



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Child migration

FRIDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2001

PERTH

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to: **<http://search.aph.gov.au>**

**SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

Friday, 16 February 2001

Members: Senator Crowley (*Chair*), Senator Knowles (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Evans, Gibbs and Tchen

Substitute members: Senator Murray for Senator Bartlett

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Brown, Calvert, Chapman, Coonan, Crane, Denman, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Gibson, Harradine, Harris, Lightfoot, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, O'Brien, Payne, Tierney, Watson and West

Senators in attendance: Senators Crowley, Gibbs, Knowles, Murray and Tchen

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

For inquiry into and report on:

Child migration to Australia under approved schemes during the twentieth century, with particular reference to the role and responsibilities of Australian governments and to the issues listed in the following paragraphs:

- (a) in relation to government and non-government institutions responsible for the care of child migrants:
 - (i) whether any unsafe, improper, or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in such institutions, and
 - (ii) whether any serious breach of any relevant statutory obligation occurred during the course of the care of former child migrants;
- (b) the extent and operation of measures undertaken or required to assist former child migrants to reunite with their families and obtain independent advice and counselling services;
- (c) the effectiveness of efforts made during the operation of the child migration schemes or since by Australian governments and any other non-government bodies which were then responsible for child migration to:
 - (i) inform the children of the existence and whereabouts of their parents and/or siblings,
 - (ii) reunite or assist in the reunification of the child migrants with any of their relatives, and
 - (iii) provide counselling or any other services that were designed to reduce or limit trauma caused by the removal of these children from their country of birth and deportation to Australia;
- (d) the need for a formal acknowledgment and apology by Australian governments for the human suffering arising from the child migration schemes;
- (e) measures of reparation including, but not limited to, compensation and rehabilitation by the perpetrators; and
- (f) whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those former child migrants who wish to pursue claims against individual perpetrators of abuse previously involved in their care.

WITNESSES

| | |
|---|------------|
| ANDERSON, Mr Mark Allan, Chief Executive Officer, Fairbridge WA (Inc) | 121 |
| ANDERSON, Ms Judith Patricia, Consultant, Family and Children's Services | 151 |
| BUCK, Mr David Alan, Member, Fairbridge Youth Development Committee, Fairbridge WA (Inc) | 121 |
| BUDISELIK, Mr Bill, Executive Director, Family and Children's Services..... | 151 |
| CIRCENIS, Mrs Mary, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia..... | 69 |
| COLGAN, Mrs Maureen, President, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia..... | 69 |
| FISHER, Mr Robert James, Director General, Department of Family and Children's Services | 151 |
| HARRIES, Ms Maria, Chair, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services | 134 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| HAWKINS, Mr John Patrick, Chair, Australian Child Migrant Foundation..... | 105 |
| HOARE, Mr Brian, Committee Member, Child Friendship Society of Western Australia | 69 |
| HORTON, Mr George Ronald, Member, Management Committee, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services..... | 134 |
| HUMPHREYS, Mr Lawrence Peter, Member, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia | 69 |
| KRUGER, Ms Rose Ann, Member, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia | 69 |
| KYLE, Mr Peter Arthur, Chairman, Fairbridge WA (Inc) | 121 |
| MATHERS, Mrs Josette Denise, Administrator, Personal History Index, Christian Brothers Province, Western Australia..... | 92 |
| PLOWMAN, Professor David Henry, Executive Officer, Australian Child Migrant Foundation | 105 |
| PRIESTLEY, Mr John Arthur, Senior Information Officer, Family Information Records Bureau, Family and Children's Services | 151 |
| ROSSER, Dr Debra Lee, Member, Management Committee, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services..... | 134 |
| WIMSETT, Mr Peter, Director, Information Services, Family and Children's Services..... | 151 |

Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

COLGAN, Mrs Maureen, President, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia

CIRCENIS, Mrs Mary, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia

HOARE, Mr Brian, Committee Member, Child Friendship Society of Western Australia

HUMPHREYS, Mr Lawrence Peter, Member, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia

KRUGER, Ms Rose Ann, Member, Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia

CHAIR—I declare open this Friday session of the Community Affairs References Committee inquiring into child migration and welcome representatives from the Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia. The committee prefers all evidence to be heard in public but should you wish to give your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. We have before us your submission, No. 44. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Mrs Colgan—No.

CHAIR—I would ask you now to make an opening statement and then take some questions from the senators.

Mrs Colgan—I have prepared a statement and a brief summary of the submission, mainly so that those child migrants who have not seen the submission will know on their behalf what the submission contained. The Child Migrant Friendship Society was formed in 1982 by a group of former child migrants in Western Australia. Its purpose was, and remains, to provide an infrastructure of mutual support to former child migrants. The Child Migrant Friendship Society was legally constituted as an incorporated body in 1988. The submission by the Child Migrant Friendship Society to the Senate inquiry is a compilation of responses from the former child migrants themselves in response to a letter from the society requesting their input. The society mailed 210 letters, with a 60 per cent response. Those responses constitute this submission. I speak, I am their spokesperson, but I am only the front. Everything comes from the child migrants; nothing is from me.

The Child Migrant Friendship Society notes that the terms of reference of the Senate inquiry relate particularly to the role and responsibilities of Australian government and non-government institutions responsible for the care of child migrants. The Child Migrant Friendship Society also acknowledges that some efforts have been made in recent years by the British and Australian governments and church and private agencies to address the situation, trace families, provide airfares and counselling, and assist in an administrative manner by helping to obtain citizenship papers, passports, birth certificates and other documentation to former child migrants.

Whilst the measures undertaken to date have been an improvement on the denial and obstructionism that tended to occur previously, there are measures that still need to be undertaken. The Child Migrant Friendship Society states that it is a matter of determined fact that unsafe, improper and unlawful activities occurred in many receiving institutions in Australia. The House of Commons Health Committee report of 1998 made findings to this effect, that child migration was a bad and, in human terms, costly mistake.

This treatment of the child migrants occurred while the children were in fact wards of the state. Australian governments, federal and state, thus share a real responsibility for the effects of such treatment and should commit to discharge their responsibilities by overcoming, in whatever way possible, the deleterious effects of this treatment. The Child Migrant Friendship Society acknowledges that Australian governments were not solely responsible for the plight of child migrants. There are other groups and other individuals who should also be held accountable for the emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual damage that has been caused to those young children who were sent to Australia.

Nor can this damage be laid on the differing cultural and social mores of the day. The child migration policy was wrong in conception and, due to the dereliction of the duty of care and supervision of those in its care, government, at the very least, permitted—and in many cases abetted—not only a lack of care but actual and criminal abuse. The Commonwealth government's Child Custodian Act of 1946 facilitated the program in Australia and children sent to Australia were legally wards of those states during their minority years.

The Child Migrant Friendship Society is a body established by, and made up of, former child migrants themselves and, as such, acknowledges the value of the Senate inquiry and seeks its support of the following recommendations. Our first recommendation is that return airfares to Britain be provided for all former child migrants. These and associated travel costs should be made available regardless of whether or not individuals have traced family members, have previously travelled to Britain, or are able to self-fund such travel. As such travel funds are partial compensation for past practices, they would not be subject to means testing, thus ensuring equitable and dignified access. As the long term impact of child migration cannot be appropriately addressed in a one-off visit to the place from which these children were sent, the airfares and related allowances should be made available as often as is reasonable in order to allow the locating of relatives, the developing of a sense of identity, and the development of family relationships.

Our second recommendation is that centrally located accommodation in their birth country and adopted country be provided—this was a very, very prominent request on the behalf of many, many child migrants. This would serve as both a drop-in centre and short-term accommodation—a few days only—and in which counselling services could be located. The availability of counselling and personal support is imperative at this time of high stress and anxiety. Our third recommendation is that additional funds be made available to bona fide agents to assist family tracing. Whilst the Child Migrant Friendship Society acknowledges the excellent work undertaken by the Child Migrants Trust, it believes that the funding of other agencies in addition to the Child Migrants Trust would expedite this urgent work. Our fourth recommendation is that the Australian government additionally assist former child migrants to obtain British passports, Australian citizenship and ongoing independent counselling free of any charge.

Our fifth recommendation is that a formal apology by the Australian government is an essential part of the acknowledgment of the wrongness of the child migrant policy. Such an apology would promote emotional and psychological healing amongst those who have been most hurt by the impact of this policy. Our sixth, and final, recommendation is that the retirement and aged care needs of former child migrants be adequately addressed, that a funeral fund be established for those former child migrants unable to meet their own funeral costs, that a permanent tribute to child migrants be established to provide testimony to the part they played in Australia's history, and that any statutory or administrative impediment to claims against individual perpetrators of abuse against former child migrants be removed.

Child migrants came to Australia at the behest of others. They were subject to treatment that was less than they deserved and was, in many cases, brutal. They came at least partly to fulfil the economic imperatives of the government, to relieve financial pressures on the British government and to provide a white work force for Australia. When they left the Australian institutions, many did so without proper education, training or preparation. That lack of basic education has haunted the majority of former child migrants into their adult years, and whilst access to adult learning facilities has helped some in latter years, the lack of confidence and self-esteem has had a disastrous effect. Many, many were disempowered as a result. Many have since struggled to find a fulfilling life journey. Some have gained considerable financial and public success and many have established sound and effective family lives. All, despite the deception and abuse of power that brought them here, have helped to forge the reality of contemporary Australia. That contribution deserves acknowledgment.

While I am president of the Child Migrant Friendship Society, I myself am not a child migrant and therefore I would request the panel to direct its questions to the former child migrants who have graciously given of their time to be present at this inquiry today: Mrs Mary Circenis and Mrs Rosie Kruger who both attended St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco, and Mr Brian Hoare and Mr Laurie Humphreys who both attended Boys Town in Bindoon. I would like to address just this little bit to the panel themselves. In recent weeks and over the last two days I am sure you have read and heard many professional submissions. Today I respectfully plead with you to hear through these and listen to the story of each and every young child, collectively termed former child migrants. I am sure that some members of this panel have children and grandchildren of their own. I would like you to take into your heart today and try and comprehend the fear, the loneliness, the pain and the sense of hopelessness that these little children experienced. Would you wish this upon your children and grandchildren? How different would their lives have been had they experienced what these children experienced? Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Colgan.

Senator GIBBS—Mrs Colgan, in your submission you talk about centrally located accommodation, or a drop-in centre, for when people actually go back to Britain. I know we have heard this from a lot of people and it seems to be extremely important—because accommodation is quite expensive and they need time—but how could this be established? Who would be responsible for this and how could we actually operate it?

Mrs Colgan—I would like to answer that briefly and then ask the former child migrants for their input. I have a dedicated line and the former child migrants can use that line and they have

spoken at length on this actual issue. I would say that their view is that it would be a joint British and Australian government initiative, in both a centrally located area in London and a centrally located area here. We recently had a former child migrant who needed quite severe surgery. She came here and she had nowhere to stay beforehand, before she was admitted to hospital, and she had nowhere to stay following this quite massive surgery that she had. Now, the sisters came to the party and she stayed in two different locations and she was made to feel very welcome; she was very comfortable, and that was a continuing pastoral care on behalf of the sisters, and rightly so. That is something that we could consider. Prior to her surgery, she needed somewhere to stay, she needed someone to talk to and she needed some moral support. When the former child migrants go back to the United Kingdom, for a start they have jetlag when they get off the plane. Somewhere to stay for a night or two to get over the jetlag before they meet for the first time, or reunite, with their families would be a good thing. That is what they would require, and that would be, presumably, a joint initiative of both governments, both here in Perth and in London.

Senator GIBBS—Like a YMCA complex or something?

Mrs Colgan—They actually did say that they would like about a six-bedroom—and that is why it is limited to a few days only—place that is quite personal, fully staffed and with a counsellor. As you well know, after family reunification there is need for counselling and that would be there, say, in London, to ready them for their trip back home again, which is a downer.

Senator GIBBS—What about Ireland and Scotland?

Mrs Colgan—That is only a concept. I personally think you would need to set up a committee of former child migrants to work out the locations, and there would be more than one, I have no doubt. But most people come via London to the United Kingdom.

Senator GIBBS—What about the establishment of a fund to assist people, or to pay their fares to go back to look for family once or twice, or other things indeed? Do you think this should be solely the responsibility of the federal government or do you think that the state government of Western Australia—which is basically where most of the children went to—should also put into this fund? Indeed, do you really think that the church itself should be made to put into this fund also?

Mrs Colgan—I think it is, once again, a federal and state government initiative—the federal government was involved in the bigger picture and the state government took the children on board, so it is for both governments. Whether or not the churches need to play a role in that, I do not know. C-BERSS has been set up for the boys and has provided travel back to the United Kingdom for certainly over a hundred, but I think it could be into the hundreds. The Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Nazareth have in fact funded a trip back for all of those who wanted to go back to the United Kingdom. Whether or not they were part of that, I cannot say, but perhaps the child migrants themselves would like to have some input on that. Mary, would you like to comment on whether you think the churches should contribute funds to this travel account, as well as the federal and state governments?

Mrs Circenis—I think the federal government, the state government and the church have failed us desperately.

Mr Hoare—The Christian Brothers at the moment are doing quite a good job of repatriation to go back, if you can find family, and even if you cannot find family—it is not a requirement that you have to have family over there. They do not do it for just one trip; you could finish up with two, maybe even three, trips, depending on your circumstances. They do give money for sustenance while you are over there and they are supplying counsellors over here. It is very easy for ex-Christian Brothers residents to get in touch with C-BERSS and receive counselling for all types of things. The Christian Brothers really are doing their bit, so far as I am concerned, and the federal government and the state government should start to do their part for these travel arrangements as well.

Ms Kruger—I agree that the Australian government, the English government and the churches should all put in, because that is where we were brought up and where all this mental abuse came from. The sisters did send us back in 1997 on a quick trip, which was lovely—

CHAIR—Which sisters were they?

Ms Kruger—The Sisters of Mercy, who brought the majority of us up.

Mrs Colgan—And the Sisters of Nazareth also.

Ms Kruger—At the moment the boys do have somewhere to go, but the girls have nowhere. There is no counselling, there is not an office we can go to and approach anybody for any help or talk about our past.

Senator KNOWLES—There is no C-BERSS—

Ms Kruger—No, C-BERSS is only for the men.

Senator KNOWLES—There is no C-BERSS equivalent?

Ms Kruger—No, nothing at all.

Mrs Colgan—If I could just add here—and it has yet to go out to all the girls from St Joseph's; I am not sure about the Nazareth House girls—but C-BERSS has in fact opened their doors. The Sisters of Mercy and the management of C-BERSS have in fact spoken and they will counsel and help fill in forms and things like that—they will not provide airfares, as far as I know. But they are in the process of organising for the girls to access services provided by C-BERSS and then the sisters pay C-BERSS. That is in the process now so that is something that is on the cards. In actual fact, it has started to a minor degree, but that will expand.

CHAIR—Mr Humphreys, do you wish to say anything here?

Mr Humphreys—Yes. I believe it is about time the federal government bit the bullet on this situation. It is all very well talking about sharing costs with the state and the churches, but most of us have paid taxes for the last 40-odd years of working and, surely, when you bear the situation of how we arrived here it would not be unjust, and the numbers are not so dramatically great, that it would be on the federal government. This business of duck shoving—like the

British government said the Australian government should do this—it is the churches actually and the child migrants who picked up the initial run with this. Last year the state government did apologise, but no contribution whatsoever. The federal government now is the latecomer on the scene. They have all the experience of having had the other studies and I think now is the time to make proper decisions, make up your mind, do not start saying, ‘We’re going to form a committee to find out who’s going to pay,’ bite the bullet and do it on behalf of what I think the government should do.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Humphreys. Mrs Circenis, did you wish to add anything at this time?

Mrs Circenis—Not really, just that when we went on the trip I got a phone call where I was staying from Immigration telling me I had another five brothers and sisters I never knew existed. That is part of it. I was trying to find my brothers for 50 years. I found them. A couple of weeks ago they both died when I was there.

CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Senator KNOWLES—Talking about the travel back, what do you think is the unmet need at the moment in terms of numbers, dollars, whatever?

Mrs Colgan—I don’t think I can answer that.

Mr Hoare—It’s the conditions that are put on us by the British government: you have to have immediate family to be able to travel back through the British scheme. In my case, I have a cousin who I have been writing to and telephoning for the past two years and there is no way that the ISS will fund a trip for me to go and visit my cousin, because that is not good enough. You have to have family over there. I am one child migrant who the British government has not helped one iota. They have done nothing for a heap of us.

Senator KNOWLES—Why is that?

Mr Hoare—Because I do not have family that are alive over there.

Mrs Colgan—That you know of.

Mr Hoare—That I know of.

Mrs Colgan—Do you mean numbers, statistics—how many need to go back and dollars?

Senator KNOWLES—What I am looking at is trying to establish how many people are in need of assistance, in tracing terms, in travel terms, in all of those aspects that maybe are falling between the stools at the moment, for whatever reason, and Mr Hoare might be one of those who, because he cannot trace his immediate family, does not seem to ‘qualify’.

Mrs Colgan—As far as numbers and dollars go, I do not think I can answer that and I do not think the child migrants here on this panel can answer that. I do not know whether there is

anyone in the audience who can answer that. Perhaps when you interview C-BERSS and Josette from the Archives, maybe they would have those. I do not think anyone would have the accurate numbers but maybe they could give you a ballpark figure. I do not believe any of us can. I have never even thought of it.

Senator MURRAY—Senator Knowles, we may deal with it later, but on page 11 of the Western Australian Family and Children Services submission is an indication that since 1992 when they set up their child migrant index they have had a total of 777 inquiries, of which in 1999-2000 there were 192. That just seems to me to be some indication of the numbers of inquiries, and from my readings I would suspect that we are likely to be looking in the hundreds or the low thousand, rather than thousands, based on the number of inquiries. A lot of people have sorted themselves out already in terms of finding family.

Mrs Colgan—That is one of the issues, though, that is paramount in that many of the former child migrants have traced their families and reunited with them at enormous cost to themselves. They are still paying off huge, huge loans, but because they have got up and had a go, or were in the position to be able to do that. They have been victimised in that, if you have been back before, the ISS fund does not allow you to go back. Yet they also do not allow Brian, who has found a cousin, to go back, because that is not what they call 'immediate family'. That is why in that submission we have asked for an equitable and just access to a travel fund. I had not even thought of numbers, and therefore dollars, but I think it is of paramount importance.

Senator KNOWLES—You talk also about funding for agencies for tracing. In addition to the Child Migrants Trust, do you see any other agencies that should be directly funded for that purpose?

Mrs Colgan—I am not sure whether I did this personally or on behalf of the Child Migrant Friendship Society, but I put in a submission to the Catholic bishops to say, 'Look, we really need to get the Catholic element of this addressed. Let's put full-time tracing agents there funded by the Catholic church.' What has happened with that I do not know. I put that in probably some nine months ago but I am not quite sure what has happened. There are other tracing agencies that are very good that a lot of the child migrants go to. Some will go to the Child Migrants Trust, which has done an excellent job; some will go the Catholic church; some will not go to either. Some will not go to one because of the other, or because of what it stands for—say, the Catholic church, so they will not go to the Catholics but they may go to the Child Migrants Trust. They may have an experience and say, 'That's no good for me. I need somewhere else.' There are other agencies.

Senator KNOWLES—In your experience and knowledge, if I may just follow that on, do you see that there is an effective exchange of information from one agency to another? There was an indication yesterday from a couple of witnesses that there might not be an adequate exchange of information, and so one might find out a part of the jigsaw here, another part of the jigsaw here, and one agency is saying, 'We are not going to give you that information.' What is your experience?

Mrs Colgan—I think that is a known fact, but I also believe that there has been an element of addressing that. I note in the C-BERSS submission that they are actually working closely with

the Child Migrants Trust and that is a wonderful turn of events. I think that is being addressed, perhaps not quickly enough, but it has definitely been the case.

Senator KNOWLES—Do you believe that the Child Migrants Trust actually provides adequate information to the other agencies? Do you think it goes backwards?

Mrs Colgan—I think that is what is happening now. I do not know that that has been the case but I think that is what is happening. I think that is being addressed but it could perhaps be addressed even more.

Senator KNOWLES—Ms Kruger, you wanted to make some comments?

Ms Kruger—Yes, regarding having somewhere to go for information. When I went back, in 1997, I met a sister I had not seen for 50 years, but I also found out I had another sister who was born the year I arrived in Australia. I do not know how to go about looking for her. All I know is I have her birth date and her name and I was told that she was adopted out. Therefore, we need somewhere we can go so we can get someone to help us look. At this stage of our lives some of us are not financial enough to go into the depths of it.

Senator KNOWLES—I noticed in your submission you talked about adequate retirement and aged care needs. Do you believe that that requirement goes beyond what the rest of society get in terms of welfare payment, and, if so, in what way?

Mrs Colgan—Once again, I approached the Christian Brothers with regard to the former boys and spoke to them of that very need, and some of the boys had approached me with regard to that. The Christian Brothers did a feasibility study that drew out the fact that there was not a need there. However, in the submission—and all I have done is word it; the content has come from the child migrants—they have asked for aged care attention. Apparently, there are a number of child migrants buried in paupers' graves—

Senator KNOWLES—But what I am asking is: does that go beyond what is provided to the rest of Australia in terms of a welfare allowance, and also in terms of aged care facilities? If it does, I would like to know how far it goes and what type of assistance is required?

Mrs Colgan—I do not know that I can answer the actual 'how far' or 'what', but I believe that there is an element there of, 'You brought us out as young children, you need to care for us as we age.' I would like to pass that over to the child migrants themselves, if I may.

Mr Hoare—We do have HomesWest, that type of thing, for people who are in need of housing and that type of thing. The only problem is that HomesWest was approached to supply a house so that former child migrants, when they were in the gutter virtually, could go there and get on their feet and be helped to get themselves right so that they could get themselves into decent accommodation. But it was knocked back; they did not fit the criteria was the reason given.

Mrs Colgan—This is more as they age.

Mr Hoare—Yes, but this is what I am saying now. It is already being asked and it is already being knocked back. It is as simple as that.

Senator KNOWLES—I suppose when I read the submission, though, I looked at ‘aged care’ as meaning aged care as in what we look at traditionally when people go into hostels and nursing homes and the like, and also who require income support, such as the age pension or whatever. My question really revolves around those two aspects. I am not dismissing what you have previously said; I am just saying it revolves around those two aspects of whether or not there are additional needs that are not covered within society generally.

Mrs Colgan—It is possibly a matter of a priority, that because they are a former child migrant when the need arises for aged care that perhaps they be a priority in whatever is available with regard to the state government facilities. I do not believe that they are asking for added funding, additions to pensions or anything like that, but perhaps a priority entry.

Senator KNOWLES—I have one more question in terms of citizenship. You talk about citizenship ‘being provided in an expedited fashion and at no cost to the former child migrants.’ Are there many who have not taken out Australian citizenship, and for what reason, predominantly?

Mr Hoare—I have taken out Australian citizenship. It was a very gruelling process for me because it took six months for them to clear me. I was accused of being a criminal and I got no apology whatsoever from the department concerned. I had to pay for the thing myself. This was back in 1993. The way I feel was that to become an Australian citizen should be the happiest day of your life—great, become an Australian citizen—but personally I did not see it that way, the reasons being that I was kicked off the roll because I was not an Australian citizen. As a child migrant I always thought that I was automatically an Australian citizen, and I got the shock of my life. I had just moved houses and the electoral roll people told me, ‘You’re off the roll.’ So it is important about this citizenship, yes.

Mrs Colgan—Also, the gaining of the original birth certificate from the United Kingdom is not always easy, and they need that. This year I have had a couple of child migrants phone me to say that they cannot get a passport because they cannot get their ‘proper’ original certificate. I have developed a really nice relationship in the British Embassy in Canberra and we manage to get all of that done fairly quickly and he now has his passport and is going to apply for Australian citizenship et cetera. But that is just one or two people. I think that needs to be expedited. If ‘former child migrant’ comes up in the conversation, I think someone needs to take that on board personally and -

Senator KNOWLES—Sorry, I did not mean to cut you off. You are saying that there is not a process in place within the Department of Immigration to process these people as a category?

Mrs Colgan—As far as I know there is not—whether I just do not know that, I do not know.

Mr Humphreys—I put in a submission to the Minister for Immigration when they had an inquiry into this. One of the things that did come out with it is there is a priority given to migrants to be able to become Australian citizens at a reduced cost and they are helped. Admittedly, I paid for mine years ago, but when this opportunity came up I did put a submission

in. There is something happening in that regard and it has been happening for years so that is a thing which I do not think we need to concern ourselves with much, but just to make sure that those who do not have birth certificates or who find themselves in a situation where they do not have an identity, they should be made sure that they are given preference and looked after. Because those problems arise and I think what happens here is if they do not have it they probably do not bother to apply. There should be some help, through the agencies, to ensure that every one of them gets that now of right, because of the time they have been in Australia and the circumstances under which they arrived. So I do not think it would be too hard a thing to come up with.

Senator KNOWLES—In finishing, I apologise for my puzzled appearance on this issue. It is an issue that is actually outside the normal purview of this committee so I think it is something that we can just investigate and see whether there is a process in place.

Mrs Colgan—It has certainly been my experience, whether that is in place or not, that it is not an easy process for the child migrant and they are more often than not being knocked back. This man came to me because he had been knocked back. It turned out that we were able to get it fairly easily. Perhaps if they had help filling in forms or were asked what the problem was and then told, 'I'll take it over from there'—not by me, by the person at the other end of the phone. Perhaps there can just be a little bit more personal care there.

CHAIR—Ms Kruger or Mrs Circenis, do either of you wish to make any comment to Senator Knowles's question about applying to become an Australian citizen?

Mrs Circenis—I became one a few years ago.

CHAIR—Was it an easy, straightforward process for you?

Mrs Circenis—I had to fill in all these forms and I would say three-quarters of the form was, 'Your guess is as good as mine.' But I got through.

Senator KNOWLES—Did they take that answer?

Mrs Circenis—Yes.

CHAIR—We have a lot of sympathy for that, Mrs Circenis.

Ms Kruger—I applied in 1995, because I had a bad experience. I went to Centrelink to apply for a job and because I did not have a passport I was told I should not be in the country. Therefore, they wrote a letter, which I had to sign, and the letter started off that I arrived in Australia in 1947 by boat as a child migrant, and a few more lines, and I had to sign that before they would put me on their books for a job. Therefore, I left the office quite upset and then I went and got naturalised.

CHAIR—Did you find the process straightforward? Was it an easy process for you?

Ms Kruger—Yes, I just got the forms and paid for it. I did not have any problems that way.

Mrs Circenis—When I became naturalised they said, ‘But you’re a foreigner,’ and I said, ‘Bully for you.’ I said, ‘Why is that?’ They said, ‘You are Irish, you were born in Dublin, you cannot have an Irish passport, you cannot have an Australian one, you cannot have a British one’. I said, ‘Well, you’d better give me an Australian one then, hadn’t you.’ So I got one.

CHAIR—A very good answer, Mrs Circenis.

Senator MURRAY—I will stay with the citizenship thing briefly. We have had a brief outline of this issue from the federal department concerned and I put to them one of the ideas I have been exploring—but which the committee has not yet considered, so do not take my views to be the committee’s views—of the prospect of the committee perhaps, if they agree, asking the federal government to make all child migrants automatic Australian citizens, unless they opt out. That would mean you would be written to and they would say, ‘We are making you an Australian citizen because you came here in 1947. If you don’t want to be one, please tell us.’

That would cut through a lot of those issues. I think it is manageable, again referring to the submission from the Western Australian Family and Children’s Services. They say they have 2,941 former child migrants listed on their index, and all the various organisations seem to have databases so I think you can probably reach most child migrants that way. How do you react to that idea?

