

Episode 1, samsn's STRONGER: Karma Police / Identity

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1 in 6 Australian men will experience sexual abuse, usually as children or adolescents. Survivors of child sexual abuse often speak of feeling like their identity was stripped away by their abuser. Who would they have been, how would they have turned out, if the abuse had not derailed their life? What resilience, resourcefulness and strength is required to overcome the impacts of child sexual abuse on forming your identity? How can you find your way back - and forward - to yourself?

Featuring (in order of appearance): Les S, Ryan C, Jarad G, Phil S, Lindsay G, Matthew O, Dr Judy Cashmore, Shane Greentree (SAMSN, Clinical Services Manager), Brett Pickard (SAMSN, Eight-week Support Group facilitator).

Resources for survivors:

<https://www.samsn.org.au/recovery-and-healing/resources-for-survivors/>

Thanks to:

All our wonderful interviewees!

[Rob Carlton](#) and [Felicity Blake](#)

Peter Bolam

And [The National Redress Scheme](#)

Music: Licensed via Audiio.com

OPENING - Matt-Stewart Evans: *Finding Hope* (Instrumental)

PHILLIP - Andrew Word: *Fields* (Instrumental)

RYAN - Philip Daniel: *Reverse The River - Strings* (Instrumental)

CLOSING CREDITS - Seth Öphengon: *A Safe Place* (Instrumental)

SPEAKER	CONTENT
Rob Carlton	Welcome to SAMSN's 'Stronger', a podcast series featuring stories of resilience from male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and their allies. In some parts it <i>is</i> heavy going, so if you're not in the space to listen right now, switch to something lighter. But do come back. We learn a great deal about surviving and growing stronger than your past from survivors.
Felicity Blake	If what you hear stirs up strong feelings, know that you can contact SAMSN at samsn.org.au , or on 1800 472 676, or give Lifeline a call on 13 11 14.
Felicity Blake	What does it take to grow stronger than your past? Childhood sexual abuse is when an adult or an older adolescent uses a child for any sexual act, or imposes a sexual threat upon a child. It's a form of sexual violence, and it is a crime. But this isn't a series about crimes, or about the criminal perpetrators of child sex abuse. SAMSN's STRONGER shares the stories of survivors: the men,

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	<p>abused as boys, who - with extraordinary courage and resilience - are connecting with support and recovering from their childhood trauma. Not only did they survive; they have found ways to thrive.</p> <p>In this podcast series brought to you by Survivors and Mates Support Network, we'll hear directly from survivors; their partners, children, and supporters; therapists, psychologists, lawyers, and others about the facets of some incredible recovery journeys.</p> <p>I'm your host, documentary maker Felicity Blake, and my co-host is Rob Carlton, SAMSN's Ambassador.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>Hi, I'm Rob. I became SAMSN's ambassador because I wanted to support an organisation that was established by male survivors of child sex abuse... ordinary guys who were helping other men (like themselves) find community, and heal and recover from their childhood trauma. SAMSN is a charity, it's not connected to any religion, and their services are free.</p> <p>To kick us off, here are some short soundbites from six male survivors - we'll be hearing more from each of them later in this episode.</p>
Les S	<p>I'm Les. I grew up in a small country town in eastern Queensland, and it's only a small town. Look, I never told anyone throughout my adolescence, or ever since the grooming process. But grooming is an insidious process where the perpetrator knows exactly what they're doing, but everybody else is oblivious to it.</p>
Ryan C	<p>Where the abuse transpired, it was not only down at the beach, but it was in behind a church as well. And what happened to me was not good and then I ran away, absolutely petrified. And I remember running away. And the next thing I remember is the abuser running after me. And he grabbed me. And he, he shook me and said, "Don't tell, don't tell." And I felt really confused.</p>
Jarad	<p>I've got a really great immediate family, a fantastic extended family, and, you know, a really great group of friends. And I had parents who made sure I had other adults to talk to when I was a teenager. So I had all the best conditions to be someone who started addressing these things early in life.</p>
Phillip S	<p>My story is not just centered around sexual abuse as a child. Childhood rape. But it was exposed to, you know, domestic violence, it was exposed to, you know, poverty, unsettled, you know, house environment and things like that. I'd always known something was wrong around my own patterns of behaviour. I always knew something was wrong, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. If I look back over my childhood, there</p>

