



# Exposing the truth

**An insight into the failings of  
our churches and institutions**

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## **The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has uncovered more problems than they've solved.**

It's been acknowledged that several churches and institutions have swept the issue of child abuse underneath the carpet - but what has the Commission achieved?

Lawyer and former State ward Peter Kelso has represented many victims of sexual abuse.

He has witnessed first hand the devastating effects these churches and institutions have had on their victims. As a foster child, he experienced firsthand the failings of the child welfare system.

As part of his work for the victims and his ongoing interest in the Royal Commission, Peter has written about several key issues coming to light from the Commission.

**These are the ten most read articles on the Kelso Lawyers website.**

**Piece One:** We have a Catholic problem in Australia

**Piece Two:** Is Muslim child sexual abuse taken seriously by the Royal Commission?

**Piece Three:** Let's strip all churches of tax exempt status

**Piece Four:** Sadistic perverts employed at Parramatta Girls' Home

**Piece Five:** It's time to demolish Newcastle Anglican Cathedral

**Piece Six:** Destroy the Newcastle Cathedral, Part II

**Piece Seven:** My brutal childhood as a State ward

**Piece Eight:** My bizarre upbringing with Foster Parents Part II

**Piece Nine:** Abused foster children deserve compensation too

**Piece Ten:** The church should be the safest place for children

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**They're one of Australia's dominant religions.  
They also have an unprecedented level of paedophilia,  
and Peter is calling for the Catholic Church to be  
shut down in the interest of child safety.**

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# 1 We have a Catholic problem in Australia

## There's a question we need to ask ourselves about the Catholic Church in Australia.

Have you been outraged by the sheer magnitude of the problem of child sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and religious brothers from the Catholic Church in Australia?

In some parts of the country, paedophilia has infected 10% of the priesthood and as much as 40% of brothers.

These figures are genuinely shocking.

And the problem is not limited to Australia.

We all know the Irish had a nine year investigation into the

Catholic Church, and twelve Dioceses in the United States had to declare bankruptcy because of lawsuits from victims.

The 2016 Oscar-winning movie, 'Spotlight' highlighted the cover ups of clergy abuse in Boston.

Literally hundreds of Catholic priests were abusing children while the local Cardinal deliberately chose not to take action, allowing these criminals to continue working with children within their organisation.

The Child Abuse Royal Commission in Australia is currently pushing through a

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***“ We need to try and pinpoint the problem to make sure it's solved for the future. But if nothing changes within the church - we can expect nothing more than a continued catastrophe. ”***

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three week hearing into the systemic failures of the Catholic Church.

The Commission wants to know why paedophilia is such a Catholic problem.

While other Christian religions had paedophiles in the ranks, the problem never reached the unfathomable scale seen within the Catholic church.

The massive numbers of criminal acts perpetrated by paedophiles within the Catholic church is staggering, but if we can understand why the entrenched organisational problem exists - then logically the cause (or causes) can be addressed.

We need to try and pinpoint the problem to make sure it's solved for the future.

But if nothing changes within the church - we can expect nothing more than a continued catastrophe.

We can only hope the issues don't reach the levels we've seen in the past, but there will be more clergy child abuse unless the cultural issues within the Catholic Church are acknowledged and addressed.

This raises the question many Australians want answered:

Why is the Catholic Church still allowed to operate in our country?

This is a reasonable question.

Let me pose a hypothetical.

Imagine the Catholic Church did not already operate in Australia. Suppose the Catholics wanted to move here to set up new churches and schools.

With the Catholic Church's proven record of child abuse overseas - there would be absolutely no way our government would allow any paedophile-infested organisation to offer services in Australia.

Yet the church is allowed to operate freely here, to run schools and youth groups, and have unlimited contact with children.

The Church's leaders have continually failed to report offenders to the police.

The Church's leaders have continually failed to adhere to child protection laws.

The Church's leaders have continually refused to acknowledge and eradicate the cultural problem entrenched in their organisation.

The Church as an organisation cannot be trusted.

Does the Catholic Church deserve a second chance?

Are we happy to chance our children in their care?

Can bishops and archbishops be trusted to supervise professional standards among priests?

Simply - would you trust a priest to babysit your child?

If not, then why is the Catholic Church still here?

The Royal Commission will hand over its final report by the end of this year.

It will make recommendations for the future of child protection.

***But will it recommend the Catholic Church be taxed or closed down until we have proof it can comply with the law? ■***

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“ ***The Church's leaders have continually refused to acknowledge and eradicate the cultural problem entrenched in their organisation. The Church as an organisation cannot be trusted. Does the Catholic Church deserve a second chance?*** ”

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## 2 Is Muslim child sexual abuse taken seriously by the Royal Commission?

**We are 50 hearings into the Child Abuse Royal Commission without a single hearing into child abuse within the Islamic community of Australia.**

With systemic abuse uncovered in a number of religious organisations across the country - some sections of the public are asking questions of Muslim institutions.

Scores of underage Muslim girls are married off to older men.

Many are forced to join polygamous marriages.

Worse still, some women within the Islamic faith are forced to endure genital mutilation.

Some Middle Eastern groups find this practice culturally acceptable - it is

even commonplace in some communities.

The thought of defenceless young girls being forced to have sex with grown men is horrifying.

For any female to have their clitoris sliced off with a sharp knife is impossible for most of us to imagine.

Australians cannot condone this practice. Why is female genital mutilation (FGM) happening in Australia?

FGM is, of course, illegal - and specifically outlawed by the UN

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“ ***Around 5,640 girls under the age of 15 may be in danger, and 1,100 girls are born every year to women who may have had FGM. This is not okay.*** ”

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Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is also illegal to take a child out of Australia to have the procedure.

Yet, genital mutilation is happening in our country.

In fact, instances of genital mutilation in Australia have doubled in the past year.

According to the ABC's analysis of ABS and UNICEF data: "around 5,640 girls under the age of 15 may be in danger, and 1,100 girls are born every year to women who may have had FGM."

This means that three girls a day are born in Australia who are at high risk of being subjected to FGM."

A recent report conducted by researchers at the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit at Westmead Children's Hospital in Sydney found evidence of children as young as five months old enduring genital mutilation procedures.

Whilst the practice of FGM is not a religious one, some Islamic communities persevere with the illegal procedure in Australia. In June 2016, Islamic

sect community leader Shabbir Mohammedbhai Vaziri became the first person imprisoned for female genital mutilation in Australia.

FGM is a cultural practice in some regions within Malaysia, Indonesia, The Middle East and South Asia. We cannot allow FGM to happen in our country.

The Royal Commission must use its powers to help make sure this horrific procedure never happens again on Australian shores.

Why hasn't The Royal Commission investigated forced child marriage within the Muslim community?

Child welfare agencies have received 70 calls for help in the last two years.

Girls in Australia as young as nine have been sent overseas and forced to marry Muslim men.

The Australian Federal Police have investigated 69 complaints of child marriage in the last year alone.

Child marriage is outlawed in Australia.

State police forces have prosecuted Muslims participating in child marriage here.

The Royal Commission is an inquiry into 'institutional responses to child sexual abuse'. It is not an Inquiry into child abuse in families.

