

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Rishworth, Amanda, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.34 pm)—I rise today to support the motion before the House. It is with some sadness that I rise to speak because, over the last few months and years, I have heard many stories of the forgotten Australians, of some of the issues they faced and the emotional, physical and sexual abuse that some of them suffered. So it is with sadness that I rise to support this apology, but I am very pleased that this bipartisan apology has been made. I think it is very important that we do acknowledge that there are over 500,000 forgotten Australians—people who as children spent a period of time in homes, orphanages and other forms of out-of-home care between the 1920s and the late 1970s. I also recognise the 7,000 former child migrants who arrived in Australia through the historic child migration scheme and were subsequently placed in homes and orphanages.

I recognise that this apology does mean different things to different people. For some, this apology is something they have fought very hard for, and for others it only awakens a lot of memories of the things that happened to them in the past. So this apology does mean something different to everyone. It is my hope that this apology will start a process—whether it is a continuing process or the start of a process, for some it might be the end of a process—and will mark something in that process and mean something very special to people.

For me, the ongoing consequences of the abuse that these people suffered are not surprising. It is not surprising that the severity of abuse, the feelings of not being secure and of being lonely have led to the damage caused to these people. I am not surprised about that, but hearing firsthand some of these stories has been very moving for me and also, as I have said, very saddening.

I was particularly moved by the stories of two women in my electorate who have been fighting for an apology for a long period of time. In fact, in South Australia under a process before a former Supreme Court judge, Ted Mullighan, a lot of the state wards came forward. There was a large inquiry into what had happened to them. Both of these women were involved in that and have been involved for a long time in telling their stories. They have been brave enough to tell their stories so that others could identify with them and be willing to speak out.

The important part—the Prime Minister did talk about this; it was a theme in his speeches—is being able to tell one's story, to be able to express it and be heard without people judging, to be heard without people not believing. Just being able to tell that story is an incredibly powerful process. I do know that Mr Mullighan also found the same experience during his inquiry. He said a number of times that telling their story was a huge part of the process. Certainly the two women in my electorate, Josephine Cavanough and Lila Ophof, have also found that telling their story has been an incredible part of the process. I would like to acknowledge some words from Josephine.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 5.39 pm to 5.59 pm

Ms RISHWORTH—I was speaking about two of the women in my electorate, Josephine and Lila, who attended the apology today. I want to quote Josephine, who said: 'We can't change the past, but we can look forward to the future and let the healing begin.' Today is a very special day for her. It was also a very special day for her because she finally got to meet some of the relations whom she had never known. In fact, today was the day that she met her aunties for the first time. Josephine had a very lonely childhood. She was separated from her 16 brothers and sisters. She says that during her time at the Sisters of Mercy orphanage she was fed bread and water, beaten and sent to solitary confinement. This was a very difficult and upsetting time for her.

At age 13 she was forced to relocate to Adelaide, where she lived on the streets for a few years. Since that time she has been piecing her life back together. She has been trained as a chef and has done courses in mining skills and communications. She has also raised two children. What she has been able to achieve is a real testimony to Josephine's strength of the character.

Lila told me that the most important thing for her about the apology today was that she no longer felt forgotten, which she had for a long time. She said to me that now she would be one of the remembered Australians. It was also very empowering for her to hear that she was not to blame. How can a three-year-old be blamed? For so long she had believed that she was to blame for her mother giving her up. She still does not know why, and a question that she is continually asking is, 'Why did this happen to me?' But today was a time for the powerful realisation that it was not her fault. She was just a child and there was a duty to look after her. She experienced an awful childhood, one with no love and no care. That has been really awful for her.

Lila was not funded by any of the organisations to come here today. I want to pay tribute to a company in my electorate, Wirra Wirra winery. Many in this chamber may be familiar with their wine. They have no relation whatsoever with Lila. Our office spent some time trying to find some sponsorship that would enable Lila to come over and hear and see this apology. Wirra Wirra were incredibly generous, paying for her airfare and enabling her to be part of this. I cannot give a big enough shout out to them, because in a time of need for someone who had been forgotten for so long they acknowledged her and helped her get here.

This has been a great process for both of them. Both of these women are very keen to support and help others who have been in this. In fact, Lila says that since there has been some publicity and because her picture has been in the paper others have come up to her and thanked her for what she has done. Both of them have a very strong and real commitment to helping others.

I support this motion. It was a very emotional day for both of these women and for the many people here. It was a very emotional day for me. I feel honoured and privileged that these forgotten Australians have been able to share with me and with many other people their often very personal and sad stories, stories that have stayed with them for so long. I hope that sharing those stories—without judgement and without people disbelieving them—and gaining real recognition and acknowledgement will help some of these forgotten Australians move on. In conclusion, today marks a point when these Australians and child migrants are no longer forgotten. They will be acknowledged and remembered for many years to come. In saying that, while they will be acknowledged and remembered, I hope that we also—as other speakers have said—learn from those mistakes of the past. No child should ever have to experience what these close to 500,000 Australians went through. I commend the motion to the House.

SPEECH

Date	Monday, 16 November 2009	Source	House
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Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Albanese, Anthony, MP	Question No.	

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House)
(1.45 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the resumption of debate on the motion relating to the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

I say, particularly for the benefit of the members of the gallery who honour us with their presence here today, that we are doing this so as to enable further debate by members of the House of Representatives. I am sure many from both sides of the chamber will wish to participate in ongoing parliamentary debate on this important issue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Before I put the question, can I thank all of the honourable members for their contribution on this historic day on an historic motion before this House. I acknowledge former Senator Andrew Murray and all of the members in the chamber.

Question agreed to.

SPEECH

Date	Monday, 16 November 2009	Source	House
Page	99	Proof	Yes
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Neal, Belinda, MP	Question No.	

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (4.09 pm)—I rise to speak on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. This historic apology begins the process of healing for more than 500,000 Australians who suffered as foster children in orphanages, children's homes and in other institutions around Australia. The full significance of this suffering is brought home most tellingly by the sheer number of people affected and this is shocking.

The personal stories heard today, in the foyer of parliament, were extremely affecting. Today I had the privilege to hear the harrowing life story of one of my constituents, Sharyn Killens, who lived through juvenile detention at both Parramatta Girls Home and the equally notorious Hay Girls Institution. Sharyn's story is one of heartbreaking separation from family. It is also a story of triumph over great adversity. For decades she knew nothing of her father. Her mother was unable, or unwilling, to share any details. After 40 years, Sharyn found out that he was an African-American serviceman stationed in Australia after World War II. In 1996, after eight years of searching, she was finally united with her brothers and sisters in America, but tragically her father had already passed away.

Today I attended the national apology along with Sharyn and many hundreds of people who suffered terrible neglect and abuse while in the care of institutions. There were many tears but also many old friendships reignited in what was a very emotional ceremony. Sharyn spoke to me not from a backward-looking sense of bitterness at the fate she was subjected to, although she had every reason to be bitter. Instead she talked of the national apology as a chance for the people of Australia to embark upon a healing process. She said the apology would be seen as a wake-up call to the nation. 'Australia,' she said, 'must now ensure that the human rights of all children in institutions—past, present and future—are protected.'

Sharyn is now a well-known singer and entertainer. She has spent two years with author and fellow entertainer Lindsay Lewis writing Sharyn's biography, entitled *The Inconvenient Child*, a harrowing but triumphant account of her life. She featured recently on ABC Television's *The 7.30 Report*. I commend Minister Jenny Macklin and the Rudd Labor government for initiating the national apology to the forgotten Australians. Every indication today is that it is a great moment for our nation.

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source House
Page 133	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Raguse, Brett, MP	Question No.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (12.36 pm)—Today I rise to applaud and congratulate the Prime Minister on his apology this week and also to applaud Minister Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, for the hard work and effort she put into bringing this issue and this event to a conclusion. But when I say a conclusion, it is really only the beginning. It is only the beginning of what we need to do in the process of healing. It is a significant event, but in order to complete the process of healing we really do have to understand the whole complexity of what occurred. It is about having no more secrets. For too long, lots of these things have been buried in people's memories and those emotions have been covered up. I would like to acknowledge today those who were affected and who have fought for this recognition. It really goes to the opening up of more issues and to lifting the lid on some of the secrets. It is about identifying areas that still need resolution.

I have spoken before in this chamber about the fact that I am an adoptee. While I, and many adoptees more generally, have had a very good life, there are issues that relate to adoptees as much as they do to the forgotten Australians and child migrants. A lot of child migrants and some of the forgotten Australians were also caught up in the adoption process. Too many stories exist in relation to the adoption process and the forgotten Australians, but all are related to similar issues of institutional care, the problems that existed and the lack of identification of some of those problems. Many of the young women who arrived here as child migrants later became single mothers and further institutional care put them into a situation of some grief and loss.

It is about relinquishment and the profound loss experienced, whether it was families who lost children as migrants coming to this country never to be reunited, or the loss in this country of children who had brothers and sisters. Today I want to put on the record my connection with those who are affected by adoption. I have spoken many times in this House about the positive aspects of adoption. For those people who have been caught up in it, and certainly for those mothers who have had to relinquish their children, I want to put on the record what we need to do for other forgotten Australians and migrant children and for those affected by adoption as part of the healing process.

