

CHAPTER 7

TRAVEL AND REUNIONS

Distance is tyranny and money is the question, I cannot be with my mother.

7.1 Evidence to the Committee emphasised the importance of providing continuing funding for travel assistance to enable former child migrants to revisit their country of birth and be reunited with family and relatives.

Benefit of reunions

7.2 Submissions emphasised the positive effects that providing travel assistance has made to former child migrants' lives both in addressing their isolation and anger – of not knowing 'who they are' or 'where they came from' and their need for belonging and identity as part of a family.¹ The International Association of Former Child Migrants and their Families (the International Association) commented on the effects of family reunions in the following terms:

We have witnessed and experienced the effect that reunification has had on our members. It is amazing! It is like meeting a completely different person, a happy, confident, complete person. A person who now knows who they are and where they come from. A person who, after decades of not belonging, knows that they belong; knows that they are a member of a loving family, and knows that they were not an "unwanted street urchin" – or an orphan when they were deported.²

7.3 The Committee also received many heartwarming testimonials from former child migrants commenting on how the reunions had had a very positive effect on their lives. One former child migrant wrote in his submission to the inquiry that:

...they [the Trust] found my family and in February 2000 they flew me home for the most wonderful 3 weeks I have spent in my entire life.³

7.4 Another former child migrant stated that:

...as I have been to see my family in England 4 times in the last 5 years I have discovered the family I never knew I had and of the love and affection which I was denied of over the last 45 years.⁴

1 Submission No.129, p.34 (IAFCM&F); Submission No.46, p.3 (ACMF); Submission No.121, p.5.

2 Submission No.129, p.34 (IAFCM&F).

3 Submission No.78, p.2.

4 Submission No.70, p.1.

7.5 In a moving tribute a former child migrant appearing before the Committee stated that:

I would like to dedicate my session to my 88-year-old mother. I am 65 and I have only been with her for six weeks of my life.⁵

7.6 The Committee was able to hear first-hand from the parents and siblings it met in London the stories of absolute joy and elation at rediscovering family and being reunited as a result of the travel scheme. They were tempered however by feelings of bitterness and anger at having been ‘absolutely robbed’ during their lives. These meetings proved to be very powerful and moving occasions for the Committee.

7.7 International Social Service (ISS), who administer the UK travel scheme, reported the experiences of many former child migrants commenting that the reunions with family and relatives had ‘changed their lives forever’, others report that they ‘know who they are’ for the first time and feel at ‘peace’ with themselves.⁶

Current travel assistance arrangements

7.8 There are a number of arrangements in place for the funding of travel to assist former child migrants to be reunited with family members. The principal travel assistance funding is currently provided by the UK Government through the Child Migrant Support Fund and by the Christian Brothers in Australia through the Christian Brothers Ex-Residents & Students Services (C-BERS Services).

7.9 In addition, a number of other Catholic religious orders in the 1990s have offered financial assistance on an ad hoc basis to former child migrants to travel to their country of origin, especially to meet family members. The Sisters of Mercy in Perth made a major financial contribution to ‘the Sentimental Journey’, a trip back to Britain and Ireland by many of the female former child migrants who came under their care from Britain. The Poor Sisters of Nazareth and the Sisters of Mercy in Rockhampton have also offered travel assistance to former child migrants.⁷

7.10 The other receiving agencies do not fund travel to the country of origin for former child migrants for family reunions.⁸ Neither the Commonwealth nor State Governments, except Queensland, provide funding for travel assistance. In Queensland, the Forde Foundation provides assistance with family reunion costs to former residents of Queensland institutions, including former child migrants.⁹

5 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.536.

6 Submission No.48, p.5 (ISS).

7 Submission No.54, p.16 (JLG).

8 Submission No.136, p.2 (Fairbridge WA); Submission No.43, p.4 (Fairbridge Foundation); Submission No.50, p.5 (Barnardos Australia).

9 Response to Forde inquiry, p.43; *Committee Hansard*, 21.3.01, p.416 (Qld Department of Families).

7.11 The Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF) has previously assisted former child migrants to visit the UK as part of its family reunion program. The Foundation currently has no funds to continue with this program. The program operated by the Foundation provided a single return airfare, travel allowance and travel insurance. Counselling services were also provided on a needs basis to both former migrants and their UK families.¹⁰

Child Migrant Support Fund

7.12 The UK Government set aside £1 million over three years to fund former child migrants' reunions with relatives in the United Kingdom through the Child Migrant Support Fund. The Fund, which commenced operations in April 1999 and will continue until March 2002, was established as part of the response of the British Government to the UK Health Committee report into the welfare of former British child migrants. The Fund assists former British child migrants to reunite for the first time with close family members who qualify under the eligibility requirements from whom they have been separated since they were brought to Australia.

