

CHAPTER 4

TREATMENT AND CARE OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS

Do I often wonder what it would have been like to have been left in a loving home with my family intact, to share Christmas morning with all my brothers, sisters, grandparents and mother? Sure I do! I do not delude myself that it would have been all roses and always loving. We would have had many trying situations but we would have had the only unconditional love that is available, that of the love of family.¹

4.1 The highly evocative and emotive language that is constantly repeated through the submissions and evidence received from across Australia is testimony to the nature of the treatment of children in institutions over many decades. Language such as 'my sentence', 'concentration camp', 'prison', 'hell-hole', 'felt like a convict', 'entombed in institutions', 'inmates', 'incarcerated', 'internship', 'tortured', 'nightmare', 'release', 'outside world', 'victims', 'survivors' graphically describe the feelings that remain about the treatment received at an early age of their lives.

4.2 It must be remembered at the outset of this chapter that a large number of the children placed into the 'care' of the state, especially during the 1950s and 60s, were status offenders who had been charged with neglect, no visible means of support, being uncontrollable or exposed to moral danger. These were not crimes of the child. They were crimes of the parents or, in a sense, crimes of a society that at the time was not providing anywhere near sufficient help and assistance to families living in underprivileged social circumstances and often desperate poverty. As one witness succinctly said: 'We were not bad then and we are not bad now'.

4.3 Yet these children were placed in receiving depots and institutions with other children who were guilty of various misdemeanours or more serious criminal activity. The many submissions and evidence from those children who found themselves in this situation at such a young and vulnerable age can only give a sense of the full extent of the trauma and horror they experienced when confronted with this totally foreign world and way of life.

4.4 One of the most tragic consequences of this time that was expressed in so many submissions is a powerful feeling of guilt and shame that has haunted people throughout their life. These unnecessarily mistaken feelings are the result of attitudes beaten, both psychologically and physically, into children during their time at so many of the institutions. But the children were not guilty. The events and experiences of that time were not their fault.

1 *Submission 272, p.4.*

4.5 As will be seen in this chapter such events and experiences included being repeatedly and constantly subjected to deliberate and callous cruelty, humiliation, abuse and deprivation of basic necessities of life such as healthy food and diet, proper clothing, medical care and education, and most tellingly the emotional support, love and psychological necessities required by a young maturing child. A breakdown by type of abuse described by care leavers in their submissions is in Appendix 7.

Receiving children into care

Arrival

I snatched at each shaft of the iron fence as the policeman pulled us towards the great double gate. The gravel crunched under our feet as we drew near the dark-red building. Looking up to the balcony on the second floor, Billy read to us the cast iron words 'ORPHAN ASYLUM 1865'. This was a grim place, this Ballarat Orphanage. Solid, like a fortress. (Sub 18)

The very first thing I saw of my destination was a very large steel gate. I remember the clang it made when it was shut and the sound of a bunch of keys being turned. (Parkside Baltara – Sub 278)

'I arrived at a large grey depressing looking building which was Bidura.' Being taken to Bidura was a revelation to many – 'Bidura was our first stop and what a culture shock it was coming to this cold dismal institution'.

I felt my life had come to an end after the door was closed behind me. I missed my mother enormously and used to cry myself to sleep at night, the feelings of loneliness and isolation were terrifying. I was scared and I wondered what would become of me. (SA Nedlands – Sub 231)

They took me to that terrible place called Parramatta Girls' Home...I am quite sure that I was in shock – with the big high wall around it and all gates and doors all locked, no way out no one with a smile or a bit of kindness – I was there for a long time. (Parramatta – Sub 377)

Health checks, delousing and body searches

4.6 Reception at some institutions involved a number of health and hygiene procedures. Delousing by cutting and washing hair in kerosene was commonly practiced. However, the manner by which procedures such as internal examinations were performed was most traumatic, especially for young girls who in some instances were not even teenagers.

Upon arrival each individual was stripped searched in the full sense of the term, made to take a shower and had delousing solution applied to their hair. You were then issued with a shapeless uniform, some underwear and sandals with no laces or thongs. The institutional programming had begun. (Wilson – Sub 58)

I was subjected to a humiliating, distressing, and painful internal examination by a doctor, who used heavy stainless steel instruments. I had never been examined internally prior to this, and was absolutely destroyed. (Parramatta – Sub 284)

On arrival back at Bidura I was given the standard vaginal tests...When I protested I was told they knew "how quickly I would open my legs for a boy!" *I was 9 years old! I had no idea what they were talking about.* (Sub 258)²

4.7 Dr Joanna Penglase, in her thesis *Orphans of the Living*, under a section titled 'State-sanctioned rape' notes there was a provision in the NSW Child Welfare Act 1939 for certifying wards were free of venereal disease. However it appeared thousands of girls were given vaginal examinations on the pretext of testing for 'promiscuity'. Dr Penglase quotes from an interview with a child welfare department field officer who in referring to this procedure commented it 'was just straight out assault, there's no doubt about it, it's a wonder somebody hasn't complained about being assaulted all those years ago'.³

Removal of belongings and clothes

I was taken to a room where my bag containing everything I owned in my life was taken away and nothing was ever returned. Even the clothes I had on were taken from me as I was told to put on the stock clothing. (Bidura – Sub 351)⁴

Royleston was a terrible place to find yourself, at any age. Each time you entered, you were reduced to a manageable unit, private property was removed and never seen again, Government day clothes were issued and you were given a number, this number was your tooth brush number. (Royleston – Sub 321)

She confiscated all my clothes, all my belongings, then used a pair of large black shears to cut off my shoulder length hair. There was no care taken to style the hair, it was HACKED.... I was issued with regulation clothing, a number (43), horrible long dresses made of rough material, clumpy shoes and disgusting bloomers and singlets. I was not given a bra. (Parramatta – Sub 284)

The state wards...were sent to Winlaten remand centre. This had a deeply emotional effect on me, as I was treated like a prisoner. I had to strip, then I was required to put on clothes they provided. I was confined to an exercise yard during the day then locked in a bedroom on my own at night. (Sub 166)

I was sent to Lynwood Hall at Guildford. Every thing that my foster parents had given me, clothes, jewellery, shoes, my treasures and my bank account were taken from me. I never saw any of them again. (Lynwood – Sub 325)

2 Graphic stories of internal examinations, especially at Bidura where the doctor was nicknamed Dr Finger, were reported, eg *Submissions* 272, 315, 407 – Bidura; 39, 298, 325, 377 – Parramatta.

3 *Submission* 63, *Orphans of the Living*, pp.237-240 (Dr Penglase).

4 Removal of personal belongings, toys and clothing to be replaced by standard issue was common, eg *Submissions* 217 – Neerkol; 231 – SA, Nedlands; 297 – St John's Goulburn; 382 - SA Bexley; 413 – Royal Park.

4.8 Many care leavers reported presents and other gifts being routinely removed from the children; of being searched upon return from outside visits and having food packages, clothing and comics taken.

I received a parcel from an Aunt, it was a beautiful hand-knitted red jumper which I never wore as it was taken away from me and I didn't know what happened to it until I saw it being used to wash the floor. For a little girl who was so pleased with her new jumper it was devastating. (Salvation Army, Cottesloe – Sub 184)

We were never allowed to keep the presents as the nuns used to take them off us when we got back to the orphanage and would sell them at their fetes. (St Joseph's Subiaco – Sub 172)

My mother used to visit us every 2-4 weeks. I can still visualise her coming up the hill carrying two shopping bags with some goodies and toys for us, but they were always taken off us when she left. (Parkerville – Sub 181)

I never owned a Doll or Teddy Bear. Those that did had to leave them in a "Special Room" on the top floor, where they would be shown to visitors, but rarely taken down for us kids to play with. (WR Black – Sub 409)

4.9 Letters were regularly censored at best or simply not delivered. The Committee heard of one 70 year old lady who accessed her DOCS file only to discover that 'inside were letters, letters that her Father had written to her and which she never received, letters also from her siblings which she never received and letters that she had written to her Father that hadn't been posted...Ivy has always wondered why her Father didn't reply to her letters'.⁵

Physical environment and living conditions

Buildings and accommodation

The buildings we grew up in were unsuitable. They were architecturally marvellous castles, but growing up in huge cold empty spaces that did not resemble family homes at all was quite traumatising...for little children. (Burnside – *Committee Hansard* 3.2.04)

What a shock! This place had bars on the windows every door was locked, the staff all jangled when they walked as the keys hung from the waist. (Lynwood Hall – Sub 258)

I was sent to Mittagong. Mittagong was a large property Federation style buildings with contemporary add on schoolrooms and a relative modern building for small children. Mittagong was a horror show. (Sub 321)

Now my life lay within the walls of the convent. These walls were at least ten feet high with a thick wrought iron gate at the front. I guess I had become institutionalised because I rarely thought about life on the outside and concentrated more on survival where I was. (GS Oakleigh – Sub 423)

Food

The best that could be said about the food was that it was regular and recurrently basic. Bread and dripping ('flop') was our common breakfast with a mug of lukewarm tea. The main meals were routinised: you could tell what day of the week it was by what we were eating. The menu was totally predictable. And there was never enough. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

I have become a vegetarian as a result of often vomiting up meat that was off and we could smell was off before we ate it, but were forced to eat it anyway. (Protestant Federation Home, Dulwich Hill – Sub 311)⁶

My first memory of Goodwood is of the food – the lack of it. I can now only recall being hungry all the time. I can remember licking plates but I could not have been much older than 4 or 5. (Goodwood – Sub 419)

We were always kept near starvation point at Westbrook. All the best produce that we grew was sent to the markets to be sold. We were left with only the maggoty, the mouldy, the weevilly and the stale. I am not exaggerating. I wish I were. We were not allowed to have butter on our bread (even though we produced our own), while the warders and their families received all the milk, cream and butter they wanted. The animals we raised – mainly cows and pigs – were better fed than us boys. (Sub 141)

The freshest part of the food actually moved. (Box Hill – Sub 148)⁷

My memories of meal times at the orphanage were all very similar to this – being forced to eat food we did not like, being hit and removed from the table if we objected and being separated from my siblings. (Sandgate – Sub 412)

4.10 Many compared the standard of their food with that which the nuns or other staff were served.

I was made to work every morning and evening in the nun's dining room and kitchen...They ate wonderful food; fresh peaches and roast lamb. I had never tasted anything like this before. I used to steal all the scraps and give them to my sister (St Joseph's Lane Cove – Sub 95)

The officers did not eat the same food as us. They were seated on a stage looking down at us eating their lovely roast meals, whilst we were eating horrible stews. (Salvation Army, Nedlands – Sub 231)

4.11 Many also reported, especially in Catholic and Salvation Army institutions, that at meal times there was strictly no talking allowed. To talk would result in a strike across the back or head with a cane or other implement.

6 Being forced to eat vomited food was not isolated, *Submissions* 5 and 108 – Nazareth Houses, Vic; 120 – WR Black; 142 – Blackwood House; 266 – SA Camberwell.

7 Having to eat food that was rancid or containing weevils was reported by many care leavers.

4.12 With food and diet being basic and insufficient, children learned to scavenge or supplement their diet through other means.