	<p>were patterns of behavior, which is indicative of a childhood being exposed to trauma. But I didn't make the connection between what was (and is) sexual abuse, and just trauma growing up around domestic violence and things like that.</p>
Lindsay G	<p>I lived in a family that was dysfunctional. So I learned a whole lot of dysfunctional messages about being compliant, about keeping my mouth closed, about being a boy that stood in the shadows, but that if people were upset, it was somehow my responsibility.</p>
Matthew O	<p>Gee, it, it takes a huge amount of energy to, to portray this whole image that nothing's wrong, that everything's okay, that I, that I'm okay. And I look back on all that. And I think, wow, you know, that I had some extraordinary strength to be able to do that.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>In Australia, one in three girls and one in seven boys have experienced some form of child sexual abuse. But we can't be completely sure of the numbers, because of what's called the "dark figure": the children who never report what happened.</p> <p>Males are much less likely than females to disclose child sexual abuse at the time... in fact, guys often take around 25 years before they tell <i>anybody</i> what happened, and seek help for the harm they experienced.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>This is Dr Judy Cashmore, a developmental psychologist who works with the School of Law at Sydney University:</p>
Dr Judy Cashmore	<p>One of the major problems in this area is that we actually don't have a true figure as to what the real incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse is, particularly for boys. Because they, we know that they're more reluctant to disclose. And we know that there are many people out there, many boys, many men who have never told anyone. There were some particular cases in the Royal Commission that really went home. I remember the judge talking about an 80 year old man, who'd never told anyone until he went for a private session the next day, and that's when he told his wife and his son. And we don't know how many people there are like that out there. And who've been suffering in silence, covering it over, getting on, but also having it emerge and trigger problems for them at various times in their lives.</p> <p>Some of those consequences, the longer-term effects can come back and come to the surface, and sometimes at time when they have, they can really take them by surprise. They can be triggered by, for example, by particular life events, when they have relationship difficulties. Because child sexual abuse is a betrayal of trust, it's a manipulation by the perpetrator of an interpersonal relationship, that they have deliberately groomed the victim so that they will be compliant and be</p>

	<p>silenced and they will see it as their secret, that makes it very difficult for them to tell, and for them not to think of it as something that they're responsible for.</p>
Rob Carlton	<p>Male survivors of child sexual abuse often speak of feeling like their identity was stripped away by their abuser. Who would they have been, and how would their lives have looked if they hadn't been abused? In this episode, we'll explore the effects of abuse on identity, particularly the way it's experienced by men.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Les Spencer, SAMSN's General Manager.</p>
Les S	<p>So the grooming process started with just simple little gestures of I'll pick you up from school, your Mum and Dad are busy. I'll take you for a drive and I'll teach you how to drive. I'll give you some tuckshop money. Your Mum doesn't have any money today. So it was just these little grabs that would entice you.</p> <p>And over the years, I've often blamed myself, I used to say to myself, why didn't I stop this? And why did I leave it for so long? Why didn't my parents know? How come they couldn't see what was going on? And I never told anyone because I didn't think anybody would believe me.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>This is Matthew.</p>
Matthew O	<p>So, my abuser was a Catholic priest. He, we... Our family moved from, from interstate to New South Wales, and he formed a pretty close relationship with, with my parents who really were in, in a situation where they didn't really know anyone in New South Wales or anyone very much. And it started through that involvement.</p> <p>And sure, it included, the abuse included spending time with, with that priest at various, on various occasions, usually during school holidays, usually at the parish house. And it started mainly by the priest offering, you know, special treatment, I suppose, or special gifts or special time away from a very busy, very busy family life. And, and it sort of developed, developed from there into something where he could take advantage of, of me, and not only me, I suppose; my, my family as well, my parents as well. And there was no explicit threat that I shouldn't disclose to anyone or shouldn't tell anyone what was going on.</p> <p>It was a very subtle process of saying, you know, these privileges that I'm offering to you will no longer exist if you don't continue to go along with what was with what was going on. And I suppose that's, that's how it sort of developed and then it went on for quite a considerable period of time on and off. And then I suppose in my sort of 14, 15, 16, 17, 18-year-old sort of years, the relationship changed not from a physical abusive sort of one but more of a controlling abuse, where I was put in a</p>

	<p>situation where I was given a continuation of that that special treatment and I suppose financial inducements to, to keep on going. For example, he assisted me in you know, buying a car and, and a few things like that which there was a plan at one stage to go on a reasonably expensive overseas holiday, that never actually eventuated. And at that time, none of my family, or none of my siblings would have been in a position to go on one of those holidays or purchase their own car or something like that. So there was quite a lot of, quite a lot of that type of abuse, encouragement type of abuse to to keep, keep yourself quiet, keep quiet until, about what's been about the more... the more serious or the sexual assault sort of stuff that was going on.</p>
<p>Felicity Blake</p>	<p>Here's Les.</p>
<p>Les S</p>	<p>The the the sexual abuse went on, it was almost on a daily basis, every school afternoon. My abuse continued not because I allowed it, it's because my perpetrator used psychological... it was, not only was it sexual abuse, it was psychological abuse.</p> <p>Considering that I was actively sexual from from the age of 11 it's, it's quite surreal. And you just don't know who to tell, because I didn't think anybody would believe me.</p> <p>My perpetrator was a female, and she was a friend of my mother's. She groomed me from the age of 10 and the sexual abuse stopped when I was 16.</p> <p>And not only did my perpetrator groom me, she groomed my parents and my family. So it's a process that they know what they're doing, and it's quite calculating.</p> <p>So my perpetrator controlled me, she controlled every aspect of my life, what I do, my friends, who I could see. She wanted me to be with her so often that it actually limited who I could see outside of her circle.</p>
<p>Ryan C</p>	<p>My name is Ryan Chandler and I grew up in the eastern suburbs in the mid '80s. And I happened to be very much a part of the surfing culture down there and went to school in that area. And I fell into surfing for the best part of a couple of decades and, and that's where my life began.</p> <p>If you were to look at what had transpired in my early years, I was exposed to a lot of violence down the beach, but consequent to that, I'd also been a victim to a pedophile within that area. And that's where I had experienced the atrocities that was bestowed on me at an early age. And I was, I was nine years of age. And that's where the life that I was to lead completely changed.</p>

