Centacare, Catholic Community Services, Sydney

Response to the Senate Community Affairs

Reference Committee

Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

Introduction

Centacare Catholic Community Services, Sydney, welcomes this opportunity to submit a response to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee's Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care.

Centacare is the official welfare agency of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Centacare is a large, non-government, professional organisation which has, as one of its core enduring functions, the provision of a range of Out of Home Care programs for children and young people. Centacare's Children and Youth Services currently provides services in Adoption, Permanent Foster Care, Temporary Family Care, Adolescent Placement Services, Foster Care for Children with Disabilities (Melanie's Program), Services for Young People at risk and After Care Services for young adults. Of particular interest to this Inquiry, Centacare also manages the Catholic Children's Home Inquiry Service and the Child Migrant Inquiry Service providing individuals and their families with information from their records, facilitating reunions and offering counselling to these clients.

In our response to the terms of reference, Centacare will be concentrating on the following issues.

A. The evolution of Centacare's professional practice within the history of Out of Home Care set against the broader context of changes in the Care System. (relating to Terms of Reference 1(c)).

B. A commentary on the impact of abuse and neglect on individuals, families and society and the adequacy of existing remedies and supports (relating to Terms of Reference 1(b)).

C. A review and suggestions for change of public, social and legal policy to ensure an effective and responsive framework to deal with child abuse matters (relating to Terms of Reference 1(g)).

The work in which Centacare has been involved for the past 63 years, has brought us into contact with thousands of individuals, who have experienced

life in Institutional care. As a participant in the sector we also work alongside our community partners, both governmental and non-governmental, to effect best practice, advocacy and research within the Out of Home Care sector. These experiences have meant we have seen the effects of unsafe and improper treatment of children, which has occurred both prior to entering the care system and within the care system.

Our commitment, and that of the sector of which we are a part, is to be vigilant in improving outcomes for children and young people and to reduce the possibilities of abuse.

It also needs to be stated that the current care system works hard to fulfil the principles on which it is based : the best interests of children and the promotion of their safety, welfare and well being as paramount. However, the mere fact of growing up in a care system begs the question of whether this already imposes systemic factors of neglect, thereby requiring ongoing assistance and support around issues of connectedness, identity and belonging. *"Growing up in care is a hazardous experience for most children"* ***(Association of Child Care Agencies' 1981 Report "Lost in Care")***.

In addressing the terms of reference of the Inquiry, the expressions Out of Home Care, Foster Care and Residential Care will be used as elements of Institutional Care.

A.   *History of Out of Home Care*

The Catholic Church has played an important role in the care of dependent children since the early days of the colony. In 1912, the Social Work Journal listed sixteen Catholic Children's Homes in NSW. Over the next two decades with the advent of the World War and the Depression the numbers of dependent children needing care increased dramatically. Many more homes were established and by 1957 there were twenty five Catholic "orphanages" in New South Wales caring for children from birth to fifteen years of age. The state made no contribution to social welfare in general and did not make any contribution to those children who were placed in non-government institutional care. By 1956 there were 6,000 children "in care" in NSW; 4,000 of whom were in the care of non-government agencies.

Prior to the 1970s, one of the few solutions to family crisis or breakdown for families without supports was to place the children in a residential home or institution auspiced by a church or charitable organisations or the NSW Government. The non-government child welfare sector provided a service for children who might have otherwise come to the attention of the Department of Child Welfare. These children were from the most vulnerable sector of the population: most having already suffered some loss, neglect or abuse or family dysfunction. From individual accounts and from our involvement, as a member of the Advisory Board, with the Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN), we understand that this emotional trauma was compounded by the systemic abuse by the child welfare system of the time. The impact of

removal of children from their families to institutions or foster care prior to the 1970s has left many older Australians in need of assistance to cope with the legacy of their care experience. Although individuals have been affected in different ways, a number bear the scars of welfare practices which have subsequently been abandoned. Problems existed in all States and Territories and there has been substantial mobility around Australia of people who grew up in institutions.