Mr Hoare—Until the early nineties I always thought I was an Australian citizen.

Mrs Circenis—So did we all.

Mr Hoare—Most child migrants, I feel, would have thought exactly what you are saying: that they automatically got citizenship.

Senator MURRAY—Do you think any child migrants would not like to be made citizens on that basis? They would be protected by the opt-out clause.

Mr Hoare—Yes, definitely.

Senator MURRAY—That is sufficient protection, you think?

Mr Hoare—Yes, because if you do not want to do something you do not do it, you can opt out. That is good.

Senator MURRAY—Are there any other views at the table?

Mr Humphreys—Yes, I think there is a bit of animosity out there towards the past and you would probably find that some, especially if they are in their sixties, would decline the offer—perhaps being a bit of a royalist myself, you still tend to think that you are British to the core. I have accepted Australian citizenship willingly, but I think there are some out there who would probably say, ‘Look, because of the way I came here I would prefer to remain British.’ There is a bit of that out there but I think some of them would welcome the opportunity, especially those who have been described here today who have had difficulties.

Senator MURRAY—Is the opt-out clause or idea sufficient protection for those who do not want to be Australian citizens?

Mr Humphreys—I think the fact that you are giving them an opportunity to voluntarily—I do believe, though, that it should not be a matter of sending a piece of paper. I believe that they should be given the opportunity to receive it in a citizenship ceremony properly so that they can feel proud to have been given it the same way as everybody else who applies, not just handed a bit of paper and say, ‘After 50 years you’re now an Australian citizen.’ I think they should be given the opportunity to get it in a dignified way, the same as everybody else.

CHAIR—Well said.

Senator MURRAY—I must stress to you that my question to you is not affected by the fact that I am a direct electionist republican.

Ms Kruger—I have a brother out there who would probably send it back and say, ‘No thanks.’

Mrs Colgan—I think that is a very good idea and I think the ceremony is most important. While it would be quite a big undertaking, I think it can be done. I would just urge one thing in the communication, and that is to make it in very simple, user-friendly language, an easily read letter with perhaps even a separate end, ‘If you do not wish to participate’—perhaps in a different colour, whatever, so that it is very clear. There is animosity and there will be those that say, ‘No, thank you,’ but you are giving them a choice. I think it is an excellent idea, as long as it is very clear. While the ceremony becomes much bigger than what you had in mind, it is possible, and I think that is excellent.

Senator MURRAY—Those of you who attended yesterday will see that the committee is attending to this matter in two ways: first of all establishing the need with some causes and how people feel, but then trying to search for solutions, and that is where we are at today. One of the things you have focused on is this accommodation issue. If governments decide to meet needs they always want to know what they have to do and how much it is going to cost, but then the third question is: how long do we need to have the program for? You have been asked questions about what they have to do and you have said, ‘Accommodation’. You were asked how much it was going to cost, and I suppose we can roughly work out that a six-bedroom house in London is expensive. But the question has not been asked as to how long it would need to be done for. Is it a three-year program, is it a five-year program, is it a 10-year program? Do you have any idea of that?

Mr Humphreys—I would like to answer that one and give you a bit of experience in this. I went over there originally on my own and after sitting for four hours at Heathrow trying to work out what to do next I booked into a cheap hotel for four nights, just while I rang around and did my thing. I believe in a lot of cases the first trip, if they find family, hopefully well and good, but also it would need to be somewhere central. On the other hand, it need not be so expensive, and I do not believe that you would have to buy a place—I believe surely the institutions and that around; there are facilities.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Humphreys, sorry to interrupt you but you might have misunderstood my question. I have an understanding for individuals how long it would be, but for a program? Let us say a house was rented, would it need to be for 10 years? After that time would the need have been fulfilled?

Mr Humphreys—We come up with the obstacles that a house would need to be rented or whatever. I believe that there is currently still available accommodation, whether it is at colleges or universities or institutions or places. I think that question needs to be sent to England and the British government provide that.

Senator MURRAY—But both the British government and the Australian government would always have a time limit for any of these programs. They allocate money for a certain number of years. If this committee were to make a recommendation on that it would need to go back and say, ‘The need for this will be fulfilled after a number of years.’

Mrs Colgan—Could I just answer that for a moment? Just going once again on the input that I have had from the child migrants themselves, I see this as fairly long term, because we still have many child migrants to go back to England—in fact, we are asking that they all be given a reasonable number of trips. But also—and this came through very strongly from the child migrants—in many cases the children of child migrants have been very severely affected by the child migrant policy, by that scheme. Those children also have needs. I see this as long term.

Senator MURRAY—What do you mean by ‘long term’?

Mrs Colgan—Once again, that is a hard one to answer.

Senator MURRAY—Is it open-ended, is it forever?

Mrs Colgan—No, not forever, but until the need drops off, until the child migrants themselves—

Senator MURRAY—So when the committee is going to consider this issue would you be saying a minimum of 10 years?

Mrs Colgan—I would think so, yes. I do not believe their requests are at all unreasonable, but if you meet these requests it may well be that once that door is open there will be a flood for a while. I see that that will probably slow down in five to 10 years, maybe even sooner. But I think the fact that they would no longer be fighting the establishment would take away a lot of angst.

Senator MURRAY—How many members does the society have?

Mrs Colgan—It is interesting: the society is actually just friendship and it is for all child migrants, so it covers anyone who wants to be in it. Our basic focus is a reunion lunch each year—

Senator MURRAY—How big is your mailing list? That is probably the answer.

Mrs Colgan—It is 210.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you very much.

Mrs Colgan—But it does in fact cover more. There are others who read the little newsletters and who come to the function but who do not come to a meeting.

Senator MURRAY—My last question is about counselling. We have submissions that indicate that normal psychiatric or therapeutic counselling available through normal government services is often insufficient because the special experiences of some child migrants mean they need specialist counselling. There are a number of agencies, and a number of government agencies, that have been involved in counselling and, from the evidence we have received, it seems to me that some child migrants have in fact moved—in other words, they have had counselling with government and they have had counselling with the Child Migrants Trust, and some have had counselling with the C-BERSS organisation.

There is the question of coordination of this and the proper funding of it. If the committee were to consider a recommendation on the availability of specialist counselling, any government would like to see that at least cost and at most focus; that is how governments think. What are your views on the counselling issue and whether it should be handled on a multi-agency basis, as it is at present, or whether it should be confined to a few agencies? Do you have any ideas as to how that should be managed?

Mrs Circenis—How can they counsel you after 50 years? I was coming up to this meeting and what did I do? I woke up with a nightmare. I was battling to breathe. What would a counsellor do? What would a psychiatrist do? Nothing. I have walked that line and I am not going back down it.

CHAIR—I think it is very important to hear that comment. Some people have said counselling has helped them; others say it wakens the ghosts and it does not help. Senator Murray's very important question is: if anybody should look for that assistance, how might it be made available? But your point is so important. We cannot guarantee that it will get a happy outcome, and how do you undo 50 years of pain?

Mrs Circenis—See, we have walked that line and it is a bit hard to go back down it. You can block it out, until something like this comes up and then you are gone. I was a little spitfire when I was a kid, and I still am.

CHAIR—I think the idea of a spitfire is very attractive, Mrs Circenis. Don't you stop being a spitfire.

Mrs Circenis—That was my nickname.

CHAIR—I cannot imagine why. Sorry, Senator Murray, to cut across there, but I wondered if others of you would like to speak to—

Ms Kruger—The counselling idea is very good. It does bring back the ghosts, but we have had to live with them all this time anyhow, because you do not ever really forget—you forgive

what happens but you do not forget it. I was counselled before I went on the trip in 1997. It did help, but when I came back, that is when I fell to pieces—after the trip and when I met family I did not know I had. That is when I needed counselling but I had nowhere to go.

Mrs Circenis—And you get a call to tell you you have five others. It seems ridiculous: there are four of us here; how can there be five more?

Ms Kruger—I went over there one of five and came home one of 10. When I got here in 1947 I was told I was an orphan, ‘Forget about over there, you’re an orphan,’ and when we left to come here we were told we were coming on a nice holiday. Fifty-three years later the holiday is still going.

Mrs Circenis—And the hardest part was when you go back and get something from the files and it says, ‘The four McCloskys left from Belfast.’ I did not leave from Belfast. Evidently, being born in the south I was not allowed to be emigrated, so they put me through Belfast, Northern Ireland. I didn’t; I left from South Hampton. We just do not know.

CHAIR—I am cutting across Senator Murray and I think his point was very important. Mr Hoare or Mr Humphreys, did you want to add anything more about the opportunity for counselling?

Mr Hoare—Yes, I do actually. Some people say it is worth it if you can get it. I have taken up being counselled by C-BERSS. I have been counselled about once a month, on average, for nearly six years. My question is: where are the experts in this counselling? When does it stop? I go there and it is gut-wrenching to tell your story, you have a hell of a hangover from it, and I feel that you need real experts to do this counselling for child migrants. I think myself you have to go through it, you have to be a child migrant to understand what we went through. It is just hopeless.

Mrs Circenis—I am a naturalised Australian now and we proved that when we went overseas, didn’t we girls? They asked us, ‘Are you American?’. I said, ‘God forbid, we’re Australians.’ We are very proud of being here, but we have not got there through any help; we have had to do it on our own, and, believe me, it was not easy.

Mr Humphreys—There are, once again, some who feel that they could do with counselling. I might sound as tough as the next one but I have had counselling, mainly—

CHAIR—Just take your time, Mr Humphreys.

Mr Humphreys—Mainly when I have come back from an overseas trip, or someone has died.

Senator KNOWLES—So it has been of assistance to you prior to and after your visits to be able to come to terms with the events that have happened? It has been a bit of a backup for you?

Mr Humphreys—Mainly after the events. You go across, you meet family—

Senator KNOWLES—Fine, thank you.

Mr Humphreys—Believe you me, I have a big family here, but there is that link. I think in the last five years I have lost three members of my family in England.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Colgan—Can I just comment on that question, because I think it is an extremely important question. Certainly the child migrants themselves, many of them require it, but, like the Australian citizenship, some will take counselling and some will not. I think Brian's point is an excellent one in that: do we have specialised counsellors who are specialised in that particular area? I do not know much about counselling. Do we have that expertise? The other thing is, to answer your question—which I think was very good—the former child migrants need to have a choice. They have not had much in the way of choices throughout their lives; they have been told and they have been controlled.

They need to have the choice, and the choice may be C-BERSS, it may be government counselling. I think the big thing is for them to be made aware of what is available and where it is available, and, of course, at no charge. As Brian says, he has been going monthly for six years. If he had to pay for that, he could not do it, so it has to be free of charge. They need a choice and they need that specialised expertise. Then, the most important thing: we have 210 on our mailing list but there are, as you know, about 2,000 out there. They need to be made aware of what is available, where it is available, and that it is free of charge. I think it was an excellent question.

Senator TCHEN—Mrs Colgan, I think the question has been asked of you by both Senator Knowles and Senator Murray—but in different ways—about your recommendation of establishing a travel fund. You say there is an unmet need in this area. Can I ask you, also referring to the answers you have given to Senator Knowles and Senator Murray: do you think such a fund should be capped or uncapped?

Mrs Colgan—Uncapped.

Senator TCHEN—Uncapped?

Mrs Colgan—Yes, I do. I think it should be made available as the need arises. I believe that the former child migrants are not an unreasonable group of people. They have very, very reasonable requests, one of which is to go back to their country of birth and maybe meet with family—many of them have no family to meet with so maybe just to seek and to find their identity. I believe that they are not unreasonable; they are not going to be asking for too much too soon or forever. I think once the door is opened there will be an initial flood, but I think that they are an honest and dignified group of people. They are not out to rip anybody off; they only want a fair and equitable chance.

Senator TCHEN—Thank you for that. You also said earlier in your submission that you do not believe that government—and I am paraphrasing here—can take the different mores, the different time, as an excuse, and should take on this responsibility in terms of what it owes to child migrants. I appreciate that. However, you also said that a policy should be put in place to

meet the retirement aged care needs and other special needs of the child migrants, going beyond the normal social security type entitlements. We have had indications that in fact, notwithstanding the—

Mrs Colgan—Excuse me, but can I just comment on that? Somebody else made that comment too. Where have I said in the submission ‘beyond the normal entitlement’? I said:

That government develop policy to ensure that the retirement and aged care needs of former child migrants are adequately addressed.

Senator KNOWLES—You have not said that it should go beyond—sorry, if I can just clarify, because I was the one who asked it. What I was asking was whether in that comment you were actually asking that it does go beyond?

Mrs Colgan—No, and I do not know whether I answered that question completely, did I?

Senator KNOWLES—Yes, you did.

Mrs Colgan—As I said before, child migrants are not an unreasonable group—in fact, they are an incredible group of people; their strength and their character blows me away. They are not unreasonable. They do not want anything that they are not entitled to, but perhaps priority access.

Senator TCHEN—I appreciate that, but it is just that evidence the committee has received so far indicates that in fact, repugnant though the treatment they received may have been, actually it was not that much different from the treatment state wards received from welfare agencies in those days generally. So the treatment they received, it is not just endemic through the system; you might say it is pandemic through the system.

Mrs Colgan—Meaning that the treatment they received in the orphanages was similar to the treatment that wards of state were receiving?

Senator TCHEN—Yes.

Mrs Colgan—That does not make it right, though, does it?

Senator TCHEN—No, it does not make it right, but in terms of equity should not the same sort of deal be given to other wards of state?

Mrs Colgan—By ‘wards of state’ I presume you mean Australian children who were made wards of state and who possibly mostly have family here. They really in fact had an infrastructure as they left their orphanages. The former child migrants had no infrastructure. They were at whatever age they left their establishments; they did not have a mother or a father or a sister or a brother to go out to in the Perth metropolitan area or in the state of Western Australia to reunite. So I see it as two very different scenarios, but you could do it for both.

Senator TCHEN—That brings me to the question of priority, because I think in part of your answer to Senator Knowles you also mentioned this matter of priority. In all the issues that you

raised, such as travel funds, access to funding for assistance with family tracings, formal apologies, and this kind of thing: could you give us an indication of the priorities on that? What is your order of priority?

Mrs Colgan—Can I ask the child migrants? I, in fact, listed—

Senator TCHEN—I want to hear the society's point of view.

Mrs Colgan—Well, that is theirs; I have only put it together. This is all from the answers to the letter I sent out. I am putting in a submission on behalf of the child migrants, but I cannot do it without their input. I have in fact put that in order of those priorities.

Senator TCHEN—So it is actually in order?

Mrs Colgan—Their top priority is to find their families and to go back and reunite, if that is what they choose to do. Once again, that choice is theirs: if their top priority is finding family, family reunification. However, on the apology, some wanted the apology; some said, 'What on earth good can an apology do now?', so that was slightly less. Everyone wanted the family tracing and the reunification. Also very high on the list was the accommodation.

Senator TCHEN—I think it was Mr Humphreys who said that the Western Australian government has apologised but has not done anything; is that right? So what good is that?

Mr Humphreys—There has been a fair bit of duck shoving over the years. There should be an apology, yes, but a contribution towards these trips and the funding. Everybody seems to say, 'Oh, the feds'll do it. It's their responsibility,' or, 'The British government should do it'. That is what I said in the first instance: someone bite the bullet and let's get on with the job. I would like to give a summary at some stage if I can.

Senator TCHEN—This is probably unrelated, but I have two questions relating to citizenship. Firstly, I have heard a number of people referring to the cost of applying for citizenship. What was the actual cost of applying for citizenship?

Ms Kruger—I think it was \$85 when I did it.

Senator TCHEN—Oh, they have put a price on it, because when I—

Mr Humphreys—It is \$135 now.

Ms Kruger—It was \$85 in 1995.

Senator TCHEN—I had better check on that because when I did it it was free. On this issue, you said many of your members have difficulties getting help. We have 145 members of federal parliament in Australia and 76 senators. On average, that means about one federal politician for every 90,000 people in Australia, so we are very thick on the ground. Doesn't anybody go to your local members and say, 'I need help. Why am I being hassled by the bureaucracy?'

Mrs Colgan—Can I answer that question?

Mrs Circenis—They only come out at election time.

Mrs Colgan—I helped a former child migrant who had been living out of a suitcase for years—she is beautiful—and I said to her, ‘Look, let’s go to your local member.’ So we did, out we went, and we saw the local member—who was very difficult to get to. We told the situation and we went back two or three different times. We went to the doctor; we got the doctor to write a letter to say that this was an untenable situation, that she was not well enough. She continued to live out of a suitcase, going from one friend’s place to the next friend’s, and these are the child migrants going to the child migrants, because that is their family. We got nowhere. Finally, she went to a specialist for a medical complaint. He said to her, ‘What’s your address?’ She said, ‘I haven’t got one; I live out of my suitcase.’ He said, ‘What do you mean?’, so she told her story. Within a month she had a HomesWest home. So going to your MP does not always work out.

Senator TCHEN—Maybe she should make more demands on them.

Mrs Circenis—It is easier now than it was when we were growing up.

CHAIR—A couple of points that I wanted to pick up on in the conclusion of your—

Mrs Colgan—Before we end, Brian actually has some things that he has prepared that he would like to say? Is that possible?

CHAIR—Certainly, go ahead, Mr Hoare.

Mr Hoare—This is regarding the responsibility of government departments and the church authorities, and I have to get this off my chest, if you do not mind. I clearly recall the everyday realities of the life that I and my friends had at Bindoon, including the lack of proper education, lack of medical treatment, the lack of training and opportunities for personal hygiene—no toothpaste or toothbrushes for a period of 10 months; the forced labour regime, grossly inadequate nutrition, the physical, psychological and sexual abuse, and so on. What this leaves me wondering is how all this could have gone on for so long while various government departments were responsible for monitoring the standard of care we were receiving?

I have attempted to answer this question for myself by going through the archival records at the Western Australian branch of the National Archives. However, I have not had the financial resources or the time to do this satisfactorily. The bulk of the relevant files being available for examination only in Canberra are simply not accessible to me. In effect, through these restrictions the federal government of today is continuing to suppress information which I consider vital to my own mental well-being and my efforts to make some sense of what happened to me and my friends.

CHAIR—Just take your time, Mr Hoare.

Mr Hoare—The very limited amount of archival material I have been able to access has done nothing to reassure me. To begin with, it has become clear to me that at least some of the

government reports on the care of child migrants in Christian Brothers' institutions are totally unreliable, since there are gross contradictions between reports prepared only months apart. It is apparent from the documents and books I have read that there was friction between the WA state welfare authorities and the Christian Brothers. One book written by a Christian Brother states:

The Child Guardianship act of 1946 appointed the Minister for immigration to act as 'sole guardian' until the person reached the age of 21 years—this to the exclusion of mother, father or any other guardian. It was allowable for him to delegate his authority to the secretary of the State Child Welfare Department, resulting in a situation very unsatisfactory to the Brothers, who believed that the very 'materialistic philosophy permeating the program was running counter to Christian ideals.' Also, many officials in the department were regarded as being very arrogant and hostile towards the staff in many institutions. Reverend Fr Stinson the Director of Catholic Immigration, had detected this attitude in many of the reports forwarded to him, so he immediately came to the defence of the staff members. After a long and fruitful conference, the CWD promised every consideration and respect for the Sisters and Brothers, who were not its paid servants.

One of the documents I have, from the Western Australian branch of the National Archives of Australia, is a handwritten memo of 21 October 1949. In part it states:

A conference with Mr W.E. Smith (Lands and Immigration Department) mentioned that conditions at Bindoon and Tardun are far from satisfactory, boys working and not receiving proper education, also that some boys acting improperly, indicating insufficient control. If British authorities were aware of conditions may create uneasiness. Probable cessation of selection of children under the scheme.

Messrs Watts and Thorn Ministers are in conference and perturbed regarding the position. Desires that position be cleared up by an inspection by officers of Commonwealth and state, and further nominations be held up pending investigation.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Hoare.

Mrs Cirenīs—You have done your homework.

CHAIR—I just wanted to raise a few points that have come from this session. Some of you may not be surprised to know that if you say the word 'women', and particularly 'women disadvantaged', my barometer goes straight through the roof and I am really very interested to discover from what you are telling me that the assistance for women is not comparable to the assistance for men out of the migrant scheme. So that is certainly one point that I want to thank you for, because in all the reading I had done I had not really picked up that the girls—women now—are now only just beginning to catch up with access to counselling and support services. Do I have that right?

Ms Kruger—Yes

CHAIR—I think that is astounding. Sexism is still alive and well. We probably need a few more spitfires, Mrs Cirenīs

Mrs Cirenīs—Exactly. They don't come at me twice.

CHAIR—One of the things that I think is very important in this inquiry is to know to what extent it is necessary to compare one set of assistances or one institution with another, but I think the most important thing for this Senate team is not to start a war or promote a war between children who were migrant children who were disadvantaged and Australian children who were disadvantaged through similar or the same institutions. Both those stories, as I think you said, Mrs Colgan, are equally appalling. However, children from Britain lost not just their

mothers and fathers; they lost a country, and there is a difference. This is not to say therefore they are worse—and probably they are—in the treatment they have had, but I think it is important that we do not want to do anything, and I would like to make that clear to you, to promote a war between institutions or carers; what we want to do is discover what is the best way this many years later to address the appalling circumstances and injustice that happened.

The other thing I am shocked by—and I think that is a fair word to put on the record—is that so many records, if there are records to find at all, are found to be false. I wondered how many of your members, Mrs Colgan and those of you who are members, would have a view about the fact that people lied: they said you didn't have a mother and father; they said your name was something different; they said your age was different or they made it up. I am very interested to find out if there isn't a crime called 'falsifying documents'. But I think institutions that wrote down that you were 'Mary Jane Smith' when you were really 'Rosie Kruger'—

Senator MURRAY—I think it is called 'forging and uttering'.

CHAIR—I think it might be indeed, but I actually think we do need to have a look at that dimension of this—that people just filled in false forms; they lied.

Mrs Colgan—That very fact, if I might just interrupt for one moment, has made it incredibly difficult for this group of people to trace family, because they can't, for a start, get a birth certificate. On this journey that the former child migrants went on, there was a beautiful lady on it—and she went over and her name was 'Edna Mary'; she came back 'Mary Elizabeth'. Now, a reporter happened to find her mother, and they reunited—she didn't know anything about it. She had had a detective working on it, but there was no 'Edna Mary', because she was in fact registered as 'Mary Elizabeth'. And that is not just one isolated case; that's everywhere—and false birth dates.

CHAIR—Mr Hoare just made a very important point that others have made too—and that is that a lot of the archival material is actually in Canberra and it is no easy thing for any of you to access it. That access to documents has been raised by a lot of people, and it is something that the committee is going to take very serious regard to. The other important question is: who owns that material? We have been discovering that if it is archived, it actually belongs to the archives, not to the people about whom it is written or who it refers to. So we have a number of questions to take from you.

Mr Hoare—I am saying some people have their birth certificates at the archives and they cannot get their birth certificates. My birth certificate was not at the archives but because I could not get a birth certificate the archives did, back in the late 1980s, write a letter for me stating that, according to their records, I was born on 6 February 1941. I tried to use that as a birth certificate but it just did not work. I wanted to marry and I could not marry because I did not have a birth certificate. It is as simple as that.

Mr Humphreys—Just on the particular one for you. This document is headed 'The Commonwealth of Australia' and it says, the Department of Immigration, Australia House, London. Item 5 says: furnish name and address of parents. It clearly has here, 'parents dead'.

CHAIR—And that was not true?

Mr Humphreys—My father lived for a further 25 years. It also says here:

Furnish name and address of parent, guardian or next of kin. If father is living, his name must be given.

This was signed by a Sister Bonaface on behalf of the Catholic Church. It is clearly a document which is false. The fact that I had other brothers and sisters living in other orphanages: somewhere someone should have investigated the fact. What has clearly happened here is that no-one at that stage bothered to see who was being brought from England. No-one checked on family background, it was just a matter of 'Hand up if you want to go to Australia.' If you put your hand up you went. I did not see this document until 1992.

CHAIR—Mr Humphreys, would the committee be able to get a copy of that document?

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—We would very much appreciate that, thank you. I suppose in summary I would just like to say, listening to my colleagues' questions and your answers, that they are just some of the very important points we have to pick up and pursue as well as the answers you have given to the questions my colleagues asked. This is a very fruitful submission and we have learnt a lot from it. I thank you very much. I also appreciate that in coming here, apart from even going to counselling or trying to trace anything, this is also another way in which we are awakening the ghosts. I want to thank you very much for your generosity in being prepared to open them once again for this federal Senate committee. Thank you very much.

Mr Humphreys—On behalf of the migrants I thank the committee for your work and for instrumenting this inquiry. At the end of the day I would like for the federal government to admit—and as this will be an historical document, the question this inquiry needs to answer is: why did these children come to Australia? Was it to work? Was it to further their education? Was it to help populate Australia? Was it to spread the message of the religious group that sent them to Australia or was it merely as part of the white Australia policy? I believe there have been lots of books—and *The Scheme* says the same thing—that there was a religious content about our coming. There was another which said it was to populate Australia with little white boys. I will tell you now that I have done my contribution there. I have 31 grandchildren out there so I have done my bit for populating Australia.

I would like that to go on historical records somewhere as to why the government of the day decided to populate Australia. It was a clear-cut intention and I would like to know who the brainchild was. If you in this inquiry at some stage answer it I think that people out there will at least have a bit of satisfaction of knowing why we were brought here in the first place. Thank you.

Mrs Colgan—One former child migrant has just given this to me, to answer the question, Senator Murray, that you asked on a time frame for the accommodation. We have just thrown that around. We have not looked at a model. If you were really interested in that we could in fact, with the child migrants, get together, form a little committee and then submit something on that. That is what they want. We have not gone into the model of it. However, she has said that we should look from 20 to 25 years. I think she makes a very good point because most former

child migrants do not get the chance to go back with their younger families until retirement. It could be 20 to 25 years, but if we started with a program of 10 years it would be good.

CHAIR—Mrs Colgan, if your organisation would like to add any further information that strikes you that you think the committee should hear we would be very pleased to receive it. Thank you very much.

Mrs Colgan—I would just like to thank the four former child migrants here. It was not easy getting someone to come and sit in front of this panel but I think they showed great courage.

CHAIR—Hear, hear. Thank you

[10.25 a.m.]

MATHERS, Mrs Josette Denise, Administrator, Personal History Index, Christian Brothers Province, Western Australia

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comment on the capacity in which you appear today?.

Mrs Mathers—I wish to clarify that I am not representing the trustees of the Christian Brothers except in my capacity as the province archivist. My submission to this inquiry was sent as the administrator of PHIND, the personal history index. Mrs Kay Mackie is acting as my clerk today but will not be giving any statements.

CHAIR—I have to say that the committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but should you wish to give any evidence in camera or answers to specific questions you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. We have before us your submission No. 47. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Mrs Mathers—No.

CHAIR—Mrs Mathers, if you would like to make a statement and then field some questions.

Mrs Mathers—As I said, my submission to the inquiry was made as the administrator of PHIND, the personal history index, a position held by the incumbent province archivist of the Christian Brothers. PHIND assists former child migrants to Catholic homes in Australia to locate information about themselves. The index covering Western Australia was officially launched in March 1999, extended to all Australia in 2000 and is available through 11 licensees in South Australia, the ACT, Queensland and Western Australia. There are no licensees currently in Tasmania, Victoria or New South Wales. We have actually been having negotiations with some of the government departments there but they have not shown any interest at this stage in taking the index.

PHIND was the first index of its kind in Australia and was funded and supported by the 10 Catholic religious orders and diocesan agencies who took 1,355 child migrants from the UK and Malta. My submission to the inquiry concerns the accessibility of records, particularly those held by the National Archives of Australia. As previously stated I am also the province archivist and our archive holds some records on the four Christian Brothers institutions in Western Australia. The province office receives many inquiries from former child migrants or their relatives asking for information we may hold. Inquiries have also been received from family in UK trying to locate a sibling they may have only recently discovered was a child migrant. We have found that PHIND is very beneficial here in helping these people.

