COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Children in institutional care

TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2003

MELBOURNE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 11 November 2003

Members: Senator Hutchins *(Chair)*, Senator Humphries *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Knowles, Lees, McLucas and Moore

Substitute members: Senator Murray to replace Senator Lees for the committee's inquiry into children in institutional care

Senator Tchen to replace Senator Knowles from 22 August to 19 December 2003, inclusive

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bishop, Carr, Chapman, Coonan, Crossin, Denman, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Harradine, Harris, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Payne, Tierney, Watson and Webber

Senators in attendance: Senators Humphries, Hutchins, McLucas, Moore, Murray, Tchen

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

(a) in relation to any government or non-government institutions, and fostering practices, established or licensed under relevant legislation to provide care and/or education for children:

(i) whether any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in these institutions or places,

(ii) whether any serious breach of any relevant statutory obligation occurred at any time when children were in care or under protection, and

(iii) an estimate of the scale of any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children in such institutions or places;

(b) the extent and impact of the long-term social and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect on individuals, families and Australian society as a whole, and the adequacy of existing remedies and support mechanisms;

(c) the nature and cause of major changes to professional practices employed in the administration and delivery of care compared with past practice;

(d) whether there is a need for a formal acknowledgement by Australian governments of the human anguish arising from any abuse and neglect suffered by children while in care;

(e) in cases where unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children has occurred, what measures of reparation are required;

(f) whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those who wish to pursue claims against perpetrators of abuse previously involved in the care of children; and

(g) the need for public, social and legal policy to be reviewed to ensure an effective and responsive framework to deal with child abuse matters in relation to:

(i) any systemic factors contributing to the occurrences of abuse and/or neglect,

(ii) any failure to detect or prevent these occurrences in government and non-government institutions and fostering practices, and reporting mechanisms

(iii) any necessary changes required in current policies, practices and reporting mechanisms

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to direct its inquiries primarily to those affected children who were not covered by the 2001 report *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, inquiring into child migrants, and the 1997 report, *Bringing them Home*, inquiring into Aboriginal children.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is not to consider particular cases under the current adjudication of a court, tribunal or administrative body.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to make witnesses and those who provide submissions aware of the scope of the inquiry, namely:

(a) explain the respective responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states and territories in relation to child protection matters; and

(b) explain the scope of the committee's powers to make recommendations binding upon other jurisdictions in relation to the matters contained in these terms of reference.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 11.30 a.m.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing and welcome everyone who is present today. The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee is inquiring into children in institutional care. This inquiry addresses a very important issue which affects the lives of many Australians. The committee has received hundreds of individual submissions, both in public and confidentially. These submissions have provided the stories of many people who spent time in a range of religious, government and non-government institutions across Australia, and over many decades. The committee is grateful to these people for sharing their stories with us.

I remind everyone appearing today that their comments are on the public record. Caution should be exercised in your comments so that individuals are not identified and cases before courts are not referred to. I indicate that there may be local print and electronic media coverage from within the hearing room during the day. If anyone has any problems or concerns with that, please see the committee secretariat to indicate your problems.

[11.31 a.m.]

BROWN, Mrs Delyse Joy, (Private capacity)

BROWN, Mr John Robert, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr Brown—My name is John Robert Brown. When I was young I was known as Robert John Brown. I was born at Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne in 1929. I was sent to the Methodist Babies Home at South Yarra when I was three weeks old. From 3½ years old I was sent down to Cheltenham Boys and Girls Home at Cheltenham and from there, when I was nine years old, I was sent to Tally Ho Boys Home at Tally Ho. When I had just turned 14, I went to the Woodlands Training Farm at Lilydale. I was there for two years. I found it was quite good in those homes because we were all treated very well, especially at Tally Ho, which was a boys home. There were 100 boys there in dormitory situations in those days. Management and staff of that home were very helpful to everyone in the home. I had no problems there.

At Tally Ho we did harvesting, farm work and laundry. You learnt to make your beds and wash your clothes, which I found of benefit when I went out and was living on my own. It was very helpful. At Woodlands we did farm work. We went out and cut wood and all that. They were training the boys to be adopted out or sent out to farms in the area or down in Gippsland to become farmers. But I was offered an apprenticeship in Lilydale as a printer so I took the opportunity and I did that for 30 years. I am still living in Lilydale. I have been well accepted in the community.

Regarding the home life, I give full credit to the people who ran those institutions. They looked after you, they fed you and they clothed you. They told you this and that. At Tally Ho they even had tin money so that you comprehended the fact that you could use money if you went out. You bought things with the tin money.

I forgot all about the main thing: I have never known who my mother was. I found out that I was never a ward of the state. I was never adopted, and I was once told that I was never to be adopted. But, in the meantime, I have been trying to find out who she is. If I was adopted I would have no problem finding out who my mother was, but, as it is, I can never find out. It costs you a fortune checking up on things, but that is beside the point. The main reason I wanted to know who my parents were was for genetic purposes, because we have three daughters and

eight grandchildren now. I have already had a stent put in, so I would just like to know what genetic things could happen to my future generations. That is about all.

Mrs Brown—I have been married to John for 37 years. We have children, and I think everyone has a right to know their heritage. John has no means of finding that out. During the time that we have been married, John has quite often tried to find out who his parents were—even if it was just the mother. It is possible that the mother gave a false name. Every avenue has been tried, but John has not been able to find his mother, and I find that a great sadness. It also comes down to the fact that my children do not know half their heritage either, and my grandchildren do not know a quarter of their heritage.

It seems to me that somebody must know who John's mother was. It must be written somewhere, but that has not been able to be determined. At the end of the day, we all ask, 'Who am I, and where did I come from?' When that answer cannot be given, a person has a loneliness that cannot be described by anybody who has all the information and knows what their ancestry is. John does not even know what people he came from. We all have a bit of pride in our background and say what it is, whether we are English or whatever. John does not know, and I find that sad in terms of looking back at ourselves and our identity.

CHAIR—At the Royal Women's Hospital, were you essentially whisked away after you were born? Is that what happened?

Mr Brown—As far as I know—I got details from the Royal Women's Hospital about how I was born and all that—my mother's sister took her away from hospital a day after I was sent down to the Methodist Babies Home. That is as far as I know about that.

CHAIR—Were the Victorian birth register's requirements complied with?

Mr Brown—I applied for my mother's birth certificate and it said, 'Shirley Brown—unknown'. I have those documents here with me. My birth certificate states that I was born at the Royal Women's Hospital. My mother came from Koroit. On her birth certificate it said that her father was dead. I have tried all over Port Fairy, Warrnambool, Swan Hill and Creswick—they are different things I have come across in trying to research—but I have come up against a blank wall in all the things I have tried. I have tried BirthLink, VANISH, the Mormons and all those, and I still cannot get anything.

CHAIR—It seems very difficult.

Mr Brown—It certainly is.

CHAIR—So you started off as Robert John Brown.

Mr Brown—I was sent to the babies home as Robert John Brown.

CHAIR—That was from the women's hospital.

Mr Brown—Yes. I have always known myself as John Robert Brown. I do not know where it was changed—at the babies home or at Cheltenham.

CHAIR—I suppose it became a bit more urgent when you were diagnosed with a genetic heart disease.

Mr Brown—Yes, mainly to find out what other genetic things I could have inherited and then passed on to my children and grandchildren.

CHAIR—Still the quest continues to find—

Mr Brown—An officer at the Department of Human Services has looked up lots of things, and he has not come up with anything. If I was not a state ward, someone must have been paying for me. I asked him to check up on that, but I have not heard from him since. That was about a month ago.

CHAIR—When anybody was born in Victoria 70-odd years ago, did the registrar of births require certain forms to be filled out? In New South Wales, where I come from, I am sure there were requirements in the 1920s or 1930s.

Mr Brown—It may have been done through the hospital, but I could never find any records of anything like that. I got details from the Methodist Babies Home when the freedom of information legislation came out. It stated my health, what was wrong with me when I was a kid and all that.

CHAIR—Are you aware of any other men or women who might be faced with the same difficulties as you are at the moment?

Mr Brown—No. Most of the ones that I know were adopted and they had no problem. There is one person we go and visit every now and then. We happened to meet up at the anniversary at the babies home. I had a 'John Brown' name tag on. One of the women there came up to me and said, 'You are Robert John.' I said, 'How would you know that?' She said, 'I was the nurse here in 1929 and 1930.' She recognised the other person we go and meet. She was a nurse there. We have her over for lunch at our place and we go up to her place for lunch. We meet about two or three times a year. We keep in contact with her. We call her our mother.

Senator MURRAY—Mrs Brown, your story reminds me of others I have seen, where love heals a great deal but never answers all the questions. Do your children worry as much about identity as you do?

Mrs Brown—I do not think they worry about it. They just accept John for who he is: their dad. My youngest daughter has tried very hard to find out his identity. I think once people have their own children they want to know what their past is. It is a natural thing. But they do not have any resentments. It is not really talked about very often. Obviously they were curious when they were growing up, and we told them the truth—that John had never known his parents. It used to distress them a bit at school when family trees were filled in. I was a teacher myself and I became very aware of the need to be very careful about family issues, so I suppose there are insights one gets.

The community assumes that everyone has a mother and a father. It goes beyond the person who does not have a mother and father; it goes down to the children. When a school project says,

'Do your family tree and find out who your grandparents were,' I suppose there is a sense of embarrassment or feeling different. If a child says, 'My dad never knew his parents,' I suppose it would embarrass a teacher as well, especially if the project is put on display for kids' presentations and things like that. I do not think it embarrassed our children to the point where they were traumatised, because we handled it very sensitively at home.

Senator MURRAY—This question of identity, of needing to know who you are and where you come from, has it got worse as you have got older?

Mr Brown—No. I have accepted that I will probably never find out who my mother was. It has not got worse. I have just accepted that I get a clue one minute and the next minute it just goes right down.

Senator MURRAY—Has it affected your life in terms of necessary papers? When you get married or want a passport, people ask for your birth certificate. In tax affairs or anything else; has the lack of a history on your mother's and father's side affected you?

Mr Brown—I have no problem with because I had my birth certificate. I would show that and they would accept that. But there is one thing I did not mention before. When I left the home when I was 15 and went out boarding, I was thrown into a different world. That was the very hardest part to accept. Then I got in with the locals—the fire brigade, the football—and I got to know a lot about life outside. The hardest bit was I did not know how to have conversations. I still find it a bit hard at times to converse with people. But, other than that, I think I have done all right as far as getting on with life.

Senator MURRAY—Do you think it is possible that the names on your birth certificate were made up?

Mr Brown—That could be true. I was Robert John. Looking up all the records, I think my mother might have given a false name.

Senator MURRAY—Is there any record of her age when you were born?

Mr Brown—It said 20 on the birth certificate. She gave the place of birth as Koroit but, when I went down to Koroit and checked up with different churches and things down there, there was no sign at the registry or anything of a Shirley Brown.

Senator MURRAY—Have you been able to use an agency that specialises in tracing identity, or have you tried to do it on your own?

Mr Brown—I have done it on my own through some of the agencies like VANISH and BirthLink, but they have come up with just what I have given them. I went through the Department of Health and Community Services and the State Trustees, but none of them could find anything.

Senator MURRAY—Previous inquiries into institutionalised children have been the Stolen Generation inquiry and the child migrant inquiry. Both of those recommended—and to some extent governments responded—that moneys be provided for the tracing of identity because it

matters so much to so many people. In your circumstance, with respect to those you know who have been in institutions, is identity and the tracing of parents a big issue?

Mr Brown—My identity?

Senator MURRAY—You were institutionalised for a long time and you know many people from those institutions. Is identity and the tracing of identity important to a lot of those people?

Mr Brown—I would say so. The ones I have met have been trying to find out. The ones I know of are all adopted. They have managed to find brothers and sisters and things like that because of their adoption, but when I try mine I come up against a blank wall every time. One or two institutions said the records were burnt. What can you do about it?

CHAIR—How long have you been searching?

Mr Brown—Since I was about 25.

CHAIR—So how many years is that—38 or 48?

Mr Brown—I am 73 now.

Senator MURRAY—Nearly 50 years.

Mr Brown—Over 50 years, yes. If my mother is still alive, she would be 93 and it might be a bit late. I have a good idea who the father was, just through checking around. I will not mention names, but I have the history of his whole family.

Senator MURRAY—Is he still alive?

Mr Brown—No, he died about six years ago. When I got in contact with the parish where he was, they said that his wife is still alive and that there was a person who used to visit this chap's mother at her home address every Cup Day. That is all I could find out. But she gave her name as Shirley Brown—and that is my mother—as a sister.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is there an organisation in Victoria for people who are seeking their natural parents? If so, do you belong to that organisation?

Mr Brown—There are organisations. I do not belong to any of them. I have tried a few of them. I give them a lot of the details I have, and they always say to me, 'You've done a lot of research,' but they cannot find anything either.

Senator HUMPHRIES—If a case like yours happened today—if a person like your mother gave birth to you today—do you know whether the records would be better maintained or whether the situation would be essentially the same? For argument's sake, if a person did not want people to know that they were giving birth to a particular child, do you know whether that information might be possible to disguise or cover up so that the child would not be able to find that person in subsequent years?

Mr Brown—If they were born in a hospital, I think all the details would be kept. Nowadays, I think there is a legal liability. They have to keep records of everything. In that way, I think they would have a better show of finding out things.

Senator MOORE—Mr Brown, you have seen some of the submissions that the inquiry has received, and a lot of the focus has been on the horrific experiences that people have had through various forms of residential care. In your submission, you have gone to lengths to explain that the two places you were in were supportive and that you learnt a lot from that experience.

Mr Brown—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you sense that there is any shared experience with people who have gone through forms of residential care? Do you sense any similar relationship or any particular relationship with other people who have been very badly traumatised by the process?

Mr Brown—The ones I know about—and this was mainly in Tally Ho, because it was a boys home—came from broken homes. They used to tell us of the experiences they had had in other institutions. A lot of them were surprised that they never got any of that treatment at Tally Ho. They used to get belted, whipped and all that type of thing, but Tally Ho never had any of that. If you did something wrong at school, you got the cuts, which was expected in those days.

Senator MOORE—That was how it worked.

Mr Brown—There was strict schooling. The schools that I went to were in the homes, both at Cheltenham and at Tally Ho. That is the best way I can answer that question.

Senator MOORE—So the boys you were with actually talked about their experiences?

Mr Brown—In the home, yes.

Senator MOORE—You also mentioned earlier that you had gone to some of these functions that are now held at places that used to be homes.

Mr Brown—Mainly at South Yarra babies home.

Senator MOORE—Reunions and things, yes.

Mr Brown—They were reunions. That is how we got together with one of the nurses. There were three nurses, but unfortunately two of them have died. The one who is still alive is a real livewire.

Senator MOORE—Did you find it useful to go back to those reunions?

Mr Brown—Yes. We got photos through her, and she pointed out the different people she knew.

Senator McLUCAS—Mr Brown, you said something earlier that I need to be clear about. You said that you were not to be adopted. Have I got that right?

Mr Brown—Yes. There was a woman who used to visit a boy and pamper him—and I am not sure if he was her son or not, so I will not mention his name. She was the one who told me that I was never to be adopted. She said she saw a document that said I was never to be adopted but, when I went down to the Central Methodist Mission, which was the institution running it, they had no records of anything.

Senator McLUCAS—Just so that I am clear on the difference in this state, if you had been adopted, the adoption papers would show your mother's name—

Mr Brown—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—and approval would have had to have been given. Is that correct?

Mr Brown—Yes. I have found out from one or two that have been adopted that they have found out all the details. They have even found out they have brothers and sisters. It is made a lot easier if they were adopted.

Mrs Brown—Your mother signed you over to the Methodist Babies Home, but the signature is not there.

Mr Brown—Yes, she did sign me over to the home. She breastfed me while I was in the Royal Women's Hospital. Then I went to the home on 21 January 1930, and she left the hospital on 22 January 1930.

Senator McLUCAS—And you know that from the hospital records.

Mr Brown—Yes.

CHAIR—Is there anything you would like to say before I call the next witness?

Mr Brown—I would like to say that I had a good home life in the homes. I might have got the cuts now and then for doing something wrong—which anyone would as children—but, other than that, I had a good life in the homes.

Mrs Brown—The only thing I could really say is that it does have a lasting legacy if a child is abandoned. I suppose the bottom line is that John was abandoned by his mother, even though he was placed in care. Whenever John has been in those normal situations that we go through from time to time when things are not going right, that abandonment still has a legacy of emotions that come from it. The sense of abandonment is probably much greater in him than in a person who has had a family life. I think that causes an emotional numbness for John. He finds it very hard to take criticism. That makes life difficult too—not so difficult that it is unbearable, but it has to be considered. My dealings in the marriage are to make sure that John does not feel criticised but to still maintain an honest relationship. So I always have to be very aware of John's fragility when it comes down to anything that one can interpret as giving a sense of abandonment, whether it is saying, 'I don't agree with that idea' or 'I don't want the veranda to look like that.' It still gets back to that feeling of being rejected. That is the biggest legacy that I see as negative. On the other hand, the positive aspects are that John is a very independent person. I do not think

I have ever had to tell him to pick his socks up, put the towel back or anything like that. He is very good at being an independent person.

I know that if I dropped dead tomorrow John would be able to cook, iron his clothes—he does that now—and look after himself without any hassles. He was brought up to be an independent person who is able to look after himself. Probably the biggest impact on John is the emotional aspect of not being able to express himself. But then people can come from families and have those issues as well—it may just be his personality. John and I relate very well to each other and, at the end of the day, that is what counts in a marriage. John's children love him and his grandchildren love him. If everyone in the world could say that it would be a happy world.

CHAIR—Yes, it would.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Brown, you said you found your father. Was your father's name on your birth certificate?

Mr Brown—No. It has 'father unknown'.

Senator MURRAY—Did you find your father by asking questions of people who knew the surrounding circumstances?

Mr Brown—I found it by asking questions and inquiring. I was working at a printing place and there was a chap there. He asked me whether I had ever played football with a certain league team. I said, 'No, I only played football with Lilydale.' He told me about a bloke who played for this certain team who was the spitting image of me. When I found out who that person was I found it was a person who lived at the address that my mother put down on the birth certificate. I made inquiries and that is how I found out about this person.

Senator MURRAY—Has that brought any sense of closure, or none at all?

Mr Brown—None at all.

Senator MURRAY—Why is that?

Mr Brown—When I rang up one of his sons he said, 'We could be related.' And that was as far as it went. They did not want to know and I did not pursue it because I was not interested in that side of it. I was more interested in finding out who my mother was. On my transfer form to the Methodist Babies Home it says, 'dark skinned'. No-one can tell me what that was for. As you see I have olive skin. At Cheltenham Boys and Girls Home I realised that I had no-one, and on visiting days—Saturdays—everyone would have visitors and I would not. I would go out and sit in the garden or climb a tree and wait until they all went. That could be a habit and why I withdraw from certain things.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr and Mrs Brown, for coming along today.

[12.03 p.m.]

GANDOLFO, Mrs Geraldine, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has a copy of your documentary, *Unholy Orders*. I invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mrs Gandolfo—It has been quite an experience preparing for today, because I was not quite sure what you wanted. It also took me back into the process of making the film and the difficulties in actually getting this project made. When I say the 'process' of making a film, I am talking particularly about the interviews I did, the stories I heard and the emotional impact of that. It is a few months since I finished the film and I am finding that there is some sort of emotional aftermath which is a bit difficult to deal with at times. I think some of that is feeling that, when you have heard so much, you want to do a really good job. Even after 4½ years of work, you make a film, it is 52 minutes long and it does not do justice to the issue. There is no way you can do justice to this issue in 52 minutes. It is the tip of the iceberg; it is a very, very small part of that experience that people all over the world have had in institutions. I wish it had been a series. I think the subject deserves a series.

I had one hell of a time finding the money to do that project. When I look back and think about it, I think that part of the difficulty in funding that film was the general apathy in our community towards dealing with difficult social issues. It is very difficult in this country to find funding for a film; it is even more difficult to find funding for a social documentary. In fact, I was told by someone that we asked several times at Film Victoria for support that they had no interest in this subject, and I think that speaks volumes about the community at large.

There are many things I could speak of. I am not sure how I can be of use to you. I am aware of the huge number in the community who are touched by this issue—I meet them everywhere. Even though the film was made, in a way, about a Scottish experience, it is a generic one. When I tell them what I have done, I find all sorts of people disclosing to me either their own experience or their connection with a relative or a friend. It happens very frequently and in unexpected places in the community. I believe that one reason people speak to me about that is that they think I will be open to that conversation. There is still a huge stigma to being able to speak openly about that experience. It is not only the stigma that prevents people; it is also people's unwillingness to listen to hard things and the way people are silenced.

It is very interesting to see how very rapidly a conversation about institutions can become polarised. People assume because of the film I have made that perhaps I am anti-Catholic. I was brought up Catholic. That film was not made out of revenge, anger or anything—actually, I am

angry about the church; I would have to say that. But it was made to give people a voice, because I realised that people had not been listened to. When people start to talk about trauma, abuse or things that were difficult for them, they are silenced very rapidly by well-meaning people wanting to shift the conversation very quickly to something positive: 'But what would have happened to you if you were not there?' or 'There must have been something good.' They never get a chance to talk about the hard things. I see it still.

I took Cath—who is, I guess, the major person and the key to the film—to Nazareth House in Camberwell. She wanted to go down there, and it never occurred to me that she would want to do that. I made an appointment and we went down. The nuns knew that she had been in an institution in Scotland. I also learned something interesting there: the nuns moved around, not only within Australia but also from institution to institution overseas. One of the nuns there knew some of the nuns Cath had had to deal with and she was reminiscing about a nun's wonderful singing voice, but when Cath wanted to tell her about the nun's short temper with members of the choir, one of the little old nuns said, 'Well, let's just talk about the happy things.' I was angry and also depressed about that, because it is such a frequent scenario.