	<p>The surfing was a completely and totally wild period of my life. We all went to school together, we all surfed together down the beach, and there was a competitive nature amongst us all, but we're very, very closely knit.</p> <p>But there was one thing that I noticed within me and this would be in my early teens, that I felt very, very uncomfortable. And to be brutally honest, I had a lot of flashbacks during my early teens from my abuse. And one thing that enabled me to not only overcome that, but also connect with those guys was to drink, and I was exposed to heavy, heavy binge drinking at a very young age down the beach. And that had a massive, massive effect on me. And I was diagnosed with depression at the age of 16. And I knew there was something wrong with me, but I didn't know how to deal with it. And I felt very, very different to all the guys down the beach. And as I said, the common denominator was drinking. And I eventually fell into drug addiction, not too long after that, coming into my late teens.</p> <p>And I remember being intelligent at school, I remember having the ability to surf really good. And in the end, I failed my HSC.</p> <p>What happened was towards the very end of my drinking and drugging, my past was my reality. And so I didn't know that I was utilizing those coping mechanisms to overcome my thoughts, which were my flashbacks, my inability to deal with my feelings, and also the train wreck of my life that had passed, leading up into that point. And I felt as though the world owed me something.</p>
Felicity Blake	This is Lindsay
Lindsay G	<p>My name is Lindsay. In my mind, I believed that I had been responsible for all this. Had I been a better person, had I been a more compliant young man, had I been a better Catholic, these things wouldn't have happened to me, because I was really deserving of them because I was such a bad person.</p> <p>That's really erroneous stuff for a child to have, but in my mind, I was responsible for how my mother felt, and I was responsible for the other siblings in my family. They were tasks that I shouldn't have been exposed to, and they were inappropriate for a young child to take up. But nevertheless, I did. And I have carried that sense of responsibility through in my life, and it's something I now have to deal with, and recognize that it is a hangover from the past. And that all I have to do is to accept where I am now, and accept the situation as it is. Because for me responsibility led to attempting to control situations. It led to</p>

	<p>attempting to control people and manipulate situations. It led to me trying to make sure that everything, everything had appeared in a particular way, and that the outcomes, were going to come out the way I thought they should have.</p>
Les S	<p>So it got to the stage where I could see the only way out of this entrapment was suicide. So after my unsuccessful attempt at suicide, I did end up in hospital. And after the medical procedure, the doctor came, came up to the bed, to the bedside. And, and not once did he ask me why I did it. He lacked a lot of compassion. And the only thing he said to me: "You stupid little bastard, you've upset your parents".</p> <p>So at that stage, well, prior to that, I was actually ready to tell someone because I just could not cope anymore. My school results were poor. I couldn't concentrate. I was drinking, I was smoking. So my life was just in turmoil. And if that doctor had a bone of compassion, and just, just a bit of a twig, "What happened to this boy? Why is he... Why did he do this?", he could have asked me a question. And I would have told him: I wanted the pain to finish.</p> <p>Throughout my journey, suicide, thoughts of suicide or suicide ideation has lived with me, and at times, it still does. It's just something that doesn't go away, but I manage it because I know life gets better. And I really would love to tell people who are thinking about suicide because of whatever is happening in their life. I just want you to know that life does get better, but you have to work at it. It just doesn't fall in your lap. But somehow, you know, you have that inner strength. And I found it. I don't know how I found it, but somehow you do. And I know that you can do it as well. And life does get better, even though today might be just absolutely shit. Tomorrow can be fantastic. And I really would like you to hold onto that thought and just keep pushing through because life does get better.</p> <p>After my failed second attempted suicide, I decided that I would end the abuse and not my life. And that was the start of my journey away from her. Even though she was physically out of my life, somehow, she controlled my mind and I really struggled with it. I started drinking excessively, I was smoking, I had a lot of marijuana, I looked for every excuse to ease the pain and as an escape from reality.</p> <p>But somehow I don't know how I did it. I still maintained a job. I still maintained this professional persona. But when I was alone, that's when I would fall apart. It was almost like I was full of concrete when I was out and about and I was strong. But when I was alone, that concrete turned to jelly.</p>

