

Dungeon daughter, children say thanks

By staff writers and wires
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Article from: <http://www.news.com.au/> 

- Dungeon victims send messages to the world
- Thank public, pray for ill sister
- **Josef Fritzl** (<http://www.news.com.au/feature/0,,5017077,00.html>) : full coverage of the horrific case

THE family at the centre of the Austrian dungeon case has thanked people for their support in their first public messages since they were freed from their shocking ordeal.

In a handwritten message displayed on a notice board in the square of their home town of Amstetten, Elisabeth Fritzl and her six surviving children thanked the many well-wishers for their messages of support since they were released from a cramped, windowless dungeon at the end of April.

The family is currently being shielded from the media glare and receiving psychiatric counselling in a clinic in Amstetten, 100km west of Vienna.

In a drawing of an open pair of hands, Elisabeth Fritzl, now 42, writes: "I wish for the recovery of my daughter Kerstin, the love of my children, the protection of my family and for people with heart and compassion."

Elisabeth's father, 73-year-old Josef Fritzl, has confessed to imprisoning her since she was 18, repeatedly raping her and forcing her to bear seven children from that abuse.

One of the children died soon after birth, three were taken upstairs to live "normal" lives as Mr Fritzl's "grandchildren" and the other three remained incarcerated with their mother in the dungeon below the family home.

In the centre of the board, a message reads: "We, the whole family, want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your sympathies with our fate. Your compassion helps us a lot to cope with this difficult time and shows us, that there are also good and honest people.

"We hope the time will come for us to find back into normal life again!"

Other individual messages were also written inside two outlined hands.

One read: "I wish that I can live in peace with my children, with lots of power and the help of God" and "I miss my dear friends and my freedom". The words have been attributed to Elisabeth's mother Rosemarie, who police say knew nothing of the dungeon or her husband's use of it.

It was the hospitalisation of the eldest child, 19-year-old Kerstin, on April 19 that brought the shocking case to light.

Kerstin has since been placed in an artificially induced coma and is in intensive care on a life-support machine. Initially, her condition was life-threatening, but doctors have since said she has stabilised.

The family drew Kerstin's name inside a love heart with a smiling sun looking down.

In his message, 18-year-old Stefan wrote: "I miss my sister. Happy about freedom and my family. I like the sun, the fresh air and the nature".

The third child held all his life underground, five-year-old Felix, wrote of wishing to drive in a car, ride a snow-sledge, play with other children and run in fields, the *Kurier* newspaper said.

A message from Alexander, one of those taken upstairs, read: "I desire freedom, strength and power and the sun. I miss the fire brigade, the school and sister Kerstin".

Monika, another child who lived upstairs, also wrote of missing school and her sister Kerstin. She added that she hoped "everything will soon be over".

The *Kurier* quoted the head of the hospital, Berthold Kepplinger, as saying that the family must "very carefully and very slowly be led back into reality".

- with Reuters

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