

TRULINCS 23038076 - LUMMUS, ALLAN CRAIG - Unit: BAS-T-A

FROM: 23038076
TO: Clf Prison Ministry, The
SUBJECT: mp79 UUWorld articles on Sexual Safety Policies
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mp79 UUWorld article on S Offenders Among Us

As an SO, I was intrigued by last issue of The Unitarian Magazine UUWorld (Winter 2014) which had a good set of articles on s abuse and Congregations. Kim French argued that all congregations have both abuse victims and abusers in their communities right now and that that everyone in the congregation knows someone who is one or the other [or both]. Since this is the case we need to think about how to handle the situation. One response is popular in the culture is excluding all registered SO from the community. But she correctly counters that argument by saying most SO can learn to live without reoffending. Therefore the registered SO is actually less of risk after serving time and getting treatment. [Not in the article, SOs have the lowest level of reoffending of any criminal category (about 5%)]. The real risk are from those who are not presently registered. So laws that focus on a group which has the lowest of all criminals to reoffend give the false impression that the community is lowering its risk when in fact most offenders are unidentified.

Who offends? The majority of the offenses are down by adult males, but interestingly the majority of abusers are actually other older children and teen girls (47%), followed by adult males (31%), older male children or teens (17%), with the rest by adult woman. Most young people who abuse other children do not continue to reoffend as adults. So by focusing on the already identified S Offender we lose sight of the danger coming from other youth and men who are not identified. The article says that roughly 1-5% of males admit of sexual attraction to children. So there are men in our congregations who have not acted on there s tendencies.

After laying out the reality of congregations real risks, she argues that instead of excluding SOs and thinking we have kept our communities safe, we should instead create policies that lower the risk. Policies that assume the abuser is someone already here and active in the congregation. Therefore the policies should discuss ways of keeping everyone safe. For example make sure all youth and adults who work with children should do so in teams of teachers. The most powerful prevention is another set of eyes. French gave examples of websites of model policies for people to visit.

Ms French describes the typical multiple child abuser which represents only 5% of all abusers [Not in the article: which is a subset from an even larger population of s offenders which include tens of thousands of internet porn possession and not any hands on history]. But the article does not mention is that since the federal government goes after internet related crime, the vast majority of the SOs that come through the federal prison system over the past decade have no history of child abuse. So communities should not assume that a registered SO has a history of child abuse.

As an SO, returning to a religious community will be an important part of my reintegration into the community and emotional healing. I am hopeful that the UU congregations will follow these model policies and hold everyone to a responsible set of policies which make everyone safer and not single out SO for special exclusion.

allan lummus #2338076 | pobox 1010 bastrop tx 96402 | mindful prisoner | betweenthebars.org/blogs/570