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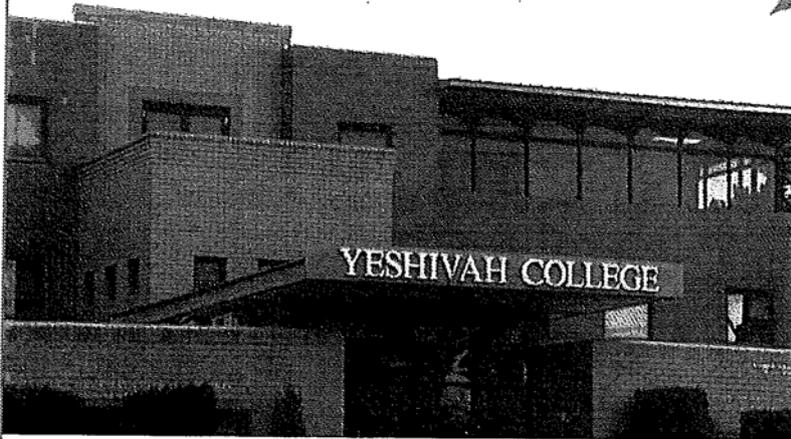
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School's sex abuse secret probed

June 22, 2011

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Yeshivah College. Photo: John Woudstra

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POLICE are trying to breach a wall of secrecy at a private boys school in St Kilda East over allegations of sex crimes by a former teacher who is now in jail in the United States.

David Kramer fled Australia in the early 1990s after accusations from parents that he had sexually abused boys at Yeshivah College, an Orthodox Jewish school. The school did not report the complaints to police.

Former students, who have spoken to *The Age* on condition of anonymity, said the allegations were covered up by the school. "Parents were threatened they would be thrown out of the school if they told police," one said.

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However, several alleged victims have come forward after Kramer, 50, was jailed for seven years in the US for molesting a 12-year-old boy while conducting a youth program at a synagogue in St Louis in 2007.

Kramer pleaded guilty to one count of sodomy of a child under 14 and one count of sexual misconduct. *The Age* understands Victoria Police hopes to extradite him when he is released, with the earliest parole date April next year.

Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, who alerted police in Missouri after the boy's family told him something inappropriate had occurred, said: "The Kramer

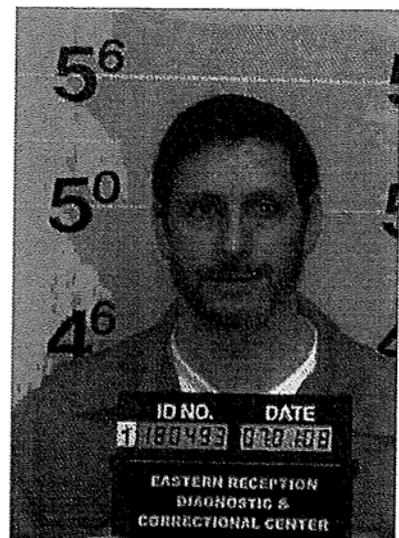
case provides a great opportunity to trace the failure of segments of the Jewish community to their source.

"If only the problem had been addressed in Australia ... the victim in St Louis and countless others would have been spared suffering," he wrote in 2008.

Speaking from the US last night, Rabbi Smason said individuals had a religious, ethical and moral obligation to ensure a person who committed a crime could not do so again.

"If there were other victims, any religious authorities who did not step forward enabled him [Kramer] to commit such crimes," he said. "To a degree, an individual who could prevent evil from happening is responsible when it occurs - that's a pretty heavy spiritual burden to carry."

Police have written to former Yeshivah College students urging them to contact Crime Stoppers if they were assaulted or witnessed an assault between 1989 and 1993. "Yeshivah College is aware of this request and are assisting Victoria Police in this investigation," the letter said.



David Kramer fled Australia in the early 1990s after teaching at Yeshivah College.

However, parents said many alleged victims were still reluctant to speak out because they were afraid of being ostracised. "If you are labelled an informer it gives the family a bad name and makes it hard for children to get married," a former Yeshivah College student told *The Age*. "The issue is not just about the sexual

abuse investigation, it is about the culture that enables it."

Police officers are expected to meet Jewish community leaders this week and ask them to give their imprimatur for victims to speak to the police.

The Rabbinical Council of Victoria last year issued a statement affirming that the prohibitions of mesirah (reporting crimes to the civil authorities) did not apply in cases of abuse. Mesirah, which means to inform on a Jew to secular authorities, is proscribed under Jewish law.

But the Rabbinical Council of Victoria's immediate past president, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Klugant, said the council had said "time and time again" there were no prohibitions on reporting domestic violence or sexual abuse to the police.

In an email to members of the Jewish community, Yeshivah College parent Menachem Vorchheimer said many in the community had been aware of the allegations for an extended period. "It is not time to judge the past errors, rather it is the time to set things right," Mr Vorchheimer wrote. "As a community we must have the courage and dignity to unite and ensure a full, thorough and proper investigation is conducted, and those who took advantage of our community's children are held to account. Ongoing silence is not an option."

The Age understands teachers at the school were divided at the time over whether to report the accusations. Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Groner was the head of Yeshivah College at the time.

Yeshivah College general manager Nechama Bendet said the school now "absolutely" encouraged victims or witnesses to come forward. She said the school fully complied with "working with children" checks and had protocols governing communications between students and teachers.

She said Yeshivah College had also implemented safety measures such as transparent classroom doors and taught resiliency programs where students were informed of their rights and told to report any inappropriate behaviour.

Asked why the claims had not been reported at the time, Ms Bendet said: "My understanding is that it was prior to mandatory reporting. I can't speak for why the victims didn't step forward at the time."

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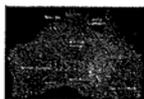
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