7.13 International Social Service (ISS), an international non-government, non-profit organisation, was contracted to operate the scheme on behalf of the UK Department of Health due to its expertise and independence in this area. ISS was established as an international migration organisation in 1924 and since that time has provided international casework services in many countries for a wide range of migration matters. The operations of the UK Fund are co-ordinated by ISS UK, with collaboration from ISS Australia and other ISS Branches concerned with UK former child migrants, including Canada and New Zealand.¹¹

7.14 To establish their eligibility, applicants to the Fund must meet the following criteria:

- the applicant was an assisted UK former child migrant (thereby excluding the Maltese from eligibility);
- the applicant can prove that he/she has a father/mother, uncle/aunt, or brother/sister living in the United Kingdom, who would welcome his/her visit;
- the visit to the United Kingdom is the first time that the applicant will meet the nominated relative since being sent to Australia; and
- the applicant's family income falls within certain income limits. The income limit is a fortnightly gross amount of \$A1,688.25 for single applicants or \$A2, 820 for a couple, with \$A36 added for each dependent child or student. A person on a full Australian pension would normally qualify.¹²

10 Submission No.46, p.3 (ACMF); *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.107,119 (ACMF).

11 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.269 (ISS); Submission No.48, p.1 (ISS).

12 Submission No.48, p.3 (ISS); *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, pp.270-277 (ISS).

7.15 Successful applicants receive an economy airfare to the United Kingdom, all taxes and travel insurance, and assistance with travel from their homes to the airport of departure and from the airport of arrival to the address of their relative. An allowance for accommodation for up to 14 days is also provided. The rate of assistance vary if staying at a hotel in London, outside London or with relatives.

7.16 Reimbursement of the costs of passports and visas is provided where these costs have been incurred. The Fund also provides up to three hours of formal counselling post travel, if required.¹³ The average expenditure per person, including airfares and the accommodation allowance, is approximately \$A4,500.¹⁴

C-BERS Services – travel assistance

7.17 The Christian Brothers provides travel assistance as one of the services offered through the Christian Brothers Ex-Residents & Students Services, a service for former residents of Christian Brothers institutions in Western Australia. C-BERS is funded by the Christian Brothers but is operationally independent.

7.18 Access to travel funding is not means tested, nor is it dependent on men finding family in their country of origin.¹⁵ The eligibility for travel funding is detailed below:

- travel assistance is available for a once only trip to meet with family of origin and/or to visit the country of origin (where no family has been found);
- priority funding is provided for meeting with the applicant's family;
- assistance is provided for one direct economy return airfare from the major airport of the applicant's usual place of residence in Australia to the major airport close to his destination in his country of origin (assistance for travel during peak periods is not normally approved);
- a £700 allowance is provided towards living and other expenses associated with travel;
- in exceptional circumstances such as disability, funding may be provided for an accompanying carer;
- C-BERS must be satisfied that, as far as possible, due regard has been paid to issues of the psychological health and the safety of all individuals involved;
- financial assistance is provided once C-BERS is satisfied that all necessary preparation and planning has been undertaken, both with the ex-resident and

13 Submission No.48, pp.3-4 (ISS); Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01 (ISS).

14 Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01 (ISS); *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.270 (ISS).

15 Submission No.45, p.1 (C-BERS).

family members overseas; and that professional backup is made available, while overseas, to the ex-resident and family.¹⁶

Numbers assisted

7.19 ISS Australia has received over 400 inquiries over the last two years from former child migrants, and 234 of these people have gone on to submit an application to the Fund. Of the 234 applications in Australia for travel funding, ISS has submitted 214 to the United Kingdom for approval (after ensuring that the documentation etc is in order). The United Kingdom has approved 181 applications and rejected 22 applications. A further 16 applications have been withdrawn by the applicants for various personal reasons (figures as at May 2001).¹⁷

7.20 The Catholic Church's Joint Liaison Group (Joint Liaison Group) estimated that travel assistance to former child migrants by Australian Catholic congregations and organisations has been provided to over 250 former child migrants, involving expenditures of approximately \$1 million to date. More than 100 other people are currently either having their applications processed, or have had their applications approved and have yet to travel.¹⁸

7.21 C-BERS advised the Committee that it has provided travel funding to 211 ex-residents and 26 carers to the UK or Malta (as at April 2001).¹⁹ This number includes funded trips for 48 Maltese clients.²⁰ Expenditure on travel by C-BERS from 1995 to April 2001 was \$1,416,695.²¹

7.22 The Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF) has assisted some 80 former child migrants to visit the UK as part of its family reunion program.²²

7.23 While these schemes have been welcomed by many former child migrants in that they have provided an opportunity for many ex-residents to return to their country of origin, the UK scheme in particular has been the subject of criticism during the inquiry.

