

Victims say childhoods ruined by local man's sexual abuse

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The Sault Ste. Marie Courthouse is pictured in this file photo. Michael Purvis/SooToday

A 71-year-old local man was sentenced Tuesday to house arrest for dated sexual offences involving young girls.

Wayne Grexton pleaded guilty at an earlier court appearance to three counts of indecent assault that occurred in the late 1970s.

Ontario Court Justice Melanie Dunn imposed a conditional sentence of two years less a day, which he will serve in the community, followed by three years of probation.

Grexton was charged with the offences, which involved fondling and digital penetration, in July 2016.

A publication ban prohibits reporting any information that could identify the three victims.

Prosecutor Karen Pritchard was seeking a sentence of two years less a day behind bars, while defence counsel Jennifer Tremblay-Hall argued that a conditional sentence with strict conditions was appropriate.

When she delivered her sentencing decision, Dunn outlined the need for deterrence and denunciation in such cases.

"Sexual abuse of children is abhorrent" and must be condemned in the strongest terms, the judge said. Children are the most vulnerable members of society and must be protected from predators.

Dunn spoke about the "thoughtful and moving" victim impact statements the complainants had read to the court.

"Sadly, there is nothing I can do to relieve the harm."

In the statements, the women talked about life-long struggles to cope, their lack of confidence or self worth, how entire childhoods were ruined and their feelings of shame and anger.

Referring to a pre-sentence report, Dunn noted Grexton has been married for 25 years, owns a hobby farm, and although he only had a Grade 8 education worked as a truck driver. Grexton was described as a devout Jehovah's Witness with no prior criminal record.

He was described by others as hardworking, responsible, generous and always willing to lend a helping hand.

The report indicated he had struggled with alcohol, but quit drinking when he met his wife and has been sober since then.

The writer of the pre-sentence report, who called the offender a suitable candidate for community supervision, said Grexton feels shame and remorse and is willing to accept the consequences of his actions, the judge said.

Dunn cited the age of the victims, the intrusive actions and the "profound and devastating impact" on them as aggravating factors.

She pointed to Grexton's genuine expression of remorse and the apology the victims had waited for 40 years to hear as mitigating factors.

As well, he has self-rehabilitated from alcohol, lead a life of sobriety for decades, has committed no further criminal acts since the late 1970s, and has the support of his family, she said.

The judge concluded that a conditional sentence would satisfy the need for denunciation and deterrence, and Grexton doesn't pose a danger or risk if he is in the community.

During the first 18 months of his sentence, Grexton must remain in his residence or on his property.

He can only leave for medical emergencies or appointments, for religious services and counselling or with the prior written approval of his sentence supervisor.

Grextton also is permitted to be away from home on Mondays, between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., to obtain the necessities of life.

As well, he can have no alcohol, must attend counselling and rehabilitation programs, can have no contact with the victims and must not go within 50 metres of their residences or places of employment.

Dunn also ordered that he not be in the company of any person under the age of 16 unless another adult is present.

Once he completes the sentence, Grextton will be on probation for three years, the maximum permitted under the Criminal Code of Canada, with conditions to remain away from the complainants.

Grextton must register as a sex offender for life, and provide a DNA sample for the national registry.

He also is prohibited for five years from attending public parks or swimming areas where persons under 16 are present or are reasonably expected to be, as well as daycare centres, school yards, playgrounds or community centres.

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