

Yeshivah launches redress scheme for sex abuse victims

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[Read later](#)**Benjamin Preiss**State Political Reporter for *The Age*[View more articles from Benjamin Preiss](#)[Follow Benjamin on Twitter](#)[Follow Benjamin on Google+](#)[Email Benjamin](#)[Email article](#)[Print](#)[Reprints & permissions](#)Advocate and abuse victim Manny Waks (left) with Yeshivah spokesman Yechiel Belfer on Sunday. *Photo: Paul Jeffers*

An Orthodox Jewish centre where children were sexually abused while in its care is offering victims counselling, payments and personal apologies in a new redress scheme.

Melbourne's Yeshivah Centre has established an independent panel to determine appropriate responses for each victim who comes forward.

The centre has written to its community members about the scheme and will host an event on Wednesday to discuss sexual abuse, including a panel with outspoken abuse victim advocate and former Yeshivah College student Manny Waks.

In the letter, Yeshivah committee of management spokesman Yechiel Belfer says the scheme, being launched on Monday, was introduced so "wrongs committed against children" involved in the centre and its schools would not go unnoticed or unacknowledged.

"The Yeshivah Centre deeply regrets its failure to protect those who were victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by people in a position of trust within the Yeshivah Centre and its schools," he writes.

In a statement, the centre said the scheme's design was guided by the *Redress and Civil Litigation Report* from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Mr Waks said the latest developments were "groundbreaking" and a "positive reflection" on Yeshivah's new leadership.

He said the scheme demonstrated sensitivity and compassion towards victims, "something that has been completely lacking in the past".

"This shift in approach by the Yeshivah Centre, which is now in both word and deed, is an indication that they are now finally taking this issue seriously," he said.

But Mr Waks said not all matters would be resolved quickly and change would require commitment to a long and challenging process.

The leadership of the Yeshivah Centre has been overhauled since allegations of sexual abuse emerged publicly

The leadership of the Yeshivah Centre has been overwhelmed since allegations of sexual abuse emerged publicly.

The redress scheme covers anybody who was a victim of sexual abuse at the centre's schools or through its activities and who was under 18 when the abuse occurred.

It will include payments for three categories of abuse ranging from significant to extremely severe.

Payments will range from \$10,000 to \$80,000.

The Yeshivah Centre has advised police of the scheme. The panel will encourage victims to report sexual abuse allegations to police but will allow individuals to decide.

Mr Belfer said the welfare of anyone who experienced abuse was the primary concern in establishing the scheme.

"We are offering to victims financial redress, access to specialist counselling, case management and support," he said. "And most importantly, we offer our sincere apology."

Mr Belfer said payments under the scheme would not prejudice an individual's right to pursue legal action against the Yeshivah Centre.

Yeshivah was at the centre of multiple high-profile sex abuse cases, which included those of convicted offenders David Samuel Cyprys and David Kramer. Both pleaded guilty and were jailed in 2013.

Jewish Care Victoria president Michael Debinski will oversee the scheme and will be one of its case managers. Mr Debinski recently administered an abuse redress scheme at Jewish Care.

Former Department of Human Services executive John Leatherland will also conduct reviews for the scheme. There will also be a female reviewer.

For individuals to be eligible for the scheme the panel will have to be satisfied it is reasonably likely that sexual abuse occurred.

Anyone who experienced sexual abuse at Yeshivah and is seeking redress can call 1800 059 064 or email yeshivahredress@gmail.com

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