

Seven separate writs issued in massive abuse case

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Seven former students of the Christian Brothers College to sue for sexual and physical abuse

Arnold Thomas & Becker has issued seven separate legal proceedings in the Supreme Court of Victoria against Trustees of the Christian Brothers alleging the abuse of young boys throughout the 1970s and early 1980s at Christian Brothers College (now Emmanuel College).

Our clients, who were all children at the time the abuse started, were allegedly physically and sexually abused by Brothers at the school over a period of several years, well into their teens.

Arnold Thomas & Becker lawyer Nicole Elliott-Struth said, "At the hands of the people they were supposed to trust, these vulnerable young people were allegedly subjected to shocking physical and sexual abuse at a place of learning. Our clients, and many other young people, have suffered life-long traumas as a result of several failures by the Christian Brothers Institution to protect children."

In a writ lodged with the Supreme Court of Victoria, Arnold Thomas & Becker Lawyers outlines revelations that our five clients, along with other students, were abused by Brothers while attending Christian Brothers College from as early as the 1970s and into the 1980s. The abuse comprised of students being excessively hit with the strap until they bled, indecent assault, name-calling, closed-fist hitting and watching students while they showered.

The court papers also outline:

- How a victim was kissed on the lips by a Brother, following which he ran away but was too scared to tell his mother about the incident;
- Allegations that a Brother masturbated in full view of students in the classroom during a sexual education class by a female teacher;
- One victim was held back after class and shown pornographic content;
- Alleged touching and fondling of students' buttocks and genitals by Brothers;
- How one victim was punched so hard by a Brother that his eye was split open, and
- Certain Brothers would allegedly force students to get changed in front of them after showers

Prior to this period, leadership knew that children at Christian Brother Institutions were at risk of being abused due to historic complaints against Brothers starting as early as the 1920s.

"There was a failure to act on knowledge of widespread sexual abuse at institutions run by the Christian Brothers, and to put in place systems and policies within the school to enable the notification and prevention of sexual and physical abuse," said Ms Elliott-Struth.

"Our clients endured severe sexual, physical and psychological abuse throughout their formative years at Christian Brothers College that had a profound impact on them for the rest of their lives since then," she said.

Media Release



They have suffered from issues including shame, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, drug dependency, inability to form proper relationships, PTSD, depression, pain and suffering, among other problems.

“The ongoing sexual and physical abuse by some of the Brothers occurred under the guise of supervision and care towards the boys. They were an abuse of their power and authority. Because of this relationship, being one of trust and reliance, the boys were subjected to psychological and disciplinary disadvantage in defending themselves or reporting the abuse,” said Ms Elliott-Struth.

“We are suing for damages in separate legal actions, arguing that the Christian Brothers’ leadership failed to look after and protect the children in their care.”

Arnold Thomas & Becker represents over 700 abuse victims across Australia.

Ms Struth added, “We are alarmed at how many people are coming forward with historic abuse claims, but also shocked to hear of how many have entered the Government Redress Scheme and have accepted grossly unfair and low payments”.

“We continue to do all we can to educate survivors of what they are entitled to. It is inconceivable that the government is encouraging victims to pursue redress as currently Australia’s Redress Scheme offers a cap of \$150,000 to individual victims, whilst civil litigation with the support of a specialist abuse lawyer can provide millions in compensation to the individual”, she said.

“Anyone who accepts an incredibly low and unfair redress payment forever loses the one chance they have to receive fair and proper compensation – this is why we urge victims to speak to an experience abuse lawyer”, she said.

We’re currently pursuing claims for dozens of victims of abuse perpetrated at Surf Coast-based institutions, including the Department of Human Services, a number of schools, an orphanage and other facilities.