

My submission to the Senate Inquiry on Government Compensation Payments

I was made a ward of the state at six years of age. I spent the next six years of my life being moved from family to family, house to house (9 times in 6yrs). I got abused sexually, physically and emotionally. I had no contact with my parents or siblings. I didn't even know where they were. I was constantly told that my parents didn't want me. That they did not want any of us children. I had no security in my life being moved all the time, making me feel terribly isolated and alone. I cried constantly within my heart and when no one was looking (which was normally in my bed at night). I would cry myself to sleep, while my heart screamed out for my family. Not knowing what was going on or why I was not allowed to be with my family. I was scared that if someone caught me crying, I would be moved on to another house, another family. This I definitely did NOT! Want. I had no trust in anyone, as I would always be told one thing, and the opposite would happen. Or it wouldn't happen at all. Believing I would be sent away (moved again) if I ever told anyone about the sexual abuse. Believing I was not important and that I meant nothing to anyone, as not even my parents wanted me. I thought that no one would believe me if I tried to say anything about the sexual abuse. Before going to my last placement I had given up on everyone and everything. I didn't care if I lived or died and I believed that no one else really cared either. I secretly wished in my heart that the earth would just swallow me up. I would scream in my heart for everyone to go away and leave me alone. I longed to die, so the pain and suffering I was feeling would stop. Over time I learnt how to block it out from my mind, what was happening to me, the sexual abuse, the loneliness, my feelings and my emotions. I believed that if I didn't have feelings and emotions then I couldn't be hurt me anymore. I made myself become numb to everything and everyone around me.

Things did improve somewhat for me at my last placement, aged almost 12yrs. Sexual abuse was the only abuse to occur at this placement and still I could not speak up for fear of being institutionalised. So it continued along with my suffering, loneliness and isolation. That was until I decided at around 14 yrs that I could not handle anymore of what was being done to me. I wanted it to STOP! So I ran away from home. This turned out to be the worst thing I could have done, but I felt there was no other way of making it stop. After being caught and dealt with I was returned to my foster family and the sexual abuse continued. I stayed with this family until I married at 17yrs. As an adult I feel my life has been destroyed. The pain, suffering and emotional turmoil I felt as a child is still with me, every day. I have a void in my life that I know will never be healed. I don't socialise very much because I do not trust anyone and feel unsafe with more than a few people around me. Because of the constant moving from house to house, family-to-family, as a child, I find it very difficult to settle in one place, or allow anyone to become emotionally close to me. I feel I have no bond or connection to anyone or anything. I fight every day with myself to hold in the tears and the pain I feel. Even my working life has been affected, in that, I am unable to continue my

studies and have been advised to sort out the problems I have from my past before undertaking my diploma in youth work (I have completed certificate II and III in youth work)

I recently put in an application to Redress WA. Which distressed me no end. Having to bring forward in my mind, things that I have had to push to the back for so long, just so I could cope with life. But I did, hoping something good would come out of it. I believed that finally someone was going to listen to what I had to say and acknowledge what I have been through. The information in my application to Redress WA only touched on the surface of my childhood; it is by no means everything. This I feel would be the case for many of us state wards. I felt that possibly all my pain and suffering had not been for nothing. I hoped I would get enough money to be able to get away from everyone and everything for a while, to find some direction in my life and to be able to get help (counselling) in overcoming the difficulties and problems I am having, allowing me to move forward in my life. This hope was short lived, when not long after putting in my application it was announced that the Redress WA ex-gratia payment was to drop from \$80,000 to \$45,000 max. The disappointment I felt on hearing this was further heightened when I received my letter from Redress to say that my application had been processed and it was felt that I was entitled to the full \$45,000 (\$80,000 if the government had honoured what they were offering in the first instance). All my hopes vanished. I felt cheated, my application nothing more than a joke. I accepted this amount ONLY because I didn't want miss out completely. It certainly has not helped me move forward with my life nor has anything changed, in any way, in my life as result of this payment. All it has done is heighten my distrust in everyone, especially the government. Redress WA to me has been nothing more than a smack in the face and made me feel that the pain and suffering that I and many other state wards have been subjected too (as far as the government is concerned) was and is nothing more than a joke.