During this period, removal from abusive and/or neglectful family circumstances may have been unavoidable and practices may have been formed with the best knowledge available at the time. Nevertheless, addressing the resulting problems is a matter of social justice for people scarred by the experience. Their problems are not unlike the problems of child migrants and the "stolen generation" which have had Federal Government acknowledgement of poor welfare practices in the past.

In the1970s changes such as Child Endowment and Child Support impacted on the numbers of families who needed assistance to care for their children and the type of assistance available. Further, much research was being undertaken with regard to child development and the increasing body of knowledge was clearly stating that children were not best cared for in institutionalised settings, rather in a family environment or within small group homes. In 1975 a survey of Catholic Children's Homes found that there were just under 1,000 children in residential institutions within the Catholic system. Throughout the 1970s up until the 1992 *Review of Substitute Care Services in New South Wales* (the Usher Report) Centacare worked with Catholic Residential Institutions as they moved from large scale congregate care, through smaller group settings within the institution to group homes and/or foster care located in the community. Centacare provided professional processes and policies with regard to admittance, record keeping, support for the staff and operational procedures. Centacare, during these years, worked towards the deinstitutionalisation of Catholic Out of Home Care Services. It did this by helping the Religious Orders who operated Children's Homes to appreciate the importance of the proper assessment, placement and review of children in care. By the 1970s Foster Care was being encouraged as a preferred model of Out of Home Care and most Catholic orphanages in NSW were closed by the mid 1980s. Centacare stressed the importance of birth families a maintaining connections with them, individual support and counselling for the children and some specialised planning for the children. At the same time Centacare stressed the importance of keeping siblings together so the age-old practice of separation of siblings on the basis of age and gender changed.

The 1980s proved to be a decade where the body of knowledge around Out of Home Care for children continued to develop and the systematic closure of institutions and movement of children into family based foster care was consolidated. During this time Centacare's Permanent Family Care Program was set up because it was recognised that children required the security and stability of a permanent placement, preferably with their family, or if this was not possible, in permanent foster care or adoption. There was also a growing

awareness of the occurrence of Child Sexual Assault in the community and within the care system and services were established to assist children in this area. Centacare employed a Child Sexual Assault worker to counsel children in care who had experienced sexual assault. These Centacare support services continue today.

In 1992 Father John Usher Chairperson of the Review of Substitute Care Services in NSW, presented the report on Out of Home Care within New South Wales. The Report's main recommendation related to the closure of the larger residential facilities and the transfer of all Out of Home Care to the non-government sector. Although such a transfer did not occur, the Usher Report facilitated the closure of many large, mostly government run residential institutions for children and young people. These institutions were seen as *"inappropriate environments for already vulnerable children and young people"* (Usher Report).

Also in the 1990s, Centacare set up the ALIVE program as a service for young people who required ongoing assistance to transition into independence, most of whom had been left vulnerable and unsupported following disruptive experiences in and out of the care system.

In 1994 Centacare established the Catholic Children's Home Inquiry Service and Child Migrant Services to provide a central register of the details of all of the Catholic Children's Homes in New South Wales to enable people to access their records and receive some professional support.

It is difficult and perhaps impossible to estimate the numbers of children who have been impacted by institutional care. Centacare is aware from anecdotal evidence that there were a significant number of children who were cared for "unofficially", particularly in rural areas where records were never kept. In the 1990s there were thirty nine congregate care Catholic Children's Homes in New South Wales and Centacare estimates that there may have been as many as 50,000 children in residential institutions within the Catholic System in New South Wales alone.

A Piece of the Story: National Directory of Records of Catholic Organisations Caring for Children Separated from Families (1999) accompanies this submission to assist the Committee in its consideration of the issues.