I would also like to say that it is very difficult to make generalisations about this experience. You would know that from listening to people. There are so many variations on the stories and on the effects that it is difficult to generalise, but there are some common themes. I would like to say that I do know there were exceptions in all of the systems. There were people who were kind and there were people in the community who were advocates. They may not have gotten very far at times—the opposition was huge between the church and government, and things moved slowly—but I would like you to take as given that I am aware of that. Whilst that did not get much of a look-in in the film—it is quite difficult to actually edit a film, especially if it is for television, because the broadcaster has some input into that is well—it is a given that I am aware that there were exceptions.

There are all sorts of things I could talk about, but I am not sure what you want to know. I could talk about the common themes of what I have heard here and in Scotland; the church's attitude, even currently, to the claims being made in Scotland; the effect on parents and families and the stories that I heard when I was away—the effect on siblings is profound; and some of the myths that people have about these people that were in institutions. Some of the myths make it difficult and I guess contribute to the stigma. There is the fact that they were in some way criminalised: if they were put behind closed doors then there was something wrong with them. There is the old Victorian belief that being poor makes you unworthy in some way, and poverty is what drove a lot of people into institutions. It might be easier if you asked me questions, but I could keep talking because there is a lot of material.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will turn to questions.

Senator McLUCAS—You said earlier that it was a small thing—52 minutes—and you seemed to be devaluing it. I am sure that it is a very useful documentary. Can you describe to me the value of the work that you have done in producing a documentary to those people whose stories are being told?

Mrs Gandolfo—When I think of the limitations of the documentary, I sometimes take it right back to the value in actually interviewing people as part of the research process, the

conversations that I had with the people who are in the film, some of the things we did together—a ceremony that was held outside Nazareth House Aberdeen—and also the sort of odd way in which some things were settled for Cath. I think the value of it is that, despite its limitations, a documentary on that subject is going to be screened. It in some way has the effect that at least the issue is coming out there again—at least somebody is listening.

Senator McLUCAS—Is it about acknowledgment?

Mrs Gandolfo—It is about acknowledgment, but it is about being listened to specifically, I think.

Senator McLUCAS—I am trying to extrapolate what you have done into a broader policy response. Are there other things we could be doing to assist in the recognition of what has occurred that might help with the healing that is required?

Mrs Gandolfo—One of the things that I would like to see done is for the type of anecdotal research that I often did to be collected. It should be archived. I do not have the financial resources to do that, but it would be a great thing if that were archived. An oral history project should be set up in Australia, like the one that is being done in the armed forces, which is a very big oral history project happening at the moment. I think that this part of our social history should be documented in that way and that people's experience in writing—or whatever it is that survivors want to have archived—should be archived. They should be consulted in the process. That should be done.

Senator McLUCAS—That was certainly a recommendation of *Bringing them home*—the report of the inquiry into the stolen generation. It was recommended that there needed to be a record made that gave legitimacy to what had happened. But, if you think of any other ideas that you would like to advise the committee on in the future, do not hesitate to contact us.

Mrs Gandolfo—I think the thing about being listened to—I am just remembering now what Frank was saying—is not just about being listened to; it is about being believed. They are actually two different things. It is about being believed, and then it being put on the public record that this occurred.

CHAIR—In making the film did it give you any insights at all into how significant abuse of children in care may be these days?

Mrs Gandolfo—No, not directly. In my training and work as a counsellor—I have a background as a counsellor; I went into film-making specifically to make this film—I dealt a lot with the time before 1964, which is the cut-off point made by the legal precedent for people making claims in the UK. I find it appalling that we are still sitting here talking about this in 2003, when these institutions were established as far back as the mid-19th century. If we have not addressed the past adequately, I do not think that we can possibly protect children today.

I know a lot of things have changed—certainly, my research did not stop dead at 1964. When we launched the film in Melbourne I wanted to raise the awareness of people in the audience of what is currently happening. I feel huge concern about the amount of resources put into child protection. Certainly my fear is that in Victoria that funding might get cut as things like the

games—whatever games they are—start to cost more. It is a very indirect answer but, yes, I have severe concerns about the current situation.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Gandolfo, you tell stories about Cath Yeomans, Frank Docherty, Paddy and Teresa Ryan, Helen Howie and Mary Scott-Brannan. They are listed in your *Unholy Orders* synopsis—I have not seen the film. Does your understanding of their life stories make you think it is true that hurt people hurt people—that people who are hurt as children end up hurting others because of the effects on them of institutional abuse?

Mrs Gandolfo—I am glad you asked that. I believe that the idea that people who were hurt do hurt other people is very common in our society, and I believe it is one of the ideas that creates a stigma for the people who have been in institutions—that there is sometimes a sense of 'We'd better be careful of them. You don't know what they'll do.' One of the things that I was interested in that may not come into the film so much was that aspect of it. Certainly, a lot of people who abuse have been abused, but it does not follow that if you have been abused you will become an abuser. I certainly believe that the way those people were treated gave them a very distorted view of how to discipline children but, when they came out of the institutions, they were able to work out for themselves what was acceptable and unacceptable.

At the same time, people like Paddy were extremely violent. It has taken him a long time to understand where that came from, to work with that and to turn his life around. He is 60 now, and I know some of his family still have not forgiven him for how he was. When they came out of the institution, he used to discipline his brothers and sisters violently, and it has been a very difficult process to come to terms with that. One of the worst aspects that the film deals with, and one of the worst aspects of institutionalisation that I was looking at, was the corruption of children to discipline other children. I believe that that was a method of controlling large groups of children—the right to punish was delegated. I believe that suited the people who ran those institutions.

Senator MURRAY—I agree with you that hurt people do not always end up hurting people. Do you think, based on your experience of these stories, that hurt people remain hurt? In other words, do they have a lifetime of hurt which needs attention, or is it possible to 'grow up and get over it'? Those are not my own words.

Mrs Gandolfo—I know, but it still shocks me, because I know there are people out there who think that you should grow up and get over it or that surely time heals. I found that time does not always heal. In fact, what I found, because I was dealing sometimes with elderly people—Cath is 87 now—was that there seems to be something that happens as you age: you try somehow to sort out your life or review it, and very often that hurt can escalate. It is also one of those areas where it is difficult to generalise. I think it vastly depended on what happened to people when they left the institution, as well as while they were in there, as to how that hurt was healed, for want of a better word—it is not a word I am fond of—or soothed, perhaps. Some people made good partnerships; other people did not. Sometimes it was men who found relationships most difficult, but there were women I met who had also had a series of relationships and breakdowns. But I know that time does not necessarily heal, though it can a bit.

Senator MURRAY—You are familiar with the term 'unfinished business'. I think that returns to Senator McLucas's question because, from your own experience, if people get to tell their

story—and, even better, if they are believed when telling their story—it provides some closure and some healing. Would one of your recommendations be that in some way a mechanism be provided to governments or institutions to allow people to find a forum for expressing themselves and recording their stories? I am not so much thinking of the oral history program, although that is useful. I do not want to trivialise either, but I am almost thinking of the Holocaust approach used to resolve people to those terrible events worldwide. The Australian oral history program has been established so that people can have closure. You are dealing with an old lady of 84. Do you think that is an area we should show some interest in as a committee?

Mrs Gandolfo—I think so. When I say 'oral history project', I mean on a grand scale like that. This is a huge issue. The limitation with a documentary is that you cannot put everything in. People give you their stories. You might have talked to them for 30 hours and you might have taped seven of those hours. Somewhere the story in its entirety should be held. I think that is the most respectful thing to do. It is the most acknowledging thing to do so that the story is not chopped into pieces for the purposes of television.

Senator MURRAY—My question to you is related to the benefit to society. Governments could put money into that and they might think it is an indulgence. But is it your experience that it enables people to function better in society and has a beneficial effect in a cost sense, because they do not have to access welfare services as much or that sort of thing? Is that your experience as a person who has been told a story, or is it just a kind of fanciful extension of things?

Mrs Gandolfo—I think it is beneficial. My experience has been that it is an extraordinary experience for people to be listened to until they are talked out. To give them seven or eight hours to tell their story allows for an experience of being heard that is not possible in any other way. I think that, if those stories are on the public record, we are acknowledging a very important and at times shameful part of our social history. It should stand there in some way, like the stolen generation's stories or like what has just happened with John Howard opening the memorial in London yesterday. There ought to be some very public acknowledgment, and I think it makes a huge difference on a personal level to these people.

I can only imagine it will make a huge difference to following generations, because one of the other things I have been dealing with is the effect of these people's experiences on their children. There was absolutely no room for that in the film but I did interview people. I also had to deal with the ethical issues: how do I treat the relationship between Cath and her sisters, given that Cath's sister has children who are alive? They were upset when they saw that film. I think as a culture we need to know where the members of our community have come from and what they have experienced. I think it could have a very powerful destigmatising effect. That is what I hope; I do not know.

Senator MOORE—I am interested in what is happening with the film now, after you have put all that effort into your product. I am also interested in your perspective of the impact that it has had and the responses you have had when it has been shown. I am interested in the use of the film to widen the general awareness of the issue and that kind of thing.

Mrs Gandolfo—The Australian television screening rights have been purchased by SBS.

Senator MOORE—It is a nice brochure.

Mrs Gandolfo—Because they did that we were actually able to finish the film. Without their support we could not have done that. I put in $40,000 myself and I had other people put money in. That is how we made it. SBS will screen it and they are also the distributor. It will be available, through the catalogues that they run, to institutions and to schools for education and that sort of thing. That is the commercial aspect of it. I think Senator Murray is speaking about access for the community, where it is like a memorial. That is a different thing. I would like to see that. I would like to see the film archived.

Senator MOORE—Have you had public showings of the film?

Mrs Gandolfo—I have had public screenings of it.

Senator MOORE—What has been the impact of those? What feedback have you had?

Mrs Gandolfo—Because I have heard so much, I am always amazed at how shocked people are—people who do not know anything about it. This is the tip of the iceberg. If they are shocked by that, there is obviously an enormous ignorance in our society about this experience, even though there was *The Leaving of Liverpool* and other short pieces in the media. There is an appalling ignorance. Survivors can identify with aspects of it but they are also aware that it is the tip of the iceberg, and in some ways it is disappointing and frustrating for them. I know that if you have lived through that experience whatever film you make cannot actually capture that real experience. I hope that it will make a contribution. I hope that it will go through schools, be held in organisations and archives and be a part of the whole picture.

Senator MOORE—After all your research, do you have resources and footage that could be used in the future as well?

Mrs Gandolfo—I have all my original footage—all the masters. Along with a list of other things that I would like to see happen, I would like a project such as my own to get some sort of financial assistance to do that and to have some financial assistance to keep a web site, even if it is basic—I do not have many funds left to do that—so that when the film is screened people can go to the web site and it would be a starting point for information and support networks. It would not provide it all, but the film will be screened and people ought to be able to go somewhere and follow on from there to have their needs met.

Senator MOORE—There is a process now where they occasionally have lines at the end of the program saying, 'Stay with us for a couple of hours and you'll be able to talk with the maker,' and that sort of thing just to get the dialogue going.

Mrs Gandolfo—Or people could access a web site. I have a domain site registered but I am still scratching around for the money to put a small web site there. When you stir up a social issue like this, there is some ethical accountability to provide something to follow it up. I do not know how to apply for that or where I would apply. But I would like to see that every bit as much as I would like to see the survivor networks supported in that way so that we can interconnect.

Senator MOORE—Thank you, and good luck.

Mrs Gandolfo—I would like to make another couple of points. One of the things in the Forde commission findings was that the survivors recommended that there be a silence for the people who died as a result of being institutionalised. Their life was shortened in some way. I bring that to you today to see whether that recommendation can be honoured in some way in your process in the next couple of days. It was requested by those people that some time be found for silence.

I would like to mention some things that I would like to see happen. I would like to see a full consultation with survivors to redress the past, and I would like to see the political will be found to follow through on those recommendations. I would like to see ongoing and increasing support of survivor networks and organisations which support them to research their past—people like VANISH and CLAN. I would like the church brought to full accountability for the abuse in their institutions. I would like to see them called to account for their beliefs and attitudes, which contributed to the need for institutions in the first place, and their underlying motives for establishing the places on the scale that they did.

I would like a full and heartfelt apology to the people who have been in these institutions. Even at this late stage, although it would not be voluntary—I would imagine it is a little bit late for that—it could mean something. I have mentioned the oral history project. I would like to see community education and a review of textbooks that treat these issues at all levels—secondary and tertiary. I would like to see the press lobby for some solid feature articles to help dispel the myths about this social era and, hopefully, to destigmatise some of the experience so that people may feel that they can talk if they want to. I have also mentioned that I would like to see support of projects, such as my own, so that people can gain access to information and support. Thank you for listening.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 12.42 p.m. to 1.14 p.m.

GOLDING, Mr Robert Alvan, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mr R. Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. I now invite you to make an opening presentation to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr R. Golding—Thanks. To the best of my knowledge, I was taken into care in October 1940. In November I was committed under section 24 of the Children's Welfare Act and sent to a boy's depot, wherever that was. On my fourth birthday I was placed at Andrew Kerr Memorial Home for Children in Mornington. On 28 April 1941 I was given probation. To whom, I most probably did know, but I have forgotten. On 14 March 1941 I became a ward under section 103 of the Children's Act 1928. In 1943 I went to the Ballarat Orphanage, but between-times I was sent to different foster homes, and they would throw us away, and into another one and so on. I think I went to about five in a couple of years. I must have been a villain.

On arrival at the orphanage my brothers and I were met by a matronly type of woman and taken inside, where I heard a child screaming. I said, 'What is going on?' and I was told, 'Get inside before you get some.' Then my younger brother and I were taken up to a toddler section. My older brother went to the juniors. We were accosted by a couple of bigger lads and asked, 'Who is the better fighter?' I said, 'Me.' My brother said, 'Him.' So we had to get in and prove it. And so started the pecking order, as I call it, at the orphanage.

I got my first lesson in terror from the orphanage. I was in the toddler section and we were told, 'Head down, go to sleep.' So, being a good boy, that's what I did—I put my head down and closed my eyes. The next thing, the side of the cot was dropped, my blankets were pulled back and I was being whacked with the cane part of a feather duster. Needless to say, at nights I started to get terrified. We were bathed in a public bath in the toddler section and, if you were lucky, you didn't find any floaters in the bath—I do not know if you know what I mean. But the toddler section was not too bad, except for the nights. You just thought, 'They have done me once. Are they going to do me again?'

In about six months I was transferred to the junior section. On that day it was drizzly grey, and Ballarat cold. My first job was to go up to the top paddock, where a lad had a rope around his neck and under his arms. He was pulling a sheet of iron along. We had to pick up the cow droppings and horse droppings in our hands and place them on a big sheet of iron. I got a bit upset, so I was shown how not to get upset—I got a crack. We worked in the rain. I often

complained of chapped knees and cracks, so I got a hiding for not drying myself properly. I could not dry myself because the bathrooms were locked during the day.

I think I have cried once since I left the home, and that was when my son was killed. I haven't found many laughing matters, either. I was well and truly institutionalised. When I got out I went home with my parents. I could not hack it so I off and joined up, back into an institution—the Air Force. Within a week I was fighting—but not fighting the enemy; fighting the blokes who were with me. But I have gone too far.

I recall working on the farm. I was about 12, and my exact weight was 69 pounds. I had to lift bags of pollard and bran, which weighed 120 pounds. They were one on top of the other and you took the top one off. My reports from the schools say I was a big boy. One says I was tall, and another one says I was short, so I am damned if I know how the hell they ever saw me. I must have been too small to look at. You had no privacy. There were no seats on the toilets. You were cold, so you got in there, and you were allowed three sheets of paper to wipe your bum. I used to get sent to the Ballarat brewery to pick up the grains for the cows. I drove the horse and dray up there. I would see the superintendent pick up the grains and eat them when I brought them back. I thought, 'This must be good,' and I started on that. I think that started my drinking. I have not stopped yet.

CHAIR—You do not use the grain anymore, do you?

Mr R. Golding—No, I just drink beer, brandy or whatever comes to hand.

CHAIR—Sorry.

Mr R. Golding—That is all right. We used to get locked in the tan at night. One of the staff used to say, 'No names. No pack drill. You and you, into the ring,' and you would fight with bare fists. If you were a bloody idiot like me, you did not like to lose, so you had to stay in until you were beaten. The same bloke lined us all up around the wall one night and said, 'Somebody's been cutting the boxing ring ropes.' I think it was fair wear and tear. Each one of us had to go up and he would ask us, 'Did you do it?' We would say, 'No,' and he would hit us. He would hit us with a fist or open handed, depending on our age. The big blokes got a closed fist and the young 'uns got the bare hand.

One bloke said to me, 'Bob, you're getting to be a big lad. I need some help with the younger children. You come around with me.' He took me around and we found a young lad in a room he was not supposed to be in. He said, 'You deal with him.' I said, 'I'm not going to hit him.' He said, 'If you don't, you'll get it.' He handed me the strap. I gave the kid a couple of whacks while the bloke stood and watched. He handed me the keys of his bedroom and said, 'You'll find some sweeties under my pillow. If you'd like to go up there, you can help yourself.' It did not gel with me, so I went to the superintendent at the time and I handed him the keys and the strap and told him the story. He must have checked, because the bloke did not stay any longer. He was gone within a day. That was a good thing.

On Sunday the food was always cold meat and salads. One time there were maggots in the meat, and the bloke said, 'If you don't want to eat the maggots, leave your meat.' That was it. You got nothing else to replace it. Another lad had glass in his potatoes and was told, 'Don't tell

anybody or they'll all want it.' That was the attitude. We used to bandicoot the spuds and carrots out in the garden; that is, we would get our hands underneath the spuds, swedes or carrots and eat them raw. A young lad got caught, so for tea that night he had a plate of carrots. The bloke poured a bottle of castor oil on the top of them, hit him and said, 'Eat it, you little varmint.' Those were his exact words.

You learn a bit from that. You would get away with what you could. We got a plate of porridge in the morning. I think there was a piece of bread, but I am not certain. It was always a hot meal, except on Sundays. At night you got a piece of bread and dripping, a piece of bread and jam and some stuff they called tea. I have never drunk it since. The whole experience has left me angry—angry with authority and angry with the institution. I just cannot hack it. I have never, ever told my own children that I love them. I still cannot. That is as close as I have come to crying since my son got killed. He got killed in England.

I went through the papers I got under freedom of information. I have got here a copy of my birth certificate, and it says my mother and father were married. I got the papers from the other freedom of information, and it says they are not. I found that out when I was about 60. That is a bloody great thing to find out! I do not know what more I can say. The thought of sitting here and telling you all this is not doing me a world of good, I can tell you.

My wife and I do not go out. Once or twice a year I might see my grandchildren because I do not like travelling. I cannot travel because I have got a crook neck and back. When my wife goes away playing croquet—you will find this hard to believe—she will leave me food, and I cannot touch it because it is not mine. That was from my time in the home—if it was not yours, you do not touch it. I cannot open a tin of food; I just cannot do it. I will go down the street and buy something to eat. It was what was drilled into you.

I went over to Malaya with the Air Force. I got married over there to an English girl. I do not know how the hell she stuck with me. I have been married 43 years. We split up a couple of times. She went back to England. After I had done another six months in the Air Force I had to get back into something. I applied for Vietnam but I did not get it. I thought, 'Damn this. I'm out. I'm gone.' I went over to England. I was over there for about five years. I joined the British Army. I just thought I had to get back into something, so I spent 6½ to seven years in the 4/7 Dragoon Guards. I served in Germany. I was an out-and-out loner, but I had to have someone—an officer; you salute him and say, 'Yes, sir. No, sir'—that was great.

I have come back into civilian life and I just cannot hack it. All I can say is, 'Thank God I have retired,' because I do not have to join up again or do something like that. Anyway, that is about my lot. I can tell you I hated the orphanage. I have lost all sense of who I am and what I was here for. The last 16 years of my life I went up to Warracknabeal. My mother was there. I looked after her until the day she died. I visited her twice a day. We never got the same treatment in the home, but I felt like I was doing something good.

CHAIR—Was there anything else you wanted to say, Mr Golding, before we ask some questions?

Mr R. Golding—Honestly, I cannot remember.

CHAIR—That is all right. You might want to elaborate when we ask some questions.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Golding, it is 60-plus years since this started to happen to you.

Mr R. Golding—It has been 60-plus years.

Senator MURRAY—And you are still in pain?

Mr R. Golding—Yes, because I could not talk about it. When I went into the service I would get letters from home, from my mother. People would say, 'I thought you were in an orphanage.' 'Well, I was.' 'How the hell could you be in an orphanage?' One thing led to another and maybe there were fights or arguments. You are told you are a liar and all this.

Senator MURRAY—Why did you want to tell us your story?

Mr R. Golding—I have to get it out of me. I have written it down and put it on a CD. My daughter-in-law cannot even read it. She got past the first page and that was it.

Senator MURRAY—Is there anything you think can be done for people like you, who are still in pain and who are still carrying so much baggage from being treated like that?

Mr R. Golding—I do not know. I am just starting to talk about it where I live in Warracknabeal. People there knew my parents and what great bloody people they were. I had a bit of a bad reputation when I came home because what sort of a person would not come home for his father's funeral? I was in England and I could not give a damn whether he was living or dead.

Senator MURRAY—We have to learn lessons from this for the community at large. Do you think that one of the most helpful things that any government can do is to provide mechanisms for people to tell their stories, to be believed and to be understood?

Mr R. Golding—Yes, I would love that. Then you could get it out. I have written 90-odd pages like this trying to tell my story. I would love to see it printed—not for the money—and see what people think of it. I do not know if that answers you.