In addition to direct inquiries, I am often approached by the agencies who are assisting former child migrants in their search for birth families. For example, the Catholic Migrant Centre and C-BERSS, which is the Christian Brothers Ex-Residence and Student Services, and on one occasion by Child Migrants Trust. Most homes hold very few records on former child migrants. Birth certificates for post-war child migrants should have been included in their immigration selection documents. In Western Australia, according to a file note on a National

Archives file in the early 1950s, which I have here and you may have a copy of, the birth certificates should have been sent to the Child Welfare Department. Family and Children's Services have originals or copies of most birth certificates for post-war child migrants. It would seem that in Western Australia a home generally never saw a birth certificate, the document going from the Commonwealth Immigration Department to the State Child Welfare Department.

For some children their baptismal certificates were also included with their immigration documentation. These appear to have been lodged with the Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association, the diocesan agency which was the official custodian of post-war child migrants to Catholic homes in Western Australia. Again, the homes did not have these documents. People often request access to school reports and medical information from their time at a home. However, these have not been retained. This is not unusual. For example, I understand that the education department in Western Australia currently recommends the destruction of student records seven years after a student turns 21.

I have read the *Hansard* of the first public hearing with the Department of Immigration and have noted their responses to a couple of questions regarding inspections of homes and access to files at National Archives. If the committee would like, I have some supplementary information which may be of interest.

CHAIR—Ms Mathers, every piece of information you said that you could provide to the committee, the committee would like. We would like the extra information further to what you have read from the submission of the federal department. But also you said you could offer?

Mrs Mathers—The file note on a National Archives file from the 1950s. It is in the immigration documentation.

CHAIR—That would be very helpful. Would you be able to provide the committee with a list of the 10 or 12 religious organisations that you are archiving for?

Mrs Mathers—Yes. I am doing the administration of the personal history index. I can also give you a booklet which we give to anybody who accesses the personal history index. It is about a 40-page booklet which will give them some idea of what records are available, where they are available and names and addresses of contacts, so we can provide that for you as well.

CHAIR—I will just ask one small question to open. We have had any number of witnesses and written submissions saying that getting data, getting archival material, getting their birth certificates, their school records and baptismal certificates has been a nightmare. They have been met with, 'It doesn't exist; we don't have it; we can't help you.' In many cases people have said from the Catholic Church itself—and here I cannot specify which bit of the Catholic Church they necessarily meant but sometimes it was the school or the organisation, sometimes it was the discern representative—that they have been told absolutely nothing: 'No, we don't we cannot help you.' But subsequently they have been, when somebody else was answering the question, provided with a baptismal certificate or something of this sort, which has then been able to assist people down that path. Can you say whether your understanding is that many people have been met by such obstruction? If your answer is yes, is that now changing?

Mrs Mathers—I have been the archivist for the Christian Brothers for the past three years. Very shortly after I started we began to work on this project for the personal history index. In doing that project we accessed as many sources as we could within the time frame and within the budget. That included records that were held by the Catholic Migrant Centre in Victoria Square, which is the successor agency to the one that I referred to earlier, the Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association. They were the official custodians of the children. Having read some of the Immigration Department's public hearing evidence, this did not happen in every state but in Western Australia there are on some archival files—and I do not have copies of those—written agreements between the Child Welfare Department, which was the official guardian in Western Australia after 1952, and the Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association—if I can abbreviate that to CEMWA for simplicity. CEMWA then basically allocated the boys to the Christian Brothers and the girls either to the Sisters of Nazareth or the Sisters of Mercy—this is my understanding of the research I have done.

CHAIR—Did they allocate the 'in lieu of parent responsibility' or did they retain that?

Mrs Mathers—I do not know. I have not read the documents that closely. The 'in lieu of parent' bit I understood was part of the guardianship. The custodianship—and if I can just quote a little bit from the regulations that accompany the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946 and which stood through the changes of 1952, it says:

- (1) A custodian shall provide for the welfare and care of every immigrant child of whom he is the custodian.
- (2) Without limiting the operation of the last preceding sub-regulation, the duties and obligations of a custodian in relation to any such immigrant child shall be of the like kind to those of a person in relation to a child who is committed to his care, or of whom he becomes the guardian or foster parent, in pursuance of the Child Welfare laws of the State in which the custodian is resident.

CHAIR—I am completely goggle-eyed.

Mrs Mathers—I know, legalese, but I am sure somebody will be able to interpret it better for you.

CHAIR—Could you take on notice for me any evidence you can give us about the difference between custodianship and guardianship. My understanding is that the Commonwealth government signed an agreement with the British government to bring the children here and that the Commonwealth actually had the guardianship of those children which they then passed over to the welfare department in the relevant state, in this case Western Australia. You are saying that the Western Australian welfare department then passed that to the—

Mrs Mathers—The custodianship, not the guardianship.

CHAIR—I am interested to know whether the Catholics passed the custodianship to the institution, to the Christian Brothers.

Mrs Mathers—My understanding is no because, looking at the documentation, any negotiations regarding subsidies, equipment allowances or anything like that for any of the children who were in Catholic homes in Western Australia was conducted by CEMWA with either the state government or the federal government. CEMWA also on occasions looking at

some of the files would reprimand the superior of a home if he happened to change a child from one home to another without telling CEMWA, because CEMWA had to let the Child Welfare Department know the movements of any children.

Similarly, once the child left a home, say at the age of 14 or 16, depending on their circumstances, the custodianship of a child remained with CEMWA until the age of 21. CEMWA was responsible then for placing the child out in employment, finding accommodation for the child and for reporting to the Child Welfare Department on the movements of that child. That was also part of the obligations under the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act, that they had to theoretically keep track of any movements of children between homes and where they all were.

My understanding is that the Child Welfare Department maintained a card system which tracked where the children were. For many children—I am not saying for all of them because over time things become lost—and for most children post-1952—which is when the Child Welfare Department had the guardianship; prior to that it was Lands and Immigration who was the official guardian—they should track where the child went. There should be dates, places and where they were living. There should be information on those cards as to whether there were any medical conditions or major medical treatment that occurred. Under the legislation there is actually quite strictly prescribed the type of records that the guardian, the authority who was delegated the guardianship, had to keep. That is all part of the regulations of 1946. Included in that was: the name, address, occupation and religion of every custodian; the name of every child in the custody of the custodian—this had to be kept by the Child Welfare Department or the Child Welfare Authority in a state—the age, sex and religion of every child; the names, addresses and occupations of the parents or guardians of the child in the United Kingdom; the date of arrival of the child in Australia and the name of ship in which the child arrived; and any other particulars as the minister determines.

Theoretically, that information should have been kept. Practically it did not always happen, partly because in some cases documents did not accompany children when they arrived, for a variety of reasons. Even though the documents should have arrived with the children, they often did not. Again, if you look through the correspondence files at National Archives you will find that there are letters from Commonwealth to state to Kenworth saying, ‘We don’t have these birth certificates; where are they?’ But as I said it did not always happen but theoretically they should have come with these documents. I have gone round the question five times I know.

CHAIR—You have not; you have done splendidly and it is of great assistance. There are about five thousand questions that I would want to ask and I suspect my colleagues do. I am still interested and it may be that we have to pursue this with other people and not the archivists: this chain of responsibility and whether or not, for instance, the Child Welfare Department or Lands and Immigration before 1952 ever did anything to satisfy themselves about the truth of the information on any of those bits of paper.

Mrs Mathers—According to the what they call the selection document for a child migrant which is called an LEM3—and I think Mr Humphreys has passed over a copy of his own document to you—there is a facility there that says the date of birth. For a lot of child migrants there is a little annotation above it that says, ‘This date of birth has been verified from a birth

certificate and has been signed.’ That agrees with this other document that I mentioned from the 1950s. If I can just quickly read it to you it says:

Under the Child Migration Scheme as it was in 1950-51, the selection dossiers were sent from London to the receiving state branch, and they included a birth certificate. As these children were subject to the control of the Child Welfare Department, birth certificates were detached from the dossiers and forwarded to the minister’s delegate under the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act, that is, the Assistant Director of the Child Welfare Department. If a birth certificate cannot be found, the date of birth of the child, as shown on the selection documents, would have been based on the information on the birth certificate and she could therefore apply to Somerset House for a duplicate.

So, presumably, this note was in a response to a specific inquiry. The only thing that seems to have been verified on this would be the date of birth; the others details were not. I have a couple of copies that I am also quite happy to provide to the committee—I have blanked out the names so that there are no problems of confidentiality—which will show that there were two styles of this LEM3 that were sent: the first was a two-page document, handwritten and with very limited details; the other one was a four-page document. I have only copied two pages of it but it has far more detail, such as when the child was admitted to the home. Sometimes it may say when there was last contact with the parents, and it gives more medical history on these documents. I have been unable to establish whether it was a timeframe when the documents changed, whether it was a location in the UK or why the documents changed, but they are all official Immigration Department documents. As I said, I am quite happy to make those available, together with a medical examination form.

CHAIR—I suppose one of the questions for the committee is: where does the responsibility for false documents lie? From what you are telling us, I suspect that when the Western Australian Child Welfare Department got a document it was through the Australian federal Immigration Department from the UK government, which was, presumably—we have already seen some examples—getting documents signed by an orphanage in Northern Ireland or northern England or wherever. It would seem that the falsification happened at the institution -

Mrs Mathers—At the UK end.

CHAIR—Yes, and that it was never checked by the UK government—or we do not know that, do we?

Mrs Mathers—I do not know that. What I would say is that in most instances the information on names and dates of birth that a child arrived with was information that was provided at the UK end.

CHAIR—On the archives, do you have any information that would answer the question already put to us about ‘Why was I never allowed to receive any letters?’

Mrs Mathers—I have nothing, no.

CHAIR—There are no archival records of letters?

Mrs Mathers—I have one letter in the archives that was from a pre-1938 arrival. It was sent by a home in England—I think it was one of the Nazareth houses—just basically saying, ‘These

are the five boys that came from this home. Please let them know that we're thinking about them,' but that is the only correspondence I have seen.

CHAIR—You have no archival letters from mothers looking to make contact with their children?

Mrs Mathers—I have not, no. In many cases I believe that sort of information, if it came through, would have gone to CEMWA; it would not have come necessarily to the homes. You see, most of the documentation, correspondence et cetera that I have had access to has been held by the diocesan agency, because they were the main custodian of the child.

CHAIR—And there are no letters in CEMWA from parents seeking to make contact with their children or from children seeking to make contact with their parents?

Mrs Mathers—There may be. I have not gone through every single file there. One of the things that seems to be coming to light now, and which refers back to one of your earlier questions, was that there is a much more open policy these days about providing access to documents. Anything that somebody wants from my archives I provide. If I have a question about the sensitivity of some of the information I would prefer that they went through a counsellor of some sort. I suppose one of the advantages that I have, if I can call it that, is that people who have major axes to grind with the Christian Brothers tend not to approach the Christian Brothers' archives; they will make their inquiries through one of the other agencies assisting them, either C-BERSS, the Catholic Migrant Centre or the Child Migrants Trust. So, generally, the people who come to me will not have had problems. They may have little gripes, because I think everybody does with their childhood anyway, but they do not have major problems and therefore the sensitive information I have I do not have to pass to them direct.

CHAIR—Do you have any archival material of reports of sexual assault or thrashings and beatings or insufficient clothing of children at any of those homes?

Mrs Mathers—No, I have not come across anything of that nature. There are a lot of documents in the archives, as you would appreciate, and I obviously have not been through every single one of them. My research tends to focus so that if I get an inquiry then I go looking for that information.

CHAIR—Can I just ask, as a last question: what do you do if you are asked for material that you discover is archived in Canberra?

Mrs Mathers—Can I approach that in a slightly different way and refer back to my submission and to some of the evidence of the Immigration Department. I have since had an informal off-the-record discussion with the National Archives about original documentation. Those documents are not owned by the National Archives; they are owned by the Immigration Department still. To the best of the informal advice I have been given, it does not require a change in legislation; what it requires is an agreement between the National Archives and the Immigration Department to vary their disposal—which is what they call it when they are putting it in there—so that original documents can be handed back. Now, if the committee or the government decides that that is what is required to be done, then, presumably, the mechanism will require negotiation between those two departments. But, in a brief space of time and from

the limited advice that they were able to give me, it did not require a change in legislation. That is one aspect.

The other thing I also brought up with National Archives, and I have done so on a couple of occasions, firstly with their Perth office and then also with their Canberra office, was this issue of making files more readily available—for example, inspection reports of Clontarf or Tardun or whatever that are in Canberra—to people in Western Australia. They are already considering, not for child migrants, digitising some of their records and making them available on the Internet. Now, whether again an instruction comes from government to National Archives to say this is a priority, that I think is a possibility. Obviously, in some cases names would have to be what they call ‘expunged’ -

Senator KNOWLES—Who would be the censor in that situation, though?

Mrs Mathers—That is what I am saying. Names would need to be expunged—which is a policy that they have in place anyway—so that there is no personal identifying information there, but in things like inspection reports very rarely is a child referred to. Whilst I am on the subject of inspection reports, in the first day’s hearing there was also some discussion as to whether there was monitoring of the homes by the Commonwealth department as well as state governments, and there was. Inspections were carried out reasonably regularly, and for some homes they were carried out at quarterly intervals. I do not have these available to pass to you, but as an example I have a letter here from 1949 which was a report sent by Lands and Surveys, who were the state guardians, to the Commonwealth department attaching an inspection report. These are just some photocopies I took of National Archives files.

Here I have an official minute paper by the officer in charge of the British and Child Migration Section at Victoria Park—which is a Commonwealth department—on his inspection of the Clontarf home in 1953, and a joint inspection that was done of Tardun by the Commonwealth Immigration Department, the state immigration department and the Child Welfare Department in 1949. Also, at the back of the booklet on PHIND that we will be giving you there are lots of files that I have identified as being possibly of interest to former child migrants if they are looking for the peripheral information, not necessarily name identified information, because these inspection reports are quite interesting.

Sometimes they will tell you that the day the inspector visited the children were all sunburnt because they had spent too long on the river, or that Clontarf needed flyscreens and there were lots of flies in the kitchen, or that the bedwetting area, the dormitory there needed to have linoleum on the floor and not just be bare concrete. They are of interest to people who are trying to research for any information about themselves or about their surroundings. Those sorts of things are held on the inspection reports.

At the back of this 40-page booklet that we hand out every time somebody accesses the index are other sources of information. There are a whole heap of files that are held at the National Archives that people can access. Although at the moment I am only talking about Western Australia—because that is where my research has been done—this index actually covers the whole of Australia. We had researchers working in other states trying to identify information or trying to locate where information was held. One of the other problems that we came across was regarding these immigration selection documents—a copy of which, I think, has been passed to

you. We have been unable to locate immigration selection documents for any of the child migrants who went to Tasmania. We have looked in the National Archives in Hobart and Melbourne; they are not there. We have been unable to locate immigration selection documents for a majority of children who went to Queensland. They can often be a very useful source of information, but it would require a great deal of research to try and determine whether they actually were ever deposited with the National Archives. Maybe that is another area where the Immigration Department could assist.

Senator MURRAY—Mrs Mathers, do you have a qualification in this field?

Mrs Mathers—I hold a Bachelor of Applied Science in records management, with distinction, from Curtin University.

Senator MURRAY—So that would make you an expert witness, as opposed to an experienced witness.

Mrs Mathers—I do not know; I do not like calling myself an expert.

Senator MURRAY—It gives a greater credibility to your professional opinion in this field. If you have done that qualification you will know that archival law and precedent are very complex. My experience on various Senate committees and with the Commission of Government in WA has indicated that it is a difficult field. One of the key issues is the property issue: whose property the documents ultimately are; and in this situation whether documents which are properly the property of a guardian should be available in the original to adults once that guardianship has ceased.

Mrs Mathers—If I can draw a distinction: if we are talking about things like a birth certificate or a document of identity, which, to me, is personal property, and speaking to other people involved in archives, the only reason that they have ended up on an archival file is because they were never given out or have never been restored to the person whose documents they are. If you are looking at things like an immigration selection document, which was a form which was completed to satisfy a government accountability process, then the original of that cannot be given out; that has to remain with the department.

Senator MURRAY—Perhaps that is an issue. What I am leading to is: if there are legislative and private contractual obligations between agencies, between agencies and governments and so on, which impede the availability of archival documents in a way which is unsatisfactory, given modern values and needs, then the only way to overcome that, of course, is to change the law so that effectively you can override what are refusals to provide information based on existing understanding. Now, yesterday in the public hearing we had one of those very instances where a witness said the ladies at the referral centre had advised him that he had a mother and then refused to give him access to the documents which said who the mother was. That is on the public record. I see you shaking your head, and I do not know whether that is in denial or dismay.

Mrs Mathers—Dismay probably.

Senator MURRAY—But that is the fact of it. Given your professional qualifications and experience, what I would like to ask you is to take on notice to give some thought as to whether there are any binding contractual legislative provisions which in your view unnecessarily impede access—

Mrs Mathers—Are we talking about documents in the public arena or are we talking about documents owned by private organisations?

Senator MURRAY—I am talking about both in the private and public arena. For a child migrant it is irrelevant where it is; they want either to get the original, if they can, or to have access. If you could examine that for us and drop us a note subsequently so we can be clear about that -

Mrs Mathers—If I can give you an example of that instance in my own archives—

Senator MURRAY—Let me be very clear—because you will get a record from the *Hansard* of what I am asking for—that I am asking for any legislative or contractual relationship which prohibits or impedes, in your view, proper access to documentation, either at the private organisational or the governmental level.

Mrs Mathers—I will do my best.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you very much.

Mrs Mathers—I am not a legal expert so—

Senator MURRAY—I am just looking for guidance, because the committee can only rely on guidance. The next thing I want to ask you about is this: you refer a great deal to archival material and you referred, I think, to 10 or 12 Catholic organisations for which you have this task.

Mrs Mathers—No, that is not quite correct. I am the archivist for the Christian Brothers.

Senator MURRAY—Just for the Christian Brothers?

Mrs Mathers—Just for the Christian Brothers. Where the 10 other agencies come in is in the personal history index, which assists people to find their records. Those 10 agencies—

Senator MURRAY—I have that clear now; we do not need to go further. Excuse me rushing you but I am conscious that the time is going to go. What I want to know is: do you have all the archival material together or is there still a big job to do? In other words, is there archival material still located in other places where it still has to be collected, indexed and put together?

Mrs Mathers—It is unlikely.

Senator MURRAY—Unlikely?

Mrs Mathers—Yes. I cannot be positive about that but to the best of my knowledge I have the archival material for the four institutions that the Christian Brothers ran. It mainly consists of admission registers and that is about it.

Senator MURRAY—Then I wanted to know from you briefly how the information is available, the technical side of it. Is it just physically available, is it on microfiche; has any of it been computerised? How is that done?

Mrs Mathers—This is me talking as the province archivist now.

Senator MURRAY—That is right.

Mrs Mathers—The material that I make available is usually in the form of a transcript of an admission register. There are two reasons for that -

Senator MURRAY—That is a physical, original document?

Mrs Mathers—No, it is a copy; it is a transcript. I am taking the information that is in a register and I am re-entering it into a Word document.

Senator MURRAY—That is a summary then.

Mrs Mathers—No, it is a full transcript; everything that is in the document I am transferring onto another sheet of paper. There are two reasons why I do that and do not give a copy of the original. The first reason is the original admission registers have a number of names on a page and therefore there are privacy issues; I cannot just photocopy a page which may identify other people. The second reason is that these volumes are fragile and I cannot keep putting them on photocopiers, because they are not going to last.

Senator MURRAY—Is there any censorship process in that, and I do not mean that in a negative sense?

Mrs Mathers—No, there is not.

Senator MURRAY—In the sense of leaving things out.

Mrs Mathers—That is a question people ask because they are having to rely on my honesty to transcribe everything that is there. I do transcribe everything that is there, but that is, as I said, somebody having to rely on me saying that. I have been investigating the possibility of getting a handheld scanner so that I can scan a line of an admission register, but with the rest of my workload I have not finished that process yet.

Senator MURRAY—You operate entirely on your own?

Mrs Mathers—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—There are no volunteers to help you?

Mrs Mathers—No, I work part-time in the archives; I work four days a week.

Senator MURRAY—Listening to that, since you have had three years only in the job—

Mrs Mathers—And it was three days a week prior to that.

Senator MURRAY—I would think there is still a lot to do.

Mrs Mathers—There is, because it is obviously not just child migrants that I am involved in as a province archivist.

Senator MURRAY—Yes, I understand that. So assistance of some form in your field would speed up that process, would it not?

Mrs Mathers—Yes and no. There is still a limited amount that one can handle, and even in a managerial role there are still certain processes and evaluations one needs to go through in order to complete the job satisfactorily.

Senator MURRAY—Fairbridge's submission says that records were destroyed. Were records destroyed from the institutions you are dealing with?

Mrs Mathers—I would suggest they probably have been because there are very few records left. As I said in my opening statement, it is not common practice to retain records indefinitely. It is just a fact of life. Most schools destroy their records, as I said, once a child has reached 28.

Senator MURRAY—You indicated that child migrants who have had a bad experience with the Christian Brothers tend not to approach you. I would assume they would go via other agencies, so you would be approached by the Child Migrants Trust or other institutions -

Mrs Mathers—Very rarely by the Child Migrants Trust. As I said, only on one occasion have they approached me directly.

Senator MURRAY—Why do they not approach you?

Mrs Mathers—I do not know; you will have to ask them that.

Senator MURRAY—I think we will. The last question I have is this, and could you take this on notice. One of the requirements seems to be, because large numbers of former child migrants are not well off, that there is an easy and efficient method of accessing essential information. Since that information can be in many places, in Australia and the UK, you need a technical ability to move between those, and I am very interested in the work of the government department and Mr Robert Fisher, and I have asked him questions on this line as well, but I would appreciate it if you could advise the committee with some thought as to ways of technically improving the multi-agency access to essential information.

Mrs Mathers—That is a little bit outside my area, and I think that probably from the perspective of the Christian Brothers you will be receiving more evidence in a hearing later on. As I said, it is not an area I get involved in so I do not actually have an opinion on that.

Senator MURRAY—All right.

Mrs Mathers—I know we are running out of time, but after I put in my original submission I worked out some other statistics which might be of interest to the committee, and you can take it away and look at it. Some of it is to do with the ages at which children arrived, some of it is to do with the arrivals by year of arrival and country of origin, and it is broken up between the UK child migrants and the Catholic ones. If I can just show you from a distance: this graph here illustrates the ages at which people arrived—it may not be accurate because not always I am advised, as a PHIND administrator, of the deaths of child migrants. You can see that this big peak here is the age range of 55 to 59 and this one here is 60 to 64.

CHAIR—Are these arrivals who were then sent to Christian Brothers?

Mrs Mathers—No, Catholic homes in Australia.

CHAIR—All the Catholic homes in Australia.

Mrs Mathers—This one here shows the ages at which children arrived, so you will see that there is a big peak here which is the ages of eight, nine, 10 and 11, and that is probably also illustrated here. If you take that bit of the pie chart, 64 per cent of children were aged between eight and 12 and the average of children to Catholic homes was 9½.

CHAIR—Do you have any of those broken down by sex?

Mrs Mathers—No.

CHAIR—So we do not know how many of those were girls and how many boys?

Mrs Mathers—I could do that.

CHAIR—If you could at some stage—

Mrs Mathers—I am able to get quite a lot of statistical information out of the index so if there are any other statistics that the committee—

CHAIR—Is it about 50-50 girls and boys or two-thirds boys?

Mrs Mathers—By sex to the whole of Australia there were 894 males and 371 females to Catholic homes. Most of the girls came from the UK—it was about half—so from the UK it was 725 males and 320 females.

CHAIR—That information is extremely useful. We would appreciate that and anything further. One last question: what does the word 'province' refer to?

Mrs Mathers—The structure of the Christian Brothers within Australia. The ‘province’ is the administrative centre for Western Australia and South Australia.

CHAIR—Yes, that is of recent times, isn’t it?

Mrs Mathers—The provincial office, sorry.

CHAIR—The province used to be run out of Strathfield, and Strathfield covered the whole of Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

Mrs Mathers—It covered the whole of Australia at one stage. I think it was in about 1950-something that it split, so that it was then run out of Melbourne—Western Australia and South Australia were run out of Victoria but Tasmania and New South Wales had the rest of it—and then our province commenced in 1967. Another difficulty from the province archivist’s point of view is that the original records would have been in Sydney. When the provinces split they tried to divide the records that pertained to the other provinces and then they were sent to Melbourne. Then when they split again they were sent to Western Australia.

CHAIR—I think we have to finish at this time, but thank you, indeed, Mrs Mathers. We have given you some more homework, but the information you have provided is enormously useful. There are a number of dimensions to this inquiry, and one of them is picking up the difficulty people have had in accessing records, so we are very much assisted by the information you are now getting through archives and documents. But, as you say, you have been doing that for three years?

Mrs Mathers—I have been a province archivist for three years, yes, and the administrator of PHIND since March 1999 when it was launched.

CHAIR—So, many of the stories we have heard about difficulties in the early nineties are entirely consistent with the fact that you did not exist then.

Proceedings suspended from 11.08 a.m. to 11.21 a.m.

HAWKINS, Mr John Patrick, Chair, Australian Child Migrant Foundation

PLOWMAN, Professor David Henry, Executive Officer, Australian Child Migrant Foundation

CHAIR—I welcome the representatives from the Australian Child Migrant Foundation. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence, or answers to specific questions in camera you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. We have before us your submission, No. 46. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Mr Hawkins—No.

CHAIR—I will ask you to now make an opening statement and then take questions.

Mr Hawkins—I would ask my colleague, Professor Plowman, to do that.

Prof. Plowman—Thank you. Our submission is essentially the submission that we made to the British government and therefore should be seen in that light. We take the view that child migration schemes were established by government to government arrangements and actions, and therefore it follows that those governments involved have ongoing responsibilities in relation to those schemes and the child migrants who came out under them. In relation to child migration, to Australia at least, it has been argued that governments have, by and large, not even acknowledged their responsibilities, let alone acted upon those responsibilities. For this reason we welcomed very much the British inquiry, as we do this particular inquiry.

In our view, child migration has resulted in a range of psychological, physical and social problems for many former migrants. Their abandonment by their home government, the government of their birth, is perpetuated by continuing inactivity today which does not allow for potential healing of the many problems. In our experience, an important element in the process is that of locating parents, usually the mother, seeking a reunion, which usually entails travel to the United Kingdom or to Malta, and, importantly, providing pre- and post- reunion counselling. Our experience suggests that in the absence of such counselling—and in particular in the absence of assent on the part of the parents to the reunion—the outcomes can leave former child migrants even more scarred than before the attempted reunion.

In addition to reunion, our submission has canvassed a range of other activities and instruments which we believe need to be implemented. Our experience is that there are a number of organisations seeking to assist child migrants, but there is little coordination of activities and, I would have to say, a degree of territory proprietorship. For this reason, we have recommended the establishment of a peak coordinating body. We believe that former child migrants should be afforded a role in such a body. We reiterate our strong view that the United Kingdom, Australian and Western Australian governments have a moral responsibility to assist former migrants, the stolen white generations.

CHAIR—Do you wish to add anything, Mr Hawkins?

Mr Hawkins—No, that is fine, thank you.

Senator KNOWLES—I would like to start where you finished in terms of you saying there was little coordination of activities and that there were territorial or proprietorial restrictions and responsibilities. Could you give us examples of where you see that actually happening at the moment?

