



Rabbis, our Principal and honoured guests. Good morning to you all, and thank you for your time.

I stand before you today, as part of the Yeshivah Centre Family, having been educated here from kinder through high school, and now, as part of the newly appointed Committee of Management.

The Yeshivah Centre was established some 75 years ago, under the auspices of the Chabad Leader, Rabbi Schneerson, and his emissaries to Australia, my great-grandfather included. It started as a fledging synagogue and school led by immigrants from war torn Europe. Under Rabbi Groner's leadership spanning some 50 years, we now boast a campus that hosts 5 synagogues, a thriving youth centre and a school 1400 children strong.

But I stand here today, not to laud our accomplishments, but to acknowledge our failings.

As you are aware, the Yeshivah Centre was the subject of a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This followed the incarceration of two perpetrators of child sexual abuse, both of whom held roles in different capacities here at the centre and focussed on the institutional response to these heinous crimes.

As an institution, the Yeshivah Centre was ill-equipped to deal with its response at the time of the abuse, and regrettably, in its later dealings with victims and their families.

We at the Yeshivah Centre have been working hard to properly respond to these issues and ensure that we cement in place policies and processes of the highest standards to guarantee a safe environment for our children. The Yeshivah Centre's number one priority is the protection of children in its care, and we will continue to take all steps required to maintain and continually raise this standard.

But we must also turn our eyes to the past.

The Yeshivah Centre deeply regrets its failure to protect those who were victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by people in a position of trust in the Yeshivah Centre and its schools. We also condemn any form of abuse and acknowledge the serious harm it causes.

It is with a sense of duty, that today I announce the Yeshivah Centre Redress Scheme.

This scheme has been established to ensure that these wrongs committed against children will no longer go unnoticed or unacknowledged.

It has been a work in progress for some time that was initiated by the previous management, and a body of work I am proud to have been involved in.

In September this year, the Royal Commission released its *Redress and Civil Litigation Report* which details the Commission's 'concluded views' on its recommendations 'to ensure justice for survivors'. The Yeshivah Centre supports the establishment of a national redress scheme as recommend by the commission, however does not feel it should stand idle in the interim.

We have therefore developed our scheme as guided by the recommendations, which will be operated by Mr Michael Debinski and Mr John Leatherland who will share with you some of its details shortly.

Mr Michael Debinski will oversee the operation of the Scheme and act as one of the case managers. He draws on experiences gained having recently overseen an abuse redress scheme at Jewish Care. Reviews will also be undertaken by Mr John Leatherland, whose wealth of experience in child protection and youth services spanned over forty years. He was awarded a Public Service Medal for services to vulnerable families and children.

We are so fortunate to have two individuals of such calibre and high regard on board and I express the Centre's sincere gratitude to them for getting us to this point.

But before handing you over to Michael to hear about the operation of the scheme, I have one final message to share.

It is to the victims, those known to us and those we may never know, I say this:

*"You were each entrusted to the care of The Yeshivah Centre. All of you were blameless. All of you were just children. Each and every one of you had the right to be protected and cared for. You had a right to feel safe. You had a right to be educated in an environment that enabled you to reach your full potential. In each of these respects, we let you down, in ways that we can never fully make up for. For the abuse you suffered while you were in our care, on behalf of myself personally and The Yeshivah Centre management and staff, both past and present, I am profoundly sorry."*

Thank You.

Yechezkel Belfer  
Yeshivah Centre, Committee of Management