To provide a brief background—and I have spoken about this before—my mother was 17 years old when I was born. She was the oldest of 12 children and the family were quite destitute. My mother was told that she could have the child and would be able to take it home. That was not to happen but little did she know that until after the fact. Whilst I was being born, a pillow was placed to her head to stop her seeing or understanding anything that was going on. She remembers my cries as I was being taken down the hallway to the nursery. She was then put into a ward with mothers who had had stillbirths, those who had lost children through miscarriages and some who had suffered infant deaths. At that point she only saw me very briefly when a kindly nurse said to her: 'Come and have a look. Here is the baby.' However, she was then told to go away and forget that she ever saw it. Her breasts were then bound so that she would not produce milk and she was told to go home and start a new life; that it was just a mistake. That is the sort of profound loss that many of the forgotten Australians and migrants have also felt.

What I wanted to put on the record today is a statement, a 'Declaration of Profound Loss' that 21 organisations, including those involved in the apology this week, have issued. This Declaration of Profound Loss came before the apology, so the apology was the start of that reparation, getting things very much on the record and out of the closet so there are no more secrets. The Declaration of Profound Loss by these 21 organisations reads:

We the undersigned

MOURN the loss of our children

TAKEN FOR ADOPTION

Mourn the loss of our families of origin

DENIED US BY ADOPTION

MOURN the loss of our brothers and sisters

CAUSED BY ADOPTION

MOURN the loss of grandparents

DENIED US BY ADOPTION

MOURN the loss of our rightful position in life

DECREEED BY ADOPTION

As I said, this is a statement signed by 21 organisations. Again, the apology this week goes some way to starting to resolve the issues of that loss.

Can I now indulge the chamber by reading a letter that I have been asked to read by an organisation called ALAS, the Adoption Loss Adult Support group. Again, these emotions are very much the same as those being felt by people who were in institutional care and affected by institutional care. This letter was to me. It says:

Dear Brett,

We, the members of A.L.A.S. Qld, call on all members of parliament to apologise to the mothers of another stolen generation here in Australia.

The ongoing pain, suffering, psychological scars and heartache have been caused by the actions of over zealous consent takers, social workers, doctors, nurses and medical staff. Through threats, bullying and coercion, our babies were stolen for the purpose of adoption.

They denied us our legal rights to raise our much loved and wanted babies, by never allowing us to see, hear or hold them. Such practices were inhumane, barbaric and cruel.

Our babies lost their biological right to be raised by their mothers, leaving them with unresolved anger and grief at the loss of their identity and natural family.

A grave miscarriage of justice was done to us.

Most of us were under the legal age of 21 years and did not have legal presentation or a parent present. It was impossible to reject the intense pressure placed upon us to sign the consent form.

At the time of consent, most mothers were still under the influence of strong medications. Signatures obtained under these circumstances for a legal document, were invalid.

Some babies were placed in locked nurseries, had their birth weight and time of birth changed so they could not be found. This was the usual procedure until a signature was obtained.

We make this approach for an apology on behalf of the A.L.A.S members and all women who were subjected to the former coercive adoption practices.

Please find attached a copy of Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital apology.

The hospital sent an apology, and it reads:

Dear Friends,

Thank you for meeting with senior members of Women's and Newborn Services at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital ... and sharing your stories with us about the care you received at the Royal Women's Hospital some time ago. It was very moving and indeed saddening to hear how your experiences have adversely affected your lives, and many other lives that are near and dear to you.

From our frank discussions, we understand that each of you was denied the right to experience the natural relationship between mother and child to care for and to raise your children yourselves, but because of hospital practices were not permitted to do so.

In summary you have described to us how your much wanted babies were taken from you by the practices of the hospital operating at the time and that you feel you were coerced by hospital staff to sign over your babies for adoption.

In this regard we acknowledge the hurt and suffering you have described and sincerely apologise for any ill treatment experienced by you as single women during your pregnancy and confinement at the Royal Women's Hospital.

That is signed by Professor Ian Jones.

Further to that, the Anglican Church was also approached, among other organisations. I am only reading a sample of these letters, but I think it is very fitting that these organisations have seen fit to apologise. This letter is to one of the members of the ALAS organisation:

Dear Mrs Hamilton

Thank you for your letter ... regarding your experiences in St Mary's Home in Toowong ...

I was most concerned when I read of your distressing experiences in St Mary's in 1966 and the sad separation from your baby as he was taken for adoption. As you have so poignantly written, the effects of that separation are still with you and your son even after so many years. These effects may perhaps be only slightly lessened by your knowledge that he is alive and safe.

It is concerning now to be made aware of actions taken in the past which—while often taken with the best of current knowledge at the time—have now caused so much distress and hurt to those persons directly involved.

I sincerely apologise to you for the hurt and distress caused to you by past actions of the Church and those persons employed by the Church at St Mary's. On behalf of the Church, I would like to offer you pastoral support and counselling. If you consider this may be helpful, please contact ...

and we—

will then make the necessary arrangements with you.

That is signed by the Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, Archbishop of Brisbane.

After the apology was given, I received a letter from a group called Origins Inc. They were accepting of and very happy with the apology because they know the issues that surround the adoption processes well. The letter said:

Origins Inc is a support organisation for people affected by adoption, removal and separation welcomes the apology to the Forgotten Australians.

As stated by the Federal Government on the announcement of the apology, many of these children were from unmarried mothers, and many were taken from these mothers by the forced adoption practices of various States and adoption agencies.

Many babies taken for adoption were placed into care either as the result of medical problems, or were returned to the care of religious and State institutions when the child became an unwanted responsibility, or the adoptive parents became parents of their own natural children.

These babies were denied the security of their own mother's love, by a system and a society that treated the lone mother as a pariah, and her child as a "result" of an immoral act that needed legitimizing in order to become an accepted part of society.

This is another group of children that follow in the path of the Stolen Generations, Child migrants and Forgotten Australians that have all suffered at the hands of a cruel and unloving system.

We are yet to hear from the 150,000 mothers and their children forcibly taken for the adoption market from 1950-2000. Once this sordid chapter in Australia's history is addressed and documented through a Senate inquiry then we may say that we finally live in a compassionate and equal society.

They are some of the feelings that still remain. While recognising the apology it does lift the lid on some of those other issues that may have to be resolved as time goes by. I applaud the PM and Jenny Macklin, the minister, for their work in resolving the issues of the forgotten Australians and migrant children. I think it is our role as members of parliament—now that the lid has been lifted, as someone said in this chamber earlier—to start the healing process by getting some of these people on board to tell their stories and be part of a resolution so that they can live with the understanding that their issues have been recognised.

It is about those people affected by institutional care. When I said that my adoption was one that was very good for me with loving parents and a wonderful upbringing, I solidly recognise that there are some who did not have those same experiences, including many of the relinquishing mothers that I have had involvement with

over the last 20-odd years. They are applauding the fact that the government has recognised issues of grief and loss and that migrant children, forgotten Australians or others in our society who are affected by institutional care should be recognised and given similar support and help, and I know that will come.

This is a very, very intense, emotional issue for many people. I do not want to upset the balance in understanding adoption, because it was well intentioned. It was a system run mostly by state agencies, and the federal government were not necessarily directly involved. Some of the statements made in the apology by the Prime Minister the other day showed that some well-meaning and caring organisations actually lacked the ability to care for individuals, which is very clear from the forgotten Australians and migrant children who suffered. Some of them doubly suffered through what occurred to them and their children through either foster care or the adoption process. It was well intentioned but it was certainly an uncaring system at the time.

It is through our recognition in bringing these issues to the table and to the chambers of parliament that everyone will know we have lifted the lid on the issue and now have the opportunity for no more secrets. One of the issues around adoption was that it was secretive. There are laws that prevented people having access. For the migrant children and forgotten Australians the problem is that there were no records, so lots of that contact was lost. In relation to adoption—and this was only just resolved in Queensland this year—people can finally get access to some of their birth information. I have spoken of my own story before in this chamber about getting information on my background and medical history. Only 20 years ago finding my natural family was very, very important to me. For a whole range of reasons people who have found themselves in that situation understand it.

That is a small part of the wider feelings the apology was directed at earlier this week. The apology was to those forgotten Australians and migrant children who suffered at the hands of institutions that were well intentioned, no doubt, but just could not provide the care, support and emotional treatment that many of us as young people certainly require, and not having proper care at a young age has an effects on us as adults.

This apology is about building a caring community—a community that does understand its past. It is so important that we understand where we have come from. The Prime Minister, in his speech, said that denying or not understanding the past can mean that we make the same mistakes in the future. In my 50 years of life we have become a sophisticated society. When I was a child, even the mention of adoption or of being the child of an unmarried mother was something to be ashamed of. My school friends would call me the ‘bastard’ and I still hold that as something that happened to me, and I accepted it and I understood it. But we have certainly progressed and matured as a country since that time.

For those reasons I again applaud the government for the apology and I certainly applaud all the members who have spoken in the House and in this chamber today about the need for this apology and about their understanding that it is a start. This is about moving forward and about rectifying the past. It also about understanding that, as a country, we have done the right thing and that we will continue to do the right thing for all those who have been affected by being a child migrant, a forgotten Australian or by adoption.

