

A Childhood Lasts a Lifetime.

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into the implementation of the recommendations of the LOST INNOCENTS and FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS Report

My name is Daryl Sloan, ward number 82258. I am 47 years of age and another of the estimated 500,000 Forgotten Australian and Migrant Children spoken of in the above reports.

I'd like to honestly thank the Chair and Committee for this overdue review; it offers people like me great hope for the opportunity to gain healing and therefore, a brighter future.

My two brothers and I were placed into what today is still so poorly known as "State Care" after being charged in the Melbourne Children's Court with the Criminal Offences of No Settled Place of Abode and No Visible Means of Support. I was just over two years of age, it was then November 1963.

My brothers and I were then incarcerated as Wards of the State (Victoria) within a insensitive judicial system that has managed to continue to punish us ever since. We brothers ended up placed in different institutions simply on the basis of our ages.

Those were terribly hard and cold years that words simply can't express and I have well learnt the truth that a Childhood lasts a Lifetime.

Living, having survived "State Care" is difficult, but I find it's even much harder to explain. To make a proactive stance such as writing this letter, to advocate for the simple recognition of what occurred and to communicate something of what should change is a huge task that drains one of both emotional and physical energy. I think it is obvious what should happen - it's all been said and written before by those who are much braver, cleverer and so more articulate than I...

The recommendations of *Lost Innocents* and *Forgotten Australian's* were valid then and remain even more so to me today.

The echoes of the past haunt many of us with the consequences of our emotional and physical neglect, for many also: we try to deal with the physical and sexual abuse. Surprise sightings of old red brick buildings still put me on edge; stale sandwiches and lumps in porridge almost bring me to vomit. It's a daily event or more, something that we have little control of.

I have no idea how to attempt to explain repressed memories, of living with an over active stress response; of what that physically does to your body and mind or how to share just a little of our understanding and experience. Some of us struggle in our relationships and have difficulties holding down secure employment. Guilt, shame, sleeplessness, physical and mental disabilities, addictions, homelessness, suicidal actions and thoughts should not be our inheritance as Wards of our State. When put in place, these recommendations would help many of my 500,000 brothers and sisters.

We are the individuals that we are today *because* we were shaped by the events endured when we were at our most needy, our most innocent and our most vulnerable. It's now well established that the human brain is a histrionic organ that reflects its earliest fundamental, developmental history.....

As Forgotten Australian's we continue to be survivors of the terrible, life changing disaster called "State Care;" as the reports clearly documented; the Ministers of the Commonwealth and State Governments in those years failed dreadfully in their Duty of Care to protect us, today we look to the Governments of the present who have the opportunity to help us gain our healing. We well know; all we have is the present...

As little children, we were supposedly taken into "Care" for our protection but the stark truth for many, many thousands of Forgotten Australian's and Migrant Children; for my two brothers and me, is **we were put at risk and placed into horrifying danger.**

I was with Indigenous friends who gathered in Shepparton on that wonderful and remarkable morning in Australia's history when Prime Minister Rudd read his heartfelt Apology on behalf Our Nation. I witnessed strong men break down and weep as they heard and took in the words "It was Wrong and we are Sorry for those actions."

Like me, many of the Forgotten Australians and Migrant Children shared some of their childhood in the same institutions as the Stolen Generation and those words of acknowledgement and apology are just as strong and important for us too; we also long to hear and take into our hearts those precious words of Apology from our Nations leader for the Understanding and Healing they offer and hold.

I ask only one question in my submission. **How else can we receive our healing until it is at least openly and honestly recognised that we too as innocent children were wronged, hurt and offended against?** Please don't withhold this from us any longer, a lifetime without healing is far too long. These matters are so important these reports were proposed in 2003, their recommendations are too important to be not acted upon now.....

Recommendation 1

"The Commonwealth Government on behalf of the nation, acknowledge by formal statement the hurt and distress suffered by children"....