While we worked in the garden there was always the chance of a bit extra to eat, and we thought it well worth the risk. We'd break the tops off carrots then put the top back in the ground, after consuming the carrot. Potatoes were eaten raw as well. With them it was just a matter of digging at the side of the plant and pulling out the potato. This was called 'bandicooting'. (Ballarat Orphanage – Conf Sub 6)

There were lots of orchards around the place, so we would raid them when we could. Also used to drink the milk before it went through the separator, and would also swallow raw eggs when I could get hold of them from the chooks. One thing we did learn as kids was to be crafty, that's how we survived. (Parkerville – Conf Sub 44)

Clothing

All my clothes were hand me downs from the other kids and given out daily from a pile on the table. (Kardinia House – Sub157)

We were known as 'home' or 'orphanage kids' just by our clothing – I felt very stigmatised. (Sub 111)

Clothing 200 growing children was almost as great a task as feeding them. Uniformity was best, for reasons of economy and practicality. Most of our clothes were hand-me-downs, and like the boots, were expected to last for ever...Saturday mornings we lined up for fresh clothes. Socks and singlets every Saturday; clean pyjamas and shirts every second Saturday; fresh pants once a month...Underpants were unknown until we were at secondary school. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

We were not allowed to wear our shoes and were barefooted the whole time we were there, except when we were in a public place ie, outside the confines of the home. (Salvation Army, Nedlands – Sub 231)

4.13 The non-wearing of shoes was common-place across institutions, with many recollecting the pain of going to and from school in bare feet on gravel roads. The only time many children were allowed to wear shoes was on special outings or if important visitors came.

I can remember crying all the way to school in winter as my feet really hurt – chilblains were common – and in summer we would get blisters because the road was so hot. (Sub 181)

Personal hygiene

I remember while we were there that we only got a bath once a week and that the same bath water was used for all the boys. (Ardill House – Sub 199)

At Nazareth House we had a bath once a week, this bathing ritual was performed with me wearing a calico gown so as I wouldn't look at my body or see my reflection in the water. (Sub 111)

Friday night was bath time in the toddlers' block. We soaked ten at a time in a big raised bath. The big girls scrubbed and polished us one by one and pushed us out quickly to make way for the next lot... When we graduated to the big kids' block, we had a shower on Saturday mornings. The system was as efficient as a factory assembly line: six shower outlets to each of five rows, thirty boys at a time. Sixty boys could be done in ten minutes flat. No privacy, no dressing gowns and you shared a towel with the mob. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

To stop us getting tinea (athlete's foot) we had to all wash our feet in a bathtub before we got into the showers, that was exactly the way to spread it and I would (after contracting it a few months after I arrived) spend nights tearing my feet & toes to pieces, they were so raw & bloody at times, I could barely walk on them...(King Edward Newcastle – Sub 351)

In the early years we cleaned our teeth with salt rubbed on our fingers. Later, in our teens, we got a toothbrush. Even then, there was no toothpaste. The dentist was called in emergencies only. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

4.14 Many girls complained of the lack of education when menstruation commenced and described how they had thought there was something terribly wrong with them. Access to sanitary items was heavily controlled – 'when we wanted one we had to ask a staff member and wait til she unlocked the cupboard and gave us one in front of other children' – 'we had to ask the staff (males included) for one pad at a time and it was written in a book'. The humiliation of actually having to show a soiled pad before receiving another was vividly recalled by many care leavers. No allowance was made for girls who had heavy periods – 'for 18 months I had to stuff toilet paper, lots of it down my undies especially at school'.

When we had our periods we were given a bag with 6 large pieces of rag in it and with our name on it. Once used we had to scrub these until spotless... (Newtown, Hobart – Sub 208)

Depersonalisation and other forms of psychological abuse

The whole time I was in the institutions all I wanted to do was not to be seen, I just wanted to disappear so I wouldn't be singled out.

4.15 The impact on an impressionable child of being constantly told they were good for nothing, would amount to nothing, were evil, were the devil's child, were worthless, were scum of the earth and not fit for normal society, were a nobody, were not wanted by their mother or anybody else, were sluts, whores and prostitutes, had come from the gutter and would end in the gutter cannot be overemphasised. It is little wonder that such abuse and negative reinforcement destroyed the self esteem of so many who have remained scarred through their adult lives.

All my life, as a child in those dreadful homes I was told I was 'ugly', 'would end up a prostitute' and 'should never have been born'. It took me years of struggle to even realise I was a person... It is only recently I have gained enough confidence to believe I am a decent person and as good as everyone else...we really never knew what we were. (Sub 95)

Most of the Christian Brothers made sarcastic remarks to destroy ones innate personality and self worth. The perpetual drive to snuff out the spirit of the individual by inflicting them with senseless brutality and humiliation to conform to the grinding regimented life of the institutions was in the main successful. This would ensure the full potential of many kids in these institutions would be snuffed out. (Sub 365)

Because of being constantly told I was nothing & would end up in the gutter & no one wanted me or ever would, the core negative beliefs I have are my reality. They are the deepest most profound assumptions and expectations I have of myself, & therefore I find it hard to function as a 'normal' human being, beyond my frontdoor. This is just the way life is to me now, & these negative core beliefs continue to govern my life & reality. (Sub 124)

[The officer] then gave me 4 straps across each hand. He then made me run around a yard 5 times yelling at the top of my voice, very ugly things about myself. I was yelling things such as, I'll never be any good, I'm useless, I'm pathetic, I'm a sook etc... Out of everything I took with me from that place, that has been the one thing that has stopped me on many occasions from getting anywhere in life. (SA Eden Park – Sub 291)

4.16 The loss of childhood, of having what would be regarded as a normal childhood taken away, was poignantly described in many submissions. For many there was no time for childhood play with daily life so structured and regimented.

I have come to realise that we were never children. We were an unpaid workforce, with no reward just punishment...At the beginning I said I don't remember being a child, I am saddened that most of the memories of my youth are pretty grim. (Sub 169)

Due to the period in the Home I lost my complete childhood. I never knew my Uncles, Aunties, cousins. I have no happy memories of my childhood at all the Salvos robbed me of that (Sub 198)

We lived in fear during most of our childhood. And our childhood was stolen from us. (Sub 266)

Lack of love and affection

4.17 The most fundamental need for the emotional development of a young child is to be shown love and affection, to be nurtured and wanted. The lack of these essential human qualities was pervasive in institutions and was commented upon or referred to in literally every submission and story. Growing up and developing as a person without receiving love and affection has possibly been the single most influential and tragic legacy of life in institutional care for every care leaver.

I feel like I grew up as a worm, as I felt I was beneath everybody. (Sub 367)

I was never shown any love at all you were just a number to them not even a name. (SA Kent Town – Sub 198)

We had no nurturing, no love, no hugs, no kisses all necessary in ones upbringing, it was nearly 45 years before we could hug each other when we

met and talk openly about what we had been through. A lot of Hopewoods are still mixed up and still having problems and no one to turn to. For a lot there are still no answers. (Hopewood – Sub 93)

I was trying to get some caring or love from anyone. I remember talking to the laundry lady and trying to get some caring from her but it seemed that all the adults in the place were totally cold to the children. (Royleston – Sub 150)

My biggest complaint is that I was never offered or given anything that even vaguely resembled nurturing. No affirmation of the person I was becoming, no encouragement, no warmth, and absolutely no affection, not under any circumstances... The Manager lived upstairs with his family, providing all 16 residents with a tantalising but extraordinarily painful glimpse of the loving family life we so desired... He and his family made absolutely certain that we all knew our station in life, and reinforced our collective worthlessness. (Raith – Sub 28)

The emotional abuse I received was demeaning and humiliating, it undermined my confidence and self-worth. The continual taunting of being told that I was nothing and would amount to nothing, that I was stupid and that I would be just like my mother who came from the gutter. (St Catherine's – Sub 111)

The special training I was to receive at Brougham was designed to make me believe I was unloved and unlovable, unwanted, worthless and a burden on society who would never amount to anything. Many of these thoughts I still carry. (Brougham – Sub 20)

The most difficult part of all this is the fact that you had no one to turn to for some form of comfort. You just bury it, no way to deal with it... You'd learn to hide emotions in this place, because you might get strapped for it as I did. (SA Eden Park – Sub 291)

There was no one to trust, to confide in, to cuddle, to read us bedtime stories. No one gave us an affectionate 'goodnight' or stopped for a chat. And yet all the while I ached with a question that would not go away. *What can be so wrong with our parents that makes it better to be brought up by such cruel and uncaring people as this?* (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

4.18 In all institutions over all periods of time, the lack of love was a fundamental constant. Stories emerged that in some instances there were different levels of treatment in care over different eras at the same Home. Even in those few submissions that had positive comments about childhood experiences in care there were still comments about the lack of love and warm human emotion.

Suppression of identity and individuality

4.19 It was common practice in many institutions to give each child an identification number which they kept throughout their time at that particular place. 'No one was referred to by name – usually it was "you" or your number was called out'.

It was here in Parkside I was given the name "NUMBER FIVE". The number you are given is what you answer to, it is sewn on all your clothes, it is your locker number and your bed and cell number. I ceased being Alan and became number five. (Sub 278)

4.20 The impact this had on individual identity could be seen by the number of care leavers who remembered their number or signed off their submission so many years later with the inclusion of their identity number.⁸

4.21 If calling a child by a number is not dehumanising enough, the lack of recognition and celebration of birthdays is the ultimate suppression of identity.

I never had a birthday party or cake. (St Catherine's, Brooklyn – Sub 8)

there were so many children the Orphanage did not celebrate birthdays. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

No Birthday parties, no presents no kindness, just fear and regimentation to keep us in line. (Murray Dwyer – Sub 364)

4.22 The lack of recognition of celebratory days including birthdays, Christmas, Mother's and Father's day has had a profound impact on future life, especially for the partners and children of care leavers. Many people have grown up without feeling for these family days and they now pass with little or no recognition.

The absolute sadness I still have is the loss of family, never receiving or giving presents, having birthdays and all that family stuff. That is all I ever wanted. (Sub 181)

4.23 Other care leavers said that their name had been changed while in institutions, which they did not discover until many years later when searching for records. One person recalled having her name changed because they already had a child with the same name in the Home.

I can still remember standing with my Father, Gracie [stepmother] and Matron Gennon. 'We already have a Shirley here. What are we going to call her?' Gennon asked. 'What about Lurline then?' answered Gracie, and that was that! (WR Black – Sub 409)

4.24 Changing a child's religion or forcing them to attend services of a different religion to that which they were baptised both between catholic and protestant and between protestant faiths was also reported in some stories.

we discovered a record on microfilm that I had indeed been baptised as a Church of England in 1937. Although Child Welfare Department Records of my detention...records my religion as being a Presbyterian. I believe that something as important as changing my religion while in the care of the Child Welfare Department should have consulted my father for his approval for such an important decision. (Sub 319)

8 For example *Submissions* 231 – Salvation Army, Nedlands; 282 – SA Gill; 406 – Goodwood; 409 – WR Black; 416 – Parramatta.

4.25 A particularly effective form of depersonalisation was the total regimentation of everyday life – the ultimate suppression of any individuality in a child. Many submissions, particularly those from people who had been in Salvation Army homes, describe a spartan existence where the whole day was governed by bells – 'bells to get up, bells for school, bells for each meal' – or whistle blows and having to march to all activities including meals, showers, school.

4.26 A common theme was not just the separation of children by gender into separate homes or for all daily activities but the constant reinforcement of differences. This inability to relate and interact with the opposite sex as a child has been at the base of many relationship difficulties in adult life, as discussed in the next chapter.

Staff at both homes discouraged boys from having anything to do with the opposite sex, boys were brainwashed that talking about girls was filthy and were punished if they were heard by an officer... I now believe this is why I seem to have trouble starting a relationship with the opposite sex. (Salvation Army Riverview and Indooroopilly – Sub 90)

Lack of privacy

4.27 The absolute lack of privacy in showers and toilets was frequently raised, especially the embarrassment of being constantly watched and taunted by carers, often of the opposite gender and during adolescent years.

