

Submission to Senate Enquiry on Review of Government Compensation Payments

My name is            I am 45 years old and I spent part of my childhood in Institutional 'Care'. I was placed into care as a result of desertion by my father and mental ill health of my mother. My brother and sister were also institutionalised. I spent time in Nazareth House (Camberwell) and St. Vincent's Boys Home (South Melbourne).

During my time in these institutions we were also fostered out (usually during school term breaks or long weekends) to families.

I want to keep my submission brief, and I realise that I cannot therefore hope to get across just how much my childhood experiences have adversely affected my own mental health, especially as my own children grow – it reminds you of how abnormal was your own childhood.

To be brief, I was beaten, sexually assaulted, emotionally and mentally traumatised at the hands of the Christian Brothers, the Sisters of Nazareth Nuns and the foster families (adults and children) who were charged with my 'care'. Care that the Government of the day was meant to oversee.

How would you like to live with the never ending feelings of fear and worthlessness that I endure EVERY SINGLE DAY? Imagine that every time you close your eyes you relive the assaults of your childhood. Imagine how several times a week you think about suicide. Imagine spending years of your childhood so terrified that you virtually never spoke. Think about how socially inept you became then as an adult. Imagine ALWAYS having this little tinge of fear, irrationally but ever present as an adult.

Now imagine you want to seek justice – but you can't, because you were so afraid as a child that you have no ability to recall names of perpetrators, you can't even conjure the faces (? repressed in your mind) – but by golly you can sure relive the pain and suffering. In my case I only need look in the mirror to see the large lines of scars across my lower back and buttocks from beatings – I don't ever get to escape that. Now realise that because, apparently, no records were kept/all records are lost... that you cannot ever hope to bring any persons to justice.

Where is justice? Our country has a fragmented array of redress, sometimes available to State Wards but not 'private placements' (believe me, it mattered not how you ended in these places, you all got mistreated the same). Some states have time limitations, my own State (Victoria) offers absolutely nothing. I can't relive my trauma in the courts, it will destroy me.

It is time for the Government to provide financial redress to all Forgotten Australians / Care Leavers. The National Apology in 2009 led us to believe that, at last, our Government believed us when we told them what had happened to us. How can you believe us but not want to make true amends. Our justice system is well used to a system of compensation for crime. I am a victim of crime. The Government was meant to protect me from crime as a child and it failed.

The churches and Government owe me financial redress. Redress would enable me to seek the services I need to help my mental health. How can I get the counselling I need, which is an ongoing requirement, not a once fixed – all better situation, when I must work to support my family? When I get really low I would love to be able to go away for a few days, a couple of times a year. This would give my family a break from my depression but how can I do that when I can only just manage financially as is?

We are owed redress, we are owed compensation for the crimes perpetrated on us. We should not have to relive our traumas through the courts. We must be believed, respected and treated equally, no regard to private versus state ward, catholic church versus state institution.

I live in hope but grieve in private – every single day.