The apology in August 2006 by the Victorian Premier Steve Bracks was dirtied and spoiled by the cold-hearted prior manipulation of State law to prevent the Victorian Government being held liable for what in fact happened to the children placed in their care; to those very same children that they were supposed to protect.

We were the victims then and the Victorian Government protects itself now!

As the churches, charities and various institutions were paid to provide "Care" by the Commonwealth Government via child endowment, nothing less than a compassionate apology at this level would be acceptable.

Recommendation 2 - 5 "Redress for all States and Territories."

There ought to be a Commonwealth Government administered system that encapsulates all Forgotten Australian and Migrant Children in our Nation instead of the uncoordinated (clumsy and hurtful) piece meal affair that has to be navigated through currently. It remains a dreadful and shameful reality that Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory continue to hide from and in doing so *their very actions continue to deny the well established fact that previous State Governments failed in their mandated responsibilities and in doing so, prevent and frustrate the opportunity for Care Leavers to seize and take hold of Healing.*

This redress should be equal across the states for *all* Care Leavers and the disproportion of such investigated in a timely manner across the States that have/had systems in place. Appropriate support, counselling and de-briefing etc should be made available (by non-perpetrating agencies) to all Forgotten Australian and Migrant Children who have no other options made available and are forced to seek appropriate redress through the Courts or to access services presently available.

I have read some of the submissions made to this Senate Community Affairs Committee and I agree with and give my full support to the **Recommendations 6 - 34** that have been made by the Care Leavers Australia Network.

I also wish to acknowledge CLAN as being the most helpful organisation that I as a care leaver have ever been able to link with, not only the leaders of CLAN but also its members; those every day brave people who are the innocent victims of past Governments and those officials who were made in charge of the Homes and the employment of their employees.

Recommendation 20

I humbly request most of all reoccurring and suitable governmental funding for CLAN, these people do wonderful and *timely* work with not only the most needy and hurt Forgotten Australian's and Migrant Children but with the many care leavers who are still discovering their histories and trying to tie together the tattered fabric of their identities. CLAN and its members help stabilise each other in our rough and tiring journey of searching for Understanding, Comprehension and Healing.

CLAN should always be available for those Care Leavers who are not yet strong enough to start on this passage of discovery, but one day will be.

My family are accredited Foster Carers in Victoria and have been so for almost 15 years, we provide short and long term Foster Care to children placed into State Care/Foster Care; these may be babies, toddlers, pre-adolescents or teenagers. We provide 24-hour care, 7 days a week, all year in our home. We have had many scores of children live with us, some for days, weeks and years. Years after leaving Foster Care, some of these now adult "care leavers" still telephone us or drop in, have meals with us, stay overnight or otherwise join in our family's activities. They are one of our mob; we love them and they love us. Our door remains open to them.

I wish to draw this committee's attention to the collapse of the Victorian Foster Care system, possibly there even being a collapse of the Foster Care system Australia wide; (Attachment; Fears Grow) that as a direct result of the Victorian Foster Care collapse; children in State Care are re-entering "institutions" in alarming numbers. On any given night there are about 100 Victorian children placed into "Contingency Care," this means for some children staying in a motel or a caravan park with an agency paid employee (Attachment; 15th July 2008)

It is sadly acknowledged that Foster Carers have left the Victorian Foster Care System **in their thousands each year.** (Attachment Foster Care Shep News) Data supplied shows there now less than 1000 Victorian Foster carers; this being well down from the 5500 carers in 2002 and there being around 5000 children presently unable to live in their homes. (Attachment; 15th July 2008) Whilst there is some growth in professed "Kinship placements" (& at times the carer *isn't* a relation,) these have been known to be fraught with poor relationships between agencies and carers. The simple reason I consider the Foster Care system is collapsing is because it clearly has been and remains grossly under funded. Foster Carers are considered volunteers and not paid wages or costs.