The shower cubical consisted of half doors where an officer would be continually watching you; again you were given no privacy. (Ormond)

These showers were on a wall and open for everyone lined up to see there was no privacy at all, it was embarrassing (Kent Town)

The toilets had no doors either, and I found this aspect of life at Parramatta most upsetting, particularly during menstruation. This might be difficult for men to comprehend, but a woman likes her privacy in the toilet.

Visits by family members

4.28 Having parents or family members visit was a keenly anticipated occasion, although highly regulated in many institutions. Stories were told of children getting dressed up on visitors' days, more out of hope than expectation that they would receive a visitor in many cases, only to be let down. This had a shattering psychological affect, reinforcing feelings of abandonment and not being wanted. The situation was equally so for those not expecting visitors.

Visitor's days were traumatic for children who had no parents or for those not receiving visitors that day, no counsel or support was provided to children who experienced abandonment every visitors Sunday. (Goodwood – Sub 89)

The emotional harm was much worse, visiting day once a month, sitting and waiting all together in the sewing room, listening to the noise on the driveway outside the window, hoping someone would visit me. Sitting there

all alone pretending it didn't matter that no one came to see me, this was a common occurrence. (Lynwood Hall – Sub 407)

On my arrival at the home [Gill] I was informed by the management that my boys were unavailable to me that weekend due to as the Salvation Army officer explained, that their refusal to grant me access to my children on this weekend was that it was the wrong weekend on which they accepted children in their care to be taken out of the home by parents or family members. I was unaware of these rules being explained to me, rules that did not allow parents or other family members to take out their children, on some weekends but not others. I was not allowed to take my sons out that weekend or allowed to see them. I returned to Moss Vale. (Sub 317)

Forms of Punishment

4.29 Children were punished for a wide range and often the most trivial of reasons. Talking during meal times, if somebody laughed or giggled out of place, not standing still when spoken to, answering back, getting answers wrong in class or being left-handed, playing out of bounds and not doing daily chores properly or to a supervisor's satisfaction were commonly mentioned behaviours that often resulted in severe punishment. Punishments ranged from beatings with straps, canes, cricket bats, bunches of keys; being forced to perform additional and often repetitive tasks; withdrawal of privileges such as watching television or being allowed visits; food rationing; forced immobility for long periods; isolation and humiliation.

Punishment, we were caned with cricket stump...If you spoke out you were caned. If you let your hair grow and a nun didn't like it, she would make you have it cut like a boy, as well as cane you. No one had long hair. (Nazareth house, Camberwell – Sub 169)⁹

...the superintendent at that time ran her school for girls like some sort of Nazi officer making us scrub and polish floors for hours on our hands and knees for being disobedient which might I add was for minor things such as loosing your hair brush, talking when you were not supposed to be talking, answering back etc. (Lynwood Hall – Sub 272)

Punishment could mean extra duties, a good talking to, withdrawal of privileges, or if the Superintendent was involved you could be in for a good beating especially if he lost his temper. (Dalmar – Sub 136)

Every day from 6am when [the nun in charge] would sort out the girls who wet their bed...to belting girls who's bed was not up to scratch, shoes not shined enough, chores not perfect, lockers untidy, going too fast or too slow, talking. It seems she would find fault just because we were there. She hated us. (Goodwood – Sub 406)

At Ormond the punishment there for being disobedient, such as talking when you weren't supposed to consisted of scrubbing cement courtyards on your hands and knees with a tooth brush (I have always been curious, with

9 The trauma for young girls of cutting long locks 'to look like a boy' was often described. A comment was made that is why so many Homies have long hair today.

the amount of girls scrubbing courtyards with toothbrushes why the department never wondered why so many were needed). (Ormond – Sub 272)¹⁰

I loved to climb trees and walk along the fence tops. For this I was caned. The joy of climbing the trees outweighed the pain of the caning. (Burwood –Sub 192)

Any glancing sideways or looking up was met with what Ben said was the standard punishment that occurred at Tamworth Boys Home. This was the loss of a meal or the loss of all meals over a period of 24 to 48 hours. The punishment for boys who habitually broke the rule was being made to wear a cardboard cereal box that had two holes cut for eyes. The boy had to keep wearing the box until it fell to pieces. Ben recalls that later a set of leather blinkers was made, similar to those that a horse would use, and the boy had to wear these for a set number of days. (Tamworth Boys Home – Sub 329)

The punishment inflicted was to have her hair shaved off, and she [a young girl of 7 or 8] was compelled to wear a sugar bag as a dress all day for a period of time...she even wore it to school, which was a public school some distance from the institution, and the children had to walk along public streets to get to this school. It would be difficult to imagine the trauma, that this child was compelled to suffer, or the effect it would have had on her in later life. (Swan Homes – Sub 414)

4.30 A particular punishment practiced at many institutions was not to simply withdraw privileges from the individual child, but from all the children. This would make the individual highly unpopular resulting in ostracism or beatings from his or her peers. Another form of punishment commonly referred to was hours of bed drill consisting of stripping the bed of each sheet and blanket and remaking it with 'envelope corners and no wrinkles' and repeating the procedure over a period of many hours.

4.31 A form of punishment practiced in some institutions was to force younger boys to have fist fights or boxing matches with older and stronger boys, thereby enlisting older boys to inflict the punishment. Holding mismatched boxing bouts was also seen as 'entertainment' for the staff at some institutions.

4.32 The handing out of punishment was also seen as a method of controlling the children. Those children perceived as leaders or simply highly respected by their peers would be 'targeted' and regularly punished so as to serve as an example to the others.

Bedwetting

4.33 The overwhelming number of submissions that referred to punishments for bedwetting indicates the traumas this condition engendered. Bedwetting is commonly

10 The use of toothbrushes to scrub clean toilets and corridors as a punishment was referred to in many submissions, especially from NSW and Victoria, eg *Submissions* 271 – Mittagong; 278 – Parkside; 279 – Winlaton.

a sign of a distressed child. Yet the greater the incidence of bedwetting the greater the incidence of abuse and trauma the child was subjected to. A variety of punishments were inflicted including beatings, cold showers in winter (often combined with a beating) and a range of humiliations so traumatic and severe to a young child that the condition was exacerbated.

As I was a bed-wetter, I used to be belted daily. They used to throw me under a cold shower then belt me really hard with a large strap while I was wet. This was extremely painful – especially in winter – and left big red marks on my body. They also used to rub my face in the wet sheets and then my brother had to wash them. (Parkerville – Sub 181)¹¹

The bedwetters received such humiliation, they would have to parade around the room with their wet smelly sheets draped over their shoulders. (St Catherine's, Geelong – Sub 111)¹²

If you wet the bed, you were made to wear a potty strapped around you rear end all day – thus dis-allowing you to sit for meals and become the brunt of much humour. (Parkville – Sub 379)

If any boy wet his bed, he would be ridiculed in front of everyone, and at times be dressed as a girl. (St Joseph's, Kincumber – Sub 364)

They used to grab us and put nappies on us and then send us off to school. The school was on the premises...I'd have been eight or nine at the time. (Salvation Army, Box Hill – Sub 296)

4.34 It never seems to have been considered that the problem may lie in a range of other reasons such as the child being stressed due to separation from a comforting and loving home environment with parents and family or that they were now living in a state of constant fear.

4.35 As a preventative measure in some institutions drinking was forbidden well before bedtime. This was especially harsh in Queensland.

I have memories of being hungry. But the worst was being thirsty in the summer not allowed to have water long before bedtime. (Riverview – Sub 339)

The master made us or you could say let us have no water after 2pm so that you would not wet your bed. (Brougham – Sub 333)

4.36 More bizarre preventative measures were tried.

11 Rubbing noses in wet sheets, beatings and cold showers were commonly reported punishments, eg *Submissions* 101, 409 – WR Black; 203 – Dalmar; 297 – St John's Goulburn; 411 – SA Bexley; 415 – SA Stanmore.

12 Draping wet sheets over the head and standing for lengthy periods or parading ('Kangaroo Hopping'), and forced nappy wearing were favoured humiliations, eg *Submissions*. 89, 406 – Goodwood; 141 – Westbrook; 166 - Abbotsford; 169 – Nazareth House, Camberwell; 201 – Lismore; 217 – Neerkol; 237 – Nazareth House, Wynnum; 322 – St Joseph's Croyden.

If you wet the bed more than once a week, you got a machine put under your bed, it gave you a shock, you flew out of bed to go to the toilet. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 103)

Isolation, including locking in cupboards and cells

[Lynwood Hall] also had an isolation room which apparently the Child Welfare Department was aware of. The room consisted of a mattress on the floor, a metal potty, a window that was boarded up from the outside and a small opening in the bottom of the door where meals were passed through three times a day, the light switch was on the outside of the room. I spent many 24hour periods locked in isolation at the age of twelve to sit and stare at a wall. (Lynwood Hall – Sub 272).

We were often locked in a dark room for hours, mice were running around our feet. We would miss meals. It was very scary. (WR Black – Sub 101)

[The Superintendent] would lock her under the staircase in a narrow dark room, and leave her there for ages, all day and even over-night. She was left there until she was either prepared to apologise or own up to something she didn't do or say what he wanted her to say. (Dalmar – Sub 203)¹³

I was taken down to the dungeon under the home where there is no windows just the dungeon and told by the sisters the Devil is going to come and punish me. She then closed the door it was pitch black I could not see my hand in front of me I was very frightened as I was waiting for the Devil to come. (St Joseph's, Largs Bay – Sub 106)

4.37 The 'Training Schools' had their own isolation cells.

I couldn't handle being placed in isolation, this was a building away from main building constructed in concrete with 4 or 6 cells...Isolation cell punishment had 2 time zones, 24 hours or 48 hours, the 24 hours you were given bread and water three times a day and a mattress at night to sleep on the floor with 1 blanket, (I still remember the cold and my house as we speak has cupboards full of beautiful wool blankets). I didn't experience the 48 hour number but I believe after 24 hours, you received food...

REMEMBER, WE WERE CHILDREN IN THIS COLD DARK LONELY PLACE. (Parramatta Girls Training School – Sub 299)¹⁴

4.38 The Committee was provided with extracts from the punishment book from Karrala House which records children being locked up in solitary for periods of 30, 40

13 Isolation for long periods by locking in cupboards, dark rooms, attics or cellars for minor misdemeanours was a common punishment, eg *Submissions* 5 and 237 – Nazareth House; 105 – Wilson; 120 – Holy Cross Woolloowin; 146 – Abbotsford; 192 – Burnside; 268 – Bayswater; 278 – Parkside; 279 – Brighton; 318 – Royleston; 322 – St Joseph's Lane Cove; 329 – Tamworth Boys Home; 356 - St Joseph's Cowper; 406 – Goodwood; 421 – SA Fullerton.

14 Many submissions about Parramatta especially recalled the panic and trauma of being locked in isolation and detention, eg *Submissions* 250, 263, 284 ('There were rat droppings in the cell, and the mattress on the floor smelled of urine and vomit'), 293, 304.

and 60 days during the mid 1960s. Lengthy periods of isolation, which breached provisions of child welfare legislation, were common in many other institutions.

4.39 In a bizarre twist, isolation could be sought as an escape from the trauma of daily life.

The inmates formed groups with a leader and younger inmates were required to obey the group. Failure to obey resulted in being bashed which occurred frequently...There were frequent riots by the inmates and invariably everybody was punished including me although I took no part. Punishments included being thrown fully clothed under a cold shower and locked in my room...