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source House
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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Scott, Bruce, MP	Question No.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (12.50 pm)—I rise to support the motion on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. I acknowledge the speakers who have talked so openly about, and with so much understanding of, the hurt that they, their constituents and so many thousands Australians experienced as children. I acknowledge the member for Forde and admire the way in which he has put on record, in the *Hansard*, his own experience. I am sure that it is very hard to talk about, but I sometimes think that talking about these experiences is part of the healing process. Although the member for Forde said that he was adopted out to wonderful and loving parents, I found listening to his story very hard and heart-rending.

I commend the speeches that were made in the Great Hall on the national apology and of course all of the speeches that have been made on it since. The speeches of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition took place in what was a very emotionally charged Great Hall. Many people attended the apology in the Great Hall. Obviously not all those who have suffered abuse were able to be there. Only a very small cross-section of the people who have suffered abuse from government institutions, churches and charitable organisations were there.

I want to acknowledge the work of the senators who were involved in the reports that have led to this national apology. They deserve great credit too—not just those of us who are speaking on the apology now, such as the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. These senators went out and did the hard yards in gathering the information about this abuse and in bringing forward in reports that have ultimately led to a long-awaited acknowledgment of this very dark side—a very black side—of our nation's history. None of us can be proud of it. It is important that we look back, and we have done that.

I also want to acknowledge former Senator Murray. He has been openly and widely acknowledged by many for his work in this area. After he left the parliament, he continued this work. He and those other senators who are no longer with us and who worked in this area must feel a great sense of satisfaction with the work that they did through the committees. If I can digress for a moment, I think this apology underpins the importance of much of the work that is done by the committees of the House and the Senate. I think too often the committees bring forward their reports and there is little response from governments of both sides of the House to them. This is one of those very positive results following the work of a committee.

I want to share with the chamber some of the comments about the apology that I have received from my constituents. I particularly want to talk about a man called 'Ray'. For 45 years, Ray has tried to forget what happened to him and his family—his brothers and sisters. I was talking to him on the day of the apology, and he said that it is a start but more needs to be done. More work needs to be done on restitution, but the apology is certainly a start for him. I want to share with you part of his story—and it is only a very little part of it. Many years ago, programs were funded to take children away on a holiday to the beach. Ray, along with his brothers and sisters, went on one of them. They boarded a train at Cunnamulla and went to a camp down at the beach, where they saw the ocean for the first time. They had a holiday by the sea.

When they hopped on that train to go back home, they were looking forward to seeing their parents after having that wonderful time, as kids would from the bush—and I know how important it is for them to be in the salt air and sand and play in some of these holiday camps. When their train arrived at the railway station in Cunnamulla they were met not by their parents but by the police. The police put those children straight back on that train and sent them away to orphanages. Brothers and sisters were put into orphanages not far from Brisbane. I think one was near Nudgee and another one was at Riverview.

In talking to Ray about his experiences there, he said that, some days, he could see his separated brothers and sisters, but within the orphanage they were not allowed to talk to their brothers and sisters. If he did, as we have heard in a number of speeches, he was taken aside and given a flogging; these were his words. His sister would have received the same sort of treatment and they were barred from seeing their brother or their sister, albeit in

an orphanage. It eventually got too much for Ray and he ran away. He spent many, many years running away and trying to escape the horror of what he had experienced. He did say to me that he was not sexually abused, but he was physically and mentally abused. He ended up on a large pastoral property in Western Australia as an unknown person, and he has a great deal of time for the family that gave him an opportunity and a job. He still has contact with the family that understood the plight he was in but never revealed him to the authorities for fear that he would be taken back and put into an institution once again.

For any parent, just to think about your own children and how you have loved them and nurtured them through those very formative years, it is hard to comprehend how those children lacked that nurturing. There are the maternal instincts of a mother that are lost because of what happened to so many children being taken away and put in orphanages. Maybe, as was considered at the time, it was for their welfare but, as we all know now, the physical, mental and sexual abuse that so many of them suffered is just incomprehensible in a modern Australia.

Another person that spoke with me was Robyn from Stanthorpe and I want to share with the chamber Robyn's story. Back in 1959 when she was 15 years of age, her mother had been divorced for some 10 years from her husband, and she was not able to help her—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! As a division has been called in the House and it is almost time to adjourn proceedings, the honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 19 November 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Scott, Bruce, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (10.01 am)—During my contribution on the motion for the apology to the forgotten Australians yesterday, I was talking about Robyn from Stanthorpe when we were called to a division in the House. I want to pick up where I left off and talk about what Robyn has told me. Robyn's mother, as I said in my contribution thus far, had been divorced from her husband for more than 10 years. This was back in 1959. Robyn's mother decided that the best thing for her daughter, because she wanted to make sure that Robyn had the best chance in life, was to entrust her to the care of the Pastorelle Sisters at their hostel for girls in Carlton, Victoria. They were to make sure that she had a job, went to work and went to night school and continued her studies. In the space of less than eight months the Pastorelle Sisters had convinced Robyn that she should become a nun. She was convinced. She was then asked to basically, using Robyn's words, 'lie' to her mother. She was then sent to Rome. The Pastorelle Sisters really failed Robyn and, using Robyn's words, her, 'passport application and documents were falsified' as far as she was concerned.

Robyn's mother had no assets. She was a divorced lady, a single woman, having at that time in history to make her own way and maintain a job for her own wellbeing. When her mother found out, she was powerless to act. Robyn was sent to Rome. It was at the convent in Rome that she was sexually molested, physically abused and ill-treated. She was 'neglected', as Robyn says, to the point where her youthful vigour waned and she became very ill. She was detained in this situation because her passport had been taken away. She had no money, no civilian clothes and no friends on the outside, and she could not speak the language. All of her correspondence home was censored. As Robyn says, she was subjected to 'behaviour modification'.

In the last two years of the seven years she spent there she was, really, a stateless person because she did not have a passport. She had not been able to apply for a renewal of her passport. She was not even able to register to vote for federal elections in Australia. Robyn is a constituent of mine, and when she came back to Australia she lived with this for some 30-odd years. She is now on a disability pension. But when you talk to Robyn and read her story—and there is a lot more than I have time to put on the record today—you can see that it was an appalling situation: a whole life destroyed because of the treatment that she received. Her mother was a single mother who entrusted her daughter into the pastoral care of the Pastorelle Sisters at the Carlton hostel for girls in Victoria.

I want to briefly, because I do not have a great deal of time, talk about John Walsh, who now lives in Roma. His story is that he and his brothers and sisters were taken away from their mother while their father was serving overseas during the Second World War. John has written to me. He said that there was a knock on the door of their home at 10.30 at night. Child welfare, the police and the Salvation Army had arrived. Their mother, fearing what might be happening—because she was aware that children were being taken away from their mothers—would not open the door, so they heaved it open and took the children away. They were sent to Hay Street East in Perth. I wish that I had more time, because I know that John's story could be told over and over again. It is harrowing, as are the stories we have heard from so many speakers.

I also want to say something about another lady in my electorate, Jenny, who is dealing with children who have been taken away from their mother, a single mother, in the last month. I know that child protection agencies today go to great lengths to make sure that children are safe. These children have been taken away from their mother, who is expecting another child in fact to Jenny's son. She has been the subject of domestic violence. I know it is not a very pretty situation, but those children have been taken away and fostered in other homes. Jenny said to me, 'Bruce, wouldn't it be better if we were able to put a parent into the home to keep the mother and children together to help the mother cope with the situation rather than take them away and put them in foster care?' One of the children who were taken away has already run away from the foster home and gone back to her mother. The mother is pregnant, so you can imagine the strain on her and the baby she is carrying. Wouldn't it have been better to have brought foster parents into the home to live with the family and to make sure that she is able to cope and look after the welfare of the children? I put that on the public record and I think it is a suggestion that we should all look at. I hope that the government will look at it as an alternative in each case to fostering out children and taking them away from their parents, where they get mothering, nurturing love and care.

I thank the chamber and I hope that as a nation we continue to work on this issue and make more restitution to those who have been so mentally and physically abused by churches and government. Care from government is what we must make sure of in the future. *(Time expired)*

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 113
Questioner
Speaker King, Catherine, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (6.19 pm)—I add my voice to those of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in giving my apology to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants. Today's apology extends to a large number of Australians—around 500,000 of them; 500,000 people who spent time in children's homes, in orphanages and in out-of-home care, alongside some 7,000 former child migrants who came to Australia at part of child migration schemes to then be placed in children's homes and orphanages. Today's apology extends to these people; it also extends to their families and to future generations, to give us a better understanding of this disgraceful tragedy in our past century.

It is a particularly important apology for the people of Ballarat. It is important for the many Ballarat people who were residents in institutional care and their families. It is also very important for those of us who were not to formally apologise for what happened in these institutions in our community and to recognise what happened to the children, now adults who live among us. Ballarat had three major institutions: Ballarat Orphanage, St Joseph's homes for boys and Nazareth House for girls. The Alexander babies home and a number of smaller institutions also existed. One estimate is that over 15 institutions operated in Ballarat at some point over the course of the past century.