Senator MURRAY—Yes, it does. You can see the contradiction in you because you express it. Listening and watching you, I judge you as a very emotional man, but you say to us that you cannot express emotion. Is that typical?

Mr R. Golding—I have built myself up to this.

Senator MURRAY—I can understand that. Is it typical of people you know who have been through your kind of experiences?

Mr R. Golding—The only person I have seen since I left the home, or since I came back from overseas, lives in Warracknabeal. He cannot speak about it. He will not speak about it. His grandchildren do not know. 'Granddad does not want to talk about it—leave it.' Like me, he has a chip on both shoulders. We are evenly balanced, you see!

Senator MURRAY—There are some counselling services, although in my experience many counsellors do not understand this stuff. Have you ever tried to seek professional help?

Mr R. Golding—Yes, I tried once in England. I got treated for alcoholism, but not for the reason for it. I would knock away one or 1½ bottles of whisky in a session.

Senator MURRAY—As you know, it is a symptom, not a cause.

Mr R. Golding—Yes, but is it inherited? My father was an alcoholic at 18 years of age.

Senator MURRAY—What was his background? Did he have a bad upbringing?

Mr R. Golding—He left school at about 12 and humped his bluey. He got into fights and got into trouble with the police.

Senator MURRAY—If you have had relationship difficulties and difficulties expressing yourself, what has been the effect on your children?

Mr R. Golding—I do not know. My son is a chef down here in Melbourne, and my daughter works for an electrical company. As I say, I see my grandchildren once, twice or three times a year, maybe. I have got onto them: 'Why don't you read it? That's what I've put it there for; it's history,' but they do not have time. I think that the way I brought them up is that if I said jump, they jumped. That is what I had to do. That is all I knew.

Senator MURRAY—There are probably many tens of thousands of people who went through institutional life and were wards of state—many tens of thousands. What about bringing people into specialised counselling services where the counsellors understood the environment and the background, and there was some continuity—a place where you could go and talk, get your story out and be understood? From your experience, do you think that that would assist?

Mr R. Golding—I just started talking to a bloke last week, as it happens, because I was getting frustrated. This was coming up, and I was thinking, 'Should I really go?' I spoke to a psychologist last week, on Monday or Tuesday. I had another appointment with him on Thursday, but he was crook. I think you should somehow get it out. I do not know if you have ever had anger. I have put my fist through doors. I took up boxing, wrestling—anything, just so that I could vent anger. I would take it out on anything. I would take it out on a dog. It is absolute rage. Maybe I have had to hold in longer than I should have, because I respected that my mother was my mother. I was looking after her, and she did not want people to know how we were treated. 'Don't mention the orphanage!' So I did not. All the time I was looking after her and saying, 'What the bloody hell am I doing?' I was looking after her saying, 'She's my mother.' Often we sat on the fence at the orphanage. 'We'll be up to see you on Sunday.' So all Sunday afternoon we would sit on the fence waiting for them. Two or three months later they would come.

Senator MURRAY—And you still feel that pain today?

Mr R. Golding—Oh, yes. That is why I remember it. I actually remember—I said this to my younger brother—going into the orphanage on my fourth birthday, I thought. It was another

home, but I do remember. My fourth birthday! I was not wanted, so I went into a home. We were made wards of the court. I think that was until we were adults, and in those days that was 21. You would not sentence a murderer to that.

Senator MURRAY—You regard it as a sentence?

Mr R. Golding—What else was it? We were actually sentenced.

Senator McLUCAS—You talk about needing to be institutionalised: going into the Air Force and, subsequently, into the British Army. Did you know that when you did that? Did you understand that you needed to be in an organised environment?

Mr R. Golding—No. I went home to my mother and father, and was threatened by my father: 'You can still go back to the orphanage until you're 21 if you don't toe the line.' I was an apprentice fitter and turner, against my will. I wanted to be a jockey, initially. Then I got down here and wanted to be a policeman and all sorts of things. I stuck it for a couple of years and then said, 'No. I have to get out of this.' I had my indentures cancelled, and joined up. I did not know it, but I just had to be with other people in the same boat.

Senator McLUCAS—Other people have said that to us in their submissions as well, that once a person has been through an institution they feel comfortable in a place where decisions are made for them rather than having to make their own decisions.

Mr R. Golding—Yes, but you still had that feeling that there was a pecking order and you had to work your way through that—even in basic training. I did not give a damn how big people were: if I wanted to fight them, I would fight them. That was the way I was brought up, and I got into a few blues in the services.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to ask about the incident in your submission regarding the circumcision of boys at the orphanage. You said that boys up to 14 years of age were sent to the hospital to be circumcised.

Mr R. Golding—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Approximately when did this happen?

Mr R. Golding—I would say—and it would be a hell of a rough guess—in 1948.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did you actually see boys who had been circumcised?

Mr R. Golding—We had no underclothes—we did not know what they were—and they would open their trousers and say, 'Look at this.' They would be bandaged up and in pain. They were bandaged up, but they had no underpants and rough clothes, which did not help.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Were all the boys in the orphanage circumcised?

Mr R. Golding—No, not everyone got done. They started on it—and why it stopped I do not know—and the idea was that if the boys wet the beds, they were inspected to see if they had been done, and if they had not been done, they were subsequently taken and done.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume that the Ballarat Orphanage was run by the Victorian state government?

Mr R. Golding—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How do you feel about issues of compensation at this stage for people like you who have been through that experience? How would you feel if money were made available to you?

Mr R. Golding—I do not think money is going to cure it, but if a bloke said to me, 'Here,' I would take it. I would be a bloody idiot not to. I have got something out of it, but it has not really satisfied me. The money does not satisfy you; it is the people saying, 'I'm sorry I did this'—not Bracks or whoever, but the people who were responsible for it—but most of them are dead. You want them to say that they are sorry, if they are.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thank you for telling us your story.

Senator MOORE—Thank you, Mr Golding, for talking with us. There were three boys in your family?

Mr R. Golding—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And were you all put in care at the same time?

Mr R. Golding—No. My elder brother was a half-brother, a step-brother, and I believe he was kept by my mother and her first husband—if he was her husband; I do not know; I cannot find out. At the Ballarat Orphanage, yes, we all went in together, but not in the years before that. I did not know how old I was. I was living with Mrs So-and-so one week, then I was back and then I was living with someone else.

Senator MOORE—Were you able to keep up your brotherly relationships, the three of you together?

Mr R. Golding—No. I did not go to either brother's wedding, because I had joined up and I think I was in Malaya. When I came home I tried working with my father as a farrier, but that did not work out. I just could not hack it; I had to go. By this time my wife had left me because of my drinking and my parents were interfering.

Senator MOORE—The family as a unit did not exist.

Mr R. Golding—No. I was in England and I phoned around Australia looking for my brothers. I got onto Frank and he put me in touch with Bill, the older brother, and his wife said, 'You're dead!' I thought, 'Yeah, maybe.' Anyway, Frank came over to England and we met up. A

year or so later, I decided to come home, and my wife said, 'Yes, I'll come, but nowhere near Ballarat.'

Senator MOORE—Ballarat is not a place to go.

Mr R. Golding—No, but I think she really meant my family—not my brothers, my mother and father. But my father was dead. I could not have cared less. I saw my mother when I came home on 10 October 1986—I am good for dates. She was so hunched over and looked so sick, yet she lasted 16 years. Now and then, we brothers meet up and phone up, but I do not think it is the same as brothers or whatever who have been together through the years.

Senator MOORE—Can you talk about your experiences?

Mr R. Golding—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Are you able to talk about what happened to you and share that experience with each other?

Mr R. Golding—Yes, we have a laugh over some things—if you can call it a laugh. Laughing is a thing that went out of business with crying.

Senator MOORE—It has closed down.

Mr R. Golding—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Thank you.

Senator MURRAY—You love your kids, don't you?

Mr R. Golding—Of course.

Senator MURRAY—When they read this, they will know. We give it back to you in writing, you see.

Mr R. Golding—I have put it on a CD, but it is all jumbled up, like I am. I jump from year to year, making mistakes: 'No, that was 1943, not 1945'—that sort of thing.

Senator MURRAY—I am sure they know you love them very much.

Mr R. Golding—I hope so. I am going down there this month, I hope.

CHAIR—Unless there are any further questions, thank you very much Mr Golding.

Mr R. Golding—Thank you very much for listening.

[1.48 p.m.]

GOLDING, Mr Francis Patrick, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I can certainly see you are brothers.

Mr F. Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence be heard in public but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mr F. Golding—That is true.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr F. Golding—Thank you very much. I was aware of my brother's submission and knew the type of material he would present today, so I wanted to do something a little different and look at the documentation, which partly explains the story behind the events that Bob has talked about and that we talked about in our submission. In November 1940 we were taken by our father to Melbourne following an argument with our mother. Our older brother, who was six—I was 2½ and Bob was nearly four at that stage—was left at home. According to the records—and all of the story which I am telling you is according to the records; none of this is material which we have got from our father or our mother, particularly our mother, who refused to talk to us at all about these matters until her dying day—our father told the department that our mother had told him, 'Clear out and take the kids with you.' No-one checked that story. There is no documentation that suggests that our mother was ever interviewed to check whether that story was true. We were immediately fostered out to a registered person living in Northcote. After nine days she returned us to the welfare department, saying that she could not look after us because of our 'habits'—that is what the record says; I am 2½ and my brother is four and she could not look after us because of our 'habits'! So after those nine days we were back in the children's depot.

Meanwhile, our father had failed to pay the maintenance which he had agreed to pay and, under the Children's Welfare Act 1928, if payments fell four weeks in arrears, automatically, without discretion, the child was made a ward of the state, and that is what happened. I found it interesting that in the documentation it seems it was a conscious decision not to chase the maintenance. The welfare department did not make any effort to chase the maintenance; even though they became aware that our father had told a cock-and-bull story, they did not make any effort until four weeks were up and then they started chasing the maintenance. In the meantime

we became wards of the state under that provision. The outstanding sum of money was £2 for each of us.

So we were taken to this other place on Bob's fourth birthday. He was right. We always believed, until we saw the documents, that we went to the Ballarat orphanage on his fourth birthday, but in fact it was this other place, the only record of which is a delivery receipt at Christmas time—just like a Christmas delivery—signed by the matron of the home and witnessed by the chauffeur who drove us there. That is the only document that explains anything of that period of our lives, which extended over about nine months before we were free from the institution.

As soon as we were made wards of the state and only then—and I want to stress that—did the department actually begin to get serious about maintenance, asking the police to intervene on their behalf. In the meantime, our father had actually made application to get us back. You have to understand—perhaps you have already got that understanding—that my mother and father had a fairly volatile relationship: two weeks in love and two weeks out of love. Two weeks after we were in Andrew Kerr home they were petitioning to have us released. He wrote to the welfare department—there was no question about him trying to hide anywhere—but the welfare department, having his correspondence, put it to one side and asked the police to actually find him so that he could pay his maintenance. It is really a preposterous story of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo, and I can only believe it is an honest series of mistakes, though the conspiracy theorist in me suggests perhaps that they were intent upon getting us detached from those horrible people—our parents. He wrote twice to the department, each time giving his address. The first time he apologised for not paying maintenance and enclosed a part payment of £2 10s—what he could afford then —and later made an offer to pay off so much a week.

The welfare department recorded in the files that we should not be allowed to go back to them because the father had told so many untruths on the first occasion he had been interviewed. In fact, we were released on probation, as my brother has said just before, and formally discharged after nine months in September 1941. In July of that year our father enlisted in the Army, but not long into his service he actually began to take periods of AWL—absence without leave. It seems to me clear that he was doing this to deal with family disruptions.

In one of these periods in October '41, he came to Ballarat and took Bob and me away from our mother again to put us in a home. He told a story which was duly recorded in the files. It seems as if this story is another fanciful story but, again, it was never checked. There was never any attempt to find our mother and check whether the story our father had told was true. What is recorded there is that our father:

> ... had been drinking heavily ... His hand was so shaky he asked me to complete his forms ...
>
> Father does not wish Mother to see the children.

That was the end of it. 'Father does not wish Mother to see the children', so Mother is cut out of the picture altogether. The file continues, saying he 'expects to embark soon for overseas.' When we got the files from the military, that clearly was a cock-and-bull story. There was never any prospect of our father being sent overseas, certainly not at that stage. He was dishonourably discharged in 1943—the Army could not cope with him.

Our father took us down to Melbourne again. They again did not check the story—simply an administrative routine, a mechanised sort of procedure—and he went back to join the Army again to explain his AWL status. This time the department boarded us out to a woman in South Yarra. Our father had agreed to pay 10s 6d a week for each of us, and this time he arranged for the Army to send that money from his pay. In a letter which he sent to the department, he said, 'At least their mother would not try to claim any of their pay.' It is clear to me he was out to punish her at that time, as he had done on other occasions, and we were the handy weapons. A fortnight later, he was trying to get us back again—with our mother's support, of course. The file says:

> Golding is again living with the Mother of these children and now wishes to take them back to Ballarat. I informed him that he would not be permitted to do this until he had made payments for Children's maintenance up to date ...

He got an advance from his Army pay and cleared the arrears of £4 10s, and we were free to go home again. This time we stayed out of the departmental clutches for a whole year.

In January 1943 we were taken to the Ballarat police by a woman. There is a gap in the files between the period that I have just spoken about and this next period. We were taken to the Ballarat police by a woman—a friend of our mother's, apparently—who was looking after us. The police put us straight away into the Ballarat Orphanage and formally applied to have us declared wards of the state. We were charged—we, the children—under the Children's Welfare Act with being without sufficient means of support. To make us wards of the state under that provision, a police report was required to be made to a magistrate who was required to do an investigation of the facts and then make a recommendation to the chief secretary, the minister at that time, who made the formal wardship order.

The police report was very brief. It relied entirely on the story of the woman who was looking after us at the time. It reads:

> Children were left in the care of Mrs H by their mother who has since deserted. It is believed that she has gone to Sydney. Mrs H is unable to keep the children. Father: Alvan Henry Golding, VX 60098 6th Field Co., R.A.E. Believed to be in South Australia.

That is the investigation by the police. They could cite his military number and say what unit he was with but they concluded that he was 'believed to be in South Australia'. In fact, he was in Western Australia at the time. The files from the Army show that our mother was probably still in Ballarat at the time—but living at another address—but the police believed she had deserted and was living in Sydney.

The magistrate's report, which was the second part of this process, simply reiterated the police report. It added no new facts. There was nothing the magistrate had turned up. The process was in camera. Our parents knew nothing about the process. They were not invited to defend the situation. Nobody spoke up on behalf of the children: it was the police, the magistrate and the department. I believe that was a very common part of the practice.

The orphanage, on receipt of us, wrote in their files 'both parents deserted'. There must have been many fathers during World War II who were in that category of deserters if they had joined the Army. After this period of volatility—three foster mothers and the Andrew Kerr home—we

were kept in the Ballarat Orphanage for a protracted period of over 10 years, until 1953, when I was 15 and my brothers were 16 and 18. I thought it would be instructive for you to see the institution. This is the best photo I can find of it. It was pulled down in 1965. It was built in 1865. That is the place we were taken to at that early stage of our lives and spent 10 years in.

That is the story, so far, of how we actually got to be in the Ballarat Orphanage. I think the more interesting story is how we came to stay there so long. I would like to take you through that. Our parents did apply to have us returned to their custody on several occasions after 1943; they were capable of looking after us and they had the means to do so. Remember, we were charged with being without sufficient means. When the means became sufficient, we were not then able to be released, for reasons which the file shows clearly. They basically boil down to judgments made by bureaucrats about the worth of the quality of the people who were our father and mother, and the values underpinning what they perceived to be their role as carers of children in need of care and protection.

My father, let it be said, was not a pleasant man, although he did improve with age. He had a police record which was quite extensive. I was very surprised to see how extensive it was when we finally did get to see it. With one notable exception, all the misdemeanours that he committed were at the trivial end—they were associated with alcohol. Almost every time he was in trouble it was because of alcohol—he was abusive, he resisted arrest and he did those sorts of things. There was one exception, which was quite out of character with him, and for that he was jailed for 18 months. He was released in July of 1947. The following year Mum and Dad applied for custody, and they were given a resounding no. The file says:

... you possessed such a serious and protracted police record that would exclude any possibility of your application being favourably regarded.

That letter came with a sting in the tail. They had applied for custody and this was the response, 'No, you have got a police record, so you can't have your children back.' It said:

... the desirability of permitting you further access to the children is open to grave doubt ...

Our father had to come in and explain why he should be even given access, having made an application for custody which was rejected on the grounds of his police record.

At this stage, our father was leading a respectable life. He was off the grog, in steady employment and intending to marry our mother. One of the files refers to our illegitimacy, though it related to nothing that I could understand had any significance to the matter being discussed at the time. But it was very important to the department to know that we were illegitimate. But my father was promising to marry our mother. The department warned him that it would require to be satisfied that he, our father:

... had borne a decent reputation for a considerable period before favourable consideration was likely to be given to returning any of the children to your custody.

It was not enough that he had been found guilty of a criminal offence, had been punished, had served his time, had been released, and was back on the straight and narrow and seemingly reformed; the department now felt it necessary for it to get its share of the punishment and that

he must pay some more. So it imposed, 'a decent reputation for a considerable period' with no criteria to define either of those terms. It struck me as being quite an anomaly that our father's sins should be visited on not only our mother but ourselves. We were to spend another five years in the Ballarat Orphanage, despite the fact that he was not in trouble with the police ever again after that significant offence.

It must have been about this time that I remember the orphanage superintendent sidling up to me and, in one of our very rare conversations one on one, saying: 'Your father upset you. I'm going to cut out these visits.' He had found out—the files show—about our father's police record and so he took unilateral action to cut out the visits. He just walked away and left me to deal with the emotions that all of that produced. All the evidence from 1948 confirms that our father was in steady work, that he was off the grog and that he was making every effort to do the right thing. He never added to his police record after that. He was never in trouble. But still he needed to do, and we needed to do, five more years before there was even the possibility of any release—although that was never a tangible prospect; it was just that considerable time would have to be served before you could be released.

In the middle of 1950 and in the middle of 1951, our parents made further applications for custody. By 1950, the authorities were not dealing with three little boys: I was turning 12; Bob, 13; and Bill, 15. Mum and Dad were becoming more pressing, and the superintendent reported in the file:

I told him that it would be a considerable time before the application could be decided.

In June 1951, weary of being pressed by our parents, the department asked the superintendent:

Is there any reason why this ward—

this was in Bob's file—

should not now be returned to relatives or be placed in employment?

The superintendent's response was ominous:

You have the records of the father.

This was in 1951. He was released from jail in 1947. So the police files, inactive as they were, were an albatross around our necks for another several years. In February 1952, the superintendent complained to the department:

Father & Mother now living in Ballarat and are always in touch with ... [the children] Too much. Rather a nuisance.

'Too much. Rather a nuisance' was actually underlined in the original. Parents in touch with their children—too much? A nuisance? A nuisance to whom? It was not a nuisance to us and it was not a nuisance to our father.

A departmental officer even went so far as to suggest, in a note on Bob's file, a shift to another institution to frustrate our parents' being around so much. They nominated a couple of places.

Fortunately institutional inertia set in and no action was taken. But it was beginning to become clear even to these authorities that the inevitable was looming: we were getting too old to be playing this game. In an internal memo, the department wrote:

Undoubtedly, all the boys will return to the mother and Golding in due course and it is just a question of whether he—

this was in Bob's file—

should be retained and given an education at the expense of the State when his future earnings will probably be collected by the mother.

What sort of evidence was that statement based on? Their view was, 'The future earnings will be going towards the mother, so let's not worry too much about this boy's education.'

In the end, the decision was actually snatched out of the department's hands by the accident of my winning a trip to England in the *Herald Sun* newspaper at that time. By sheer accident, I won this trip in a competition and I had to be released from wardship. This is what the department said at the time:

As the boy is a ward … it will be necessary … to obtain Ministerial approval for his departure from … the State.

… it might be … preferable to discharge him as a ward … prior to his departure. I realise that such action would put the parents in an advantageous position should they seek custody—

in the future. In other words, 'If we release the youngest brother, the parents will get an advantage because they will be able to get the other two out.' The superintendent agreed that discharging me:

… would put the parents in an advantageous position should they seek custody of the boy on his return next August … The father is certainly endeavouring to live a respectable life and at present is in good employment …

This is 1953—five long years after his discharge from prison. Having had the decision to discharge me, my two brothers' wardships would follow. The superintendent reported to the department:

Robert has been told by his father that on Frank's return from England he is going to have them both discharged from the Department, and this knowledge has had definite retarded action on his behaviour at the Hostel.

That was the place where the older boys went from this main building.

I would therefore recommend that Robert be permitted to return to his parents custody as soon as it is convenient.

Just like that. I was on my way to England when I was formally discharged as a ward, but the authorities did not tell me. After I got home—I remember the scene on Princes Pier quite distinctly—there was the superintendent on one side and our parents on the other. 'What's going on? Where am I actually going to be sleeping tonight?' My parents had told me that I was no longer a ward. It took a little while—and, certainly, it was between clenched teeth—but the superintendent said, 'You are free to go home, but we'd like you to come to the orphanage

because we want you to tell the other girls and boys what a good time you had.' I am afraid I did not take that option up.

I went into the Ballarat Orphanage as an infant and came out as a teenager, which is a very long sentence, if you think about it. It was more than a decade since we were together as a family. I must say that I agree with Bob's sentiments: it was very difficult to try to get together as a family after such a long break from these people. I am sure that it was difficult for them, too, to suddenly have three teenagers where before they had had three infants.