16 Submission No.45, Additional Information, 22.5.01 p.2 (C-BERS).

17 Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01 (ISS); *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.270 (ISS).

18 Figures relate to the situation as at December 2000. C-BERS has provided more recent figures. See Submission No.54, p.16 (JLG).

19 Submission No.45, Additional Information, 22.5.01 p.1 (C-BERS).

20 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.142 (C-BERS).

21 Submission No.45, Additional Information, 22.5.01 (C-BERS).

22 Submission No.46, p.3 (ACMF); *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.107,119 (ACMF).



Committee members meet Mrs Rose and Ms Sylvia Coulson, the mother and sister of child migrants who have all been reunited under the travel scheme, accompanied by Mr Ian Thwaites of the Child Migrants Trust

Limitations of the UK scheme

If as much care had been taken to obstruct me coming to Australia as to obstructing the funding for me to return to my birthplace, then things might have been different.

7.24 Evidence to the Committee indicated significant deficiencies in the United Kingdom's scheme, especially relating to the Fund's restricted eligibility criteria, the limited total funding and the limited time period over which it operates. One submission succinctly explained that the criteria were for many child migrants 'discriminatory, intrusive, insulting, restrictive, insensitive, invasive, intimidating, degrading and annoying'.²³ Much of these comments are directed against the personal and intrusive nature of the questions on the application form required to determine funding eligibility.

7.25 Submissions noted that the Fund's restricted eligibility criteria caused the most bitterness among many former child migrants ineligible to apply for travel assistance. The kinship test whereby a narrow range of eligible near relatives are recognised for the purposes of the Fund and the stipulation that the travel must be for a first time reunion with close relatives were cited as particularly restrictive criteria. The Child Migrants Trust (the Trust) stated that:

23 Submission No.118, p.6.

Applications are means tested, and involve only first time reunions with mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts. Visits to other relatives such as cousins, or to pay respects at a parent's grave, are ineligible for funding.²⁴

7.26 Submissions noted that former child migrants who were sent to Australia earlier in the pre-war period are especially affected by these limitations. As they tend to be older, their eligible close relatives are often dead, but they have nephews, nieces or cousins still living whom they would like to contact, and who may be their last remaining relatives. Having found their families, what matters most to these former child migrants is the opportunity to make contact with their remaining relatives and re-reclaim their identity.²⁵ That is not easily done in just one visit.

7.27 The effect of the restricted eligibility on former child migrants applying to travel was illustrated in evidence to the Committee. Swanleigh indicated that it had assisted 20 former residents in applying to the Fund yet only five applications had been accepted.²⁶ Barnardos indicated that while all those that the organisation had assisted with filling out applications had been successful, however, this was largely because applicants were made very aware of the criteria that applied to the Fund – ‘there might be a self-selection process there where those who do not feel that they would meet the criteria select themselves out from applying’.²⁷

7.28 Submissions also noted that many former child migrants feel bitterly disappointed at not being able to obtain support to at least visit their parents or close relatives' graves, because these types of visits are ineligible for funding. Evidence was also received that many former child migrants have made significant financial sacrifices to obtain the funds to visit the United Kingdom to search for and meet relatives and, as a result, now live in difficult economic circumstances. These people believe it is unfair that they cannot obtain any reimbursement for the funds they have expended or to be eligible for a further funded trip. They believe that the governments who brought them to Australia should assist them to return or reimburse them if they have already spent their own funds to meet family members.²⁸

7.29 C-BERS noted that a complaint of some former Maltese child migrants is that they had been given conflicting information about their rights to claim ISS funding for travel and reunification.²⁹ As noted previously, C-BERS has funded a number of reunification trips to Malta for clients to meet extended family.

24 Submission No.132, p.39 (CMT). See also Submission No.121, p.5.

25 Submission No.48, p.4 (ISS); Submission No.132, p.39 (CMT); Submission No.44, p.5 (CMFS).

26 Submission No.56, p.2 (Swanleigh).

27 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, pp.469-70 (Barnardos).

