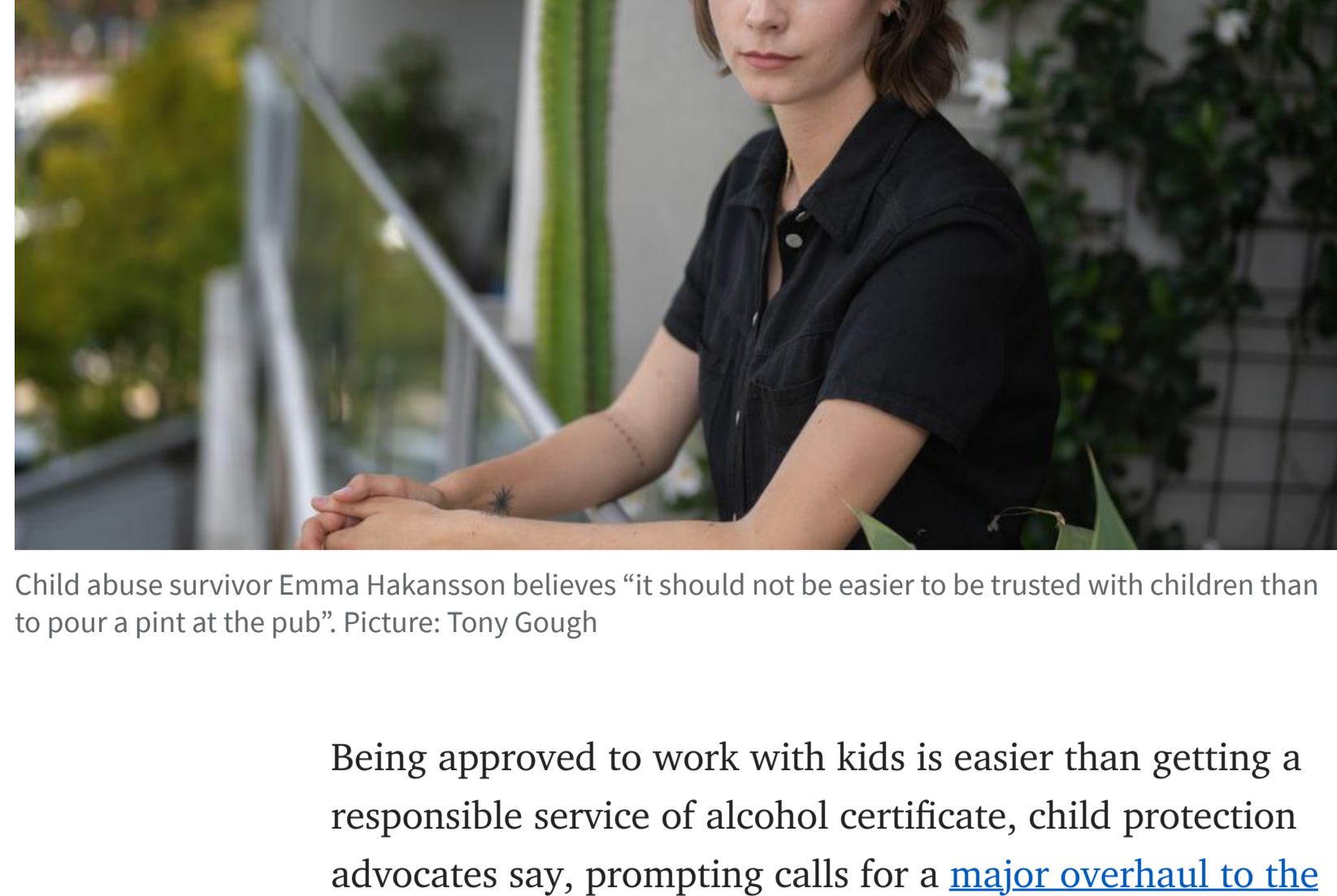


Being approved to work with kids easier than becoming a bartender

Child protection advocates have called for major changes to the way working with children checks are issued in Victoria in an effort to address child sexual abuse.

Mitch Clarke [Follow](#)

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Child abuse survivor Emma Hakansson believes "it should not be easier to be trusted with children than to pour a pint at the pub." Picture: Tony Gough

Being approved to work with kids is easier than getting a responsible service of alcohol certificate, child protection advocates say, prompting calls for a [major overhaul to the way working with children checks are issued](#).

The call is the key recommendation from a landmark new report by the Australian Childhood Foundation which identified urgent action was needed to address child sexual abuse.

The 'Hear Us Now, Act Now' report, which heard the stories of 339 child sexual abuse victims and survivors, has called on the Allan government to overhaul the way Working with Children Checks are handed out.

It wants mandatory online training about sexual abuse to become an added requirement of the application process.

In Victoria, the Working with Children Check is a screening process used to assess or reassess people who work with or care for children. It looks at a person's criminal history and any professional conduct findings but doesn't require an applicant to undergo any formal training.

