

## **Media Release:**

### **Vandals Destroy Artwork for the World's First Child Abuse Monument**

The Child Abuse Survivor Monument was created to give a voice of acknowledgement, compassion and hope to one of society's most vulnerable groups: victims and survivors of child abuse. Today, The Monument is as vulnerable as the survivors it was designed to protect: it lies derelict and vandalized in Toronto storage space. The damage was discovered in a heart-rending moment during a national television interview about the Monument. Despite this latest of many setbacks, The Monument's creator and supporters are hopeful that it will survive and be placed in a public location.

The Monument's journey began in 1990, as Dr. Michael Irving, an artist, psychotherapist, and child abuse survivor, stood at the Vietnam Memorial. There he became determined to create a monument of equal impact, but this time for survivors and victims of child abuse. "In that epiphany," Dr. Irving explains, "the artist and psychotherapist in me was convinced that a public monument could transform the despair and disillusionment that survivors feel into hope, and move society to acknowledge the issue of child abuse"

For 20 years, Dr. Irving and his family and hundred of participants and volunteers have toiled to create the world's first monument to child abuse. The monument consists of two angelic figures, each 10 feet high by 15 feet wide, which are draped with the artwork of over 300 survivors of child abuse, their supporters, and children. These survivors worked with Dr. Irving as he sculpted exact renditions of their hands, around which they carved their own stories of hope and survival. One figure, which has been cast in bronze and weighs over two tons, sits in Dr. Irving's driveway on Rhodes Avenue. The other, which is still in the form of wax moulds, was being stored while it awaited bronze casting.

During a recent interview Dr. Irving traveled with a Global National film crew to see the molds and discovered that "the worst possible scenario has happened". Vandals have battered the child abuse monument-in-progress. One silicone mold was torn in two; its fragile wax artwork destroyed. On the rubber that incases some of the child abuse survivors' artwork, adult boot-prints identify where sculpted hands and carved messages of hope lay broken beneath. It is not known if the vandalism was malicious or senseless. It is certain that one thoughtless act has wasted thousands of hours of detailed artwork.

Dr. Irving assures that he will not let the world's first monument to child abuse be cast aside like so many survivors and victims of child abuse. He estimates that it will cost up to \$100,000 to rebuild the broken art and molds, and he is seeking funds and the donation of a secure studio space. These donations are necessary to breathe life back into what has been described as a modern-day masterpiece. The Province of Ontario has also been asked to accept the finished Child Abuse Monument as a donation in order to heal and validate survivors and promote child abuse prevention. Dr. Irving asks the public to help by signing a petition to the Premier at [www.childabusemonument.com](http://www.childabusemonument.com).

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## **About the Monument**

### **Introduction**

When one hears about “child abuse”, it is usually in the context of a negative and sad experience. Despite its prevalence, the general public has little information about child abuse and even less about the experience of its many survivors. The reality is that the incidence of child abuse in Ontario and across Canada is staggering and unfortunately, the stories we hear in the media are too often true. Although it is an uncomfortable and frequently avoided subject, it is important that the reality of child abuse be acknowledged and addressed. The “Reaching Out Child Abuse Monument” can bring significant attention to the issue of child abuse, in a positive, meaningful context of hope and healing.

The Monument is a bronze statue built upon the courage and spirit of victims of child abuse and their supporters, and empowers them to speak out. It addresses child abuse in a non-confrontational way by focusing on the feelings of those affected, offering hope and facilitating the healing process.

Details:

Dr. Michael Irving is an artist and a psychotherapist who has dedicated his life to working with victims of child abuse and those who support victims of child abuse, leading him to create a visual masterpiece that has become known as the “Reaching Out” Child Abuse Monument. Anyone who views The Monument is immediately struck by the messages conveyed by each of the individual “reaching out” sculpted quilt squares that make up the sculpture. When the Honourable Ken Dryden, Member of Parliament for York Centre, was President of the Toronto Maple Leafs, he aptly described the Monument as follows: “Each square is an intensely personal story, creating a monument by non-artists who discover in their hands a powerful voice which makes us understand”. Mr. Dryden remains a key supporter of the Monument project and serves as Honorary Chair of the Friends of the Monument.

The Monument incorporates the artistic contribution of survivors of abuse and/or their families and supporters. The underlying premise of a Monument of individual quilts is that people who have confronted and survived abuse, who have triumphed over adversity, possess a special wisdom that can help others face the reality of child abuse, through hopeful, healing messages.

