

Towards Healing

Summary of Process for Villanova Old Boys wishing to bring a Complaint of Abuse

Introduction

"Victims of abuse can experience fear, shame, confusion and the violation of their person. They can feel guilty, blame themselves and take responsibility for what has happened ... " (TH 6). Professor Patrick Parkinson writes "The destructive effects of sexual abuse on a person's faith are likely to be considerable ... because the sense of betrayal is so great". The Augustinians and the Council of Villanova College have developed this process to ensure that any Old Boys who have been exposed to sexual abuse whilst students at Villanova have a way of bringing their concerns forward with confidence that their concerns will be listened to in a caring and compassionate way and so that "sense of betrayal" they feel may be appropriately remedied.

Choices available to an Old Boy who has suffered sexual abuse whilst a student at Villanova

Choices are available for an Old Boy who wants to bring his concern or complaint of abuse forward. This process applies whether the perpetrator of the abuse is Augustinian, religious or lay person whether an employee or volunteer worker for the College. The process outlined in this document has been adopted from and is in conformity with the Catholic Church process established under the Towards Healing protocol.

Any Old Boy who has been the subject of sexual abuse has a right to seek to pursue the matter through criminal and/or civil court process.

Both the Augustinians and the College Council are committed to supporting in an appropriate way any Old Boy who chooses to take his matter to Police and proceed with criminal prosecution of the perpetrator.

For those who choose neither a criminal or civil process the Church has established the Towards Healing process and this document outlines how that process applies in relation to Villanova College.

The College already has a process whereby any complaint relating to a current student at the College is automatically referred to the police authorities for investigation. That is in compliance with state legislative requirements.

For Old Boys who come forward with a complaint of sexual abuse which has occurred in the past both the Augustinians and the College Council will encourage those Old Boys to take their concerns to the police authorities.

If a matter is being dealt with under the criminal processes, a Towards Healing process can also be progressed once the criminal complaint has been dealt with.

The Towards Healing Process

The Towards Healing process has been established to address allegations of sexual abuse or of physical or emotional abuse of a child or young person by a member of the clergy, a vowed religious or any other person employed or acting as a volunteer in an official agency of the Catholic Church.

Villanova College qualifies as such a body. The Towards Healing process is binding on the College and on the Augustinians.

The process has three basic phases namely hearing the story, assessing the facts and addressing the needs of the Old Boy.

Initial contact may be made by a phone call to the Director of Professional Standards. The Office of Professional Standards has been established by the Queensland Bishops and Leaders of Religious Institutes and the Towards Healing process is overseen by the Director of Professional Standards. This person is completely independent of the College and of the Augustinians.

The Role of the Contact Person

For each Old Boy who brings a complaint a Contact Person is appointed by the Director of Professional Standards to support and provide assistance. The Contact Person will be completely independent of the College and of the Augustinians. Alternatively the initial contact may be in person to the Rector of the College or an Old Boy may choose to take his concern directly to the Provincial of the Augustinians. The Provincial will then assist the Old Boy to approach the Director of Professional Standards, if the Old Boy wishes this to occur.

Once the Contact Person has been appointed, the Contact Person arranges to meet the Old Boy concerned at a mutually convenient time and place. This will provide an opportunity for the Towards Healing process to be explained, to answer any questions and to begin the preparation of the Contact Report. It will not be necessary for the Old Boy to come to the College for this purpose. A Contact Person may also be available in various regional Queensland locations for any Old Boys who are no longer living in Brisbane.

Hearing the Story – Taking a Contact Report

A Contact Report is a written account of the details of the complaint as told in the words of the Old Boy concerned. In preparing the Contact Report the Contact Person listens to the Old Boy who wishes to bring the complaint of abuse and may assist in providing a few pointers such as "What happened then?" or "Could you say a little more about that?" Usually the Contact Person will take some notes, prepare a first draft of the document which is then presented to the Old Boy for any desired amendment. Old Boys who bring complaints of abuse, may also choose to prepare a draft statement before they meet with the Contact Person. This can be provided to the Contact Person to assist in the preparation of the Contact Report. A person who wishes to bring a complaint of abuse may require several meetings with the Contact Person to prepare a report with which they are fully satisfied.

The Towards Healing process is formally initiated when a signed Contact Report is received by the Director of Professional Standards.

Role of the Support Person

At each stage of the Towards Healing process a person who brings a complaint of abuse is encouraged to have a support person of his/her own choice. A good support person will offer support, encouragement and opportunity to debrief in circumstances that may be stressful because memories of abuse are sometimes very painful. The Contact Person may be able to provide a different level of support by explaining each step as the Towards Healing process unfolds.

What happens when the Contact Report is received?

When the Contact Report is completed the Director of Professional Standards will deliver the report (in the case of Villanova College) to the Provincial of the Augustinians and to the Chair of the College Council. They will discuss the report and take appropriate steps on dealing with the accused person.

In most cases the process will then move to the Facilitation Stage.

The Facilitation Stage of Towards Healing

To conclude the Towards Healing process a facilitated meeting between the complainant and the Provincial and the Chair of the College Council takes place. The facilitator speaks with both parties about their expectations prior to the facilitation. A facilitated meeting provides an opportunity for the victim to tell the story, for the authorities (the Provincial and the College Council Chair) to respond pastorally and for consideration to be given to the needs of the victim and ways to assist the victim to move forward.

The Old Boy bringing the complaint and the Augustinians and the College may be accompanied by their respective support persons at the facilitation.

Facilitation is essential to the process even in those cases where a complaint cannot be substantiated. Its aim is to assist the Old Boy concerned to reach some level of healing.

If a Deed of Release is to be agreed upon at the facilitation, the person is urged to seek independent legal advice before signing. The cost of that advice is covered by the Augustinians and the College.

Prevention of Further Abuse

For many persons bringing a complaint of abuse against church personnel, one of the major concerns is to ensure that abuse does not happen to anyone else. Awareness of the seriousness of abuse and the development, implementation and monitoring or preventative strategies is an important part of the Church response. At Villanova an extensive student protection policy has been developed and is in place. That is available on the College website for all who are interested to read it.

Contact Details for the Director of Professional Services:

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