

MERCY ADMINISTRATION CENTRE

ROCKHAMPTON CONGREGATION
OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE
SISTERS OF MERCY OF AUSTRALIA



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Memo

TO: Bishop Brian Heenan
All the priests of the Rockhampton Diocese
All parishioners in the Rockhampton Diocese

FROM: Di-Anne Rowan - Congregational Leader

DATE: 26 March 1997

SUBJECT: Neerkol Orphanage

Our Congregation was recently approached by, John Penlington, a producer from "60 MINUTES", to be interviewed in a segment addressing institutional care by the Sisters of Mercy. In particular, the program was to refer to recent allegations of physical abuse at St Joseph's Home for Children, Neerkol. Knowing that editing can distort the original balance of information contained in an interview, we would like you to know the main points made by our spokesperson, Sr Berneice Loch. These are:

1. The Sisters of Mercy deeply regret any harm that has come to any child in our care.
2. When any person suffers harm in our care, this is in complete contradiction to the values we stand for.
3. We want to hear from any person who has a complaint to make and we are doing our best to respond honestly and sincerely to anyone who does approach us.
4. We do now have procedures in place. They are in accordance with the document, "Towards Healing", recently released by the Catholic Bishops and Congregational Leaders of Australia.
5. While we regret that we have not been able to act more speedily, it has taken us until early this year to seek expert advice on all aspects of abuse and to identify and train persons who can act as our advisers or as resource persons to assist us in dealing professionally and compassionately with those who approach us.

The Leadership Team of our Congregation, has appointed Sr Berneice Loch, Sr Anne Slattery, Ms Sue Prosser - a social worker and counsellor, Mr Darren Holzberger - an Assistant Director of Nursing at the Rockhampton Mater and Mr Geoff O'Driscoll - a solicitor as our Congregational Professional Standards Group. They will offer advice and address, on behalf of the Congregation, complaints of abuse and all other related issues, and will work to ensure that we can prevent incidents of abuse in the present and future.

Any persons wishing to bring a complaint to the notice of the Congregation is asked to phone 041 775 1535. A contact person will respond promptly to the call.

Di-Anne Rowan