To me the only safe place in the home was "the cabin", a room used as punishment by solitary confinement. To be put in the cabin it was necessary to have committed some misdemeanour, which I would deliberately do. (Vaughan House, Adelaide – Sub 273)

Standing on spot for hours

The matron made the children stand for hours with their arms stretched up high above their heads. When our arms fell we were beaten. If this happened in a war prisoners camp it would be called torture by the international community. (WR Black – Sub 87)

There were many other humiliations too numerous to mention...standing for hours on end facing a wall for talking out of line. (Parramatta – Sub 284)

The form of punishment would be standing in line for hours on end without movement and if a boy fainted, he was left lying there until he recovered and resumed his place in the line... A more severe variant to this of standing in line was that the boys had to stand up on the sitting benches, which were around the walls of the playroom, and face the wall and press the nose against the wall. Any boy who took his nose off the wall would have his face pushed into the wall by the officer. (SA Gill – Sub 282)

The white line was the worst punishment... We were required to stand to attention, without bending the knees. No one was allowed to talk to or look at a child on the white line because those children were "a disgrace," to the nuns. No-one wanted to be friends with anyone who had been sent to the white line. Those children were isolated and vilified by the other terrified children. (Goodwood – Sub 419)

Secondary abuse

4.40 Many people referred in submissions to their abuse in institutions as a form of secondary or systemic abuse. Children were taken from their parents who it was claimed could not adequately support or maintain them. The implication was that 'welfare' would be able to provide the care and opportunity that the parents were unable to provide. How then could it be that for many of these children the abuse perpetrated upon them whilst in care in the institutions was far greater than that

committed by their parents? To many this is seen as a failure of 'government' to monitor their needs and well-being during the time they were in care.

4.41 Another form of secondary abuse has been the treatment of these children as adults over a range of issues from the attitudes of supposed support people and counsellors, the lack of programs and services, to the barriers encountered in trying to obtain records and information about their families and childhood.

The reason we have suffered this lack of programs and effort is that the agencies responsible for creating our problems in the first place have sought to hide that fact. They have done that by denying our experiences as children and our existence as adults.¹⁵

Discipline and physical assault

4.42 Many of the severe beatings handed out as punishment went way beyond the sort of corporal punishment which was acceptable at the time. They often took the form of extremely severe physical violence – what can only be described as criminal assault.

He would hit you with a stock whip if he caught you talking during milking...he [also] had a leather strap, which appeared to be from the stirrup of a saddle. The strap would be approximately quarter of an inch thick one to one and quarter inches wide and about twelve to eighteen inches long, this would be used to hit and flog boys with. Our nickname for this was the "horse harness". (Riverview – Sub 90)

This man seemed to take great pleasure in humiliating us publicly, flogging us with his heavy leather belt while we knelt naked at his feet. You could receive anything up to 60 lashes and you always ended up bleeding profusely. Sometimes boys lost consciousness. They were the lucky ones. (Westbrook – Sub 141)

We were then belted on a regular basis by the warders...They were savage beatings. Boots and all. Time and time again. They would get you when you were laying in your bed. Come in, grab you, get you on the floor and kick and beat you till you were badly hurt. It was a nightmare. I often wished I were dead. This happened so often it was frightening thinking about when would be the next time. (Bayswater – Sub 148)

Four kids would hold the offender down and a nun would hit the bare buttocks with a leather belt, anything up to six times. Once I was hit so hard I could not sit down for two days. (Murray Dwyer – Sub 364)

I had my hands held behind my back, hair held and my head bashed into a lot of sinks in the shower block and lost quite a few teeth. (Parramatta – Sub 280)

She'd thrash and thrash looking coldly into your eyes, I could see the hate in her face. Her face would go red the white mantle around her face would get

15 *Committee Hansard* 4.2.04, p.31 (Positive Justice Centre).

tighter and her face would puff up. I would see how determined and mean and cruel she could be. (Goodwood – Sub 89)

She did not give me a reason for what was about to happen, I was forced to pull up my dress exposing my bare back from my shoulders to my waist. She then struck me anywhere between 10 and 15 times across my waist, very forcefully with the strap. The strap itself was square, thin and very long much like a horse whip. Because of its length, they used to double it, so in effect you were getting a double dose. The force of the blows caused my back to go black in colour. We used to change in front of the other children in the dormitory, but I was so ashamed because of my back, I used to change away from the other children. (Nazareth House, Wynnum – Sub 237)

Matron was an extremely cruel woman, she would hit us with the copper stick, chair or whatever she could pick up at her time of rage. (WR Black – Sub 101)

Absconding

4.43 Absconding was a widely reported practice. Punishment took many severe forms, though one of the most common was being beaten in front of the other children or even by the children.

if any girls ran away, when they were caught they were publicly flogged. Us girls used to have tears in our eyes watching this, but we couldn't do anything. (St Joseph's Subiaco – Sub 172)

...you knew who ran away because when you got up the next day, the boy was standing in the 'quad' with his hands on his head. The punishment for this was not carried out until that night when he was caned on the hands in full view of the rest of us. If you pulled your hand away you were then whacked on the legs. (Salvation Army, Nedlands – Sub 231)

Whilst at Riverview I witnessed two boys flogged. For running away, they used a thick leather strap across their backs. (Riverview – Sub 339)

We were all assembled in the gymnasium where we were told to form up in a line in the shape of a horseshoe, the three boys being punished [for absconding] were instructed to remove their clothing...each of the boys was then told to get on to his hands and knees and they had to scuttle across the floor in this fashion to where the line began, as they did this they were lashed with a rattan cane across their buttocks, as they reached the start of the line they had to crawl between the legs of the other boys and were unmercifully bashed and kicked...When they reached the end of the line they had to remain on their hands and knees and were flogged back to the start. (Swan Homes – Sub 414)

4.44 Many absconders were locked in cellars or rooms for many days and with minimal or no food. Regular offenders would be sent to the harsher, more secure training schools such as Parramatta or Mt Penang in NSW.

4.45 Nobody bothered to inquire why children continually ran away. Those who reported abuse as a reason for absconding, especially to police, were simply not believed and returned to the institution – usually to be summarily punished.

I was a persistent runaway – nowhere to go, no one to see but I would runaway just the same. I now know the sadness and devastation I felt but no one in the Department ever seemed to notice. (Sub 344)

Even after repeated 'running away' episodes by many of their [Child Welfare Department] wards, they never once asked the simplest question 'WHY'. Nor for that matter did police officers. In my own case, with five boys 'on the run' and being described on local radio as 'armed and dangerous' was that simple question raised. NO! (Sub 11)

Sexual assault

While at Bayswater I was abused sexually by an officer, and thought by now this was the normal thing for us boys to endure. (Sub 278)

The night times were hard on us as the brothers would come in and have their ways with us. There were other kids besides us all getting the same things done to them. We just didn't know when it was our turn to be raped, so that's why I still cannot live with the nights. (St Joseph's – Sub 371)

I can't get some of the terrible things he did to me out of my head, they loom in the shadows of my life and haunt me. This man took my virginity, my innocence, my development, my potential (Sub 239)

All the time while the priest was assaulting me (or other children) the sister would stand at the door looking the other way. If another sister came she would flash her torch on the ground and the priest would stand behind the partition until the sister flashed her torch again. After this he would resume his abuse. I don't know how often this occurred but would estimate that the priest came 3 – 4 nights per week and would assault several children on the one night. I was raped on a regular basis. The older children were picked more often than the younger ones. (Sandgate – Sub 412)

4.46 Submissions and evidence to the Committee provided many accounts of extremely graphic and disturbing descriptions of sexual abuse and assault on girls and boys by a wide range of perpetrators. Sexual abuse was widespread with reports covering all States and type of institution – government and non-government, and between religions and in foster care. Care leavers retold being sexually abused or assaulted as very young children and through their teenage years. Stories were received of males assaulting males and females, and also of females assaulting females and younger males. Mostly the predators were staff members, including religious and lay, or adult workers.

4.47 However, some submissions recorded sexual assaults by the older children as well as by staff. The activities of older children were undertaken with the staff simply turning a blind eye.

Most of the time I couldn't sleep, it wasn't possible to shower either. In time I lost the count of the times I was sexually assaulted in the showers. The

place was sickening the cruelty and violence coming from both the older boys and the guards. (Westbrook – Sub 217)

4.48 A number of patterns emerge from the descriptions of those sexually assaulted of the predatory behaviour of the perpetrator. The child's confidence is gained through kind words and actions – 'I thought I had a friend, and as I had never been shown affection by another human being that I could remember, I welcomed it'. Bribes of lollies, biscuits, cigarettes and alcohol were often used.

4.49 Some care leavers indicated paedophiles targeted children who did not receive visitors. One care leaver, speaking from personal experience of the Salvation Army's Box Hill orphanage, confirms that paedophiles singled out 'the ones they know never get visits because they know that the other kids will talk to their parents and that sort of thing'.¹⁶

4.50 Those desiring sexual favours also applied psychological pressure in the form of withdrawal of privileges, the removal and destruction of personal belongings. The threat and carrying out of physical beatings if the sexual assault was mentioned to other people was a common practice.

4.51 The social arrangements existing in some institutions were favourable for predatory behaviour.

I slept in a dormitory with thirty or more other girls. We were locked in of a night with a guard outside our door. There were night watchmen who would give cigarettes to girls for sexual favours. The place we were placed in for protection was the most dangerous for any young girl with young male security officers taking advantage of these girls. (Bidura – Sub 271)

4.52 The Committee referred in its report on child migration to the accounts of systemic criminal sexual assault and predatory behaviour by a large number of Brothers over a considerable period of time at the Christian Brothers institutions Bindoon, Castledare, Clontarf and Tardun in Western Australia.¹⁷ The Committee received a number of submissions from men who had been in these institutions, and who were not child migrants, describing similar assaults being perpetrated against them. As one wrote 'the Brothers did not distinguish between types'. The operation of these institutions and the impact that it has had on the lives of so many was graphically described:

The Brothers were unusually adept at turning loose upon society a huge number of social misfits, low in self esteem and life knowledge (except of the perverse kind), who would pay society in criminal and anti-social behaviour over many years. I personally met plenty of them in various prisons (known individually to me), observed a number in mental

16 *Committee Hansard* 3.2.04, p.103.

17 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, Report on Child Migration, August 2001, pp.76-79.

institutions, and knew of the attempted and successful suicides of others (including a brother of mine). Their commitment to ‘save souls’ was bastardised into a system whereby they ‘stole our souls’; whereby they made us into mere ciphers, to be seized and used whenever the need for sexual gratification was upon them. We meant no more to them than the moment’s pleasure.

These institutions were totally devoid of love, had little compassion, and very little understanding of the needs of young boys. True, a few Brothers had all these attributes, and some boys experienced them. I believe them to be in the minority. These were punishment regimes.¹⁸

Separation of families

4.53 One of the most forceful issues that became apparent through this inquiry was the destruction of families that occurred through the institutionalisation of children. As described in an earlier chapter, children were placed in care for a number of reasons. The vast majority came from large families. Families would be split with children sent to different institutions. Many would not see their parents again and with minimal or no effort made to keep siblings informed of each others whereabouts, let alone arrange meetings, families inevitably drifted apart, often permanently.

I never ever had the opportunity to say goodbye to either of my parents. They were taken out of my life & circumstances never returned them. (Sub 341)

...not to have seen my mother again after we were taken away and not to have been able to find my brothers has been quite traumatic for me, especially when I got a little information so late in life only to be slapped down again when I found that both my brothers and my mother had all died (Sub 184)

Our entire family was ripped apart and we can never get back together. They split me away from my 1-week-old brother and we never knew each other until we were old. I had cousins in St. Aidans and the nuns never told me. I never knew my family. How can you get back together when you don’t know each other? (Sub 264, p.4)

4.54 Some care leavers have discovered from records that extended family members offered to provide a home for the child to prevent the child from going into care or after having been in care, yet these offers were usually denied by the department or agency.