B(i). *The Impact of Abuse and Neglect*

Accounts of institutional life documented in studies (Maunder 1994; Penglase 1999; Forde Inquiry 1999) reveal the inherent systemic problems where little consideration was given to a child's emotional needs or kinship ties. Discouragement of birth family contact, separation of siblings due to age and gender, harsh discipline regimes and sub standard living conditions are documented as common features of the institutional culture. No account was taken of family history, medical history, photographs, personal memorabilia or

information about the reasons for coming into care leading one client to express to a Centacare worker *"...I spent my childhood (there) and there's one line in a register about me".*

Whilst differences in outcomes for individuals will always be evident, it is reasonable to expect that a child growing up in institutional care pre 1970's would have been adversely affected by these conditions. By way of illustration the experiences of children adopted from Romanian Institutions have provided scientists with a unique opportunity to study the impact of institutionalisation on the developing brain systems. Dr Chigany, from the Detroit Children's Hospital, undertook neurodevelopmental research involving eight of the children. Electronic PET scans of their brains showed low activity or even black holes instead of active areas for the interpretation of language, emotions and attention. He documented that through lack of stimulation and nurturing, institutionalised children suffer delays in physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development which manifest in areas such as vision, hearing, language, motor skills and attention. Some children manage to overcome difficulties through sheer determination or a rigorous daily regime of different therapies that somehow enable other areas in their brain to take over. Others are less fortunate; they remain unable to talk or attach to their adoptive parents and others. This example is provided simply to illustrate that the link between early childhood experience and consequent long-term capacity to function has been scientifically validated. It is in no way implied that children who experienced institutional care in NSW were subject to such extreme deprivation.

Some further outcomes for children in institutional care which have been researched and documented include:

1. **Poor and/or disordered attachment impacting the individual's social development.**
   - Tizard (1977) showed children in institutional care were more clinging and diffuse in their attachments, more attention seeking and restless and less likely to have deep attachments.
   - Cheung et al. (1997) showed adults who have been in care are more vulnerable to depressive states.

2. **Lack of familial relationships.**
   - Separation of siblings in institutional care was standard practice impacting the individual's identity and sense of belonging from childhood and throughout life. Individuals separated from their siblings as children, have no basis for a relationship as adults and have not had the opportunity to learn about family history and relationships. Many adult care-leavers talk about the difficulty in searching and finding then forming and maintaining a relationship with a sibling they have not known.

3. **Lack of sense of self and identity formation.**
   - Growing up in an institution and being separated from family impacted on children who felt rejected and abandoned and

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therefore worthless and inferior. Bishop (1990) explores the impact of care on children thus *"From the child's point of view the greater the number of caretakers he has had to meet, relate to, live with and then leave behind, the more rejections he has experienced. No further proof is needed of his inherent badness and incapacity to change. This constant rejection by adults leads him to expect that no adult caregiver cares about him or if they do, they will desert him sooner or later so that he cannot afford to become emotionally dependent on any adult".*

4. **Poor education and employment attainment.**
    *   Individuals who have been in institutional care have significantly lower educational results and higher unemployment rates. The worst results are for children entering care before eleven years of age and for extended periods. This profile fits the majority of care leavers entering care pre-1970 (Penglase 1999).

5. **Mental health issues.**
    *   Evidence of physical and sexual abuse occurring for children in care has been well documented (Cashmore and Paxton 1996; Forde Inquiry 1999) and linked with mental health and substance abuse in care leavers.
    *   Abuse is *"...an important predictor of poor health and social functioning".* (Dunne and Legosz 2000).

