

Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia



Dear Committee

Re: Submission for inquiry Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices.

Please find attached my submission for the above inquiry.

Terms of Reference:

a) The role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions.

- The hospital staff treated me inhumanely as a single mother without any rights and considerations at all and as a consequence I was drugged with unknown chemicals to the point that I have not been able to remember the birth.
- Welfare practices were focused on the needs of married couples who were unable to have babies and not on the general welfare of the individual.
- There was no financial assistance made available by the Commonwealth Government.
- The Commonwealth Government did not make information available to me about my own birth child.
- The Commonwealth Government made money from children (as well as other agencies) who were adopted and specifically, from those who were disadvantaged and they were taken advantage of and given no rights.
- Why did it take the Commonwealth Government so long to acknowledge the indifference of adoption and to educate society even though research

b) The potential role of the commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who subject to forced adoption policies.

My story

Thinking and writing about my unmarried mother months, and trying to make it real (that I adopted my baby), still completely breaks me.

Finding somewhere to live in Sydney, living in a shed for free, sleeping on a camp stretcher for around 6 months and giving up my baby felt like I was losing my heart, soul and mind. Going to the Crown Street Hospital, lining up (at most being thought of as a number), feelings of loneliness, embarrassment and being scared. Nobody was interested in me as I was labelled a disgrace. The words I could remember were "this baby is for adoption" and the words rung in my ears so many times. It was months of sadness, I remember praying god would take me and I wouldn't wake up, but I did wake up and I felt worthless. I remember this woman came to me in the hospital room and said that she found some 'rich' people' and they would 'have my baby and educate it', everything was supposed to be great and I had no worries. I had no money, no job and nowhere to go and I just had to

except the situation. My parents said I was a disgrace and not to come home because it was against 'Gods Law' to carry on with such filth. They lived in a caravan and travelled somewhat.

I can't remember but around the last month of my pregnancy I was put into Crown Street Hospital as I had high blood pressure. There I was, put on a diet and I believe I was given a mixture of drugs to calm me down. I read it was called *Diethylstilbestrol*.

I wasn't able to remember my baby daughter's birth or her birth date. I was placed in a ward with other women and babies and nobody told me about *my* baby. Your baby was 'for adoption' was all they would say. I just remember going to "Arthur Place" where unmarried mothers went. There were a lot of girls crying, angry and fighting. Some were just wanting their babies back as they didn't want to adopt them. I was sadder than ever. I also remember it took a long time for those drugs to get out of my system as I had to find work and was told to 'move on'.

I was never encouraged to keep my baby - they would say 'you have no money and it cost so much to keep her'. I was at my lowest.

I remember leaving that home, that big door closing behind me. I hated God, I hated people, my feelings were just broken. I had no one to talk to. I never touched or looked at my baby girl. I think I remember her cry. I wasn't good enough. I had no money. My life was saddened for 25 years. I searched for her in those 25 years and my heart was always saying keep looking.

I often, in my dreams, see a little girl running to me with no face. I didn't care I just wanted to touch her and see what she looks like. I never told anyone about her because of what they would think of me. I needed help.

Why wasn't I helped? Why were we just told to go and forget about it? Why wasn't counselling available? They had all our details filed up in the back room at St Margarets' Hospital. It is so sad that our mental lives were scarred from this dreadful broken feeling that hangs below the threads of our hearts. I believe women of our era will carry it to their graves if they haven't already.

Why aren't we cared for now? I have trouble trying to comprehend why this happened and why the government still does not want to take responsibility and help people who have suffered all their life due to the stigmatisation of single women in the 1960's – 1970's.

The stolen black generation people received a 'sorry' and help when they needed it and still have given it, although, I do think this is fair. What about the white stolen generation. It feels as if politicians wanted to sweep it 'under the politician carpet' and feel that we should just 'move on' and 'forget about it'. Maybe the state and federal government will say sorry and we will be recognised and understand in a different way and then we can *try* and move on.

The consequences of my adoption.

Short-term

- Very little financial assistance given at the time.

- Not knowing what to do and was given no support by anyone. I had become suicidal at times and did not know how to get any support.
- Being drugged and not being in control. This affected my memory of the experience other than the trauma and tremendous sadness.
- Being treated as a 'second class' citizen and not allowed to have thoughts or feelings of my child, affected my self-worth as a person.

Long-term

- Throughout my life my relationships have been affected due the trauma of hate and internal sadness at the loss of my child.
- The trauma of telling my children when I had found my adopted daughter.
- The trauma of continually searching for my daughter wanting to know who she was, where and how she was.
- The effects of having to independently look for my daughter by myself without any support or being able to tell anyone about my hardships.
- I have felt traumatised by the fact that I had no help for so long with getting over the stress and injustice of losing my baby.
- The fact that I had to keep it a secret from all my family and I lived with the pain of that secret for 25 years gave me a deep and internal sadness.
- Trying to control the void of my life which is the distance between my daughter and myself due to the separation for so long. I feel that I need to find the missing pieces that can help me with the void of not being part of her life previously.
- Not knowing where to go for help or how to get support and this added to the trauma of the experience. As well as the secrets and lies I had to live with most of my life.
- Not being able to share the experience of finding my daughter with anyone as they did not understand my experience and I had no-one that knew how I felt.
- Being alone as I did not go back home after the experience because my parents travelled. Therefore, not having any support or person to talk to about my pain.
- The ache of wanting to hold and love my baby that was taken from me.
- Were never able to grieve as adoption was a 'taboo' subject'. – disenfranchised grief.

Recommendations:

1. An apology and acknowledgement.
2. I believe that we need counselling and support services – specific to the needs of adoption and for the cost to attend to be exempt.
3. Health and Welfare professionals need to be educated about the long-term effects and historical context, not provide misinformation.
4. Better resources and access of records for people to be able to find their families. For example more funding for agencies that support people in their search. Also, as part of this, the Government to approach adoptees and birth parents with the information without the people having to search for years to find anyone. This would only be from a certain date range when it was known that people were taken from their families.

If you have any questions concerning this submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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