



International Centre
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Jack T. Moyer Case Review

*These notes taken from two independent internal reviews available online as part of a settlement.
The full reports are available online.*

Introduction

“In June of 2014, thirteen women retained (a law firm) to hold their alma mater accountable for its decades-long concealment and denial of Jack T. Moyer’s sexual abuse of female students.” These survivors found each other due to an alumni event awarding Moyer ‘favorite teacher’ status and made multiple attempts spanning years to illicit a public response from the school. At least 19 female abuse survivors were interviewed as part of one internal review.

This case is of note for the lifelong harm to victims, the entrenched denial of the school for decades and the reconciliation offered survivors once the school finally accepted responsibility.

Background

Jack Moyer’s employment over nearly 40 years at a single school was marred by reported sexual abuse from the start. The abuse varied in degree and scope, and included forcible rape, sodomy, digital penetration, oral copulation, molestation and extensive, repeated sexual abuse. The sexual abuse would frequently begin when the student was 11 or 12 years old, and – in some cases – would continue for years. Most of the sexual abuse occurred on or near campus, or on school or independent trips to Moyer’s home on an isolated island.

Many of these survivors suffered in shame and silence for decades. However, a number of these women (and their friends and family members) made reports of Moyer’s sexual abuse to the school in every decade for 40 years. Each time, the school assured them that something would be done to protect future students. Each woman thought that she was the only one who Jack Moyer abused. Unbeknownst to these women at the time, they were not alone.

Moyer was asked to retire in 2000 even as the school continued to deny knowledge of the abuse and was under pressure from alumni to act. He admitted having made ‘many mistakes’. In 2004, upon learning he still worked with local students, a survivor confronted him by email. Moyer confessed in writing to sexually abusing many students. The survivor threatened to report him to police if he continued to work with children. He took his own life. Survivors and supporters continued to press for an investigation or inquiry until 2014 when the school sent an open letter to alumni triggering more allegations and an internal review.

The Teacher

Jack Moyer was considered a star teacher working primarily with middle school students, but also local students of all ages. Both parents and colleagues saw him as someone to admire. He was trained as a marine biologist and used this specialty to select students for special attention including participation in trips, SCUBA lessons, laboratory work, excursions and summer research at his island home and 'lab' thus gaining access. He frequently used older students, inexperienced teachers or parents as chaperones. Students slept in a common room in sleeping bags, and he either slept in this room openly or entered the room at night. Multiple girls were groomed by day and molested at night. He frequently provided students with alcohol and treated them as 'adults'.

Moyer was known for being 'touchy' and openly gave back and foot rubs. Students hung out in his classroom, received special favors, and some walked his dog. At least one moved into his home for a time. He encouraged students to take SCUBA lessons and visit his home on weekends and school trips.

Some children were groomed into compliance with the abuse, but forced sexual assault and rape frequently occurred. The age of his victims ranged from 11 years to adulthood. Predatory targeting, grooming and emotional manipulation were hallmarks of his offending pattern. Said one victim, "he abused me hundreds of times, in hundreds of places."

Complaints

Historic school administrator response could be summed up by the response to a teacher reporting their concern over a student sitting on Moyer's lap, "that's Jack being Jack." Yet, alumni report that student rumor referred to Moyer as a known pedophile at multiple points in time.

Although the school denied that contemporaneous reports had been made there is abundant evidence to the contrary. There are reports that minimizing language was used, victims and family members were deflected and given false promises of action although no actions were taken beyond 'talking to' or 'warning' the offender. No record exists of the contemporaneous or subsequent allegations or any disciplinary action being taken. No information was shared with new administrators into the 2000s.

Until 2014 survivor complaints were met with excessively legalistic responses and denials of responsibility by the school. Thirteen survivors who called themselves the thirteen sisters, decided to embark on legal action following the school's 2014 letter to alumni which implied a lack of responsibility.

Vividly, on survivor stated, "Do you blame the alligator or the ones who keep feeding him children?"

Independent Review

Two internal reviews were conducted, the first by a law firm with ties to the school. Among the findings of the second independent review:

- School learned of Moyer's inappropriate conduct with young female students by at least 1967 and concealed Moyer's sexual abuse of female students for more than forty years, extending to March 2014.