28 Submission No.48, p.4 (ISS); Submission No.132, p.39 (CMT).

29 Submission No.45, Additional Information, 4.5.01, p.2 (C-BERS).

7.30 The exclusion of some former child migrants through the application of means testing applied under the Fund was also criticised during the inquiry. The view was strongly put that every child migrant, irrespective of their social status, is still a victim of the migration scheme and should be treated in the same way. Assistance to one section of child migrants to the exclusion of others was discriminatory and wrong. ISS observed that being excluded seems in the majority of cases to be felt as another deliberate rebuff from the United Kingdom Government. Regardless of the applicant's financial circumstances, ISS noted that 'it seems to exacerbate the deep sense of injustice felt by former child migrants in relation to their treatment by all governments involved'.³⁰ ISS (UK) advised the Committee that that the means test and other eligibility restrictions were due to the limitations of the amount of the original fund.

7.31 Evidence to the inquiry also raised the issue of the exclusion of former child migrants from Malta from accessing the UK travel fund.³¹ C-BERS noted that:

The ISS does not make funds or assistance available to Maltese former child migrants and this means their experience is inequitably treated when compared with persons from Britain. The only funding that we are aware of for this group comes through C-BERS, with individual, as-needs assistance from female religious orders.³²

7.32 The Committee was also informed that some former child migrants are not aware of the existence of the Fund and how to apply for assistance. The South Australian Department of Human Services reported that 'in a meeting that we had with the Child Migrants Trust we learned that some of the former migrants had trouble working out how they could access the travel fund'.³³ Barnardos Australia also expressed the view that the Fund had not been 'properly advertised'.³⁴

7.33 ISS commented on the funding limits within which the Fund operates:

I guess the overriding thing about the fund is it has finite dollars. It is £1 million and they expect the £1 million to be spent in three years...If the £1 million is not spent by then, I imagine that it is possible that they could say it can run on for another three months until the money runs out or something but, in terms of making major extensions to it, it is always that overriding situation that there is only £1 million to be spent.³⁵

7.34 Submissions emphasised the importance of prompt access to the fund because it is limited by time and in terms of available funding. The Trust noted that the fund is

30 Submission No.48, p.4 (ISS).

31 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.141 (C-BERS).

32 Submission No.45, p.3 (C-BERS).

33 *Committee Hansard*, 16.3.01, p.299 (SA Department of Human Services).

34 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.469 (Barnardos).

35 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.273 (ISS).

expected to be fully subscribed, despite its very limited eligibility criteria, within its three year operating period.³⁶ The UK Department of Health confirmed with the Committee that the available funding will be totally spent.

Unmet need for travel assistance

7.35 While evidence to the Committee clearly demonstrated that the travel needs of former child migrants have not been met, the actual level of unmet need is difficult to determine, though some evidence to the Committee suggested that it may be considerable. ISS indicated that some 415 former child migrants had made inquiries about the UK travel fund to ISS – of these, 181 or 44 per cent had *not* gone on to make an application. ISS suggested that one obvious reason for this would be that they did not meet the eligibility criteria.³⁷ The level of unmet demand is illustrated in the case of Swanleigh where that organisation indicated that it had assisted 20 former residents in applying to the Fund yet only five applications had been accepted.³⁸

7.36 ISS (UK) advised the Committee that it had been trying to determine the full demand for the service in the future and believes that it would be for at least five years. ISS noted that an important question to determine is the extent to which all eligible former child migrants know of, and have applied to, the ISS for travel funding. ISS added that:

While we have had 415 former CM's directly contact us, there is a much larger number who would have heard about the [the Fund] directly from other related agencies, or by word of mouth, and we cannot capture those figures. Our major concern is that the [the Fund] will be wound up before all eligible former CM's have a chance to apply.³⁹

7.37 Barnardos suggested that the degree of unmet need may be understated as 'there might be a self-selection process there where those who do not feel that they would meet the criteria select themselves out from applying'.⁴⁰ Barnardos also suggested that some further 'filtering' may occur as some potential applicants may be persuaded not to apply because the organisation assisting them in their application feels that they would not meet the eligibility criteria.⁴¹

7.38 The operation of the C-BERS travel fund also indicated a degree of unmet demand for travel assistance. A former member of the C-BERS Management Committee noted that C-BERS underestimated the demand for the scheme:

36 Submission No.132, p.39 (CMT).

37 Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01, p.1(ISS).

38 Submission No.56, p.2 (Swanleigh).

39 Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01, p.2 (ISS).

40 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, pp.469-470 (Barnardos).

41 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.470 (Barnardos).

