

## STATEMENT TO COURT

**Re: Experiences of being a Ward of the State**

**By David Guthrie**

- I was abandoned by my parents shortly after birth. A referral from the Royal Women's Hospital to the Royal Children's Hospital where I was sent at age 6 weeks makes this clear. I was passed around from the Children's Hospital to the Royal Vic Institute for the Blind to a foster home until 1962. No one took responsibility for my care.
- I was made a Ward of the Social Welfare Dept in 1962, placed in Allambie, and later

transferred to Hillside Boys Home. During these years I was physically beaten, sexually assaulted, verbally abused and emotionally tormented and neglected. I lived in fear and learnt that aggression and violence were necessary survival skills.

- At the age of 15 I was placed in Private Board. I left Hillside uneducated and illiterate. I had few social skills, and felt I was a social misfit. I had learnt that "care" and "justice" were words with no meaning, and that rules, institutions and authority were not deserving of respect.
- The attitudes and lessons I learnt as a Ward of the State handicapped me in life.

I got into trouble with the Law. I have been convicted of theft and assault.

The memories of the torment and fear I experienced as a child resulted in drug abuse, depression and suicide attempts.

The lack of education meant my employment options were limited, and thus affected my income potential.

My early experiences taught me that people could not be trusted and have affected my ability to interact with others and form long-term relationships.

Today I have to deal with the consequences of my upbringing as a Ward of the State.

- I have a criminal record, which cannot be undone.

- I have had a drug problem and have had to seek counselling and support to address this. I no longer drink or take drugs to suppress my early memories, which are all the more painful as a result.
- I have had to “unlearn” my violent and aggressive behaviour, through counselling, anger management courses and Life Skills Training.
- My memories of childhood haunt me, and have resulted in continuing nightmares and sleep disturbances, anxiety, phobias, depression, irritability and other emotional disturbances, for which I have had to seek treatment, medication and counselling. Currently I attend a GP, a Psychiatrist and a Counsellor on a regular basis.

- I currently receive a Disability Pension and live in an Office of Housing rental property in the country. I live there because it's the only way I can afford a decent standard of living, but I'm required to travel 2 hrs each way to Melb to access the services and support I require. I receive no financial support to do this, and my family and I go without, or seek welfare assistance (e.g. food parcels) in order for me to deal with my past.
- I am told that there's help available, but the only help I have received to attend today, or to prepare this statement, is from my wife. There are support groups, but no one helps me access them from the country, and financial assistance is non-existent. No one has ever apologised to me for the things that happened

to me when I was a Ward of the State, nor offered to help me deal with the effects of living in State run Institutions. Always, I have to pay for the right to access the services and support I am told I need because of my childhood in these institutions, and my wife and her son pay also, both financially and emotionally.