I think the main concern that I have in telling this story is that it reflects my having lived for some 40 or 50 years with whole lots of questions nagging away at me. It was not until I was able to start getting freedom of information access in the 1990s that the story I have told you became clear to me. I have lived my whole life not knowing the answers to the questions that obviously occur to you about why you were in an orphanage when you were not an orphan and why your parents, who told you that they wanted to have you, were not allowed to have you. It has taken all of that time for that story to actually become clear—and it is not yet absolutely clear. I have had to sift through and try to sort the evidence from the files, and sometimes there are gaps in it.

I want to raise the issues that are important to me, if you will bear with me. Firstly, I would like to say that the standards of inspection of institutions in my time leave me gobsmacked. The inspection that we underwent once a year was perfunctory, to say the least, and I have plenty of examples to show you. The kinds of things that were commonly reported—often in no more than one sentence—were, 'He looks after his teeth,' 'He needs glasses,' 'He wears glasses,' or 'He's a fine boy.'

There was never any opportunity to discuss with the so-called inspectors what was going on in your life and how you felt about it. There was never any opportunity to ask questions like, 'Where's my father? Where's my mother? Why has he sent us a box of grapes from Red Cliffs? What's the story behind that? These skates turned up; he's obviously thinking about us. Can we be in touch with him?' There was never any opportunity to discuss that sort of matter. In fact, one risked a box over the ears if one raised that sort of question with the wrong staff member at the wrong time. So the inspections were never concerned with the psyche, the emotions or the feelings of the child; they were about your teeth or what grade you were in. We knew what grade we were in.

I think Bob has mentioned the wall in passing. This was our refuge. This is a photograph taken some five or six years ago of the three boys standing against this symbolic wall. We would go and sit. The terminus for the tramline from Ballarat to the city ended at the orphanage. We would go and sit there for hours to see if anyone was going to come and visit us. We were never told in advance, but on a weekend maybe—maybe—someone would come and visit us. We would go and sit there. That is the place we went to sort our heads out. When the superintendent sidled up and said, 'I am going to stop these visits; your father upsets you,' my head was saying, 'No, he does not upset me; you upset me, the institution upsets me. Father doesn't upset me. Why are you saying that?' We went and sat on the wall to see if we could sort it out and make sense of it, because it did not make any sense. There was no-one willing to talk to us.

The deprivation and harm that I feel very strongly about was this inability to have any information at the time to make sense of the situation we were in. If the authorities did refer to

our parents—and there were lots of years when we did not know whether they were alive or dead or whatever—they talked in derisory terms. Our parents were bad people.

On the matter of whether the authorities paid due diligence to their responsibilities, I make these points. I have already made some of them but I want to clinch them. The authorities accepted unreliable information and made lifetime decisions for us on the basis of unreliable information. That they made assessments without checking the basic facts sticks in my craw. On the matter of religious faith, for example, we were Catholics but our father, wanting to pay off our mother, put us down as Church of England at one stage and Salvation Army at another. So we were raised in a Protestant institution.

The value judgments and the personal preferences that come through the files absolutely astounded me when I saw them. I was in my late 50s when I got these files and I read things like:

> The [father] wishes the children's return to enable him to obtain Sustenance for them. While there is so much work to be obtained it does not appear right that a strong healthy man like Golding should be drawing Sustenance.

What has that got to do with my welfare? They did not like my father. They did not like the fact that he was on the dole. They thought, 'He is a good, strong, healthy man; he should be working.' That kind of mentality is at the base of the decision making, particularly about keeping us for that protracted time from 1948 onwards. This is another quotation from the files:

> Undoubtedly, all the boys will return to the mother and Golding in due course and it is just a question of whether ... should be retained and given an education at the expense of the State when his future earnings will probably be collected by the mother.

That was a decision about the further education of the child and it was made on the basis that the mother might get some advantage from it. It is absolutely astounding to me to think that child welfare authorities would think to punish the mother by making a decision that was against the interests of the children. I have mentioned the gratuitous references to our illegitimacy. Apropos absolutely nothing, in a letter from one officer to another, it said, 'These children are illegitimate.'

I want to stress the incompetence of the authorities. On more than one occasion, as I have said already and want to stress again, they ignored correspondence from our parents giving their address, but set the police on them as if they were fugitives—'Find out where they are; interview them and find out why such and such is not happening.' In this case it was maintenance payments.

Elementary mistakes riddle the files. My birth date varies by 10 years. My brother Bob seems to have suffered the most in this regard—his name is usually misspelt. There are absolutely wrong names, wrong dates and wrong information. At one stage it was asserted that we were made wards of the state on the application of our mother. Our mother never made an application to have us made wards of the state. Our father was reported to have deserted us when he joined the Army and was sent to Western Australia. On what grounds can anyone make that claim, especially when they can cite his Army record number? To make a claim that he had deserted us when he was in the Army in 1943 was preposterous.

The processes by which we were made wards of the state in 1943, where the police were supposed to investigate the situation and then pass a report on to the magistrate who would further investigate the facts, was—I was going to use the word corrupt but that is too strong—totally incompetent. There was no such investigation; there was no investigation to gather any of the facts beyond what our foster mother told the police sergeant at that time.

Lastly, the lack of accountability within the system at the time is what strikes me from this distance looking back. It would explain a lot about how we were treated. There was nobody to call the authorities to account, and this applies to our education as well as to our life in the orphanage. The school was situated in the grounds of the orphanage. It was run by the Victorian education department, but there was no parental interference and there were no reports to parents. The violence in the school matched the violence in the institution, and I think the failure to have a proper inspectorial system was a major failing in the system.

As to the impact of the long-term social consequences on me, you can see, but perhaps in a different way, that my whole life has been deeply affected by my experience as a ward of the state—just as my brother's has. Our third brother, by the way, would not come near this process with a 40-foot pole. He is dealing with it in a different way, which is just to stay away from all of that. There are still parts of my story that I do not understand, but I am reasonably comfortable that I understand the basics of it. I would like to know answers to some other questions, which I cannot get.

Incidentally, in the freedom of information process that I started in 1994—and I still have applications in—although I have been told on a number of occasions, 'The files have been have all been released to you,' further files have been found upon pursuing particular matters. The censorship of the files was something that had disturbed me and I appealed as vigorously as I could without getting into the legal process. I managed to retrieve whole paragraphs from my own file. It galls me, having been a child in an orphanage and never told anything about my parents, that now, when I am in my 60s, I am being told, 'You can't see what's on your file.' It really galls me that some perfect stranger, a bureaucrat, can see what is on my file but that I cannot. So I go through this process of getting a letter with a paragraph missing and having to write another letter and then six months later getting response. That has taken a long time. It is now 2003; I started in 1994. I still have live applications before government departments for information which is my information. That really sticks in my throat.

I regret that we did not live with our mother and father earlier. I regret that I had a very superficial, shallow and difficult relationship with them as an adult and that my children had that same problem. It need not have happened; I do not believe we should have been there that long. The last thing I want to say is that I do not think that the story I am telling you is by any means unique and different. I think there are lots and lots of stories almost exactly the same as mine. The elements are there: the value judgments by bureaucrats about whether people are worthwhile as parents, the mishandling of information, the use of hearsay. I think those elements are to be found in many, many stories like mine.

CHAIR—Thank you. As I recall from reading your submission, you are considering writing a book.

Mr F. Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—I am just trying to get some background. You may be more privy to it than we in the committee. There is the concept of Oliver Twist—of children in Charles Dickens's times who were abandoned or in difficulty or whose parents were not seen to be fit to have children. In the space of maybe a century, the states started to assume some responsibility and intervene in how children should be treated. From your research are you able to comment on that?

Mr F. Golding—Yes. I have been very interested in trying to understand the nature and function of children's institutions. Ballarat might be unique in one way, in that it began when there was a tremendous civil disturbance, if you like, with lots of abandoned children and children whose parents were killed or went missing during or immediately after the gold rush period. My research indicates that there were social functions which these children's institutions played, one of which resonates strongly with me—that is, the state seemed to be responding to a fear of disorder. The fear was that if you let these people bring up children, they would in turn graduate as members of the criminal class, and there would be a price to pay socially. At the same time, I am also quite conscious of the fact that there were genuine philanthropic thrusts. There were people with Christian commitments, for example, who were keen to bring up children in a way which was better than what might otherwise be the case.

But I do think there is an element of punishment running through lots of the speeches of politicians, civic leaders and so on, which refer to orphan asylums in terms of fear. I think the same argument was had in the public debates about education in the 1870s, when free, secular and compulsory education was being introduced, not only in this country but in the UK and other European countries. There was a mixture of philanthropy, fear and a need to make sure that the right values were being inculcated in the children. I certainly was very sensitive to those value judgments about my parents. They were representative, I think, of value judgments that bureaucrats and politicians were making about people who were at risk.

CHAIR—Can I ask one more question on education. You and your brothers were educated in rural Victoria in the fifties. Did you find in your research that children in institutions in the period, say, from the 1920s onwards, stayed in school longer than other young people in those areas?

Mr F. Golding—Did children in institutions stay longer?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr F. Golding—No.

CHAIR—Farm boys—and farm girls even more so—did not finish primary school, let alone get into secondary school. I wonder if you would like to comment on that.

Mr F. Golding—I think I would need to do some more research. It sounds like a question on notice. But my impression is that, where it was common at around the period that I am talking about for ordinary people—non-orphan asylum children—to go on to tech, high school, girls secondary school or whatever until at least they got their intermediate, which is fourth year of secondary school, there was never any systematic intention that that would be the case with the Ballarat Orphanage children and, from what I understand, with other children, too. Our school on site went up to grade 8, and almost invariably children left as soon as they got to grade 8. The

boys were literally, sometimes, farmed out; they were commonly farmed out. My oldest brother, Bill, was farmed out.

CHAIR—Grade 8 is what form? There is only one Victorian here.

Mr F. Golding—That is form 2. It built on to the six years of primary school. The girls were serviced out to Ballarat families—those who were not retained as carers, doing U-turns from being inmates to suddenly having power over the children as supervisory staff. That was quite common. I have been through the annual reports of the Ballarat Orphanage, and they talk very commonly about the girls graduating to positions of domestic service with families in and around Ballarat, and the boys going on to farms and/or apprenticeships in the trades.

When I got to the end of grade 6, to my very great surprise—and, again, without any consultation or discussion—it was, 'Here's your bag for the high school,' with three other children. Four of us out of a class were suddenly mysteriously sent off to the high school. I had thought that that was the first time that had ever happened, but in fact the annual report for 1922 shows that some other children went to the Ballarat high school that year, though there is no reference to it from that time until we went in 1949, I think it was. So it was very uncommon, and we were very much fish out of water, though extraordinarily grateful for the release into normality. You understand that all of our days—weekends and weeks—were spent in the orphanage, because the school was there. So to go on the tram and, later on, to go on a bike up to the high school, rubbing shoulders with ordinary people, was an extraordinarily novel thing to do. We were grateful for it, but it was only four out of a class of 35. It was not systematic; even after my period it was idiosyncratic.

So I would think that the educational opportunities for orphans of the living or whatever were constrained. Certainly I know of children who were in the orphanage at the same time as I was who were kept down systematically. There were two boys I can clearly remember, who were in school when I started in the bubs grade and who were still there when I got to grade 4—they were in grade 5. I know of reports that say that expectations of children in institutions were terribly low: 'They could not be expected to go on to secondary school. The parents did not have the intelligence, so why should they?' I think my case was an exception, and I am very conscious of that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I just want to clarify something. You are saying that, after 1947, although your parents were both living together in Ballarat, they were not entitled to access to you and your brothers?

Mr F. Golding—They had access. They did not live all the time in Ballarat; they lived some of the time in Ballarat. My father used to chase work fruit picking around Red Cliffs, Mildura and so on, and there were times when he lived in other places, like Bendigo. But when he lived in Ballarat he would visit from time to time. I cannot remember how regularly, perhaps it was every other month.

Senator HUMPHRIES—And your mother visited separately or with him?

Mr F. Golding—Sometimes with him but never separately.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Would they see the three boys together?

Mr F. Golding—Yes. Sometimes we were allowed to go out—never overnight, although I think there was one occasion when we did have a weekend with our father. We could visit some other relatives in Ballarat from time to time, too, but that was not a regular thing.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume that you would say that the relationship with both your parents was severely adversely affected by the fact that you had spent all those crucial years away from them.

Mr F. Golding—Absolutely. Not only did we not have that kind of history that ordinary families have growing up together that you can talk about at the dinner table or whatever—such as breaking your arm and wrist, or getting in trouble with the teacher and being bailed out—but also the circumstances under which we were placed and kept in the orphanage were painful. It was a very difficult thing to begin to talk about. In fact, our parents refused. Mother in particular simply would not talk to us about those matters. So all of the stuff I have about my mother is what was kept in the files, which is quite amazing. It is amazing that it was kept there. I was quite surprised at what was kept there and the detail in which it was kept, as I was surprised with the reluctance the authorities had to give me back my story. Yes, it was a very difficult period of time. I think in each of our three different ways, we got out from a sticky situation as quickly as we could.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thank you.

Senator McLUCAS—I noticed that in your submission you do talk about the children's ombudsman and similar offices, commissions or councils that have been established in state jurisdictions. Do you recommend that there be a similar Commonwealth entity, that the federal government should establish a similar sort of organisation or body that would monitor, report on and advocate for children?

Mr F. Golding—Yes, I do because I think there is some value in having some uniform standards and consistency across the different jurisdictions. I feel very strongly that a lot of the pain that we experienced was brought about because there was no-one advocating for us. There was no-one independent of the police and the other authorities, which are closely interlinked with one another anyway serving each other's needs. There was no-one advocating on behalf of the children. I think if there were some standards, some of those inspectorial difficulties might have disappeared too. If those standards or set of principles were given the weight of the Commonwealth, it would be more difficult for state authorities to opt out of their responsibilities. If anyone would like to ask me what I think of the Victorian government's submission to this inquiry, I would be very happy to answer. I think it just perpetuates the same old thing. Unless somebody is cracking the whip on the state departments—whatever their political persuasion might be—they will obfuscate and avoid responsibility. It needs somebody to oversight and, in a sense, set up some sort of keen competition between the states as to who can do the best job. If there were a set of national yardsticks, you would see that Victoria or New South Wales was falling behind and so on.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you, Mr Golding.

Senator TCHEN—I have a question which I intended to put to Mr Robert Golding as well, but I knew you were coming up after him so I thought I would keep this for you. Basically, it relates to the idea that the professionals or the people representing the community would have a better idea of how to treat children. I refer to the term 'the best interests of the child', which is still commonly used not only by welfare professionals but also by judges, lawyers and all sorts of advocates. Do you have any concerns about how this term is being used?

Mr F. Golding—Yes, I do. It is in our files from time to time. I come back to the point we were just making: how can you assess the interests of the child without talking to the child? How can you possibly claim to do that? Maybe when we were 4½ or five there was a need to have some other way of assessing our interests, but when I was 14 or 15 and fully able to understand the facts of the matter, surely it would not have been too hard to ask, 'What do you think? Here are the options—what would you like to do?' That failure is something that is strongly in my mind throughout the whole story that I have been telling this afternoon. The fact is that there was nobody to say to the police, 'Look, you really haven't investigated this story.' The police heard what the foster mother told them, wrote it down and passed it on to the magistrate. The magistrate then wrote it down, so it became fact. The magistrate handed it on to the authorities and it became absolutely embedded in the story of these children and became truth, even though the genesis of it was in a falsehood. There was no-one there to say, 'Hang on, what sort of investigation has been carried out? Who is looking after the interests of the child? Can you guarantee that you have looked at the several options available rather than the easiest option, which is to put the children into the Ballarat Orphanage and say that the father has deserted because he is in Western Australia with the Army?'

I think that a very sad part of the story is that there was no kind of objective group or entity challenging the issue of the best interests of the child. I find it really upsetting to read letters saying, in effect, 'It's in their best interests to stay in the orphanage for another five years.' From my distance, looking back on it now, I can see that it was not in our best interests and it has not turned out to be in our best interests in the long term. I am very sceptical of people who use that phrase as if they have somehow won the argument, because they have used the phrase without actually looking at what it means and looking at different perspectives.

Senator TCHEN—From conversations I have had, I have learned that a lot of people—including me—quite often make the assumption that all these bad things happened in the past and that we are much wiser now. But, from the account you have given to the committee, you still run into similar attitudes even today.

Mr F. Golding—Yes. I am extremely disappointed with the Victorian government's submission. I think that is whitewashing—

Senator TCHEN—How do you think we can overcome these problems?

Mr F. Golding—By doing what you are doing, in part—hearing stories from other angles, uncomfortable and as distressing as they might be. I think it is really important to get the stories. The annual reports of the Ballarat Orphanage, compiled into a so-called history of the Ballarat Orphanage, are an absolute disgrace if they purport to be a history of the orphanage. All they do is tell you how many children were there, what sex they were and what the overdraft was that year—

Senator TCHEN—It must have been run by accountants.

Mr F. Golding—without any reference to the lives of the children. In that 100-year history, there is only one child who is mentioned by name. It really embarrasses me. Because I won a trip, I was a spectacular success. God, it was not any of their doing! To write a 100-year history of an institution and mention only one child by name is a disgrace. What you are doing is getting the stories from people and not the institutions' view of things. It worries me a bit that you are doing that tomorrow, and it worried me a bit that you did that on the web site until a late stage. To get the organisations' views of it is to get a cock-eyed, one-sided perspective. That is what the Victorian government has done again with its submission.

Senator MOORE—I have a question similar to the one I asked your brother. Who have you been able to talk to about these things? You have done an enormous amount of research, and you are going to publish. But, when you have been working your way through it, with whom have you been able to talk?

Mr F. Golding—My second wife—not my first. Like my brother, I cried for the first time at age 40. You went to the wall; you did not cry. You were a sissy, a sook, if you did. You would get belted and bullied if you cried, if not from the other children then from a staff member. You learnt to bottle it all up and be really tight about things. So you did not want to talk about these things. The craving for normality drove my first 40 years. I was not going to tell people—even the person I was married to—that I was in an orphanage as a child. I preferred to tell a lie. When my first wife asked me where I went to school, I said Queen Street Primary School because I did not want her to know that I was in the orphanage. It was a matter of great shame. It was not until a much more mature part of my life and a different relationship—with me having failed the first one—that I learnt how to cry and express other emotions, which we had learnt to bottle up.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Golding. That is very enlightening.

[2.48 p.m.]

TURNBULL, Ms Margaret Ann, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—The committee welcomes Ms Margaret Turnbull. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Turnbull—That is correct.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation to be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms Turnbull—In 1956, when I was five, the police removed me and four other siblings from my parents and put us into the care of the state. Apparently my parents were not looking after us as they should. We were taken to the receiving depot at Royal Park. We were placed there for eight months, of which I have no recollection whatsoever. I do recollect being taken to Nazareth House in Ballarat and being placed there, away from my siblings. They were removed to another institution because they were under the age of five and one was male.

Life there was pretty much a nightmare. On the day that I arrived I cried, and I was greeted with, 'If you don't stop the crying, I'll give you something to cry for.' So I quickly learnt. There was a lack of food at this home and a lack of clothing. There were a couple of hundred kids—lots of kids to play with—but I was very much alone. The abuse was systematic. There was physical abuse and mental abuse. You were told you were nothing. I was told my parents had died so, therefore, I was to live there. My father did turn up when I was eight—three years later—for one visit. It was very emotional. I wanted to go home with him, but the only place he knew to take us to was the pub. I did not see my mother again until I was 11½. She had approached the department—mind you, that was seven years later—and they had given her permission to have her three girls released into her care.

I have skipped a little bit there. At one time I was fostered out for 18 months into a country town. One of my sisters was also fostered to the same country town but to a different set of parents. So we had different surnames—and we went to the same school—but we were sisters. These two foster families were to have us meet every second weekend at one of the homes to play for one day on the weekend. My sister's foster parents did not like me, so when I came to visit her at her home I had to sit in the entrance hall for three hours, because they were not my toys and it was not my home. I would just sit there and patiently wait until my foster parents came back to get me. Consequently, after 18 months of constant knock-backs from my sister and her family, I ran away. I actually asked to be taken back to the orphanage so that I could be with my two younger sisters. I was sent back to Nazareth House in Ballarat and was introduced to my five-year-old and six-year old sisters, whom I had not seen for many years.

And then my mother turned up when I was 11. Apparently she lived in Richmond with her de facto partner and had approached the member for Richmond, whose name I cannot recall, in 1962, with the request that we be returned to her care. The government were reluctant to release us and so was the institution, but the member for Richmond persisted and six months later we were placed in my mother's and her de facto's care. That lasted only six months, because he sexually abused us.

From there, we went to an institution in Geelong. It was absolutely horrific. We went into a Catholic organisation, the same as the previous one. I arrived there in June 1963 with my sisters, and after a month I was removed from them because I had too much influence. I was moved from one side of the building to the other. They stayed together, and I was placed away from them. I was not to have any contact for three to six months. It is very disheartening to see your little sisters across a playground, knowing that you cannot touch them, you cannot hug them and you cannot go anywhere near them—yet they are in that same area. As I said, that lasted three to six months. As sisters, they did not keep you together in this institution; they tended to split you apart. It was not just me and my sisters; it was other sisters as well. I stayed at this particular institution from 1963 to 1968.

I won a scholarship to go to Sacred Heart College in 1964, but I was expelled when I started to talk to outsiders about the orphanage and what was happening there. They shut me up. They did not want people to know what was happening with the lack of food, the beltings and the physical and sexual abuse. It was quicker to shut a child up and remove them. So I went back to the home, where they had their own education system, and stayed there until year 9. They then sent me to another Catholic school outside the home. It only went to year 9, so they made me repeat the two years. Rather than find another school that went to the next level, they had me repeat. That was my education as far as being at that institution. I had wanted to be a doctor, but I was told I was fit for scrubbing floors. I was told that my mental capacity was such that I would never amount to anything, that my mother had come from the gutter and that I was just like her—basically, that I would turn out just like her.