6. **Criminal activity.**
    *   Studies show a strong link between the care system and the juvenile justice system and a subsequent link between the juvenile and adult justice systems (Vinson 1974; CAMA Report 1996).
    *   Incarceration is more likely to be imposed on children who are under wardship orders. In 1993/1994 males were thirteen times more likely and females thirty five times more likely to be admitted to a detention centre if they were wards than if they were not (Community Services Commission 1996)

Studies of outcomes for individuals in the Out of Home Care system in the 1990's (Cashmore and Paxton 1996; Community Services Commission 2000; NSW Review of Substitute Care 1992) indicate that whilst models of care have changed and practice has improved, there continues to be evidence of poor outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Of great concern is the anecdotal evidence that there is a link between growing up in care and the subsequent entry of the care leaver's own children into care. Centacare has the experience of three generations of families in the care system.

B(ii) *Adequacy of Existing Remedies and Supports*

Current Out of Home Care services in New South Wales in collaboration with bodies such as the Community Services Division of the Ombudsman, the Community Services Commission, the Commission for Children and Young People and the Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies have learnt from research and the experiences of those who have been in care and continue to identify the risks associated with the care experience. As a result certain mechanisms have been put in place aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers. Some of these include:

- The introduction of the new *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* in New South Wales heralded best practice and safety, welfare and well being of children and young people as paramount. The objects of the Act charge all institutions responsible for the care and protection of children and young people to *"provide an environment free of violence and exploitation and provide services that foster their health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity"*. The Act also makes provision for assistance to be given to parents and other people responsible for children and young people in order to promote safety and nurturance within child rearing. This capacity within the legislation for "request for assistance" is a significant shift in the way the community responds to asking for and receiving help in caring for their children without fear of reprisals from the "welfare". Such a change, however, in the perception of the public eye, in particular with regard to the Department of Community Services as a helping agency, will require much promotion and active work in the community, in order for the real preventative benefits to be evident in the future.

- Another part of the new legislation which is intended to address the systemic factors of children drifting in care and possible undetected abuse and neglect, is the establishment of the Office of the Children's Guardian. The intent of the Guardian's role was essentially threefold – to exercise the parental responsibility of the Minister for Community Services to accredit agencies providing Out of Home Care and to examine copies of case plans and reviews of all children and young people in Out of Home Care. All aspects of the Children's Guardian's work are underpinned with the premise of promoting the best interests of children and safeguarding their rights. The separation of roles would allow for greater accountability of all services, government and non-government, in their work with children and young people. Case plan reviewing would ensure that proper planning takes place and that children and young people participate in decisions affecting them, hopefully reducing systems abuse. It has been long awaited in New South Wales for these sections of the Act to be fully proclaimed, five years after the Act's proclamation. Centacare notes with disappointment the proposed dilution of these roles for the Office of the Children's Guardian to a random review of care plans as opposed to the original intent of all care plans to be reviewed. Accreditation will mean that all Out of Home Care service providers must comply with Standards of Practice to ensure best practice is consistently delivered in Out of Home Care. Centacare would support these

structures and roles as being important in strengthening the essential framework around Out of Home Care services.

- Within Australia, child protection and intervention services are the responsibility of State and Territory Governments administered through the relevant Community Services Departments. The problem which is posed by State based legislation becomes evident when as of 2002, New South Wales did not have a cross jurisdictional agreement with the Australian Capital Territory for "wards" to move between the two geographical areas. Whenever there is such separateness, there may be the potential for children and families to be lost in the system and therefore at risk. If such legislation is to remain the responsibility of States, it would be necessary to obtain agreements and protocols to effectively manage movement of children and families.

- In 1998 the Commission for Children and Young People was established via legislation in New South Wales. This independent organisation has the aim of making New South Wales a better place for all children and young people by initiating and influencing broad, positive change for children and young people. The Commission is a structure that can impact social change by the heightened awareness of issues affecting children and by the ability to have child representation and input on social, public and legal policy in the State.