4.55 Access visits by parents or grandparents were often denied due to apparently subjective decisions of departmental officers and as a form of punishment for a child's behaviour or their parent falling behind in fee payments. As CLAN noted family visits to children were regarded as a privilege to be withdrawn, rather than a right. Little

18 *Submission 11*, p.1. Other submissions providing graphic descriptions of these WA institutions include *Submissions 25, 34, 41, 85, 251, 365*.

effort was made to encourage or facilitate the maintenance of connection with parents or family.

I was very angry to read all through my earlier files how my mother and maternal and paternal grandmothers all tried for access visits. They were denied each time as my mother was deemed to have fallen from grace...My father although separated from his wife was also denied access. If only I could have met them I would at least have had a mental picture to remember of them. (Sub 263)

What I don't understand is why the Dept. deemed it necessary to deny me any contact with any member of my family. When I read my file my sister & my parents had written asking for contact with me on several occasions. (Sub 258, p.4)

I would witness many tears shed by my mother after coming out of the Superintendent's office, several times being denied access to us children and being turned away from our fortnightly visits because she was unable to pay. (Dalmar – Sub 136)

4.56 The worst scenarios for young children were being told lies about the alleged death of parents and siblings, of not being told when a parent had died or being told embellished horror stories. For some the truth would not be discovered until many years later.

Imagine being told that at the age of five years old that your mother is dead only to find out six years later that she is alive & well and wants to come & visit you. (Sub 111)

It was during my early primary school days when I was told either by my foster parents or by an employee of the Department that my parents and siblings were dead, having been killed in a car accident. I have since learned from my records that my mother and father and brother had written to me however I did not receive any of these letters nor were I told of their existence...Since I learned of the existence of my family I have been in a state of trauma, anxiety, anger and suffering from major stresses related to the knowledge that I have been lied to for the past 35 years (Sub 142)

[At age 11 the House Parent] told me my father had hanged himself...that his head had swollen to five times its normal size and would also have been black...He told me that my father had died in a room above a pub and that I would turn out just like him, an alcoholic who killed himself...I was twenty-eight when I learned that my father suicided at the swimming pool (Sub 246)

As a child I was always told that my parents had been killed in a car accident, only to discover at the age of 40, my mother and other relatives, a result stemming from personal research. There has been little contact since. (Sub 401)

...being told that his family were dead or injured was one of the many dark and dreadful ways in which the boys of Tamworth were treated. (Sub 329)

Separation of siblings

4.57 Relationships Australia referred to studies showing that children and young people living in care have a higher prevalence than other groups of children of physical, developmental and behavioural problems remaining over time, and that siblings who were separated when in the care system have been found to be at increased risk of poorer outcomes.¹⁹ The Committee received many stories from care leavers showing that separation of siblings was a common practice with many reporting a sense of loss and sadness often having difficulties at reconnecting and sustaining family networks.

The staff saw no reason to treat brothers and sisters as part of a family. Instead, children were separated into age groups and some siblings were even sent to different orphanages depending on what room was available here, there and elsewhere. (Sub 18)

I had four brothers and three sisters; I was nine years old and the eldest. I and a few of my siblings were taken to Bidura Children's Depot at Glebe whilst two of my brothers were taken to Royleston Boys Depot...(How could any child taken from the only family she knows and not understanding what is happening be anything but scared, being the eldest it automatically comes to you to be the one to look out for the younger ones which I was not able to do reinforcing my feelings of being a failure.) I remained in Bidura Children's Depot for several months during which time I watched as my brothers and sisters were taken away. I didn't get to see any of them again until many years later. (Sub 272)

This home was in Newcastle so it was impossible for me to see my sisters as they were in Sydney. The Dept never made any effort to keep the bonds between siblings alive. (Sub 351, p.19)

I used to see [my brother] every Sunday because we went to the same church. We could only wave to each other because we weren't allowed to speak. It was shocking, I remember thinking why can't I talk to my brother? (Sub 185)

Forced adoption of babies

4.58 Many submissions were received that provided stories of teenage girls falling pregnant and having their child removed at birth and adopted even though they desperately wished to keep their baby. This situation happened not just to girls living in-care but to single working girls who would be placed in an institution and expected to work for their 'board' during the term of the pregnancy.

I went [to the Sisters of St Joseph's, Fullarton] because institutionalisation was what was familiar to me and I was afraid and confused. We worked in laundry for long hours of the day, and also paid a major part of our Social security benefits to the nuns for board and keep. I now suspect they made a

19 *Submission 158*, p.8 (Relationships Australia NSW).

lot of money put of us. We were encouraged by the nuns to adopt our babies out. (Sub 89)

Apart from working all day in the laundry the days were made even longer by being woken up at 5 in the morning to go to mass most days of the week. The long hours working with no rest through the day made me very tired and depressed. (Holy Cross Woolloowin – Sub 221)

4.59 The removal of the baby and offering for adoption was often undertaken by duress or in some instances deception. Alternative options to keep the baby and legal rights were not explained.

It was a given that you had to give up your child for adoption to stay in the home [Alexandra Home, Highgate]. [The Matron] made it clear that my baby was not MY BABY – there was no way I was going to keep "it", if I wanted to stay in the home. I had nowhere else to go...There was no privacy in the home only in the bathroom, as we all slept in a dormitory and worked in the kitchen and laundry...Neither 'they'; the 'Welfare', nor any social worker came near me, let alone explain any of the options available. e.g. a special payment from the government for a female to stay at home and look after a relative, the layette, the food assistance, baby bonus and child allowance and / or an additional benefit. Not wealth by any means, but at least a chance for us to get on our feet and stay together. (Sub 97)

She cruelly promoted adoption above my rights to know of alternative options to keep my own child. I was not informed of the Social Welfare benefits that were available to me at that time...I was not even told that I did not have to sign a consent form...I remember being made to sit at the desk, I was sobbing and yelling for my baby and all I got was this nun pushing papers under my face and telling me to sign here, here and here. (Sub 104)

I still had not been shown my baby and on the 8th day a woman from the department came and threatened and coerced me into signing the adoption papers for my son. (Sub 221)

We were submitted into signing Papers, which I found out later, they were adoption papers. We thought we were signing Registration Papers. The nuns forced us into signing, and had their hands over the word adoption, and I will never forget that at all. (Conf Sub 58)

4.60 While the treatment and care of girls in institutions who became pregnant and those who were placed in institutions after falling pregnant are relevant to this inquiry, there is a much wider issue of past adoption practices when babies were routinely taken from young unmarried mothers. When allegations are made that social workers of that time used 'unethical, emotional blackmail and inhuman practices to illegally gain consent forms' and efforts to obtain hospital medical and social worker/almoner's

records, at least in Victoria, are denied,²⁰ there needs to be inquiries at the State level to uncover the truth surrounding past adoption practices.

4.61 The Committee notes that the Victorian Government pledged at the previous election to hold an inquiry into past adoption practices and that a recent decision of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal has ordered the disclosure of a number of documents relevant to this subject.²¹

Lack of education

Education in the homes was abysmal; when I entered the state school system I was so far behind my age group I was ridiculed and taunted by both teachers and fellow students; leaving me feeling different, dumb and excluded. I have carried those feelings through most of my adult life. (Sub 321)

I left Hillside uneducated and illiterate. I had few social skills, and felt I was a social misfit. (Sub 260)

4.62 One of the saddest indicators on the lack of education provided can be seen in the content and style of many of the personal submissions received by the Committee. While short on literacy, the emotional strength and honesty of these submissions shines through. Many submissions were dictated to partners or other supportive people.

I am not able to write this submission myself, because during my time in the state care they never gave me an education and as a result of that I can't read or write but I can put my story across verbally, to my partner, who is writing this for me. (Sub 217)

They never taught me much, they reckoned I was too slow at everything. I taught myself to read and write at 23 years old age...Even my submission today, I am talking to my sister and she is writing it on the computer for me, as I am not writing it as I can't spell. (Sub 283)

One thing, I was in the boys home in Box Hill from the age of 10 to 15, could you tell me why I am trying to sit at the kitchen table telling my wife these things to write down for me, because I am illiterate? (Conf Sub 132)

4.63 Schooling was usually undertaken at the institution under a variety of arrangements. In State institutions teaching would be undertaken by staff from the education department, the Catholics used nuns or brothers from the order assisted by lay teachers while other non-government groups used outside teachers or sent children to local schools.

We attended school on the grounds two days a week. I have no recollection as to what the lessons consisted of. The other three days were a day in the

20 *Submission* 104. Other submissions with personal stories about the removal of children and commenting on adoption practices include *Submissions* 216, 247 and 387.

21 'Adoption files opened to mothers' and 'Mothers who can't forget', *The Age*, 7.8.04.

laundry, a day in the kitchen and a day mending and sewing. The girls that were in Lynwood Hall at that time maintained the institution. There was never any recreational time given. (Lynwood Hall – Sub 272)

I now know why my education was lost, because of a night time I was bashed, raped and molested, then stay awake all night wondering if they were going to come back. Then be bashed by the nuns at school for falling asleep in class, so I guess that's why I can't spell today. (St Joseph's – Sub 371)

The large number of kids who left these institutions unable to read and write is testimony to the crude and brutal methods used by a supposed teaching Order, the Christian Brothers. It also points to a complete dereliction of duty of care by the Child Welfare authorities. They should have been involved and provided remedial help for those struggling with their education in a climate of fear. (Sub 365)

4.64 Many of those who attended outside schools reported that school was just a waste of time. Often so tired from early morning work and lack of nutrition the children would be too tired to learn and would consequently be punished. By wearing home clothes and not having the books of other children, their difference was reinforced by being treated differently in school and being teased and humiliated by the other children. Teachers were also responsible for reinforcing stereotypes.

We went out to public schools, the torment and ridicule of other students who weren't in the home made it difficult to learn as we were branded 'homies'. (Sub 279)

We then marched to school in a group dressed in grey shorts and shirt supplied by the Salvos...Other kids at the school used to call us Homies and pick fights with us; at the time the teachers did not worry about it. I can not recall a teacher ever being nice to me. I feel we were treated at school different from the other children. (SA Kent Town – Sub 198)

I went to the local (I'm not sure which) school and were made to feel like the dregs of society. The teacher would refer to us as 'the home kids' or simply as 'homies'. I hated being so different to other kids (Sub 412)

I felt victimised at school and used to get the cuts a lot for getting sums wrong. I found it hard to learn and just remember trying so hard to be quiet and 'invisible' so that I wouldn't get into trouble. I gained nothing from my schooling. (Parkerville – Sub 181)

4.65 Educational achievement did not have a high profile in most institutions. In many instances children were being prepared for work in domestic service or as farm hands so that a 'practical' education was deemed more important than 'formal' education. This usually saw the child removed from school by 14, though many reported being taken out of school at an earlier age to work on the farm or in commercial laundries.

Unmet health needs

4.66 The Committee heard many stories of minimal medical attention received as children, and the often lack of or late treatment of injury and illness for which many care leavers have suffered long-term complications. Dental health was also poor with again stories of long term dental and oral health problems. Many children grew up believing large doses of Epsom salts cured everything!