There were different things that happened in the institutions. It was horrific for the bed-wetters, having to parade with their wet sheets draped around their shoulders. They were punished for wetting the bed. I had a sister who wet her bed and the punishments were awful. The physical abuse happened all the time. Children had their heads smashed together for simple little things, maybe not remembering to say their prayers or not knowing their times tables.

All the nuns were guilty. There were those who turned their backs and walked away, who did not stand there and stop it—they were all guilty. No-one protected us, but where were the government and the department? There were rules and regulations, but they did not come and visit me once in those five years at this home. Not once did anybody come and say, 'Margaret, how are you going? How's life here? How are you being treated?' Nobody checked up on me. I was the government's child. They put me there to protect me; they abandoned me. Not once did they come near me. I want to know why. Who is going to answer my questions? Why didn't they come near us? Why didn't they look after us?

Not having that education and not knowing what life is about when you leave a place like that, I had a breakdown within three months of leaving. I attempted suicide—I had no wish to live. I had no family here. My parents are English. In my file I discovered that my grandparents from

England had applied to the Australian government to have the five children sent to England and be raised with family members. No, no way: let them live a life of abuse in these institutions—that'll be the best thing for them. It is horrific.

I heard Frank say that his story is not unique. I do not think mine is either. There are plenty of people who had the same experience I had. We were just abandoned and abused. There was no love in these places. If you vomited your food, you were sometimes made to eat it. Sometimes it was not edible. The pigs did not want it. We used to put it out to the pigs and they would not eat it. Having been made to feel so worthless and so useless and to lack self-esteem, how are we to take our place in society and move on with our lives? How are we to create our own families and know how to give love to them and do what is best? What role models did we have? It is very, very difficult.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Our job in this committee is both to hear the stories that people like you are telling us and to recommend action that should follow. What is the single most important thing you would like to see done for people who have experienced what you have experienced?

Ms Turnbull—I would like to see some resources put into play. There are people I know of my age, of my generation, that do not have an education who would love to have assistance. I know people ask for finance, but the financial side of things is for counselling, medical reasons and looking for our files and our family. Those all come together. There is a whole group of them and we should not have to put our hands in our pockets for any of those whatsoever—especially for tracing our families and finding out where they are. Frank talked about finding that bit of paper on that file and having that bit blanked out. It is our information. We should not be putting our hands into our pockets at all. The government should be assisting us in every possible way for education, for psychological reasons, for medical reasons and for finding our personal information. That is the least they could do in assisting us.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You say your case was not unique.

Ms Turnbull—I know of others.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Would you consider that it was at the more extreme end of the experiences of children who went through the institutions you were in, or was it fairly typical? Were there people who had, on average, more scarring experiences than you had? Where did you fit in that spectrum?

Ms Turnbull—I think mine was at the more extreme end, but I would like to divide it into male and female. I think males and females certainly did experience different abuse. I have spoken to many people over the last few years and a lot of the males' stories are just horrific—absolutely horrific. That is not to say the females' stories are not, but it is a different type of abuse. I do not know whether the males have retained it so much longer than we have and not talked about it—females tend to talk a little bit more. But I would say my experience is a bit more extreme than that of a lot of the females I have spoken to. Most people talk about the physical abuse; not everybody talks about the sexual abuse. The mental torment and the physical torment were just horrendous.

CHAIR—Have you had the opportunity to confront the people who abused you in the orphanage or to tell the Catholic Church authorities?

Ms Turnbull—Yes. I have been successful in that regard. There was a priest—I did that. To move towards healing, as much as you can, you allow yourself to be heard. I must admit, as far as dealing with people is concerned, it was probably one of the better situations I have been in. As far as the last institution is concerned, that will go to the courts.

Senator MURRAY—Staying with what Senator Humphries asked you, in the evidence to the child migrant inquiry witnesses indicated that there were particular children who were identified by those who carried out abuse, and they got much more of it than other children. I refer principally to what went on in the Catholic boys homes in Western Australia. There were children who got more beltings and physical punishment than others did. There were children who were sexual targets much more than others, and in the same institution some might get through with very little physical abuse—plenty of emotional and other abuse, but very little physical abuse and no sexual abuse—yet others were tormented. Was that the experience at the institutions you were in?

Ms Turnbull—I would agree with that, yes.

Senator MURRAY—So, from the same institution, it would not surprise you if we had evidence that some had got through relatively whole and unscathed and others had experienced dreadful things.

Ms Turnbull—I can tell you that, yes. Some have gone through with nothing.

Senator MURRAY—They seemed to identify three categories of carers: those who tried to do good and who seemed often to be moved on, those who turned their backs but did not participate and those who were abusers. Is that similar to the experience you had with carers?

Ms Turnbull—I would say the latter two; I would not say the first one—the ones who tried to do good and were moved on. They all did a stint and then were moved on anyway. I would say there were just those who turned their backs and those who abused.

Senator MURRAY—With regard to both the physical and sexual abuse, did you get the impression that people with sadistic or paedophilic tendencies were attracted to the institutions? Were there rings of people, or was it just kind of opportunistic?

Ms Turnbull—It was a control thing. They used it as a control. It was to control the child. In my situation, anyway—being outspoken—it was used as a control thing. In fact, I was brought to Winlaton in Melbourne from Geelong and was threatened with being put in there if I did not cooperate. I was then taken to Fairleigh prison and told that that would be my next stop. I was 15 years old. It was all used as a control to get me to behave.

Senator MURRAY—In your submission you identify four crimes of abuse: emotional, physical, sexual and systems. With respect to emotional, physical and systems, you generalise and do not particularise a person—

Ms Turnbull—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—whereas, with sexual abuse, you particularise a priest, a nun and a holiday host who was a friend of the priest. Was that person male or female?

Ms Turnbull—Male.

Senator MURRAY—Did you do that because emotional abuse was across all the carers and physical abuse was across all the carers but sexual abuse was confined to a few?

Ms Turnbull—That is correct. Emotional and physical abuse was dealt out by the majority of them. Those who did not use physical abuse certainly used mental abuse by degrading and demeaning us.

Senator MURRAY—You mentioned there were five of you.

Ms Turnbull—I have got three younger sisters and an older brother. He was born in England and was 18 months old when he came to Australia.

Senator MURRAY—Who was the one who rejected you?

Ms Turnbull—My sister. I have a sister who was fostered out until she was 16. I met up with her when I was 18.

Senator MURRAY—We heard earlier from the Goldings, and themes can be picked up from the two of them who were here. Have the five of you had a similar experience of life, a similar attitude and similar consequences?

Ms Turnbull—We were all together in one room five years ago for the first time ever in 40 years, and that was at our father's funeral. It was the first time ever. I see two sisters—and that is it. I do not have anything to do with my brother and the sister who was fostered out. She is different from us—we do not know her. The three of us who grew up in the institution are different from the one who was fostered out. We do not know her, and we cannot get to know her.

Senator MURRAY—You and your two younger sisters, are you—

Ms Turnbull—It is not a close relationship—

Senator MURRAY—What I am really looking for is whether the damage is the same or similar.

Ms Turnbull—it is very damaged.

Senator MURRAY—Are the needs of each the same, in terms of the things you suggest that should be done for children or adults who have gone through this experience?

Ms Turnbull—One of the younger ones is doing quite well, but the other one—history repeats itself. She had her children removed from her care, exactly the same as our mother did, and so did my brother. History repeats itself.

Senator MURRAY—Because of a lack of parenting ability?

Ms Turnbull—That is how I look at it.

Senator MURRAY—Do you have children?

Ms Turnbull—Yes, I do. I have two adult sons.

Senator MURRAY—How have you avoided that same consequence for them?

Ms Turnbull—I had very good in-laws, who are wonderful people. I am not married now; I am divorced after 28 years—my choice. I had a very supportive husband so long as I did not talk about my past.

Senator MURRAY—It is difficult to cope with.

Ms Turnbull—He just could not cope with it. I did not talk about it until a few years ago, and then I decided to have some counselling. It was four years of counselling and the marriage went on its way as a result, but I feel better.

Senator MURRAY—Your family members—your sisters, your brother, your children, their children—are they are aware that you are here today?

Ms Turnbull—My two sisters are, yes. They chose not to be part of it.

Senator MURRAY—How do they feel about you being here?

Ms Turnbull—Okay, as long as I do not tell too much about them.

Senator MURRAY—You write in your submission:

The consequences of being in care has left me with low self-esteem and self worth.

Is that a historical view of yourself or a current view?

Ms Turnbull—Historical. I am much better now than I was even 12 months ago.

Senator MURRAY—What has helped you get to a higher level of self-esteem and self worth—the counselling?

Ms Turnbull—Counselling, definitely.

Senator MURRAY—And maturity and understanding?

Ms Turnbull—No, I think it was the counselling. I blamed myself for a lot of the things that happened at the home. Originally, when we were put into care I thought I must have been a terribly naughty little girl at home for my parents not to have come back and got me. I thought that was why I had been put there. That stayed with me for a long time. I remembered my dad saying to me, 'Look after the little ones,' and I took on that role of being like a parent. And it took until the younger ones were in their twenties before I stopped parenting them. I think it was that my counsellor kept on saying, 'You were only a child—you couldn't have stopped what happened to you.' I always thought that, as a tough 13-, 14- and 15-year-old, I could have stopped it, but I could not have.

Senator MURRAY—You write in your submission of 'a terrible dark secret for thirty five years', and you have mentioned that you could not discuss it with your husband—or he did not want to discuss it. Were you able to discuss it with your siblings?

Ms Turnbull—No, nobody.

Senator MURRAY—What about with other people you knew from the institution?

Ms Turnbull—No, you did not talk about things. Even when we were not far apart and a child was being belted, you did not go over and say anything to that child. You did not talk to that child afterwards. You went your own way. Nobody defended anybody. I was as guilty as those nuns; I did not go over there. A couple of times I tried to help my little sisters. In fact, I bailed a nun up with a pair of scissors once and then suffered the consequences. But you did not do it; you just turned your back and walked away.

Senator MURRAY—I am reminded, in the evidence we have had today, of something I have thought of before—that is, when many of the children in the institutions leave, they want very little to do with each other again. It is almost as if they share a nasty secret and do not want to be reminded of it. Only in later years do they seem to come back, bond again and share some of the circumstances. You are a member of CLAN, aren't you?

Ms Turnbull—Yes, I am affiliated with CLAN.

Senator MURRAY—I see it emerging there that people are getting together because they understand each other's background and experiences. Having lived so closely with all those children for all those years, as soon as you left did you cut contact with those children at the institution?

Ms Turnbull—That was actually done for you. When I left in 1968, I was told not to have anything to do with the others and to move on with my life. When other children of my age had left and I had asked for their addresses I was not given them. You were told not to contact them. The only reason I went back to the institution was that I had two younger sisters there. After I had had my breakdown and got my act together—which was eight months later—and was in a relationship with my boyfriend, we drove down every weekend and picked up the two youngest ones and brought them back to my place for the weekend. So I had nothing to do with those in my age group—just my younger sisters. The nuns actually put a closure on it.

Senator MURRAY—One of the comparisons you can make with children who do not go through your experience—who come from a family home and go to community schools—is that they remain attached to the school experience and bonded with the people who went there. Institutionalised children, mostly—and I had better not generalise—seem not to attach themselves to the institution and not to be bonded with the children that went there because of what happened there.

Ms Turnbull—I can understand that perfectly. But, looking back now, you kind of want to go back there because it was your home and your home no longer exists. You have nothing behind you. The big institution has been pulled down. It is as if you had never lived anywhere. Other people can always go back to a house that they lived in and say, 'I lived at 19 Lantern Street, Richmond,' or whatever. They know that the house is there or that is where the block is, but in my case there is nothing there. Even though you were abused, you have to have some roots somewhere. If you do not have your family of origin and you are trying to find them, you need something to go back to. It really is a weird situation.

Senator MURRAY—You were in two institutions from 1956 to 1968. Do you have lifelong friends from there, people you have been attached to?

Ms Turnbull—I have some friends, yes. I have a friend here today. Unfortunately, my best friend from the home died at 40 of cancer. That was difficult to deal with. I have friends outside the home whom I have had since I was 18. They are probably more my friends than those from the home because they do not have those issues to deal with. I have enough trouble dealing with mine.

Senator MURRAY—I am drawing these points out deliberately so that, as a committee, both from the evidence in this inquiry and in the child migrant inquiry, we can get an understanding of the consequences of institutionalisation. Another issue is that there is not the same level of socialisation and bonding attachment as there is in somebody who has been to two schools for the time you were in those institutions and who came from a family home and did not have the sort of treatment you had.

Ms Turnbull—Like I said before, you could have 100 children in that home but feel so alone. Even if your sisters are there, you just feel like you are alone. There is no-one. There was never anyone to go and talk to about your problems. Having been sexually abused by my mother's de facto, I wanted to talk to the head nun there and her words were, 'Good little girls don't talk about such things.' How can you move on from things like that? Already at 11½ I had baggage and I was going to get more, staying in a place like that. Then you leave the institution and you do not deal with that baggage. You take it for 30 years. You plant it in that little box in your brain somewhere, and one day it is going to come out and you have to deal with it. We are all dealing with it now—all this time later—because years ago no-one wanted to listen to us. No-one wanted to hear what we were saying about what was happening in these places. Why couldn't we have our information? We wanted to know. When freedom of information first came out, we had to pay for our file and then we were given selective information. Like Frank said, the bureaucrats wanted you to have just so much. It is very difficult.

Senator MURRAY—I must tell you, so that you understand the difficulty this committee is going to have, that from both the stolen generation inquiry and the child migrant inquiry, it is

still virtually impossible to get governments to improve the provision of information. They are just dreadful.

Ms Turnbull—If we do not get the finances to help people for medical reasons or psychological reasons, at least give us the complete file. At least let us read and put the jigsaw puzzle together as to why we went into these institutions and why our parents were not given permission to come back and visit us. At least let us have our information about ourselves—why two little girls go to a country town to two different foster parents and pretend they are sisters. How stupid! What a ridiculous situation to be placed in as an eight-year-old. Let us have our information. That is what I would like.

Senator MOORE—Do you think that information is there?

Ms Turnbull—Of course it is.

Senator MOORE—Do you think there are documents that would—

Ms Turnbull—You heard Frank Golding say that he has got files in trying to get stuff. Each time I have applied, I get that little bit more.

Senator MOORE—So you firmly believe that somewhere there are records with explanations for all of this. You just have not been able to have it yet.

Ms Turnbull—I am trying again to get more information. I want to know more about my parents. I have got nothing. My mother is not of the mind to be able to tell me and my father died. He said the government would not tell him where we were, so when we were in Geelong he could not come and visit us for six or seven years. He did not even know where we were. I took him there to meet his two youngest daughters, as an 18-year-old. I found him. He did not know where we were. I think the information is there; they just do not want us to have it. But I want it.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Turnbull.

Proceedings suspended from 3.20 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.

CARROLL, Ms Caroline, (Private capacity)

DAVIS, Mr Hector, (Private capacity)

DOHERTY, Mrs Elizabeth Cicilia, (Private capacity)

DONNELLY, Ms Joan, (Private capacity)

DONNELLY, Ms Tara, (Private capacity)

GALE, Ms Wendy, Manager, VANISH

GUTHRIE, Mr David, (Private capacity)

KENDALL, Ms Jenny, (Private capacity)

LONDRIGAN, Mr Frank Peter, (Private capacity)

LOWDON, Ms Kerrie, (Private capacity)

McINNES, Mrs Kathleen, (Private capacity)

SHINGLES, Mr Ray, (Private capacity)

TERRI, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Mrs Wendy Gale and representatives from VANISH. The committee prefers evidence to be held in public but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Gale—Yes, indeed.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without fear of reprisal or intimidation. That goes for everybody. The committee has before it a submission from VANISH. I understand each member will be making a presentation. I now invite you to make those presentations, to be followed by questions from the committee if time permits.

Ms Gale—We hope time permits. Thank you very much. I will give you a little bit of background about VANISH for those of you who do not know. It will not take very long. VANISH is a Victorian government Department of Human Services funded agency which commenced 13 years ago to provide search and support for people separated from their family of

origin. Initially we worked predominantly with people who are part of the adoption triangle but about six years ago the department funded VANISH to provide a search and support function for people who were former wards of state. This financial year that funding has been increased to provide brokerage dollars for counselling to care leavers. VANISH's work in the area has developed as a result of a long recognition of the needs of people who are separated from their family. VANISH has a strong understanding and appreciation of the issues arising and the impact on lives due to family separation. In this last financial year VANISH had a 604 per cent increase in the number of contacts with care leavers. The demand continues to grow. We know we are only scratching the surface and our limited resources cannot provide the services that are required.

I could talk to you about the effects, today, of separation from family. I could discuss with you emotional deprivation theory, attachment disorder and so on. But you will hear all about those theories, probably tomorrow, from the academics and the organisations. VANISH is privileged to walk beside people who trust us enough to share their stories and so for me today it is more important that you hear the journeys of people whose lives have been directly affected—people who are now older in years, although some of them are younger, and whose lives still bear the impact, the pain and the continuing trauma of what happened to them in their childhood.

Today we have been allocated 1¾ hours. Each person has had to contain their life story to five minutes, which does not do justice to them or to the impact their childhood experiences have had on their lives. I would like to go so far as to say it seems almost demeaning that they have five minutes to talk. We would appreciate more time at a later date, if that is at all possible, so that some of these stories could be elaborated on. But today, in order for this representative group to be heard, each person will try to limit the time so that at the end of the individual speakers you will each have time to ask questions and so that each person here feels that they have an opportunity to respond. I have been asked first of all to speak on behalf of Wendy Tennison who did submit a submission to you. I am reading part of her story.

CHAIR—So Wendy is not here?

Ms Gale—No. This is her story.

We had to parade up the passageway Friday night, showing our underpants. If we had an accident by wetting our pants, or if we shitted our pants, we were told to kneel on the passage, wearing our pants on our heads, then were belted and kneeled on the passage all night. The same thing happened if we wet our beds. I was always belted on the bum by a nun who had a scrubbing brush. We had our heads pushed down the toilet bowl, and then the cistern flushed. Then we had our heads banged together, ears and cheeks pulled, plus our hair, also our noses pulled, then our hair was washed in phenyl. If we asked who our parents were or anything about our families, we were flogged.

There was always public floggings that took place every day. I can remember I was hit across the eyes. Not only that, I was tied to my bed in my cell. I suffer a lot with headaches—mainly migraines—also blurred vision at times and a lot of pain. There are things that these nuns did to us, like having us flogged, to satisfy their egos. I do not know what made these nuns treat us the way they did. Not only that, they never paid us for the jobs we did. We were just slaves. We should get compensation for what those nuns did to us. We were innocent little kids when we first went there.

Not only that, we want Pauline arrested for her part in the abuse towards us. I hope she is still living, because we want her brought to justice. These nuns knew what she was doing and did not even try to stop her. Pauline was a bed wetter. When

she wet her bed she would swap her wet sheets with someone else who had a dry bed, and then the kid whom she swapped the wet sheets with would end up with a hiding. We had to wear sheets over our heads all day, but she did not. I want something done about these nuns and I will never forgive them for as long as I live.

When they had finished with us, we were put in another institution called the Good Shepherd. They were not as violent as the Nazareth nuns, while at the Good Shepherd we were not paid for the laundry work we did. The hours were from eight till five, then we went to church for the rosary, then to tea. I still have nightmares over what happened, and I will never be able to marry and live a normal life. But I am trying, with the help of some people like Marilyn, Helen and Wendy from VANISH, and a few other people who have become special friends. I really would like to find my brother.

Senator McLUCAS—What age is the woman whose document you have just read? I do not need to know the exact age; I am just trying to get the time.

Ms Gale—I would say that she would be in her 60s.

Ms Kendall—In 1968, I and my two younger sisters were made state wards. We first went to Allambie, which is a large state institution. My strongest memories of that place are the shock of never being cuddled or touched, because we had been with our mum. We were forever getting injections, which were sedative. I was seven, and my sisters were 18 months younger and 18 months. I am not sure how long we were there. Then we were sent to the St Vincent de Paul children's convent home, run by the Sisters of Mercy. We were there for a while, and then we were moved to cottage homes—family group homes. Supervising parents would change every two years, so problems of identity and belonging were real issues for us. Every time a different set of supervising parents would arrive, as children we would try to match our personalities to what they were all about. If one set of parents thought reading was a good thing then you would go for reading. Another set of parents was into sport, so you would become sportspeople.

With the first set of cottage parents, my two sisters and I—as well as the other children—experienced sexual abuse, predominantly. There was other abuse, but that was the main thing I remember about that time. The next set of parents were really into the physical discipline in a big way, and we lived in terror. I will not elaborate on these stories, because I imagine you have heard them anyway through the people you have already listened to. Just listening to Margaret before, I felt like I was listening to our story. I will not keep going on about the abuse that we suffered at these people's hands, but you can rest assured that we suffered every label of abuse that there is.

I think I would have been in year 11 when I came home from school one day to find that my bags were packed, and I was told that that was it. By that time I was 15 and I had significant influence over the younger ones, including my sisters. A new lot of cottage parents had come, they decided they did not want me there and that was it. The principal at my school at the time was the one and only person I ever remember receiving any encouragement from. We had been planning my future education at university, and all that stopped that day. Within a few months I was homeless, and I spent the next 10 years of my life struggling to survive physically, mentally and emotionally, just missing out on incarceration and further institutionalisation by the skin of my teeth.