Prof. Plowman—Perhaps I can preface this by saying that, as well as being involved with the Tardun Old Boys Association and this foundation, I was also one of the foundation directors of C-BERSS. I did that for three years and it has given me a fair experience in dealing with former migrants. I am, happily, not a scarred former migrant, but I have tremendous empathy and sympathy for those who do have difficulties. Part of the difficulty is that there is an anti-Catholic divide within this particular debate. Some organisations claim to be neutral and therefore they will not deal with those other organisations which they purport to be church influenced. In the case of C-BERSS, for example, C-BERSS actually had the funding which enabled people to go back to the United Kingdom, and C-BERSS would have given you information on how many they have been able to assist. At the time I left the organisation we had assisted close to a hundred former migrants to go back to the United Kingdom.

What C-BERSS did not have was a capacity to locate parents—which is very tiresome, very difficult—but it is not only locating them. Having located the parent, usually the mother, you need time in which to actually get the mother acclimatised to the fact that, some 40 years after the event, having been happily married for the last 38 years, husband and children not knowing about little Johnny, she is affronted with this new reality. Just as child migrants, of course, have rights, so do parents. I did mention in my opening review that, where that counselling was not done and where the parent was not given the opportunity to, in a sense, absorb this new reality, come to grips with it, get the rest of her family involved with it and then accept Johnny when Johnny came home, then in fact the reunion was generally disastrous. There has been one instance of a murder taking place as a result of a bad reunion.

My point is that C-BERSS had the expertise and the capacity to assist migrants in terms of their travel arrangements. We did not have the expertise to be able to go to the United Kingdom ourselves to find records, to find parents, to do all of the counselling, but there were other organisations which not only could do this but in fact did it very, very well. A particular organisation which we thought was the most appropriate one for us to deal with—and therefore get a relationship where they could do one part of the equation and we would do the other—essentially would only speak to us through their lawyer and also had any of their clients, as they called them, filling in forms which, amongst other things, required that if they went with this particular organisation they could not even divulge such things as their name, their date of birth and the institutions to which they went to other—

CHAIR—Which organisation was that, Professor?

Prof. Plowman—I am not prepared to mention that.

CHAIR—Would you agree if we could name it?

Senator KNOWLES—This is covered by parliamentary privilege.

Prof. Plowman—I am really more interested in outlining the problem rather than naming organisations which, by and large, do an excellent job on behalf of child migrants. But in my view there is a need for some umbrella organisation which has the capacity to force these institutions to operate where their comparative advantages lie. In the last discussion Senator Murray was following up with archival information. Here is a classic example of there being little territories, archives owned by different institutions that are not prepared to let go that information so that there actually could be a national archive. They defend it on the basis of privacy and a whole range of other things, but I would submit to you that it would be quite possible for a parliamentary archival system to have exactly the same privacy standards as individuals. So I think there are areas where we do need to bring about some sort of coordinated activity.

Senator KNOWLES—I am interested to know how many former child migrants you have on the foundation?

Prof. Plowman—The foundation is not a member-based organisation. We have a board whose activity is primarily that of trying to raise funds and then using those funds to assist former child migrants irrespective of which institution they were placed with.

Senator KNOWLES—Thank you for that answer. The reason I asked that question is that it was a little unclear to me from reading your submission whether or not people actually came to you seeking the support. In your submission you state:

The Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF) is an independent, non-denominational organisation which has been established by former child migrants to lobby government, church groups and other institutions.

Hence my question as to how many former child migrants you have involved, considering that the ACMF was actually founded by them.

Prof. Plowman—I think a better answer is simply to point out that we have assisted about 80 former child migrants on return trips to the United Kingdom, so we do not believe that we have to be a membership-based organisation. In fact, part of the reason for forming the foundation was that previously we had belonged to a membership-based organisation—John should perhaps be answering this question, because he was the founder of the organisation—but we felt that that led to inequalities in the sense that we could cater very well for people from our own institution but we were very conscious of the fact that there were other people from other institutions who were having no activities done on their behalf.

Mr Hawkins—The foundation is basically a child migrant idea, a child migrant initiative. At the time we could not see as being fair or equitable the idea that a group of British child migrants could get funding from a particular religious organisation, yet other boys or girls from the various non-Catholic organisations were simply denied that at the time. We found that it was a very important thing for us, as child migrants, to become a non-political, non-religious group. We set this group up as just that, to go to the various religious organisations, governments and other people who were involved with child migration and seek funding. The idea at the time was, and we still hold this belief, that maintaining basically a ‘no-blame’ policy would be the best way of raising funds, and we proved that by raising funds. We were able to open doors and

get almost immediate assistance from people who would not otherwise contribute, and we still maintain that today.

We found that because of the publicity blaming different organisations for their involvement it was very, very difficult to actually extract any funds from these organisations whatsoever. So, with a bit of time and lots of lobbying, we were able to extract funds in the end. However, despite our best efforts at the time, we were not able to extract a single dollar from either the Australian government or the British government who we believed were the most culpable of all the elements within the whole child migration movement.

Senator KNOWLES—So funding is met by donations; is that what you are saying?

Mr Hawkins—Basically donations, people we had approached, organisations, religious organisations, individuals—whoever we thought might contribute, we approached. We continued to receive funding almost until the British government announced its own travel arrangements. I think you will find that one of the major planks of our submission was that the British government—being the most responsible for this whole thing—provide funding for travel, because we thought the most important thing for any child migrant was to have some funding to go back and to meet their siblings, parents or whatever. To us that was the most important thing. But, as I say, despite our best efforts we could not, and still have not, received any funding whatsoever from government, either British or Australian.

Senator KNOWLES—Is your funding ongoing still? When you talk about establishing funding, it is not just for the establishment of the foundation, it is an ongoing thing that people are prepared to contribute to to provide for the travel and counselling services that you describe in your submission?

Mr Hawkins—We have not approached any organisation since the British government announced its funding programs through the International Social Service. We now believe that our role, and I think the role of this committee, ought to be to pressure the British government to loosen up the strings, to make the provision of these funds easier to access, because at the moment the criteria are so stringent that too many people are unable to get access to these funds. It is being handled in a mean-fisted way. We were quite happy to show them our criteria, which were very, very compassionate. These criteria are not compassionate and we think that the biggest problem at the moment is not that there are no funds available any more; it is that the British government is mean-fisted with the way it is approaching the running of the travel scheme, which we see as a major problem at the moment.

Senator KNOWLES—How would you have those criteria adjusted?

Mr Hawkins—I would think that one of the roles of this committee could be to look at the criteria in detail—and perhaps look at criteria such as our own and other criteria from other organisations—and approach the British government, as an Australian government, to loosen up and provide much easier access. A million pounds is probably not a lot of money but I think at the end of the day the British government will still be holding the majority of those funds, and within five years they will probably still have those funds because of the strictness. Once again, it is a no-blame situation. Go straight back to the British government and say, ‘Please, do the

right thing. You've made the money available. Make it now so that people can actually get access to these funds before it is too late.'

Senator KNOWLES—Does the foundation believe that the funding should be means tested?

Mr Hawkins—Absolutely not—it would not be necessary to means test the majority in any case because so many people have actually fallen by the wayside. We were very, very compassionate about the way we ran our criteria and I do not believe that there was any necessity to means-test it. The reality was that those people that we were associated with who had done very well in their life and who needed to travel back to England to meet up with family for the first time by and large funded their own travel. It seemed to be the case most of the time, and we have quite a few examples of that. So they were not prepared to actually come to us and take precious resources from us if they could afford it themselves.

Senator KNOWLES—The foundation indicates in the submission a need for more independent counselling services. I have two questions, I suppose. Firstly, where are the services currently falling down, and, secondly, how big do you think is the area of unmet need?

Prof. Plowman—Let me take the second question about unmet need first. The answer to that is that we really do not know. When C-BERSS was created there was an assumption that it would be an organisation that would serve its role in perhaps three years and everything would be over and done with. The reality is that, as we have dug deeper and deeper and more and more people have come to light, we have discovered the needs are actually a lot more intense than we had anticipated, and more diverse. For example, we pointed out in our submission things like literacy; we never thought that was a problem but it clearly is. Where it falls down, in part, is again there is the divide that if one looks at where the services are being provided one has to say that C-BERSS is probably an exception in the sense that it is providing counselling services. But C-BERSS, by its very nature, is limited by the fact that it is seen to be associated with the Christian Brothers and, therefore—not surprisingly—many of the people who feel that they need counselling are not going to C-BERSS.

Senator KNOWLES—Even though the counsellors are quite independent of the Christian Brothers? It is a perception that you are talking about?

Prof. Plowman—I think there is a perception that, since it is funded by the Christian Brothers, how could it possibly be independent? From my own work on C-BERSS I know that the committee of management of C-BERSS made it very plain to the Christian Brothers that they would only report to them on financial issues and nothing else, and for the three years that I was there that is what they did. But, nevertheless, there is a perception that if it is funded by a church organisation it is part of a church organisation, and I can understand that perception. I do know that when she was Minister for Social Services, Cheryl Edwardes was very happy to attempt to assist in this particular area, but the reality is that trying to locate the people who need this information and get them the sort of counselling they require is very, very difficult.

I did say in my opening remarks that if we go back to what we see as a very, very important part of the healing process, that is, reunion, we believe that the counselling pre- and post-reunification is sufficiently important that it should be a condition of any person being funded for reunion purposes. The other point I would make in relation to your last question to Mr

Hawkins is that the foundation would be very happy to send you the criteria which we used when we were assessing people for travel assistance.

Senator KNOWLES—Thank you, that would be very useful. Can I just come onto one area that we really have not gone into in the day and a half we have been conducting these hearings in Perth, and that is the area that you just touched on: literacy and numeracy. It has been raised with me over some months that that has been a huge problem for a lot of the former child migrants. I understand that there have been facilities made available to many of them to be able to improve their literacy and numeracy, albeit in a lot of cases probably too late to have an impact. Would you like to comment to the committee about what you see as having been done to assist those who claim that they have had a poor education and therefore it has led to poor work options and skills for the rest of their lives?

Prof. Plowman—I would not claim to have too much expertise in this area. The issue of literacy and numeracy was one that came to C-BERSS as I was about to move off the management committee. I do not know whether or not CBERSS has given evidence as yet, but if they have not—

Senator KNOWLES—This afternoon.

Prof. Plowman—I think they would be in the position to answer that.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Hawkins, this submission came in under your signature. Am I correct in the fact that this is the same submission given to the United Kingdom Health Committee in 1998?

Mr Hawkins—Yes, that is correct.

Senator MURRAY—Is there any reason that you did not update it, especially in view of the report of that committee?

Mr Hawkins—We felt quite negative about another inquiry; there have been many before and we felt this was just another one. We felt that the British government inquiry was easily the most important to us as they were in a position to take responsibility, given that their role was easily superior to the role of the Australian government or the role of the institutions. So it was our view that we redirect the submission. There may have been some minor changes, especially given the fact that the British government has since come up with some travel funding and some things have changed. The other reason was a question of time. We are all volunteers—nobody gets paid to do any work—and it is very difficult to get someone to spend the hours and hours that are necessary to actually put these things together. I think you would understand that. So, rather than reinvent the wheel, I think most of the wheel is in place in this submission and for that reason we presented this one.

Senator MURRAY—Moving on to your no-blame policy, I heard you say that the United Kingdom and the Australian governments were the most culpable, and I would think that is an application of blame straight away—perhaps I am putting words into your mouth. Let me ask this question: do you believe that if individuals are able at law to pursue criminal assault, sexual

assault, stolen wages, any of those issues, that they should be able to do so? I assume your no-blame policy does not say that individuals should not take up matters that they feel they should.

Mr Hawkins—The no-blame policy, as I mentioned earlier, was simply the methodology used to obtain funds. We are not saying that the no-blame policy should prevent people from taking action. What we are saying is that by simply approaching the different religious organisations for funds we were able to get funds to get our scheme onto the road without further alienating people who could assist. For that reason, we went down a pathway where we would present them with the problem, we would ask them to acknowledge their role and their responsibility and ask them for assistance.

Senator MURRAY—But as an organisation you do not oppose individuals pursuing matters of justice if they wish to?

Mr Hawkins—Certainly. We have no right to question anyone in that regard. People have their own rights.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you. You have a remark in your submission, at page 6, where you say:

The ACMF believes that none of the agencies currently providing services for the benefit of former child migrants are able to perform their duties in an arena which is free from 'negative' politics, political interference, accusations of child abuse and fear of media interference.

Do you include yourself as one of those agencies or do you say all of them except for you?

Mr Hawkins—I would think that in all of this there is an element, and I think David alluded to this earlier, of territorial significance. I might give you my own personal view on this question. If I had a problem in putting together a submission or a problem with an injustice, I think that I would want to bring that problem forward myself without somebody else representing my view. I think that what has happened here is we have a whole raft of different views being presented at different times, different levels, and that there is a degree of manipulation going on with respect to this. I certainly believe that there is a degree of self-serving interest at work as well. Sometimes I think how the Aborigines must have felt 35 years ago when the white advisers were presenting their case to government agencies and others where the grassroots of the Aborigines themselves were not involved.

I think in the case of child migrants—and we alluded earlier to the fact that we needed a structure which was free of this—it is really important that the child migrants themselves have a say, have a clear voice through some way, some means whereby you are getting everything from the grassroots, as much as possible from the grassroots. I think the only real way you will get that is through child migrant organisations and the child migrants themselves.

Senator MURRAY—I am confused by your answer. Earlier I heard Professor Plowman say you were non-member-based but you now seem to be advocating a view that member-based organisations best express child migrant views. Let me return to my question. You said, 'The ACMF believes that none of the agencies ...' and I just simply want to know if you include yourself as being in that grouping of agencies?

Mr Hawkins—I said earlier on that we do not exclude ourselves from that, because we regard the whole business as being unsatisfactory.

Senator MURRAY—You want—and I suppose all of us sometimes want this—to be free from political interference, but later, under ‘Recommended course of action,’ you ask that the peak body comprise government appointees, and also for funding publicly by British and Australian governments. The very constitution of this Senate committee was a political act and the Senate committee’s findings will seek to pressure governments to do things. Regrettably, politics is part of the process. But I must say to you that I think there is a small contradiction because if you are asking for a peak body to be established—which it would be through government action—and for that peak body to comprise government appointees, you have immediately made it political.

Mr Hawkins—You would be more aware of that than I would be.

Senator MURRAY—I think you are exactly right. The fourth issue I would like to deal with is this, and I will read from page 5, for the benefit of *Hansard*:

The major non-government and non-church organisation active in the area of child migration is the Child Migrants Trust. This organisation offers counselling services and claims to be independent and neutral. Our assessment is that it is dependent on government funding and is far from neutral. It has succeeded in alienating itself from a number of institutions capable of assisting former child migrants. Its membership rules discriminate against those who have worked with or been involved with other migrant agencies. In our view, this is unfortunate and reduces the Trust’s capacity to help former child migrants.

That was your view in 1998. It is now 2001 and I would like to know if you still have that critical view or if you could expand on your view, and, in passing, if you could indicate your knowledge of how it is funded?

Prof. Plowman—Perhaps if I could attempt to answer that. We would hold that that statement was true when we wrote this particular document. We have indicated that we have not sought to update the document for the purposes of this exercise, largely because the people who actually wrote the document—including me—were not available to do so when needed. The reality at this stage is that we have not been as close to the task of assisting child migrants as we were when we first submitted this document so it would be difficult for us to comment on whether or not that particular statement continues to be the case or whether it is one that is part of the history. In answer to Senator Knowles, I did indicate some of the problems we have in dealing with some of the organisations and I think that is indicative of what we are trying to express. For example, when we talk about neutral, the reality is that we found the Child Migrants Trust very, very difficult to deal with on a formal relationship when we were associated with C-BERSS. We thought that was a tragedy for the child migrants themselves because instead of resources being aggregated and brought to bear on the problem, in fact quite the opposite was taking place. But I do not think we would want to go to the stake on that particular statement at this point in time.

Senator MURRAY—In passing, I should say that in my experience I have seldom found any organisation, any politician or any political party to be neutral. What I ask most is that they are professional, and I assume you are not saying they are not professional?

Prof. Plowman—No, quite the opposite. Indeed, let me put it on the record that in terms of locating parents of former child migrants I think the Child Migrants Trust has a record superior to every other organisation that has attempted to do work in this area.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you for that. This sort of issue, of course, means that many people do not become neutral—the issues are highly emotional and so on. I should indicate for your knowledge, in case you do not know it, that I am not neutral. I am a former child migrant myself, and therefore my emotions are inevitably involved in this matter. I have declared that several times before and I probably will need to again, but that is so. I am more interested in your remark on the bigger issue of whether the different biases, which are in each organisation that deals with these matters, including government, actively impede the resolution of many of these issues, or whether the diversity helps people. For instance, if you are not antagonistic to the Christian Brothers you can go to C-BERSS; if you are antagonistic to them you can go to the CMT or to yourselves. Should this committee be seeking to encourage the collapsing of a number of organisations into a few or does the diversity of itself allow people lots of alternative avenues for access?

Prof. Plowman—In one sense I come back to the question which Senator Knowles asked with respect to literacy and counselling. The experience we have had is that it is very, very difficult to get to the grassroots and find those people who need these particular services. One of the things that has happened is that, as more and more child migrant organisations come into being, they have come into being to serve particular purposes and they tend to be a lot closer to those grassroots people and in a better position to assess what particular services they need. So I would not be suggesting a collapsing of organisations. But I think at the end of the day there are limited resources and organisations should not be competing with each other; they should be trying to assist each other. In the case of the Child Migrants Trust, for example, my observation is that they have been tremendously helpful in being able to locate parents but they did not have the resources to enable people to travel. Now, C-BERSS did, and therefore there was a potential for a very good working relationship there.

When we talked about neutrality, the reality is that Margaret Humphreys' view about the abuse that took place in Catholic institutions, the way in which that has pervaded the bias which the Child Migrants Trust has, then actually militated against a workable relationship, in my view, with C-BERSS, and, had that working relationship been there, I believe that we would have been in a better position to assist those people for whom both organisations were established. So it is with regret that I say this; it is not meant to be critical.

Senator MURRAY—I hate to smile but I almost had the thought in my head that the heads of organisations might need counselling after all this, as well as the child migrants themselves, but that is just an aside. Thank you for those answers.

CHAIR—Professor Plowman, what are you a professor of?

Prof. Plowman—Industrial relations.

CHAIR—I like it. From what I hear you talking about, it might equip you for what is needed—that is slightly flippant. How did you come to be involved in this area, and I will also ask Mr Hawkins these questions in a minute?

Prof. Plowman—Like the senator, I am also a child migrant. I spent five years at Christian Brothers, Tardun.

CHAIR—At which one?

Prof. Plowman—Christian Brothers, Tardun. John Hawkins was also there; we were classmates.

CHAIR—So you are both child migrants and that is how you got involved. Can I ask you, Mr Hawkins, what are your qualifications now and how did you get involved in this organisation?

Mr Hawkins—Even though I do not do it any more, I still regard myself as a wheat farmer, a specialist noodle wheat farmer. I am not farming any more; I sold the farm about 18 months ago. I do not have any academic qualifications but I am a child migrant. I came to this country in 1954 at the age of seven. I arrived at Castledare and spent four years at Castledare and then I went to Tardun after that.

CHAIR—So you speak from real world experience of the challenges facing a lot of these folk.

Mr Hawkins—I can speak from years of hardship and pain, and I can speak from my own experience that growing up with the knowledge of not knowing who you are, the knowledge of fairly basic care and all the rest of it, leaves a lasting impression. So I can speak with experience on that. If that qualifies me to work in this area then I guess that is probably why I am here.

CHAIR—My presumption was that neither of you had been child migrants so I am very pleased to discover the accuracy of your work. It is interesting to me that some people of that background have actually become involved in assisting and other people who have not had that background are involved in assisting. I do not conclude one way or another; some can, some cannot. I just note your generosity, both of you, in making this contribution through the foundation. I am interested in one thing you said before, Professor, which was that you think counselling is so important that people should be required to have counselling after they return. Is that accurate?

Prof. Plowman—My comment on counselling was for both before and after.

CHAIR—Yes, but that they should be required?

Prof. Plowman—Yes, and indeed this was the case when I was on the committee of management of C-BERSS. I do not know if it still is but that was part of our criteria. We considered it so important that the reunion be a positive event, rather than a negative one. It was very important for former child migrants, who have very often had no relationship, including by letter, with usually the mother, that they actually did need some sort of assistance in coping with that new reality. I have also mentioned the fact that the parents also had rights and they needed counselling in the sense to be able to come to a position of accepting that they were going to meet. The post-counselling is very important. I have never given birth to a child but I have heard of the post-natal blues, or whatever they are called, where you experience a high and then

there is the reality of coming back. Here there is the reality of living back in Australia and people do need assistance with that particular process. I would not see that as being compulsory but I would certainly say that the pre-meeting counselling is sufficiently important that it should be compulsory.

CHAIR—We have been getting a lot of evidence that supports the importance of the counselling before, during and after for a number of people. Indeed, some people have said that they might be having counselling in Australia but when they arrive in London they might also need counselling there to help them take the next step, to cope with it et cetera, and counselling when they return. Others have told us that counselling has been of no use to them at all and it is no more than brushing over the bad dreams and they find that other mechanisms are helping them, or they are not assisted by it. I am interested that it should be, as you said, a requirement of taking the trip, and I wonder whether you would give consideration for people to be encouraged to have it, but not compelled to have it, on the grounds that to be told you cannot go unless you sign up for this might be a reminder of compulsion in the past.

Prof. Plowman—I understand what you are saying, but can I say that the minimum requirement should be an acceptance by both parties to a reunion, and the counselling was designed for that purpose, particularly in the case of the parent or parents. They often needed to come to a situation where they agreed to a reunion, and it was in that context that we thought counselling was very, very important. In other words, I come back to the point that we wanted a situation where the reunion led to positive outcomes. For example, we had one situation where the parent refused to see the child, even after three years of assistance. The chap gave up with us, went back to England, met the parent—and it was a very unhappy situation—and came back. He is no better off for that experience. I know we are not short of seeking to have compulsions, but at the end of the day if what we are trying to do is heal something that is broken then it does seem to me that the parties have to be brought to a state of mind where that is what they want to do. You can call that counselling; you can call it something else, pre-union briefings or whatever. Call it what you want, but what we do not want is students just landing up, knocking on doors and saying, ‘I’m Johnny. Remember me?’. That is a most negative and unhelpful experience.

CHAIR—I think that is a very helpful elaboration and I do not think the committee would be in disagreement with the importance of that for the mother in the UK in particular—after 50 years suddenly discovering that the son she let go all those years ago has now returned. I think there is a great sense in which you would need to be expecting that the child and the parent would be well met, and I do not dispute that at all. I note my resistance to compulsion to have that post-counselling. I think what I would like to know is that it was there, with a huge encouragement for people to have it, but not saying, ‘You can’t go to the UK. We won’t pay your fare unless you sign up for post-trip counselling.’ That is not to say that I do not agree that all the work should be done and so on, but I think some people would just say, ‘It doesn’t help me.’

Prof. Plowman—Can I pose a problem to you? If you are managing a fund which, amongst other things, allocates moneys for people to travel for the purposes of reunion, suppose the result of that reunion is a negative one which leads, for example, to the parent being murdered. Do you have any legal responsibility with respect to that particular outcome? In law, if the answer is yes, what is it that you, as an administrator of that particular fund, should be doing so

that you are actually showing in good faith that you are actively seeking to ensure outcomes like that do not happen? The instance I have given you is an actual case; it is not something I have made up. I come back to the point that reunion is all about a healing process, and it does not seem to me to be particularly sensible to simply throw people into a swimming pool without any preparation for that.

CHAIR—Hold on, I hope you were not ascribing those words to me, Professor. I am just interested that -

Prof. Plowman—Sorry, I was not.

CHAIR—I am pleased to hear that.

Prof. Plowman—I was simply trying to elaborate on why it is that I think it is very, very important.

CHAIR—I do not think that there is any dispute that it is very important. As I understand it, C-BERSS has no restrictions, or there is no means testing on people accessing that funding. Is that right?

Prof. Plowman—That is true. Means testing, though, is a separate issue altogether.

CHAIR—It is in some ways, but I find it somewhat contradictory to have an open and generous fund with minimal restrictions that says, 'If people would like to make that trip and if they have a reason for making it, they are either looking for or have found and would like now to make contact,' and then to have a restriction called post-trip counselling. I just want to say for the record that I absolutely support the counselling and the working out so that the child, now adult, meeting a parent after all those years should have an agreement between those people; as much as possible, each should know that the other is coming and so on, and that you would expect counselling would be a very constructive part of that. We have been told by some people that counselling has been of no use and I would hate to think that those people who had done the preparatory work—the parent knew they were coming, all of that kind of work—said when they got back that they did not want counselling and that this would mean that they were then denied all the other parts of the services.

Prof. Plowman—I think there is more commonality in our view than there is that separates it. Can I also make one point with the means testing. Once you move into the means testing arena there are significant complications involved, not just matters of privacy but actually how you measure wealth, income and all the rest of it. Our view was that we would probably spend more time trying to sort out what we meant by means testing and that we may as well get on with it. I think we also took the view that at the end of the day we almost regard it as a matter of right for people to be funded on at least one trip.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Mr Hawkins, you were going to say something earlier and I think I kept on going and cut you off. Was there something you wanted to add?

Mr Hawkins—Yes, there was. I wanted to make the point—and this is not just my own experience but it is the experience of quite a few of the others—that quite often the parent,

usually the mother, has no wish to be reunited with their son or daughter; on the other hand, though, the other siblings are more than happy to be reunited with their sibling. That was my own case where, whilst my mother was very, very distressed for some time, my three sisters were absolutely delighted. So I have a problem with one person having complete veto on reunion. I think that perhaps that should be considered for the future because I think that to give one person such veto over what could be an absolute joyous reunion is hardly equitable.

CHAIR—That is a very powerful point, Mr Hawkins, very powerful. It has not exactly been raised in those terms and I think the committee appreciates that contribution. I am sometimes interested to listen to witnesses before you who have been saying things like, ‘Counselling is useless; what would they tell us?’ et cetera. You cannot make people attend counselling and you cannot make people benefit from it. You can say, ‘Ninety-nine people have gone and have found it useful. You might give it a try,’ but I think what we are doing here is trying to walk carefully alongside of and in support of people who have to come to terms with pain in their own way. I was just interested to make sure that it was as open as possible and, given most everything else that C-BERSS had been doing was very open, I was just interested in those words, ‘should be required to have post-trip counselling.’ I might agree with it, you might agree with it, but I would like to know that if somebody came back and did not want that option that they would not have to pay back the money.

Prof. Plowman—There was never a question about paying back the money; the question would be whether you would give it in the first place.

CHAIR—Exactly, so that is even worse.

Prof. Plowman—No. Put it this way: if you did not believe that the person who was being assisted for a reunion purpose was in a position to benefit by that—and we did not make that judgment; we left that to a counsellor to make—there is the issue of: do you actually assist people in a negative experience? That is what we were trying to overcome. There is also the issue of what you mean by counselling. I would say that in about 80 per cent of cases the counselling was over and done with in five minutes, that the counsellor very quickly assessed the fact that this person was ready to go, period. So I would not want to make too much of this counselling thing but I think it is very, very important. I take your point that it should not be a stumbling block to people who do want to go but perhaps do not want the counselling, but there also needs to be some protections in place for negative outcomes.

CHAIR—That is a powerful point, particularly the range of negative outcomes that could happen. But I would have thought that a lot of these people, as you yourself would know, would find the concept of a negative outcome nothing novel: their life has been a negative outcome, has it not?