- High level administrators and leaders received more than five dozen direct reports of Moyer's ongoing sexual misconduct and abuse of students.
- Moyer's activities were open and notorious: administrators and faculty were undoubtedly aware of or personally witnessed hundreds of red flag incidents evidencing Moyer's inappropriate behavior with young female students.

Lessons Learned

Numerous examples of institutional grooming are apparent. Unprofessional and inappropriate behavior became part of school climate. The school's ongoing denial of responsibility for years is indicative of a reputational response. Decision making and supervision around school trips was inadequate. Issues of grave concern to the wellbeing of students were not communicated beyond the individual administrator nor brought to the Board. Adults failed to prioritize children's safety. No record-keeping was maintained for disciplinary actions or dismissals. Teachers failed to identify numerous signs and indicators of abuse including academic failure, and withdrawal from school. Administrators failed to respond in any way to protect or identify victims or survivors until 2014 when legal action was threatened. There is a shocking lack of curiosity around virtually every disclosure and report, both contemporaneous and historic. What response existed could be characterized as dismissive or legalistic.

Managing Allegations

In most cases there was only a single point of decision making around student and teacher reported allegations which were never documented. Survivors were repeatedly told the school was never informed or was unaware of abuse.

After Moyer's retirement in 2000 and death in 2004 the school deemed the matter closed stating,

"Faculty continue to ask us about the rumors that they have heard about Moyer, and we have decided to read them a statement. . . which will be succinct, give few details, but will hopefully give them enough information to settle the rumors. While the issue is not completely resolved, I hope that we are in the latter stages. We will do a thorough review of our policies and procedures that relate to sexual harassment, and we should have new policies for Board consideration at our next meeting. Time will hopefully continue to heal this vexing issue."

A professional code of conduct was added to existing policies in 2012. A policy modeled on the AISA Handbook was adopted in 2014.

Only after a social media page for survivors was created and repeated requests (2011, 2012, 2013) from alumni to the Head and Board Chair for transparency and identification and assistance to survivors, did the school decide to deal with the matter publicly in 2014. An internal review was launched and at least four additional alumni came forward as survivors and one current student disclosed sexual misconduct by an employee. The teacher in the latter case was dismissed as a result. There were additional reports of multiple former faculty members who allegedly engaged in behavior ranging from boundary-crossing physical contact to sexual misconduct with multiple victims.

Record Keeping

One internal report states,

For the most part, it does not appear that records were generated and/or kept at the School concerning these reports. The administrators either denied the alleged reports, or their recollection differed significantly from that of the reporting individual. From our review of the evidence, including our interviews with current and former board members, administration, faculty, staff, and alumni, it appears that the School's inadequate identification of and reaction to these warnings were caused by a variety of factors, including: (i) a lack of continuity, documentation, and information-sharing from one School administration to the next, (ii) a historical lack of formal policies and protocols for responding to allegations of sexual abuse, (iii) a historical lack of awareness of, or sensitivity to, issues pertaining to child sexual abuse generally, and (iv) cultural norms that treated discussing sexual abuse as taboo.

Prior to the internal review in 2014, Board minutes continued to exclude discussions about the case, and new Heads did not receive any documents related to allegations of Moyer's sexual abuse.

Working with Survivors

This case is notable for a reversal of response since 2014. The school engaged in policy audits, instituted background checks on all existing employees and new hires, purchased prevention curriculum, held assemblies, created a student protection team, trained senior staff and initiated outreach to survivors and alumni affected by the abuse.

One internal review observes:

The school does not (*currently*) concentrate authority for handling student protection matters with individual members of administration without ensuring accountability and transparency of decision making. Accurate, and complete records of allegations are created, both to inform investigation and ensure continuity and information sharing among administrators and reporting to government authorities when required by law.

The acceptance of responsibility included a "unique resolution and reconciliation achieved by the victims and the (school) including reimbursement for counseling costs, compensation for the survivors' injuries, new and improved child safety policies, and full acceptance of responsibility for the actions of "teachers and administrators...[who] failed to protect students in their charge, and an apology by the Board who acknowledged **that survivors attempted many times to expose abuse, and we are ashamed to report that they were rebuffed or ignored by the school.**" Heritage honors for Jack Moyer were revoked or destroyed. The school provided survivors an opportunity to be recognized by current students and to share their stories with school representatives. An annual scholarship was created to recognize their persistence.