	<p>Growing up in a country town, you have to have this strong persona. You can't be this wimpy, sooky kid. And so I pretended. And I actually used to say to myself, fake it until you make it, and I used to do it all the time, say it all the time. Fake it until you make it. And so I used to put on this tough image. I used to drink and smoke and swear.</p> <p>And being abused by a female perpetrator is... it is just emasculating. It just takes away all your power. It just... I didn't feel like a man or a boy. I didn't... I was almost like I was an empty shell. It was almost... It was almost like she had sucked out my masculinity. And I just had no power. I had no voice. I had no confidence. And so I used to pretend. And being drunk was great because I could act tough. I could just be someone who I really wasn't.</p>
Matthew O	<p>So one of the coping mechanisms, I think, was a complete denial of what was going on. And one of the things that I tried to do, I think, was portray to everyone that it was like a quasi father-son type relationship, that there was nothing really untoward with what was going on. And I don't know why I did that. It took a long time during therapy later on to try and unpack all of those, those sorts of things. Because it certainly wasn't anything that is, there was nothing normal about the relationship at all. And it was quite both physically and mentally abusive throughout that period of time. And as a young child, trying to develop into learning how to trust people trust adults, that that was a very difficult thing to, to try and to try and cope with on your own, basically, because you've you've, you're not able to tell people you feel you're not able to tell people because you feel that you wouldn't be believed.</p>
Lindsay G	<p>I realized, as my life was developing, that I was building an alcohol dependence. I realized this because there wasn't a day where I either, where I wasn't drinking alcohol, or a day where I wasn't thinking about it. So most days of the week, I was drinking. And when the weekend came, it was, in my mind, my entitlement to go and drink as much as I wanted to.</p> <p>Now, the impacts of that were that it just destroyed the relationships around me. My children were not connected, they were angry with me. And all they saw was this sort of person who was escaping responsibility.</p> <p>The gambling fitted into it as part of the drinking culture, if you like. Here I am at the club, I'll drink alcohol and play poker machines and avoid dealing with life. That was the whole goal: to avoid dealing with life's experiences.</p>

	<p>About the perpetrator, I did feel as though that sense of "It's my fault, I shouldn't have been such a passive person, I should have jumped up and down a bit and made more noise". But my overwhelming fears at those times were abandonment, that if I did make noise, I would be abandoned. And I still have some of those abandonment fears that come back from time to time.</p> <p>There have been times in my life, when I've experienced extreme vulnerability. Those times were usually preceded by a stressful event. And it could have been work related, it could have been in the family or could have been a relationship issue. Or it could have been around aspirations, if you like.</p> <p>So for a long time, I had experienced this vulnerability about being a fake person, I would have nightmares about being found out to be a fraud. That I'm going to get my diploma or my degree at the University, and somebody jumps on stage and says "Stop! He's a fraud, he's a fake, it's not true!". And I had those dreams for long periods of time. And then they dropped out, I'm not quite sure why they did. But I think it was that sense of being vulnerable, at that time to being not a true person, or not being an authentic person, were seeping through. By that I mean, that I became a person who sought to please others, rather than actually deal with issues.</p>
Les S	<p>And I've often thought... what would have become of me if that didn't happen? Would I be a different person? Would I think differently? And the answer is, yes, I would think differently, I would be in a totally different stage. I would be in a different place than what I am now.</p>
Ryan C	<p>I've often thought about what it would have been like, had not the abuse that occurred to me... what type of life I may have been exposed to, or what type of life I would have led, and I'm clearly of the opinion that it would have been different. And one of the most loneliest and heaviest, intense experiences I've ever had in my life is not only seeing the train wreck of my life come to fruition, but also the loss of my identity. And I always felt that, despite I felt different, that I didn't know who I was, or what I was meant to do. And I was never capable of determining that. And that was reflected in the way I interacted with people, it was reflected in the way I was engaging with employers. It was reflected in the way I saw myself through others. And that had a massive bearing on me. And I had an incredible sense of loss, because I felt that this is my gig. This is how I'm going to live my life. And it was incredibly lonely.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>We draw our identity from many sources: family, culture, community, country. Every survivor's story is different, because each one happens in a unique combination of conditions.</p>