A significant number of children grew up in Ballarat institutions. The Ballarat Orphanage alone saw some 4,000 children in care. Many of these children continue to live in Ballarat and have raised their families there. The stories heard in my region are similar to those heard from all corners of Australia in this debate so far—stories of children accommodated in large institutions without love, without the sort of nurturing care and warmth that is every child's right; unfortunately, all too often, stories of abuse, of children beaten with a belt or a cane and of young boys and girls sexually abused—raped by their carers and abused by the people who were supposed to give them care. We have heard of staff bashing children senseless while other children watched in horror and despair. Those are stories of children who wanted just one thing: to be loved.

One of these stories is of Frank Golding. Frank, who was only three, and his two brothers found themselves in institutional care on Christmas Eve in 1940. While many children were thinking of the joys of Christmas, the beauty of family and the laughter of friends, Frank and his brothers found themselves alone. Frank's once forgotten story has been realised in his book *An Orphan's Escape: Memories of a Lost Childhood*. I highly recommend Frank's book to anyone who truly wants to understand what happened in institutions in Ballarat. Frank tells many stories throughout his book, few which give a sense of his larrikin and kind-hearted nature and many of which give an explanation of his harrowing experiences suffered in institutional care. The book tells a story of a child forgotten. The book is one of thousands of stories that exist around Australia.

To do justice to Frank's story, I want to quote fairly extensively from it. Like many others, the picture of arriving at the orphanage is a vivid one, one which has clearly stayed with him. He wrote:

I touched each shaft of the iron fence as the policeman pulled us towards the great double gate. The spikes towered above our heads as I ran my hand over the cold bluestone base. The gravel crunched under our feet as we drew near the dark-red building. Looking up at the balcony on the second floor, Billy read to us the words cast in iron 'Orphan Asylum, 1865.' This was a grim place, this Ballarat Orphanage. Solid like a fortress.

Like many children, Frank and his brothers questioned what they had done to have this happen to them.

Why were we in this place? ... orphans haven't got parents. We were not orphans. What did they mean by Asylum? Mum told us about the lunatic asylum up near the lake. That was the place where mad people got locked up. Why were we being punished? What had we done?

Frank was lucky in one way: at least his two brothers and he were in the same institution. But the sibling groups meant little as children were separated according to age.

With scores of children to play with, the idea of brothers and sisters soon lost its meaning. We shared surnames but not much else. Some children told us they had brothers and sisters in other orphanages. Years later I met people who never knew

they had siblings until they discovered them while piecing together the jigsaw of their families decades after their stay in institutions. Some have tried to reunite as family but found that physical resemblance is not a sufficient basis to make up for the lost years. To stare across a train station at a 50-year-old stranger who looks like you can be both thrilling and disturbing. To become sisters again can be stressful.

Frank spoke of those who worked in these institutions. He wrote:

A hard core of staff stayed for ever but otherwise there was a high turnover and constant shortages. It has been said that staff in children's institutions fell into three categories, the devoted, the dull and the deviant. To which I would add the disciplinarians. Many of those with compassion couldn't bear to stay after they saw what the orphanage was like and what they were expected to do to keep the children under control.

Frank outlined story after story of his experiences that are chilling to read. Unfortunately, for Frank, they are not only a story; they are his reality. These are stories that are difficult to hear but they must be told and we, as members of the Ballarat community, have a responsibility to listen to every one of them.

I know there will be people in my own electorate who served, or whose parents served, on the boards of these institutions or who worked in them and who will say, 'But these institutions did good things as well,' and that the children were happy; that at the time people thought it was the right thing to do. Again, I refer to some powerful words from Frank:

I have been asked, sometimes with aggression: isn't all that positive achievement the result of the stable upbringing provided by the Orphanage? It has been said I thrived, and I should remember what we were taught all those years ago: "For what we have received may the Lord make us truly grateful." I thank the authorities for a roof over my head and three meals a day for more than ten years. I lived with two hundred children in the Orphanage and I made friends with many of them. They, and the extraordinary diversity of experiences we shared, taught me important skills for coping and surviving. We had some good times and managed together through some bad moments. Those chosen by the State did not sexually abuse me as they did other children. But I do not feel grateful for the salvation of avoidance. I should never have lived under the dark shadow of chance and I should not still be weeping for those little kids who were picked out to be buggered by paid predators.

It is incredibly important that we do not gloss over what these places were like for the people who experienced them. No matter how difficult or embarrassing it is, these forgotten children should expect no less from us.

Frank, along with others who grew up in my electorate, was here today in Parliament House, and I thank him for his permission to use his story. I encourage Ballarat residents to learn a little about Frank's story and what happened, in our own community, to Frank and to the hundreds of children just like him in care in Ballarat institutions.

Today's apology has been a very long time coming. The federal government, through the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, has reported in detail on this issue over the past decade. Three separate reports of inquiries under the committee include *Lost innocents* in 2001, *Forgotten Australians* in 2004 and *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited* in 2009. These reports told us something that many Australians had known for years. They spoke of the abuse that children in institutional care suffered, the physical and emotional suffering, the neglect. These reports unanimously called for a national apology. The Senate committee recognised that a national apology was an important part of the healing process for those who had suffered at the hands, the poor policy decisions, of our governments.

The first report, *Lost innocents: righting the record*, gave a stark assessment of the treatment of children who were brought to Australia from the United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta via child migrant schemes. Australia made a commitment to protect these children. The report showed parents consented for their children to migrate because they were told of the wonderful care their children would receive in Australia. Some of these children were sexually assaulted and were abused by their carers. They were alone.

In 2004, the Senate committee delivered its second report, *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*. This report reflected on the half a million children who spent time in institutional care from the 1920s to the 1970s. It outlined many of the horrific things that occurred in this care, including many of those that I spoke of earlier.

In June this year the Senate committee released the *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited*, a report on progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the two previous reports. With the Australian government's formal apology today we have specifically addressed the report's first two recommendations. They

advised, as had been stated in the previous reports, that the Commonwealth formally apologise to our forgotten Australians and former child migrants.

The hard work of the Senate committee is to be congratulated. We have also seen hard work from many over recent years, and decades, to address this issue. I would like to recognise the hard work of the following: the Child Migrants Trust, Families Australia, the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, the International Association of Former Child Migrants and Their Families and the Care Leavers Australia Network.

Today we recognise the mistakes of the past. We as a nation placed our children in a position that was cruel and ugly. Children went to sleep in the coldness of the night, alone and afraid, and they awoke cold, alone and afraid. Because these children, these forgotten Australians and former child migrants, suffered enormous pain they did not have somebody to turn to when they needed care, when they were being neglected. They did not receive the love, the care, the security and the compassion that many of us take for granted today. When many of these children suffered both physical and sexual mistreatment they did not have anybody to turn to and, if they did, many of them were just not believed. The situation these children found themselves in was through no fault of their own. I apologise that we as a nation did not intervene to stop what was happening to them.

I support the motion moved by the Prime Minister today, because these experiences must be publicly recognised. With today's apology we start that process. I hope that this apology brings some small relief to our forgotten Australians and our former child migrants. I hope that, by coming together as a parliament to reflect on this dreadful past, we can realise the true extent of what has happened. Today's apology is long overdue. This apology should not be seen as the final step in a difficult journey but, instead, as the first page of a new book.

I recognise that scars never truly heal, that few memories will ever fade and that we cannot return lost childhoods and, in some cases, lost lives. But today I apologise. I would like to place my apology firmly on the record and say that what happened to these children was wrong and should never have occurred. I apologise to the over 500,000 forgotten Australians and former child migrants. I apologise to the thousands of children, now adults, who grew up in institutional care in my region. I apologise to those men and women who were placed in the Ballarat Orphanage, in St Josephs, in Nazareth House, in the Alexander Babies Home and in other institutions that operated in Ballarat. I apologise for the loss of your innocence and for the loss of your childhood. Most of all, I salute you as extraordinary survivors whose courage contributes to who we are as a city. Your stories should forever be recognised as a central part of Ballarat's history.

Finally, I want to give the last words to Frank Golding. I quote:

I have won some control over my past and understand the story, but the scabs still itch. What if ... we had not been infants in wartime when family life came under profound stress? What if ... the struggle by our parents to get us out of the Orphanage had succeeded earlier? What if the welfare department had been in less haste to condemn our parents? What if ... the state had supported and helped them through their hard times, instead of condemning them as not fit to be parents? What if ... the child welfare system of the day had been instead a family welfare system?

What if?

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source House
Page 130	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP	Question No.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (12.12 pm)—This morning I had the opportunity to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. I preface my contribution to the debate on this motion by saying one of the things that I think unites most people generally, certainly everyone I know this place, is the fact that we put children in the forefront of our thinking. I am very fortunate to have three fine kids, and those who have ever heard me talk will know how proud I am of my four grandchildren. I cannot for the life of me think that anyone could not act to put kids in the forefront of their thinking. Therefore, it behoves governments that we do everything in our power to protect children. I take up the point just made by the member for Murray: these are things that should be at the forefront of government because children are our future.

I would like to take the opportunity today to reiterate the words of the Prime Minister and other members of this parliament from all sides of politics who have acknowledged the appalling abuse and cruelty towards those of the forgotten Australians and former child migrants who suffered whilst brought up as state wards in institutions—and who were brought up unloved. The apology to the forgotten Australians, like the apology made to the Indigenous Australians, is an apology that is very important. It is not about furthering a political agenda but rather doing what is right and what is decent.