- Three other pieces of legislation accompany the Commission for Children and Young People and together they assist in creating safer child-related work places within New South Wales. They are the *Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998*, the *Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection and Community Services) Act 1998* and the *Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000*. *"Building a workforce committed to child protection requires employers to complement the legislation with a range of policies and practices. If adopted, these should assist employers of staff in NSW to look after children in a safe and caring environment"* (*The Working with Children Check Guidelines, June 2003*). It is hoped that these measures are formative in the process of building safeguards to prevent abuse in care. As noted above, foster care is the significant caregiver model in New South Wales and carers are included in the system of screening checks to ensure greater protection for children in care. Foster carers have historically also undergone criminal record checks to screen for offences that could signal potential safety issues for children, for example, drink driving offences or assault. Since 2000, obtaining these criminal record checks has not been possible for non-government organisations. It is Centacare's understanding that in October 2003 there will be new legislation that will enable non-government organisations to obtain national criminal record checks for foster carers, albeit for an administrative cost. We wholeheartedly support this change as an additional prevention strategy of abuse and/or neglect for children in care but suggest there should be no charge for this essential service.

- The system of recruitment, training, assessment and ongoing support for foster carers has changed substantially in New South Wales over the past three years. These changes are built on the premise that the better prepared, screened, trained and supported the foster carers are, the higher the rate of successful placements for children in care. Consistency within a system, which has multiple care providers, has been seen as a positive approach and one which enhances the future building blocks of the system as a whole. Prior to the development of the new foster carer training model *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* (developed by the Association of Child Welfare Agencies, funded by the NSW State Government), agencies used individually selected training programs for foster carers. There were no common processes or benchmarks set down as necessary and helpful for training of carers, who were then to embark on the difficult task of foster care. *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* was developed, as the "best of the best" in training materials, using interstate and international programs as sources. *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* has been widely embraced by the sector in New South Wales. It provides an innovative presentation model and the strength of the written materials provides a future system where common benchmarks are able to be assumed for all carers and children entering a placement.

- This strategy of consistency across the sector has been followed up with a newly released (June 2003) foster carer assessment package, **Step by Step**, based on a competency-based model of assessment. Whilst there has not been time to see if the take up rate is as widespread as **Shared Stories, Shared Lives**, there is no doubt, that the attempt to set minimum requirements that are deemed necessary to care for children in the care system, is important. Quality of care and therefore, stability of placements, are the hoped for outcomes of these new approaches. As Cashmore and Paxton (1996 p158) reported, the importance of stability in placement *"...lies in (the) long-term implications because children's history in substitute care and wardship is a good predictor of young people's circumstances at discharge and beyond."*

- Greater participation of children and young people in Out of Home Care in decisions affecting them by being in regular, meaningful contact with their worker (*Updated NSW Standards for Substitute Care Services*) assists in reducing the probability of abuse in care. In their summary of findings and implications for policy and practice, Cashmore and Paxton (1996 p162) spoke of a disturbing extent of abuse in care, and cited quality relationships with workers, regular contact between workers and children in care and monitoring of placements as vital issues. Centacare would support these practices as essential to the caseworking relationship within a placement – between the worker and child, worker and carers, worker and significant services and people in the child's life. To meet this end agencies need to be well resourced in manpower and have appropriate caseload ratios to allow for quality casework practices.

- It is realised that financial resourcing of the child welfare sector is in competition with the many other realms of governmental responsibilities. It

does behove the community at large however to keep the safety, welfare and well being of children as a priority issue and a future investment for the country. The New South Wales Government is applauded for recently granting a $1 billion increase over five years to build a more resilient and planned approach to the child welfare system within the government and non-government arena. The profile of safeguarding and protecting children, however, needs to continue into the general community and not just the child welfare system. *"Whilst the extent of child abuse cannot be pinpointed, there can be no doubt that from an epidemiological perspective, child maltreatment is one of the most significant issues facing the community. That is because of its immediate and long-term impact on the health and well being of children and young people concerned, their families and the cost this represents to the community"* (Layton 2003)

- Centacare Sydney has been at the forefront of the provision of After Care services since their inception in late 1996 when the then Premier of New South Wales announced the funding for the establishment of Leaving Care and After Care services for young people, aged fifteen to twenty five years. A key principle to After Care is the recognition that care leavers are open to particular vulnerability because of their earlier experiences. They may require continuing access to after care supports in order to successfully manage the transition to independent living. They may indeed require continuing access to After Care services well into adulthood, especially if they have had a history of multiple and/or disrupted placements, a history of abuse and/or neglect whilst in the care system, or limited social and familial connections during their care period.