In order to classify as 'institutional abuse' and to attract the jurisdiction of the Royal Commission there must be an institutional connection.

Any child sexual abuse with the involvement or approval of an Islamic cleric would pass as institutional abuse.

Therefore the Royal Commission may investigate victim stories of underage child sex, forced child marriages, and genital mutilation of girls under 18.

***So why hasn't the Royal Commission done anything about this? ■***

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**“ Why hasn't The Royal Commission investigated forced child marriage within the Muslim community? ”**

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As part of the ongoing compensation for victims of clergy abuse, the question arose on how churches have the funds for payouts. Peter explores one area where churches save money - their tax exemption status.



## 3 Let's strip all churches of tax exempt status

**Guess how much money the combined churches in Australia make in one year.**

I'll give you a hint - it's a truckload of cash. Over \$30 billion.

The Catholic Church owns over half of that - they make \$16 billion a year.

Their wealth grows every year.

Some people refer to this hidden windfall as the 'the purple economy'.

It's a shocking amount of money.

You're probably astounded by this figure. The average Australian thinks most or all churches are close to broke. It's an all-too-common misconception.

You know Jesus warned us about the pitfalls of greed and wealth when he said 'You can't serve both God and money'.

You just don't know the extent of all the real estate and financial investments held by traditional religious institutions in Australia.

The total wealth of the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese alone is \$1.3 billion.

The Sydney Anglican Church owns half of Glebe, all the best foreshore on Port Hacking, and a swag of prime Sydney real estate it managed to snag for free way back in the colonial days.

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**“ The Catholic Church makes \$16 billion a year. It's a shocking amount of money. And they're not taxed on a cent of it.**

**”**

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The older Christian denominations don't make their money from the Sunday collection plate anymore.

That's chump change now.

These carefully managed institutions are earning significant interest from investments gleaned from the estates of the faithful dying who left their wealth to the church.

Many churches don't practice what they preach anymore. They have become landlords and investment managers. And everything they make is tax free.

The Australian Catholic Church is managed more like an investment bank than a charitable institution.

They are now employing financial experts who know how to use money to make even more money.

Church income is earned and received absolutely free of tax.

The church tax exemption is thanks to an old law we inherited from the British.

The 'pursuit of religion' was always considered a charitable purpose and therefore exempt from tax.

Today we have the Charities Act which deems religion to be a charitable purpose and therefore tax exempt.

Churches don't have to prove religion is 'for the public benefit'.

We're just supposed to accept it.

And because of this - about \$30 billion of church money goes untaxed every year.

Imagine what the country could do with the tax from that much money.

Thankfully, times seem to be changing.

People are starting to ask questions about Australian churches.

The Child Abuse Royal Commission has uncovered large-scale child sexual abuse by clergy and deliberate attempts by church leaders to cover up these atrocities and stop the police from investigating.

The movie, 'Spotlight' won the Oscar for Best Picture last year. The film exposed the world to the crimes of hundreds of Catholic priests in Boston, USA.

These priests were raping children while the Archbishop of Boston knew all about it.

Similar things have been happening all over the world.

You must be wondering why these churches are still afforded the privilege of tax exempt status.

How can we allow these organisations to have tax privileges when they have abused our trust so shamefully?

Remember the days when we believed the churches were looking after our children and families?

Are those days over?

### **You remember when the church:**

- Baptised our babies.
- Married us when we fell in love.
- Prayed for us and gave us comfort when we were distressed.
- Taught Sunday school to our children.
- Fed the unemployed and homeless.
- Conducted funerals and picked up the pieces when no one else would.
- Inspired us when we had lost our way.

Has the church's focus changed?



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“ **How can we allow these organisations to have tax privileges when they have abused our trust so shamefully?** ”

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Exactly what are churches doing to earn their tax exemption?

Are they doing as much as they used to 'for the public benefit'?

How can we find out?

Shouldn't only those churches who comply with child protection laws and work hard to help others be rewarded with tax exemption?

Shouldn't tax exempt status be earned?

Tax exemption should be a privilege for charitable organisations, not an automatic right.

I propose that all churches be stripped of tax exempt status and replaced with a new system where those who want it will have to apply for it - and offer proof to make sure they are deserving.

Tax exemption should be a privilege reserved for organisations who are truly able to offer proof of their work for the benefit of the public.

The definition should be broad enough to capture many different ways of helping children, youth, young adults, singles, families, migrants and seniors.

Charitable activities will need to go beyond running Sunday services for believers; ministries will need to prove their benefits to the public based on their operations across all seven days of the week, year after year.

Tax exempt status should be renewed periodically, or else - forfeited. Churches will have to prove compliance with child protection laws and participate in continuing education.

Let's strip churches of their tax exemptions and make them earn the privilege.

It's time we demanded change.

The Child Abuse Royal Commission has uncovered too much criminal activity and entrenched organisational incompetence for Australians to remain trusting.

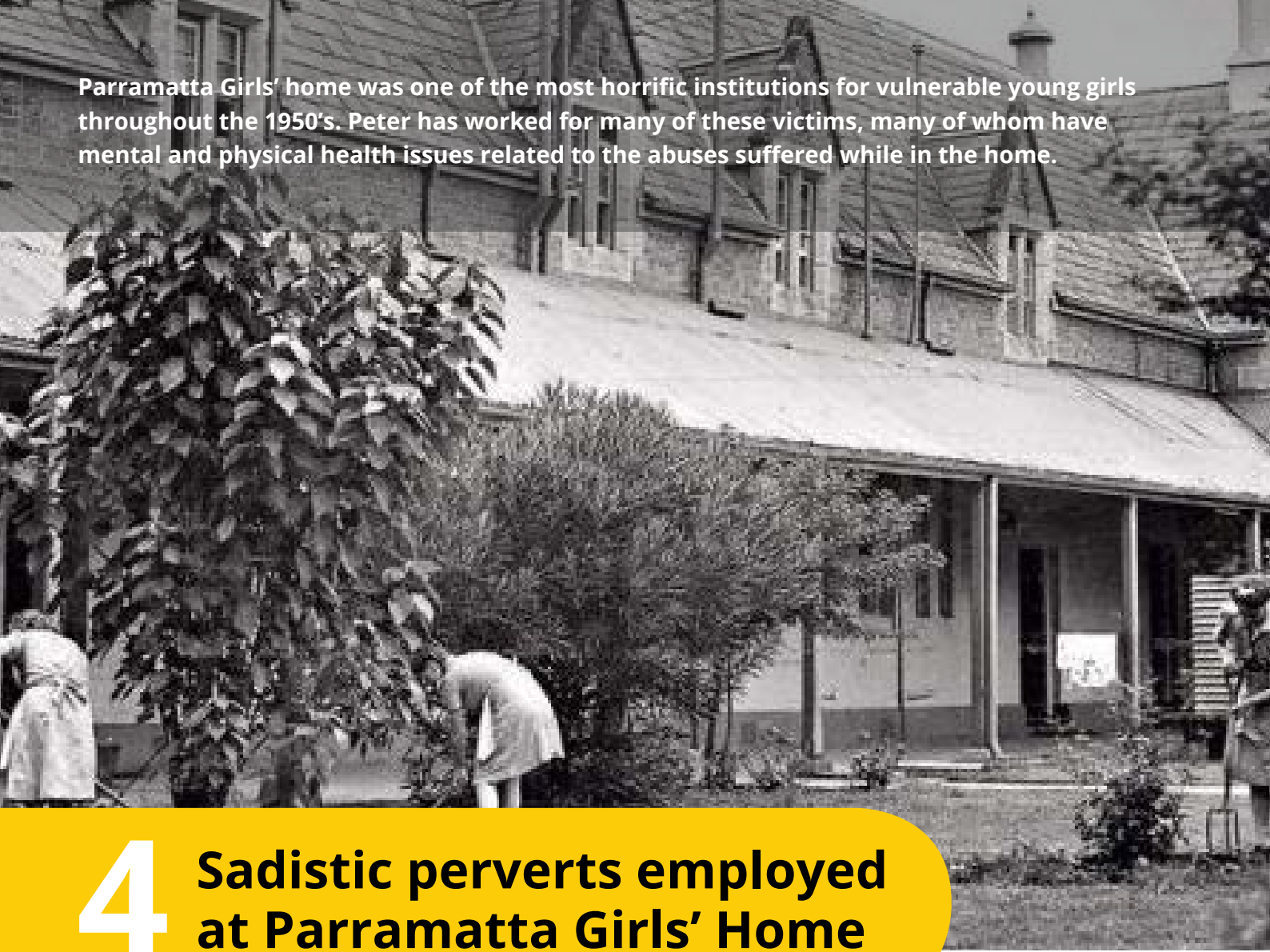
***Are you comfortable with the church receiving a tax exemption on their billions of dollars of revenue?***