We all know that this apology to the forgotten Australians and child migrants is a historic moment in their lives and, more importantly, is the first step to moving forward. It is the opportunity to formally recognise past injustices and to recognise that what happened was not their fault but the failure of the system. I know that this apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants will bring special meaning to people involved and their families. Hopefully, it will provide a measure of closure for them.

I pay particular tribute to one person, John Hennessey, who lives in Ingleburn—not far from my electorate office. John was born in Bristol in the UK. His mother was an unmarried 16-year-old who was encouraged to give her baby up at birth. At some stage, John, after having been in an orphanage run by a particular religious order, was shipped off to Australia along with about another 10,000 boys and girls. Clearly, British orphanages were overflowing and John, as I say, was transported to Australia. He went to Western Australia and spent his time, I think, at a BoysTown. John is 73 and is a very iconic figure in my electorate. He has been around for some considerable time. He has undertaken various roles in our community, including that of deputy mayor. But he is a 73-year-old and he speaks with an unmistakable stutter. He told me that he started stuttering at age 12. Most stutterers are kids. We went through this not that long ago when my three-year-old granddaughter started stuttering. What did we do? We went and took advice. We went and saw paediatricians. We did everything we could to address it. As I understand the advice, stuttering is normally acquired at preschool age and, provided it is approached carefully and consistently, can be ameliorated. Fortunately, that is the experience that we found with my three-year-old granddaughter.

John told me that he started stuttering at age 12. Ordinarily, I would have thought that was a bit unusual, but his life was unusual. I understand that when he was 12 John was stripped naked in front of 50 other boys and thrashed within an inch of his life at this orphanage near Perth for stealing grapes from a nearby vineyard. His point to me was that as a result of this incident he started stuttering. But the routine beatings were only one terrifying aspect of John's life in this grim institution. He recounted to me that he faced perpetual hunger and heavy labour. But, more horrifically, and with a fair degree of certainty from his perspective, in the night whilst he was in his dormitory he would be violated sexually.

Despite this young kid being uprooted from his country of origin and suffering these mental and physical scars, John went on to represent his community with distinction. In the 1980s, over his period of time on the council, he was elected Deputy Mayor of the Campbelltown City Council and has made an invaluable contribution to our local area. Given the horrific nature of John's life, one could be excused for thinking, 'How could that come about?' After reading and listening to some of the heartbreaking stories of the forgotten Australians and former child migrants like John, one can only start to imagine how much they have suffered and continue to suffer.

John says to me: 'That pain is something that you carry on. It was bad enough that we went through all that as a child—to be cut off from any relatives, to go through not knowing anything about your parent or parents and to be told that your mother died.' He said that is something he struggles with. In fact, when I was talking to him just recently as he was preparing to come down to Canberra to personally witness the apology, John revealed to me that it would have been great for his mother to see this day. His mother died without him ever seeing her or being able to visit her. He thought this apology should also have been delivered to her and many other young mothers in a similar predicament who gave up their children to an orphanage to try to secure a better life than they could have provided for the child. John has been invited to travel to England next year to hear the apology as it is delivered by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, because this is not something that just involves Australians. This involves the policies of other countries—Malta and Great Britain—in terms of how these young people were treated.

However long it has taken for this apology, we know we cannot give back what was lost to people like John, the 500,000 other forgotten Australians and the 7,000 former child migrants. It is not the words of the apology that are important but the genuine feeling of sorrow, remorse and regret for the actions taken by past administrations and also the lasting hurt that the forgotten Australians and former child migrants have had to endure ever since. These are the people in our society that have been stripped of their childhood and of all those things that you, I and every other member here take for granted in respect of our kids and our grandkids. This is something that these people could never personally experience themselves. They were deprived of that experience. I know we cannot take away the pain, but this apology is aimed at addressing our past wrongs.

Finally I would like to pay tribute to the tireless work of the various groups representing the forgotten Australians and the many years that it has taken to bring this to reality. Through their persistence, I think they have done the community a great service by making sure that the facts of these issues are at the forefront of our minds. To the hundreds of people who gathered in the Great Hall to join with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, it is a very significant turning point in our national history, not simply to say sorry but to commit ourselves to take action for the future.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009	Source House
Page 107	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Chester, Darren, MP	Question No.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (5.19 pm)—It is an honour to rise on this historic occasion to support, on behalf of Gippslanders, this apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants and also record my personal sorrow over the events that have taken place in the past and offer my personal apology. Before I begin my main remarks I would like to comment on the events of the day. We have just heard from the member for Fremantle, who, in keeping with her style in this place, has exhibited an enormous amount of empathy and thoughtfulness towards and respect for the people whose lives have been affected in such a way as to warrant today's apology. I think that is of great credit to the member for Fremantle and it is also of great credit to this place that we have gathered here today in such circumstances. I think all members present really appreciate being a part of today, particularly when we look at the remembrance ceremony earlier in the Great Hall. Serious work was certainly done in this parliament here today as we came together to deal with what the Prime Minister described in his motion as 'an ugly chapter in our nation's history'. We came together to offer our nation's apology and also to say we were truly sorry to the forgotten Australians and those who were sent to our shores as children without their consent.

It was a day, really, for the forgotten Australians and former child migrants themselves. While politicians might want to wax lyrical and talk about the event, in a sense it really was a day for the people whose lives had been fractured by the experiences that they had had as young children in our care. As a father of four children and a member of this place, I really struggle now to understand the fact that our state failed so many people so badly, having abandoned them, given the sense of betrayal that they must have felt in those circumstances as young children. I find it hard to think that such events could occur in the past. I take up the member for Fremantle's cautionary tone that we need to be mindful that such events might be continuing today in some form or other. We must be ever vigilant in that regard.

It is hard not to get emotional when you read the accounts in the Senate reports and also the personal accounts of the experiences of these children. The neglect and the abuse which have occurred are a fundamental breach of the trust that we have as a community and as a government, particularly as to our most vulnerable citizens, our children. I want to give credit to the Prime Minister for the way in which he spoke today and also to the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I think for many of us who have not had that direct experience they made it all come to life that the challenge we in this place face as members of parliament is to ensure that we take steps to prevent such abuse from ever occurring again. So it goes without saying that the motion has the unqualified support of the opposition.

I think today was really a major step forward for us as a nation in recognising that appalling treatment has occurred in the past and that many of these young children have suffered at the hands of institutions, whether they be government run or church run ones or ones run by other charity-type organisations. I found the contribution before in the main chamber by the member for Swan to be quite captivating as he told of his personal experiences. He is an absolute inspiration to us, given the fact that he was placed in a babies home at the age of six months and was made a ward of the state of Victoria. He quoted some harrowing examples of other constituents he has met since that time. I think that the member for Swan is a very humble man and that perhaps would not like to be described in these terms, but he himself is quite an inspiration given what he has been able to achieve in his life after such a difficult start. If you read his maiden speech, which I recommend to other members, you note there is not a trace of bitterness as he tells the story of his life, in which two of his sisters were lost in tragedies related to alcohol abuse. I am sure that Steve Irons, as a survivor of the system that was in place, has taken a lot of heart from the apology that was given today by the Prime Minister and endorsed by the opposition in a great bipartisan way.

I just make the point, though, that I am concerned—and this is a very real fear in my mind—that once all the nice words are finished with today there will not be the will to go further and make sure that we do everything in our power as members of parliament to make sure that this emotion filled day is capitalised on with a commitment to prevent such abuse from ever occurring again in the future.

It is not the size of the roof of the institution in which the abuse takes place that matters. If the abuse still occurs under a smaller roof we still have a major problem in our community. It is somewhat smug and perhaps idiotic of us to even pretend to think that this generation is not making at least some of the same mistakes with the current generation of children in our nation. The abuse continues to occur, albeit under a smaller roof—perhaps not with the blind acquiescence of the system that we may have seen in the past, but abuse does continue of Australian children on our lands and it is perpetrated by Australian sex offenders in foreign lands.

I refer to the contributions of the member for Warringah and the Leader of the Opposition who both join me in cautioning about the need to learn from past mistakes. The Leader of the Opposition said in his contribution in the Great Hall:

And just as we ask ourselves whether in different circumstances we too could have spent our childhood in a “home”, as you did, so we should ask ourselves whether we too could have neglected you and abused you as others did.

Or could we have been a Minister, a Bishop or a member of a worthy charity committee that presided over these homes, but did not know, or perhaps did not want to know of the neglect and the abuse that you were suffering.

Those homes are long closed and they will never re-open. But when we hear a child scream in pain in the next apartment, or we see a little boy at school with bruises, or a little girl who seems sleepless and withdrawn—do we say: it’s none of our business?

The Leader of the Opposition went on to refer to his meeting with the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. I have also had the opportunity to meet with NAPCAN on several occasions and regularly attend meetings of the Parliamentarians Against Child Abuse and Neglect. NAPCAN’s purpose is to stop child abuse and neglect and ensure the safety and wellbeing of every Australian child.

The figures are quite damning according to research that NAPCAN circulates quite widely. Thirty-three thousand individual Australian children are known to be abused or neglected each year. That is, one in four girls and one in seven boys are sexually abused by the age of 18. Thirty thousand children are living in out-of-home care for their care and protection, one in four children have witnessed violence against a parent and one in 10 teenagers regularly binge drink. When we talk about abuse of young people in our institutions over the most recent decades and still quote figures of that nature in 2009, as I said before, it would be smug and idiotic of us to think that our children are necessarily safe today.