The report said adding mandatory training is a "small step to take with the potential to add yet another, far reaching mechanism into the strategies to improve efforts to prevent child sexual abuse and better respond to the needs of children who experience it".

Co-author and child sexual abuse victim-survivor Emma Hakansson said training is compulsory to hold a Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) certificate but not for adults seeking to obtain a Working with Children Check.



Emma Hakansson, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, co-wrote a report with the Australian Childhood Foundation calling for changes to the process of obtaining a working with children check. Picture: Tony Gough

"It should not be easier to be trusted with children than to pour a pint at the pub," she said.

"The Working with Children Check cannot prevent those with insidious intentions from working with children. But it can arm every other adult with tools to prevent that abuse.

"I was told to trust, obey and respect the adult who sexually abused me, and who had a Working With Children Check. If the other adults around me had known what signs of sexual abuse looked like, how to respond to that and support my autonomy, I could have been saved from the heights of my violent abuse."

A man, who in August last year was charged with over 1500 sexual abuse offences over a 15-year period, held a Working with Children check. In September last year, a former primary school teacher on the Mornington Peninsula [who faced complaints of inappropriately touching young male students](#) won a VCAT bid to work with children again. And in 2018 [a man who chased and killed his ex-girlfriend and shot her lover](#) was also granted a working with children permit.

The Australian Childhood Foundation report heard from victim survivors that as children, they needed adults to take action, to validate their experiences and to reach out and ask them what was wrong.

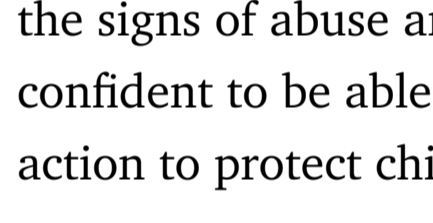
It builds on research from the Foundation over the past 20 years which has found one in three people do not believe children who report child abuse, one in five people aren't confident about knowing what to do if they suspect a child is being abused or neglected, and one in six would be reluctant to make a report.

Australian Childhood Foundation chief executive Joe Tucci, a registered psychologist, said it is crucial the community can recognise the danger that children are exposed to in their own families, in their community and online.

"We have been calling for community education about child abuse for over twenty years," he said.

"This research makes it so abundantly clear that children cannot afford for us to wait any longer.

"Victims and survivors have been advocating for changes in community understanding and beliefs so that adults are better equipped to know how to identify the signs of abuse and feel confident to be able to take action to protect children."



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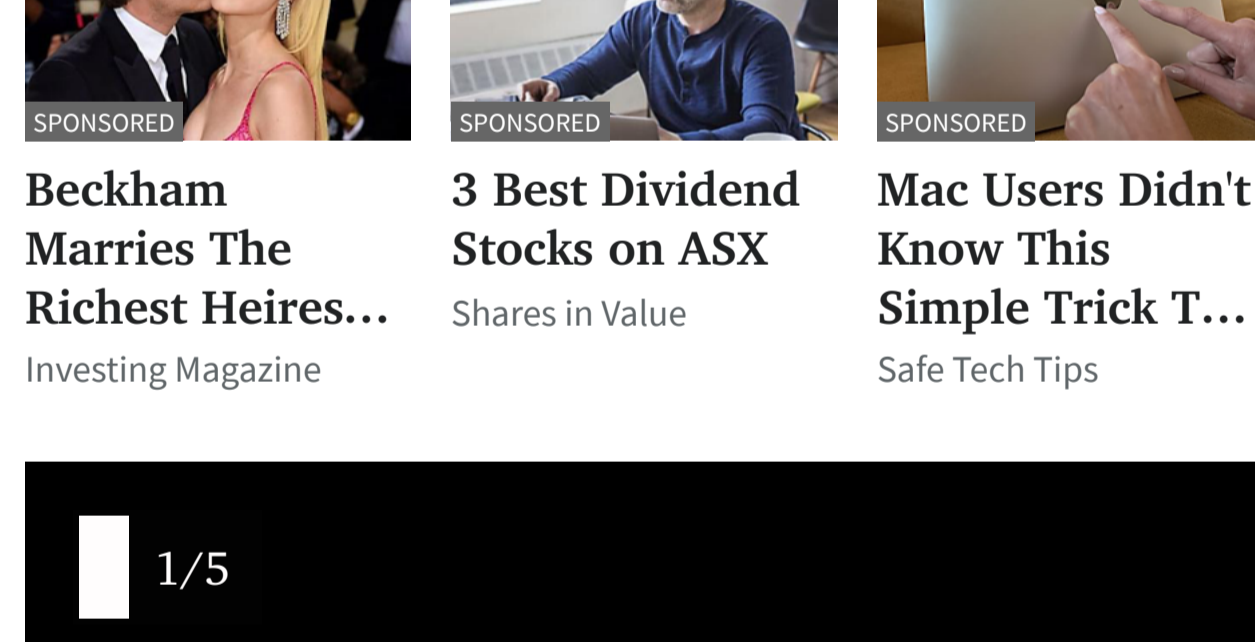
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