Prof. Plowman—True, but stubbing yourself on the toe because that has happened before is not—

CHAIR—No, I quite agree with that; you are not encouraging that. Perhaps we are talking around and around in circles here, but I just wanted to get that clear. The other point you made was something like: when C-BERSS was first set up it thought it might all be over in three years.

Prof. Plowman—Yes, we totally underestimated the demand that was out there.

CHAIR—Who had that view? Was this the people who first decided that they should address it?

Prof. Plowman—No, I think it was an informal view held by the management committee. You will be talking to Maria Harries who was then the chair—she still is, I understand. Obviously, as we got more and more into this, we saw that the needs were much greater than we had anticipated—if anything we actually shared almost a growth industry, not something that was going to be over and done with very, very quickly.

CHAIR—Absolutely. Do you think your foundation would see its role as being to assist people in bringing legal cases and charges of criminal behaviour?

Prof. Plowman—No, we have set as our priority assisting people with travel arrangements. I think we have talked about a no-blame policy. We believe, given that we are dependent on organisations to give us their funding, it is not particularly helpful for us to get organisations to fund us and then to actually fund people to take legal action against those organisations. That has not been part of our charter. But, as Mr Hawkins has already indicated, that does not mean to say that we oppose people exerting their rights in law.

CHAIR—Who should support people to bring criminal cases?

Prof. Plowman—I think there are a range of organisations that could do that. I would believe, for example, that we already have—I am trying to think of the name of the legal organisation which assists. There is a government arm which assists people.

Senator KNOWLES—Legal aid?

Prof. Plowman—Legal aid would be an example of an organisation that could do that.

Senator TCHEN—Actually, the more appropriate organisation would be the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Prof. Plowman—That would be another one. That is a problem in Western Australia, of course, where the statute of limitations has actually been used—I believe perversely—to deny people justice. But our point is that we believe we have a big enough contribution to make in assisting with reunions and do not need to be associated with that other side of it—and we do not have great resources; that is the other thing.

CHAIR—On page 3 of your submission you say:

The foundation has assisted some 80 individuals to return to their home country. Unfortunately, the foundation is now out of funds and awaits an injection of both public and private.

How much private money versus how much public money have you had?

Mr Hawkins—Probably 95 per cent of the funding we have received is private funding—in fact, I think I might say that it was pretty well all private—and certainly no government funding.

CHAIR—Do those words mean that you would anticipate asking for public funds in the future?

Mr Hawkins—We mentioned earlier that the main role of the foundation was to seek travel arrangements, because that was easily the most important problem that we saw. Seeing as the British government has set up its own travel arrangements, through the International Social Service, our role almost becomes redundant to the point that the British government has set up this organisation and we would just be duplicating what is already there. What we would hope for would be a much more compassionate approach by this International Social Service organisation to actually implement the release of those funds in a similar way that we were able to provide funds for the people that we assisted.

CHAIR—Do you imagine your organisation has run its course?

Mr Hawkins—No, we believe that we would like to maintain a presence of some sort, because we believe that we are the grassroots and we have a role to play in that regard. We would like to think that people might ask our opinion on matters that concern us directly and to that extent I believe that organisations such as the foundation, or indeed any child migrant organisation of whatever persuasion, ought to have a direct say in the future of this whole issue.

CHAIR—It is a challenge for us because one of the things that has become very clear is that people who have been child migrants are at very different stages of coping with their lives. Some people are opening the lid on a box that they have kept closed for many years and are finding that the only way they can cope is in the company of some person who is walking in support with them, whether it is another organisation or a counsellor or whatever. Others are actually perfectly able to march in and start chasing down records and pushing the world around and so on. I guess your organisation is actually one such that will walk with people if they need it.

Mr Hawkins—Exactly. We have been there since we began and we certainly do not intend to go away. We would like to ensure that we keep our eye on progress and we certainly hope that we continue to be consulted.

CHAIR—What would you like the principal recommendation of our report to be?

Mr Hawkins—I really do believe that the Australian government has sufficient influence with the British government to ensure that the criteria for its travel arrangement are set to the point where they become compassionate rather than restrictive. Also, I believe that the Australian government could actually assist more directly those child migrant organisations that wish to remain involved in the issue to maintain their structures. I think there is some room there. But I think the basic thing really is to promote the easing of those tough restrictions that we are seeing on travel, and perhaps making some contribution yourself so that you have a proper say in getting some of those restrictions lifted.

CHAIR—We thank you very much for your submission and for coming along and speaking to it today.

[12.22 p.m.]

ANDERSON, Mr Mark Allan, Chief Executive Officer, Fairbridge WA (Inc)

BUCK, Mr David Alan, Member, Fairbridge Youth Development Committee, Fairbridge WA (Inc)

KYLE, Mr Peter Arthur, Chairman, Fairbridge WA (Inc)

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from Fairbridge Western Australia. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera, you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. We have before us your submission, No. 136. Do you wish to make any alteration to this submission?

Mr Kyle—There is one typographical error which I will not trouble you with too much.

CHAIR—We love those kinds of corrections; that will keep us busy for ages.

Mr Kyle—You will find it on page 1, third paragraph, third line, where we talk about the ‘taste of restoration’ instead of the ‘task of restoration.’

CHAIR—It has been amended before it arrived. I already have a ‘task of restoration.’

Mr Kyle—Wonderful, thank you.

CHAIR—But the ‘taste of restoration’ does have its own flavour, does it not?

Mr Kyle—It does indeed, Senator, and it perhaps reflects the emphasis of what we are trying to do.

CHAIR—Would you like to make an opening statement and then take questions.

Mr Kyle—Yes, thank you very much. I am sorry that Senator Knowles has had to go, because as a Western Australian senator we would like her to hear the comments we have to make.

Senator TCHEN—She has not gone.

Mr Kyle—May I say, in amplification and in some additional comments to our submission, first of all that as an organisation Fairbridge takes very seriously its obligations to the people who are now known as old Fairbridgians but were former boys and girls at Fairbridge Farm School at Pinjarra. We take that responsibility very seriously primarily for two reasons. The first reason is because Fairbridge, the place down at Pinjarra, is considered by a large number of old Fairbridgians as a home away from home, if you like. Obviously it was home for them, and for many of them for many years, but even now it is considered to some extent an alma mater. We,

as the custodians of Fairbridge Farm School, take that obligation very seriously. Secondly, we take very seriously the fact that for many years we were the custodians of the records of the old Fairbridge Farm School and, of course, those records are of deep significance to those to whom they refer. They are now lodged in the Battye Library under the control of the Battye Library. Access to them is administered by a person on our board who is also the secretary of the Old Fairbridgians Association and who over many years has had very close contact in assisting Fairbridgians to have access to their records in a helpful way.

Thirdly, we are the custodians, or the trustees, of a fund established initially by the English organisation that owned Fairbridge and ran the Fairbridge Farm School to assist former students of Fairbridge who are in need. That fund, to the tune of about \$40,000 now, has existed since 1980-odd, set up as a sort of parting gesture, if you like, from the old English association. It is used primarily to assist Fairbridgians who are in need in a general sense—rather than the specific sense of, ‘We want to go back to England to find our family’; it is rather more in the welfare sense. But it is there and we take seriously the role that we have as a trustee of that fund. The fund is, in fact, administered on a day to day basis by the organisation which represents old Fairbridgians, the Fairbridgians Association.

The second thing that I would like to say publicly is that while Fairbridge WA (Inc) did not exist during the years of child migration and came into existence to hold the assets that were part of the Fairbridge Farm School in 1982, we do, as an organisation, acknowledge the very real suffering that occurred for those who passed through Fairbridge Farm School as a result of their loss of family ties. We acknowledge that publicly, not because we accept any direct responsibility for it but that we do accept the responsibility to try and alleviate, as best we can, the suffering that created.

We also acknowledge that the loss of family ties or any known contact with a family relationship back in England for many old Fairbridgians was, as a matter of practice, and perhaps to some extent as a matter of policy at times, if you like hidden, misconstrued perhaps on occasions by the authorities who ran Fairbridge Farm School. Whatever the reasons for that—and I personally believe that it was a matter of simply misguided policy rather than any deliberate attempt to harm—we do accept that that was an element which made worse the suffering that was caused simply by the fact of dislocation. As I said before, we cannot accept responsibility for what was done then, but we do accept that it happened—to what extent is a little bit uncertain but it happened—and we should recognise that it happened and that it happened at a place that we are responsible for and that we should, whatever we can and whenever we can, do something to assist the results of it.

I would like to say that we at Fairbridge believe that there is no evidence of any systemic physical, sexual or psychological abuse. There are certainly no proven cases of that. There have been complaints along the way from many people on occasions about the hardships at Fairbridge, just as there have been of other institutions not necessarily related to child migration, but we believe that there is no evidence of any systemic abuse such as there is in other places. While in the nature of things Fairbridge is caught up, in a public perception sense, with some of those allegations, we strongly maintain that it is different in that way. As an organisation we have constantly been vigilant to hear any such complaint and never has there been one single direct complaint of that sort of thing. It is important, I think, that we say publicly that that has not happened to the best of our knowledge. It is not trying to slide out of

anything at all, but it is a fact. The reality is that a very large number of old Fairbridgians—and David will be able to speak to you more directly on this—feel a very strong sense of pride, rather than hatred, regarding their time at Fairbridge and we, as an organisation, consider that there is a very strong heritage which we are proud of and which we seek to protect at all costs.

In substance, we essentially say that we believe that Fairbridge offered to many kids an opportunity that just did not exist for them otherwise, or may not have existed for them otherwise. It does not excuse any of the background aspect of that, but in terms of what happened out here we say that it is something to be proud of and we believe that the majority of old Fairbridgians think that too.

Our experience in handling the issues that confront old Fairbridgians and the relationship between them and our organisation is that the overwhelming need for old Fairbridgians is for opportunity and assistance to locate their families. If one listens to the talk of old Fairbridgians, at their meetings and one to one, you overwhelmingly hear that as the primary need. Wherever we can, as a matter of policy we seek to assist those people who have that need and want to do something about it to do so. Primarily that is through the availability of records and assistance in going through them and so forth, but there is a relationship with the Fairbridge Society of the United Kingdom and that is available for assistance in whatever way we can.

What I would like to say about that is that in my opinion the really difficult aspect of this whole matter is the urgency of it. It was only yesterday that I received from the Old Fairbridgians Association a newsletter that told me that another six old Fairbridgians had died since the previous newsletter. It is with that urgency that I would say to the committee that if you can possibly achieve a result on this, however small it may be, that you do it quickly. That, I believe, will serve a lot of former child migrants much better than if it is two years down the track and there is more at that time. In my view there is an urgent need for assistance with location of families. If you left it two years a substantial proportion of those old Fairbridgians from pre-war days may not be with us, and that is a very sad thing.

Two last points if I may, and I am sorry to go on so long. In my view, one of the most pressing needs for child migrants in this country is a recognition of the contribution they have made to this country. We tend to concentrate upon the bad things of it, but in fact there are some wonderful stories to be told about what people have achieved after going through this dysfunctionality, this dislocation, and, if I might say so without embarrassing him, Mr Buck is a prime example of it. There is very little attempt, I think, made by the community to acknowledge and welcome to the Australian community the successes and the deeds and the contributions that have been made by child migrants—and I am not looking at you, Andrew. What I want to say is that, at the same time as talking about these undoubted needs that exist, we should not forget that we need to talk up the good aspects of this program—that we all acknowledge was misguided by today's standards—talk up the things that it did achieve as well as deal with the problems.

It is probably true to say that at the end of the day the large majority of child migrants will not benefit from programs that are designed to find their families, but I think the large majority will benefit from a feeling that they are valued as members of the community. I do not think anyone who has not experienced it could possibly imagine what it is like not to have a birth certificate. I just cannot think that we could imagine for a moment what it would be like. There is a vacuum

there as a result for a person who is in that situation. There is a need for a sense of belonging, there is a need for a sense of community, there is a need for a sense of being needed and wanted and accepted. In my belief, the House of Commons committee and the previous inquiries in this state have failed to recognise that there are some good things and that many people are sitting out there in the community hiding their personal loss and getting on with their lives, and doing a damn good job of it. I think government needs to recognise that.

The last thing I would like to say is that some months ago we, along with other receiving agencies and other agencies generally, met with the state department here and talked about the program of the inquiry, and we were fortunate enough to have Senator Murray come along and discuss the matter with us. I suggested to him at that time that I thought there would be some considerable value to the committee if at some stage in the process we were able, instead of giving formal evidence and answering questions, to sit around a table and discuss this issue. I got the impression—and Senator Murray can say whether he agrees with it or not—that most of the agencies involved at that time thought that that was a good idea and would produce some worthwhile results.

I acknowledge your need, of course, to get the facts and to listen to formal submissions, but at the end of the day what this thing needs is ideas and talking about rather than simply gathering the facts and going home and making recommendations that the government should produce a whole lot of money, or whatever it is. There are greater subtleties than that in this exercise and we feel that we can contribute to helping you to come to some worthwhile and useful conclusions, along with the other agencies who are involved. I say that while acknowledging that we have, in a sense, a peripheral role. We are not involved primarily in the business of providing assistance to child migrants, we are not involved, as I said, in dealing with allegations of brutality or whatever, but we do think that we have a role to play and we do think we have an experience which maybe might assist you if one can sit around and talk about it.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Mr Kyle. Some of the committees I have been involved with have had—whether you call it a roundtable or a square table or whatever—an on the record informal discussion, and I think what is very critical for Senate committees is to have it on the record. But we do not need to do it all by question and answer. I would have to say too that if you have some creative ideas over there, feel free to pop them over in this formal part of the discussion. We have to give consideration to that. We have had other people propose that we might have a less formal setup than this, but it would still be valuable to have that informal discussion recorded by *Hansard*. I do not think that stops a lot of people pushing around, but I think it is a useful point you make. I will ask Senator Murray to start the questions.

Senator MURRAY—I want to start with numbers, if I may, Mr Kyle. In your submission you say the Fairbridge scheme saw approximately 1,200 children as child migrants pass through the Western Australian farm school. On page 21 of submission No. 135—which is a very professional submission I must say—from the Western Australian Family and Children's Services Department—it says the following:

... Fairbridge received a total of 1520 children (1,174 pre-war and 346 post-war)— the highest number of children of all the child migrant schemes.

I draw your attention to this, firstly, to get a sense from you as to whether your figure of 1,200 is likely to be closer to the truth or whether the department's figure is, but, secondly, because it does confirm three points. The first point is that Fairbridge is not often acknowledged as the largest of all the child migrant schemes. Secondly, it confirms the point that it has been the one with far fewer allegations attached to it. And I have read the Fairbridge books and other books such as ones by Bruce Blyth, Alan Gill, Margaret Humphreys, Professor Sherrington and so on—I have been across the literature. The third point really confirms the point you made that the Fairbridgians have a particular need for urgent attention because large numbers were pre-war, whereas, for instance, at the Christian Brothers institutions large numbers were post-war, and that is a key point.

Mr Kyle—Yes, thank you, Senator. I might ask David Buck to comment on the numbers. My understanding is that there are some discrepancies in the figures primarily by reason of different definitions. One might in one sense include in the numbers of child migrants those who came with a single parent, for example, in the 1950s, many of whom came to Fairbridge. Alternatively, you might say, 'They're not really child migrants; they're family assistance', which happened to be located at Fairbridge. I think that would be the primary reason for the discrepancy in the figures.

Senator MURRAY—For your assistance, I should indicate that the department specifically excludes what are known as youth migrant schemes, such as the YMCA schemes and others.

Mr Kyle—I noticed that, and the Big Brother scheme and so forth. But, nevertheless, I think there would have been—and I am surmising here—some grey areas there that may well have led to discrepancies in the figures. But, having said that, yes, Fairbridge was by far the largest receiving agency, certainly before the war. David Buck was there from 1933 until 1942 and he can tell you far better than I can—well, he can tell you and I cannot. But we do acknowledge that Fairbridge itself, not only in Western Australian terms but in Australian terms, was by far the most significant receiving agency under the various child migrant schemes, pre-war. After the war was a different matter altogether.

Thank you for the acknowledgment about the lack of complaint, or perhaps to put it in the positive, the acknowledgment of the essential quality of Fairbridge. Can I just ask David Buck to say a few words on that score.

Mr Buck—Firstly, going back to the question that was asked about the numbers, I do not personally have an accurate record of those numbers but I am pretty sure that from about 1969 onwards virtually the only way the physical structure of Fairbridge at Pinjarra could survive was because they agreed to take, in the main, one parent family groups where there was no obligation as to the length of time that Fairbridge cared for the children. The parents were housed mainly at Noalimba, the migrant centre in Bateman, and they had free and reasonable access to their children. As soon as they felt that they could cope, in terms of employment and accommodation, with caring for their own children, then the children were released to them. They were also released during school holiday times et cetera. Probably within a couple of years of that there would have been almost no children left at Fairbridge who were of the old scheme, if I can call it that, who came under much the same circumstances as we did prior to World War II. Can I make a few comments about treatment at Fairbridge?

Senator MURRAY—I just wanted to start with the numbers and then I am going to move on to treatment.

Mr Kyle—One further comment on the numbers: Mark Anderson tells me he can give you a definitive answer on that.

Senator MURRAY—I merely want to know if the figure of 1,200 is a lower figure or if the upper figure of 1,520 is more accurate?

Mr Anderson—The figure pre-war does match Fairbridge figures to what Family and Children's Services has. There is some discussion and discrepancy about the figure post-war of the other 300 in terms of who is defined as a child migrant and who is not. Some of those figures post-war, in our discussions you would include some of those as child migrants. So more than 1,200 would probably be more accurate.

Senator MURRAY—I will move on to the treatment thing, and there are a few aspects here. Firstly, Senate committees of this kind are, of course, used to the fact that people with grievances are more likely to come forward than those without grievances, so we understand that. Secondly, I have stated a fact; namely, that the literature does not evidence the same number of complaints about Fairbridge. Thirdly, I should say that the committee, if it so decides, will make recommendations and those recommendations will ultimately try and squeeze money and programs out of the government. Now, to do that you have to indicate whether there is need, and if you are going to have a look at need you have to look at whether people are in trouble. That is one of the reasons we have to focus on the trouble side of things.

But I should say to you that I have seen at least four confidential submissions to the committee which are very detrimental concerning Fairbridge. To put that in perspective, we have had about 250 submissions, about 80 of which are confidential—I think that is about right. Now, those submissions include very harsh treatment by what were known as cottage mothers, including severe physical punishment which would I think in some cases be defined as criminal assault; long work days, starting at 4 or 5 a.m. and going right through to very late in the evening with no time for homework, which was regarded as excessively cruel; a lack of affection bordering on cruelty—lack of affection is always a problem in institutions; you cannot be loved when there are hundreds of you and there are just a few people looking after you—but almost bordering on cruelty. For instance, one of those people we spoke to yesterday—and I will not identify the person—referred to terrible hygiene, no child welfare visits, physical separation of siblings such that you were not allowed to see each other, being used as slave labour in a military style regime, being abused verbally and physically, and that there was sexual abuse to both boys and girls, and I quote, 'Most of them will not talk about it, as my own brother and sister won't.' The last quote I noted in my notes, 'It broke my heart to see how many of my friends had killed themselves.'

That could, of course, relate to a particular time, they might have had a particular bad egg as cottage mother or a particular nasty assistant principal or any of that sort of thing, and you cannot always generalise over a period of 50 or 60 years. But I do make the point that those allegations are very serious and you should be aware of them. I think you are unaware of them, and you say so in your submission:

Fairbridge WA (Inc) is unaware of any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children at Fairbridge (Pinjarra).

But it may be that there are people under the surface who need attention in more than the areas you have been able to help, namely with connection with family, specialist counselling services and that sort of thing. With that lead-in, you might like to respond, and Mr Buck, you have personal experience. But that is the evidence we have had on the confidential side.

Mr Buck—Might I stress first of all that what I say is my own personal experience. Might I begin by just referring the committee to a statement that appeared in yesterday's *West Australian*. There was an obituary for an ex-Pinjarra Fairbridge boy, Ronald Dare. It says:

His godmother sent him to Australia—

this was in 1921—

in the hope that Fairbridge Farm at Pinjarra would offer him a future.

From reading the account of his life in this obituary, that came true.

It was to be a childhood of strict discipline and long hours of work. However, unlike many former Fairbridge boys—

and I might add that personally I disagree with that word 'many'; it should be 'some—

Mr Dare never resented his fate but expressed gratitude for the security the farm provided.

That appeared in the public press yesterday. I can only speak about my personal experiences, and I guess this might appear to be a very narrow view, but it does support what the board chairman, Mr Peter Kyle, said in the fact that there needs to be some reference also to the fact that many child migrants have had a satisfactory life and they have made very significant contributions. Might I just say something off the record for a moment, please.

CHAIR—Mr Buck, what do you mean 'off the record'?

Mr Buck—I will tell you after. It is not evidence or anything like that; it is just something which amuses me.

Mr Kyle—Are you seeking to do it free of Hansard?

Mr Buck—Yes, that is all. When we talk about contributions, interestingly, one product of the Pinjarra Fairbridge—

Mr Kyle—Just stop for a moment.

CHAIR—I am not sure whether Mr Buck wishes to say something and does not wish it formally recorded, as apart from in camera?

Mr Buck—Not formally recorded, that is all. Might I withdraw that request, please, because I do not wish to appear frivolous about this matter.

CHAIR—That is fine, Mr Buck. I am sorry, it is just that we need to make sure that you are protected.

Mr Buck—That is okay. Again, let me emphasise, I am speaking about my own experience. I have had access to my records. There was no evidence of my father being present at my birth; I was born an illegitimate child. My mother's circumstances in England were such that the opportunity to send me out under the Fairbridge scheme provided a lifeline for her, and I guess also in her view provided one for me. During my time as a child at Fairbridge I was not neglected by her because, as with most children, the two significant times in your child life are your birthday and Christmas and that was always remembered. I am sure, Senator Murray, if you have read John Lane's book you will realise that twice a year I was probably the most popular boy on Fairbridge because I could supply everybody with English comic books.

CHAIR—Did you keep them, Mr Buck?

Mr Buck—No, they sort of disappeared, I am sorry. My apologies for that. I have spent over 50 years associated with education in Australia, from being a classroom secondary school teacher in science and mathematics, to being a head of department in both subject areas in government secondary schools here, to having been a university teacher, both in Victoria for two years and for 15 years involved in the preparation of secondary school mathematics teachers in the state. Under the rules I had to retire at the end of 1991 because I was about to turn 65, but from the beginning of 1992 until the end of 1999 I did a significant amount of part-time work involved in training teachers.

Also, amongst my experiences in the state education department, from 1969 to 1976 inclusive, I was officially classified as what is known as a senior advisory teacher and my role was to supervise and act as a consultant and assistant, without the traditional assessing inspectorial role, for secondary school maths teachers right throughout the state. My immediate responsibility was to 43 district high schools throughout WA. Virtually during that eight years I had the status of being, and I use this term loosely, second in command of maths education in WA schools.

I mention those things not for any aggrandisement that might follow, but all through my career I have kept a very close contact with Fairbridge at Pinjarra. Practically every school holidays I went down there to assist in recreational activities with the children who were present. I also met a lot of the people who were associated with the Fairbridge Society in England who visited this state, and also some members of the British parliament who came out here to look into migration and included child migration in their brief.

I am very certain in my own mind—and I will accept this as my own personal fact—that the opportunities to achieve what I did would not have arisen had I remained in England. So in many ways the statement that was made in the *West Australian* held true for me, and it held true to differing degrees for many, many others. As a child at Fairbridge, from what I can remember—it is quite some years ago, as you may appreciate—I was treated quite well. I was subject to the normal disciplines, but, if I may say this, one of the things that stood me in good stead in my teaching career—and even in the days when corporal punishment was permitted by law in schools providing you accorded to the regulations that applied to it—in 18 years of classroom teaching I never used corporal punishment in any shape or form, because the kind of

disciplines that were instilled in us as children at Fairbridge held me in very good stead in those circumstances.

I am sure that there are many other old Fairbridgians who perhaps in different walks of life could readily indicate to the honourable senators that they have had some opportunities here, that they have been quite successful—although their degree of success may differ, their avenues of success may differ. But I certainly have no complaints to make—and that might not be the best word, I am sorry—in regard to the treatment and the care that I received at Fairbridge. I would, however, completely support the chairman of the board of Fairbridge WA, Mr Peter Kyle, in the matters that he raised in that there are former child migrants who are in need of assistance to reunite with family, that there are child migrants who may need some other form of assistance. When you were dealing with the previous delegation I could not help but hear the very strong references to counselling advice, and that sort of thing should be available, particularly as it may affect even the immediate offspring of child migrants, because there is that very close attention.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Buck.

Mr Kyle—I would like to say one thing about Senator Murray's comments on the confidential allegations. The last thing I would want to do would be to seek to inquire into allegations that somebody has wanted to make on a confidential basis, but, of course, we have to recognise that it is impossible to deal with an allegation if you do not know what it is. All I can say is that not once has there been to Fairbridge a formal complaint of that sort. There are grumblings of a general nature, just as there are about any school, but not once, I think, has there been a complaint of abuse to us. I would love to be able to deal with it. I think if it is possible it would be good if the committee could inform the people who have made those submissions on a confidential basis that if they were prepared to, we could, as an organisation—and again, on a confidential basis—try and help them.

Senator MURRAY—For the record, I think we should indicate that the chairman is a lawyer and any approach to him in that capacity would obviously cover legal privilege as well. I assume if somebody came to see you, as the chair of the foundation, your legal training would assist in the matter of—

Mr Kyle—I would not see somebody in that situation as a client, but, nevertheless I can assure you, Senator -

Senator MURRAY—The point I am making to you is that this kind of stuff is extremely sensitive and all we could do would be to pass on the *Hansard* record of this discussion and let people come to their own conclusions. But that is why I would wish to put on the record that you have professional training in matters of confidentiality.

Mr Kyle—Thank you. I do not often find people saying, 'Well, you're a lawyer, therefore you'll do the right thing,' but I can assure you of this: I am not seeking to get a *Hansard* record or anything; I am simply asking you to pass on to those who have made a submission that if they wished to take it up with me, or the Old Fairbridgians Association, or whatever it is that they feel comfortable with, then we would certainly deal with it in the most sensitive possible way and entirely on a confidential basis, and would be delighted to do so.

CHAIR—Mr Kyle, all witnesses to our inquiry will receive copies of the public record *Hansard*, as well as the *Hansard* of their own private contributions. Your words are now on the public record and they will be read by all those other witnesses. One of the things I have discovered about people who attend as contributors to an inquiry is that they are usually extremely faithful in reading the contribution of other witnesses and the questions and answers, so I would be surprised if people with a past history from Fairbridge will not be interested to get hold of your submission, which they will be able to get, and read those words. So they will already have received your offer.

One of the things that I would ask you about is that the prospect has been raised with us in other places of the organisation writing to all past pupils and saying, ‘This is the state of history. We are now offering a counselling service. We are offering assistance should any of you wish,’ so it may well be that you could take up your own challenge, Mr Kyle.

Mr Kyle—That has, I am sure, been done on a number of occasions before, and there are a lot of people who do not want anything to do with Fairbridge, naturally enough, and I understand that. There are many who have very regular contact and there are some who have just the occasional contact. The opportunity is there, on a regular basis, for every single person who has ever been through Fairbridge, who remains alive, and that we know the address of, to see what is going on there and the care that we acknowledge is needed in dealing with the fall-out, if you like. We will, however, consider again the possibility of a quite specific general approach to all former students. I think it is timely to do that.

Senator MURRAY—I just said to the chair, because we are coming to the end of your time, that I would like to say something to you. You may have found that in our interaction we have not focused as a committee on your recommendations. That is because your recommendations are almost common to everybody else. What needs to be done seems to be well understood: the ability to make connections, reunification, the ability for people to get there and back, airfares and accommodation, the importance of the records indexing and so on and so forth. I focused in my questioning on those areas where there was some doubt, but you should understand there is a very common theme of your recommendations and those of other organisations and individuals.