Obviously, as we got more and more into this, we saw that the needs were much greater than we had anticipated – if anything we actually shared almost a growth industry, not something that was going to be over and done with very, very quickly.⁴²

An Australian travel fund

7.39 Many submissions to the inquiry argued that the Commonwealth Government should establish a travel support fund.⁴³ This proposal was advocated as one way to address the need to widen the eligibility criteria for travel and family reunions.

7.40 Some groups proposed that State Governments should also contribute to the fund.⁴⁴ The Trust and the International Association argued that an Australian travel fund would complement the existing UK scheme which is due to finish in 2002.⁴⁵

7.41 Several submissions and other evidence commented on how such a scheme should operate, arguing that it should have much broader eligibility criteria than the UK scheme. The Child Migrant Friendship Society (CMFS) proposed that the scheme should provide for return airfares to Britain for all former child migrants and their partners/carers, as well as the provision of a daily allowance in the UK for two weeks. It was argued that such travel costs should be made available regardless of whether the individual had successfully traced family members, had previously travelled to Britain, or was able to fund a trip out of his/her own resources.⁴⁶

7.42 Submissions also commented on the frequency with which visits should be provided. The CMFS argued that the travel scheme should permit travel back to the UK every five years. The Society argued that:

The long-term impact of child migration cannot be appropriately addressed in a one-off visit to the place from which these children were sent. For these former child migrants, the locating of relatives, the developing of a sense of identity located to the place as well as to persons, the development of family relationships, is an on-going and complex undertaking that requires both time and serial opportunities.⁴⁷

7.43 The Australian Child Migrant Foundation, reflecting on the operation of their own travel scheme, argued that they came to the view that it was almost ‘a matter of

42 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.118 (Professor Plowman).

43 Submission No.129, p.45 (IAFCM&F); Submission No.132, p.46 (CMT); Submission No.54, p.18 (JLG). See also Submission No.30, p.5; Submission No.37, p.3; Submission No.93, p.22; Submission No.110, p.2; Submission No.141, p.3.

44 See, for example, *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.72 (CMFS).

45 Submission No.32, p.46 (CMT); Submission No.129, p.45 (IAFCM&F).

46 Submission No.44, p.5 (CMFS).

47 Submission No.44, pp.5-6 (CMFS).

right' for people to be funded on at least one trip back to their country of origin.⁴⁸ Another submission argued that the travel fund should provide for at least three visits home as one visit is 'not sufficient' time to reestablish family ties.⁴⁹

7.44 The Committee sought evidence on the length of time over which the scheme should operate. The CMFS suggested that the scheme should operate for a minimum of 10 years. The Society argued that there may be many applications at the start of the scheme though 'that will probably slow down in five to 10 years, maybe even sooner'. The Society saw the need for the scheme to operate as 'fairly long term' as many former child migrants would want to visit the UK more than once and that 'we are asking that they all be given a reasonable number of trips'.⁵⁰

7.45 Some evidence also indicated the need for centrally located accommodation in the United Kingdom – in London, and possibly other cities, which would serve both as a drop-in centre and short term accommodation (up to four days), and in which counselling could be provided. The CMFS stated that:

For many former child migrants, the return to their home country, the contact with families and others connected with their childhood...produces high levels of stress, anxiety and pain. The availability of counselling and personal support is imperative at this time.⁵¹

7.46 Evidence also indicated that many former Maltese child migrants expressed the need for the establishment of a half-way house in Malta for returning former child migrants.⁵²

7.47 C-BERS noted, however, that some former child migrants would not want this type of service and that it is necessary to respect an individual's choice in this matter – 'a number of the men have family or have contacts or have places they want to go to and they just want to go there—they do not want an interim place'.⁵³ C-BERS added that 'we need to be very careful in that place, and if we have counselling, that it is... non-partisan; that we do not in any way have a place in which the men feel that there is a right or a wrong way of doing things'.⁵⁴

7.48 There was strong support in evidence to the inquiry that any new travel scheme should not be means tested. The CMFS argued that 'as such travel funds are not a welfare payment but a partial compensation for past practices, they would not

48 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.116 (ACMF).

49 Submission No.126, p.5.

50 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.81 (CMFS).

51 Submission No.44, p.6 (CMFS). See also *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.72 (CMFS).

52 Report on a forum of Maltese former child migrants. See Submission No.45, Additional Information, 4.5.01, p.3 (C-BERS).

53 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.148 (C-BERS).