NAPCAN works, as I said, to try to prevent child abuse and neglect wherever it occurs and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every Australian child. It has a range of approaches in that regard: it does advocacy work, it promotes social change, it attempts to build resilience in our children and young people, it tries to develop a professional and parental skills and knowledge base, and it works to try and strengthen community capacity. The field that we are referring to is incredibly complex and difficult. It is emotionally charged. The underlying factors which contribute to the abuse occurring are the main reasons why it becomes so difficult for an organisation like NAPCAN to break the cycle of abuse and neglect. It is one of those topics that we have not liked to talk about as a community. Regretfully, we have turned away from where we may have held suspicions and have not necessarily believed the children as they have come forward with allegations. I congratulate NAPCAN on the work they are trying to do and urge all members to do whatever they can in their work as representatives of their regions to support NAPCAN and Parliamentarians Against Child Abuse and Neglect in the parliament.

There is another area that NAPCAN is focused on. I recently attended a function in the parliament titled Don’t Trade Lives. It is particularly relevant in the context of the motion today as it refers to insidious human trafficking and the impact it is having on young victims, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. As much as we refer to migrant young children who were forced to travel to Australia and were put to work, often in difficult and menial conditions, an ongoing form of abuse is occurring today. Reverend Tim Costello was the guest speaker at the function that I attended with NAPCAN. He made it very clear that there are reports through the Asia-Pacific region of children still vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, such as bonded labour schemes, commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. It is challenging for us all to confront these very difficult issues and not simply look the other way.

In my own electorate of Gippsland the challenge is there for us as a community as well. We have rates of child abuse which are a constant cause of concern in our community. We have a significant issue in the Gippsland region, where the rates of Indigenous child abuse and sexual assault are way beyond what would be accepted in any humanitarian and civilised situation. It is the same, I think, in the broader community. We must remain

ever vigilant. I am concerned about the situation in Gippsland. The government of the day at the state level has admitted that 60 per cent of child protection cases in Gippsland were not allocated a case worker because the government department is struggling to recruit staff. We are simply not on top of the situation we are faced with in Gippsland at the moment. I say to the House that we are kidding ourselves if we believe we are anywhere near on top of the situation of child abuse and neglect as it occurs throughout our nation at the moment.

We need to provide the resources and we need to understand that we have a whole-of-community responsibility to confront this problem. Today we have had the Prime Minister apologise on behalf of the nation, on behalf of the government, but I put the challenge out there to the community in a wider sense: we must all remain vigilant, not just those in leadership roles and members of parliament but those in our communities, wherever we find ourselves. We need to be ever vigilant and look out for those children who are defenceless in the face of those who may prey upon them.

I support the motion before the House, but I would like to add perhaps one more positive note. I would like to thank those carers and foster workers who have done the right thing and have worked tirelessly in the past to assist young people who have been abandoned or orphaned. The member for Swan noted in his maiden speech that some foster parents have in fact saved lives. We need to be careful that we do not become so risk averse, from the negative publicity about removing children from some situations, that they are left in the kinds of appalling conditions and risky situations that have often in the past resulted in serious injury and death.

In closing I would like to read from the motion before us today and offer my complete support:

As a nation, we must now reflect on those who did not receive proper care.

We look back with shame that many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and nobody to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that many of these little ones who were entrusted to institutions and foster homes, instead, were abused physically, humiliated cruelly and violated sexually.

We look back with shame at how those with power were allowed to abuse those who had none.

I would like to take up the Prime Minister's final words in speaking to the motion:

So, let us therefore, together, as a nation, allow this apology to begin healing this pain.

... ..

And let us also resolve this day, that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story.

A turning point for shattered lives.

A turning point for Governments at all levels and of every political colour and hue, to do all in our power to never let this happen again.

For the protection of children is the sacred duty of us all.

As I said earlier, a lot of words have already been spoken here today in relation to the apology to the forgotten people. I believe there is enormous goodwill in the heartfelt commentary on behalf of both sides of the House. What it needs now is action from us and a commitment to ensure that we never let this happen again. When it comes to the health and wellbeing of our children we must all commit ourselves to never looking the other way—to shining the light in dark places. Every child has the right to live in a safe environment that protects and fosters them in their formative years. We need to provide our children the environment where their physical, emotional and social needs are all catered for. That is an individual family responsibility and a community responsibility. But where those families and communities fail, for whatever reason, governments have a role and a sacred trust to step in and provide assistance to our nation's children. We must make the prevention of child abuse a national priority for our community. The momentum gained from today's historic apology must be capitalised upon. Our nation's people are watching us. Our children deserve the best chance to achieve their full potential in the future.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 116
Questioner
Speaker Jensen, Dennis, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (6.32 pm)—I wish to speak on behalf of one of my constituents whose appalling experience as a child in Neerkol Orphanage in Queensland is, sadly, just one of many covered by the Prime Minister's apology. Firstly, though, I would like to congratulate my colleague the member for Swan. He has a particular passion and commitment for this issue and his work in this area over a period of time deserves special commendation. I also wish to commend the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their expressions of understanding of apology and of sympathy. They spoke, most of all, of their gratitude and admiration for the many people who had the courage to come forward and tell their own stories of suffering, to relive the horrors so that we may better understand what occurred but, more importantly, so it may never, ever happen again. This is a critical point. We need to move forward, acknowledge what has happened in the past and actually rectify some things that occurred in the past.

In this speech the people I am being particularly critical of are individuals at Neerkol but, more importantly, the Queensland government officers who were supposed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children in these institutions. All of these people betrayed these young Australians in the most callous and indescribable ways imaginable—in some cases, unimaginable. Too often we hear of generic claims of abuse and sometimes of sexual and physical abuse, even institutional abuse, but often we do not appreciate the terrible reality that is too often glossed over by glib generalisations. Therefore, I shall lay out the story of Mrs Sandra Pollard, as provided by her and her current husband, to show that she was abused many times over not just by some of the priests and nuns running Neerkol but by the system—successive Queensland state governments, which not only sought to avoid taking any meaningful responsibility for what occurred but even attempted to blacken Mrs Pollard's name in order to shift the blame. That particular exercise was possibly one of the most disturbing, disingenuous and malignant pieces of political posturing it has been my misfortune to read about, and I shall return to it later.

I shall now recount Mrs Pollard's painful history as she has written it out for me. Mrs Pollard's life started out in a manner which, sadly, was to echo throughout the formative years of her life. When she was eight years old she was sexually abused by her stepfather. Her mother was dying of cancer and could not protect her. After her mother died, the department of children's services left young Sandra with her stepfather. After several years of abuse, her stepfather was caught in the act. He was given a good behaviour bond, and Sandra and her siblings were committed to the Neerkol Orphanage.

The *Weekend Independent* of November 1997 reported the hell on earth at Neerkol, outlining the physical, psychological and sexual abuse. One former inmate said, 'I cannot recall a single happy day in that place. The physical and psychological brutality was unrelenting. Every memory I have is of being brutalised.' This was Sandra Pollard's childhood. The newspaper said:

Not only were the children 'contracted out' by the then State Children Department to work in harsh conditions on Queensland farms, but in some cases, years of meagre wages, supposedly kept in trust for them, simply disappeared.

Mrs Pollard wants to know who was responsible for this money. Where is the accountability?

There were outbreaks of typhoid which were made worse when 'those who were sick were not notified to the doctor and isolated', according to a medical report. Sick children were not getting the appropriate medical treatment for typhoid and, worse still, living with healthy children. What an absolute disgrace! Mrs Pollard said that, because of the substandard nutrition she received at Neerkol, she suffered serious bone degeneration which resulted in the removal of all of her teeth while she was there. Mrs Pollard spoke of children who died and were given no autopsy but just buried in the grounds at Neerkol. Again, who was responsible? Where is the accountability?

Let us look at something as simple as drinking water. An Irrigation and Water Supply Commission related to the state children's department stated: '... this water would be suitable for stock watering and for the irrigation of ... crops.' These young children were drinking water fit only for animals and irrigation. Then a medical scandal: the Senate report *Forgotten Australians* stated in chapter 4:

Children in orphanages and Homes have been used for medial experiments for many decades. Some of these have been reported in medical journals. Many questions are raised, not least of all is that if these experiments were known, what other experiments may have occurred that were not officially reported?

Not only were these children used as guinea pigs, but it appears that there is a good chance that the vaccines they were given were contaminated by the SV40 virus, which has been linked to some cancers. Mrs Pollard wants to know: who was responsible for this program? Again, where is the accountability? An investigation by the *Age* found that at least four batches of vaccine—almost three million doses—were contaminated with the virus between 1956 and 1962. Two of those batches were released after testing positive to contamination.

Sandra Pollard was vaccinated and Sandra Pollard has cancer. She cannot even get insurance because her illnesses are all pre-existing conditions. For the sake of people like Sandra Pollard, it would be only right if there were tests available for SV40 to give them peace of mind. With all that Sandra and others have been put through, I think it would be the least that we could do. I stress the word ‘do’ because so often, in cases like this, there are many fine words, of sympathy, of apology, of apparent understanding, but the words only go so far. What I think would mean so much more for these victims of abuse and of experimentation, who have suffered from the repercussions for much of their lives, is action.