Mr Kyle—I think we are aware of that and I think we are aware that some of the solutions are obvious. Some of them, however, are not. It is usually the solutions that do not involve money that are not obvious, and those are the ones which I urge you to concentrate on. From my poor knowledge of the political scene, I suppose one would have to say that you would be battling to get too much money out of the government. Hopefully, that is an unduly pessimistic reaction to it, but there are many very good and wide-ranging things that could be done under the auspices of the Australian and state governments which do not involve a great deal of money.

Mr Anderson—Just following on from those points, one of the things that we do, as you may be aware, is Fairbridge currently works with a whole range of young people with the aim of assisting them to reach their potential. One of the things that we do is work with quite a few of the old Fairbridgians who regularly come down to Fairbridge. They actually meet with those young people and tell their story about their life, where they have come from, what they have done, and then where they have gone to, and David Buck has been one of those people who

have come down and told their story. We have found that that has been very useful, not only for the old Fairbridgians themselves to be able to share their own history and where they have come from, but also in terms of the young people who now come to Fairbridge—quite a lot of whom are at-risk young people—to actually hear of the trials that older people have been through and how they have come through and the benefit that that has been. That has been something that has been very, very useful

The other thing is that Fairbridge is the last place left in Australia, as part of the Fairbridge schemes, in terms of still operating in its entirety. We get a lot of old Fairbridgians coming from around Australia, and also from overseas, to actually visit the site and to see and hear the history. We have spent the last three years restoring the village, and one of the things that a lot of old Fairbridgians are coming to us and saying now is that they have a lot of historical records that they would want to be displayed, and for their own personal history to be interpreted on site. One of the things that we now have is a real need—and it is something that we are working with the old Fairbridgians on—to interpret the history of the Fairbridge site and of their lives there. We have now completed a conservation plan of the whole site, an interpretation plan of the whole site, and we are now moving towards that process and working with the old Fairbridgians to actually now go through and interpret the history to those people who are visiting, which not only goes back and looks at the life of the old Fairbridgians and child migrants, but also looks at what they have been able to achieve as well. That is now a priority for us and what we are now working towards trying to achieve as well.

CHAIR—That is very interesting and it is also a dimension that we have not had spelt out. That notion of being able to tell your story in a supportive environment where others will benefit from it is another way in which people can be assisted. So that is really very useful.

Senator KNOWLES—May I just add to that as an observer, and having had the pleasure of seeing Mr Buck on site a few months back: I think what Fairbridge is doing in that respect is very good, and in many ways I think it would be very cathartic for a lot of people who have been involved too. I take the opportunity to congratulate Fairbridge on undertaking such a project.

Mr Kyle—Thank you, Senator. I like that because in a couple of weeks time I will be speaking at the Old Fairbridgians annual general meeting, which they hold down at Fairbridge every year. I will certainly be reporting upon this inquiry and lot of people will be very interested. To hear an expression of interest and congratulations in that respect I think will enthuse many old Fairbridgians who, naturally enough, as they get older their enthusiasm wanes for some of the things that people try to do for them, because you do not get enormous results all the time. To hear that the Senate, through your committee, appreciates that sort of approach I think will make them feel very good.

CHAIR—Can I give you a couple of questions on notice that follow that. I am not sure if others have asked—I apologise, I had to step outside to take a call—but I was wondering if you could take on notice a request for any documentation you could provide to the Senate about your relationship with the state welfare department, any records of the department examining the facilities or examining the state of the children, a report on the educational standards achieved, access to it and so on; were there ever any adverse reports, if there are any of those records available; and if there is any history of an internal monitoring by Fairbridge during the

time—and I suppose we are talking particularly 1945 through 1965, that post-war era mainly, although I understand some Fairbridge children came prior to the Second World War.

Senator MURRAY—Yes, we dealt with that.

CHAIR—I heard you saying that earlier. But in particular if there was any internal monitoring that you have any documentation of and any evidence regarding mistreatment, physical or sexual. I am just asking if you could take that on notice. We are looking for the history that is not so easy to tell about how the state department kept itself aware of the children that were normally under their custodianship. If Fairbridge can provide any of those records or a report of what you understood to have been the case, that would be very useful.

Mr Kyle—We will take it on board.

Senator KNOWLES—I know we are over time, but I have one more question. On page 2 of your submission you talk about the travel arrangements for family reunification. We have had some evidence, as you may or may not have heard earlier, that the funds that are available are inadequate, restrictive and so forth. Do you have any suggestions as to how best they could be provided in a more generous term or a more appropriate term?

Mr Kyle—You are talking about funds provided by the Australian government, presumably?

Senator KNOWLES—Funds primarily provided by the British government.

Mr Kyle—By the UK government, okay.

Senator KNOWLES—The criteria that are actually being used to assess eligibility.

Mr Kyle—I do not have any specifics. If Mark has some I would be happy for him to answer; if not we will take it on board. It is certainly a subject that has been discussed from time to time in the general sense but I do not know that we have actually got down to the specific job of identifying particular ways in which that might be improved. For my part, I just have a rather underwhelming feeling that the UK government was involved in tokenism, but that is a very general view.

CHAIR—We have had evidence that there is such a tight means test that many people, if they try to access assistance that way, find, firstly, the paperwork is overwhelming and, secondly, that they do not qualify, whereas the C-BERSS money, for example, is not means tested at all. In answer to Senator Knowles's question, I would like to hear whether Fairbridge would have a view about whether it should be eased up.

Mr Anderson—From the Fairbridge organisation we do not have a view, because we have not discussed it at board level. In terms of the feedback that we get from old Fairbridgians who regularly come down on site and talk with us, the issue of means testing and the degree of documentation that they are required to fill out does not allow them then to access any of those funds. They are just saying, 'It's too extensive, it's not what we want and I just wouldn't waste my time.' That is the feedback that we are getting. 'A little bit of a joke' would probably be the words some of them would use.

Mr Kyle—We should not underestimate the intention, but I heard the Australian Child Migrant people talking about legal aid. It is the same problem: there is not too much point in having a legal aid system if nobody can access it because the conditions are too stringent.

CHAIR—On that note, Mr Kyle, Mr Anderson and Mr Buck, thank you very much for your contribution today.

Proceedings suspended from 1.17 p.m. to 2.07 p.m.

HARRIES, Ms Maria, Chair, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services

HORTON, Mr George Ronald, Member, Management Committee, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services

ROSSER, Dr Debra Lee, Member, Management Committee, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services

CHAIR—I declare open this afternoon's session and welcome representatives of the Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Students Services. The committee prefers all evidence to be heard in public but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera you can ask to do so and the committee would give regard to your request. The committee has before it your submission No. 45. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Ms Harries—No.

CHAIR—I now ask you to make a short opening statement and then we will field questions.

Ms Harries—Thank you. What I actually did was I prepared some dot points which I have given copies. I just wanted to start by acknowledging at the outset that our existence as C-BERSS is actually predicated on the acknowledgment by the Christian Brothers of some of the history and the need. So I think it is really important that we not an apologist for the brothers but our existence is predicated on that acknowledgment.

A very brief chronology, just to put us in context, is that—and this preceded my involvement, by the way—the statement of apology by the brothers was in July 1993, the helpline was established in 1993, the independent advisory panel was finalised in November 1993 and the report was submitted in October 1994. I was contacted in December 1994 to ask if I would be prepared to set up and chair the Christian Brothers Ex-Residents Service—we later called it that; it was not called that at the time. I started thinking about my involvement in December 1994. In January 1995 we established the terms of reference and I have been chairperson ever since. So that is just a bit of history.

I have been a social worker for 32 years. For a lot of that time I had been involved in working in child protection and was previously chairperson of the coordinating committee on child abuse in Western Australia. So I have a history outside of the child migrant history.

C-BERSS was built on an acknowledgment that there was significant human need and that had been expressed very clearly in the panel report, which was the material that I used to set up C-BERSS. It was very clear that there was very significant suffering, that the adult men were ageing and their need was urgent. This was something that was very dear to my heart and the committee at the time that any service we set up was so without prejudice. In other words, I was not prepared and none of us would have countenance setting up a service which did not enable that men could seek legal redress at any time. It was also set up as non-means tested and non-

investigatory. In other words, it was a service that was not going to be constrained by testing people. The other key issue for me was that the men drove the agenda.

I want to say that it has not been an easy process. In fact, it has been very painful. The primary challenge being funded by the Christian Brothers was actually to establish some sort of trust, that we were a reasonably trustworthy professional organisation. Our first task—and you have a copy of our principles—was to set up an ethical framework for the work we delivered. I have been very involved in developing ethical standards in Western Australia and so that was a very familiar territory to me. To date, 397 men—and this is approximate because this is as of last month—have had contact. We have 114 current clients, 188 men and 23 carers have been funded to travel. Our budget for 2001 is \$600,000. By the end of this year, the brothers will have funded us \$2 million—which, I would imagine you would agree, is a significant sum of money.

The key issues are many but as I wrote this I thought: the need for information and for travel is urgent and it is more and more urgent, the support for workers is very significant and has taken a lot of our time, the vicarious trauma suffered by workers who work in this area is well recognised. Finally, what I want at the end of this is to urge that we continue in the collaborative endeavours that in Western Australia we have been very successful in doing, in large part, thanks to the Director-General of Family and Children Services, Mr Bob Fisher. I think we work very well together and we have developed very good collaborative relationships. I would like to see those continuing and maximising the potential that has got.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Just one small question to open the batting. I have heard today that there are nothing like the same support services for women as there are for the men now who were boys then. I understand and was told that C-BERSS is providing support for some women. Is that case and how many?

Ms Harries—It is indeed. We have just finalised this arrangement with the Sisters of Mercy. Just a very quick history is that a number of our clients obviously are Maltese—and that is another issue. They are not just British. We were funding Maltese men to return to Malta and their siblings, who were female, could not be funded. A number of the Maltese women—not a large number but a couple—talked with us. We approached the Sisters of Mercy and we approached the Christian Brothers and the agreement was finalised last month, although we have seen a couple of women. The Sisters of Mercy have now advised the women who were former child migrants that if they want to access our services they can and that the Sisters of Mercy will pay for that. They will pay on an hourly rate according to what we consider to be the need. I do not know how many we have seen. I think last month we had seen three.

Dr Rosser—I think that is right.

Ms Harries—I do not know about this month.

CHAIR—Given your background—I am grateful that you told the committee what that background was; that helps us a whole lot—would you think it would be useful for the women to have access to a women specific organisation?

Ms Harries—I am going to go back to first principles. I am firmly committed to consumer driven organisations. I think if the women want a women orchestrated, organised and drive organisations, then that is what they need. I do not for one minute think that we should be determining what sort of service women need. In large part, our organisation has been driven by the men. They are the ones that have told us what they need and how it needs to be set up. Given that there is a lot of difference of opinion, there is not one voice, we have had to actually mediate some of that. We have one woman counsellor, a senior counsellor at C-BERSS. Certainly, my understanding and her understanding would be that the if women come to the service she would be the first port of call. I also know from other organisations I run that sometimes men want to see women and sometimes women want to see men. It is their choice. I believe in maximum choice.

CHAIR—I appreciate those points. Thank you. I was quite astounded to discover there have been so few support organisations established to this point on behalf of the women migrants, or one time migrant children. I might come back to that later. You were telling us that so far you think you have actually had three women come for assistance?

Ms Harries—Three women from the Sisters of Mercy who were former child migrants, all from Malta, I understand. We have seen women previously for various reasons. We have never excluded, if you like, women, but they have been extraordinary situations. I think we have probably seen about four or five, and that is not many, in five years.

CHAIR—Twenty-three carers. What is the definition of a carer?

Ms Harries—I would love to be able to answer the question. In our terms, if somebody is not able to travel primarily for physical reasons on their own but with medical support for psychological reasons on their own, somebody who is able to provide support to them in the endeavour goes with them. Sometimes it is a partner—a wife, generally. In some instances, for one person with a profound disability, it was the Disability Services Commission's carer who accompanied him—a male who was actually looking after him in supported accommodation—and sometimes it is a sibling.

Senator KNOWLES—I am interested in the provision of counselling and so forth. We have heard some conflicting and contradictory evidence about the interaction of different agencies and the communication with the Child Migrants Trust. It was alleged by some that they were not providing information that was necessary to provide all the pieces of the jigsaw. Particularly I am now referring to the information on re-unification. I noticed in your submission that you say you have a good working relationship with the Child Migrants Trust. Are you happy with all those agencies and the way in which they work and that there is no-one jealously guarding any information that is not being passed on to other agencies?

Ms Harries—If I gave a number from nought to 10 of where we were compared to where we started, I would put us at 10. At the beginning it was appalling, because we started the service at the time of huge litigation questions and very important litigation questions which I did not challenge. We all know that when litigation is around it is actually very hard to have mediation and growth and development because things have to be settled. I think we have come a long way and, certainly, we have, I think, a very good working relationship. I wonder if you would

mind if I asked Dr Rosser to refer to this because we were talking about this just before we came in.

Dr Rosser—Since the development of the personal history index there has been increasing interaction between the agencies working in this area in Western Australia, and those interactions are generally based around the tracing process. In August this year one thing that C-BERSS staff initiated was to hold a formal meeting with the Catholic Migrant Centre and with the Child Migrants Trust. Derek Rushbrook, who is the trust representative in Perth, and Sister Tanya De Jong from the Catholic Migrant Centre, came around to C-BERSS, and the staff sat down together and developed some draft guidelines to facilitate as rapid as possible access to information and information sharing with all due respect to client confidentiality and with the consent of course of any client. So I have to make that point very clearly. It is not agencies talking about clients behind their backs but talking in an appropriate and professional way where that is wished for by the client and in the client's interest.

Coming out of that meeting we at the management committee level were provided with a draft series of protocols which we were able to sign off on but we have not yet been able to finalise them because the other agencies have not signed off on them. However, having said that, I think that that is a resourcing issue probably for the other agencies rather than anything more significant. There is a lot to be done in this area and there are not all that many people to do it.

Senator KNOWLES—So if someone comes to C-BERSS and says 'I want you to trace my family', where do you go from there? Do you actually seek out other agencies—or ask them obviously whether they have gone to other agencies? Do you actively seek out any information, of course with their approval, from the other agencies as a procedural matter?

Dr Rosser—Typically what we would do—C-BERSS is not directly involved in tracing; our primary role in that process of re-unification and it is not the best term in the world but it is the term we use to describe travel experience back to the country of birth; and our primary role in that is in preparing a person for that experience as to the challenges they will meet in that experience. So we would typically, with the client's consent, approach Sister Tanya at the Catholic Migrant Centre for assistance in initiating contact with the UK. The CMC has quite a large repository of files there which will give information to start off the process in some cases—not in all cases because the information in those files is often incomplete. However, that is the starting point.

Senator KNOWLES—So then CMC would presumably seek out other agencies here in Western Australia too, would they? What I am trying to get at is how do you actually avoid at the end of the day sawing sawdust?

Dr Rosser—Sometimes you do not. Sometimes you are all sawing sawdust, or sometimes you are all turning up things at the same time. It is very dependent on the information that is given to you. We do not really check on people. Our test is are you who you say you are. Are you a former child migrant, but are you Joe Bloggs, in fact? And we look at the personal history index to establish that the person was a former child migrant but it could well be that another agency like the CMT has been tracing for this person and is actively tracing for this person at the moment and we do not know about that.

If it is a case where they come to us and say, 'I have been with the CMT for x many years and they have not found anything', we will then, with their consent, contact the CMT—that is our preferred modus operandi, virtually in an advocacy role for that client, and then to say, 'Is there some choice here for the client if they want to change services?'

Senator KNOWLES—There is no prohibition from CMT in their giving you that information that you have sought?

Dr Rosser—There is sometimes a time lag between us making the request and getting information back from the CMT.

Senator KNOWLES—Unreasonable time delay?

Dr Rosser—We conceptualise the issue as one of resourcing. C-BERSS is fortunate in that its management committee is here in Perth and we can make decisions on the ground, as it were. That is not the case for all agencies involved.

Ms Harries—Can I just add it used to be a lot more difficult than it is now.

Senator KNOWLES—So I understand.

Ms Harries—I really need to reiterate that the working that we have done together has reduced the problems. It is the men who are telling us that there was a problem.

CHAIR—'Men' means?

Ms Harries—The former child migrants who came to us would not tell us, for example, that they had been to Commissioner of Taxation, because they were fearful. I am not in any way impugning the CMT in saying this but there was a lack of understanding between us which safeguarded the men. I do not believe we have that problem now. I would support what Dr Rosser is saying that the resource issues are very significant in tracing and in getting information and in getting confidentiality agreements signed. I think we have a good working relationship.

CHAIR—We have received evidence that the Child Migrant Trust has required people to sign that they will deal with them and nobody else. I just wondered if we could clear up whether that was the case, whether that is still the case and whether it is causing a problem. I would like to say the other evidence we have received is that C-BERSS is really very good at providing the funds for people to travel and some support and counselling and the Child Migrants Trust is very good at finding the contacts in the UK, but we have got two very different messages and a range in between. If you could just clear that up for us.

Ms Harries—I will do that historically. In first instance, very early in the establishment of C-BERSS we met with the CMT and we talked about the information the men were giving us that they could not come to us because the CMT had requested that they sign material. From the early stages, by and large, CMT indicated that they were not asking that and the men were saying they were. I do not know what the truth is in that. I have no evidence—and I do not think either of my colleagues have any evidence or staff—that that is currently the case. It may have

been. I think we have sorted it out quite a long time ago. I hope we did. I have no evidence now that the CMT were providing any restrictions. That would be my understanding. I do not give that as a fact; I give it as an understanding. Is that helpful?

CHAIR—Very. Is it your understanding that the trust is very good at digging up the connections in the UK and you are very good at providing the money to travel?

Ms Harries—I think if people say that, we should respect what they have said really. I think that the Child Migrants Trust do a sterling job at trying to dig out very difficult histories and very diverse bits of information. We have actually done a pilot project that Dr Rosser might like to talk about in terms of tracing. My view would be that we need to be putting more energy and more resources—and, indeed, the Christian Brothers are putting in some resources—in Britain into working more thoroughly at the tracing possibility. We are struggling with an ageing population and with data that is all over the place. Again, if you would not mind my asking Dr Rosser to comment on this because we were talking about it just before coming in.

Dr Rosser—The point that I would like to make—and I think it is what the committee has been experiencing as it hears its evidence—is that there is a clear need for choice. If I can speak frankly, there are people who would not touch us with a barge pole and there are people who would not go to the CMT. That is the reality. In making recommendations you need to be aware of and respect that there are individual differences and individual perceptions in the services that are offered. We do really need to accommodate those.

That is something that we, in Western Australia, and working with the Family and Children's Services and the other receiving agencies, have been trying to ensure: that there is ample opportunity for choice for people in accessing helpful instruments in tracing, like the personal history index or the child migrant referral index, so that people can take the service that is most appropriate to their needs.

Senator KNOWLES—I understand and accept that the counselling is totalling independent, but given that, is there a level of concern that worries you about people saying, 'I am not going near that because it is Christian Brothers', even though the counselling is quite independent?

Ms Harries—I would like to answer that because I was involved from the start, and certainly at the very beginning of setting up C-BERSS, my life was very uncomfortable insofar as I was seen as an apologist for the brothers, and it is what I was informed by various people who would ring me with no regard, or not very much, right to my privacy, that in working in a service that was funded by the brothers I was secondarily abusing anybody who came to C-BERSS.

My decision was to use the ethical code I have always used and to provide the most professional ethical service I could—and the men advised me this by the way—and in doing that we could provide evidence that we were safe, that we were independent, we were not going to compromise our integrity at all—then we would actually see an increase in men coming to us.

Our data demonstrates very clearly to me two things: one, numerically we have a significant number of former child migrants who come to us; the other one is that—and this is anecdotal

rather than numeric—a number of those men are men who in the first instance would not come to us, and I know them because they are the ones who used to ring me and say they would not come near us. So there is a sense, I think, that we have earned credibility because our staff are very professional. That does not mean that we get it all right all the time—we make mistakes and so on.

Senator KNOWLES—Is there a word of mouth aspect to that too as well where people have been reluctant—they have experienced, it has been positive, and then they tell others and they say ‘This is not what I thought it would be’?

Ms Harries—Absolutely, and might I add that in the first month of setting up C-BERSS we had a roundtable discussion with some of the men, and I talked about how we might promote, advertise C-BERSS and there was not a lot that the men agreed on because it was early days and they had been through a lot of trauma—I mean inquiries are traumatic let alone the experience—and they had just been through a panel which had asked a lot of questions. But they were unanimous in one thing and that is that they did not think that advertising of the service was a good idea. And I almost remember the words, ‘If you are good enough we will tell each other’, and they asked us not to advertise.

As a consequence we actually have not done much advertising. I think I have done one article in a local post newspaper, and there has been some reporting of what we do incidentally by journalists, but we have not until recently, and we are just about to do this, put some material out to professional groups because I am informed that some of the professional associations—medical, nursing and so on—do not know that C-BERSS exists. But as a consequence of the request of the men we have not advertised much and we still have seen a significant number. It is word of mouth. The men know each other.

Senator KNOWLES—If I may, Madam Chair, I have two more questions, one being the question of literacy and numeracy. I understand that C-BERSS has been very keen and proactive to try and right the wrongs in maybe lack of education and so forth—what sort of uptake have you had on that offer and what sort of success?

Ms Harries—This is the literacy—I just missed the first?

Senator KNOWLES—Literacy and numeracy concerns that some of the men have.

Ms Harries—It is an interesting question because we set up the literacy—we called it adult education at the request of the men—three years ago. We had about eight start and six graduate, and we had a graduation ceremony. We had a second one and I think—I do not have the details here—there were about five. We contracted somebody to do the education for us over a year. One of the difficulties we had was that the former child migrants, like any of us, have a right to choose who to sit in a room with—they do not necessarily like each other, like I do not necessarily like all social workers. So we did have a drop-out rate. Don’t be surprised.

Senator KNOWLES—We all love each other.

Senator MURRAY—They all love me anyway.

Ms Harries—A couple of men dropped out because they actually did not want to be doing this in a group; they wanted to do it individually. They were all at different levels, but it was a great celebration when they graduated. What we have done then is we did not have a take-up for the next lot but what we did have was individual requests from the men to do bits of different training. So for some of them it is literally reading and writing; for others more recently it has been computer skills. We are now funding, on an as-needs basis, different literacy skills, educational skills to different individuals and it is much more individualised. We contract with a providing agency, usually somebody who has been working with TAFE or whatever—in one instance, it was actually a computer trainer—to develop the skills of people. We advertise that in our newsletter. The take-up? I do not actually know. I think we have probably got three or four at the moment who are undertaking. George, would you have an idea?

Mr Horton—At this stage, there are about three or four men who have taken up the opportunity. It is interesting because not only have they improved their literacy and numeracy skills, but they are now quite active on PCs and have the ability to use the Internet, and that has given them a totally new horizon altogether which they can take full advantage of.

Senator KNOWLES—So, in other words, you have not been flooded with take-up options. Thank you for that. The other thing that I would just want to finally ask, without wishing to hog this whole session, is on page 4 of your submission you make the very accurate observation that Maltese former child migrants are inequitably treated when compared with persons from Britain. I think most of us would agree with that statement. What is concerning some of us as a committee is that some of those migrants from Malta may well have been British so therefore you get an inequity right across the line. Do you have any light to throw on how best we should deal with that? Do you know whether there is almost a code of silence in Malta about speaking about this subject?

Ms Harries—They are always difficult questions. Debbie, would you like to answer this one?

Dr Rosser—Let me first say that we know very little about Malta. As we said in our submission, we do not have a link there in the way that we do in the UK. That would probably require some time to do. It is a resourcing issue as well, tracking down someone. There is not a centralised agency. The Maltese situation was different in significant ways in that the parents were so involved in the process. We know from PHIND that there is really a fairly small cohort, if I could use that word, of Maltese who came from institutional care in Malta. Most of them came from homes. Although the migration was organised through their department of labour and immigration—I am not sure that is the correct department—there was not the church sending agencies that we could go back to in the way the British were.

There were not the church sending agencies that we could go back to the way the British were. In terms of the Maltese British, I have heard this before too, and in fact when the British inquiry was set up we really anticipated that that would arise and that they would make some determination on that.

My understanding of the way the ISS funding works is that the Maltese definitely have been determined not to be British and are therefore excluded from accessing that funding source for travel back to Malta.

Senator KNOWLES—Thank you very much

Dr Rosser—Absolutely.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Harries I thought your submission was interesting and helpful. Staying with the Maltese matter for the moment. I assume that your agency has contact with people who were child migrants who were Maltese in origin?

Ms Harries—We certainly do—a significant number.

Senator MURRAY—The figures you have got here is that 310 children, of which 51 were girls, came from Malta, comprising about 10 per cent of Catholic former child migrants to Australia—most of them to Western Australia I gather: could I ask you on notice perhaps if you could talk to a few of them? We have got a couple of months to run on this inquiry so there is no urgency, but if you could perhaps give us a supplementary submission and see if there is any way in which we can establish their particular needs—?

Ms Harries—Indeed.

Senator MURRAY—In the nearly 250 submissions we have got, the focus is primarily on British migrants.

Ms Harries—I would be delighted to do that. It might interest you to know that the brothers funded and we undertook an oral history with 10 Maltese former child migrants, and that oral history has just been completed at the present time—a very rich source of information. But Dr Rosser has written down here: 48 of the people for whom we have funded re-unification trips have been Maltese, and we have a significant number of Maltese people and I cannot give you the comparisons but I can give you that on our referral list. So we see a lot of them.

Senator MURRAY—We are getting quite a common theme coming through on the needs of former child migrants, obviously with some differences, but what I would like to know is whether they are any different from the Maltese or not.

Ms Harries—Indeed.

Senator MURRAY—I was staying with an origin other than the United Kingdom. You talk on page 8 of your knowledge from Canada, and in particular you have referred to the fact that some former child migrants in Australia who have not formed families and who are lonely and socially isolated may benefit from the provision of specialist accommodation services, almost a self support group I suppose, and the Canadian experience—I am quoting again—has demonstrated that the children of former child migrants commonly seek connection with a family of origin of their fathers—you most commonly hear about mothers, not fathers, so that interested me—and also often present with second generation problems which have as their source the traumatic experience endured by their parent.

There are a few things arising from there. Firstly, we have heard a great deal about the need for therapy and counselling. Often the people speaking to us have in fact family relationships. How big a cohort, to use your earlier word, is the number of child migrants who perhaps

because of their child migrant experience have never formed families, never married, or who perhaps have married and are now alone?

Ms Harries—I cannot give you an answer to that.

Senator MURRAY—Would you, from your number of 397 men who have contact, have that sort of record? Would you be able to give us a picture?

Ms Harries—We do a lot of eye balling about that at the present time. At the very beginning of CBERs one of the things that the men said is that they were ‘fed up with being researched’ and they did not want to be answering questions that were irrelevant to their request.

Senator KNOWLES—As a female member of parliament, I can say hear, hear!

Ms Harries—The extraneous information that would be interesting is often an invasion of people’s rights. We have data which in many ways we can eyeball and I can ask the counselling staff—and we have done this a few times—whether they could give me some general idea of how many. I find eyeballing is a very effective way of getting some data without being too intrusive. So we can certainly ask that.

Senator MURRAY—My purpose is clear and you should understand it is not idle curiosity. If we were to recommend that the provision of specialist accommodation services—perhaps even for aged persons, because that is one of the issues now, of course, as people are getting old—in a self-supporting kind of mechanism should be considered, perhaps as an offshoot of HomesWest or aged care programs, then we would need to have some feeling as to the size of the need.

