

***the
atheist
helper***

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Senate inquiry: Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices

We welcome the opportunity to provide this submission. Given the Commonwealth's jurisdiction over social welfare matters, this submission falls within the terms of reference of this inquiry. We are an organisation providing counselling support to victims of abuse by sects, cults and religions. We have a non-religious viewpoint. We are not biased in favour of, or against, any religion.

We would like to draw the inquiry's attention to the fact that the Commonwealth's past failure to adequately provide welfare services and benefits has led to children being forcibly taken into the care of religious organisations. This has had severely adverse consequences for some of the individuals affected.

In the course of our community support work, we have become acquainted with a situation in which the lives of the members of one family have been severely affected by the past interventions of the Jewish Welfare Services (now Jewish Care).

I refer to a case in the 1950s where a baby girl was forcibly taken from her mother by black suited Jewish Welfare officers. The effects that this had on the baby's older sister, who at age six witnessed the baby's abduction, and her mother's collapse to the floor in grief and lamentation, has had an indelible adverse effect on her and other family members. The baby was then advertised in the Jewish News for adoption.

Life for older sister, then six, with whom we have contact, has been characterised by stress and psychological trauma induced by the events. This is to the extent that today, over fifty years later, she still feels an extreme sense of outrage at the injustice that befell her family.

As a result of our consultations, we find that her life story consists of a long series of adverse events. The events of her childhood have affected her whole life, and still significantly impair her daily life today.

In the family of seven children, two older sisters have committed suicide, and others have suffered mistreatment. The effects of such childhood trauma are long lasting.

In the case of our contact person, the situation was compounded by the further involvement of Jewish religious organisations. In this family, the father was Jewish but the mother was not. In this case, according to Jewish culture, the children are not really Jewish. This made the intervention of Jewish Social Services even more problematic.

At Jewish school she was tormented as being a “dirty shiksa” or filthy vermin, because they did not consider her a proper Jew. In later life she accidentally came across her baby sister who was abducted, only to discover a new insult. The girl, who was by then separated from her adoptive family, had been given a new name, the same name as her. This would almost seem to have been a callous attempt to obliterate the identity not just of the adopted baby, but of her sister as well. This has caused additional hurt and anguish.

Those in charge of the situation at the time may have thought they were doing the right thing, carrying out “God’s work”, with some sense of purpose. This illustrates the problem, not just with the Jewish religion, but all religions, where a sense of being a “chosen people” creates a false sense of moral authority.

These circumstances highlight the fact that the provision of welfare services should not have been, and should not be, delegated or contracted out to religious organisations. It also highlights the fact that the activities of religious organisations were, and still are, deemed charitable, whether they are charitable or not, and receive tax concessions and subsidies, as if they are public benefit, whether or not they are a benefit or a cost to public welfare. The Commonwealth here has a case to answer.

In conveying these views to the inquiry, we submit that the Commonwealth did indeed have a responsibility for, and contribution to, former forced adoption policies and practices, at least in not providing sufficient safeguards, protections and alternatives. We believe that the Commonwealth should compensate the victims of such abuses.

Further details of the particular situation we refer to above can be provided. Our contact would welcome the opportunity to provide details. We also think it would assist her, as part of the healing process, if she were able to do so.

Yours sincerely,

John L Perkins

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