I thought that if I worked hard enough and went back to study I could overcome the legacy of my childhood. I thought that if I got enough therapy, enough counselling, I could overcome the

legacy of my childhood. I have just turned 42, and I am suffering—and have been suffering since June—my third bout of depression. The first time I had what they called a nervous breakdown was when I was 16. My studies and employment have been constantly interrupted by these bouts of depression or nervous breakdowns. At 42, I am trying to come to terms with the fact that all the therapy and all the hard work have not changed anything. I have not been able to have that relationship that all young girls dream of. It did not happen for me, and I am afraid for the first time in my life because I have run out of hope that it is going to get better. I am afraid that in my later years I will be just as vulnerable and devoid of dignity as I was in my earlier years. This loss of hope that one day I will get past this is really difficult to deal with. I have heard people saying that people do not talk about these things of the past until later years, and I think I have one of the answers as to why that is: it is not until later, after you have stopped thinking, 'It's okay, I've got the rest of my life to get this,' that one day you realise, 'No, I don't. I'm never really going to heal from this. The scars run too deep.' And I am one of the lucky ones.

So many institutionalised children are now statistics of the judicial legal system. I would like to see the statistics on how many incarcerated people were institutionalised kids who have been further institutionalised—and I forget what that word is that means they stay in jail all their lives. We are statistics of the medical system. We are statistics of the mental health system. We are statistics of the social security system. The cost to federal and state governments is enormous and ongoing, so it stands to reason that, if not out of compassion, if not for anything else, the federal and state governments want to take an active role in limiting some of these costs.

The other thing I want to say is that institutionalisation has a multigenerational effect. My mother was institutionalised with the Sisters of Mercy. My father was in one of those institutions where they worked on a farm, and he was horrendously abused. My daughter is the first in three generations to stay with her mum. It has been a constant struggle for me, and she will have effects and does have effects. She is 21, and I am beginning to see the effects of having a parent like me. Please feel free to ask me any questions.

CHAIR—We might ask general questions at the end, Ms Kendall.

Ms J. Donnelly—I was put in an institution when I was two years old and my brother was one week old, and we were not allowed to know each other. We got put into different institutions, and I ended up going to St Catherine's. I do not remember being at St Catherine's, but they said on my file that I was the worst child they had ever had. The government had me assessed. The nuns told the government that I was mentally retarded, so they sent me to Travancore. Travancore said that there was nothing wrong with me, but they stated that I was very shy, very nervous and undernourished, and they sent me back. The nuns sent me back there again, and other doctors assessed me. They still said that there was nothing wrong with me. I went back there three times, and in the end they admitted me to Travancore.

At Travancore they said that when they put me with other children I used to burst into tears and when I was on my own I was just so quiet. They sent me back to the social welfare department for a more suitable placement. I got sent to a foster family. The foster family had me for a little while, but through people—and I cannot mention their names—who worked at St Vincent's Hospital and who knew the nuns there, I was admitted to Marillac House. At Marillac House they said that the foster people were very unstable, so I stayed at Marillac House for a few years. I spent eight years there, and when I got older I just walked out of the place. They had

me picked up by the police—I had done nothing wrong—and they took me back. But I walked out a few times.

Then they put me in Winlaton. You got locked in a cell all the time at Winlaton. They put me there. You used to have to line up in the raw, with no clothes on, to have a shower. You used to have to wash your underwear out at night-time. I was the last one let out of the cell in the mornings, so I used to have long johns, at the end, because all the other girls used to take the small ones.

Anyway, they sent me to St Aidan's. St Aidan's, Bendigo, was a very bad place. You used to work in these big laundries. I was 15 then. I worked in the big laundries, and sometimes we worked until 10 o'clock at night. I cannot understand why the government did not allow us to have sugar, milk or even jam for our bread. If you wanted that, you had to pay for it. I had no parents to come and see me, so I did not get any. After I was there a year, the government must have said something to the nuns, because they started to give people five bob. You used to have to sit around a table every Saturday. A nun would be sitting up at the top of the table and they would say, 'Well, you've done this wrong, so we've taken so much off for that. You've done this wrong; we're taking off so much,' so I owed them. Every week, I owed them, so I had no money.

If you did anything wrong, they used to drag you by the hair. You used to get dragged up the stairs and they used to chop your hair off—right off, right to the scalp—on one side. You were locked up in a toilet until late at night. Bendigo is a very cold place. It is very cold up there, and we used to have these red things on our fingers and toes from the cold. I used to fall asleep on the floor in the toilet, so they used to unlock the door from the outside. At night-time when you were in there, you had no light, because the light was on the outside. When I was up at Bendigo, I was sexually abused by another inmate there, who had been put in there by the courts.

I had never committed any crime, so I do not know why the government had me locked up when I have never done anything wrong. If you are made a state ward, you are punished, because they punish the children. We got our hair chopped off all the time. The food you got in there was the insides of animals. It was really shocking food—you could not eat it. I found some wild kittens there. I decided to give them my food, so I fed them. So do you know what they did with the kittens? The kittens got very friendly with me, so they drowned them in a bucket of water right in front of me.

The thing about it is, when you leave those places, you cannot say goodbye to anybody. They used to sneak you out. They would call you and you could not say goodbye; you would just have to leave. I got out by mistake. The nuns sent a letter to the government to say, 'Please do not let this child out. Please extend her wardship, because she's too mentally retarded to be released.' I told the nuns that as soon as I saw the government I was going to tell them what happened and what they did. The government sent back a thing with four signatures on my file—if any of you would like to go and see my file—and they extended my wardship.

I happened to get out a bit early. They put me in a milk bar, to run it, with three children. Both their parents went to work. I did not even know anything about money. I did not know about change. I did not know anything, because I had never gone to school. So I used to ask the customers, 'How much do you have to give me? How much do you give me, and what is it you want?' because I did not know. I did not last there long. I only lasted there for six months. They

did not know that I was asking the customers. They told the government that I would not wear a dress. I did not want to wear dresses any more. I had dresses in the home. I did not want to have a dress on, because the nuns used to say, 'If you wear trousers, it's a sin.'

Anyway, I left there and was put back into Winlaton—back into Winlaton, for doing nothing wrong. Then they put me into a boarding place and they said to me that I was not allowed to say anything about what happened to me in these institutions. I could not help but say something. I had to say something to people. So I said it, and then I got put back into Winlaton again. So back into Winlaton I went.

When I got released—after getting out of Winlaton and all the rest—I took an overdose. I wanted to kill myself. I think that the government and the Catholic Church are responsible for what happened to us as children. I think the Catholic Church should come and have a meeting with all the authorities, so they can have it out on what they did with the children. It is up to you to decide this sort of thing, but I do not think it is going to just go away. I have had meetings with the nuns who did what they did to me, because I asked for them. I went there and I said, 'I want to speak to you,' and I did. I got meetings with them. I said, 'I want you to apologise for what you did to all us children,' but they did not want to. They said no.

I work seven days a week to try to keep my mind off things. But every time I am not working, I cry or something, because no-one has ever cared about the children in the institutions. They never cared about them. The government did not care. I told the government what was happening, and they did not want to know about it. They told me I had to keep my mouth shut. That is why I got put in Winlaton—for not keeping my mouth shut. My brother was a week old when he was taken. We were not allowed to know each other. I found him five years ago. He is an alcoholic. He was put in there when he was a week old. What excuse has the government got that my brother ended up an alcoholic?

I drank too when I got out. I drank, I took drugs and everything to try to shut everything out. Believe me, I think the government should have gone there. Do you know that the government used to ring them up and tell them when they were coming, so everything would be changed? I really do think that they should have a talk to these homes and have it out with them, because I hope it never happens again to any child. I went to court five years ago to try to get custody of my granddaughter. The government tried to step in again. They did not want me to have her. I had had her since she was born. They tried to destroy my family again. This is going back five years. So they are still doing it today. I am sorry if I said anything wrong to you people but—

CHAIR—No, you have not said anything wrong. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Ms J. Donnelly—I think it affects your children, too. My son will never forgive me for me being put in institutions. He slings it up to me—even my granddaughter knows—but I will not kick him out of my home. The nuns reckoned there was something wrong with me because I used to wander. So what? I was born on the Mooroopna river bank in Shepparton—of course we wandered around. I was two years old. It just was in me.

CHAIR—Would your granddaughter like to say anything at all?

Ms T. Donnelly—My name is Tara Donnelly. It actually does affect the family. She cries herself to sleep and it is not nice. It is not good for me to say it, because she has probably saved me from being a state ward and that kind of stuff. My mum did not like me; she did not want anything to do with me. Jason—her son—will not forgive her for what happened. He smashes things and stuff.

Ms J. Donnelly—Why can't you bring in the Catholic Church and have a meeting with them to find out exactly what happened—the way they treated us? They are supposed to be Catholics. How can they be dragging you by the hair and chopping your hair off, just because they have got none? They would chop your hair off to the scalp on one side. I think they should be held accountable.

CHAIR—Who would like to say something now?

Mr Guthrie—I am David Guthrie, and I am a former ward of the state in government care. In a minute I will get Alex to read something, because I cannot read. A lot of that has to do with when I was in a boys home. I know at the time that I was meant to learn to read that I was capable of doing it because, in the school I went to—which was in the boys home—I learnt form 2 maths. But the rest of the teachers who were paid by the state government could not have cared less. They were more concerned about putting their hand out every fortnight for their money: 'Grouse, we'll go home and have a good time on the weekend before we have to come back next week and deal with this bunch of ratbags.' I will let Alex read this.

Dr Agius—My name is Alex Agius, and I am the counsellor here today. With the committee's permission, I would like to read David's statement. If I pause or give a particular emphasis, it would be in those places where he has requested it. If I, like all of us in this room, express or show any emotion, I do not apologise, because it is about David and everyone's humanity.

'The experience 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 the age of six weeks, makes this clear. I was passed around: from the Children's Hospital, to the Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind and to a foster home until 1962. No-one took responsibility for my care. I was made a ward of the state—I was made a ward of the social welfare department—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 for 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 and phobias, constant 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 is the only way I can afford a decent standard of living but I am required to travel two hours each way to Melbourne to access services and support I require. I receive no financial support to do this and my family and I go without or seek welfare assistance—example, food parcels—in order for me to deal with my past. I am told that there is 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 have 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 had 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.

That is David's statement to the committee.

Mr Guthrie—My wife helped write this for me on Sunday. She was crying her eyes out trying to do this. I had to ring Alex on his mobile phone to talk to someone on Sunday afternoon. My wife said to me, 'It is absolute bullshit doing this. Why should I become a victim to try to sort out your mess?' I know that VANISH is only funded for certain things, but where is the support for my wife and my family to go through this sort of stuff? And it is the same for everybody else here. On top of that, I do not have any kids of my own because of all this shit and I do not want to pass on my problems to another generation.

CHAIR—Okay. Who would like to go next?

Ms Carroll—I grew up in New South Wales. I was made a ward of the state when I was—I thought—18 months old; but, looking at my file, I was actually younger than that. I was one of eight, of whom I have met two to this day. I was sent when I was very young to a foster home in Coffs Harbour for seven years. They were alcoholics. They were sadistic. We were belted for anything—and always stripped naked to be belted. I was really frightened of the dark, and she used to lock me in a garden shed which was pitch black. There was a man who used to walk around Coffs Harbour carrying a sugar bag over his shoulder; he probably collected bottles—I do not know. She used to tell us that he had children in there that he cut up, and she used to come and scrape on the window or send someone to scrape on the window of the shed and say it was him coming to get me.

When I was six I stole her watch and took it to school and gave it to another kid. God knows why. Of course, it was returned to her. She belted me, then she dressed me in a nappy and made me stand on the footpath with a dummy in my mouth while the school bus went past. As you can imagine, the kids on the school bus thought that was hilarious. Also, when I was six, she gave me a birthday party. She had a glass of liquorice on the table and offered it to me first. I took one, and I swear to this day I just took one out of the glass, but it was not liquorice, it was black

electrical tape. When I bit into it she dragged me from the table by my hair, stripped me and belted me and told me that I was greedy.

There were three wards living with her. We did not know we were wards; we just thought we were sisters. One day we were playing on the road on the way home from school, apparently, and she again stripped us, belted us and screamed at me that I should know better as my sister was run over by a bus. I looked at my sisters, and they looked okay to me. That was when she told us that we did not belong to her, that we had caused her enough pain and trauma and that she was sending us back to the orphanage where we belonged.

So I went back there and was sent to another foster home. I left that foster home and went back to another home. I went to a home in Newcastle where we went to a normal school—but we were the 'homies', so we were different. I left there and went to Lingwood Hall, which was virtually a jail. I am sorry, I forgot that when I went to the foster home at Lithgow I was sent back to Badura for stealing some money from the foster father and buying lollies for the kids in school. When I got back to the home I was given the standard test to see if I had been 'with the boys', as they said. I was nine years old. They put my legs in stirrups and did an internal on me. When I objected they said that I would soon open my legs for the boys. I was nine, and I had no idea what they were talking about.

I was then sent to Lingwood Hall. It was a jail: you went through a door that had to be opened with a key for you to walk through, and there were bars on every window. The woman that was in charge would pull you by the hair; she would spit on you, she would hit you, she would punch you. You got locked in a jail cell—a clink, which was pitch black—on bread and water. A friend of mine got locking in for a month. She was 14.

I had no contact with any of my family. I did not know why I was in a home; I was never told. I had never met any of them. One day we were in the garden, gardening, and this man walked down the footpath and when he asked for me I nearly fainted. It was my brother. She said to me: 'Don't stand there with your mouth open. That's your brother—go and meet him.' I had never seen him before in my life. She had given me no warning that he was coming, where he had been all my life—nothing. Then a couple of weeks later my parents turned up, and it was the same thing—no warning, just: 'Go and meet them, they're your parents.'

Then when I was 15 I was told that I was old enough to look after myself. I had never been allowed to make one decision in my life, not even what socks I would wear, and then they said, 'You're on your own, kid.' They found me a job. I did not know how to catch a bus from where they found for me to live to where I worked. They just left me at 15 with no skills, no education, no self-esteem, no confidence. I survived, but I do not know how.

Senator TCHEN—Ms Carroll, how long ago was this?

Ms Carroll—I am 50 now. I was in a home from when I was a baby until I was 15.

Terri—I would just like to state that I put in a submission that was numbered 27. I did not get any notification that this was on nor did I get the right to appear on my own. I was taken from my father in the depression years, the excuse being that we were too poor. We were living in a stable, and my father had due respect for Welfare so he hid me in a cardboard box in the loft of

the stable. But at nine o'clock at night three cops came and removed me and charged me with neglect. They put me in the Royal Park children's depot for girls. That then started the downfall of me. I was institutionalised for a period of time and then I was boarded out. The selection of the people who you were boarded out to was pretty crummy. The second one was not too bad; the third one wasn't too good. At 14 I had a miscarriage. I went in to the department when I was 14, or thereabouts, demanding to know where my parents were. That is important, because I knew damn well that who I was with were not my parents and that I had every right to know who they were.

Just before my 18th birthday, the department, who had quietly gone about organising my adoption with the people who I had been fostered with, turned around and went to court and, without my knowledge or consent, disposed of me and had me adopted. It was not long after that I tried to commit suicide. Fortunately for me, I had gone into nursing, and in those days nursing provided you with a roof over your head. It also provided me with family and a job and money. So my way out, and to find shelter, was to go nursing.

I started drinking pretty heavily and in 1958 I found myself in the psych hospital. The psychiatrist wrote to the department and said that the adoption was one of the major problems I had not been able to deal with and asked the department to the supply information. They wrote a letter—I think it comprised about 15 lines—about the fact that I was born, and nothing about the illegal adoption. In 1962 I was in another psych hospital. Another letter was sent to the department and again no information that was given to the psychiatrist in any way showed what had happened in the past.

I went as a midwife to work with unmarried mothers, and there I suffered the same traumas—of seeing mothers being told that if they loved their kids they would give them up. There was no welfare for mothers at that particular stage. History was repeating itself. To me the adoption was one of the most inhuman things: to dispose of someone so casually, just like a parcel. You just pass it over and say: 'Here, do you want this? You can have it.' There was no investigation as to what had happened in that place; the child was just disposed of.

In 1985 the act was changed and the government decided that we have a right to find out who we are. I was in Mount Isa at the time and started trying to find family. In the old days you were charged 10s 6d if you had a child in care. If my mother and father had had 10s 6d spare they would have kept me. They chased the parents for this 10s 6d. Consequently, my mother disappeared. To this day I have never found out whether she is alive or dead and buried—and, if so, where. The long-term effects of systemic abuse—I call this abuse by the department—is something which destroys your life.

Mr Londrigan—I am 71 years of age. I was tragically orphaned at the age of six. When I came home from school, there was a police car, with a police lady and a policeman. They took me and my two younger sisters to Royal Park to be assessed to go elsewhere. My two younger sisters, I found out later, were sent to a foster home. I was sent down to Surrey Hills, to St Joseph's home, until I turned nine and then I went to St Augustine's Orphanage in Geelong. I was more fortunate than the other speakers here today. I never got that treatment. In my life I am really blessed in one way as to what things happened to me. I do recall the food was very poor in the early parts. I never got a cuff under the ear or beaten like that. I got the strap; that is about all I got.

I do recall being on a hare drive. The greyhound Plumpton course used to give a donation and get all the boys out into the open fields down Winchelsea to drive all the hares and the rabbits and that. We got the rabbits. Anyway, there was one boy near me who ran out of line, and here was one of the fellows on a horse with a stockwhip. He flashed the stockwhip over this lad's head and quickly the Christian brother just up the line from me came down, pulled him off that horse and, bang, let him have it. From that day on when I looked at those brothers I knew I was in good care, and I had that right through.

At the age of 13 I got pneumonia and I was admitted to the Geelong hospital. When I came back to the orphanage I had to go and wait on the brothers. I got the food that the brothers had. As I said, I was very fortunate—more fortunate than a lot of others here. I left the orphanage at the age of 15 to go out in the wide world. I will always remember the head brother saying, 'Right, little Frankie Londrigan, you're going out into this big wide world and later on you'll have other little Frankies running around.' I did not understand anything about this. I did go out in this big wide world. I did not know what was in front of me. I did not know about love or anything like that.

At 22 years of age I met the love of my life. We were married for 45 years and she passed away six years ago. Anyway, we eventually got married and 18 months later, my first son came along. Talking about love, I had all the loving I wanted and I wanted to keep it. When my son was born, the mother naturally wanted to give her son that love and I selfishly resented that. I knew it, I could see it and I never ever spoke about it but I kept it bottled up inside. The two girls came along later on. I found love for them. I think it was Peter, my first, who took something away. We got on with life and they grew up. My son got married and had two children. They were divorced and the two children with the mother were ill-treated. We ended up going to family law court—my son, my wife and me. My son got custody and we got care and control. Those two children were terrified. We had to have one on our knees each night to put them to sleep. This went on for a long, long time. The love that I have got out of life since has been great. One of them is married and I have got great-grandchildren. Reflecting on all these other speakers here today I look back on life and say how blessed I was to have someone, especially my own family. Then I found great family, friends and relatives. All I can say is that I have been blessed in life. Thank you.

Mr Guthrie—I am just going to say something here. That discussion I had earlier was about that senator. Since I have been here today, he has walked in and out, in and out and in and out. I asked him, 'What's going on?' He said, 'I'm too busy.' Well, hello, if you are too busy to even listen to people talk about what is going on and why they have come here, I do not think you have the right to even be here. He is not showing us any respect or behaving with dignity at all. Thank you.

CHAIR—The senator has had prior engagements.

Mr Guthrie—Then he should have gone off and done them instead of coming here, being rude and walking in and out.

CHAIR—I do not think he was trying to be rude or even conveying that.

Mr Guthrie—Well, he has not shown us any respect at all.

CHAIR—I do not think that is his intention.

Ms Lowdon—I am actually the sister of Jenny Kendall, who was one of the earlier speakers. First off I would like to say how much I resent having to be here. I resent having to bare my pain in front of people that I do not even know. It has been a huge effort for me to contain my emotions. The only reason I do it is in the hope that you people will listen and that there may be some positive changes made for future people in care. Otherwise, there would be absolutely no way you would have me here.

I started off in care at the age of 18 months. I was placed in Allambie. I have no real recollection of Allambie. I was then taken to the Sisters of Mercy convent in Black Rock and then finally placed in a family group home in Bentleigh with my three sisters. I would have been about three years old then. From then until I was about five I was sexually abused by the couple. I was forced to call them 'nana' and 'poppy' while the rest of the kids called them something else. Consequently they were sacked and we were told never to have anything to do with them. I do have memories of the abuse that occurred.

The next thing I remember is another couple just arriving. This is what seemed to happen. You would be at school, come home and there would be these people. You would be told that these people were now going to look after you. The next people came along. As my sister said, he was a sergeant major in the South African army before he came to look after children. Probably my earliest memory of him was to do with having to make my bed. You had to make your bed by the time you went to school, and if it was not done army style you were belted. He did not belt you straightaway. He would chant, 'You know what this means,' and you never knew when 'You know what this means' would happen. When it did, I was made to stand in a hallway. You knew then what would occur. I would be marched up to my bedroom. The whole bottom half of my clothing would be removed, I would be forced to bend over and I was belted until he was satisfied with the punishment that he had dealt out.

He would on occasion march you straight down the corridor and watch you shower. I still to this day have no idea how that would help a child to make the bed better. I guess I started to realise that the world was a place that I needed to be very, very fearful of and I needed to watch what I did very carefully. The same applied if you did not arrive on time for breakfast. It meant that you missed out. I have recollections of one of the children, Martin, who was always late—he had a bit of a disorder—and he would scavenge in the bins.

