

Community Affairs References Committee

Senate Inquiry

National Council Of Voluntary Child Care Organisations

(NCVCCO)

Submission

Inquiry Into Child Migration

Submission by NCVCCO

Introduction:

As a direct result of the House of Commons Health Select Committees' findings and recommendations into the Welfare of former British child migrants the British Government asked NCVCCO (National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations) to set up and manage the Child Migrant Central Information Index.

The Child Migrant Index is computerised and comprises details of 17,136 child migrants provided by Barnardo's, Fairbridge, Middlemore Homes, The Children's Society (TCS), NCH and Catholic Children's Welfare Council (CCWC) from their available records. The Index has been available to perform searches since November 1999; to date there has been over 190 enquiries and 17 successful matches. Additionally, NCVCCO holds the Western Australian Referral Index that contains the details of 2949 child migrants who arrived in Western Australia; hence there are over 20,000 child migrant details located at NCVCCO.

NCVCCO today offers an advisory service to child migrant enquirers, as to where personal and private records can be found, where help and support may be available as well as a signposting service for those who are eligible to use the Index. The project is funded for three years, from April 1999 to March 2002.

Bearing the above in mind, NCVCCO has submitted this paper to address point B of the Community Affairs References Committee terms of reference – namely: ***the extent and operation of measures undertaken or required to assist former child migrants to reunite with their families.***

Within this submission the following will be covered:

- Measures undertaken to create the Index & assist former child migrants
- Child Migrant Details on the Index
- Eligibility to use the Index
- The Future of the Index

Measures Undertaken To Create The Index And Assist Child Former Child Migrants:

Creation of the Index:

The Department of Health (DoH) decided that any database created was to be geared towards those child migrants who were sent primarily to Canada, Australia and New Zealand on government assisted schemes between 1920 to the late 1960's. This was in the hope and expectation that some of these child migrants may still be alive and could be reunited with family members.

NCVCCO contacted the main organisations who were involved in child migration e.g. Barnardo's, CCWC, NCH, TCS, Fairbridge, Middlemore Homes and the Salvation Army requesting them to participate in this government initiative and to start compiling comprehensively their child migrant information pertaining to the above criteria in an uniform format in order for it to be programmed into an Access database that had been commissioned.

This exercise proceeded to take many months as information was not ready and deadlines were continually extended. Over a period of time, child migrant details were filtered through to NCVCCO and programmed into the Index. The last batch of child migrant details was received in September 2000. It is important to note that none of the information provided to NCVCCO was in the precise format requested. The expanded Index which contains all the details provided by the Sending Agencies was finally available in October 2000 nearly one year after its original deadline date – it contains the names of 17,136 child migrants.

The creation of the Index at NCVCCO has not been a straightforward exercise. Although the initial aim was to have all the child migrant details installed into the database from the Sending Agencies at one time, this has not been the case. The efficiency of the database e.g. in terms of the child migrant details, is dependent upon the agencies providing the details on time or at all. The Salvation Army informed NCVCCO that they would not be contributing details to the Index, as they no longer have child migrant records. This clearly effects the number of people NCVCCO can help in signposting them towards their Sending Agency as there is significant missing data. The data also does not include other examples of child, youth or family migration.

Project Steering Group:

A Child Migrant Central Information Index (CMCII) Steering Group was established to provide an opportunity for users of the service, NCVCCO Trustees, sponsoring government departments and others participating in the

child migrant initiative to be involved and contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the service NCVCCO is providing.

Department of Health Leaflet:

The intention of the leaflet entitled 'Former British Child Migrants' is to provide former child migrants with a comprehensive overview of the support and assistance that is available in the UK as well as in the countries where they are now living.

NCVCCO assisted the Department of Health in designing the leaflet and is responsible for printing and distributing the leaflet to enquirers. Copies of the leaflet have also been sent out to the Sending Agencies in the UK, all the agencies that are mentioned in the leaflet, National Archive Centres and High Commissions in the relevant countries to distribute to their own enquirers and staff.

Protocols:

Protocols were written by NCVCCO to act as service guidelines for the project team and enquirers.

Promotional Strategy:

A promotional strategy was produced to highlight the service in all the relevant countries and maximize its use by the targeted group. There was a tension between proactive publicity for the Index and concerns at the possible increased demands on the Sending Agencies to trace records for family members, provide counselling and arrange reunification meetings. This has now been addressed; in addition to contacts with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies there will be increased use of newspapers and the media. Adverts on the Index have already appeared in The Australian and The Western Australian; more advertisements will appear in Australian newspapers as well as in the New Year. Press releases have also been sent out to the media in the relevant countries to renew interest and promote the service.

Child Migrant Details on The Index:

As previously stated there are 17,136 child migrant details on the Index that have been provided to NCVCCO by the participating Sending Agencies. The following table represents the number of child migrants and the country to which they were sent.

