauma Education & Care. Emma Vanderwaal is an undergraduate social work student.