

Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants – background

“It is highly likely that every Australian either was, is related to, works with or knows someone who experienced childhood in an institution or out of home care environment.” (Senate Inquiry Report 2004)

On 16 November the Australian Government will issue a formal apology on behalf of the nation to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants.

The apology will extend to:

Around **500,000 Forgotten Australians**, identified as people who spent a period of time as children in children’s homes, orphanages and other forms of out-of-home care in the last century; and

Around **7,000 Former Child Migrants**, who arrived in Australian through historical child migration schemes and who were subsequently placed in homes and orphanages.

Children were placed in care for a myriad of reasons including being orphaned; being born to a single mother; family dislocation from domestic violence, divorce or separation; family poverty and parents’ inability to cope with their children often as a result of some form of crisis or hardship.

Experiences common to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants include abandonment and loss, grief through separation from their parents and siblings, and loss of identity. Former Child Migrants also lost their connection to their country and culture.

In addition, many children suffered from neglect, exploitation, mistreatment and physical and sexual assault at the hands of their caregivers.

Adequate health care and education was also lacking, as a result of which many Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants have suffered lifelong health and learning problems.

These experiences were documented in three separate Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiries: Lost Innocents (2001), Forgotten Australians (2004) and the recent Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Revisited (2009).

The impact of abuse and neglect as children on adults

The three unanimous Senate Inquiries illustrated the consequences of inflicting emotional and physical deprivation and shocking levels of neglect and abuse on children. Children lost family connections and, without those connections, lost their identity, culture and in the case of the Former Child Migrants, their country.

The harm inflicted on children endures. Many Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants continue to experience mental health problems, incarceration, family breakdown and drug and alcohol issues. The Senate Inquiry reports highlight the struggle these children face as adults to cope and live fruitful and constructive lives.

Further information about the key findings of each Inquiry is at **Attachment A**.

Why the Australian Government is apologising

The three Senate Inquiries have unanimously called for a national apology as a critical step in the healing process for those that have suffered, and continue to suffer.

Many past care providers, including the churches, and State and Territory governments have apologised for, or acknowledged the experiences of some of these groups.

The Australian Government firmly believes that a national apology will appropriately acknowledge the trauma and suffering that care leavers experienced. It will reinforce the veracity of their accounts of what happened and that what happened was wrong and very damaging. It will ensure that a largely invisible part of our history is put firmly on the record and serve as a reminder that these practices should never be repeated.

In the spirit of the bipartisan nature of the Inquiry, the Government has worked with the Opposition and other parties to develop the remembrance event.

Contacts – media and representative groups

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The Child Migrants Trust is an independent, specialised, comprehensive, professional service for Former Child Migrants, their parents and relatives. The Trust was established in the United Kingdom in 1987 by Margaret Humphreys OAM, a Nottinghamshire social worker, in response to claims of abuse by children formerly involved with Britain's child migration schemes.

www.childmigrantstrust.com

The Child Migrants Trust

Phone: +61 3 9347 7403

Media contact: Ian Thwaites

The International Association for Former Child Migrants and Their Families

Formed in 1996 to advocate and campaign for justice for Former Child Migrants, the Association also acts in an advisory capacity to the Child Migrants Trust regarding child migrants' service needs.

The Association represents the views and feelings of Former Child Migrants and their families by actively campaigning for justice and for appropriate services.

The International Association for Former Child Migrants and Their Families

Phone: +61 3 9348 1354

Media contact: Harold Haig (former child migrant)

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians was established in 2006 and is an alliance of organisations and individuals from across Australia supporting people who were raised in institutional or other out-of-home care places in Australia in the 20th century.

www.forgottenaustralians.org.au

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians

C/- Families Australia

Phone: +61 2 6273 4885

Media contact: Caroline Carroll (Forgotten Australian) +61438 460 184

Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN) was founded in 2000 by two Care Leavers, Leonie Sheedy and Joanna Penglase. Care Leavers Australia Network's services include support, advocacy and information, assistance with records location, regular newsletter, lending library and national and state advocacy. Care Leavers Australia Network's website is a leading web based resource on, and for, Forgotten Australians.

They also retain a comprehensive collection of photos and memorabilia from the period in their museum in Sydney.

www.clan.org.au

Care Leavers Australia Network

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Families Australia is an independent, peak, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the needs and interests of families. Families Australia provides secretariat and support services to the Alliance for Forgotten Australians.

www.familiesaustralia.org.au

Families Australia

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Attachment A – Findings of Senate Inquiries

Inquiry into child migration, 2001

The 2001 report *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record* reported on the Senate Committee's Inquiry into the history and treatment of unaccompanied children, generally under the age of 16 years, who were brought to Australia from the United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta under approved child migrant schemes in which the British and Australian Governments entered into agreements for the migration of children to Australia.