***Or is it time we forced these organisations to earn this right again? ■***

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**“ Tax exempt status should be renewed periodically, or else - forfeited. Churches will have to prove compliance with child protection laws and participate in continuing education. ”**

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Parramatta Girls' home was one of the most horrific institutions for vulnerable young girls throughout the 1950's. Peter has worked for many of these victims, many of whom have mental and physical health issues related to the abuses suffered while in the home.

## 4 Sadistic perverts employed at Parramatta Girls' Home

**The Parramatta Girls' Training School was an institution sadly run like many others throughout the 1950's to the 70's.**

Sexual abuse, psychological abuse and state sanctioned slave labour weren't just accepted regular practice at Parramatta Girls' - these crimes were built into the foundation of the organisation.

I have acted for more than 200 adult survivors of Parramatta Girls' Training School.

That number alone demonstrates the appalling gravity of the systemic crimes committed by members of this institution.

I can tell you that Parramatta rates as one of the worst institutions for child abuse in Australian history.

I've heard too many personal stories about the abuses suffered by the victims. The psychological torture.

The unspeakable evil.

No person should ever have to endure the level of evil suffered by teenage girls at this institution throughout the 1950's up until 1974.

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**“ Superintendent Percy Mayhew ruled Parramatta Girls' like a ruthless warlord. He taught new officers to fondle, beat and rape the girls. Most girls didn't know what sex was when they arrived at the front gates.**

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**”**



Officers who patrolled within Parramatta Girls' high walls were bottom of the barrel types. You needed no qualifications to land a job with this establishment.

No university degree or TAFE certificate. The pay was basic. It was work you took if you couldn't get any better.

We entrusted the lives of these children to this institution, which chose to give power and control over these young girls to a collection of desperate, uneducated and immoral thugs.

Child welfare work was 'on the job' learning in those days. The absence of any structured training meant sadistic perverts passed on their skills to the next in line, perpetrating the same culture of evil from one year to the next.

Nothing ever changed.

Superintendent Percy Mayhew ruled Parramatta Girls' like a ruthless warlord. He taught new officers to fondle, beat and rape the girls. Most girls didn't know what sex was when they arrived at the front gates.

The poor pay and lack of qualifications required meant this institution attracted men on the fringes of society. The lure of direct access to children

combined with an easily obtained position of power is a desirable mix for a paedophile.

A job at Parramatta Girls had the ideal job description for a would-be criminal with a lust for a smorgasbord of sex with pubescent girls.

They were Percy's boys. He ruled his kingdom with these minions at his beck and call. They did whatever they wanted. They had no fear of being caught. They knew Percy was on their side.

Such was the strength of Percy's power - no one would ever take the word of a Parramatta Girl against an officer of the Child Welfare Department.

The girls had nowhere else to go. Magistrates in those days didn't have the options we have today.

Parramatta was the largest institution in New South Wales for girls. Inmates were a mix of juvenile offenders, girls charged with exposure to moral danger, and those deemed generally 'uncontrollable'.

The latter group had done nothing wrong. These so-called 'uncontrollables' and EMD's were victims of abuse with nowhere else to turn but to the State's care and protection.

These were young girls.

Traumatised, innocent children who needed love and protection.

Instead, they were thrown into Parramatta Girls', where they would spend up to 12 months in the worst possible environment for a vulnerable child.

There was no counselling. No special programs. No diversional therapy. No school lessons.

The girls were forced into hard labour in the commercial laundry from early morning until dinner time.

The work was monotonous, gruelling and stinking hot. Female officers kept the girls working under an iron fist.

Life in Parramatta was lived most days with your nerves on a knife-edge.

There were no kind words or soft tones. The institution had no intention to heal or nurture - just to break and silence.

Any attempts to fight the system led to solitary confinement, or worse - girls would be threatened with a trip on the overnight train to the dreaded Hay Institute (a maximum security prison for girls in the Riverina district that remained a guarded state secret until the early 2000's).



**“ No person should ever have to endure the level of evil suffered by teenage girls at this institution throughout the 1950's up until 1974. ”**

I am convinced girls were being sexually abused at Parramatta daily.

The stories I have heard and those told to the Royal Commission are indescribably heartbreaking.

I have spoken to survivors who lived there from the 1950's until the day it shut down.

The abuse was so frequent, involving so many girls - it must have occurred on a daily basis, like some form of sickening ritual.

The sort of culture that condones this type of routine institutionalised practice would have understandably screened out any staff who wanted to help the girls.

Well-intentioned workers would not have survived.

They would have been bullied out of the system. With no one willing to blow the whistle, Superintendent Percy Mayhew's power strengthened, and the girls at Parramatta had no chance left.

The occasional riot was like a pressure valve exploding.

The media reported the riots while police were brought in to 'control the girls'.

One police officer fired his gun at the rioting girls.

A witness described this at a Royal Commission hearing in 2014; she described the sound of the bullet whizzing past her head.

There was no explanation from the police as to why an officer opened fire on a group of unarmed teenage girls who couldn't escape.

Most adult survivors are now aged in their sixties and seventies.

Their health is poor.

Chronic lung disease is common.

Almost all of the survivors deal with some form of mental illness as a result of their trauma.

Most are struggling financially and trying to get by on the aged pension or disability pension. They're renting from public housing. The lucky ones are in long term relationships.