Country	Total Child Migrants
Australia	7446
Canada	8248
New Zealand	1
Not Indicated	1441
Total	17,136

Along with this NCVCCO also has the Western Australian Referral Index that contains the details of 2949 child migrants, thus at present there is something in the region of 20,000 child migrant details held by NCVCCO.

One of the concerns that has been expressed to NCVCCO by enquirers and agencies is that the Index would be even more efficient if it incorporated details of child migrants who sailed from 1900, was not restricted to government assisted schemes and included child migrant details from other agencies who were involved in child migration.

NCVCCO has contacted the Sending Agencies asking them which other agencies should also be approached for details and a list of names were provided. The Agencies who participated in the creation of the CMCII stated they had records starting from 1900 and there were 36,730 in total. This is a phenomenal number. However if it was agreed these details could be installed into the Index, it would take the Sending Agencies considerable time to compile this information based on previous experience and it would be time consuming for NCVCCO as these details would arrive in various formats and would have to be programmed into the database.

It has been the prevailing experience of child migrants that they have had difficulty in proving their existence through official records. NCVCCO would like to offer an unrestrictive service which does not wish to compound this undermining for child migrants sense of identity by offering yet another experience of being told they do not exist because their details have not been included into the Index. The Chair of the CMCII Steering Group has written to the Department of Health informing them of NCVCCO desire to widen the time frame of the Index and include family and youth migration schemes into the Index.

The Western Australian Referral Index is an additional beneficial tool for NCVCCO and operates as a stand alone Index. We are now able to locate details of child migrants who were sent to Western Australia on government assisted schemes that are not NCCVCCO's Index. If other states and countries could also provide NCVCCO with their child migrant details a comprehensive Index could be created now rather than at a later stage.

The CMCII Steering Group has also asked the Child Migrant Trust whether it would be possible to include the child migrant details held on their database into the Index. Obviously this would have to be cross-referenced to avoid duplication.

Eligibility to Use the Index:

All enquirers receive the DoH leaflet and advice on where personal and public records are held. Searches on the Index are only available to child migrant themselves, their nominated representative and parents and siblings of child migrants – these criteria have been set by the Department of Health.

NCVCCO have found these criteria to be restrictive as many of the enquiries to perform searches come directly from descendants of child migrants and not from the child migrant themselves – as is the case in Canada, where many of the child migrants are now deceased or in their 90's. There have been 53 enquiries from descendants to date.

Even though NCVCCO is aware that the Index was created under the premise of being primarily for living child migrants, our experience has revealed the service would be more beneficial if it was extended to include first generation descendants of child migrants, as these are the individuals who are more likely to use the service as time goes on.

NCVCCO has been informed by numerous agencies in Canada including the High Commission in Ottawa that the constant complaint by child migrant enquirers is that the service is not open to descendants; this is the same complaint the project team has to deal with. If the DoH extended the searching facility to first generation descendants e.g. sons and daughters of child migrants it would enable NCVCCO to provide the name of the Sending Agency to the descendant - thus helping the wider family to be reunited. Although NCVCCO has asked the DoH to include descendants in their criterion of eligibility, we have been informed that descendants will presently remain ineligible to use the Index - as it is for living child migrants and not to be used as a tool for tracing. Notwithstanding, NCVCCO is doing all that it can to help child migrants find the name of their Sending Agency and reunite with their family, based on the criteria that have been set by the Department of Health.

Future of the Index:

The levels of enquirers to NCVCCO have been slow to date given the potential number of child migrants and their families. The Department of Health has needed to reallocate the funding available for the support of former child migrants and as a result our grant has been reduced and the project team will now be an Administrator only. This will ultimately have a tremendous effect on the efficiency of the service.

There has been a history of delays across all elements of the project e.g. the Sending Agencies not completing their Indexes to time, NCVCCO being advised to restrict publicity of the Index in newspapers and also being informed that everyone knew about the service. Recent research revealed this was not the case along with the restrictive nature of who can use the service have all contributed to the low levels of enquiries and effect point B of the Committees' terms of reference.

Notwithstanding, there has been much discussion on the future of the Index. NCVCCO would like to see all the organisations in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the UK involved in child migration pulling together in the future, so that there is one central source for child migrant enquirer's to contact.

Although NCVCCO had not anticipated hosting the Index beyond the three year project, if the Australian Government is interested in expanding the child migrant details on the Index from 1900 and widening the availability, it could be considered as an ongoing project at NCVCCO or another independent agency. This would, of course, need financial resourcing and we would look to all governments who received child migrants within their country to contribute to this.

It is important that the Index is actively used after the three year project at NCVCCO to help child migrants and their descendants reunite with family members. We would hope that such a service could be provided and not limited merely as a tool for historical research.

If the Index can be extended to include child migrant details starting from 1900, the eligibility widened to include first generation descendants of child migrants as well as having other agencies involved in child migration details incorporated into the Index, then NCVCCO or a future organisation will be able to fulfill point B on the Community Affairs References Committee – Inquiry into Child Migration.