

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS RESOURCES GROUP
Contact Report
Confidential

Name: John Ferguson Wells

Address: REDACTED

Telephone: REDACTED

Date of Birth: REDACT 1944

Interview Date: 29 Feb 2012 and

Complaint

John Ferguson Wells claims he suffered physical, emotional, sexual and psychological abuse – including sexual penetration and witnessing other students being sexually abused whilst under the care of the Christian Brothers at Castledare and Clontarf Boys' Homes between approximately 1952 and 1958.

These violent experiences were destructive – their impact devastating his life thereafter, which was given to irresponsibility, infidelity, escapism, violence and erratic behaviours leading to him becoming an alcoholic, divorcing his wife and leading a vagrant life.

John understands that any process that the Catholic Church establishes cannot compel witnesses, subpoena documents, insist on a cross examination of witnesses or impose the same penalties as a criminal or civil court. He recognises that whilst he may have a right to take a civil action regarding his complaint, he has chosen not to do so at this stage.

Background

John was born to parents Arthur and Myra Wells in Kalgoorlie as an identical twin of brother Arthur, and lived a troubled childhood under the care of his mother after his parents separated. He recalls his father as a

fearsome, violent man, who worked as a butcher/slaughterman in Broome and Wyndham and was often away.

John recalls being made a ward of state at about six years of age because of family financial problems, after which he and his brother spent some eight years in institutional care - firstly at St Mary's Catholic School, Coolgardie; then Castledare and Clontarf Boys' Homes; then Hillstone Detention Centre. All of this institutional care was an experience of ongoing abuse, so severe and damaging that he never recovered from its impacts.

Abuse

The attached account of John's experience at Castledare and Clontarf, prepared as part of his successful Redress application, outlines the abuse he suffered there. Now in his late 60's, John finds it emotionally distressing to recall the abuse, but seeks to bring its impacts to resolution as part of the Towards Healing program.

These experiences at the hands of the Christian Brothers included his violent memories of Brothers Doyle, Murphy, Mullins and Smith – preceded by nightmares about Sister Agnes at St Mary's, Coolgardie, who was a stern, vicious nun who resorted to physical violence without reason.

In summary, the abuse by the Brothers was primarily physical, emotional, sexual and psychological – including incidents of sexual penetration that led to John's confused sense of sexuality later in life, which he believes caused his marriage to fail and becoming an alcoholic at an early age.

He recollects the brutal behaviours and masochistic actions of the Christian Brothers, especially an incident involving Br Doyle, who took a dove from an English orphan named **REDACT** who had saved it from the wild, and brutally broke its neck in front of all the students – who were stupefied and terrified by the event.

John recalls similar incidents of violence and being forever cold, hungry and afraid. He remembers being knocked out with a full punch from Br Mullins (Pegleg) for innocently swinging on a hand-rail. On one occasion he fled Castledare to find protection from his parents in East Perth, only to be bashed by his father and sent back to Castledare, where he was thrashed by a Brother for having run away.

The incessant effects of these actions meant that John always lived in fear and anxiety – suppressing his feelings such that they were denied any expression or development. He says he never experienced positive recognition and was made to feel inferior and despised by the Brothers. His emotions, academic progress and mental development were ignored, and their resulting volatility and violence led him into a reckless, troubled life – fearful; no trust in others, especially those in authority; low self-esteem; inferiority; lack of friendships; low confidence; loss of spontaneity and humour; becoming an alcoholic; loss of his marriage; confused sexuality.

John says he never saw the principles of Christianity exemplified by the Brothers. Instead, he believes he witnessed the opposite – brutality and abuse, which set a terrible example for his own life thereafter.

John was married in his early 20's for eighteen years and he describes this relationship as the only meaningful one in his life, despite the marriage failing because of his difficulty expressing emotions and sexual affection. He has a terrible memory of bashing his wife and son before passing out from being 'rotten drunk'. He spent most of his working life on the run – taking jobs in the far north, being inaccessible to his wife, son and daughter.

His son and daughter both had trouble with John as an irresponsible father, and are both recovering alcoholics themselves – attending Alcoholics Anonymous and Al Anon. He now has a very positive relationship with both his children, and with his five grandchildren.

John has now recovered his health and commitment to a responsible life, having given up drinking alcohol for some twenty five years. He has worked most of his life as a roofing contractor in the building industry.

Needs

Because of the abuse he suffered as a student in the care of the Christian Brothers, John has never been able to develop any long term friendships or strong, trusting relationships. He has always had strained relationships with women; was never taught living skills or sound decision-making; and wasn't taught to manage finances.