Many are single because of the trauma they suffered in their youth. Histories of depression and severe anxiety are common.

Clients tell me their lives have been hard. They wish they could do something for their children. Maybe leave them a small inheritance when they pass.

At least be able to have their funeral prepaid.

***You've heard it said, "You can't change the past, but you can fix the future."***

***This is true. We must help these women find justice. ■***

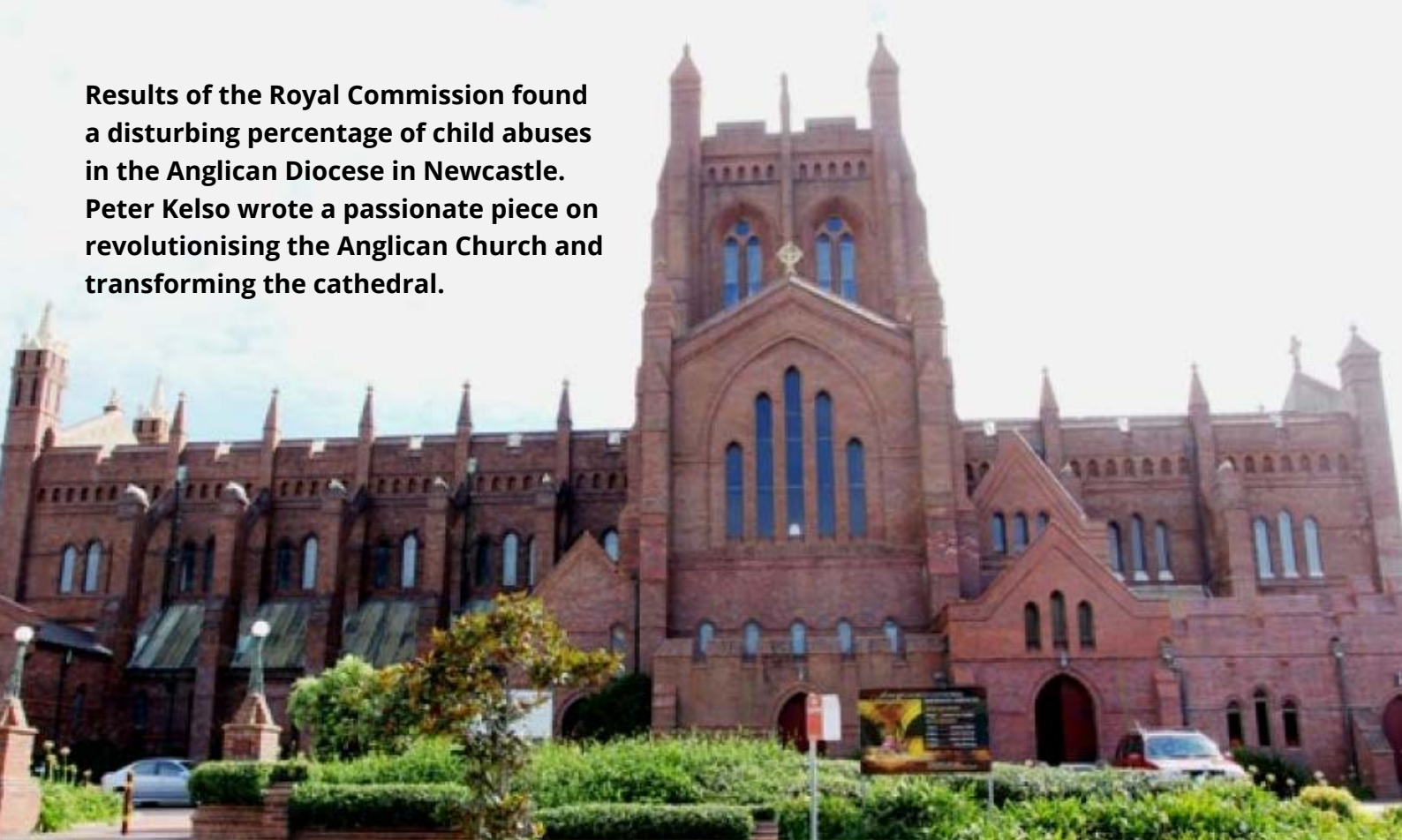
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**“ We entrusted the lives of these children to this institution, which chose to give power and control over these young girls to a collection of desperate, uneducated and immoral thugs. ”**

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**Results of the Royal Commission found a disturbing percentage of child abuses in the Anglican Diocese in Newcastle. Peter Kelso wrote a passionate piece on revolutionising the Anglican Church and transforming the cathedral.**



## 5 It's time to demolish Newcastle Anglican Cathedral

**Everyone who lives in Newcastle and the Hunter knows the once-iconic Anglican Cathedral.**

The imposing building dominates the Newcastle skyline on its perch right up there on the hill above the city.

The Newcastle Anglican Cathedral is the biggest blight on the Newcastle region - a constant, haunting reminder of the tragedy the Newcastle community has suffered at the hands of this very institution.

The Cathedral is built on Newcastle's very best piece of real estate.

There's no better view of the beautiful harbour and much-loved beaches.

The Cathedral is even floodlit at night - no one can escape the commanding symbol of secrecy and conspiracy.

So why does the City of Newcastle allow the cathedral to dominate our skyline?

It's time for Newcastle to stand together as a community and say what they really think.

It's time for the Cathedral to go.

It's not that this building is an ugly piece of architecture. The structure itself is impressive.

We all know what the Cathedral means to hundreds of people.

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“ *The Newcastle Anglican Cathedral is the biggest blight on the Newcastle region - a constant, haunting reminder of the tragedy the Newcastle community has suffered.*

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It's a daily reminder to the City of Newcastle - a chilling symbol of the place where paedophile clergy and their perverted friends abused children in complete secrecy, never facing justice.

The Child Abuse Royal Commission has uncovered the gross injustice and systematic criminal behaviour of religious institutions in the Hunter region.

Sections of the community - including myself and others in the legal profession suspected this culturally entrenched practice.

Now, finally, we have all the explicit proof we need to substantiate all of our greatest fears.

The Royal Commission recently released statistics showing that almost 1100 people who spoke to Commissioners alleged they were sexually abused as children in Anglican Church institutions between 1980 and 2015.

This Sydney Morning Herald article points to 570 alleged perpetrators identified in the report - and 247 of these alleged perpetrators were ordained clergy.

And so much of the most appalling abuse suffered at

the hands of Anglican clergy happened in the Newcastle and Hunter region.

In November last year, former Anglican bishop of Newcastle, Greg Thompson explained the significance of the problems in the Newcastle Anglican Church in a hearing with the Royal Commission.

"It's the case that there has been a very significant problem with child sexual abuse in the diocese of Newcastle?" asked counsel assisting the commission, Naomi Sharp.

"Systemic over many decades," came Bishop Thompson's chilling but honest reply.

This is how Bishop Thompson described the Newcastle Anglican Church to the ABC's 7.30 report late last year:

"What's particularly distinctive about the story of abuse in this (the Newcastle) diocese is the habituated protection of perpetrators and the undermining of survivors as they came forward.

It was like a religious protection racket."