Phillip S	<p>Hi, my name is Philip Saunders. I live in Adelaide. I was born in Mount Gambier, South Australia.</p> <p>Going back, when I was a kid, I always wanted to be like the other people across the road. I played sport and football and things like that. I wanted, I wish I'd had a dad that was around that was part of my life. My dad had left before I was born. So I didn't have any male role models that were healthy in my life. And I just saw what other people were doing across the road and it was sort of like looking outside the fishbowl so to speak.</p> <p>You know, as corny as it might sound, I was watching Arnie Becker out of 'LA Law' and I thought I want to be like him, you know, I mean, he seemed pretty cool, and he was surrounded by sort of beautiful women, you know, and blonde and a suntan! Completely the opposite of what I look like. And I just didn't want to grow up in poverty, I just didn't want, I wanted better for myself. I wanted more for myself.</p> <p>My first proper job, I was fortunate enough to get a cadetship with the Legal Services Commission in Adelaide. And that was a great introduction to the law.</p> <p>Yeah, look... My working life has been, I've had some really good jobs. I've also had, I've always I think, you know, part of my problem has always been chasing this illusion, trying to, you know... if jobs or projects will fix me, and that's why I was knowing there that something fundamentally sort of unsettling inside of me as a result of things that have happened growing up. During my life I've worked in Aboriginal communities from... in the Northern Territory consulting as... working as a consultant to traditional owners in the Pitjantjatjara lands, APY lands; Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands. I've worked in Alice Springs, in Arnhem Land.</p> <p>You know, people like, for me culture is just, it's really hard to talk about in a lot of ways, because it's just in, it's just in, in me, you know what I mean? It's like, I think the best way to describe it for me is that a fish doesn't know it's in water. My culture is inside of me, it's in my DNA, it's in... And importantly, it's how I think, and it's how... it's my view of the world. And it's about my connection to my country, it's about connection to my community. It's about my songlines, and things like that. It's about places that are special. But ultimately, it's in my DNA.</p> <p>My Mum raised us in a household where we knew about our identity, we knew where we came from, and what it meant and what it means to be part of the community, where we live. And so it's always been my anchor. And I think that when... what I've learned over the last few years</p>
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	<p>is that going home, on Country, going home to my family, to my community, when things have been difficult, has been really therapeutic and healing.</p> <p>And so when you talk about issues like this, I don't want to bring shame on my mum, and her relationships. And her relationships of her aunts or uncles or her grandparents. And that's the, that's the thing, because it's not just... I'm not talking about just one generation. Here, I'm not talking about one person that did it to me, that one person, or that two people, they are part of the family architecture, in my family structure in my, my community. And so I don't want to disrespect them, I don't wanna disrespect my relationship that my mother has with their family. And that's the big hurdle at times.</p> <p>You know, shame is like, I'm not, you know, when you talk about these types of things, our family ties go way back. You know what I mean? And that's very different to a lot of Anglo Saxon/ Anglo European families. Like, I go back... my ancestry when I trace it back, I go back five or six generations. And they're strong bonds.</p> <p>As males, we need to open our heart up. And our soul. We need to have these conversations around these taboo topics. You know, like, for me, my own experience. I'm approaching 50, and I'm just getting a handle on how trauma and sexual abuse affects... affects your development. And I know that my neurons, my, the pathways to my brain were architecturally damaged, because of what had happened. I didn't know that I was raped as a kid. Because I just thought it was normal. And, you know, sometimes I think, you know, is it rape? What does it mean, you know what I mean? And until we really understand, you know, we need to have those conversations.</p>
Felicity Blake	Here’s Dr Judy Cashmore, to explain more about how childhood trauma can change the brain.
Dr Judy Cashmore	When children are traumatized, when they have really adverse childhood experiences, what that leads to is the typical flight, fight, or freeze response. That might govern how they behaved at the time. It also has a longer term effect. And so when we get scared or upset, adrenaline surges through our system, and that has a, can have a longer term impact on the developing brain too. And the development of children's brains is really critical around their adolescent years, certainly the nought to five years, but around adolescence. And it means that it has a setpoint, it can have an effect on our setpoint of the adrenaline and the system and our developing brains so that when we're stressed in future, we've already got a resting level. That means it may not take that much more to spike us over into an adverse reaction or what might

	<p>be seen by others to be an overreaction. So that cortisol, and the adrenaline doesn't just end at the time, it can have an ongoing effect. And so the freezing that people get, the triggering that they get when they experience the same sort of sounds, or smells, or touch is what explains why they can really freak out and be seen to be reacting in a way that people who don't understand what they've gone through, and, and they may not understand exactly why it triggers such an extreme response, why it triggers that sort of physical and psychological response.</p> <p>So although the cortisol and so on can explain our stress reactions to things, you know, our brains are not set in concrete, they are plastic. And we know now that there are various things that our experiences well beyond adolescence, and when this happens, can actually change the way we act.</p> <p>But abuse isn't destiny, and by seeing how other men have dealt with it, and escaped those sorts of consequences, or dealt with those and gone beyond those longer term effects, can be, can really give hope to people about "Yes, I can do this too". And that sort of plasticity is really important.</p>
Phillip S	<p>So for me, the more I talk about it, the less it becomes a secret. And that's the approach that I take is to suck the energy out of the secret, and it just becomes a story.</p>
Felicity Blake	<p>When you become aware that your identity has been derailed by childhood abuse, how do you set about getting it back on track? How do you find your way back to yourself? The path to healing and recovery is rarely straightforward.</p>
Matthew O	<p>It was actually a process where you actually had to go out and do something, you had to go out, you know, go outside the front door, and, and, and turn up to a clinic and sit down with a counselor and start to talk. Those sorts of sessions went for a number of years.</p> <p>I suppose the first, really that first month or couple of months is all about trying to break into that, break that shell that had existed for such a huge amount of time, such a huge proportion of my life from you know, from the age of five through to the age of 40, basically, to try and, or thereabouts, to start to break through that, that that shell that I built around everything to say, you know, nothing was happening, there's there's absolutely nothing untoward going on here. It took a little bit of time to actually admit that. And that sounds a bit strange, because, you know, the reason I was going there was because this abuse had happened. I was able to talk about the abuse in a very third-person sort</p>

