



Immediate Release

Child Protection Charity Calls for Recognition of Scale of Female Sexual Offending

15th December 2009: Today, national child protection charity the Lucy Faithfull Foundation has responded to the custodial sentences imposed upon Vanessa George and Angela Allen by calling for greater acknowledgment of the presence of female sex offenders in today's society.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has worked with women sex offenders for over 10 years and has expressed concern that a lack of awareness among public and professional communities allows abuse to go undetected.

Head of Research and Development at the Foundation, Mr Donald Findlater, said:

“Hopefully today’s sentencing will help the families of those involved take another step toward recovery. They are going through an ordeal which no family should ever have to experience. The crimes that have taken place are horrific and effective support systems are vital for these families now and into the future.

“This sentence should encourage both members of the public and professionals in the field to acknowledge the existence of female sexual abusers. We also hope that Vanessa George will receive the assessment and treatment she needs to reduce the risk she poses to the public when she is eventually released from prison.

“For too long the issue of female sexual offending has gone largely unrecognised in both public and professional arenas, yet a conservative estimate would say that women are responsible for ten per cent of all child sexual abuse. Of course, we convict very few. Society’s reluctance to accept that women can engage in the sexual abuse of children makes it particularly difficult for victims to come forward as they often fear they won’t be believed or that the abuse will be minimised as less harmful than abuse committed by a man. This case should highlight to people just how important it is to accept that female sexual offending takes place, help us to recognise it when it does take place and create confidence in victims to come forward.

“We welcome the commitment by the Ministry of Justice announced yesterday to develop a female sex offender management strategy. It is vitally important that offender managers, both in prison and the community, have good training and support to effectively discharge their responsibilities, just as it is vitally important that women sexual offenders have access to assessment and treatment services as are provided to males. Of course, programmes for females differ significantly from those for males, but practice over recent years has demonstrated what credible intervention programmes should look like. We need to ensure that such a programme is available for Vanessa George so that risk is reduced before her release as well as effectively managed afterwards.”

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has worked with some 120 females convicted of sexual offences since 2005, including 40 in the last 12 months.

“The learning from this work needs to inform the response to Vanessa George and others like her if we are to best protect future children. In addition, there remains an urgent need for child protection and criminal justice professionals to be specifically trained in the area of sexual offending by females. This need was highlighted in a 2005 report published by the NSPCC* and is still outstanding.

“Specialised training will enable professionals to make more informed risk assessments and to work more effectively with these women to reduce the risk they represent and to integrate them more effectively back into the community after sentence. We are aware from our work in this area that many professionals report a lack of confidence and knowledge when faced with the prospect of female abuse.”

Over the last six years the Stop it Now! Helpline managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation has received 147 calls from 44 separate women concerned about their own sexual thoughts about or behaviour towards children, and 38 calls from people concerned about the behaviour of a woman they know.

“There is always something that ordinary members of the public, whatever their concerns, can do and all these callers received advice and help to ensure that children were safe,” he said. “Many of the convicted female offenders we have worked with express a feeling of isolation. The Stop it Now! helpline provides women concerned about their sexual thoughts with a way of accessing help to address these worrying thoughts before a child is harmed.

“If you are concerned about your thoughts or behaviour, or the behaviour of someone you know, you can call our helpline on 0808 1000 900 – there is help available.”

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

1. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Foundation is a child protection charity operating UK-wide and specialising in safeguarding children from sexual abuse. The Foundation’s policy is to collaborate with individuals and agencies internationally to develop a more child sensitive and offender aware culture in our

societies. The Foundation contributes to legislation and to policy and procedure reviews concerned with safeguarding children in faith communities, in schools, in leisure facilities, on the Internet and living away from home. www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk

2. Stop it Now! aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is an alliance of leading children's charities, working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline has received over 14,000 calls from abusers, potential abusers and concerned friends and family members. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Children, Schools and Families. The Stop it Now! campaign in Wales and Scotland are supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government. www.stopitnow.org.uk.

** Females who sexually offend against children: responses of the child protection and criminal justice systems by Lisa Bunting, November 2005.*

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