We were forced to do what he called 'garden'. It was this absurd, ridiculous punishment where every blade of grass was examined for a piece of cotton or a pen lid or something that he deemed was a really terrible thing. He would produce this piece of cotton and you would be told, 'You know what this means,' and then you were taken up to the hallway. If you were lucky, the punishment was dealt out then and there; if not, you waited. He would run a steel comb through your hair. If there was a knot, he would yank it until your hair came out. These are just some of the examples of this couple. I hear now that this man is a minister of a church. That really revolts me; it makes me quite sick.

After that couple left, we had another couple. I was one of the children with this couple who was not actually subjected to any of the physical abuse but I was severely neglected. I was

allowed to run wild and consequently ended up hanging around houses where people routinely injected heroin and so forth. I would have been about 10.

I was around that age when my mother died. This is the way I was told my mother had died: I walked up the steps, there was a police car, and they said, 'By the way, Kerrie, your mother has died,' and that was that. There was no offer to console; there was no anything. We were told that we needed to pray for her soul because she was definitely going to hell. I was petrified that my mother would live in hell so I began a ritual. I thought that if I prayed hard enough my mother may not go to hell. I thought perhaps it was best that I prayed for everybody and I became very frantic with this. I would not be able to sleep until I had done things like 60 decades of the rosary and so forth. I never went to sleep until both my sisters arrived.

Another memory I have is of the man of the previous couple. He would stand in the hallway. Often I and my sisters would, to put each other to sleep, take it in turns to make up stories to lighten the mood or whatever. He was a huge man. If he heard you talk, he would bound up the hallway, wrench the door open, flick the light on and pull you out of bed, and you were humiliated. Your clothing was removed and you were belted. It was constant terror under that man. The man of the next couple that I had was a mental torturer. He would constantly tell me that it was a wonder anybody could love me. He would constantly sit there at the table and tell me how ugly I was, that I was nothing and that it was amazing that anybody could ever love a person like me. He made me wear pyjamas in the middle of the day. This man had a famous footballer as a nephew and he paraded me around in front of this footballer in my nightwear during the day. It was humiliating.

The thing that I remember that stands out in my mind the most is having to witness these people then be kind to their own children. It was a torment that I could barely stand. I ended up with a rage that was out of control. I kept that rage intact until I was about 15 and I started to exact revenge on the system. I do not understand why the system is surprised when children who have been routinely abused end up incarcerated, doing crime or any of those things, because the system sets it up that way and then we are further punished.

There are many examples. One of my most painful memories is of the man I call my brother. I did not know of him as anything other than my brother because I was in care from the age of 18 months. His name was Glen. I came home one day and he said, 'They're taking me to Baltara.' I said, 'What did you do?' He said: 'I didn't do anything. There's nowhere for me to go.' I cannot describe to you the immense pain and powerlessness that I felt. I loved this person very deeply, and he was being punished because he was a young person with no place of abode. How dare the system incarcerate a young child who has done nothing wrong. I have not seen him; I do not know where he is to this day. I have his photograph on my fridge. If people say to me, 'Who's that?' I always say, 'That's my brother.' I did not know that I had other family. It would have been about eight years ago that I discovered an aunty. I grew up in Bentleigh and she lived in Elwood. That whole time I actually had family that were quite capable of taking care of me or, at the very least, having me on weekends. No-one ever bothered to seek them out.

It is really hard to find the words and it is really hard to convey the pain. It is hard to pinpoint exactly the worst parts of the damage. But, like everybody has shared today, I left care with a sense of nothingness. I had no roots; I did not know where I belonged. If people brought up Christmas, I would go silent. If people brought up family occasions or birthdays, I would

become very silent. I became very fearful that people would discover that I was institutionalised. I knew that the majority of people deemed you a criminal, or they acted very surprised to find out that you may be educated and actually have some worth. They would say: 'Oh, you grew up in care! Gee, you've done well.' It is a really humiliating experience. Why wouldn't I do well? How dare I not be given the same rights as everybody else. I am just a person like them. Why would I not necessarily be a good person, just because other people transferred their pain onto me and abused me?

I did not fare very well at all when I left care. I had no social skills whatsoever. I did not know how to catch buses. I was listening to Caroline, and that really broke me, because I remember going to a bank and having to pretend that I knew what I was doing. When you are institutionalised you are isolated from your community. You do not attend birthday parties like other children. You do not form friendships, for fear that they may discover where you live. I was in a constant state of fear that people would discover I was a home kid. It was obvious that I was a home kid, but I did not want to show them where I lived. I was in constant shame that these things were happening to me. I was terrified to have friends; consequently, I never had friends at school. I formed one friendship with a girl whose mother was a single parent, and she did not live in very great circumstances. They were the only people I bonded with.

I have been a recovering heroin addict now for 4½ years. I have been clean and sober for 4½ years. My life has been basically plagued with fears and doubts. I have never felt that I have a rightful place in the world, and that is because I lack a sense of identity. My identity was born out of a system that abused me. That was the identity that was formed within me. There were times when I was locked up and taken to Windsor Youth Welfare. I can honestly say that I felt safer when I was locked up because it meant that I did not have to pretend that I could cope in the world. While other people were going for jobs, having boyfriends or whatever, I felt totally inadequate. I did not know how to have conversations with people.

It has been recently—in the last four years—that I have been able to establish and maintain friendships, because of the constant shuffling around and constantly having different sets of people looking after me. In my teenage years I think I was placed in four or five different institutions until they decided that I was uncontrollable. 'Uncontrollable' was really just me acting out my pain. When I threw plates across the room it was because I could not contain the grief any longer. I could not contain the pain that I felt any longer. I did not know why I was suicidal when other kids were talking about their first boyfriends. I did not know why I was so different. I did not understand all of those things. So I would act out, sometimes violently.

I have worked really hard—I have tried really hard—to become a good parent. I am in constant doubt about my parenting skills. I am a parentless child. Look at my examples. I live in a constant state of guilt that I cannot provide my son with family. When it comes to Christmas our family is sometimes two or three of us. Yet I did have family. I had family that the system never bothered to discover. Now I have found them. There are not many, but there were some very okay members of my family, and they would have been quite acceptable to take care of a child. I cannot supply my son with a sense of identity. He identifies himself with his father's culture, which is Austrian, and he has nothing of me. I cannot offer him anything. He has had to watch me take myself to my bed; I would read for sometimes four or five hours at a time. I would blank out—just shut down. I have had to try twice as hard as I see other parents trying. I am in a constant state of fear that I am doing the wrong thing by him.

I do not really know what else to say, except that it has been really powerful. This is the very first time, outside of my sister and my father, with whom I have had a chance to talk about his institutionalised placements, that I have heard my story. What is scary is that my story is not unique. I kind of hoped that it was, and now that I hear that it is not it is even worse. I sit here and my body feels really heavy and I have a massive headache and I feel quite sick. I wish I could find words to convey the importance of the very first time I spoke with Alex, who is a counsellor at VANISH. The immediate relief I felt that there was somebody who was willing for the first time, now that I am 37, to help me to sift through the wreckage of being institutionalised was enormous. Every counsellor I have ever been to has no comprehension or understanding of what it is like. They try to graft growing up in care onto what other people have problems with. We are never given specialised treatment. It has been an absolute godsend. I felt so relieved when I was able to come away from seeing him. That is all I have to say. Thank you.

Mrs McInnes—I am a past ward of the state. In 1962 I was taken from my mother. I was four months old. She was still breastfeeding me. I was taken along with my two brothers and my older sister. I come from a family of eight. I cannot tell you my life story in five minutes, but I can tell you that someone made a decision to change our lives. It is a bit like that movie *Sliding Doors*. The decision they made has affected our lives forever. It has torn my family apart. I have just received a file that I applied for earlier this year. It has opened a few doors for me in that now I know a few more things than I did before. I have been told different things, but looking at my file I now know that I was placed in a few babies homes and eventually, because of my mother's ongoing nagging of the system, I was placed with my three siblings.

Someone made a decision to take us away and they justified it. They said we would be better off placed in an institution without our mother or family support. Our mother wrote many letters trying to get us all back. She was treated like a criminal. No questions were answered; no help or advice was given to our mother on how to reunite our family. I had no contact with my mother until I was eight. Our mother and other family members wrote letters to keep in touch. They were often not given to us or, if so, were opened and read before we received them. We were not allowed to have any personal items—dolls, toys or clothes. That was looked on as selfish. The only affection I received was on hair wash day. We would line up and a stranger would wash our hair. I went on holidays with people who were not family. We were handed out like lollies to anyone who was Catholic. How safe were these homes that we went to?

My mother was broken by a system that failed us all. My family, which consisted of eight children including me, has never been close. I would like to hear some answers. I would like to know why. As past wards we need ongoing support in place. Let us stop hiding the truth and covering up the past. It happened to us. It happened to me and I am here as proof that it did. I would like to thank VANISH, an organisation that has shown me so much care and support. Thank you, Alex and Wendy. I would also like to say that, like Jenny, I have been to numerous counsellors over the years for support and they have not really had the insight or the understanding that I have found at VANISH.

A lot of people who were placed in institutions had family who very much cared about them. They were fighting a system that would not allow them to be in touch with their children or loved ones. We were taken from Gippsland and I was placed in a babies home in Ballarat and my brothers and sisters were placed at Nazareth House in Camberwell. My mother fought for about a year just to get me to where my siblings were so that she could come and see us all together.

She did not have the money or the means to get there—she did not have a car. When we were finally given back to our mother she was to survive on $20 a week and pay $17 a week rent. She had no money whatsoever and there were no supports there at all, even back in 1968 or 1970 when I placed back with my mother.

My mother consequently had a nervous breakdown when we were taken from her. She died about three weeks ago and I was lucky enough to have that love towards the end. But a lot of these people here did not even get that. We were robbed of our childhoods. We were robbed of love and affection and having a personal item like a toy or a blanket. Over the years I have found it very hard to have long-term personal relationships. I have had to deal with bringing up my own two children, who I love dearly, and somehow learn how to be a good role model and to bring them up the right way. That has been a hard task in itself. I have also had to try to keep myself sane. I never sleep well. I have not slept well since I was a little girl. I can never remember sleeping well.

I always stood out as a child, not because I was intelligent or bright but because I felt that I did not fit in. Like Jenny, once I got out into society I tried to fit into something but I just could not. I was forever hiding things. We felt shame. Why should we feel shame because we were taken from our families? We lost everything: we lost our roots and our families. These things are never ever going to be replaced. I had a brother who committed suicide. He had also been placed in St Vincent's boys home a few years ago. I would hate to know all of the traumas he went through as a child, knowing mine and hearing some of my other brother's.

That is all I have to say. I would like to thank VANISH and I hope that something comes out of this today and that you will start to put some supports in place for people. People really need support. We are just a minority of people who have had the guts—and we are scared out of our wits—to come here today to talk to you people. We are hoping that someone will say, 'These people need support.' When you put the supports in place there will be so many more people come forth and get that help—because we need help. We need help from day to day and week to week. We need to be able to get over our pain and our loss. That is all I have to say.

Mr Shingles—I grew up in Sale with some foster carers. I was dumped with some people and they became my foster carers. Then I became a state ward at the age of about seven. I never saw any workers. I was never told; I was just made a state ward. I am the third generation in care; I reared the fourth. From that time I was robbed of having any children because the department would not do an operation when I was young. I left those foster carers because I was seen to be uncontrollable but on a daily basis I was bashed by their sons because in the small community of Sale our family was seen as nothing but ill-bred.

From there—from these people—I was put into a home. At the age of nine, I was locked in a police cell overnight in Sale and then taken to court the next morning. I was put into Baltara. I cannot remember the first week or fortnight at Baltara—apparently I collapsed. In Baltara I saw some absolute atrocities. 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. After that I was constantly told that I was going to go to Bayswater. I was only a skinny kid, and they died in Bayswater. They died of hypothermia there. I was constantly told, too, that my life would be nothing.

From Baltara I was sent to Kilmany Park in Sale. Because my family came from there, I was not allowed to speak to my family. When I did go to school and spoke to my family, and the home found out, I was constantly belted for speaking to my sisters or brothers who attended the same schools as me. My older brothers had had enough. They were coming to the home to stop the marks on me, and they were arrested by the police and locked up. In the home, if you as much as lost a red pen you were belted. We were farm workers: we were used to milk cows. We showered together and our penises were measured. I was abused by the superintendent's son and, when I told the superintendent, I was constantly pulled out of bed—probably at about 11 o'clock at night—for telling lies, made to do a three- or four-mile run, made to swim in a freezing cold swimming pool and sent back to bed. I was constantly going to school when I was crook, but then I was only a home kid. I was nothing.

I endured all that and then, while I was in care at 13, my mother was murdered. I found out from my stepsister. I went back to the home—and this was a Presbyterian home. We went to church every Sunday and were told of this God of love and understanding who was watching over us. I could not understand, because I thought: 'Jeez, what's happening? He's not watching over me.' I was told my mother was nothing but a drunken slut who had never been any good to me. I was given a foot up the bum and sent back to school.

I guess, from that time on, I just felt numb. The state was supposed to be there. It was supposed to be my protector. It never protected me. It robbed me of the right to know my mother. My mother had been ringing that home weekly to find out how her son was, because the department had stripped her of all her other family. She had to keep moving about all the time to stop the welfare from getting her other children. I can remember the days back at school when—you have heard enough now—one of my testicles had not come down and I needed an operation. I can remember a worker there—and I only presume, in later life, that she was a worker—who turned around and said, 'Well, we wouldn't want him breeding—the ill-bred family that he came from.' The abuse, sexual abuse and torture abuse that I suffered in Kilmany Park—no child should have to go through it.

I then became a bit of a rebel, after I found out that my mother had died. I just would not take being belted all the time. I remember once, at 14, I had a lump of wood and I was going to put it over the superintendent's head because I had just had enough. That is what happens when you suffer constant abuse. Then I was sent to some people who were cattle dealers, to work as a drover. These were the same people that the welfare department had banned, many years earlier, from having any children from Kilmany Park sent to them as farm workers. I was sent to them because I was a rebel. I was no good. I would end up like my brothers, in and out of jail. I came from three generations—how good could I be?

After I left them I constantly tried to get a job. How do you put down on a report that you come out of a home? Then I went through prostitution, drugs and everything else. Then I had to come back to Sale because I had found my sisters and their children were being removed from them. The only thing I could do was take the children and we hid, pleading with schools not to tell the department that I was their uncle. Otherwise the state would have taken them—and the state did take them.

I am a carer now. I have been a carer for 20-odd years. What happened to me happened much the same in the 1980s to my nephew. I am suffering now with a 24-year-old who has been badly

abused in the system, like I was. I came to terms with my demons. I found my mother's grave. I was able to come to terms with it and put it aside. But there is one thing that I cannot put aside and that is the systematic abuse that is still going on in the system. It has been bad for all of us. We have all had to suffer it. How much longer are the states going to allow children to suffer? When do we say that enough is enough? When do we say that the state has to also change? It was not a good parent to us but it is supposed to be a good parent now. We are in the year 2003. We are supposed to be learned people and people moving on.

I have told you part of my story. I have not told you the lot because I cannot speak of the lot. I hope that you learned people will take everything that you have heard back and say that in Australia we do not expect to have suffering, we expect to be Australians and do something about it. We expect to be there for our fellow man and woman and for our children. I am hoping that VANISH, a very good organisation, will be funded properly by the states and the federal government and will be able to help a lot of people who have had to suffer so much at the hands of the state—the state that was there to protect them. Thank you.

Ms Kendall—I would like to add to what Ray has said. One of the biggest questions that might pop into your learned minds is how in the hell do you pay for a different type of system. What can you put in place other than what has been in place and is still going on? I have had a lot of years to ask that same question. Think of the cost to taxpayers, the state government and the federal government of the legal systems—legal aid. When I was first checking this out, maybe 10 or 15 years ago, it was $30,000 a year for every single person incarcerated in jails. When you add up the costs of this sort of system surely there must be a way to pay for workers to go into family homes and to assist parents to be better parents and to assist families with their financial problems, their debts and the myriad of things that create family dysfunction and breakdown. If you are looking for a way to justify the cost of that then just do the bottom line on what it is costing the state and federal governments already. That is all I have to say.

Mrs Doherty—I have come here today to represent VANISH and CLAN. I am a member of both. I feel traumatised today after hearing all these stories.

Senator MURRAY—We do too.

Mrs Doherty—I am sure you do. I was never a state ward and I did not experience the traumas I have heard here today. I feel really upset by that. However, I was in care for most of my first eight years. I was fortunate that I did not lose contact with my family. I was the youngest of five and I was a child of two professional parents. My mother was a nurse and my father a doctor. My father had a drug addiction and when I was three he committed suicide. But I went into care at two weeks old because my older siblings were removed from my father's care when my mother was in hospital having me. They were charged with neglect and the children made wards of the state. It took my parents the first year of my life to get custody of their children. I was born in Melbourne. My mother was given custody of her children provided she returned to Sydney and moved back with my grandmother. Because I was a baby my grandmother could not care for me and I was put into care at Ashfield when I was about 18 months old and transferred to Burwood Girls Home when I was five until I was about eight. My mother remarried.

I have little memory of those first eight years. Certainly I have no memory at all of the first five years. One of the most traumatic things that happened was when I was five. I have no idea why I was punished but I was pulled out of my bed in the evening and brought before a panel, like you. I was stripped of my clothing and forced to dance in front of these people. I have no idea why. That has had a long-term impact on me. There were other things, but that was probably the thing that impacted on me the most. I was separated from all of my siblings until I was five so I really did not know them even when I moved into a home between five and eight. I cannot really remember them. Our life as a family began when I was eight. My mother remarried. However, we were not really close until we became adults.

I came here to talk about the long-term impact. I emerged from my childhood with a very poor self-esteem and low self-worth. That impacted on my life in many ways. The most was my schooling. I had literacy problems and that had quite an impact on my confidence. I had an enormous sense of shame around that. As a teenager I was quite promiscuous. My first sexual experience was at 17. I was raped by a 31-year-old man. I had two very traumatic abortions when I was 19 and I married when I was pregnant at 21. Fortunately, I married a man who is very supportive. We have been together for 32 years. We have four children.

For the last five years I have been studying. I want to become a counsellor. I have been studying Gestalt therapy. I have been going to an English tutor for three years, for two hours a week. I have had five years of therapy. For the last three years I have been under a psychiatrist. I see him twice a week. I see one of my supervisors at my college on a weekly basis for supervision, coaching and mentoring to get me through my course. I have developed lots of skills but I struggle with my confidence to apply those skills. I am not sure whether, at the end of my training, I will be able to really do what I want to do. But I will continue because I have an enormous amount of support in my life now. But it has been very, very costly financially. My husband pays for that. I feel very fortunate that I am at this stage in my life. I will just keep working towards our happiness. I am at VANISH and helping to cofacilitate the self-help group they run there. Thank you.

Mr Shingles—How long before what is happening now is debated and something really is done? Because of the field I am in I see many things come out and then get put in the bottom drawer and left there. We are not going to become bottom drawer. That is what I am saying.

CHAIR—This is the first day of the hearing. To get it to this stage took well over 12 months of negotiating the terms of reference of the inquiry. Like any organisation, it does not move that quickly. This is day one.

Senator MURRAY—I can give you a bit more detail on that. In this room is Wayne Chamley. He is responsible really for kicking off this inquiry. During the child migrant inquiry he remarked that there was a third in the trilogy still to come. There was the stolen generations, which is about Indigenous children in Australian institutions; the child migrant inquiry, which was about foreign children in Australian institutions; and this one, which is Australian non-Indigenous children, mostly, in institutions. The first two inquiries both had recommendations out of them. When a report is brought down, some months later the government will respond. They will agree with the recommendations or not. This is not a government inquiry; this is a Senate inquiry. They will give a certain amount of money, although some recommendations do not cover money. For instance, the stolen generation report recommendations resulted in $69

million being put out; the child migrant inquiry was $3 million. There is always a consequence of these inquiries.

Mr Shingles—Talking about money, I have one thing to say. Kilmany Park was sold. The church holds the funds. Some years ago there was a Kilmany Park reunion. Most of the kids of my era have suicided because they were dumped in those days from country homes into the city with no support. We badgered the church then for funds for counselling. We could see that there was so much drug abuse, alcoholism and second and third marriages. The church would not have a bar of it. They were not going to give over any funds at all. Yet the funny side back home is that Komayni Family Care wants to be a facilitator to Kilmany Park. I worked for them. I had to leave. I was a carer and a worker. I had to leave because I did not want to see Komayni Family Care affiliated with a home that treated children as barbarically as that.

At the same time, the church should make funds available. I do not think the government should put all the funds in. The churches should have to put a certain amount of funds in themselves. After all, they were given money by the state to run these institutions properly. They were given the guidelines by the state on how to treat children. There has to be a cost share. The states did not really oversee what they should have and the churches did not do what they were supposed to do. Why can't the churches also put in funds—not just the government? They might say sorry off the top of their heads but if they were hit financially to help people who are grieving and in trouble that might hurt them more than a sorry that they think they can get away with.

Senator MURRAY—Just to end the description for you, some of it will land in the bottom drawer. That is what life is like. We cannot give you guarantees. We also recognise, as a committee—and remember that this is the committee that went through the child migrant inquiry—the immense gulf and the huge lack of understanding about what happened, what the consequences are and so on. The value of your conversation to us, the things you each have told us, is massive because it helps us convey our understanding to those parliamentarians and those policy makers who are not here. You are never going to get out of it what you want in a total sense. We are not going to get out of it what we want, either. But it will result in a power of good in other ways.