Measuring over 11 feet tall and 32 feet wide, the bronze sculpture is a representation of two standing figures with arms spread out and upward in an encompassing embrace, as shown on the cover page of this proposal. Quilted shawls drape the outstretched arms and shoulders of the figures. Each ten-inch quilt square features a cast hand of a survivor or a supporter, along with their artwork and words. Seventy-six of the quilt squares have an outline of a child’s hand and their personal message about child abuse. On each figure, a number quilt squares are left smooth as a place of remembrance for all survivors. Visitors to the site can use water to moisten a hand and rest it on one of the plain squares, creating a temporary hand print and allowing them to be part of the Monument while undertaking a few moments of contemplation.

### **Project History**

At the Vietnam Memorial Wall in 1990, Dr. Irving experienced an epiphany about how that work of art helped America to heal from wounds that shared traits common to child abuse, including post-traumatic stress disorder, vicarious trauma, distancing and denial. As a result, Dr. Irving, himself a survivor, conceived of a memorial Monument to survivors of child abuse.

Bessel A, van der Kolk, one of the leading Trauma Researchers says“ ... talking about the trauma is rarely if ever enough: trauma survivors need to take some action that symbolizes triumph over

helplessness and despair. The Holocaust Memorial (Yad Vashem) in Jerusalem, and the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C., are good examples of symbols that enable survivors to mourn the dead and establish the historical and cultural meaning of traumatic events. Most of all, they serve to remind survivors of the ongoing potential for communality and sharing. This also applies to survivors of other types of traumas...”

### **Milestones:**

From 1990 to 1995, Dr. Irving shared his ideas with survivors, clinicians, and artists and listened to their feelings and feedback. In 1995 a formal business plan for “The Survivor Monument Project” was developed. Following numerous strategy and planning meetings, the first gathering of survivors met in April, 1996 to launch the project. By that fall, the project name had evolved to “The Child Abuse Survivor Monument Project” and out of an original 12 proposals a "Reaching Out" design was finalized.

- The vision was to create a visually integrated monumental bronze sculpture produced in collaboration with small groups of survivor and/or artists. The collaborative component of the Monument, the sculpting of the monument quilt, allowed the creation of an independent collection of artworks. The result is a project that is innovative in its process, product, goals and image design.
- During 1996, Dr. Irving supervised a group of survivors and artists in an extensive art research project during which time the elements of the Monument Project such as materials, process, and design were explored. It was determined that a ten inch sculpted quilt square would allow the best visual effect and use of space for a survivor’s hand, art and message.  
The initial pilot workshop for sculpting the quilt squares began in January 1997. During that year, collaborative quilt squares for the Monument were created on a regular basis. Six to eight survivor/artists worked for eight weeks, each making one sculpted quilt square and three accompanying poems. It is noteworthy that most of the themes and images were about positive messages, altruism, empowerment and hope for a positive present and future.
- The quilt squares by survivors and their supporters, both trained and untrained, are remarkable works of art and are in themselves powerful societal and personal statements. Each survivor's life experience provided ample inspiration and focus to artistically create their squares, and these squares in turn portray the overall message of the Monument.
- The creation of the Monument has been a community effort. The design and details of the final monument, the art exhibition and the public awareness campaign were created and refined through small and large group discussions. The project represents the concerted effort of survivors as well as individuals and organizations who lent their support to the outcome.
- In 1997, a Board of Directors formally incorporated a non-profit organization, community supporters formed a “Circle of Friends” and a number of working committees were created. The Monument Project was featured in media stories, held a benefit concert, published newsletters, received long-term commitments for in-kind donations and launched the internet web site.
- Ongoing community outreach and liaison ensured subsequent meetings and committee memberships included representatives from many diverse social agencies, organizations and groups, culminating in the more recent formation of “The Friends of the Monument”. All members have a positive interest in children or are working with children, youth or adults who have experienced child abuse.
- As part of the Monument Project, a “HandPrint” campaign was developed to introduce a massive collective visualization of healing and prevention. Across Canada, individuals were invited trace their hand on a sheet of paper and provide a message. Thousands of these HandPrint drawings have been collected and it is intended that they will be sealed in the large space inside the bronze Monument, thereby allowing many people to have a

voice and be part of this important message of hope and healing. The “HandPrint” campaign is ongoing today.

- Thanks to the generous contributions from many corporations and individuals, the bronze casting of the first of the two figures that form the Monument was completed in mid-2007 and made available for viewing by the general public. Bronze foundry work on the second of the two monument figures will begin once a site is finalized and the fundraising efforts resumes.

We are requesting the Province to accept the donation of the "Reaching Out" Child Abuse Monument and for it to be placed in a parkette setting at the Northwest corner of College St. and University Ave. on Queen's Park Circle.

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