

Ex-cop defends probe by police

By Matt Doran

A FORMER police officer connected to the original investigation of the Mornington child sex abuse scandal has defended the way police handled the inquiry.

The officer, who asked not to be identified, told the *Leader* that details of the case had become distorted over time and that some of the allegations aired in the media were unfounded.

"The case was handled appropriately; there is no question about that. There were a number of official reviews about the way the case was conducted and none of those found there had been anything improper," he said.

The former policeman said there was a clear-cut reason no charges had been laid. "The issue police faced was the availability of admissible evidence.

"There was a very strong indication that the abuse had taken place, a view that was later upheld in the Supreme Court, but there was not enough evidence to indicate who was responsible."

A Department of Human Services inquiry in the early 1990s found that childcare centre owners Norman and



Psychologist Evelyn Field

Alison Shulver had "permitted the abuse to occur or were involved in that abuse".

Mr Shulver unsuccessfully appealed to the Supreme Court. No police charges were laid against the Shulvers, who have always protested their innocence.

Psychologist Evelyn Field, who prepared a report for the Crimes Compensation Tribunal in 1994 on the impact of alleged abuse on the children and their parents, said this week she believed the children's statements had been "absolutely truthful".

"Their parents described behavioural changes in their children, such as nightmares and sexual activity, which is symptomatic of this

type of abuse. And kids of that age don't just change their behaviour that suddenly," she said.

Ms Field said one child had told her: "If I got undressed in the van a man would give me lollies."

But Ms Field said there was a point when victims of sexual assault had to move on with their lives.

"It is so important in these cases that the parents and children receive ongoing psychological treatment, otherwise the damage lies dormant."

The former policeman said he was concerned that unfounded allegations recently made to the Ombudsman had misled the public.

"There is no truth to claims that a house owned or leased by police was connected to the investigation," he said. But he confirmed that police had investigated the owners of a Mornington house where children alleged they had been abused.

He said there was a room in the house containing soft toys and a spa bath, which matched the children's descriptions, but the owners claimed the room belonged to their granddaughter. "The owners were interviewed and subjected to a background check. This showed them to be normal, everyday citizens, who were completely shocked by the allegations," he said.

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