I knew not to get sick if I could help it, because if you did, you were left in the dormitory, alone, no food, no medicine, nothing, just like you learnt to put up with trying to keep warm in freezing winters in shorts, shirts and bare feet, your arms and legs cracked and bleeding from the cold, pain every time you move and nothing you could do about it. (Neerkol – Sub 217)

I suffered so many severe attacks of tonsillitis throughout my childhood that were left untreated by the time I was 17 they had to be gouged out they were so rotten...it was not the Welfare Dept that looked after me, it was the couple I worked for...There is not one account in my file of having tonsillitis even though I would tell whoever I was with at the time my throat was sore...no-one believed me as usual. (Sub 351, p.24)

It used to get very cold...I told...I was getting pain in my ankles knees and wrists, they wouldn't believe me and said I was stupid, it was only growing pains. When I couldn't walk and my temperature was 105, they sent me to Royal Perth Hospital in an ambulance. I had acute rheumatic fever and was in Hospital for 6½ months. My mitral valve and aortic valve are damaged, and I have to take medicines for the rest of my life. (Padbury – Sub 180)

I recall being kicked twice by a dairy cow...no medical treatment was offered on either occasion...The most risky thing I was part of doing was firing up the boiler and cutting up some of the wood at Clontarf where some boys were injured...[Describing the hard labour he said] I remember being hit on the head by a brick (I still carry the scars) no medical treatment was given. (Castledare/Clontarf – Sub 251)

4.67 Hopewood was a unique home established by LO Bailey based on a natural living lifestyle. Children were on a strict vegetarian diet and medical care was unorthodox.

LOB was a believer that conventional medicine didn't work. We were not allowed to have any vaccinations for childhood diseases...LOB did not believe in formal medicine but only in natural healing...when we got sick, no matter how bad, we were put on a water diet (no food for 6 or 7 days then fruit juice for three days) and were told the BADNESS (whatever that meant) in us was what was making us sick. (Sub 93)

Work and exploitation of children in care

4.68 Some non government institutions appeared to rely upon the labour of children in their care to supplement income. The organisations running these institutions profited from the labour of children through such commercial enterprises

as farms or industrial laundries. The profits from such labour were not passed onto the children or their families in the form of wages and were received as an addition to funding.

4.69 It appears that in government institutions children were not put to employment insofar as they were not used to provide free labour through farming or laundry work. However, children in government institutions were often used to perform the day-to-day labour of running the Home by assisting with kitchen, garden or other domestic duties which were a form of free labour. This form of labour was common to all institutions with many descriptions of harsh domestic duties including constant cleaning, scrubbing and polishing floors and furnishings; of scrubbing bathrooms and toilets; cleaning windows; of working in the laundry; of hours spent peeling vegetables and other kitchen duties.

4.70 Many institutions used girls, often as young as 10, as a source of labour in the nurseries caring for, cleaning and changing babies or dressing, bathing and putting to bed younger children.

On top of that you could be put in charge of the little ones, such as making sure they were washed put to bed etc, if they did anything wrong you, as well as the children were punished. (Nazareth House, Camberwell – Sub 169)

Types of work performed

We worked seven days a week arising at 5.45am except on Sunday 6.30am and were expected to start our jobs by 6.15am lights out at 7.30p.m. The entire week was rostered, and every moment of the day accounted for...Rostered jobs over the years ranged from working in the kitchen, laundry, washing wet bed sheets, scrubbing and polishing floors (at 8 years I was using an industrial polisher), washing windows, lighting the furnace for hot water, dusting, serving breakfast or dinner, making school lunches (humiliatingly wrapped in newspaper), bathing children, polishing shoes, collecting pig slops, scraping and washing dishes, polishing silver, cleaning bathrooms, filling coke buckets, getting children ready for school, working in the babies home, setting tables, working in the staff pantry, taking children to school, working in the isolation ward, the list go on and is seemingly endless. I felt like I was serving time in prison. (Dalmar – Sub 136 p.3)

Home work at the Orphanage did not mean study and unfinished schoolwork. It was the unpaid labour we were required to do outside school time. The management had good reasons for teaching basic skills outside the schoolroom. Once trained, the older inmates were cheap supplementary labour. The girls were used for child minding, sewing, washing, cooking and cleaning for the younger children and the staff. The boys worked the farm and the vegetable garden, cut wood, swept the outdoors, raked the gravel and washed the staff cars – the traditional gendered tasks. (Ballarat Orphanage – Sub 18)

Exploitation of children

4.71 The exploitation of children as 'slave labour' – a term used in many submissions, often at a very young age, was a common means to gain income for the institution. This included working in commercial laundries, on farm plots or in other ventures that would create income for the institution.

[I was sent] to Hobart to the Magdalene (Good Shepherd) Laundry. This was an awful place and very strange to me...I was only 8 but had to work every day in the laundry from after breakfast until 5pm with a break for lunch. It was a huge laundry and we used to do the laundry for all the hotels, schools and hospitals in Hobart. I worked in the ironing room, sometimes I would iron but mostly I would fold and damp the laundry reading for the presses. They must have made heaps of money from doing all this laundry...From the ages of 8 to 12 while at the Magdalene Laundry I never had any schooling. On occasion though, we would be taken by an 'auxiliary' for an hour and she would read us a story, that was all. (Sub 182)

I was actually taken out of school for good at the age of 13 to work in the laundry and the nursery and from then on my days were hell...The laundry was hard work having to use the big mangles and presses. A lot of us have osteo-arthritis today because of this work. (St Joseph's Subiaco – Sub 172)

The home resembled a workhouse, we were made to work every day and all day in dreadful conditions. The home laundered sheets for the local hospital. From early morning to late evening we laundered or ironed dirty soiled hospital sheets. Some of the home girls were intellectually disabled. They were forced to wash soiled sheets in large machines like coppers...The only time we were allowed to break was for meal times...I remember the hunger, the work and the attitude of contempt from the staff. They made us feel worthless...I was 15 years old when I went to the Salvation Army home. We had not committed any crime. But we were locked away like criminals. (SA Hobart – Sub 388)

This place had a huge woodheap. The wood was brought in as 8 foot long pine off cuts. An officer would saw the wood on a bench saw to lengths big enough for a fireplace. We had to unload the truck of long lengths and stack them then cart the shorter pieces and either load the truck with them or stack them to be loaded at a later date. The wood was sold in and around Mt Barker as firewood. The woodheap was no easy task, it was hard work [for a 10 year old]. No talking just work. (SA Eden Park – Sub 291)

4.72 It was not just in the institutions that children's labour was exploited. Children who were fostered or boarded out were often used as a domestic workforce.

...I regarded myself as being an unpaid slave as from an early age. I had to do all the housework while my friends were out playing. I felt like a robot and if the tasks I was set were not done properly...my punishment would be the jug cord or feather duster around my legs and backside. (Sub 179)

I, myself, was placed with a family, and worked from the age of 14 to 18, for a room and food, but no wages. I worked from seven in the morning until seven at night, 6 days a week. I call this slave labour. (Sub 232)

[They were] suppose to be my foster carer but you was there slaves. If they had a party you had to stay up and clean up and be up early and look after there children and keep them quiet till they got up. They used to eat in a nice dining of a silver service then when the food came back to the kitchen that's when I used to eat the left overs. Then clean kitchen scrub the floors...I ran away a few times but she would only come and pick me up and treat me like a dog. (Sub 315)

Non payment of wages

4.73 The Committee has described above the exploitation of children in commercial laundries and farms, and that their labour was used for the daily running and upkeep of the institution or foster home. Many who worked during their mid to late teens while still living at an institution reported receiving minimal or no payment when they left care.

Whilst working on these farm jobs I received no pocket money, even though I regularly signed the pocket money card, I was under the impression that I was signing for wages that were being paid in to the bank for me. On the 4 occasions I had returned from work **I never received any pocket money or wages.** (Sub 217)

All money that was banked or earned later on other jobs where I was placed by the Department was placed in a account at the department under the name of McCall who was at the time Director and classed as friend of said child. There was a large amount of money involved, and on reaching the age of 21, I approached the department, but was told there was none left. (Sub 287)

4.74 The Committee discussed this issue of outside employment, wages and trust monies in its report *Lost Innocents*. The Committee noted that in some States trust or other savings accounts were established for wards of the State when they took up employment. Children were generally paid a wage – half in cash (which presumably paid for food and board and was given to the carer) and half banked by Child Welfare. The Western Australian Department advised that trust monies should have been paid when the child turned 21, went to work or was married. Money not collected was returned to Treasury. However, financial records are only kept for seven years so 'we cannot prove that we have given them the money but we cannot prove that we have not given them the money'.²²

Use of experimental medications and drugs

4.75 Children in orphanages and Homes have been used for medial experiments for many decades. Some of these have been reported in medical journals. Many questions are raised, not least of all is that if these experiments were known, what other experiments may have occurred that were not officially reported?

22 *Lost Innocents*, pp.94-6.

4.76 A description of photos from St Vincent's Orphanage Nudgee c.1928 in the State Library of Queensland reads:

Groups of children from Nudgee Orphanage, 600 of whom were immunised against diphtheria, with no ill effects. As a result of the favourable report thereon immunization against diphtheria was established in Queensland.²³

4.77 In the years following WWII, children were repeatedly struck down by outbreaks of polio, influenza, whooping cough and other diseases that left many children permanently disabled, or dead. A number of research institutes, such as the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical research, were developing vaccines in Australia. These vaccines needed trialling and children in orphanages were used as the 'subjects' for a range of speculated reasons, including that they were often the most susceptible to disease as an epidemic could sweep through an orphanage.

4.78 The results of a number of experimental trials were reported in the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Science*:

- Two experiments to attempt to vaccinate against herpes simplex were conducted at St Joseph's Broadmeadows between March 1946 and April 1948. The first group used 51 babies and the second two groups totalling 32 babies between 7 and 10 months old. In both experiments children contracted the disease, leading to the conclusion that 'the vaccination was of no benefit in preventing primary herpetic infection under the conditions of the study'.²⁴
- A 1953 paper refers to influenza outbreaks in Victoria in 1946 then epidemics in 1950 and 1951, and studies undertaken at St Joseph's Broadmeadows (during this period about 250 children under three years were housed at Broadmeadows).²⁵

4.79 In June 1997, *The Age* printed a series of articles on children in orphanages and babies' homes in Victoria being used for medical experiments and research until the 1970s that included trials of new vaccines that did not work or failed to pass safety tests in animals. The articles referred to studies additional to those described above, including trials of an experimental whooping cough vaccine using children from a number of institutions including St Gabriel's and Berry Street. Reported results from

23 *Submission 22*, Additional information 12.3.04 (CLAN).

24 Anderson SG and Hamilton J, 'The epidemiology of primary herpes simplex infection', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 5 March 1949 and Anderson SJ et al, 'An attempt to vaccinate against herpes simplex', *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Science*, 28 1950, 579-84.

25 Anderson SG et al (authors were from Department of Experimental Medicine, University of Melbourne; Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research; Fairfield Hospital), 'Influenza in Victoria, 1950 and 1951', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 11 July 1953.

these trials indicated the vaccinations caused fevers and vomiting in some of the babies.²⁶

4.80 It is unclear who was legally responsible for giving permission for children and babies to be used in these medical experiments. The Journal reports acknowledge that the studies were carried out with the cooperation of the sisters in charge of the orphanage. However, even if superiors at institutions or departmental authorities who had legal guardianship that covered care and protection, did this extend to agreement for the child to be used for experimentation? Not all the children were orphans, yet there appears to be no record of a parent's permission ever having been obtained.

4.81 In addition to the issue of consent, a number of other issues arise including what other research may have occurred and was it fully recorded, was there follow-up research and were children put at risk of these experiments (in some herpes research it is reported that a number of the subjects had left the Home during the course of the experiment), do any of the children know they were used as experimental subjects and did they suffer any long term adverse health effects?