    Proposed outcomes within the Tender document, produced by the New South Wales Department of Community Services when establishing the After Care services, included the following: *"To provide ongoing referral, counselling and advice to young people and adults who were abused while they were in care; To assist all young people in the target group towards independence and to gain an understanding of their personal history; To ensure that all young people in the target group are fully informed of and have access to a service which provides information, advice, advocacy, brokerage and referral to other services which will meet their needs"* **(*Tender Package No: 966/SC/0903 September 1996*)**. One of the pertinent needs was for services to be able to understand and be sensitive to the issues faced by the young people who had been part of the care system, in order to assist them throughout the After Care period.

    For some young people, however, their needs will not be met within the arbitrary age limit of twenty five years, set by the new legislation and as the criteria for the existing services. The effects on those who suffered unsafe, improper or unlawful treatment whilst in care may be ongoing throughout their lives or may become an issue at particular times in their lives.

    For those adults over twenty five years (this means all people in care prior and up to 1978), the only funded service currently available in NSW is one worker based in the Adoption and Permanent Care Section of the Department of Community Services who assists Wards but only those who were later adopted. Some non-government and church organisations who were past providers offer minimal support, for example file reading and

counselling, but these are unfunded and ad hoc services and dependent on the goodwill of the provider. This does not take into account that many care leavers will not return to the past provider for assistance because of the very nature of their care experience.

The lack of services for this group of care leavers was instrumental in the establishment of the Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN), a Sydney based incorporated organisation, the majority of its members being from New South Wales although it has members from all states, over 300 in all. It is staffed by a handful of volunteers funded entirely by small membership fees and donations. It has no premises, paid workers or office facilities so all services are provided out of members' homes on a part time basis. It inevitably provides very limited services. It attempts to provide a national contact network for care leavers over the age of twenty five years, assist care leavers to trace lost family members, provides information and assistance to members wanting to obtain their files or information about their institution, runs a library with publications relevant to the care experience, publishes a bi-monthly newsletter and promotes care leaver issues through lobbying of political and media sources. Centacare has financially supported CLAN and would advocate increased resource and financial support for CLAN from respective Governments.

- In 2003, the Federal Government through the Department of Family and Community Services, rolled out a program aimed at supporting the transition to independence for young people who have left State/Territory supported care. The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) was selectively granted to existing After Care services of which Centacare was one. It was to be an adjunct brokerage model program for young people requiring assistance with such issues as educational/vocational needs, accommodation and living requirements and support services. Whilst the TILA is in its first quarter of operation, its existence is a good example of the Federal Government's attention to young people on the national agenda.

- Centacare Sydney's Catholic Children's Home Inquiry Service and the Child Migrant Service are two services which support care leavers by providing information from records, facilitating reunions and providing counselling. The services are not funded and are staffed by one volunteer psychologist for the (approximately) 300 persons who have accessed the service since its inception in 1994. This service needs to be properly resourced in order to continue to provide a professional service which acknowledges the importance of people's needs to find their history and links to their identity which would otherwise be lost to them.

