

*for publication*

27/9/2003

The Senate Community Affairs  
References Committee

Inquiry Into Children In  
Institutional Care

Miss T

Dear Sir / Madam

I was a ward of the state from 1951 until 1968.

I was in various institutions. Methodist babies home, Gordon Boys Home, and Turana.

I guess I, as with many children in care was both sexually and physically abused between the ages of 7 and 16 years of age both by staff and older inmates of Turana.

My education on leaving care was minimal. I had not completed year 8 my marks were appalling. I was told that I didn't have the aptitude for the trade that I wanted to pursue.

I received little or no support when I left the institutions.

I had two serious medical conditions apart from sexual abuse which I still receive counselling. Neither of which were addressed at all while I was in care. The first was Crohns disease, the second was Gender Dysphoria. This meant I was the subject of ridicule and abuse by staff and my peers. As serious as these issues are, they are probably not the most disabling, with the exception of a lack of education.

For me and I suspect for many others is the lack of appropriate socialisation. That is skills that are acquired in a "normal" family setting, parenting skills and social skills.

The skill required to survive in an institutional setting are quite different and inappropriate for normal social interaction in the outside world.

One of the problems state wards have is that society can relate to and understand sexual abuse. However there does not appear to be an appreciation of the effects of being institutionalisation or in care. One of them is the difficulty not being able to form a trusting relationship with others.

For those who have been institutionalised since birth there is also the difficulty of forming a close trusting or loving relationship with significant others.

This is consistent with my experience I have difficulty forming meaningful trusting relationships with my partner (now ex), my children and other people.

After all how do you know how to be a parent if you never been parented? How do know love, if you never have been loved? How do you know how a normal family functions if you have never been in one? These handicaps have been far more pervasive and devastating to my life than the experience of being sexually abused.

What concerns me that this situation for wards of the state has not changed at all. The foster care system that now exist, means that those in "care" will have on average 6 placements. I know of some cases where children in care have had 30 different placements. These children may feel that childhood is just a succession of rejection. I know it was for me. It seems to me that confidentiality that is intended to protect children also is very effective in protecting the state.

For me, Crohns disease turned out to be a blessing. I was put on the invalid pension I was then able to access an education and gain qualification in electronics. Since then I have worked as radio technician in the emergency services for 27 years. I was a Manager of the largest Emergency Service radio network in this state when I resigned to do a four year social work degree. In appearance I had the trappings of a normal person, I married, three children, car and, a brick veneer house.

I was also politicaly active. I was selected by my party to stand for the House of Representatives in the 1998 election.

I wish I could say my personal life was as successful, I can't. It was a disaster. I am now on the invalid pension, I suffer from clinical depression and my childhood still haunts me.

It is difficult for me to discuss my experiences in writing. I would very much like to give my submission in person if the opportunity is made available. I believe I may be able to contribute in a constructive meaningful way.

Kind regards  
Miss T