54 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.148 (C-BERS).

appropriately be subject to any means-testing'.⁵⁵ The ACMF, drawing on its experience of operating a travel fund, was also opposed to means testing. The Foundation added that 'it would not be necessary to means test the majority in any case because so many people have actually fallen by the wayside. We were very, very compassionate about the way we ran our criteria and I do not believe that there was any necessity to means-test it'.⁵⁶ The Foundation stated that 'once you move into the means testing arena there are significant complications involved, not just matters of privacy but actually how you measure wealth, income and all the rest of it'.⁵⁷

7.49 In relation to funding of the scheme, the Joint Liaison Group argued that the Commonwealth Government should at least match the UK Government's contribution to travel assistance by making available the equivalent of £1 million sterling.⁵⁸ The Committee questioned the Liaison Group as to whether the introduction of a government-funded scheme would lead to a reduction in C-BERS funding for travel. The Liaison Group stated that this was not the case – 'we certainly want to help, and we want to go on helping with that'.⁵⁹

7.50 The Committee received little evidence as to the probable cost of introducing such a scheme.⁶⁰ As noted above, the CMFS argued that expenditures may be higher in the initial years of the scheme but may decline over time reflecting the fact that former child migrants represent an ageing cohort.⁶¹ The ACMF, reflecting on their experience of operating their travel fund, noted that many former child migrants with the financial means funded their own travel – 'so they were not prepared to actually come to us and take precious resources from us if they could afford it themselves' – and a similar pattern may occur with the establishment of any new scheme.⁶²

7.51 The Committee raised with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs the question of establishing a Commonwealth-funded travel fund. The Department responded by stating that if a travel scheme were to be funded by the Commonwealth Government 'we would obviously have to look at the technicalities of how funding would be provided' but that it would need to be funded differently from the way the Child Migrants Trust is currently funded.⁶³

55 Submission No.44, p.5 (CMFS). See also Submission No.25, p.2; Submission No.71, p.2; Submission No.82, p.4.

56 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.109 (ACMF). See also *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.469 (Barnardos).

57 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.116 (ACMF).

58 Submission No.54, p.18 (JLG). See also *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.278 (ISS).

59 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.497 (JLG).

60 See, for example, *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.75 (CMFS).

61 Submission No.44, Additional Information, 26.2.01, p.2 (CMFS).

62 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.109 (ACMF).

63 *Committee Hansard*, 6.6.01, p.22 (DIMA). For details on the funding of the CMT see chapter 5.

Supplementation for the UK scheme

7.52 In an effort to respond to the need for additional travel assistance for many child migrants, several submissions argued that the Commonwealth and/or State Governments should provide funding to ‘top-up’ the UK scheme. This proposal was advocated as an alternative to establishing an Australian fund and was seen as a more effective way to address the unmet need in this area and the need to widen the eligibility criteria for travel and family reunions.

7.53 ISS argued that the Australian Government should urge the United Kingdom Government to expand the eligibility criteria and match that with a ‘significant contribution’.⁶⁴ NCH also argued that the UK Government ‘should expand the fund in terms of its size and duration, in recognition of its obligation to the children it helped send abroad in former years’.⁶⁵ ISS, in supporting a widening of the Fund’s eligibility criteria, added that ‘we would need some support I think socially and governmentally in Australia to give effect to that because these criteria are across the network; they are not just criteria for Australia’.⁶⁶ The ACMF argued that the Australian Government should approach the United Kingdom Government to put the case for easing the eligibility criteria.⁶⁷

7.54 Some witnesses argued that the receiving agencies should contribute to a travel fund.⁶⁸ As noted above, the Christian Brothers and some other Catholic religious orders have provided travel assistance. The Fairbridge Foundation and Fairbridge WA stated that they did not have the financial resources to provide travel assistance.⁶⁹ Barnardos expressed a similar view stating that their budget was ‘very limited’ – ‘I do not believe that Barnardos in Australia would be able to afford the number of people that would apply’.⁷⁰ The Committee considers that the arguments of the receiving agencies in regard to their purported inability to provide travel funding are unconvincing and notes that in the case of Fairbridge WA some \$2.7 million was repatriated to Fairbridge UK in the 1980s. The Committee also notes that in Queensland, the State Government argued that the relevant churches should contribute to the Forde Foundation trust fund which has been set up to assist former residents of institutions in that State.⁷¹

64 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.279 (ISS).

65 Submission No.98, p.5 (NCH).

66 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.278 (ISS).

67 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.108 (ACMF).

68 See, for example, *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.73.

69 Submission No.43, p.4 (Fairbridge Foundation); Submission No.136, p.1 (Fairbridge WA).

70 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.469 (Barnardos).

