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Church's clinic shielded paedophiles

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THE Catholic Church's little-known treatment clinic for clergy with psychosexual problems harboured known paedophiles and shielded them from police scrutiny.

Whistleblowers closely involved with the now-defunct Encompass Australasia program allege paedophile clergy were diagnosed with a "mood disorder" so they could be treated at Sydney's Wesley Private Hospital and meet private health insurance criteria.

A well-placed source aware of the status of some clergy treated by Encompass Australasia between 1997 and 2008 said he believed several did not have a mood disorder but were "cold and calculating criminals" who bragged about their exploits with children to others while at the hospital.

"Some of these people were not mentally ill, in my opinion. They were criminals who knew exactly what they had done and were proud of their achievements," said the source, who asked not to be named for fear of being sacked. "People who should have been in Long Bay Jail were still living in the community."

Another source with intimate knowledge of the Encompass Australasia program said one senior priest who received treatment was nicknamed "Hannibal the Cannibal" because of the exuberant way he described his treatment of young boys.

Fairfax Media can reveal new details about a paedophile Marist brother treated by Encompass Australasia in 2002-03 before he was sent to Rome to work for the church instead of being reported to police.

Documents lodged in the ACT Supreme Court in 2010 allege senior Catholic leaders, including the former headmaster of a Queensland school, knew Marist brother Ross Murrin was sexually abusing his students in the late 1970s and early 1980s but did not act.

A statement of claim lodged by an alleged victim of Murrin's states that the former headmaster of St Augustine's boarding school in Cairns, Brother Gerald Burns, gave circus tickets to two boys who complained about Murrin's abuse, allegedly telling them it was in recognition of "all the bother".

Brother Burns received an Order of Australia in 2003 for "service to youth welfare, particularly through the development of the innovative services and programs of Marist Youth Care".

Several sources have said that although the clinicians at Encompass Australasia ran a world-class treatment centre, it was used by some church leaders as a "smokescreen" to hide paedophile clergy.

Fairfax Media on Saturday revealed the church's possession of thousands of pages of documents detailing the psychosexual profiles of dozens of clergy accused of sexually abusing children and vulnerable adults.

It is understood that none of the clergy treated was referred to police for investigation, despite senior church leaders being aware of serious allegations - or, in some cases, admissions - that led to clergy being admitted to the clinic.

Neither the former chief executive of Encompass Australasia nor the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference - which established the clinic - returned calls to Fairfax Media or answered written questions. A Marist Brothers spokesman failed to return calls.

New South Wales upper house MP Gordon Moyes, who as superintendent of the Wesley Mission in the late 1990s was closely involved with the Encompass Australasia program being set up at the Wesley Private Hospital, said this week that neither he nor hospital administrators knew the identity of clergy sent for treatment or the nature of their offences.

"In general we knew that they were largely priests of the Catholic Church who had engaged in various forms of serious sexual sins, particularly against children," Reverend Moyes said. "But Encompass was extremely secretive about all their business relationships."

Reverend Moyes said although the rehabilitation of paedophile clergy was important, church leaders had a duty to report alleged criminal offences involving children to police.

The Encompass Australasia program treated about 1100 clergy for sexual abuse problems as well as depression and substance addictions.

High-ranking Catholic Church figures such as Adelaide Archbishop Philip Wilson and Father Brian Lucas, the general secretary of the Australian Bishops Conference, were directors of Encompass Australasia, which was deregistered in 2010. The Catholic Church's insurance company was also closely linked to Encompass Australasia.

In the case of Encompass Australasia patient Murrin, court documents allege the Catholic diocese of Cairns, the trustees of the Marist Brothers and several senior individual Marist Brothers failed to protect young male students at a Queensland boarding school from Brother Murrin.

A statement of claim lodged by a former student at St Augustine's College in Cairns alleges several teachers saw a young male boarder in Murrin's private bedroom on at least six occasions but did nothing other than instruct the student to leave.

It further alleges the school's then principal, Brother Burns, was told in 1981 by the plaintiff, whose name is suppressed, and the plaintiff's father of Murrin's repeated sexual abuse of him and other boarders.

The Cairns school was the third Murrin taught at. He had been shifted there after he was accused of sexually abusing students at schools in NSW and Canberra in the 1970s.

Despite Murrin writing letters of apology to the Marist Brothers order and the family of one of the Cairns students, his actions were not reported to police. Instead he was transferred to other schools.

At his sixth school, St Gregory's in Campbelltown, NSW, Murrin sexually assaulted another student in the mid-1980s.

He was convicted of this crime in 2010, when he was already serving an 18-month sentence for sexual abuse offences against students in the 1970s.

Murrin was shifted to 11 schools by the Marist brothers and continued teaching until 2002, when he was placed in the Encompass Australasia program and then sent to Rome.

He was never referred to police by Encompass Australasia, the Marist Brothers or other church leaders.

Police sought his arrest in 2007 after being contacted by his victims. One of Murrin's victims killed himself in 1987.

The Catholic diocese of Cairns, the trustees of the Marist Brothers, Brother Burns and several other Marist brothers have indicated to the ACT Supreme Court their intention to challenge the former student's claim on jurisdictional grounds.

Murrin, through his lawyer, Greg Walsh, has also indicated his intention to respond to the claim.

Another paedophile Marist Brother treated by Encompass Australasia, Brother Kostka Chute, was also the subject of complaints to senior church figures at least 15 years before he was charged by police in 2008.

Like Murrin, Chute was treated at Encompass Australasia in 2002 for a "psychosexual disorder". Chute was not referred to police after his treatment.

Porters Lawyers solicitor Jason Parkinson, who has represented victims of Murrin and Chute, said the royal commission on child abuse must examine those who aided and abetted known paedophiles.