

St Joseph's Orphanage Neerkol

Diocese of Rockhampton, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy

This week's hearing in Rockhampton into an orphanage has been a tragic and sorry story of abuse suffered by some of the youngest children in some of the worst circumstances you can imagine.

It is clear that the former residents who have given evidence this week were the victims of very harsh conditions and physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

What we know is that the Church was initially very slow to react to complaints when they were first made. In time, the church authorities took a different approach and despite being able to legally knock out the claims, they went ahead and settled with more than 80, ultimately paying out more than \$1.1million to former residents.

The sisters sold the Neerkol property in order to pay their share of the legal settlement and continued support of the survivors. They have always acknowledged their ongoing ministry of care for Neerkol residents.

The Sisters of Mercy and the Diocese of Rockhampton have both acknowledged and apologised, most recently this week in a joint statement, for the hurt and damage suffered by the survivors and have been providing support to the former residents of Neerkol for many years.

One of the witnesses this week said while the compensation she had received from the sisters could never repair the damage done to her at Neerkol she felt nuns of today were trying to right what happened in the past.

"I do appreciate the help the sisters have provided to me. Anne Czekanski, the response coordinator for the Sisters of Mercy, has never turned her back on any ex residents if they have asked for help.

"I feel that she has gone above and beyond her call of duty and has shown a real care for the former residents of Neerkol.

"While they can't fix everything, they are trying as much as they can to make our lives easier."

This will be small consolation for many former residents but it does indicate a very real change in the way some people in the church are responding to abuse survivors.

The strength and resilience we have seen and heard this week from former residents is remarkable.

Blog



They are powerful advocates and have been instrumental in securing assistance, redress and justice for all who were abused at Neerkol, from the church authorities, and also from the state government.

Once again the hearing so far has demonstrated just why we need a national independent redress scheme funded by the institutions responsible for the abuse.

Francis Sullivan, CEO, TJHC

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