71 Queensland Government, *Queensland Government Response to Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions*, August, 1999, p.43.

7.55 ISS noted that the UK fund will end within 12 months and while there has been some suggestion that most eligible former child migrants will have applied by that time:

We feel that that is not true; we still receive many calls...from people who have just heard of the fund, and we are very fearful that many people will miss the boat, so to speak. The fund will end before they know about it or before they have completed the time-consuming process to find their family members.⁷²

7.56 ISS argued that ‘an extension of the fund and an expansion of the fund in terms of its eligibility and what it offers in support would be a very cost-effective option for the Australian government’.⁷³ ISS suggested that the Australian Government’s contribution to the UK fund should be at least equivalent to the UK Government’s level of funding of the scheme, and noted that ‘it seems to us to offer both expediency and economy of scale savings to add to an existing fund and/or existing structure’.⁷⁴ ISS(UK) emphasised this point with the Committee in London believing there was a need for the Australian government to recognise its obligation and become involved, suggesting that a pooled fund would be the simplest mechanism.

7.57 The Committee questioned the ISS on possible problems in implementing this arrangement. ISS acknowledged some difficulties with the proposal because of the different jurisdictions involved but added that:

...there are other examples of cross-jurisdictional cooperation...where funds have been put together. I am sure also that it is not insurmountable. If the Australian government were to press for an expansion of the eligibility criteria and match that with a significant contribution, then I think that would be all to the good.⁷⁵

7.58 The Department added a note of caution:

The experience of the British government in administering that travel fund to date is...that it is seen immediately as too little, confined by time, confined by the criteria that had been adopted. I think that before any such supplementation from the Australian end occurred, we would need to be pretty precise on exactly what it was we were seeking to contribute to.⁷⁶

72 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.270 (ISS). See also Submission No.51, p.6 (CCWC); Submission No.98, p.5 (NCH).

73 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.270 (ISS). See also Submission No.48, pp.4,7 and Additional Information, 5.6.01, p.2 (ISS).

74 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.278 and Submission No.48, Additional Information, 5.6.01, p.2 (ISS).

75 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.279 (ISS).

76 *Committee Hansard*, 6.2.01, p.22 (DIMA).

7.59 The Committee, nevertheless, believes that there are several advantages in the Commonwealth and State Governments, in conjunction with the receiving agencies, providing funding to supplement the UK Child Migrant Support Fund. Providing supplementary funding would be simpler administratively than the Commonwealth establishing a new fund. It would also overcome the complexity of three separate funds potentially operating at the same time – the UK travel fund, the C-BERS travel scheme and a new Australian scheme. While the Committee believes that there would need to be a firm commitment from the United Kingdom Government to additional funding of its scheme past its anticipated closing date of 2002, the Committee believes that were the United Kingdom Government not to extend its travel fund, then the Commonwealth should establish an Australian travel fund funded by the Commonwealth, States and receiving agencies.

Improving coordination

7.60 The need for greater coordination amongst the various agencies offering travel assistance schemes was also raised in evidence.

7.61 The Joint Liaison Group argued that there was a need for Commonwealth and State Governments – ‘to get better coordination and get better cooperation amongst the different agencies in the field so that the available resources are used to good effect’.⁷⁷ The Liaison Group argued that there may be gaps in the provision of travel assistance at present – ‘you need to get people together, talk about where the gaps are in the services at the moment, formulate some reasonable guidelines and then use the resources that are available to the best effect’.⁷⁸

Conclusion

7.62 The Committee believes that there is a need to provide on-going travel assistance to give former child migrants the opportunity to visit their country of birth and be reunited with their families and relatives or to visit sites of importance to them. Contact with family is an essential ingredient of personal healing and dealing with ‘unfinished business’. The Committee acknowledges the support currently available through the UK Government’s Child Migrant Support Fund and through C-BERS Services and other travel assistance arrangements. Evidence to the inquiry suggested that many former child migrants have difficulty in personally organising travel and the formalities that go with restoring contact. Evidence to the Committee indicates that these schemes have provided often immeasurable benefits for many former child migrants especially addressing their need for belonging and identity. It is also obvious to the Committee that further assistance in this area is required.

7.63 While it is difficult to establish the extent of unmet need, evidence to the Committee clearly indicates that there is a substantial current demand and the probability that this demand will continue into the immediate future. The level of

77 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.496 (JLG).

78 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, pp.497-98 (JLG).

funding earmarked for travel assistance to date under the current arrangements – £1 million under the UK travel scheme and \$1.4 million under C-BERS – is clearly inadequate. For the level of unmet demand to be met, further expenditure of funding is a necessity.