If that was not enough suffering and degradation, in 1967 Sandra was sexually abused by a priest, and the later court records are available to confirm this. She was sent out of Neerkol to a cattle station, where she was again abused.

She subsequently married John Pollard and finally found happiness. Unfortunately, in the late 1980s, awful memories started to surface. By 1994, Mrs Pollard could no longer tolerate these memories and she went to Queensland to get documents under FOI in an effort to deal with her problems. In a written statement given to me, she says, ‘I was trying to find the proof I needed—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

SPEECH

Date	Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source	House
Page	124	Proof	Yes
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Jensen, Dennis, MP	Question No.	

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (11.37 am)—In speaking to this motion on the forgotten Australians and former child migrants, I will continue the speech I was making on Monday evening. In a written statement given to me, Mrs Pollard says ‘I needed to show the church and the government what a horrible mess they had made of providing protection to me and my siblings’. In 1994 Mrs Pollard reported the rape to the WA police and the following year she went to Rockhampton and went through a hearing against the priest. She says, ‘I faced up to my abuser and he was committed to trial.’ The trial was in 1999 and, despite one of the jurors knowing the priest’s brother, the trial went ahead, resulting in a hung jury. In 2000 there was a second trial, which resulted in a guilty verdict and a sentence of 7½ years for the priest. Mrs Pollard continues:

The judge also recommended that the Queensland government pay me the maximum ex gratia payment. There was an appeal and the priest’s lawyers took the case to the Mental Health Court. During this period all the court documents were sent to my husband. I was so angry that this was done as I saw it as a last ditch attempt to prevent the course of justice, because if I had all the transcripts of a closed court case it would be impossible for the case to go ahead. At no time did I ever request the Queensland government to release this information to my husband or to me.

Crown law placed a suppression order on Mrs Pollard and she could not even speak to her lawyer about them. She had to appear in court without legal representation. At this point, let us hear ex-Premier Beattie’s version, which he related in a ministerial statement to parliament on 27 February 2003. According to Mr Beattie, a policy officer in his department released transcripts of the closed proceedings out of some sympathy for Mrs Pollard. Mr Beattie refers to Mrs Pollard once as ‘one of the victims in this case’, but then quickly changed his terminology to a self-serving ‘that is, one of the witnesses who gave evidence at the hearing’. Mrs Pollard was, and still is, a victim, yet in his ministerial statement the former Queensland Premier, to his eternal shame, attempted to portray Mrs Pollard as somehow to blame for the error emanating from his office. He said:

I have taken this action because despite repeated requests, including requests in writing, the Perth couple have refused to return the transcripts or to cease contacting witnesses mentioned in the transcript.

Mrs Pollard has repeatedly denied having deliberately contacted other victims. So what does that say about Premier Beattie’s statement? Was it an unfortunate error or one of the most contemptible blame-shifting exercises I have ever come across? Premier Beattie apologised to other victims but Mrs Pollard said he never apologised to her. She said, ‘Yet I was the one who had been dragged through three trials in an effort to make the system accountable for something they already knew was happening.’ She continued, ‘The evidence I now hold from having all the records show to me the Queensland government always knew how bad this institution was and knew that no child should ever have been placed there.’ So why didn’t the Pollards return the documents to the Queensland government, even if they were not at fault? Perhaps they were concerned about Queensland’s questionable record for protecting government documents, especially when they relate to the government’s handling of child abuse cases.

There has been a deal of public debate about the so-called Heiner ‘shreddergate affair’. A document tabled in the Queensland parliament by Lawrence Springborg on 17 April 2002 entitled, *The 1997 Lindeberg declaration revisited*, said:

However, over and above those unresolved matters, Mr Grundy, in a six-month intensive investigative exposé in 2001, discovered that evidence of criminal paedophilia was gathered by Mr Heiner concerning the (hitherto publicly-unknown) pack-rape of a 14-year-old Aboriginal female inmate by four male inmates during a supervised educational bush outing in May 1988 which certain Centre staff claimed was covered up at the time by Centre and departmental management.

The document continued:

Against this background, on 5 March 1990, the Goss Government ordered the shredding so that the evidence gathered could not be used against the careers of JOYC Youth Workers, some of whom, on the face of available evidence, were engaging in prima facie criminal conduct against children held in the care and custody of the State in flagrant dereliction of their

duty of care, and, perhaps, engaging in a criminal conspiracy to pervert the course of justice in covering up the crime of criminal paedophilia.

Reports such as these may explain why the Pollards felt a certain reluctance to hand back such valuable documents. The Pollards have told me that they have tried all sorts of avenues to get justice in this case. This is including the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Ombudsman without any success. They have told me that the main thing they want is not just an acknowledgement that these terrible things occurred, but a full and proper inquiry to find out once and for all who was at fault. Most of the relevant documents are publicly available and Mr Pollard has repeatedly offered copies to anyone who is interested.

Who is responsible for the suffering of my constituent, Sandra Pollard, and so many other vulnerable young children at the hands of uncaring people? Who ultimately should bear the responsibility for all these well-documented cases of systemic and systematic abuse, which continued virtually unabated for years? Mrs Pollard has letters from politicians and judges saying how much she has helped other abuse victims, and, 'how much this bravery on my part has cost me both emotionally and financially.' Despite the appalling treatment she suffered for so many years and the perceived lack of justice for Mrs Pollard, she has managed to help her son go to university and to rebuild her life with a loving husband, and to help fellow abuse victims. The least we can do for people such as Sandra Pollard is give her procedural justice.

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source House
Page 126	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Saffin, Janelle, MP	Question No.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (11.44 am)—On Monday, 16 November I began my day by going to three separate places to collect and escort to parliament, very proudly, Debra Lowe and her young son, Chris; Graham Wilson; Tina Coutts; and Barbara Lane and her young daughters, Sarah and Danielle. Ian Mackay, our driver, was lovely, showing these forgotten Australians the respect and care they so deserved, particularly on Monday.

I did it in two shifts—everyone had luggage, and I teased Graham for having the biggest suitcase. I said to him, ‘I can go around the world with one four times smaller,’ but it was all in good spirit, despite all the feelings that the day had evoked, would evoke and would continue to evoke. It is something that forgotten Australians and child migrants had long asked for. It is a shame that they had to ask for it, but that is how it is sometimes when we are dealing with what was, as the Prime Minister called it, ‘an ugly chapter in our history’.

But Monday was not the day to dwell on some of that. The Prime Minister said that an apology would be given some time back, and for that I say thank you on behalf of all the forgotten Australians, particularly in my area. I ran into Roger Green and his wife Dorothy, constituents of mine, while we were waiting in the queue. So anxious was everybody to get inside the Great Hall for the apology, and so anxious were they to get down the front and be there, that a queue formed. There was morning tea and all of the things happening and people talking, but they just wanted to get inside. I stood in that queue with them, and it was just wonderful meeting so many different people and having snippets of conversation with all sorts of people in the queue and sharing experiences as well.

My electorate office manager, Carmel Cook, was also there helping but her father was a child migrant so she was feeling a whole lot of feelings, as everybody else was, but at the same time helping to look after other people, along with me. It was a really emotional day on Monday, and it was a very draining day. I know it brought me to tears, and I can only in a very small way comprehend how the forgotten Australians and the child migrants and their families were feeling sitting there on that day.

There were some people who desperately wanted to come and be here on Monday. Other people did not want to come—for all sorts of reasons. I have people in my electorate who are really ambivalent about it, and one friend in particular. It brought up feelings for him. He wanted to see all of the recommendations out of the two Senate reports implemented straightaway with the apology. The apology was one of those, and from where I sit I said to everyone, ‘I would love it to be perfect. I would love it if we could do the absolute Rolls-Royce treatment, but that will not happen on the day. The fact is that we are doing the apology, and it is a good start.’ That was the overwhelming feeling for everybody there and for people around the country on this particular day. People left feeling that at last they were believed, they were listened to, they were included and they were able, for some, to start to heal.

I am not speaking for everybody because everybody’s experience is different. But how can a young child not be damaged in some way by being in institutions where, as the Prime Minister said, it was just loveless: there was no love, there was no nurturing and there was no caring. We heard stories about people waiting and looking at gates, waiting for people to come back, but there was nobody coming to rescue them, suffering as they did. They did not have one adult in their lives who could protect them and who could believe them. If you grow up without that trust and nurturing, it must be incredibly challenging and difficult to find your place in society, to feel included and then go on yourself to try and parent and have relationships.

I felt really privileged to be sitting with Tina, Graham, Deb, Barbara, Carmel, Chris, Sarah and Danielle and another man whom we met there. He was alone—it was clear that he was alone—and we asked him to join us, which he did. And I have had a lovely follow-up email from him. I then moved into the House where Minister Macklin moved a formal motion of apology—the one to which I am currently speaking. She spoke very passionately, as did other speakers, about the forgotten Australians. I note here the very honourable member for Swan, Steve Irons, himself a forgotten Australian, who spoke to the motion. He spoke to and about his brother, who was sitting in the public gallery, and said that they had been separated for over 30 years. It was very moving.