How can Novocastrians allow the city's finest real estate to sit

in the hands of this institution characterised by one of its own as a 'protection racket' for sexually abusive paedophiles?

The Anglican Cathedral still stands above Newcastle, casting a foreboding shadow the city.

This beacon causes such heartache to those directly affected by the unfathomable actions perpetrated by so many within the Anglican Church.

Now it's time to be rid of it.

The City of Newcastle doesn't deserve to be perpetually reminded of such a dark and disgraceful chapter of the city's history.

Instead of looking up to the hill at night to be confronted by a haunting reminder of child abuse, we should reclaim this prime real estate and replace the Cathedral with a landmark for the community to be proud of.

Let's make the hilltop a place of happiness again.

Let's create a place for everyone to enjoy. Let's create a symbol of a new beginning for Newcastle to inject some pride and prosperity.

I propose that the Anglican Church gifts the whole Cathedral



“ Instead of looking up to the hill at night to be confronted by a haunting reminder of child abuse, we should reclaim this prime real estate and replace the Cathedral with a landmark for the community to be proud of. ”

site to the city of Newcastle in trust for its citizens in perpetuity for all time.

I propose the Church donates the land to the City for the Cathedral to be demolished by public implosion on a weekend or public holiday.

Everyone should be invited to witness the Cathedral crumbling down in a cloud of dust and bricks to give the community a sign of better things to come.

We can hold a public competition to design a new complex for the site.

There are so many positive possibilities.

Imagine a giant ferris wheel soaring over the best view of the city. The Eye of the Hunter?

Or maybe a collection of entertainment venues and facilities for families to enjoy?

What about gondola lifts or a cable-car stretching from the top of the hill to Stockton over the harbour to the north and stretching over Bar Beach to the south?

Even an extension of the beautiful King Edward Park would give the community a proud alternative to the dark shadow of the Newcastle Anglican Cathedral.

Novocastrians are a proud, strong and united bunch.

***The Newcastle community needs to reclaim the city's grandest view from the institution who has inflicted so much pain and suffering on our families, friends and neighbours. ■***

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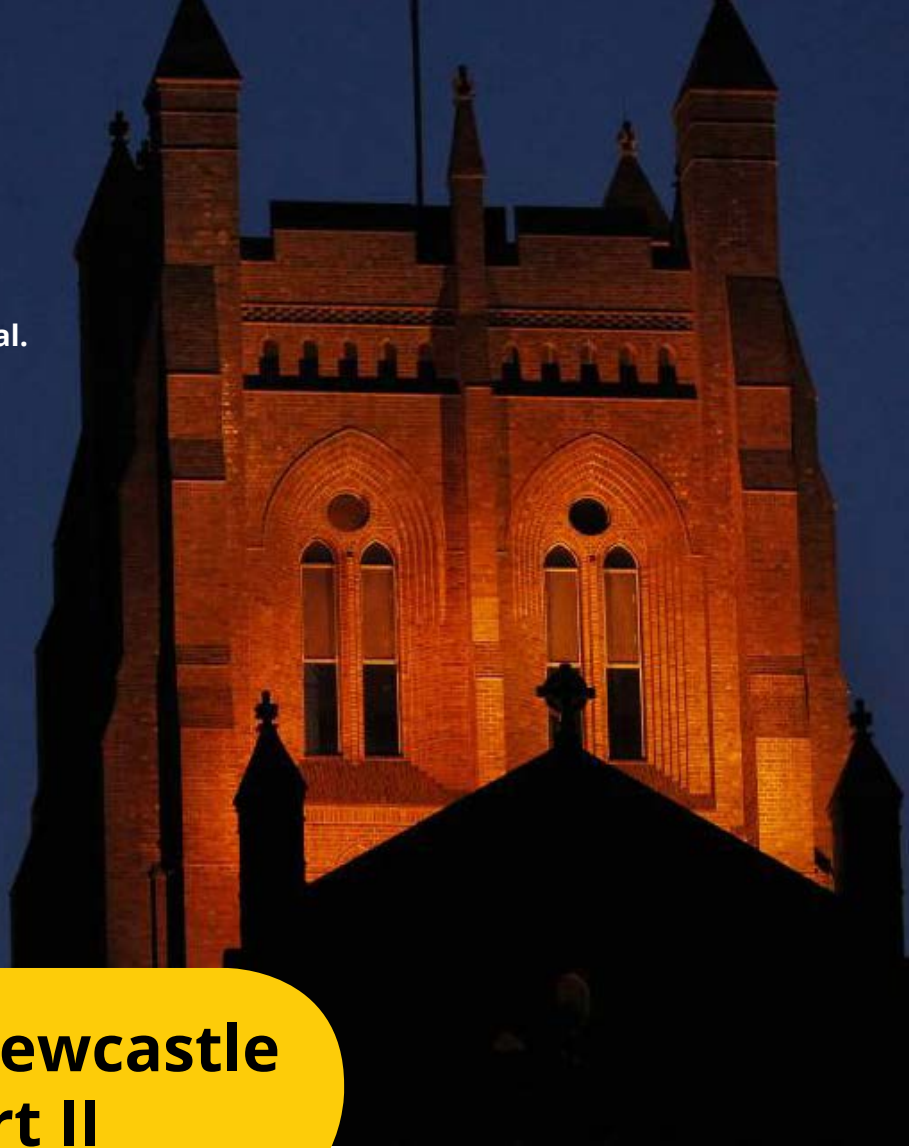
**“ Let’s make the hilltop a place of happiness again. Let’s create a place for everyone to enjoy. Let’s create a symbol of a new beginning for Newcastle to inject some pride and prosperity. ”**

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Peter's piece on destroying the Anglican Cathedral was met with passion from local residents who translated his opinions literally.

This is a follow up piece to the original article - Destroy the Newcastle Cathedral.

The piece called for a radical internal reform of the Anglican Church in Newcastle.



## 6 Destroy the Newcastle Cathedral, Part II

**I made the plea to readers that our local community should stand up and demand to reclaim the precious site of the Newcastle Cathedral from the Anglican Church.**

The location holds the best view of the city, but instead of giving pride to the community, the cathedral now stands as the symbol of a church with an entrenched culture of secrecy and conspiracy.

Many were incensed by my call - a sign that our community is passionate, with strong voices that will be heard.

Some of those vilifying me for daring to speak may be the ones who are part of the entrenched problem in the Cathedral community.

My opinion piece was intended to be a plea for individuals to think about our consent to allow an institution responsible for the sexual abuse of over 1000 individuals to own such a treasured position in the city of Newcastle.

Members of the congregation are supporting the secrecy of the abuses suffered at the hands of Anglican clergy and lay persons - this needs to change.

The child abuse problem in Newcastle has been so bad that the Anglican Church needs

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**“ The systematic culture of abuse and reticence uncovered by the Royal Commission proves the Newcastle Anglican Church needs to cut the branches right back to the stump and start over. ”**

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intrusive surgery to cut off the dead wood. We can't just pick off the bad apples that are still hanging on. The tree is rotten to the core.

The systematic culture of abuse and reticence uncovered by the Royal Commission proves the Newcastle Anglican Church needs to cut the branches right back to the stump and start over.