7.64 The Committee believes that the Commonwealth Government should encourage the United Kingdom Government to fund the Child Migrant Support Fund for at least another three years beyond its expiry date of 2002; and that this Fund should be supplemented by funding from the Commonwealth and State Governments and the receiving agencies.

7.65 The Committee believes that the Commonwealth Government should contribute \$1 million per year for three years initially and the State Governments should provide a combined amount of \$1 million over the same period. The Committee strongly believes that the receiving agencies, not currently providing travel funding, should also contribute to the Fund and that this should be funded by a levy on the agencies in proportion to the number of children placed in institutions under their care as a result of the child migration schemes during the 20th century, or by other means. The Committee notes that the Christian Brothers provide travel funding through C-BERS and that they therefore would not be subject to a levy.

7.66 The Committee believes that the Child Migrant Support Fund should have broader eligibility criteria than is currently the case and that the Fund should permit visits to family members as broadly defined and other relatives, such as cousins. The scheme should not be limited to visits to only immediate family members. The eligibility criteria should also allow travel for other related purposes, such as visits to family graves.

7.67 The scheme should be open to all former child migrants, regardless of means, and be available for two subsequent visits, in addition to first time visits as is currently the case. The current provision in the Fund providing for the payment of return economy airfares to the country of origin as well as an allowance for accommodation of up to 14 days for first time visits should be retained. For second and subsequent visits, the Committee believes that the amount of travel assistance provided should be limited to the payment of airfares and associated travel expenses, such as travel insurance, with accommodation and other living expenses associated with travel to be provided by the applicant, their family or from other sources.

7.68 The Committee believes that former child migrants who have undertaken previous visits, either through funded travel assistance or travel that has been self-funded should not be precluded from claiming travel funding under the Committee's proposed scheme. The Committee believes that the Fund should provide, in special circumstances, for travel funding to be provided for an accompanying carer – either a spouse or child or other person.

7.69 The Committee believes that the Commonwealth, in conjunction with other stakeholders should undertake a review of its participation in the Fund after three

years to determine the extent of continuing demand for the scheme and the adequacy of funding.

7.70 The Committee, while strongly supporting the continuation of the United Kingdom's Child Migrant Support Fund considers that should the United Kingdom Government not extend the Fund, the Commonwealth Government should establish a separate Australian travel fund to facilitate family reunions and travel for other related purposes. The Committee believes that such a scheme should be funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments and the receiving agencies as detailed below; and that the scheme should have a broad set of eligibility criteria as detailed in the recommendations below.

Recommendation 18: That the Commonwealth Government urge the United Kingdom Government to extend its contribution to the Child Migrant Support Fund for at least a further three years beyond its anticipated end in 2002.

Recommendation 19: That the Child Migrant Support Fund be supplemented by funding from the Australian Government, State Governments and receiving agencies; and that this funding comprise:

- (a) a Commonwealth Government contribution of \$1 million per year for three years initially;
- (b) a combined contribution from State Governments of \$1 million per year for three years initially; and
- (c) a contribution from receiving agencies, and that this be funded by a levy or other means on receiving agencies not currently providing travel assistance, in proportion to the number of children placed under their care as a result of the child migration schemes during the 20th century.

Recommendation 20: That the eligibility criteria for access to the Child Migrant Support Fund be broadened to:

- (a) permit visits to family members and other relatives, including aunts and uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces; and for other related purposes, such as visits to family graves;
- (b) be available for all former child migrants, including the Maltese and those who may have undertaken previous visits at their own expense;
- (c) provide for two further visits but with a reduced level of assistance, limited to the payment of airfares and associated travel expenses;
- (d) provide, in exceptional circumstances, travel funding for a spouse, child or other person as an accompanying carer; and
- (e) be subject to no means-testing requirements.

Recommendation 21: That the Commonwealth Government, together with other stakeholders, undertake a review of its participation in the Child Migrant Support Fund after three years to determine the adequacy of funding from Australian sources for the fund and the extent of continuing demand for travel from former child migrants.

Recommendation 22: That, should the Child Migrant Support Fund not be extended by the United Kingdom Government, the Commonwealth Government establish a separate Australian travel scheme to assist former child migrants to visit their country of origin, and that this scheme be funded by contributions from the Commonwealth, State Governments and receiving agencies as detailed in Recommendation 19; and that the scheme have a broad set of eligibility criteria as detailed in Recommendation 20.



Committee members meet with Barnardos UK in London