	<p>of way, you know, it happened like this, and it happened then and, and, and all that sort of stuff. And it takes a while to get below that surface.</p>
<p>Les S</p>	<p>Along my journey of healing and recovering, I wanted to improve myself. I was always looking for ways to become a better person, because I knew that I deserved better.</p> <p>Going to university was a big achievement for me. And, and that just gave me that confidence to take a few more steps forward in my healing journey.</p> <p>And when I had confidence, that's when I made the decision to go and seek professional help because I wanted to understand my triggers: why I got upset about certain things. And even though I still slip up occasionally, I have a really good understanding of what triggers me and how I can maintain an equilibrium.</p>
<p>Jarad G</p>	<p>I kind of understood a bit about the world from a good perspective. And so, so had the freedom and the separation, because I wasn't in the abuse anymore to, to actually to be able to see it through the window of a healthy life and of, you know, what it actually was.</p> <p>So I think, like I said, I see that as a real privilege, which, you know, sometimes I'm surprised to call myself privileged when I think about what I've been through, but I also know so many stories of people who've been through what I've been through, in far, far worse situations. So I absolutely am privileged.</p> <p>I really understood that a lot of guys don't deal with it. And so when I got to SAMSN, I was not surprised, I was significantly younger. And I also wasn't surprised that for a lot of them, that was their first time, their first time sharing. And for me it, you know, I was an old hat at sharing what had happened or talking about the fact that that had happened. And I was there trying to soak up people who had similar feelings. Who, who thought the same way; who, you know, had been been affected by something which gave them a certain perspective.</p>
<p>Ryan C</p>	<p>I actually ended up in prison six years into my recovery process. And for me, at that point in time, I felt as though I felt it was more than being rejected, I felt abandoned. And so what happened was when that transpired I had all my flashbacks come back. I had all the audio hallucinations, the audio flashbacks come back. I had the visual flashbacks come back. And I didn't expect that to happen because I'd been in the recovery process. I thought I've been in counseling, why is this happening? And it was a shock to my system. And I became really, really recalcitrant in my behavior. And I got involved in crime and I had this ideology that I wanted to cause chaos in the world. And I ended up</p>

	<p>getting 10 years prison. And I served a six years sentence on the bottom.</p> <p>Two things that come to mind is that the recovery process is never at an endpoint. And secondly, being an individual that has been through what I've been through from my childhood in that context, is that I can have certain reactions to things that maybe other people who haven't been through abuse may experience differently. And I need to accept that. It's not necessarily the things that I go through, it's how I deal with what I go through, that will determine the quality of my life. And so there was a moment of clarity: I was around about... I think I was five years into my sentence, and I was staying in contact with a woman who was the mother of a man who I knew. And he happened to be a victim to the same perpetrator as mine. And he reached out, and my family had known this lady and we reached out and I was talking to her on the prison phone. Six minutes, every, every time I was able to talk to her, I'd get as much information out of her, and I'd share as much information as I could with her.</p> <p>Cut a long story short, he went to the police and the responses by the police weren't conducive to him receiving the supporting needed. And unfortunately, whilst I was in prison, he, he suicided, about two weeks later. And I remember sitting in my cell, and I was in a cell by myself. And I held on to the bars, and it was, it was of a nighttime, and I put my head down and I wept. And I had been not only retraumatized and I was in a state of, I believe PTSD, albeit I was quite solemn, but I had a lot of flashbacks that night. And one of the things that come about was, here I was in prison. And here I am sitting with a suicide of another victim. And I thought this isn't right. This isn't right, this can't be right. And the perpetrator is still out there. And I sat with that, and it was like, this is where resilience comes in. That wasn't about me, it was about making change. It was bringing about awareness that the suffering that survivors and victims of child sexual assault endure is nothing that anyone could describe. Because only we know.</p> <p>And now I think, if we were to look at the trajectory of my recovery, despite I was in prison towards the end, I saw that there was a change. And nothing changed outside of me. It was within me.</p>
<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>Lindsay can share a lifetime of reflection on his trajectory to recovery.</p>
<p>Lindsay G</p>	<p>I am an older Australian. I am a grandfather of six grandchildren. I have a family that I love and I'm very proud of.</p> <p>I had often thought about how I would conceptualize my life to other people. And I, after thinking about it, I have conceptualized it as a</p>

continuum, if you like, of powerlessness at one end and power at the other end, and then across that at right angles, is another continuum called "competence and incompetence", so that you now have four quadrants, and in that quadrant, down the end that's powerless and incompetent, I think I would put my early life, because life for me was about being a very compliant boy.