Giving the priceless site of the Newcastle Anglican Cathedral back to the local community would be the perfect first gesture to demonstrate a commitment to meaningful change.

Even Jesus called for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem which he promised to rebuild in three days, a prophetic reference to his death and resurrection.

The Diocese needs a special person to lead this reformation process; to bring the love of Jesus back to our community and place the Bible squarely on the table.

Bishop Greg Thompson made several courageous attempts to improve the culture of silence and secrecy within the Anglican community - he was subject to harassment and bullying from members of his own congregation as a result.

That's how deep this sickening society of secrecy runs.

Members of the Anglican Church, supposed representatives of God, will harass and attack their own leader for opening the closet and bringing the skeletons to light.

The Royal Commission has shown that we significant change, and we need it now.

It's my hope that with time and unrelenting perseverance the Anglican Church will regain its trusted position within the community.

Novocastrians are strong, loyal and compassionate people. We will help the church disown and discard the congregation perpetuating this sickening culture of abuse and denial, and

we will help create a bright future for their church.

But we won't stand for empty promises.

***My call for the Anglican Church to give the site of the Anglican Cathedral back to the people of Newcastle is a plea for the church to prove the organisation is sorry and serious about genuine reform.***

***The victims and their loved ones deserve nothing less. ■***

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“ ***My opinion piece was intended to be a plea for individuals to think about our consent to allow an institution responsible for the sexual abuse of over 1000 individuals to own such a treasured position in the city of Newcastle.*** ”

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Peter Kelso has first hand experience of the ongoing effects of child abuse. This is the first installment on a series about his childhood as a ward of the State.



## 7 My brutal childhood as a State ward

**I was just five years old when my mother arranged to give me away to the Child Welfare Department.**

I remember the day vividly.

We were living in Charlestown, near Newcastle.

My mother gave me one final bath with my two older brothers, Billy and Arthur.

We dressed.

It took me longer because I had misplaced a shoe.

I looked everywhere for it.

Meanwhile, a big, black car pulled up, and the three of us boys were sent along with the men in suits.

We were taken on the train to Bidura Depot in Sydney. I had no idea what was happening to us.

A while later I was taken on a walk with a man I had never met before. Everything seemed so strange and confusing.

The next image I remember is still vivid in my mind. Billy and Arthur stood at the top of the stairs and waved me goodbye.

I didn't see my two brothers again for 17 years.

In those days the Child Welfare Department practised the 'forced separation of siblings'. Breaking up brothers and sisters was relatively commonplace.

There was nothing you could do about it.

“ *My childhood was a seemingly endless story of ruthless beatings and heartless silence, all neatly hidden away from the rest of the world.*

”



All of a sudden, I was a State ward.

In the minutes after taking that final bath and searching for my lost shoe - my life changed forever.

I was now an unwanted child who needed someone to take me in.

After two weeks at Winbin Children's Home at Strathfield, I was collected by Daphne and Arnold Mead.

They were old, formal and strict with no children of their own.

They took me to their modest house in Gladesville near the Parramatta River. This was to be my home until I left as a 22-year-old man.

The Meads brought me up as their only child. I had to call them 'Aunty' and 'Uncle'. My Child Welfare file states I was 'placeable' with foster parents because I had blue eyes. It seems my biological parents had left me with one lasting gift.

I discovered many years later Billy and Arthur had gone back to our mother and her new boyfriend after only eight months as wards.

Apparently, they weren't as 'placeable' as me. I don't know why. We all had blue eyes.

I still don't know why my mother didn't come back for me.

That unanswered question still eats away at me from time to time.

The following years in a foster home were lonely, brutal and challenging.

But I survived, with a good education behind me and a clear understanding of right and wrong.

I wasn't used to physical discipline. So it came as a real shock to the system when I was repeatedly smacked and beaten. It seemed like I was always in trouble.

Daphne was the disciplinarian. I couldn't do anything right according to Daphne.

I wasted endless hours standing and staring at the corner of my bedroom as a form of punishment. I wrote out hundreds of lines.

Her frequent weapon of choice was the feather duster- it had a bamboo handle. She kept the thing behind the fridge.

Daphne would whip me across the legs like a thrashing machine, strong and determined.

She only stopped hitting me to recover her breath. It always seemed like she was never going to stop, but eventually, she would exhaust herself.

She was only five feet tall but she was surprisingly strong.

But this still wasn't the end of the punishment.

I was then placed "in disgrace". I knew what this meant. Neither Daphne nor Arnold would speak to me for days. They knew how to keep the punishments going. It seemed like nothing to them. For me, the ongoing silence was pure mental torture.

Each hour would strike deeper than any of those bamboo lashes. Daphne would often tell me, "You are nothing but a creature.

But if you're good enough one day we'll let you change your surname to ours."

For many years I believed her. I longed for the day when I was good enough to change my name. I believed I was bad and my name was bad.

At the time I just assumed this punishment was normal. I thought everyone's parents behaved this way.

It wasn't until my late teens that I discovered Arnold and Daphne were far from 'normal' parents.

My childhood was a seemingly endless story of ruthless beatings and heartless silence, all neatly hidden away from the rest of the world.



Physical and emotional abuse was repeated in a seemingly endless cycle.

Now I'm a lawyer, I often read the stories of others raised with foster parents. A lot of them were shunted around to many foster parents. At least I had the stability of one home, although Daphne often threatened to send me back to the boys' Home.

I feel lucky I wasn't sexually abused like so many others were.

Most kids were fostered by married couples with children of their own. Their stories have a common thread. The girls were quickly put to work around the house, allowing the 'stay at home' foster mother plenty of time for leisure activities. The foster children did all the work and the 'real children' sat back and enjoyed a carefree childhood with their friends and relatives.

In many of these cases, older boys in the family used the foster children for their sexual experimentation.

Some foster fathers secretly molested the girls.

The child suffering this abuse had no way out.

There was no point saying anything. Nobody would believe a ward of the State.

They were unwanted children from bad homes. They couldn't be trusted. They were little liars. And you didn't talk about sexual things in those days, even if you knew horrible things were happening.

I want to see governments recognise the trauma so many former State wards were forced to endure.

The foster care system was riddled with instances of abuse.

The systemic abuse running through the Child Welfare Department's old programs needs to be acknowledged and discussed.

This abuse, and the traumatic consequences of this abuse needs to be addressed by our government.

This week I received an email from the NSW Minister for Family & Community Services, Pru Goward MLA.

I had asked her for a special meeting to raise and discuss these issues.

The reply was simple and abundantly clear: "Unfortunately the Minister is unable to meet with you at this time."

There was no explanation, simply a template response from her office.

The government does not want to address this issue.

This attitude has to stop.

State wards were abused while they were under the parental responsibility of the Minister at the time.

These instances of abuse reached systematic levels.

***We were the Minister's legal children. We were abused in the Minister's legal care.***

***We deserve justice for the pain we were forced to suffer - the pain that has shaped the rest of our lives. ■***

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**“ The systemic abuse running through the Child Welfare Department's old programs needs to be acknowledged and discussed. ”**

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This is the second installment of Peter's series on his childhood as a foster child. This experience has given him an invaluable insight into how the Child Welfare Department (now the Department of Family and Community Services) has failed our youngest members of society by placing them with abusive foster parents.