C. *Review and Suggestions for Change*

An effective and responsive framework to look at systemic factors which may reduce occurrences of child abuse and/or neglect requires a whole of Government, whole of community commitment to principles such as those enshrined in documents like the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of

the Child. The promotion of Human Rights education and the awareness raising in the community about the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child need to be continuous. With the restrictions of jurisdictions imposed by Australia's constitutional system and the variances this can allow in the legislative, executive and judicial systems within State/Territory/Federal systems it is imperative to have a guiding set of principles to ensure a basis of consistency in matters relating to the rights and welfare of our children. With this in mind, Centacare supports the consideration of the following services for all care leavers whose rights, and protection as children involved in the care system may not have been safeguarded and therefore require support mechanisms:

1. **Information Services**
    - Access to personal information by person themselves from the Agency or Departmental file, including assistance in locating and requesting files.
    - Access to information on relatives/significant persons.
    - Facilitated reunions/meetings and or mediation with persons identified from the file.
    - Assistance with tracing persons on the file.

2. **Assistance with Appropriate Referrals**
    - Having identified the issues from the past or even relating to current day to day living, the person may need assistance negotiating the systems to be referred to the right place.
    - People who have grown up in care may not be confident about accessing services and may need encouragement and assistance to use them. Centacare advocates the establishment of a national freecall telephone and web based referral and information service .

3. **Counselling/Therapeutic Services**
    - A person may seek counselling initially on reading the file then at different times throughout the process of coming to terms with its contents.
    - Care leavers in general need access to therapy and counselling to deal with lifetime consequences of their time in care.
    - Services must provide accessible, affordable counselling.
    - Counsellors need to be specially trained to understand unique issues.
    - Outreach work necessary to offer counselling and support to regional clients and fund rural meetings.
    - A free 1800 number.
    - Provision of a Care Leaver's Counselling Kit for regional counsellors. The NSW Government's Report *"Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998"* comments on the specific issues faced by individuals living in rural and regional areas and in its first recommendation supports the provision of a post adoption kit for rural and regional workers to assist them in understanding the issues faced with clients affected by adoption. Funding has been

provided by the NSW Government for this resource tool and it is in the process of being written. In the same way, Centacare would support the implementation of training and resources for rural and regional counsellors who see individuals who are affected by institutional care.

3.   **Peer Support**
   - Establishment of groups to share and support are key to the improved social functioning of the ex care population. These can also provide newsletters, telephone services and social events.

4.   **Education/Training Services**
   - Access to both educational and life skills courses may need specially designated services to facilitate entry to education and training.

5.   **Research**
   - Research arm necessary to search and locate records, collate histories of care locations, establish a centralised record service.

6.   **Evaluation/Review of Records**
   - Resources provided to ensure the integrity, safety and archiving of records for the future. This will acknowledge the importance in a practical way of primary information for people searching to know their identity and start the process of acknowledging their past. At present many records are in original paper form at risk of environmental deterioration let alone risk of accidental loss or destruction. With today's technology this can easily be provided if resources are allotted to the project.

The New South Wales Government spent time investigating the impact of past adoption practice and, in its report Releasing the Past, it mentioned the impact of a lack of professional services to adults affected by adoption. Centacare would submit that the issues facing care leavers in trying to access professional services such as those mentioned above are similar to those documented in Releasing the Past although in some ways more profound. Those people affected by adoption in New South Wales are able to access the variety of services provided by the New South Wales Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) and the services offered by the Adoption Service Providers, however, there are no similarly funded services for adult care leavers as mentioned above.

Centacare believes that funded services dedicated to adult care leavers should be implemented. In considering such a service model, relevant State and Federal Governments should seek the advice of and take account of:
   - the expressed needs of the care leavers
   - the individual States/Territories relevant government   and non government organisations currently engaged in the Out of Home Care sector

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- other models, such as the Leaving Care After Care Services, PARC and support groups such as CLAN

Centacare Sydney sees the work of this Inquiry as particularly timely. There is general recognition among Out of Home Care providers on the need for the States and Territories together with the Federal Government to further develop a National Agenda for Children. Ongoing services and support for people who have been in Out of Home Care should be one focus of that Agenda and the findings of the present Inquiry have the potential to contribute significantly to that end.

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