It was only by chance that I found out about Redress WA and I have to wonder how many other people, that were state wards, have missed out because they did not know about Redress WA. Or how many have missed it because they found out about it too late, as I almost did. It was only because I decided to have a read of our local paper (something I don't do often) that I came to know about it. I spotted a small advertisement about Redress WA. At that time I only had about 4 months to get my application filled out and lodged before the closing date. Redress WA was supposedly first announced in December 2007 and the scheme was opened for applications in May 2008 with the closing off date being April 2009 for applications, so why is it that there are still, to this day people who know nothing about it. Why has it not been more widely advertised? Was it because the government really did know, how many of us were out there, suffering (I believe they do), or is it because they don't really want to know how many lives they have destroyed. Why should it matter what state you were in, the type of abuse or where you had been placed. We have all suffered and are still suffering. Just because you were put in a mental institution, or was not sexually abused etc does not mean that those people were abused any less or are

suffering any less. Abuse is abuse, no matter what shape or form it comes in, no matter where it happens, or who inflicts it, we are the ones being penalised because of it. We are the ones suffering, our lives destroyed.

And why the difference in the amount of monies being paid from state to state. All abuse is the same and should be treated as such, equally across Australia. All forms of abuse cause damage, irreparable damage to a child, not only as a person, but an adult, a parent and as a partner. Every part of a person's life is affected by abuse, any abuse. When I married at 17 yrs I still felt that I had no one with whom I could turn to for support, no one that I felt really close to and comfortable enough with, that I could trust to open up my heart and share what was on my mind. Someone I could talk to when things got too hard or if something was bothering me, so I continued to keep everything in. This of course took its toll on me, (so much so that I tried twice to take my own life) and my marriage fell apart, ending in divorce. I was devastated! Everything I had ever wanted was gone. The love, the stability, the sense of belonging, everything, was gone. All this I had to push to the back of my mind, as I had children now, that I knew needed me. I knew I had to be strong for them. I eventually lost my children because I did not want a long drawn out court battle and I did not want them to suffer anymore than they had and were already. I wanted them to be together, to grow up as sisters, to have some stability back in their lives as quickly as possible. At least they would have each other to turn to for support and so they would have that connection (bond) between them that siblings are meant to have with each other. I didn't want them to suffer the way I had, losing my siblings and my parents. This decision took me 3 yrs to come to terms with. 3yrs of crying, literally day and night, as my one and only reason for living was gone. I didn't know how I was going to cope or what to do. Again I just wished I could die, but all I could do was push it all to the back of my mind and take each day as it came. After many years of being alone, I again married, and again things have fallen apart, my marriage ending in divorce and my children from this marriage suffering also. All of this because of the damage done to me, as a result of the years of abuse, neglect, isolation and loneliness. I don't know how to communicate properly with others or to speak up about things that are troubling me. I was never asked about what I wanted or how I felt about things. I would never even get told that I was being moved, before it happened, it was one of those things, it just happened. Because of this I have never felt at ease, the not knowing when my time would be up and I would be moved again. I was not even told why I had to move from each of the families I was placed with. I was never left in one place or family long enough to form any sort of bond or close relationship with those around me, leaving me unable to make the close connection (bond) needed for a relationship (marriage) to have any chance of working. I am unable to let anyone get really close to me (emotionally) for fear of being hurt. I found very early on, that if I didn't let anyone get close to me (emotionally) then it didn't hurt anywhere near as much, when I got moved on, which in turn made me feel insecure and even more untrusting of people. I know that I will never find true happiness. There will always be a void in my life, like part of me is missing. The part

that only the love of your parents and siblings (your family) can give you. I feel I am constantly searching for something that I can never and will never find. Even as a parent I am very unsure and constantly questioning myself on my ability to be a good parent and make the right choices for my children. I also know I am very over protective of my children. I rarely left them with babysitters or even friends when they were little, because of my lack of trust in people and my fear of them getting abused and suffering as I have.

I feel this government has again let me (us) state wards down, BADLY!

It's the same story all over again for me. The broken promises. Yet again, I (we) are told one thing, our hopes lifted, a glimmer of happiness on the horizon, an opportunity to move forward in our lives, to seek out counselling and support to overcome some of the problems, fears, pain and suffering that was instilled in us, as children through our maltreatment, growing up as state wards, only to have it all snatched away at the last minute, left to deal with our lives, problems and suffering alone and with no support still.

It has not just been the government that has failed us as children, many churches and charities have inflicted and contributed to the pain, suffering and problems that many state wards now feel and have. They need to be held responsible and made to be accountable for their actions also. I feel the government needs to show leadership, take responsibility and back up their well meant "SORRY" with real money. We need compensation for the years of abuse and neglect, for the emotional and psychological damage done to us as a result of our childhoods. Damage that some will never overcome. Compensation for our poor education, our poor health care and poor dental care we got while in state care. This could be achieved if the government created a national scheme that every state, contributed to equally, along with churches and charities concerned contributing too. They all played a part in creating the problems now destroying the lives of state wards and so should be made to be a part of the solution. We are all children of Australia and so should be treated equally. And why is it that others in Australia can get much larger ex-gratia payments but have not suffered as we have?