Ms Harries—I would just like to add that the brothers also funded an accommodation survey and I can send you that document, if you like. That was undertaken by Brenda Clare, who was then working with us at the University of Western Australia. She did, as well as she could, a survey of need and the outcome was that there was not a significant presence of demand for accommodation. That was her statement at the end. Again, I will send you her report. It is quite free available. That contradicts what a number of the men have said to us, which is that there will be a need. It is actually very hard to find out. We have got a staff member, one of the senior counsellors, who is really interested in doing research. One of the tasks that he has undertaken in our last strategic plan was to spend some time in looking at accommodation needs. Certainly our inclination at the present time—and it is what we have said to the province—is, rather than establishing obviously a little enclave of older former child migrants, that if they were going to do anything it would be to fund some sort of community housing cooperative in conjunction with one of the providing agencies in Western Australia.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Harries, part of what you are saying also contradicts what you have put in your submission. We need some substance to that, if you can give it to us.

Ms Harries—We can try.

Senator MURRAY—What you did say here, if I can remind you, is:

The Canadian experience has shown the need is likely to be manifested by our client base in the future—

In other words, dealing with the aged problem that we talked of earlier. Then you went on to say:

People who are lonely and socially isolated—

And, of course, they might become lonely and socially isolated because of drink or marital problems—their marriage has broken up and they are alone again. We would like to get a grip on that if you can give it to us.

Ms Harries—I do not like contradicting myself so if I could just clarify. There is an issue around accommodation and there is an issue around loneliness and sometimes the two coincide and sometimes they do not. Certainly, we have three lots of information—some anecdotal information from here, some Canadian information and then there is a totally contradictory information from the report of Brenda Clare. I think we do owe to you to clarify what we mean, so I am happy to do that.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you. The other thing arising out of that part of your submission was your remark about the second generation problems. We have had evidence that men and women who have been through the child migrant situation have had great problems in relating to their own children or, even when they have got that relationship, their children have problems about where they come from, where their identity is, et cetera. There is quite a list of things under second generation problems. In your statistics you did not indicate whether you have had to deal with the children of child migrants or other relations and you did not indicate whether the second generational thing is coming through.

Ms Harries—I will just start this and then ask Dr Rosser to comment. Our service is open to all family members.

I might just add that we see Australian ex-residents of Christian Brother's institutions as well as former child migrants. But we have not had many adult children of former child migrants come to us. Why that is I do not know, and whether it represents the lack of a need, the lack of advertising, I do not know. We have been very busy without that so I have not encouraged any more exhaustion than we have to have. I do know that the Canadian experience is that the next generation is suffering.

I would also like to add one more thing and that is that I am very mindful that a number of former child migrants are very tired of being labelled as either sexually abused or having dysfunctional families. There is a significant number of former child migrants who have got wonderful relationships both with their partners and with their children, and there are a number of non former child migrants amongst us who have terrible relationships with partners and with children, so there is not necessarily a kind of direct link. Given that, I still think proportionately, and this is what the counsellors at C-BERSS are saying, there are major problems when your entire childhood has been demolished and your family relationships have been demolished and there is a lot of work to do I think. But again we do not get the requests.

Dr Rosser—The only thing that I would remind the committee of is that we do use a family therapy model for counselling at C-BERSS. Interestingly, one of our counsellors put up to management committee a proposal to run a series of workshops for women because our counsellors have perceived a need based on their experience with the client group and we—can I just break into myself there and say that C-BERSS stakeholder group is much broader than our client group, it also includes former child migrants who do not come and access our services but have a very strong interest in what we do and what we say. But to go back, there was a perception that the wives must find life fairly challenging at times, so we advertised in our newsletter and through the bush telegraph for a women's group and we had two people respond positively to that invitation so we did not hold the group. It is sometimes difficult for people to access services that you think they might need.

Senator MURRAY—You see, you only have three recommendations, and one of those recommendations is that specialist counselling should be available to meet the needs of the adult children of former child migrants, so I assume from that that you either had experienced problems or you were expecting problems. If you were expecting problems I would then assume—and these are a lot of assumptions—that adult children get more disturbed as they get older.

It seems often with child migrant experience that the older the child migrant the accumulation of pain, and the not knowing and the wanting to know, is greater. And I wonder if it is a prospective recommendation as opposed to one which has risen out of your own experience or whether you knew from Canada that you should envisage this situation.

Dr Rosser—Can I just say, Senator Murray, that we do know from Canada and also from people in the UK who even have a longer standing interest in Canada than our own counselling staff have had, that it is the children and the grandchildren who feel sometimes that lack of identity, and this in an age of increasing interest in genealogy, which is not trivialising anything, but there is a lot more interest in: where did I come from; where did my family come from? And we do anticipate that that need for counselling will involve a need for continued access to information as well, and counselling around what that information may bring.

Senator TCHEN—I have a few questions which are not so much with the service that C-BERSS provides but more to do with your client base. Having heard all the evidence over the last two days, obviously we are faced with a fairly serious problem with the former child migrants. The question which this committee would need to know is how big the problem is, apart from how acute the problem is, and whether to cover a large group of people or acute problem with a small number of people. I understand the maximum client base—that is, the number of people who actually went through the Christian Brothers system, which is your client base—is about 2,000 people?

Dr Rosser—Australia wide.

Senator TCHEN—Australia wide, just over 2,000? That is the post-war figure?.

Dr Rosser—I would have thought it was below 2,000, but we would not have those figures at our fingertips.

Senator TCHEN—Most of this would be in Western Australia. This is not a very large group but then it is not a small group either. The thing that intrigues me is that there are a number of voluntary organisations which are serving them. When we asked them the question how big their membership was, some of the organisations which nominate a membership say it is about 200 on their mailing list but they also say they serve a much larger group of people. Some of these groups actually do not have a membership. They have an open-ended service. In itself, an open-ended service implies is non-acute service; it is a service which is available but is not serving acute need. Earlier in answer to Senator Knowles you said that you do not advertise your service because you are advised by your clients that if you are good they will pass by word of mouth. That implies a very closely knit group that communicates among themselves. Subsequently, you then said some of them do not get on with one another. So that is a bit of contradiction.

Ms Harries—If I could answer that bit immediately?

Senator TCHEN—Yes.

Ms Harries—I do not think it is a group. I think it is a network of groups, so we are not talking about a group that connects. There are four institutions and the men from those four institutions are connected. Some of them are connected as members of the group of, for example, Tardun Old Boys. Some of them just have connections with Tardun Old Boys who are not members of the old boys association. Some of them connect across institutions and some do not. Some of them connect through their partners or their wives who get on very well. So, in a sense, the contradiction is implied by the notion of group versus groups. If we use the term ‘groups’ or ‘networks’ I think we might get a better view. Certainly the men who were at the roundtable in 1995 had very different views about a lot of things and belonged to different groups but they were all former child migrants.

Senator MURRAY—Before Senator Tchen continues, may I just assist him with some figures? The very good reference document from the Western Australian Family and Children Services submission No. 135, at page 120, says this:

Throughout the years of Catholic child migration, the Christian Brothers received approximately 1,140 children.

So that is the figure.

Senator TCHEN—Thank you. In that case, given that there are different networks, shouldn’t you actually be advertising your excellent service rather than waiting for it to be passed on by word of mouth?

Ms Harries—We do it by more than word of mouth in so far as we have a newsletter which goes out to each of the four groups of former child migrants. We send that newsletter to as many organisations as are interested. The question is really how you advertise without what the men said we were doing: labelling them as a needy group. A number of the men—and you would have met some of the former child migrants—are actually not needy people; they are very successful business and professional people who do not want to be listed as desperate.

So there is a real question about respect for the population. We talk about this all the time—whether we should be advertising more broadly, whether word of mouth is sufficient. Our next step is to provide articles for each of the professional journals and think about then how we advertise more broadly. We have not had, from the information I have to date, a decrease in demand for the service so we are still getting new people self-referring. When that stops I wonder if we have exhausted the population or whether we just need to do something different.

Senator TCHEN—That is a very good answer. But what about the potential of second generation needs? Have you come across any examples of that yet?

Ms Harries—Certainly the counsellors have come across a couple. And interestingly enough—and again it is an anecdote and I do not want to breach confidentiality in any way—a couple of their recent requests have been from children of former child migrants who have died, and that itself is interesting in that they did not feel that they could come and ask for help while their father was alive. We have had incidental requests from men for the counsellors to talk with their adult children but it has been a very small demand.

The focus really in C-BERSS has been or the demand has been on travel and on meaningful counselling for intensely hurt people, and in a sense the next level is—and I am not dismissing the need at all and I am not sure what it is—but I think that is the next level. I think our urgency has actually been to help the men.

CHAIR—Nothing further, Senator Tchen? Just a couple of questions because we do have to conclude unfortunately. You have provided a travel fund and as I understand it some allowance to accompany that for accommodation and other needs when people get to the UK. We have had a number of witnesses say that it would be a very good idea if there was a house—six bedrooms or something of that kind of size, bedrooms upstairs, meeting room downstairs with a counsellor perhaps—and just a kind of place to put your bags if not your bum when you arrive, while you draw breath, get ready to face up to who you are going to meet, how you are going to deal with it, and also maybe some counselling service to just give you a strength of ‘okayness’. Others seem to suggest that this may not be necessary. Could I ask you what your view would be on that?

Mr Horton—Senator I could answer that for you. We have had some discussions with some of the men that have travelled and as you can appreciate they are now into their middle ages. They have a number of issues that they need to come to grips with. One is: what is going to be the reaction of the people that they are going to meet with in the UK? Secondly, most of them have never flown. You put them on a plane from Perth to London. They fly economy class. They have spent 24 hours on a plane. The adrenalin is running very hard. They have the time lags, the whole piece of that, and then they are expected to go and front up and meet possibly their mother or their siblings who, only a few months before, did not even know they existed. We think it is important that when they first arrive in the UK they should have somewhere that they can stay to acclimatise, to get their thoughts and their position in line before they actually meet with the people they are going to see.

Ms Harries—And might I add that there are a large number who would not want to do that. There are a large number who actually want to go back. And this has been really interesting: one of the criticisms made of me and C-BERSS in the first instance is that we were funded by

Catholics and so we were secondarily abusing a population who had been abused by Catholics, and that we should not be sending them to the UK, for instance, to stay in or anywhere near the institution they had come from. A number of the men wanted to do that. They actually wanted to go back. And a number of the men have family or have contacts or have places they want to go to and they just want to go there—they do not want an interim place.

I am just agreeing with George Horton. I think from our experience there would be a need for those who want to have a place. Just to comment about that. We need to be very careful in that place, and if we have counselling, that it is, dare I say, non-partisan; that we do not in any way have a place in which the men feel that there is a right or a wrong way of doing things. I am speaking the obvious, because no good counsellor would do anything else, but the men are very frightened of being told that there is one right way to do whatever they have got to do whenever they get where they get. There is no one right way. It is very individual. There is something about valuing their independence as human beings at the same time that they are given the support that they want. If accommodation is a need, yes.

CHAIR—That is very helpful. If you had any further thought about that, not now but on notice, we would appreciate it. One of the questions Senator Murray was following up with earlier witnesses was: over what lifetime would you see the need for such a base? Would it be maybe 25 years—which was one of the answers? For folk who are now in their fifties and sixties the opportunity for them to be making contact is running out fast in terms of parents but contacting siblings is a different matter. If there was just something you could tell us about that. You have given us enough. It is very useful indeed. It is a recommendation that has emerged and the committee is seriously going to have to consider it. So if you had any further words about that, that would be helpful.

We also understand that if a person is going to the UK to try and make contact, to look up records and to try and find out if there is a family, if there aren't cousins or siblings, they need a base. They have not got the family who says, 'Come and stay with us. We have got a room. We will be delighted to see you.' So people who have already made contact may have a different set of accommodation needs, et cetera.

Ms Harries—Absolutely.

CHAIR—We would welcome some comments about that. Thirty per cent of your clients live in regional areas or other states. Is that a big problem for you?

Ms Harries—It is probably more likely to be a problem for them than for us. We have a very high telephone bill. We also have travel arrangements within Australia. We fund travel to the UK and Malta but we also fund travel within Australia. A number of counselling sessions are actually conducted across Australia at the request of the men. A lot of the time we contract and pay for people in the location to do the counselling but sometimes the men actually want the counselling to come from C-BERSS.

CHAIR—You said too in recommendation 3:

Resources should be deployed from the Australian government to support the urgent effort of tracing members of families of origin.

How do you anticipate that happening—to fund the already existing organisations or something different?

Dr Rosser—There are two really critical factors: choice in which agency you go to to access the information. There does need to be some on-site tracing activity in England and perhaps not just one organisation in England doing the tracing and getting back to people with information, even if it is only to hear that they have found nothing yet. It is very hard for people in Australia to understand that there were 14 million Mary O’Connors born in that year.

CHAIR—In Liverpool, I presume you mean.

Dr Rosser—It isn’t a joke. It is a real issue for people. We have worked really hard to bring the British agencies up to speed and every agency that we work with that is involved in tracing up to speed in getting back to people, communicating information even if it is nothing. That is critical.

CHAIR—Do you yourself get any requests to contact families who are Australian families whose children were in Christian Brothers institutions and who are looking for their relatives who are not British migrants? I can imagine England may have a lot of requests for Mary O’Connor who may be for the British migrant children but might also be for somebody else looking for relatives. What we understand is that the people doing these searches are thin on the ground there and here. I am not sure how many million O’Connors there are but I take that meaning a metaphor for lots. I just wondered if your organisation has been asked to do things for other than migrant adults, one time migrant children, in Australia.

Dr Rosser—No. We do have the odd request to find someone who we think someone in the UK thinks may have come out as a child migrant, and we did not really have anything we could do with that before the personal history index. Now we can at least exclude them as a child migrant, which may not be what the person wants to hear, because it makes their tracing task more difficult, and then we can exclude them—I am getting tongue-tied because I know I am being recorded, I am sorry. You are all used to it of course.

CHAIR—They’ll fix it all up. They are expert at editing all our blumbles! Can I just be clear? You are saying that you do think the Australian government should be putting up money but that should be to assist more than one organisation in Australia and also to have an Australian presence backing up the search in the UK?

Dr Rosser—Yes it should. I do not think it is necessary that it is an Australian agency in situ in the UK but certainly a contracted agency or agencies because the trouble with the UK is they do not have centralised information. Although we are a federal system we are a lot more centralised than the UK, which is very regionally based. So, whatever you did you would have to liaise closely with the sending agencies, with the churches too, because baptismal is often the first course of information and that is not always easy to obtain.

CHAIR—We have run out of time, I am terribly sorry. I suspect it may occur to the committee to ask further questions and I am wondering if I could make it clear that if we needed to we could contact you for further questions and answers on notice?

Ms Harries—Indeed. And I could provide the numbers there, can I ask a very quick question? Because I did not record all of the things I said I would do—

CHAIR—You will be provided with a copy of the *Hansard* from today and you can then tick off. The secretariat will also be assisting you to recall what it is that you might be able to assist us with so no worries on that one at all.

Ms Harries—Thank you.

CHAIR—And also if you feel that you want to provide information to the committee or ask us questions you must please feel free to contact us.

Ms Harries—Thank you very much indeed.

[3.15 p.m.]

ANDERSON, Ms Judith Patricia, Consultant, Family and Children's Services

BUDISELIK, Mr Bill, Executive Director, Family and Children's Services

FISHER, Mr Robert James, Director General, Department of Family and Children's Services

PRIESTLEY, Mr John Arthur, Senior Information Officer, Family Information Records Bureau, Family and Children's Services

WIMSETT, Mr Peter, Director, Information Services, Family and Children's Services

CHAIR—The committee prefers all evidence to be taken in public but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera you can ask to do so and the committee would give consideration to your request. We appreciate that you are not required, as public servants, to answer questions on the advice you may have given in the formulation of policy or to express a personal opinion on matters of policy.

The committee has before it your submission numbered 135. I would like thank you for getting that submission to the Senate committee with its hearings at this time. Given the interim state of government, that has been an exercise that the committee very much appreciates. Do you wish to make any alterations to the submission?

Mr Fisher—No.

CHAIR—and make an opening statement. Can you tell us about this? What is this?

Mr Fisher—They are all the attachments that are referred to in the submission.

CHAIR—You might tell us this on the record.

Mr Fisher—Perhaps if I can introduce by making a comment about the members that we have here. Then I would like to briefly talk about the current political situation that we find ourselves in in this state and then I would like to make some comments about our submission which will lead into some recommendations that we have for your committee and then if we throw it open for questions.

CHAIR—Can you do all that in 10 minutes?

Mr Fisher—I would just like for the record state that two of the members of our delegations, namely Bill Budiselik and Judy Anderson, have previously worked for the Roman Catholic Church. They both graduated as social workers in 1974 and they have both been employed as social workers by the Christian Brothers. As well, Judy was employed as a social worker by the

Sisters of Mercy. Their employment, when they were working in those organisations, was subsidised by the state department.

In terms of our submission, Judy was involved in helping to prepare a submission for the 1996 inquiry that was held by the Legislative Assembly in the Western Australian parliament, so we have contracted her to assist us with the preparation of our submission on this occasion.

In terms of the issues that we would like to draw attention to in our submission, the reality is that the 1996 inquiry here in Western Australia shone a spotlight on this particular issue and that was followed up of course in 1998 by the inquiry by the British House of Commons report. At about the same time, I had a conversion on the road to Damascus because I met a woman called Margaret Humphreys. I do not know whether Margaret has appeared before this committee yet but when she does you will understand exactly what I mean.

From our point of view, I could never understand why we did not have accurate information on the numbers and the names of child migrants that came to this state. The reality was when we made our submission in 1996 we did not know. We did not have that information. As a result of those inquiries, we had a really good look at where could we get the information on the child migrants that came to this state, because the numbers varied anywhere between thoughts of up to 5,000 to 10,000. We realised that we had good information in our department from the Second World War onwards. We had a dearth of information before the Second World War. We knew that C-BERSS had been to us to access our records to build up their database from the Second World War. So we thought, 'Let us see if we can get in touch with all the agencies, get them together to sit in one room and let us talk about this issue to see if we can identify the actual numbers and names of these child migrants.' The one constant theme out of the two previous inquiries where public submissions were made by former child migrants, the one thing that they wanted more than anything, the big issue was: information about their pasts. They wanted to know and we could not tell them.

There was a feeling that it would be difficult to get the agencies together. We rang the heads of all those agencies and they agreed to meet. We had a meeting—of all the agencies—when it was made clear to them that we were not asking for their records, because just as we as a department cannot give up our records to another organisation, we understood why individual organisations could not surrender their records. We agreed that what we could do was establish an index that would signpost child migrants as to where they could go to actually get their records. So with the goodwill that existed between the agencies we have now compiled an index which shows us that, between 1913 and 1968, 2,941 child migrants came to this state.

The definition of child migrants of course is one that you have to be very careful about because there are a whole lot of schemes. But we have agreed on a definition amongst ourselves, and these are unaccompanied child migrants who came to Western Australia, in some cases under the guardianship of the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration, subsequently delegated to the state Minister for Lands, subsequently delegated to the head of the Lands Department, subsequently delegated to the head of the Child Welfare Department, for whom some form of subsidy was paid by the Commonwealth, state or UK government.

We are very confident of our figures. The figures that we got from Fairbridge would indicate that the information they gave this morning was an underestimate. We are very confident about our figures.

So when we got together we established an index which gives the name of every child migrant that came to this state, their date of birth—very important identifying information—the ship they arrived on, the institution that they went to, and very importantly, if there are any records of them in Western Australia where that information is held.

We established that index. We spent a lot of time working out the protocols amongst the agencies because it was agreed that each of the agencies would have that combined index. We had to have protocols as to who we were going to make that index available to—and of course that involved the former child migrants themselves, but also direct family members.

But then we realised that it only told half the story. What we had to do was front end that index by getting information from the United Kingdom about where these kids came from, what institution they came from, and if there was information in the UK, where that information or where those records were being held.

I went over to the UK. I met with the sending agencies, the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations, I met with the International Social Services, and I had a meeting with the minister who is responsible in the British government for this area of activity. Basically we were told at that stage that they could not provide us with front end information because it would contravene European privacy legislation. This seemed absolutely crazy to us because we were offering to provide them with the information of these 2941 child migrants under the protocols that we had amongst ourselves on the basis that they would provide us with the front end information.

Eventually after a lot of correspondence backwards and forwards the British government has agreed. On the basis that the Western Australian privacy legislation in our own state legislation is compatible with theirs. They have agreed to provide the information to our department but not to the receiving agency.

So we now have on disk the information that I mentioned on every one of those former child migrants. We have publicised that and as a result of that we have had a large increase in requests for information from former child migrants.

I think that would obviously lead to, from our point of view a very sensible recommendation to put forward to your committee, and that is that if Western Australia, which received most of the child migrants that came to this country, can get cooperation between the state government and the receiving agencies, and can arrange with the British government to front end that information and provide a complete index for the child migrants that came to this state, we cannot understand or see why other state governments cannot do the same thing.

It would obviously make sense to have a national index of every child migrant who came to this country. The only way you will establish the index I believe is for each state jurisdiction to do something similar to what we have done. All the information on our index has been crossed and double cross-checked with National Archives and we are very confident about its validity.

In the United Kingdom at the moment authorities are establishing a national index of every child migrant that was exported or emigrated out of the UK. It would seem to us to make eminent sense to have the national index in Australia.

The other thing that we are doing in this state is we are supporting the Child Migrants Trust. I have absolutely no compunction about recommending that the Commonwealth government, who has been supporting the Child Migrants Trust financially over a number of years, should continue to do that. I think they are doing marvellous work.

We have been working with the International Social Security, which is the organisation the British government has given authority to process applications for reunification as a result of the House of Commons report. They do not have an office in Perth. The forms that need to be filled out on some occasions for some people are difficult. We have been working with former child migrants and acting, if not as an agent for the ISS in Western Australia, at least as a facilitator in assisting former child migrants in their relationships with ISS.

Another issue that I would like to draw attention to is the fact that the government in this state has apologised to former child migrants. That apology is in our submission. It was an apology that was made in the House. In fact, it was moved by Dr Geoff Gallop, the man who is the current Premier of this state. Obviously, we are not in a position as a government department to recommend what other jurisdictions should do but I would like it noted that that apology has been moved in this state. When you talk about reparations, as far as I am concerned this means making amends and I think it is difficult to make amends if one does not apologise.

The only other thing that we would stress in terms of our submission is that we have, to the very best of our endeavours, put a hell of a lot of work into it to provide as much information as we can. We have been through all the records we can find but obviously there may have been things that we have missed and so we have got a caveat at the beginning of our submission on that basis. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Just before we hear from anyone else or ask other questions—my colleagues should answer this—have we got a national births and deaths in this country? I think the answer is no.

Senator MURRAY—The answer is no.

CHAIR—I am terribly pleased that you are optimistic that we could get a national migrant register but we cannot get national births and deaths yet, Mr Fisher. It might be a very telling point that you are making that, if we could go that way, it might assist in getting national anything elses.

Senator MURRAY—Maybe, Madam Chair could be a Trojan horse to the introduction of a national register.

Mr Fisher—I genuinely think that what we have done is best practice. I doubt whether the Commonwealth government would be able to direct the states to do this. We would hope the state governments themselves—I do not know how you or your committee can encourage the

state governments—would do something similar. I might also add that the submission that we have put in is marginally different from the one that we faxed to Elton earlier in the week.

CHAIR—The point you raise is interesting. What this committee can do is many things. We can write a report that picks up the evidence given to us, what our thinking might be as a result of that evidence and all sorts of suggestions and recommendations that come in submissions and hearings. We then have a government. This report is tabled in our federal parliament and the federal government has by convention three months or longer to respond to those recommendations. Senate committees in the past have been rigorously lampooned when they make recommendations to anybody else except the federal government to do something. Recommendations to states to act is one way which people say is useless but what you can do is recommend, as there are now good models, that the Commonwealth government negotiate with the states to get an agreed collaboration on legislation. The states sometimes agree to hand over their power to the Commonwealth in some cases—except Western Australia and family law, for example. In other cases, as in the recent genetic technology bill, the states will legislate to match or fit hand-in-glove the Commonwealth legislation. That is all done by comprehensive negotiation with the states and territories. So I think your proposal is very interesting for the committee.

Senator MURRAY—Whilst we are on that line, could I perhaps ask you, Mr Fisher, if you could supplement your submission as follows. Governments like things—I think you would know far better than I—that are relatively cheap and relatively easy to do. If you were able to summarise the cost and the manpower allocation of initiating this exercise and then of maintaining it, because the one is setting it up and the other is just keeping it maintained, that will enable us to put a figure to the potential cost for the other governments, and of course they would heavily use your expertise. But I think since you have broken the ground it must be a lower cost for the others to do.

Mr Fisher—Yes, we can definitely do that and we will. I think it is also important to understand that governments all around Australia are increasingly being asked information about the past. In our situation as a state government we have actually set up a managing the past unit—we call it our Family Information Records Bureau. Eighty to 90 per cent of its work is involved with the stolen generation. We have converted over one million folios onto CD-ROM in relation to Aboriginal children that were removed from their families.

Kids that have been adopted way back to the turn of the century and their families are seeking information from the past. So managing the past for governments is becoming increasingly important, not just in the area of child migrants but in the area of stolen generation and in the area of adoption. It is a very important area of government. We will provide you with the information.

Senator MURRAY—And does that include Australian children who were institutionalised, who were not necessarily orphaned or adopted but who were institutionalised, is that part of this—

Mr Fisher—They are seeking information.

Senator MURRAY—is that part of the managing the past approach?

Mr Fisher—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Because one of the things we have been interested to see is whether the systems and recommendations we have to deal with in regard to a specific population can in fact run on to other populations, and what you are indicating with this managing the past approach is that that is very much so.

Mr Fisher—Definitely. The stolen generation is a very clear analogy, but also for wards we have to keep information and have that information available.

Senator TCHEN—I kept very much in mind, Mr Fisher, your preamble statement in making sure my question does not get you into trouble.

Firstly, can I ask you, in your submission, at the bottom of the first page, you refer to a number of letters written by successive secretaries of the Child Welfare Department between 1945 and 1949 expressing concern that child migrants were not afforded the same protection as wards of states, can you tell me from your search of records what happened to those letters? I mean, the head of the department has written some letters expressing concern: what happened then?

Ms Anderson—It has been really hard to determine a pattern of consistent response of policy and procedure because of the lack of records, so quite honestly I would love to have time to sit and read every file that is available so that I can get a sense of ongoing practice. I have not been able to do that and there are not a lot of files anyhow, so we can only really give you spots of information, and we have found letters in some files, and they are in the appendices. So you will see that they are not actually referring to any specific concerns about child migrants but they are saying that these may be a vulnerable group of people and we would like to offer them the same care that we give towards the state.

In fact, that was followed up by us getting the guardianship responsibility in 1952. And from that point—even really before 1952—instructions to officers of the department were to regard child migrants as the same as they would state wards—give them the same care, give them the same protection and practise the same procedures. To all intents and purposes we think that is what happened, but again the caveat: there are not enough files to be able to follow through to check on that and I have not read every file that there is.

The other thing that happened as a result of that was that the department developed the 1955 policy to standardise practices around the treatment of child migrants. So there were some follow-up actions, and we have included in the appendices all that we could find to indicate any actions that occurred thereafter.

Senator TCHEN—Were there indications or any records that follow the institution, the subject of those letters, being brought to book?

Ms Anderson—Yes. And again we have included those in the appendices. I think there is a letter to a custodian saying, ‘I have referred to this matter before about after care and we would really like you to pursue that particular issue.’ So where we have found that we have included it.

Senator TCHEN—I am sorry, I did not have the advantage of seeing that before you came in.

