

Mercy Administration Centre

ROCKHAMPTON CONGREGATION
OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA



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15 September 1998

Ms E Jones

Secretary

Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions

PO Box 554

Brisbane Roma Street

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Dear Ms Jones

With reference to the Inquiry into the abuse of children in Queensland Institutions being conducted by Commissioner Leneen Forde, I am writing to advise you that the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy will be forwarding a submission to the Inquiry. It is not possible to have the submission to you by the date of 21 September 1998 stated in your newspaper advertisements but we would envisage the submission would be completed within the next month and then forwarded to Commissioner Forde. The submission will relate to St Joseph's Home, Neerkol which was operated as an Orphanage by the Sisters of Mercy between 1885 and 1978.

A staff member of our organisation, Mr Phillip Bauman was speaking by telephone to Mr Col Hobson from the Inquiry and was advised that some guidelines may be available in the near future to assist parties intending to make a submission. If these guidelines could be provided to us when completed, it would be appreciated.

In the past 2 years, St Joseph's Home, Neerkol has been the subject of an extensive police investigation, a report by the Children's Commissioner and widespread media coverage of allegations of abuse. We have endeavoured to respond to the current needs of the former Neerkol residents in as compassionate and practical a manner as our limited resources have allowed. Both the Bishop of the Rockhampton Diocese and myself, on behalf of our respective organisations, have apologised in writing to the former residents and have met with members of the Neerkol Action Support Group in discussions that have promoted reconciliation and healing. The Sisters have established a Professional Standards Office that funds the provision of counselling and other professional services to former residents in addition to assisting with the meeting of immediate needs that former residents may experience.

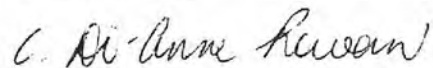
It is intended that our submission will detail the reconciliation process that we have commenced with the former Neerkol residents in addition to providing the historical origins of Neerkol, the difficulties the Sisters faced over a great many years with respect to isolation, poverty, overcrowding and a myriad of other "institutional care" problems. It is hoped to provide relevant statistical information and to briefly look at the impact of Government policies on the conduct of the Orphanage. The Report carried out by Children's Commissioner, Mr Norm Alford will also be helpful in placing Neerkol in its historical context.

We understand the importance of making the submission concise and easily readable. We also believe it should be forward looking and focussing on the "now" and the future so that those who are currently suffering can be assisted and policies can be developed that will ensure the damage that institutional care has done in the past can never be repeated.

If Commissioner Forde felt that she could benefit by meeting with me and allowing me in person to share with her the knowledge and experience we have acquired from the journey of reconciliation that we have undertaken with the former residents of Neerkol, then I would be only too pleased to make myself available at her convenience. I would be appreciative of you conveying these sentiments to Ms Forde for her consideration.

If I, or the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy, can assist the Inquiry in any way whatsoever, please do not hesitate to contact us. I wish the Commission every success with this most important work and I know from my own experience that although listening to some very tragic life experiences is emotionally stressful and distressing, it is also very personally rewarding to know that you are helping people towards a better future.

Yours sincerely



Sr Di-Anne Rowan
Congregational Leader