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EX-STATE WARD SUES OVER ALLEGED ABUSE
 By PARNELL S

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KEYWORD-HIT
 Ex-state ward sues
 over alleged abuse
 By SEAN PARNELL

A FORMER ward of the state will sue the Queensland Government, alleging it let him suffer repeated sexual abuse and humiliation while in the **Neerkol** orphanage, near Rockhampton.

On Thursday, Sydney law firm McCabe Brown sent a letter of demand to Families, Youth and Community Care Minister Kev Lingard, informing him of the pending legal action.

McCabe Brown partner Peter Karp said yesterday that his client,

Dave Owen of Newcastle, was entitled to damages for ""atrocities" suffered while at St Joseph's orphanage at Meteor Park, **Neerkol**.

""Dave was a ward of the state at the time and sent to this horrific institution," Mr Karp said.

""He is a great man, a brave man, and we'll take this to the High Court if we have to."

Mr Owen was born to a 13-year-old mother in Cairns in 1938 and although he had a grandmother willing to care for him, the authorities thought it best he be placed in an orphanage.

He first wore the **Neerkol** canvas shorts and shirt as a six-month-old baby and did not leave until he turned 14.

For three of Mr Owen's 13 years at the orphanage, he alleges he was sodomised about twice a week by one of the priests.

""Oh, it was a very cruel place. It really was," Mr Owen, 58, said.

""Because you were telling truths to the nuns about what the priest was doing to you, you'd be flogged . . . until you were blue in the face, fainted or peed yourself.

""But this is not a "get square' with the Catholic Church, the nuns or the Government; there were some good people out there.

""The main hurt I want to get over is the hurt of knowing people didn't want to listen.

""I hope they listen now, and other people come forward about what happened to them."

Mr Owen first met his mother when he was 35, and from then on cared for her and his half-sisters.

Mr Owen's mother died three years ago, but asked her son to get justice for what he suffered.

Mr Lingard was in North Queensland yesterday and unavailable.

St Joseph's orphanage closed 15 years ago.