## 8 My bizarre upbringing with Foster Parents Part II

**The physical abuse I suffered at the hands of my foster parents was not the only challenge I faced in my childhood.**

The mental trauma was something else. My foster parents were masters at it. They were also the most married couple in the world and nothing I tried could divide them. They were on a mission together. It was them versus me. By the time I left home home my hands were shaking. It was a miracle I was still standing.

I had to call my foster mother 'Aunty'.

Other kids had mums and dads. And theirs were so much younger than my foster parents.

Mine seemed ancient in comparison. They looked old. They acted like old people. And they spoke like old people. You

could be forgiven for thinking I lived with my grandparents.

My foster father was bald and Aunty had this wavy silver hair which she had styled at Berliners Hair Salon each and every week. I still felt embarrassed by their age whenever the rest of my classmates saw me with them.

I always wished I was the same as all the other kids at school. When there was a class excursion, the permission note always had a space for 'Parent or Guardian' to sign. Mine was signed as Guardian, always by Aunty. Most other kids wouldn't have given this option a second thought.

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**“ Being a State ward carried a stigma. Foster kids were branded with that title like a prisoner with a number. It might as well have been tattooed on our foreheads. ”**

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That word 'Guardian' followed me everywhere and reminded me I was different.

I remember the mortifying moment when one day in 5th Class, the teacher questioned me about the name on my permission slip. Miss Gaunt, a stern woman, called out from her desk in front of the whole class:

"Peter Kelso, who is D.Mead?"

I had to explain she was my foster mother while everyone was staring at me. Even the girls.

I can still feel the hot flush of shame that washed over me.

My primary school was Gladesville Public School. It was a ten-minute walk from home. The teachers were strict and the days seemed long and tough. But I still preferred school to being at home. That's for sure.

There were more male teachers in primary schools during the 1960's - I'm sure they were nearly all sadists.

Mr Barnes used to walk around on playground duty with a shiny gold coffee mug in one hand and the cane in the other. Always on the prowl for boys to punish. He loved it.

He'd tease you when he caned you across the hand. "Did that hurt?" He'd ask. If you said "no" he'd cane you again to make sure.

I was a regular chatter box, so I was frequently getting the cane for talking in class. When I arrived home after school, Auntie would be waiting at the front door with the feather duster in one hand.

Her first words were always the same, delivered like clockwork:

"What did you do wrong today?"

I had no idea how she knew I'd got the cane that day. Next, she'd whip me across the legs with a bamboo handle until she tired with exhaustion. When I'd ask her later how she knew I'd been in trouble with the teacher, she'd explain that, "a little bird told me."

I believed every word she said. I literally believed the sparrows sitting outside on the power lines were her spies.

Later I came to learn the school had phoned her up because I was a State ward. The mere label meant I was punished twice for everything.

Being a State ward carried a stigma. Foster kids were branded with that title like a prisoner with a number. It might as well have been tattooed on our foreheads.

You were expected to be troublesome.

Their way to deal with wards in those days was simple - hit them as hard and as often as possible.

I was an above average student at Gladesville Public. I was no genius, but I could take on the brightest of the girls for top place, especially in 5th and 6th Class. Thankfully, the other boys seemed more interested in sports.

The fight for first place in the Year was usually between me and a red-headed girl named Karen Moran. Auntie expected me to come first every time. If I didn't, there'd be an inquiry.

It was a lot of pressure to carry. I tried hard to impress her, but I can't remember getting any compliments in return.

Back then, parents thought if you handed out praise, you risked giving the child a 'swelled head'. Just when I was starting to feel confident, Auntie was quick to snap at me with the words, "Who do you think you are? You came from the gutter. That's where you came from."

She was right, in a way. That's what I thought. I had started life in absolute poverty and I was abandoned by my mother.

I was fiercely determined to use every chance I had to rise up and make people proud of me.

Auntie knew that. She used it to her advantage.



“ One thing I do know and appreciate - my upbringing has given me a story to share which might be able to help people who've had to experience something similar. ”

Outside the classroom, I had to struggle against Ross, the most popular boy in Gladesville. Ross had his own gang - they were the most aggressive boys in the Year.

Schoolwork wasn't their strength, but they ruled the playground. Ross and his crew claimed the best spots for 'king-pin' games on the asphalt and they dominated class sports and activities.

My one and only physical talent was running backwards races. I beat Ross easily. He hated it and he'd tell the teacher I was a cheat. I loved to watch him go off.

I was one of the bigger kids. I somehow had the reputation of being able to fight. This wasn't true, but I kept the legend alive - it protected me from Ross and his gang.

One day in 5th class I was hassled by Stanley Smith in the playground near the teacher's carpark. Stanley was fond of acting tough - the kind of kid you tried to avoid at all costs.

A crowd gathered around hoping to see a fight. Stanley was a year younger but his father was the underworld gangster 'Stan the Man', so no age barrier was going to give me any confidence.

I lived in Gladesville, the home of Lennie McPherson (Mr Big) and Stan the Man, so facing off with

young Stanley was a big deal.

I swung first at his head, meaning to just miss and give him a fright. But my aim was off target and I punched him hard, right on his left ear. It would have really stung. I thought this would make him mad but he turned and walked away.

He completely backed down.

You don't see that very often.

I'll never forget the day I punched Stan Smith - there was no more trouble after that. Recently I looked him up on Google. I was very saddened to read Stan junior died when he was 22 from a heroin overdose.

High School is where I really found my feet. I liked Meadowbank Boys High. My teachers were good. In those six years, I won the NSW Senior Secondary Scholarship for my performance in the School Certificate. The Minister for Child Welfare sent me a letter of congratulations.

My District Officer told Auntie I was the only State ward in the Burwood District Office to be going on to do the Higher School Certificate. Hearing this made me realise I might be headed somewhere. Maybe Auntie was wrong about me after all.

These days I know for sure my childhood has prepared me to do things many people can't do.

My education allowed me to achieve a lot in my life, an opportunity so many State wards didn't have. There was a purpose to my experiences I'll never completely understand. I'll say more about this another day.

One thing I do know and appreciate - my upbringing has given me a story to share which might be able to help people who've had to experience something similar.

That's why I'm so passionate about bringing justice to the victims of institutional abuse.

I've made this my life's work.

***I am actively challenging State governments to compensate victims of child abuse in foster homes.***

***I'm using those qualities of resilience, determination, discipline and perseverance I developed in my school years to help those foster kids who were knocked down and didn't get the education I had. ■***

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“ ***My education allowed me to achieve a lot in my life, an opportunity so many State wards didn't have. There was a purpose to my experiences I'll never completely understand.*** ”

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**Yet another failing from the Royal Commission's proposed Redress Scheme - foster children abused by foster parents aren't eligible for compensation by the NSW Government.**

## 9 Abused foster children deserve compensation too

**Did you know children placed with foster parents in family homes have very limited rights to be compensated by the government for any sexual, physical or emotional abuse?**

Foster children are incredibly vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community

Somehow, these innocent children have little opportunity to receive compensation for their abuse suffered at the hands of vindictive foster parents.