4.82 The Age articles created considerable debate. Richard Larkins, Chairman of the National Health and Medical Research Council (that had provided grants for some of the earlier studies), editorialised in the *Medical Journal of Australia* that the community needs to be assured that current clinical research is of the highest ethical standard. He wrote:

The apparent outrage to these media reports by many different sectors of the community indicates the need for all those involved in clinical research, and indeed in clinical care, to examine the events of the past, and learn from the reactions of the present...We must all note the community concerns, heed the lessons of the past and work to repair the damage.²⁷

4.83 Shortkids Downunder also referred to the 1997 Age articles claiming that experimental drugs were administered to children in orphanages by medical practitioners during the period of the Australian Human Pituitary Hormone Program that treated infertility and short stature, especially the use of human growth hormone and human pituitary gonadotrophin.²⁸ A tragic consequence for recipients of pituitary hormone treatment from this program was being put at risk of contracting Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The Committee' 1997 Report on the CJD Settlement Offer noted that there were large numbers of unapproved recipients that had received hormones from a variety of sources that had not been approved as part of the official Program.²⁹

26 *The Age* 10, 11, 12 June 1997.

27 'Victorian orphans and clinical research', Editorial, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 21 July 1997.

28 *Submission* 121 (Shortkids Downunder).

29 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Report on the CJD Settlement Offer, October 1997, pp.164-6.

4.84 The Wilson Youth Hospital in Queensland was for a period during the 1960s to early 1980s a unique institution doubling as a corrective institution and mental health facility run jointly by the Children's Services and Health Departments. It became notorious for the use of medication on children. The use of sedatives and other 'experimental' drugs have also been linked with Karrala House.

There were 6 medication queues a day, where medications like Melleril, Largactil and Tryptonal were handed out. There were psychiatrists on staff and it was mandatory to go through their mental health assessment. This included EEG's and various intelligence tests etc. Included in the assessment process was an enforced gynaecological examination, including an internal involving a speculum...

Few of my peers, who were incarcerated in the late seventies, remain. Some did not make it out of their teens. Many died in their twenties, some before my eyes. Some decided it was all too hard and took their own lives. Many more however fell into the addiction trap, self-medicating so to speak. I strongly believe there is a direct correlation between the relentless medicating of inmates at Wilson Youth Hospital and the self-medicating that people mimicked that would eventually end their lives. (Sub 58)

At Wilson I went through a series of medical tests, not told anything and talked to no one. I was heavily medicated and I remember some boys who would get a virtual cocktail of pills three times a day. (Sub105)

We have since found out that drugs were put in our food to keep us quiet, and even though we cannot yet prove it we have also found out that some new drugs were tested on us. (Karrala – Conf Sub 3)

4.85 The Forde inquiry considered the use of 'medication' at both Wilson and Karrala House. During the 1960s and 70s both apparently operated as a psychiatric facility where 'treatment' was inspired by a 'medical model'. This conceptualised the child's 'anti-social' behaviour solely in medical (psychiatric) terms with little or no regard to social or other factors. What was deemed to be required was medical intervention in the form of psychotherapy and 'chemotherapy', generally involving the use of anti-convulsants, sedatives and tranquillisers. Forde notes that the DCS at the time asserted that inmates of Karrala were 'treated along modern psychiatric lines with up to date tranquilliser drugs'.³⁰ With orderlies having no medical training and with modern treatment using up to date drugs in the 1960s and 70s it is highly likely that there were elements of experimentation in their usage.

4.86 Largactil was widely reported as a drug commonly used to pacify 'out-of-control' children. Doses of Lithium and Melleril were also referred to as being regularly used to sedate young children.³¹

30 Forde Report, pp.153-4 and Forde Closed Report on Karrala, pp.3-4. Conflict between the two Departments over the direction of caring for children in their care led to the takeover of the Wilson institution in 1983 by DCS and its renaming as Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Centre.

31 *Submission* 122, pp.13-17 (Positive Justice Centre).

Children placed in mental homes and other inappropriate accommodation

Children should not ever be placed in a ward with adults in a psychiatric hospital and should always be supervised. At Rydalmere Psychiatric Hospital in 1971 I was placed in a ward with adult men and was sexually assaulted in a toilet block by another inmate. I was only 12 years of age. (Sub 318)

4.87 A number of submissions from Queensland referred to being placed in mental hospitals for reasons such as running away from other homes. As discussed above the Wilson Youth Hospital served a variety of purposes. In the late 1970s children were still being placed in adult mental health institutions, including Lawson House and Wolston Park:

I was placed in an adult mental health institution as a child. I will start with Warilda, because that is where the mental health side of it started...they sent me to D floor at Lawson House, which was an adult institution. It was a big dormitory with about 30 women in it. The day I got there I had to be processed. There was a lady who kept screaming for help. I went to try and help her, and she was in this little cell. Because I made a bit of a scene about that and would not take my medication, they dragged me off to the cell too. They took all my clothes off and just left me on the floor, I was 13, and that was just the beginning.³²

I was sent to Goodna Mental Hospital at Ipswich [now Wolston Park] ...there was nothing mentally wrong with most State Wards that were sent here, they were sent here because they were hard to handle and they could keep them drugged up and under control here...There is also a letter [in my file] written by a doctor to the Welfare Department saying that I should not be there as this place was non-therapeutic for me and that I should be out in a hostel doing a business course. Well of course 6 months later I was still there...We were drugged up most of the time, I was sexually abused and told that this would happen at any time that I tried to escape...I was locked up for some months in the CRIMINALLY INSANE WARD and was nearly murdered by one of the inmates. It was in this ward that I got a beating with a belt and the buckle cut my face and has left a scar...In this ward I was forced to give a wardsmen oral sex and got a beating when I first refused. It was in this ward that I was sodomised and raped. It was in this ward that I have been left with scars such as the scar on my face, cigarette burns on my arms and scars on my hand where it was cut with glass...It is beyond me that when people hear that children were put in with the CRIMINALLY INSANE that they are not as mad as hell. There are not a lot of us left as a lot have committed suicide and some just did not make it out of there. (Conf Sub 3)

4.88 One lady reported being placed in Marillac House (a home for people with intellectual disability or social and emotional problems) at the age of 9 even though

³² *Committee Hansard* 12.3.04, p.38; also *Submission* 228.

file records show that only 3 years earlier a psychologist had assessed her as 'clearly of normal intelligence'.

the girls there were aged between 5-10 years and most of them were severely retarded, could not speak properly and made no sense and some of them had no control of their bodies...Had no friends. "My best friend was the dog – he would play with me – the other kids I played with couldn't remember the game the next day."

"I hated being seen with the kids...I had to dress exactly like them all in the same dress and sandals – it made you look like them and I hated it – we had to walk on the street and it was so embarrassing". (Sub 264)

4.89 A number of submissions reported people being placed in mental homes for what was apparently a form of punishment for misbehaviour such as running away, refusing to work or perform chores or arguing with Sisters or staff. The use of drugs to pacify children for what may now be considered high spirited or adolescent behaviour was also common and is referred to in the previous section. The use of such institutions for adolescent children is unjustifiable and the impact that it had upon them incalculable.

At the age of 12, I was taken to the Lachlan Park Asylum...

I used to look after the little kids in this place. I'll never forget the ones with encephalitis – there were about 6 or 7 of them – with their swollen heads just lying in their cots waiting to die. There were also 5 girls in there who were just vegetables, 3 were sisters...Once I remember the nurses putting hot water bottles on them without covers on them and they got bad burns. There were also 25 little Downs Syndrome children who would be taken out of their beds each morning and strapped onto potty chairs where they stayed all day until they were bathed in the afternoon and put back to bed. They weren't allowed to walk or run around...

As the children's ward was not locked, I decided to escape one day, but I didn't know how to get out. I remember it being freezing cold and the nurses found me before I could get out. They took me back to the children's ward and gave me a tablet, which I spat out. Later they came back and told me to get dressed, and they then took me to another ward where I could hear lots of screaming. This was where they kept the 'real crazies'. They put me in a cell with a small peephole in the door. I was so scared I couldn't sleep. (Sub 182)

another girl...spent 3 years in Graylands. I didn't know this until I bumped into her just before she died last year. She looked so frail (was anorexic) and sad and although she could barely talk, we did spend some time talking about the past. It was obvious that she had never psychologically left the orphanage and she had a real fear of being sent back to Graylands. She also told me that she had lost her daughter to a drug overdose. (Sub 172)

I ran away from the Home at Cheltenham on three separate occasions. My motivation each time was to try to escape from the abuse, the terrifying experiences, the persecution and regular beatings...After my third escape I was placed by the brothers into a receiving house at the Mont Park Asylum.

This was a terrifying experience...As I was fairly small and only a young teenager, I was sometimes physically attacked by some of the older patients with mental illnesses...During the night I was locked up in a small cell that had bars on a window and a solid door with a small, barred, glass window in it...I spent about two years at Mont Park...until this doctor made an assessment of me and then told me that I should not be in such a place. I was 14 years of age. (Conf Sub 98)

4.90 A number of the harshest institutions that had reputations well known among the children included reformatories (indeed to be sent to such a place was widely used as a threat to control children) and remand or detention centres. However, many children were sent to these places even though they did not have 'a record'.

We boys at Westbrook had nobody to turn to. Some of them (like myself) were considered 'delinquents', but many were just orphans who were too old for the orphanage yet had nowhere else to go. They were treated just as badly. (Westbrook – Sub 141)

I was unaware that Vaughan House was a remand centre for delinquent girls, nor was I told this. I was eleven years of age at this time and I had not committed any offence. I agreed since it was my Social Worker's suggestion. I was the youngest inmate, several years younger than all the other inmates were. I felt intimidated by them and was often scared. (Vaughan House, Adelaide – Sub 273)

I was 13 when I went to stay at Minali for what was to have been one night and turned into 8 and half months of hell...When I got there, I called my caseworker that said to calm down; I would only be there for the night and to calm down. This caseworker left a week later [without] visiting me and my case file was not handed on to anyone else. (Sub 69)

4.91 The NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People has submitted:

Until the late 1980's or early 1990's it was possible in Australian jurisdictions for children who had not offended against the law to be placed in detention centres or prisons.

The detention or imprisonment of non-offending youth was often utilised by Australian 'child welfare' departments as an option if a child was 'uncontrollable' or 'difficult' and as a consequential punishment for behaviour such as absconding. The provision to place children and young people in detention was also used as a response to the 'immoral' behaviour of young women.

The sentencing patterns of the juvenile or criminal courts or the use of administratively sanctioned detention as a form of care for many children, reflected a time where authorities frequently argued the rehabilitative capacity of their detention and punishment systems. Research is generally pessimistic about the rehabilitative power of detention, institutionalisation or imprisonment.³³

33 *Submission 35*, p.7 (NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People).

4.92 State wards could find themselves in places with a diverse mix of residents.

The inmate population was made up of women of all ages. There were girls who had become too old to stay in institutions for young children. These girls tended to have an intellectual disability or physical disability. Some women were single mothers and others were old women with dementia. Also many young girls had been placed by the courts for protection or for criminal offences. I was so traumatized and shocked that I didn't menstruate for about 12 months. I cried and hardly spoke a word for the first few months. (St Aiden's, Bendigo – Sub166)

Fostering arrangements, including holiday placements

4.93 Institutions would place children in foster homes for short periods, weekends or during holiday periods ('Holiday Hosts' as the nuns would call them). This was often undertaken in an uncoordinated manner with expediency rather than child welfare being a primary consideration. No attempt was made to match couples with children nor understand the needs of either party. Many reported being placed with much older couples or people with limited child rearing skills and questioned the motivation of some people who accepted children – 'I am sure they only took us to get the money'. Stories were told of being used as a form of cheap 'slave labour' while others were sexually abused by the foster parents, their children or relatives.