But as time went on, and I got older, I started to move down the continuum a little bit towards more power. I realized that I could do things: I got a job, and I went to work and earned money, and I started to study at a nighttime and I started to get more power. And if you like, my continuum, I moved towards the powerful in, but I probably was still in the "incompetent" quadrant. Because becoming more powerful, I started to do things that were dysfunctional. I didn't realize that a lot of the things I was carrying were shields, things to keep the world away from me. I became an alcohol abuser, I became a person that got involved in gambling, I got involved in self abuse by hitting myself. All defenses to keep the world away from me.

When we lived in the country, when I got really stressed, I would self abuse, I would hit myself, I would damage myself, and my wife got really alarmed by it. And she sent me off to a psychiatrist in Orange, and I had a whole lot of sessions with him. But I never told him anything. Yes, I told him I was stressed. But I never told him about the childhood abuse. I never told him about my early life, it was all about having to present an image to that person that was acceptable.

Because if he accepted that image, I was okay. And that was my criteria, if you like, for trying to live my life. I want to present to you an image that everything's okay. And if you think it's okay, it is. It's all right. What you see is more important than what it is.

And you know what? Even though I was succeeding at work, and moving along, I was fearful of the world that I lived in. And that really, I'd lived that life in fear for a long time. And it wasn't until later that I was able to move into that upper quadrant of being competent when I realized that there weren't one only definitions of maleness, there were many definitions of it. And that what happened to me was an experience that other young men had endured and overcome and dealt with. And I learned that the journey was a shared one that I could share some of my pain, and I could share it and that I wasn't going to be isolated or ridiculed or, or abused for that. But that I would be accepted and seen as a person of some value.

So that, for me, was a very powerful thing. So I put that competence and incompetence continuum there because the competence part of me was about understanding that life was about being a competent person in terms of emotions, being competent in terms of connecting to the

	<p>people around me, being competent in terms of how I treated other people, and not being the centre of the universe, not being this selfish person that had to keep the world away. That had to keep me hidden. And I said to a researcher once or a therapist once that I think I live my life wearing an overcoat, and the overcoat was the way to keep the world away from me. Not to let the world see me because if the world saw me, it would dislike me the way I disliked myself. I didn't like who I was. So if I didn't like myself, how could other people like me? So it was almost like when I wanted to throw the overcoat off, when I wanted to take it off, I could deal with the other issues. It was almost as if the pockets of the overcoat were alcohol addiction and gambling. And they were ways to keep the world away from me.</p> <p>I do regress. And there were times when I do slip back down, down, into other quadrants. And they're usually being triggered by events that I find distressing or difficult, or remind me of the past. And I sometimes get into that flight and fight response and want to run away. But most of the time, I am much better than where I was. I now seek help. I now talk to people. I now share, I now try and understand what's happening to me, and do something about it.</p> <p>So fortunately, I've been able to dispel those issues with help from SAMSN and other people. And it has been a more joyful experience than what I've lived, I suppose, most of my life: that anxiety and distress about not being worthwhile. So for me, the journey has been one of moving from darkness into a more lighted space. And those quadrants that I'm talking about that top right hand quadrant about competence and being powerful is, for me the most lighted space, that's, that's the place where all the joy is, that's the place where I get connected to people, that's the place where it's worthwhile being alive.</p> <p>And I've been able to sort of move, if you like, from being a 13, 14 year old boy, to where I am now: an old man looking at the top end of his life.</p>
Les S	<p>It's so important to actually talk to somebody who has actually experienced it also. Even though I didn't disclose initially at work, it... working there and hearing the stories, I thought I can actually make a difference to these guys, I can actually tell them about my story. And so that gave me a voice and when you have a voice, you have confidence and then you grow. You just become a different person.</p>
Ryan C	<p>What my recovery process is now, what I've gone through, is that I ended up having to learn how to deal with my emotions.</p> <p>And I reached out to a counselor. And it wasn't the counselor who was a sexual assault counselor, it was a relationships counselor. And it was</p>

	<p>there that I was introduced to the concept of an organization that was supporting men that had experienced child sexual assault. And the first thing I asked was, who's it run by? And I was told I was run by two men who had been sexually abused as well. I said, sign me up. And I had an understanding having been in the process of recovery for many years, I thought, if there are people like me, having a go at helping others, and who knew their stuff, I'm in the right place, and I became open to what they suggested.</p> <p>I never knew coming into the recovery process, that there are other people that are experiencing the same thing. And that's where my sense of community, with my peers in the recovery process enabled me to share about that stuff. Because I held on to that because I thought that's who I was.</p> <p>Now coming into my mid 40s, I'm understanding now that I don't have to do that anymore. And I am now just starting to get into contact with who I really am. And for the first time in my life, I never knew that this would be possible.</p> <p>So the one thing that I've alluded to today is that resilience is something that I must overcome. Adversity I need to overcome. And I'm not one that engages in going to church on Sunday. But I can tell you, I've fallen on my knees plenty of times, talking to thin air: God help me. I've done it plenty of times. And I'm still here kicking.</p>
Felicity Blake	Shane Greentree is clinical psychologist and SAMSN’s Clinical Services Manager.
Shane G	And, and I think that that sense of identity and label can really change over time, but has a real impact on men that have been abused, particularly going through those, even the developmental stages of adolescence in your young adulthood and maybe feeling like they've been robbed, at times, of experiences, or how the abuse has shaped their identity, but a real sense of hope, when they've come forward to get help, and I guess, reclaim and assert their identity as a survivor or however they may choose to identify, but there's often that real sense of reclamation about "I'm here, I'm not going anywhere, and this is, this is who I am".
Felicity Blake	This is Brett Pickard, one of the professional facilitators of SAMSN’s eight- week peer support groups for male survivors.
Brett P	I guess, overall, what I what I've witnessed is that the men arrive, many of them in despair. They are, by and large, men have, I think, have very few places where they can feel safe. And during the group, that's what we endeavor to do: to create safety. And I came across this