On the other hand, children abused by staff in State-run and church-run Children's Homes and similar institutions (quite rightly) have every right to seek substantial redress.

But why aren't those children

placed in the care of abusive parents entitled to similar compensation?

The law makes an artificial distinction between the two situations.

This means governments who placed State wards with foster parents (by doing so) discharged their legal duty to care for each of those children.

No matter if a child was raped every day and flogged to within an inch of their life - the government accepts no responsibility for the abuse

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**“ Imagine being flogged into obedience, forced to work for free and sexually abused by one of the foster parents, their grown children, or their adult relatives on a regular basis.**

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**”**





- simply because the child was not abused by an employee or member of the institution.

In NSW for example, this leaves the abuse victim to appeal to Victims Services for a free handout of \$10,000 - if they are lucky.

Of course, there is no amount of money capable of replacing a lost childhood.

There is no amount of money in this world to recover a child's innocence.

But a respectful award of compensation does play a significant role in assisting a victim's recovery.

This money helps pay for vital and immediate needs resulting from the abuse - including housing, medicine and mental health services (often required after such a traumatic event).

The proposed National Redress Scheme seems very likely to ignore abused foster children as there is no legal liability to compensate them at common law.

Why should foster children be treated any differently to children sent to an 'institutional home'?

Can you imagine the horror of being placed with foster parents you don't know, only for these strangers to use their State-invested power to inflict such pain, trauma and abuse?

Imagine being flogged into obedience, forced to work for free and sexually abused by one of the foster parents, their grown children, or their adult relatives on a regular basis.

Imagine receiving infrequent visits by the Child Welfare officer and not knowing your rights to speak up. Imagine complaining, only to be told to stop telling lies.

No one would believe these children - after all, their foster parents were selfless, 'salt of the earth' people, right?

Wrong.

These vulnerable children were trapped in a nightmare where no one could hear them scream.

Governments and churches now rely on a recent English case, titled *NA v Nottinghamshire County Council*. In the UK, the local councils look after child welfare and community services.

A victim sued the Nottinghamshire Council for the horrors perpetrated against her in foster care back in the 1980's.

She was beaten by one foster mother and sexually abused by a foster father.

The council had placed her with both sets of foster carers but refused to accept the blame for the abuse.

The Court of Appeal decided it was an unfair burden to expect councils to be responsible for what happens in foster homes.

The judges said foster parents were not employees of the Council - unlike staff at a Council-run Children's Home.

Therefore, the same legal responsibility did not apply for foster children placed in family homes.

Are you sick of governments and churches hiding behind 'legal fictions' to avoid responsibility?

Why is a child abused in one situation and compensated, but a child abused in another is shut out?


***It's time this nonsense was stopped.***

***Our government needs to step up and take responsibility for the vulnerable children in our society. ■***

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**“ There is no amount of money in this world to recover a child's innocence. But a respectful award of compensation does play a significant role in assisting a victim's recovery. ”**

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The final piece in this ebook - Peter writes a passionate plea for churches now and in the future. He calls on all churches to change and become a safe place for children again.

# 10 The church should be the safest place for children

## Have you ever noticed how easily children believe in the wonder of faith?

Children seem to have a natural curiosity about God.

They are drawn to the stories of Jesus, the Christmas narrative, the image of beautiful angels bearing good news, the spectacular public miracles, the sight of a man walking on water, the idea of healing the sick and good people being rewarded.

Children easily accept the supernatural and genuinely believe they have a Father in Heaven who loves them. Just like the Bible says.

That's a lot of trust.

For two thousand years, the church was entrusted with the care of our children without a second thought from a parent.

And that's how it should be.

The Royal Commission has shocked and disturbed trusting parents who readily encouraged their children to participate in church organised activities like youth groups and Sunday school.

The Royal Commission has uncovered the most shocking and unapologetic breach of our community's trust.

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**“ The church should be the safest place in the world for children and all people - the clergy are God's most visible representatives on earth.**

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**”**



And it's not okay. We cannot accept this.

The church should be the safest place in the world for children and all people - the clergy are God's most visible representatives on earth.

They are supposed to be the hands and feet of Jesus. But so many Australians have been abused at the very hands of these so-called 'representatives'.

We have lost our trust in what was once the most trusted institution in our society.

In my experience as a lawyer acting for clergy abuse victims, I have found that many adult survivors have lost their trust in 'organised religion' in general.

This is for good reason - the abuses and manipulation suffered has robbed them of any ability to relate to the church and its teachings.

The idea of karma is quite popular with many of these victims - again, for good reason.

Karma gives one a sense of hope to believe their abuser, the monster who stole their innocence, will one-day face justice.

As a survivor of abuse myself, I have found great comfort in the knowledge that abusers face the final judgement of God.

Jesus' teaching of forgiveness resonates most profoundly with me.

The value of forgiveness gives me hope that one day we will see a day where churches are once again a sanctuary for our community, not a symbolic reminder of the horrific abuse our sons and daughters have suffered.

The Royal Commission has given me - and many other victims of institutional abuse, genuine hope that things will change.

For years, for decades, survivors and their loved ones have been losing faith not just in our religious institutions - but in the Australian justice system.

For so long it seemed like the entrenched culture of child sexual abuse and institutional cover-ups would go on unpunished.

But the Royal Commission has, and will change everything.

Better days are ahead.

We need to open our hearts and find a way to to be able to trust our church again.

I hope that once the bad apples have been tossed out, and the branches pruned - our community can help the church to once again become a haven.

There will be a time when no children will ever have to spend the rest of their lives recovering from the abuses suffered in their childhood. There must be.

***Let's trust the good ones in the church, the real Christians, to pick up the pieces and re-build a safe haven of trust, love and respect. ■***

## Conclusion

The Royal Commission was the just the first step to acknowledging a widespread problem in our country.

We still have steps to take before all the issues uncovered by the Royal Commission are solved.

Child abuse by large institutions and churches are still happening.

***If you are a victim of abuse from a church, school or institution, please get in contact with us. We'd like to help you achieve justice for your suffering.***

## About Kelso Lawyers

Kelso Lawyers are specialists in historical child abuse cases.

Founder and director, Peter Kelso was himself physically and emotionally abused as a child while a State ward.

Now a lawyer, Peter has made it his mission to provide compassionate and supportive legal representation to child abuse survivors seeking compensation.

You can hear Peter tell his own story of abuse and recovery on our website [kelsolawyers.com/au/peter-kelso](https://kelsolawyers.com/au/peter-kelso).

Kelso Lawyers have offices in Sydney and Newcastle, but represent abuse survivors across Australia.

Peter is supported by an expert legal team who share his passion for helping survivors to seek justice and compensation from the institutions that abused the children in their care.

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***While no amount of money can erase the harm caused by child abuse, a compensation payment can ease the pressure and help to make life more comfortable in the here and now...***

Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.  
Legal practitioners employed by Kelso Lawyers are members of the scheme.

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