Between 1922 and 1967, about 150,000 children, on average aged around nine, were sent to Australia from the United Kingdom to Canada, Rhodesia, New Zealand and Australia.

It is estimated that around 7,000 children were sent to Australia from the UK and Malta through child migration schemes during the 20th century. About 6,700 of these were from United Kingdom and were placed in various care arrangements in Australia.

The Australian Government was the legislated guardian of the children but then transferred responsibility for their care to State Governments. In turn, the State Governments transferred responsibility to receiving agencies.

Some Former Child Migrants have made positive comments about their time in institutional care. Others can only recall that under the custodianship of receiving agencies, there was a complete disregard for the needs, safety and wellbeing of many children.

The Inquiry's report noted an overwhelming emphasis on the dark and negative impacts of child migration—the brutality of life in some institutions where the most appalling abuse and assault, both physical and sexual, was a daily occurrence, where hardship, hard work and indifference were the norm and where childhoods were lived in loneliness.

Evidence indicated that some parents had only consented for their children to migrate because of assurances that they would be better off in Australia. Many children were sent without parental consent, with evidence indicating that parents were lied to about their children's fate.

The report noted that many children were incorrectly told that they were orphans and correspondence was often not passed on. Without those connections, children lost their personal identity and were unable to connect with their culture, country or extended birth families.

The Committee made 33 recommendations including that the Commonwealth and State governments supplement the travel funding of the Child Migrant Support Fund. Extensive recommendations were made to assist Former Child Migrants with access to services, including access to their records through the development of uniform protocols for accessing records. The report also recommended that the Commonwealth Government issue a formal statement of acknowledgement and regret for the harm brought about by the Child Migration schemes.

Inquiry into Child Migration:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/1999-02/child_migrat/index.htm

Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 2004

The people who may identify as Forgotten Australians are survivors of the Australian institutional care system, which was the standard form of out-of-home care in Australia until the later 1970s.

At least 500,000 children grew up, or spent long periods, in this environment between the 1920s and 1970s.

The Inquiry's 2004 report: *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* noted:

"hundreds of graphic and disturbing accounts about the treatment and care experienced by children in out-of-home care.... Their stories outlined a litany of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and often criminal physical and sexual assault... neglect, humiliation and deprivation of food, education and healthcare."

The Inquiry noted accounts of abandonment and loss, grief through separation, loss of identity, as well as neglect, exploitation, brutality, mistreatment and physical and sexual abuse and assault. Such neglect, abuse and assault was widespread across institutions, across States and across care providers.

The Committee heard that health and dental care was often lacking, as was access to education, leaving many Forgotten Australians to suffer lifelong social, economic and physical consequences.

But the overwhelming response to treatment in care, even among those who made positive comments, was the complete lack of love, affection and nurture for young as they group up.

Children were placed in care for many reasons - including being orphaned; born to a single mother; family dislocation from domestic violence, divorce or separation; family poverty and parents' inability to cope with their children, often because of some form of crisis or hardship. Many children were made wards of the state after being charged with being uncontrollable, neglected or in moral danger, not because they had done anything wrong, but because of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Irrespective of how children were placed in care, it was not their fault.

The report made 39 recommendations, including that governments, churches and other agencies should issue formal statements acknowledging their role in institutional care policies and practices. Other recommendations include: improvements to internal church processes for dealing with abuse allegations and addressing past grievances; a range of measures related to personal records; providing services to address care leavers needs; and the need for specialised counselling services.

Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/index.htm

Forgotten Australians and Lost Innocents revisited, 2009

In June 2009, the Senate Community released its *Report on the progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports*.

The report recommended that the Commonwealth issue a formal acknowledgement and expression of regret to Former Child Migrants in accordance with Recommendation 30 of the *Lost Innocents* report; and that this statement be issued in conjunction with, or as a part of, a broader Commonwealth apology to people who experienced abuse and/or neglect in institutional or out-of-home care as children.

The report also recommended that the Commonwealth Government issue a formal statement of acknowledgement and apology to children who suffered hurt and distress, or abuse and assault, in institutional care, in accordance with Recommendation 1 of the *Forgotten Australians* report.

Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/recs_lost_innocents_forgotten_aust_rpts/index.htm