	<p>15th-century word actually called 'respair', which is the opposite to 'despair'. And I think that that's what I see happening in the men, that they recolonize that space that the perpetrator had taken from them. And they become the author of the story as the eight weeks unfold. So I guess as the weeks transpire, the men gain greater resilience; they become more confident. I guess, they get given an identity again, where their identity had been taken away from them by the perpetrator. And I guess, you know, as they have been able to re-author their story, and start owning their story, through the group process, they are affirmed, then they become increasingly more resilient and more confident that they're going to be all right.</p> <p>I mean, I think what's really important is that by the men re-authoring their story, they, you know, it's their story now, they are not going to be defined by the abuse. They're not going to be defined by sexual abuse, that their identity is larger than that. But I think that they become more whole, I guess that's what I see. The men become more resilient, more whole, more willing to take on challenges that they possibly wouldn't have done before. Their stories become other men's stories as well. You know, they become stronger.</p>
Lindsay G	<p>And surprisingly, when I sought help, a lot of the issues I had with relationships started to resolve. And they resolved because I was prepared to accept that this is what life is, I am who I am. And if they don't like who I am, then that's okay. I have to like myself, before they like me. And when I could deal with the issues of my own liking, and understand myself a lot better, those relationship issues were back in the box. They no longer became as threatening, or as influential as they'd been in the past.</p> <p>When I stepped out of my overcoat or stepped into the light or stepped out of the dark, I embraced truth and honesty and justice. When I stepped into that light I stepped into a way of saying, "Here I am. I am prepared to be an honest, transparent person".</p> <p>And from that first week, I really felt a sense of, boy, this is great, because I'm going to become so much a better person. And as the group went along, it got better and better for me. It felt as if, "Ah, I've been waiting all my life to get here, and here I am." And I'm with these other guys who I really think are special. Special because we share part of this story, special because we're together, and we can support each other, and special because we're connected to each other.</p> <p>And as people told their stories, and it unfolded, it became really clear to me that this was a community of men who didn't really need to hide themselves. They were men who were accepting of each other, who</p>

	<p>knew what had happened to each other, who were prepared to put out their hands to support each other, based on the sense that we’re on this journey together. Not a one up or one down position. But we’re here to support each other. I don’t have to tell lies, I don’t have to manipulate situations, I don’t have to make things worse than what they are. I am just me. And being just me was about accepting me as I am. I believe we are all acceptable as we are, we don’t need to change. We just need to be honest and transparent. And when we are in that honest and transparent phase, we can show each other who we are, we can talk about the things that have assailed us, have hurt us, have damaged us. And we can take away the power of those events, we can take them away from being incidents that that cause us to destruct, to incidents that can make us better people.</p> <p>Being honest and open were the greatest things that I got from SAMSN. That acceptance that I am okay as I am, is a powerful message. But I could only arrive at it by being honest and open. I could only arrive at that position by telling somebody else about what happened to me. I can only arrive at that position by telling that person and accepting that yes, that was the reality. But it’s not my reality now. My reality is I want to be a better person, and I can recover.</p>
Closing Credits	
<p>Rob Carlton</p>	<p>SAMSN is the only specialist charity in Australia dedicated to helping all male survivors of child sexual abuse and their families.</p> <p>Each year, SAMSN provides free services to hundreds of male survivors and their supporters.</p> <p>SAMSN believes that male survivors of child sexual abuse can recover and thrive.</p> <p>Help him believe.</p> <p>Donate today. Visit: samsn.org.au (that’s s-a-m-s-n).org.au</p> <p>Remember to rate and share this online, because it helps others - especially survivors - to find it.</p>
<p>Felicity Blake</p>	<p>STRONGER was created for Survivors and Mates Support Network entirely remotely during the pandemic of 2020 and 21. It was produced and directed by me, Felicity Blake of The Dove Media, with Julie Blyth of SAMSN. Our Executive Producer is Craig Hughes-Cashmore. Interview help from Les Spencer and Shane Greentree. Audio editing by Dion Brooks. Transcript assistance from Dr Anna Kamaralli and Melanie</p>

	<p>Teychenne-King. A big “thank you” to our co-host and SAMSN Ambassador, Rob Carlton.</p> <p>Very special thanks to all 32 of our participants; your insights make others STRONGER.</p>
ENDS	