I know from first hand experience that it costs Foster Carers much to provide "Care" for the child/ren placed into their homes and vouch that this cost is ever increasing. If Foster Carers were just simply paid the equivalent of a reasonable wage, many Carers could and would have been be in a financial position to be able to continue to provide the more than suitable care for foster children in a safe caring family environment. As a long term Foster Carer, this systemic disintegration is seen inevitable, the lasting result of Carers continuing to be held grossly under valued and under funded. Carers remain "classified" as benevolent volunteers so they are not recompensed anywhere near actual daily living costs and their genuine efforts in providing fitting and appropriate care are not fiscally recognised.

Because there are so few available Foster Care placements, children (*including babies and toddlers*) that can not return to their biological families, who could and ideally would be accepted into Foster Care are instead placed into what are now called "Residential Homes" where paid agency workers are employed around the clock to staff these homes seven days a week. These "residential units" are run by NGO's and funded by the State Government. This type of institutional care is spreading with Australia having an estimated 31,000 children currently in "Care, approximately 5000 of these children in Victoria.

There are a lot of these resi units in Victoria and these costs that Government and therefore that public tens of millions of dollars each and every year! Considering the cost of renting a house, funding 24/7 staffing, shift, weekend, public holiday penalty rates, utilities, telephone/s, vehicle/s, fuel, groceries, annual or long service/sick leave and insurance costs then multiplying by each house, it can be seen this results in an enormous amount!

Regardless of past efforts made across the State to recruit/retain Victorian volunteers, "Residential Care" grew further within our regions agency to make up 37 % of their ~\$35 million 2007 - 08 gross income. Foster Care remained at the previous years 13% with that organisation listing a profit of just under \$2,000, 000 that financial year. http://www.berrystreet.org.au/files/pdf/publications_and_reports/annual_report_200708_final_a4.pdf

I think the saddest thing for the children living in "resi units" is they miss out on the opportunities to live, learn, love, trust and grow up in the "normal" boundary setting and sharing of caring, stable family environments and therefore are not able to form long term emotional attachments or gain a true identity of self and belonging.

These children may then exit these "residential homes" at the conclusion of "protective, agency and State Care" by merely turning the physical age of 18, never having connected into a community, not having strong family attachments and perhaps totally lacking a significant other in their life who they can call upon, at an age known for their high risk taking; at a time of life when they actually need these protective factors the most.

I don't believe that this type of State Care has been the result of any careful long term thought out planned approach or that such could or would be considered an ideal model but because the collapsing of the mainstream Foster Care system wasn't addressed when observed and noted ten years ago, this type of institutional care seems to have evolved in a reactive and somewhat; empirical commercial manner rather than a (w)holistic planned approach supervised and determined by some truly independent specialists who measure the quality of provided services and plan long term for the best therapeutic outcomes for children in "Care."

Because the States are mandated to provide "Care" for children placed in their protection, each year tens of millions of State dollars have been and continue to be reactively spent because placements remain primarily crisis driven and time or opportunity isn't seen to be (or at least made;) available to clinically examine and record **the long term outcomes** of what is and has occurred to children in Care across Australia and those who have left Care in the last few decades.

Recent Victorian studies have shown that the single largest population group attempting to access Supported Accommodation Assistance Program are former Care Leavers at 42%. I suggest that if this study included those over the age of 25 years that this figure could be as high as 65% or even more. (Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) Young People Leaving State Care) *Obviously despite **Recommendation 28**, these statistics have not been collated and need to be captured via MDS (data collection policy - State managed.) Up to date studies conducted overseas confirm this information, noting in several countries the over representation of Care Leavers amongst the Homeless.*

The numbers of children presently within the Welfare System across Australia should therefore signpost and give fair indication of where SAAP needs to be aiming for in the not so distant future and where it needs to be in 20 and 30 years time...

This should also highlight growing social and economic need for a recognised group of disadvantaged within the greater Australian Community. **My concern is that we presently have in Australia, in our State's Care, in many of these "Resi Units" the next generation of Forgotten Australian's and Lost Innocents.**

I close with hopefully these familiar words: **Any nation that does not care for and protect all of its children does not deserve to be called a nation.**

Nelson Mandela