Mr Shingles—Everything we have heard here today is very painful for each individual and for people who are not here—the ones who have lost their lives through all this, and should not have. At the same time we older ones need the recognition. Search your hearts. Find it in your hearts for the other ones who are in the system now. Do not bring another generation on. Listen to learned people in the field. Only 12 months ago I was being attacked because workers would say, 'You come from care so you have issues.' It is not that I have issues. It is that for every child who comes through my care I am there for them—far beyond statutory requirements. They are my family. I was robbed of having a family. They are my family and my responsibility because I reared those children. They are going to be the next foot soldiers I hope who will come to you, senators, or another lot of senators and say, 'You have got to do something.' My foster father had to go through it. You have to do something. I protect my children from at times bad legislation. As human beings, search your hearts. That is all I ask.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Shingles. We are running a little beyond time and we still have one more witness to go. Could I ask you, Ms Gale, to sum up, if you would not mind.

Ms Gale—I would ask the others if they want to add anything. These are the points that have been raised in discussion with the care leavers here. In terms of summing up the long-term impact on individuals, you will be able to gather that yourself from the tapes and notes you have made. Overwhelmingly people say it is relationship breakdown. There are no role models for families. They do not know how families function. They have a low sense of worth and self-esteem, a sense of confusion and fear, unresolved grief and few educational opportunities. These are only some of the long-term impacts. They have an inability to tell their own children that they are loved, because they were never told that themselves.

I think Jenny has gone through the impacts on society considerably. There are a couple of others—and I think Jenny did talk about unemployment services—which include the demand on unemployment services, the prison system and the health system, in relation to drug and alcohol services and mental health. We must include suicide there as well, which comes under the mental health system. In the adoption community it is one which we are looking at at the moment. All of these are anecdotal; there is no hard research on any of this. One of the other things that has come up recently for the adoption community is that there appears to be a significant number of women who are care leavers who are also relinquishing mothers. That is a link that we are just beginning to see, but I know that many of the former wards of state and care leavers who come to talk to us at VANISH are relinquishing mothers. I think we need to be doing some research about that connection and many other things.

These are the services which have been identified by care leavers which they say are essential. I would like to preface this by saying it is totally inappropriate for people to be referred to the agencies which treated them so poorly. It concerns me when I see large organisations that are part of this system being given additional funding to support people that they have been abusing. I think it is essential that independent organisations be funded. The things that need to be covered, and these are only some of them, include long-term counselling. You have heard many people today say they have been to counselling and it has not worked. Counselling needs to be long term and it needs to be appropriate. We still see people today who come from psychiatrists and therapists and say, 'They told me to get over it; it happened years ago.' That is totally inappropriate. It is counselling by someone who does not understand the issues—who has not really looked at what the issues are, identified them and walked along holding hands with people who are care leavers. Counselling also needs to include counselling for the children. You have seen the impact today on Joan's granddaughter, you saw it probably on Kathleen's daughter and you have heard of the impact. It impacts on the children. This is, as you have been told, an intergenerational thing.

Care leavers would like family reunion assistance and mediation—once again, not by the agencies that disrupted those families but by independent agencies which provide some understanding. To go back to the counselling, I think it would be essential that any counsellors are screened for their understanding and that they undertake training that is recognised, but not by any society like the psychologists society, the Association of Social Workers et cetera. I think they need to have counselling by psychologists who understand. At the risk of promoting Dr Agius, you will see today the effect that he can have and the way he works with people. Care leavers should also have input into that counselling and what needs to be there. Advocacy services are essential. You have seen today the pain this has caused many people, and what it means to have an advocate who walks beside them, who does not take over and take control but encourages them—I hate to use the term 'them', please forgive me.

Care leavers would also like a comprehensive referral and resource service. What is available? Where is a national library? What research has been done? There is nothing. You will see in the report into domestic violence that there is a wonderful resource up at one of the universities in Sydney, that is a national coordination body. Care leavers should have access to the same resources. They should have access to research into a whole lot of things. When I look at intake forms for penitentiaries, there is nothing there about what your background is, whether you were brought up in care, whether you were an adopted person or whether you were a foster care person. There is no reason why these simple, basic questions cannot be put into admittance forms in a whole range of places, including mental health organisations.

Care leavers would like literacy and employment training. You have seen today there are many people, even here, who do not have literacy skills, and who are designated to long-term unemployment. Once again, we know that is an intergenerational thing. Where there is no modelling of employment, once again it is likely that the next generation will perpetuate that. Care leavers would like ready access to support networks, including peer support. One of the benefits—and I hope it can be witnessed today—is that people here support each other. One of you raised the question earlier about making friends with people who came from institutions. You will see today that one of the supports that this group feels—and there are more than this group—is that they can share with other people with a similar experience. It does not take the place of families, but they know they can talk openly and that people understand. They are not filled with shame at having to explain themselves. We believe that peer support and self-help models are crucial when it comes to supporting care leavers and making some sort of movement in their journey towards some healing.

Ms Kendall—This is an aside, but you might understand it. In today's climate, the cost of housing is enormous. What I call normal people out there—people that can have relationships, people that can build futures—in two-income families are finding it a struggle. But for someone like me and my family—and, I am sure, for many other people that have been through the system—the impact of what that system did totally cancels out that avenue for us. I am afraid that there are people—and I am sure there are a lot of other people my age and older who are coming into the later parts of their lives—who are still no closer to having that real home they have never had. In England, wards of the state are automatically guaranteed public housing. I do not know if something like that can be introduced here in Australia, but it stands to reason to me that the people that need it most, the people that were denied that home environment, would at least be given a little bit of hope that it might be possible for them to have it one day.

CHAIR—We might have to make this the last comment, if people do not mind. We do have one more person to go.

Ms J. Donnelly—I found my brother five years ago after we had been split up. He got cancer and died two years ago. As I said before, he was a week old when he was taken into care. He ended up an alcoholic on the street. He was an alcoholic in Darwin and he lived in the long grass.

Ms Gale—There is just one other thing: when people were invited to come today, there did not seem to be any recognition that, for a lot of people, this is a struggle, not just emotionally but financially. I am not negating the emotional struggle; I think you have witnessed that yourself. A lot of support has been given to each other here. The other thing is that there needs to be an

understanding that this impacts financially on people. We had to ask if we could have reimbursement for travel from the country. Several people today have had to come from the country. My understanding was that no sandwiches were provided for the people who have been here all day. This has been held in a church, which for many people is a very painful environment to come back into. I think these things, for the future, need to be considered. Once again, it appears as though care leavers have to come cap in hand to say, 'I can't afford to get here. I want to make a contribution. This is painful emotionally, but I cannot afford to even be here. I have to put my hand out again,' instead of this being a supportive environment where they feel as though they are encouraged and honoured to be in a situation where people will give them the dignity, as David said, to listen to them. Thank you for that.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Gale. Thank you very much to everyone for sharing that with us today. I know it was very painful and I think you all displayed a lot of courage in being very public. Senator Murray outlined the history of how we have got this far, so all of us here are certainly taking on board what has been said. I am sure we do not want to repeat the problems of the past.

[5.33 p.m.]

ZIINO, Mrs Clare Suzanne, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. I am sorry for the delay, Mrs Ziino. I know you have sat there patiently for probably 1½ hours. That happens in these sorts of inquiries.

Mrs Ziino—I understand.

CHAIR—The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses in evidence. Is that correct?

Mrs Ziino—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity, and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mrs Ziino—Thank you. I am at a loss speaking after what I have just heard. I also feel a little ambivalent, because I come here today to speak to you about two issues. One is my experience, and that of my husband, as a foster carer. I have heard a lot of negative things said today about carers and I know that there are people who are not good carers. I would like to think that my husband and I represent some of the good carers that are out there. Perhaps my appearing today is evidence of that, because I also come to speak on behalf of a child that came into our care six years ago. Prior to that, we were involved in foster care as foster carers on a part-time basis—on weekends and when emergency care was needed for children—for over 10 years.

We reached a stage where we felt that perhaps we could offer care on a more full-time, long-term basis. Firstly, we approached a permanent care agency, who told us that, whilst we had already trained as foster carers, we would have to undergo another arduous round of training to become permanent carers. We went back to the foster care agency because we felt that this was a big ask; the process is pretty intrusive and demanding. We do have children of our own and we both work. So it took a lot of time for us to comply with the requirements of the training, the interviews and filling out the forms. We went back to the foster care agency, who told us that they did often have a need for foster carers who were prepared to care on a medium- to long-term basis rather than a short-term basis. Within a very short time, the little fellow who has now been with us for six years landed on our doorstep. We finally became his permanent guardians a year ago. His mother died when he had been with us for two years, and his father left when he was 15 months old. We have since contacted the father and they have met, but it is a very distant relationship.

As I said, I come to speak about two different issues. I will speak firstly about our experience as foster carers. I was prompted to write this letter because at the time that I noticed your advertisement in the paper for submissions there was a lot of talk in the media and in the local papers with regard to foster care and the drop in the number of people prepared to be foster carers. It really alarmed me when I heard this, but when I sat down and thought about it I thought, 'I don't really blame them for not wanting to become carers,' because I do not know how my husband and I continued on many occasions, despite the stress and the strain on our relationship and on our health, to persevere through the system for the sake of this little boy who called us mum and dad. He just wanted a permanent place to call home and some unconditional love in his life, and that really prompted us every time we felt that we were going to fall along the way.

Dealing with the system is difficult. We found that, whilst the care workers that came out were all lovely, we were often dealing with young girls who did not have families of their own and were very limited in their experience with regard to child care and relationships. When I was speaking to them I often felt that they held the future of this child and our lives in their hands, yet they were not very experienced in life. I found that difficult sometimes. I found myself, quite an educated person, being counselled by these young girls. At one stage I felt quite angry and this girl agreed with me in my anger. I remember saying to her: 'I know what you're trying to do. I know how to counsel. I've got qualifications in counselling.' I felt she was trying her best but she was not helping me very much. It was difficult for me dealing with someone that I felt really did not understand.

There was a lot of talk of 'the process'. It comes up all the time, but as foster carers we are not privy to what 'the process' is. I can now see, with the benefit of hindsight, that 'the process' led us to a very good place where this little boy is very secure. And, in law, he is now in a very secure place. There are no more avenues to pursue for the people in his life who have tried to thwart the process. But it took five years for this little fellow and us to go through 'the process'. It seemed such a long time at the time.

I also mentioned in my submission a small point: the meetings with foster care agencies and the permanent care agencies were invariably scheduled during the day. We were told that DHS workers do not work after five o'clock. We work full-time so we constantly had to ask for time off from work. That became onerous after a while. We felt embarrassed about asking for that time. I believe that maybe that is an area where there could be a bit more understanding. Speaking on the other side of the issue—for the child involved—the support that this little fellow's mother had was really apparent to us. As I mentioned in my submission, we went to a meeting on one occasion and she came with half a dozen people to speak on her behalf. My husband and I were there with perhaps one worker and there was this barrage of people representing the mother.

When this little boy came to us, we were not told about his background—only really bare facts. We had to find out a lot of things down the track. For example, we only found out when his mother died—as I mentioned in the submission—that she had hepatitis C and that she had been a heroin user. No-one had told us this and we were dealing with this little boy. He was living in our lives and we had not been warned that this was the case. Things had happened in his life that we were not told about. Abuse had occurred to him that we only found out about because this little boy would suddenly come out with something like, 'I don't like that ad. That

ad on TV upsets me.' When I asked him why, he went on to tell me that one of his mother's abusive partners had held his head under the bathwater as punishment while that ad was playing. I did not know whether this was true or not but I had to try to clarify that.

We were trying to deal with this little boy who did things like smearing his faeces all over my car when he first came. He was constantly saying, 'You don't want me anymore.' He still says that now and he has been with us for six years. He is now nearly 14, and he still resorts to, 'Oh well, send me away then!' But I reply to that that he is not going to get out of it that easily, that we have not put in this much time and effort to give up on him that easily and that he is not going anywhere; he is staying with us.

As an educated person—as a primary teacher who has a lot of skills—I could have better helped him had I known some of his background right from the outset rather than having to find this out as we moved along the track. He moved around a lot with his mother and I only found out down the track that this child had been to about five different schools before he came to us at the age of eight. He had also lived in a ridiculous number of residences—something like 25—by the time he was eight. It would have been useful to know that sort of background. As a result of this moving around and the emotional stresses in his life, he has educational difficulties. I am able to help him to some degree.

We thought we were his mum's first chance. I found out down the track that we were about mum's fifth chance. This child had been pushed from pillar to post while mum was given all these chances to rehabilitate. Meanwhile this child's education and emotional life were out of the window. I know there are always going to be scars emotionally. We have come a long way with him, but I can see that he is never going to be what he could have been. He is a bright boy, but he is never going to catch up with the literacy side of things because of all the moving around and the changing of schools.

When he came to us, provision was made for him to go and see mum, who was in rehab. That little boy in grade 3 would get picked up by someone from the foster care agency in the afternoon, so he would miss school. This happened every week. He would miss school, he would have to travel for about 1½ hours in the car to see Mum for half an hour up in the country somewhere and then he would come all the way back again. Meanwhile his grandma wanted her rights too, so on Monday and Wednesday nights after school the child had to go and see grandma. Grandma was also allowed to have one weekend a month when he went to stay with her. Whilst I believe it is important—certainly after listening to what I have heard today—that children in care are aware of and do have contact with their birth families, I also see, being on the other side of it, the disadvantage this little boy was placed at as a result of some of these expectations on him because of the rights of the birth family. I could see the negative impact on him. Perhaps there could have been a bit more consideration given to finding a means to support this child's needs without placing such an onerous task on this little fellow.

Those were the main points that I wanted to make to you. If there is anything else it is in my submission. I do not want to take up too much of your time, but it does concern me that people are not putting their hand up for foster care when I know, as a good foster carer, the difference that we have made in this child's life. There could perhaps be more incentives. Perhaps the system as it stands at the moment is a disincentive to people. I have often heard parents in

schools saying that it is something they would like to do, but they do not get much past the initial stages, it seems to me.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Ziino. Do you want to expand on that point about why in your opinion there is a decline in foster care, and what might be offered or what should be considered to encourage it more?

Mrs Ziino—I can clearly remember listening to the radio one day and hearing Collette Mann, the actress, talking. She revealed that she had been a foster carer. The topic was foster care and the decline in figures. I was interested that Collette said that they had been foster carers but echoed some of my thoughts that the system was very much weighted in favour of the birth family. Whilst we all recognise that that is important, it is very weighted in their favour and, when you are a foster care worker, there is little regard for you. You are made to feel that you are just doing a job and that you really do not have any rights. Your job is to give this child the love and care that it needs and to do the best you can, but ultimately the process is about the birth parents and reuniting the child with them.

That is made clear—I am not saying that is not made clear to you. But it is very hard when you are a foster carer, when you know what the child is going back to, to have to send the child back to a situation that you know the child does not want to return to, that you know is going to be detrimental and where the child is probably going to end up back in your care, down the track, because it has not worked. And everybody knows it is not going to work. I think I gave an instance in my submission where this little boy's mum was given additional access time with him, unsupervised, when it was patently obvious—and everybody knew—that she was abusing again. I can remember ringing up the foster care worker and crying and saying: 'I can't do this any more. This is so wrong. This little boy—we've got him to this stage and now you're going to send him back into his worst nightmare,' and being told, 'We have to do this because mum has to fail big-time so that the process can move forward.' Why should the child be sacrificed so the process can move forward?

You asked me what would help. Had I known where the process was going, if someone had explained to me what the big picture was, I perhaps would have coped better along the way, but I was in the dark—and so was my husband—all the way through. Now, as I say, with the benefit of hindsight, I can see how the process was worked through, but no-one really explained to us at the time that this would be the process, that it would be a lengthy process and that this would be the ultimate outcome if we could just hang in there.

Again, this might not be something that can be addressed, but the workers changed all the time. We and this little fellow had five or six different workers, just with DHS, just in the time that he was primarily in their care. They were stated to be his guardians. DHS were the guardians, and if he went on a camp we had to send in the documentation and they had to sign it to say he could go on camp, but they never really bothered. They never asked to see any of his school reports, for example. They were not interested in looking at those sorts of things—the sorts of things that my husband and I do now as the guardians.

There were lots of instances like that where we had our hands tied. We could not exert authority. This little boy would talk about 'the apartment'. It was as if 'the apartment'—being the department—were like a big brother: 'The apartment says I can see mum,' or 'Mum says the

apartment are going to let her.' It was like a big brother sort of thing. He had this sense of not having any control over his life, and that was very much our experience when we were going through the process with him: that we had no control and that our opinion was not really sought—it was the process.

Senator McLUCAS—I am aware also of the discussions around how do you properly support shared family care providers or foster care providers, and of the debate around whether the financial support is in recognition of the costs of care or whether it is in fact some sort of remuneration. Do you have a view about that discussion?

Mrs Ziino—My husband and I are in a financial position where we would do it for nothing. That has never been a consideration for us, but I can see that it would be for others, yes. If we were to add up what it has realistically cost us—not only in caring for the child and providing for his needs but also the financial costs to our health and the counselling we have paid for, for him, over various issues: those sorts of things that are not factored in but are very relevant—we would be well out of pocket. I can see that there are people out there, perhaps with young families, who would be wonderful carers and who would be happy to take on another child and offer them a positive experience of family life. But, financially, particularly if they are living on one income, there is no incentive. I can see also that if it were too much of an incentive you could get the wrong people applying.

Senator McLUCAS—The principle you would suggest is that the money is in recognition of the costs of care rather than pay.

Mrs Ziino—Yes, I think so. Certainly in our case, we decided to foster a child because we felt we had something to offer and we wanted to do something for others in life. It was not about the cost for us. Most people involved would do it for altruistic reasons. I can also see that for this child it could be a positive thing for him to know when he gets a bit older that there was money coming in to cover his costs—to feel that he was paying his way, that he was not too much of a financial drain.

Senator MOORE—What kind of support is offered to you and your partner through your term as foster carers? Do you have regular support from the department or an association that helps you out when you are having a tough time?

Mrs Ziino—The support we had was through the care worker who was assigned to the case. We were not offered any additional counselling—nothing like that. It was through the worker. The meetings were invariably scheduled during the day or were few and far between. There are things available. For example, Ozchild advertise coffee mornings where carers can get together, but they are mornings; I work and I cannot get there. More often than not things are scheduled during the day when full-time workers cannot get there. There really was nothing. As I said earlier, more often than not any counselling being offered was being offered by someone much younger than me who was delightful but, I felt, did not really understand what I was talking about because they had not had a family of their own. I was talking about the issues with my own children and having this child in our lives and the impact that was having. I could not really expect them to understand. Understandably, their hands were tied somewhat because they were in the middle of the process so they could not do anything to thwart the process by telling me anything that might make me feel better but might thwart the process.

Senator MOORE—It is a balance with the privacy issues you mention in your submission, as well. In Queensland at the moment there has been some fairly significant media coverage of incidents in foster care. There has been some horrific media coverage. The career of foster caring has been suffering pretty strong public condemnation and discussion. When that kind of thing happens is anything offered, to your knowledge, to people like you who are working in the system and trying to do a good job to adjust to that kind of media outcry?

Mrs Ziino—No, not at all. I think that is a really good point.

Senator MOORE—That is quite significant. One more thing: do you think your boy is going to make it?

Mrs Ziino—I hope so. I have a vision of him getting up there at year 12 to get his certificate or something and me sitting there with my husband, bursting with pride. He has some lovely redeeming features. We know that it is going to be tough over the next few years. As I said to someone only the other day, your own children tend to assume: 'You're mum and dad, and you just have to do,' whereas this little fellow will often say: 'I'm so lucky. I love you so much.' It is nice to hear that, not that we expect it, but he feels the need to say it and express it. I think our own kids feel it but do not feel the need to express it. They just think, 'You are mum and dad and you just have to do this.'

Senator MOORE—How are your kids coping? In my experience it is not so much a foster mum and dad, it is a foster family, so your own kids are very much part of the whole process. Are they similar ages?

Mrs Ziino—No. We have three daughters, and they are now in their early 20s, but when he arrived they were teenagers. Whilst in the initial instance they were very happy for him to join our family, when they realised it was going to become long-term we encountered a lot of problems. We even had our extended family saying to us that we were doing the wrong thing by our own children. That was really hard. My husband and I had to really talk about that. We had to stand strong and say, 'No, we think we're doing the right thing. We can't do this to this child.' By the time this happened, he had been with us for a year and we felt in all conscience we could not turn around and say that he had to be the one who went.

But we are aware that there are still issues with our daughters, and there probably always will be. There will always be resentment, I think, towards him, for coming into our lives. We just have to hope that perhaps they will mature. Our eldest daughter is much better about it now. I think the time will come. When we decided to stand strong over it, part of our thinking was that we knew that down the track, when they did mature, they would not have to bear the guilt of perhaps never knowing what happened to him but knowing that they were the cause of his leaving, or of finding out that he had followed the same course as his mum and got involved with drug and alcohol abuse and feeling that it was their fault that he had ended up like that. It was a very conscious decision on our part to bear it so that long-term they would not have to worry about those sorts of things. But it certainly has impacted on our relationships with them.

You were talking about costs before. I do not know how much we have spent on getting counselling for them, to support them in coping with us not coping and having this other child in the family. There are flow-on effects. It has affected my health very badly. This year I had two

terms out of work in hospital, unwell, because it has had such an impact on my emotional wellbeing. Every now and then I just do not cope anymore. But I still think of the long term. When he stands up and makes something of his life, it will be worth it. I hope in coming forward today, even if one thing I have said can make a difference, it will be worth it. He knew I was coming today and he asked me to put in a good word for him. I think he must have thought it was an assessment of him.

Senator MOORE—Have you given some of the recommendations you have given to us to the state department about the kind of support that foster families need?

Mrs Ziino—No, I have not. This is the first opportunity that I have seen where I could.

Senator MOORE—I think it would be really useful in terms of the experience that you and your family have had to get that message back to the state department. They need to see the whole picture so that the process does not take over from the people.

Mrs Ziino—That is right, yes. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mrs Ziino, for hanging around for so long and being so forthright with us.

Committee adjourned at 6.04 p.m.