Ms Anderson—I think 39 is an example—

Senator TCHEN—From your description it sounds like a severe slash with a feather, is it?

CHAIR—Slash with a feather; often translated as hit with wet lettuce.

Senator TCHEN—No, feather. No, I mean to say this—

Ms Anderson—I cannot comment because of the lack of records. It is very hard to say, 'Okay because of that letter this is what happened.' I do not know what happened. But what I have found from the records is that there has been very strong information from secretaries, the Child Welfare Department, to ministers saying, 'We really want these child migrants to be treated appropriately. We want every care to be taken with them'. And I think what care the child migrants got was the same as the care that other children who were in institutions got at that time, and that was around looking at the accommodation, physical care, the sorts of diets they had, health issues—in those years people were not thinking about psycho-social needs of children in their developmental stages. They were thinking about physical care of children, and there were investigations and assessments done of institutions, to see that that physical care was being adequately provided, and keeping in mind too, the staffing of the department, the numbers of children in institutions—we are not just talking about child migrants here; we are talking about all children in care.

You will see on page 14 of our submission that we refer to the staffing levels of the department. In 1959 there were two psychologists, five welfare officers, five district officers and 13 probation officers for the whole state—the 13 probation officers being responsible for all children's criminal matters, for all matters there. So a few staff spread across the state.

Mr Fisher—I think at that stage also—I mean in the late 1960s we had as many as 5,000 wards in the state so you had a very small staff base looking after a huge number of children, and I think when inspections were made of the institutions, particularly in the post-war years, the inspections were more on the facilities, the infrastructure, the dormitories, the kitchens, rather than sitting down and spending a lot of time with individual children. And at that time of course, as Judy just said, we had a handful of staff covering the whole state, and a huge number of wards for whom we also had a statutory responsibility.

The difference between the child migrants and the wards was really one of a legal nature. With the wards we had to go through the Children's Court to get an actual legal decision, whereas the child migrants were treated as wards but they were not officially wards even though the head of the department had a delegated guardianship responsibility—although, in legal terms there is obviously still some debate about exactly what that means.

Senator MURRAY—For the record, whilst you are on that point—if you would not mind, Senator Tchen—on page 14, you said:

In 1959 the department's field staff comprised two psychologists, five welfare officers, five district officers and 13 probation officers.

I would assume probation officers would not visit institutions because they would be concerned with people on probation.

Mr Fisher—That is right.

Ms Anderson—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—Effectively, it looks to me as if you had 12 people covering all institutions. Is that accurate?

Mr Fisher—Yes.

Ms Anderson—And all wards. The difference being that there are a lot of wards who were not in institutions.

Senator TCHEN—We have heard evidence earlier that there was death of children in the Christian Brothers institutions. Do you have any records of the death of migrant children in those institutions?

Ms Anderson—Yes, we do. I do not have that with me at this point in time. We went through the records of all of the child migrants who were in Catholic institutions and there were a number of deaths. I do not remember the number, but I know that it has been counted. I do not know in all cases the circumstances of those deaths. I think we are aware of a very famous part of history with a bus accident where a number—10, I think—of Clontarf and Castledare boys were killed. There were other incidents. I know that those deaths are referred to some books in the public domain. Certainly we can track that. We may not have in all cases the information around the death.

Senator TCHEN—Were you able to ascertain whether those deaths were investigated by the coroners?

Ms Anderson—I am not sure on that point. We do not have files on child migrants. We just have a little blue card which has got very superficial information, so the information will be: died in 1945 as a result of an illness or an accident. That is in probably 98 per cent of the cases all of the information that we have. But we can follow that through.

Senator TCHEN—I understand accidental death at least would have to be investigated. That is the normal procedure.

CHAIR—Is that a truism that death by accident would warrant a coronial inquiry in all course of events?

Mr Fisher—I think the coroner made his own decision as to what he investigated.

Ms Anderson—I do not know what the practice was in those years either.

Mr Budiselik—There is a difference between an inquiry and an inquest. The coroner would make an inquiry but whether he chose to go to an inquest might be the difference as it applies now.

CHAIR—So you are saying all deaths by accident would warrant an inquiry?

Mr Budiselik—I think so.

CHAIR—And back then would have too?

Mr Budiselik—I do not know.

Mr Fisher—What happens now is that whenever a child dies in this state we get a letter from the coroner's office asking if we have had any dealings with that child or that family. The coroner presumably writes to other arms of government asking the same question. He collects that information and then he makes a decision as to whether he is going to pursue it or not. The practice back then in the 1940s and 1950s—I do not know.

CHAIR—Senator Tchen, sorry to interrupt.

Senator TCHEN—That is all right. On page 15 of your submission—I assume it is page 15; that is the last page of your submission because it printed out on different machines—you referred to probable difficulties in changing the statute of limitations for civil matters. Can you expand on why you think this particular will be difficult? I understand the point in here is that in other states the court can rule that in particular cases the statute could be extended whereas in Western Australia that is not provided. You see difficulty in having that inserted?

Mr Fisher—I think, when we realised we were coming today, we sort of caucused to see whether we would bring a lawyer with us. We made a very conscious decision not to bring a lawyer with us because we thought that might get bogged down to legal debates. But obviously any change here would be a change that would involve the political level, if they wanted to make a change. We have just had a change in government. What the new government's attitude will be I do not know. The information that has been put in our submission is basically information that we received from the Attorney-General when we provided information to the previous inquiries.

Senator TCHEN—Well I am heartened by the fact that it was Dr Gallop who moved the motion of apology in the first place. But that also actually brings up another point which I would like you to enlarge on when you referred to delegation. What precisely do you see as the division of responsibility between the state welfare departments and the Commonwealth with respect to the welfare of child migrants in institutions?

Mr Fisher—It is a very good question. Obviously there are a number of players involved in this chapter of our history. There were the sending agencies from the United Kingdom, there was the British government, there was the Australian government, there were the state governments and there were the receiving agencies.

I suppose to be honest—and we have tried to tease our way through all the legislation that existed then—it is a nightmare. And we kept saying to ourselves, ‘Rather than looking at it from that point of view, let us look at it from the point of the former child migrant to see what can we do, what can we as a department do, to assist former child migrants?’ So instead of saying, ‘Look this really is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government or the British government or the receiving agencies’, I personally think that is a futile exercise. The reality is we all had a degree of responsibility and I think we should all accept that and work out what we can best do going into the future.

So, in terms of the relationship between the Commonwealth government and the state government, the answer is quite easy: get a lawyer from the state government and get a lawyer from the Commonwealth government into a room and wait for a solution.

Senator TCHEN—We will never get an answer out of that.

CHAIR—It is a very interesting approach and indeed it being so commonsense it is going to be low on the likelihood I suppose. But I would just like to say that even to the extent that I have had to flick through these appendices, I would like to put a qualifier on you saying ‘Let us not look at the history and everything else’, I do believe that looking at the history is extremely useful, not the least being that I can read on a page—the third—that amongst relevant legislation there was the British Custody of Children Act which in fact is not the one going back as far as 1850, it is the 1891 which permitted the voluntary organisations to dispose of the children in their care by emigration—by which I understand they emigrate the children not themselves.

And it is interesting sometimes to just do the exercise, to walk through the legislation in the UK in the 1800s, and the little I know is what happened to women during that century, and what happened to children born of mothers and which mothers had no access or rights to those children until the law was changed in the late 1800s I think—1880-plus. There is something very useful, even to the extent that you have done it here, in spelling out the way the law has moved over the last 200 years towards something approaching decency, towards something approaching a compassion and equity. And it is really an extremely interesting journey: what was it in the minds of the legislators in Britain in the 1800s that regarded children as able to be disposed of and women as chattels et cetera. So we have seen a significant move and I would think it would be a shame not to be aware of that historical change—even in the work you have done about what has happened in Western Australia, where I believe I read somewhere the other day that in 1906 the Australian government was bringing migrants to this country and Western Australia got some and thought it was such a good thing that they actually were paying their own £6, in 1913 I think, to bring children themselves under some different act.

So I know what you are saying, and if we are looking to solve the problem for people who are looking for assistance now, yes, but in terms of the history of how we have moved as a nation to become more compassionate I would like to make sure that that legislation is kept—the history of it is kept—and I thank you very much for what you have done so far. Does the state government fund any travel assistance?

Mr Fisher—No.

CHAIR—Does the state government fund any counselling services?

Mr Fisher—We have made offers for counselling and I think there has been a small take-up in that area.

CHAIR—I presume the state does a lot of counselling and some people might indeed, through their own network, seek counselling but it would not be earmarked counselling for one time child migrants.

Mr Fisher—Previously, ministers, when the issue of child migrants has arisen, have reiterated the offer to provide counselling services for child migrants. To be honest, the take-up rate in terms of the counselling that we as a department provide right across the board is minimal.

CHAIR—Does the state government provide any direct funding to former child migrants other than funding to support the Child Migrants Trust?

Mr Fisher—No, not that I know of.

CHAIR—We have been given evidence that there has been considerable tension between the Child Migrants Trust and other organisations—for example, C-BERSS— and that, as you have just heard, is now much less than it was. Given your effort to try and put it all out there and organise it in some sensible way, do you have a concern about a tension between the organisations; and, if so or if not, what are you doing to try and get an optimal service of support for child migrants through those different organisations that might be impeded by such tensions?

Mr Fisher—As I said before, when we embarked on the exercise of getting all the agencies together, we involved the Child Migrants Trust in the initial stages. Anecdotally I was told that I would never get all these people into a room together, but we have never had a problem. There has been nothing but goodwill. I can understand why former child migrants in researching or getting information about their past may not in some cases want to go to the institution that they were attached to because they have bad memories. I can understand why some of them want to go to what they see as an independent organisation like the Child Migrants Trust. All I can say is that, from my point of view in the efforts that I have put into this, I have had nothing but goodwill from everyone from all sides. But let me ask John Priestley, who has been working in this area for 15 years. He has seen tremendous developments taking place as we have moved forward.

Mr Priestley—I think it is true that there was friction some years ago between the trust and some of the other agencies. I think they thought the trust was gaining all the publicity from Britain and over here and were trying to dominate the scene perhaps to some extent and were reluctant to share their information with other agencies. They used to have to visit from Britain to go and see child migrants over here to bring information to them instead of trusting one of the agencies here to pass on that information. I think there was some resentment or concern. There was a delay in that information coming over. Margaret Humphreys would have to travel and see people over here when the information could have been given to them months before.

But, as Bob says, I think that has dissipated in the last few years. Certainly, in the last couple of years, the agencies are working well together.

CHAIR—Have you taken any active steps, even off the record ones or outside of the meeting room, to try and say to people that it is going to be much better if we work together? Have you actually done a little bit of cajoling and encouraging?

Mr Priestley—Only by personal contact with the people at the Child Migrants Trust here. There have been two or three officers here since they set up in Perth. They set up in Melbourne originally. Just meeting with them and having discussions with them and certainly Bob's meetings with all the agencies have helped to ease that tension.

Mr Fisher—We meet with the agencies on a regular basis to exchange information. We started off to develop this and then we said, 'This has worked so well. Let us keep meeting.' And then of course another impetus was the Senate inquiry, and we have caucused on that and we invited Senator Murray to come along. So that, in terms of that—I mean the relationship is established and we will keep it going as long as there is a need, and as I say, it is goodwill.

CHAIR—Does anybody else besides the Child Migrants Trust get benefit from the Lotteries Commission?

Mr Fisher—No, not that I am aware of.

CHAIR—Have they ever asked for any?

Mr Fisher—Sorry, has anyone else asked, any of the other agencies?

CHAIR—Any of the other organisations sought funding from the department?

Mr Fisher—From the department—not that I am aware of, no.

CHAIR—I am sorry—does the department have anything to do with the Lotteries Commission of Western Australia providing grants valuing of \$51,000 to assist the Child Migrants Trust?

Mr Fisher—No. The Lotteries Commission of Western Australia is completely separate from the department.

Senator MURRAY—It is separate from the government as well, isn't it?

Mr Fisher—No.

Senator MURRAY—Is it not an independent statutory body?

Mr Fisher—It reports to a minister.

CHAIR—So no other organisation working to assist child migrants has approached your department for funding?

Mr Fisher—Not that I am aware of. The church has got more money than the government. But they may receive some funding from the government.

CHAIR—Remember ,Mr Fisher, that line is on the record.

Mr Fisher—I would be interested in know what an independent statutory authority is—I thought that was an oxymoron.

Ms Anderson—I would just like to add something. As the consultant who was doing the research for your inquiry I met with all of the agencies, and there is tremendous goodwill and I feel independent from these men in that I do not work for the department, but I was very impressed with the willingness to share information and to help each other out.

CHAIR—We have had a number of people putting submissions to us that they would like to see a kind of data set available—we need this thing, this comprehensive data set. It is a good idea but where? Some people have suggested it might have to be available on the Internet but I would have thought such a data set is going to have to be set up somewhere. Do you believe the information you have collated and put together would be the beginnings of such a data set?

Mr Fisher—No. We would be very concerned about anything going out publicly. We believe the information we have is private information for the individuals or the families concerned and we would be very concerned—or we just would not allow it to be used universally. And exactly the same way I think I heard the tail end of a previous submission about the issue of citizenship. I think again that if there are any former child migrants who have wanted citizenship and have not been able to achieve it then that is something that definitely your committee could look at.

But I understand a suggestion was put that perhaps you could write to all the former child migrants. But we would have grave reservations about that, because many former child migrants are living in families and their families do not know that they were former child migrants and they do not want their families to know that they were former child migrants, so to get a letter in the post which could be inadvertently opened we would have some concerns about.

I think perhaps that same result might be able to be achieved by advertising and then people who wanted to come forward could do so to seek information on citizenship. I think confidentiality is a very important issue in this particular area. There are a lot of sensitivities involved.

CHAIR—The committee is assisted by those comments, Mr Fisher, thank you. Any other questions colleagues?

Senator KNOWLES—I am fearful that most of my questions are going to be contained in this large file, so just having a look through it I think it is very good—

Mr Fisher—I apologise for getting it to you so late.

Senator KNOWLES—Excellent.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Fisher, I will just start with a comment. Senator Crowley has quizzed you on the amount of money the department gives out in this area as opposed to including in your normal programs: I would for the record say that it is on page 6 of your submission and is an annual allocation of \$64,000 to the Child Migrants Trust, which, without attempting to belittle it at all, is a bit underwhelming I think in terms of the size of the problems.

The second comment I want to make is that I sit on 10 or 12 committees and we see a great number of submissions from government departments, some state but frequently Commonwealth. May I compliment you and your department. This is of a very high standard and of great assistance. It reflects very credibly on the high reputation you personally enjoy. As an experienced observer in these matters, it is a very useful thing.

I want to begin with a question which relates to the C-BERSS submission. On page 6 of their public submission, under the heading 'Summary: a global approach', they say:

We would hope that one of the outcomes from the Senate Inquiry will address the 'knowledge gap' by enabling a mechanism for sharing expertise in the area of service provision for former child migrants.

Earlier we heard from the chairman of Fairbridge WA (Inc) and he also talked about the committee making recommendations which do not cost a lot of money but actually have a great outcome. It seems to me that your coordination of a number of agencies to produce a productive outcome was a managerial exercise which had tremendous positive and practical consequences. I ask your opinion as to whether you think it is possible to replicate that nationally and whether what may be needed is the sponsorship by the Commonwealth, which would be a relatively low cost, of meetings under a proper facilitator such as yourself, to produce outcomes which have a practical consequence and utilise existing services, existing organisations and existing expertise.

Mr Fisher—I think it is a very good question. To be perfectly honest, the only way you achieve something like this is to have someone who drives it and to have a real commitment to achieve something. In government, of course, you have to have commitment from the government itself, otherwise you achieve nothing. I meet with my colleagues, heads of departments in the area that I operate in around Australia on a regular basis. On a regular basis I have the issue of former child migrants put on the agenda and on a regular basis nothing happens. So I do not think that there is the same enthusiasm and commitment in the other states to do something in this area. I think some of them feel that the issue was not as large in their states. I think some of them perhaps have taken advice from lawyers that this could end up costing a fortune so why get involved. I do not know how it can be achieved.

For us, it was not difficult and it was not an expensive exercise. The most difficult thing was making the decision to get the people together. Once that happened we agreed to establish the index and this happened reasonably quickly and it did not cost a lot of money. In the other states, I think basically the way it could best be achieved would be to get a political commitment to do something in the other jurisdictions. I would be interested in assisting in any way possible. I know Margaret Humphreys, if she has not spoken to you, will. She has had great difficulty in getting access to ministers in other states. I think the idea is good. We would definitely be prepared to be involved, but somehow the issue that Senator Crowley raised of

how you translate a Senate initiative into state government doing something is an issue that I am afraid I cannot help you with.

Senator MURRAY—I see the chair looking at her watch, which is a signal, but I will have one more question if I may.

CHAIR—You may stay. It is me who has to go. I am sorry; I have a plane to catch.

Senator MURRAY—I understand that, being a frequent flyer myself. I had earlier asked a question of Mrs Mathers, who is a professional archivist and runs the PHIND organisation. This question of access or availability of information is an important one. What I asked her on notice I want to ask you on notice. In your view, are there any legislative or legal impediments arising out of contractual obligations, or legislative obligations, to the definition of documents as property and the accessibility of that property either by agencies which need to find information or by individuals who may need copies or other documents? In the whole matrix that governs this kind of information, are there blockages that a legislative override or some changes to acts could relieve?

Mr Fisher—From our point of view, any information that we have is available to individuals to whom that information refers—it is available under FOI, but we will make it available willingly at any rate—or to family members who can demonstrate their close relationship with a former child migrant.

Senator MURRAY—Could you get information, even though you had a guardianship capacity, out of an Anglican or Methodist agency?

Mr Fisher—No.

Senator MURRAY—Since you had the legislated requirement under the acts for certain duties, and you in fact are carrying out that duty now—years later—by the provision of the service you have outlined, it would seem to me to be an impediment which should be overcome, even if it is just the ability to access the archives—not to take things away. That is really what is in my mind.

Ms Anderson—I agree with you; it is very important. When I was visiting all the agencies about writing submissions to you, it was a concern expressed by all the agencies, particularly the archivists of the agencies. They all want information to be made available. They showed me some of the information. There is a lot of information that does not talk about individual child migrants, but it is historical information and it is very useful for finding out some of the things like Senator Tchen was asking about. There is a lot of information there, but it is currently up to the director of that particular agency to say, ‘No, you are not having it.’

Senator MURRAY—They may themselves feel constrained by contract.

Ms Anderson—Exactly.

CHAIR—I must leave, so please excuse me. The committee will take a few more questions. I want to put a couple of questions on notice. One of the questions is: further to that, we have

discovered quite clearly that some of the people filling in those documents in the UK were lying. I am very interested in whether your government's discovering that those documents or archives are actually a false uttering—

Senator MURRAY—Records of forgeries.

CHAIR—Not just forgeries in the standard sense but lies such as, 'There is no mother or father,' and years later people find out. There is an archival document or piece of legislation—I cannot find the right words—that I would love your comment on. Secondly, in the documentation of inspections that I have been able to look at—and this is on notice because I do have to whiz, and I do not want to keep you—I would love it if you could tell us whether at any stage—we will look too—there was any documentation about how the children were. The ones I have looked through seem to say that there were four walls and a roof and whatever. We kept hearing from places like Bindoon that the kids had awful clothing, no socks, no shoes, no underwear and very few jumpers. Did somebody pull them all out of the closet and, under threat of death, the kids had to put shoes and socks on for the inspection? Somebody is nodding that they did, which is particularly interesting. Thank you for that nod. I wonder whether the department picked that up or ever asked the kids, 'Do you have shoes every other day?' But it seems that such a basic thing as very poor clothing was never drawn to the department's attention, which is of concern.

Finally, this submission and the work you have done I think deserves significant acknowledgment from this committee. From time to time, I am told about the virtues of other than the public sector, and there are many times when I know there is nothing as good as the public sector—particularly if it is minded to do its job comprehensively. I would like to put on record that I think the Western Australian department deserves a big plaudit for this.

Mr Fisher—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Senator Knowles will take the chair. Please excuse me, I have to run.

Senator TCHEN—Mr Fisher, can you tell the committee what the financial arrangements were between the state welfare department, the church and other agencies? Did money change hands on a per capita basis?

Mr Fisher—Yes. We have given a snapshot of that on page 13 in the first submission. It shows:

In 1948 payments to child migrants up to 16 years of age were summarised as:

Commonwealth Child Endowment 10/- per week; State Subsidy 3/6 pw; British Government Subsidy 6/3 pw; Lotteries Commission 3/- pw; Total 1.2.9 per week

And they had increased in 1963:

Commonwealth Child Endowment 10/- per week; State Subsidy 15/- pw; British Government Subsidy 1.50 pw; Lotteries Commission 10/- pw; Total 3.0.0 per week

That money went to the receiving institution.

Senator TCHEN—From memory, in those days the average weekly income was probably in the order of 10 or 15 pounds per week. It is not a bad payment. Was there any accountability between the agencies and the department on how they spent the money?

Mr Fisher—No, not directly. That would have been covered in the inspections just to ensure there was a proper standard of food and bedding. The dormitories and so on were inspected, and the kitchens were inspected. I am just trying to work it out, but three pound a week in 1963—that was one hundred and fifty pounds a year; I was at university then on a scholarship—was not a lot of money.

Senator TCHEN—It was not that little either.

Senator MURRAY—Do you think you could ask Treasury, when you are responding to the other questions, to convert that into current value for us?

Mr Fisher—What we can do is to put that down against average weekly earnings at that time.

Ms Anderson—It is an interesting question. If you have read any of the texts that have been written about Fairbridge, there is a lot in their documentation about the financial difficulties they had caring for the children and how they were always writing back to sponsoring bodies in the UK for more money. I understand from the historical literature that that was the case for every receiving agency. They were dependent on other sponsorship.

Senator TCHEN—Yet the evidence that we received was that the children were put to work rather than put to study. It will be interesting to see some results. If you are preparing to close, Acting Chair, I would like to make some comments, but not so much to the department. Is it appropriate?

ACTING CHAIR—Do you want to comment before we release the department or after?

Senator TCHEN—It does not really matter.

Senator MURRAY—The one critical element concerning your own department needs to be explored briefly by us—you might want to look at the *Hansard* later; it does not relate to this generation, it relates to a former generation—and it is the belief that the department received wages as a component from the farm work that wards were carrying out. In other words, on the farm they got bed, board and lodging, which seemed to be in the local shed—or in some farms it was like that—and the wage component went to the department to be paid to the child migrants at the age of 21. A number of them have said in submissions that they were not paid and believe in essence that the money was stolen from them. Do you have any records or any way of dealing with that?

Mr Fisher—We can comment on that now.

Mr Wimsett—We have taken several of these cases. We have searched diligently through the records. The money would have been lodged in the Commonwealth Bank and, as you said, when the child turned 21 they would have been refunded the money.

Mr Fisher—Explain why we took the money.

Mr Wimsett—We took the money in trust so that when the child turned 21, went to work or got married, there was a sum of money to set that child up in addition to the £30 that we used to give to each child and every ward when they left our care so they could get their first clothing to go to work in. The money was held in trust for that purpose. If you married, you got the money, when you got married. That was one of the differences. Or if you died, you got it as well.

Mr Fisher—How much of their salaries was it?

Mr Wimsett—It was about 50 per cent. Usually half of the money that they were paid by their employer went into trust, but not in all cases.

Senator MURRAY—The only way in which you could prove that that happened is either there was a signature, ‘I have received the money,’ or it has been transferred into a bank which can be identified. The alternative, of course, is that if the department paid it out, they paid it out to the wrong person.

Mr Wimsett—The problem we have is that we keep financial records for only seven years, so all those records of paying out those children have disappeared. If money was held in trust, and we did not know what to do with it, we gave it to Treasury with the name. We have checked all those Treasury records as well—and Treasury have checked diligently—for these people to see whether there is money held in trust for them that has never been collected. We cannot prove that we have given them the money but we cannot prove that we have not given them the money.

Senator MURRAY—Are you telling me that the audit trail has gone cold?

Mr Wimsett—Yes. The records have been destroyed.

Senator MURRAY—If it was, say, £600 in the year 1960, I presume it would have a present value—I don’t know how to convert that—of something like \$50,000.

Mr Priestley—I do not think interest was paid once it was paid into consolidated revenue but prior to that.

Senator MURRAY—I was purely converting it as a parity. How do you think we as a committee should deal with that? The people making submissions to us strike us as honest people with a real grievance and a real belief that they did not get what was due to them. What do you think the committee should do with that?

Mr Fisher—We will just get Judy to add something on the issue and then perhaps we can respond.

Ms Anderson—Just some extra information from my research. The information that is still available on former child migrants is what we call the blue cards. In most cases, there were exit interviews with child migrants,, as there were with wards. It was a very stringent procedure.

Again, referring back to how it was intended that child migrants would be treated in the same way as state wards, the procedure was that when they turned 21 or got married there would be some termination of our contact with them. They always received a letter. In most cases, according to the blue cards, they had an exit interview. I find it hard to believe that the issue of money was not dealt with, because in the extant records that I have seen, there is a lot of procedure and there are a lot of guidelines about what you need to follow up and what you are supposed to do. The blue cards indicate that those things were done. I would have to say—without proof, but just from the information I have discovered in reading the extant records—that that also was a procedure that was followed through.

Senator MURRAY—I may have misunderstood the submissions and evidence we have got but I had the impression that at least some of those persons only realised long afterwards, long after they were 21, that they should have got money—in other words, they did not know it was an entitlement and you will excuse me, because it does not reflect on you, if I am a little suspicious about how stringent or rigorous an exit interview was when we have got evidence that the inspection process was so poor. I would not therefore automatically assume that the exit interview was well conducted.

Ms Anderson—I think that is a fair enough comment, given the number of staff and so on but it is nevertheless interesting that from what I read of the blue cards it did say there was an exit interview, so that affected all the child migrants in the Catholic institutions.

Senator MURRAY—Just one last comment and I thank you for your discretion: I would assume in our interchange you are not stating unequivocally—

Ms Anderson—No, definitely not.

Senator MURRAY—Everyone was paid, you just do not know, do you?

Ms Anderson—That is right. I am not stating unequivocally that everyone was given an exit interview either—just trying to tease out the procedure around that. Thank you.

Mr Wimsett—I am not defending my predecessors, but it would have been very hard for a public servant in the department to steal someone's money and not everyone's, and there were audits and Treasury would look over things and you had to report the money you held in trust. It would have been difficult for someone to pocket one or two people's money, that is my view.

Senator MURRAY—I am not suggesting a public servant necessarily would have done it but they might have paid it to the wrong person who claimed it fraudulently.

Mr Wimsett—Yes. Unfortunately the trail is cold and we have no signatures.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. There is a gentleman who is signalling down the back who wants to ask a question. It is a little unorthodox but he could ask the question after the meeting is concluded, because we do have a formal process, but certainly he may.

Just before we conclude today, Senator Tchen was actually wanting to make a comment about what one of our witnesses, Mr Peter Kyle, said today:

That in all of this we must lose sight of the positive contribution that so many of the child migrants have made to this country

I think it needs to be something that is held very much uppermost in our minds throughout this whole inquiry and no doubt through everything you have done because most of these people, if not all of these people, made such a wonderful contribution. Some of it might have been bigger in some ways and smaller in others but, so what; their contribution has been made. To you, Mr Fisher, and your colleagues: your reputation certainly preceded you and you have not let us down. I would just like to also add officially, in closing, our most sincere thanks for the superb information that you have given and the evidence that you have provided this afternoon. It is very much appreciated, and do not be surprised if you hear from us again before the conclusion of our inquiry. Thank you very much. The meeting is closed and we will reconvene in a couple of weeks time.

Committee adjourned at 4.24 p.m.