When people came to look for foster kids we were lined up like cows so they could pick who they liked. (Sub 194)

'Foster care' was actually being 'farmed' out as temporary worker...I was sent to those who needed a slave & a slave I was (Sub 293)

It seems that the government paid people to care for abandoned children – in the hard years of the Depression the extra income would have been welcome in many families. I later found out that the head of the house and his sons were the town drunks and I guess I was used for drinking silver and cheap labour. (Sub 320)

We were placed every holiday with complete strangers and it was always somewhere different. I never understood why I was never asked back to any of these foster homes...It wasn't until I read my wardship file that I learned I was wanted back but as Catholic welfare did not co-ordinate with the state welfare this never happened.

...these [foster] people had no intention of having a child for the holidays to give them some home comforts, and a taste of family life, some wanted housemaids, someone to do the housework and watch the younger children...This was what the system was set up for, not with our best interests put first but to fill the needs of families and the Church was so grateful to these people. (Sub 351)

The truth is that if anyone had seen how we had to live, being child slaves to these very poor excuses of foster parents, we would have been taken from them, they would lose the payment for us and they would have no one to push around and make do all their housework. (Sub 206)

Social welfare standards around 1960 for the foster-placement of children were as lax as the advertising of tobacco products. My first placement occurred as the result of two pensioners placing an add in the local newspaper. Aged in their 60's, my foster father was mostly confined to bed, his injuries the result of military participation in both world wars...My foster mother didn't drink or smoke, and most outings consisted of excursions to horse racing tracks and places filled with people playing cards and drinking. (Sub 401)

My Foster parents were and are wonderful people, but in their middle ages, childless and with no parental training, they were totally unprepared to take on the parenting, of the troubled nine or ten year old I was. (Sub 321)

4.94 Issues relating to foster care generally and contemporary problems, remedies and future directions for foster care will be considered in the Committee's second report.

Deaths in institutions

On a few occasions the police would come to the orphanage if one of the girls died. I remember once when a baby had died and the police came - we were told what to say by the nuns, which meant lying. (St Joseph's Subiaco – Sub172)

My older brother has a story about a child in his time two or three years before my stay at Westmead where a child was killed and hushed up by the staff and no more was heard, it still puzzles him today. (Sub 303)

I am writing this brief note on behalf of my younger brother Owen. Owen died whilst in the care of some Church of England nuns. Owen apparently had a tumour on brain and he was smacked across the head by the nuns. This apparently caused the tumour to burst and Owen died as a result. Owen was 3 yrs of age at that time. (Sub 411)

4.95 As was the case with the Child Migrants inquiry, the Committee heard stories of children who died while in care, in mysterious circumstances or 'disappeared', especially if they had been sick or injured. Some of these stories were accompanied by comments of possible foul play or cover up. Children were usually never given information in Homes, and it is possible that in many cases of allegedly missing children the child could have been transferred to hospital or another home and no one would be told.

4.96 The Forde Commission in its Closed Report on Neerkol endeavoured to establish if there was any basis in fact for the stories of a number of former residents over suspicious deaths and burials in unmarked graves. Not all were satisfactorily resolved with a couple of accounts unable to be confirmed either through first-hand evidence or contemporary documents.³⁴

34 Forde Closed Report on Neerkol, pp.8-9.

4.97 The Committee noted in *Lost Innocents* that the records relating to the deaths of some child migrants had been destroyed and that coronial inquests had not appeared to be conducted on some violent deaths. The Committee considered that the lack of coronial inquests and the history of cover-ups of other assaults lead to the conclusion that there should as a minimum be some suspicion concerning the events surrounding some deaths. Unfortunately the passage of years meant that pursuit of cases would now produce inconclusive results.³⁵

4.98 With the level of physical assault that has been reported in evidence, it is highly probable that within a group of 500 000 over many years some deaths would occur as either a direct or indirect result of these assaults. While the Committee only received minimal anecdotal and circumstantial evidence, there remains a suspicion of a pattern of limited investigation by police or authorities, no inquests, and police or authorities accepting unquestioningly the word of the carers in relation to deaths occurring at their institution.

I witnessed a boy who was attacked by a brother and after being punched and beaten he was thrown down the stairs. This boy was taken to the infirmary and I found out that he died a short time later. Later on the day of this incident I was near the infirmary and I overheard some brothers talking. One of the brothers claimed that the boy had fallen down the stairs. (Conf Sub 98)

[One boy stabbed another boy] with a pocket knife he had. The whole thing was – how do you say – hushed up by the nuns. We weren't allowed to discuss it. We weren't allowed to speak to the police...So it was more or less swept under the carpet. We did have a mass at this little boy's funeral. The mass was in the chapel at the orphanage. But, as far as I know, there was never any blame laid on [the other boy] at all. So what happened about that is anybody's guess. (Conf Sub 107)

I befriended an Aboriginal boy, and I can remember being belted black and blue because I was a 'nigger lover'. At that time in Baltara, that boy – I can say now – was probably murdered. I was being held in bed, by people who were supposed to be keeping me safe, while this boy was being bashed.³⁶

4.99 The Committee is also aware that on 28 June 2004 the South Australian Police Commissioner initiated a review following the raising in the South Australian Parliament of allegations by a former State ward that a child had been killed while he was an inmate at an orphanage in Adelaide in the 1960s.³⁷

4.100 In earlier years of the century children died from disease which could sweep through an institution. Through lack of hygiene and nutrition children in these times

35 *Lost Innocents*, pp.99-100.

36 *Committee Hansard* 11.11.03, p.63.

37 'Police advice on orphanage allegations', News Release, Hon Kevin Foley MP, 29.6.04.

were more susceptible to contract disease, which could in their weakened condition prove fatal.

Transition from in care to independence

4.101 If life in the institution was not traumatic enough, leaving it was equally so. With little or no aftercare services many care leavers reported that their departure from care consisted of a letter from the department wishing them well and being given a suitcase with what meagre possessions and clothing they may have acquired, some money if they were lucky and being shown the door. They were left to fend for themselves.

These 6 [Hopewood] girls spent 4 years or more working as UNPAID LABOURERS in the NUNS COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY [Good Shepherd, Ashfield]. When they neared their 18th birthday, they were called out of the workrooms, told to change their clothes, they were given a small suitcase which contained all their possessions, they were given £1.00 and shown the door. These girls were just dumped on the street just a few days before their 18th birthday, they were not given a chance to tell the other girls they were leaving. (Sub 93)

4.102 There was no gradual introduction to the outside world, and no preparation to cope with it, so that children had no preparation for adulthood and little idea how to live a 'normal' life. The 'outside world' often proved overwhelming as they had not been trained in any of the most basic life skills.

I left Burnside quite unprepared for life in the real world. I was afraid of everything – people, unfamiliar places, public transport, conversation, shopping, loud voices, being alone with one person, authority figures and so on. (Sub 276)

When I finally left that home I was so unprepared for the outside world that I fell into a world of alcohol and drugs which allowed me hide myself and my problems from those around me. I had no training in handling any of the things that I was confronted with and so made many mistakes. (Sub 20)

Even at eighteen, after leaving the state's care, I had no idea how to catch a bus, or how to pay my fare, or any idea of the outside world after being institutionalised. It was very hard to fit into a society of which I had absolutely no knowledge or experience. (Sub 8)

I found the world was a lot different to what I knew in the 'Homes'. It was hard to adjust and I found it hard to communicate with people. Institutional life had protected me and now I was on my own. (Sub 153)

When I left Dalmar I could not deal with free time, I did not know what to do with free time as I had developed no interests or hobbies. Even when I had my own children I found it very difficult to play with them. (Sub 136)

There should have been support, counselling and follow up once I turned 18, especially since I had a history of suicide attempts. There was nothing at all available; I was dumped like a hot potato. (Sub 318)

4.103 This was yet another form of abandonment. Often the only home they knew was the institution. Having had any sense of self worth crushed during childhood, they were now thrown out alone into the outside world and expected to function as an individual.

How could the welfare allow young girls and boys to go out into the world so institutionalised. We were like little children not knowing how to cope with all the changes. No wonder so many ended back in institutions and gaol there was no preparation for us. I feel the welfare thought that was all we deserved, and would end up there anyway, as we were no good.
(Sub 407)

Good memories

4.104 Among all the vividly recalled bad memories of life in an institution, some also recalled happier occasions. Some country based institutions would provide an annual outing to the city where the children would go to the pictures, catch a ferry to the zoo or go and see a show. Others recalled being taught drama, singing and dancing or performing in a band. Performing plays at country town halls gave an opportunity to get away from the home.

We also put on a play out in the wheat-belt. Us kids then spent the night and the next day at various farms – the people I went with were really kind and this was the first time that anybody had showed me any kindness.
(Parkerville – Conf Sub 44)

[Our band was] invited to visit other towns to play. Dalgety Show Committee invited us to play at their show. We were very well treated and had all the food and drink we wanted. This was great and we enjoyed ourselves. (Gill – Sub 292)

4.105 For others, the only fun they had they made for themselves. Children, irrespective of circumstances, seem to be able to make fun of nearly any situation.

The highly shined floors were great for skidding on and we also used to drink the communion wine and play confessions. Another way of having fun was playing truth and dare with the coffins where girls would dare each other to take the cotton wool out of the dead nun's noses or take their rosaries off.

We used to have pictures shown regularly, and this was good fun. If you were naughty, you were still allowed to go but had to sit with your back to the screen. What the nuns didn't realise though was that as most of them wore glasses and used to sit behind us girls, you could watch the movie through the reflection in their glasses. (St Joseph's Subiaco – Sub 172)

Conclusion

4.106 The Forde Inquiry found that unsafe, improper or unlawful treatment of children had occurred in most of the institutions for which submissions had been made and which had been licensed or established under the relevant Queensland Acts.

Breaches of Regulations in relation to food, clothing, education and corporal punishment were commonplace in institutions.³⁸

4.107 The submissions and evidence of care leavers to this inquiry were from a wide-range of government and non-government institutions and out-of-home care across Australia and covering nearly 70 years. As with the Forde Inquiry, the stories put to the Committee indicate that unsafe, improper and unlawful treatment of children was widespread and not limited to particular States, places or periods of time – although a number of institutions in each State were more notorious and severe in their treatment of children entrusted to their care.

4.108 Procedures to protect children from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect were either insufficient or non-existent, for example visits by welfare to check on children in placements did not appear to be thorough nor was the investigation of claims by children about being abused by carers.

4.109 The stories reported to the Committee contain many serious breaches of statutory obligations in relation to the provision of care and treatment that was experienced while in care. There were stories of children being systemically abused, either through omission of duty to protect children from abuse, or through direct emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The seriousness of these breaches can be established when compared with the requirements outlined in respective State Child Welfare Acts or the protocols for the conduct of particular institutions in the treatment of children placed in their care that were operating at the time, as was discussed in chapter 2. Issues relating to failure of duty of care are also discussed in chapter 7.

4.110 The questions arise as to why was such abuse able to occur and continue over lengthy periods of time and what was the life long impact for the children who suffered from such abuse while in care? These questions are addressed in the following two chapters.

38 Forde Report, pp.277-280; *Submissions* 31, p.3 (Relationships Australia Qld) and 159, pp.2-3 (Board of Advice of the Forde Foundation).