The honourable member for Swan is such a nice person and so liked, and it was nice to have the opportunity to hear him speak. There were people in the gallery from CLAN, Forgotten Australians and the Child Migrant Trust. Also present in the gallery was former Senator Andrew Murray. Many people, of course, have been involved in recognising the forgotten Australians and child migrants but Andrew Murray, more than any other person in this place, deserves special mention for the work that he did in the Senate. Senators Jan McLucas and Claire Moore also did a lot of work in this area. It was a very moving time.

I have been having quite a few meetings in my electorate office with local forgotten Australians—I hope they are now called ‘remembered Australians’ after Monday. We have sat around the table and talked about the reports and what should happen. Obviously, we have talked about things like reparation and compensation—all of the things that should happen. My personal belief is that reparation has to happen—that is, reparation in the broad sense. This covers a whole range of things that can be done to provide care and support for people who have suffered abuse. That might cover compensation but it should cover things like decent access to health care. A lot of the forgotten Australians whom I know do have poor health status, and that can be physical, emotional and dental. Dental health is a big issue for many of these people because they never went to a dentist. They did not receive that sort of treatment. There are also other issues to do with the health of these people, such as not knowing where they come from—their genetic history—and things like that.

At one of the meetings in my office, which was quite an enjoyable meeting, I asked people, ‘If you could get money, how much would you want?’ because what has happened to them is not something that can be quantified. The mean that people came up with was \$500,000 to get a house and a car. That gives an idea of some of the prices for houses in my area—although one person said \$300,000. Some people might say, ‘You’re dreaming’, but it is okay to dream because, if you do not dream, a lot does not happen. It was good to discuss that.

I was pleased to see that people who were forgotten Australians will be treated specially in aged care and that care leavers will recognise their special needs. Nicholas Kostyn, who comes from my area, said that that was one of the key recommendations that needed to be taken up because people who have been institutionalised will experience a whole lot of feelings, as you can imagine, if they have to go into another institution—and it does not matter at what age. So I was pleased to see that recommendation taken up.

The National Find and Connect Service is a very important initiative, and the ability for people to record their stories is also great. My local newspapers, the *Northern Star* and the *Daily Examiner*, have been actively covering this issue in a very comprehensive way. This morning, the local 2LM radio was talking about the forgotten Australians. Everybody is interested in them. The media want to cover this history; they want to talk about it; and they want to know the stories of the people involved. The key issue that has come out of this is that it should not happen again. I agree.

When we were talking about this, another thing I said was, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice’—again, dreaming—‘if a forgotten Australian could have a gold card that gave them access to the services that they needed?’ We often talk about counselling but they need a lot more than that. They could access those services individually as they needed them and not through a particular service provision or a model or something like that. One man I spoke to this morning was an older man who never thought that he needed counselling. He is just going to counselling now and he said how helpful it has been over the last few years. People need it at different times in their lives for different reasons. Barbara Lane asked me the other day, ‘You will not forget to mention the gold card when you speak?’ I said, ‘No. I will make sure I put it on the public record.’ I have done that now.

I also say thank you to Penny Sharpe, the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport in New South Wales. I put in a request to her office for rail tickets. I know that Minister Macklin’s office put in that request as well. They said yes immediately. So a lot of people were able to get here in that way, including some people from my area. Everybody who was asked said yes and helped out wherever they could.

I also got a beautiful card from the people who came down with me the other day. I said I would mention that. One of them, Barbara Lane, wrote a poem, and I am going to read that poem now, Mr Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence. She wrote at the top of the poem, ‘To Janelle, many thanks for all you have done—Barbara.’ It is called ‘Remembering Osler House:

Screams echo down the hallway of my mind, as they did the cells and hallways of that house of endless horrors, through the years.

My body still remembers all the shame of what I witnessed,

And the corrosive, all-pervasive acid-urine smell of fears.
I was thirteen years.
The sobbing, wailing background noise that ate away the night;
The soul-shattering, too-sudden ... cessation of the screams,
These joined the tortured memories I buried in the abyss,
To carve away my childhood, brutally, as they stole my dreams.
I was only thirteen.
The milling, naked bodies in the showers with no doors;
The excrement and sanitary pads, my first time, on the floors.
Betrayed by my own government, the state that had my care,
In an adult asylum for the criminally insane; I'd pulled out all my hair.
I was only a child.
Hollow-eyed people, shock-treatment blank, helpless,
And no longer knowing their names;
The intellectually disabled and terrified children
Still haunt in their drugged, bruised and bare-naked shame.
I was thirteen years old.

By Barbara Lane

I worked in that mental institution. I know what it was like. There were children in there who did not have a mental illness. There are children who were forgotten Australians. There were all sorts of people dumped into that place. It was like the house of horrors. If you have ever read *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, you would recognise it. Even without knowing anything about it, when I read the first line I recognised it. I worked there when I was quite young. I was nearly 17 when I went to work there. I could not abide it. It was cruel. It was inhumane. That poem evokes memories for me.

Some of those children, who are now adults, came to me some years ago to see if I was prepared to give some evidence in cases that they wanted to run against the government. I said, 'I will, but I am not sure how helpful I can be as a witness for particular people for particular incidents that happened.' Fancy ending up somewhere for the mentally ill. The way the mentally ill who were there were treated is a whole other chapter.

I would like to finish by just saying how wonderful the day was. It was long overdue. Isn't it good when you do something that is the right thing? One of my forgotten Australians said to me, 'It was really nice to hear the good words from Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull on the day.' (*Time expired*)

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 12
Questioner
Speaker Clare, Jason, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (1.16 pm)—In 1957, a little girl's life was changed forever. She was three years old when her family was torn apart, when she was separated from her brothers and sisters and sent to St Catherine's Orphanage in Geelong. For the next 13 years she lived in constant fear of being punished for every minor indiscretion, and with the empty feeling of a childhood deprived of love. She would not see her brother again for 40 years. Hers is one of half a million stories. Today is an important day for that little girl and the brave and determined woman that she became. Her name is Leonie Sheedy and for the past nine years she has been fighting for an apology for that little girl and for others like her.

In 2000 she established a support group with Joanna Penglase called Care Leavers Australia Network—CLAN—and from a tiny office in Bankstown in my electorate they have helped hundreds of forgotten Australians. In 2004 their courage and tenacity prompted a Senate inquiry. In 2007 it earned both of them an Order of Australia. And now it has delivered an apology. Today I want to pay tribute to them and the hundreds of thousands of Australians who they have spent so many years fighting for—this really is your day.

This morning the parliament shone a light on a dark chapter of our history, until now unacknowledged and very much forgotten. For half a million children who were placed into institutions in the 20th century, the memories of their childhood cast long shadows. For many, silence was their best friend. A woman named Kayleen told the Senate inquiry: 'As a child you learn to be quiet out of fear. Nobody will hurt you if you're not heard.' This apology means that people like Kayleen need not be silent anymore. An apology cannot undo the suffering. Nothing we say can undo the damage. For some, today will be like ripping off a scab, reviving hurtful memories they have spent a lifetime trying to forget. But for so many others it will help to heal these scars and start to set things right. One lady I met this morning said that since she had heard that the nation was apologising the nightmares had finally stopped.

I rang Vera Fooks on the weekend. Vera is the oldest member of CLAN. She has cancer and the doctors keep telling her that she does not have long to live, but she

has been determined to hang on to hear her nation apologise. She told me, 'I'm going on 99. I've been waiting a lifetime for this day.' Vera is not here today—she is too frail—but she wants you to know that she is here in spirit.

There are many people who deserve the thanks of this House for bringing this day about. There are the senators who were forever changed by the evidence they heard. One of those was Andrew Murray, who took up this cause and is perhaps more responsible for this day than any other. In his valedictory speech he asked Richard Marles and me to carry on his work. We have both taken this responsibility very seriously. On behalf of hundreds of thousands of forgotten Australians, I want to thank you, Richard, for everything that you have done. Steve Irons, one of my best friends on the other side of the House, has brought his own personal experience to bear and has helped to ensure that this day is everything that it is and that it should be. I thank Jenny Macklin for her caring heart and steely resolve. I thank Abbie Clark and Corri McKenzie for their support and assistance. I thank our Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their understanding and their stirring words. I thank Caroline Carroll and the Alliance for Forgotten Australians; Harold Haig and Ian Thwaites; and, finally, Leonie and Joanna. I was first drawn to this cause by them, by the force of Leonie's personality and by the force of Joanna's words. They helped me to understand.

If you do not understand what we are doing here today, take out your childhood photos, tear them up and throw them out the window when you are driving home tonight. Then come back tomorrow and try and pick up the pieces and put them back together. That is what Leonie has been doing for the past 40 years. A few weeks ago there was a story about Leonie in the *Women's Weekly*. Last week she received an email from a woman who read that story. It reads:

Dear Leonie, I read your article and what caught my attention was the photo of your grandparents, and what attracted me was that I have the exact same photo, as they are my grandparents also. It appears that your father and my mother were siblings; therefore we would be cousins.

This is the power of what we are doing here today. 'Sorry' might be an easy word to say, but an apology has the power to change lives.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 9
Questioner
Speaker Macklin, Jenny, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (12.48 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the House support the apology given on this day by the Prime Minister, on behalf of the nation, to the Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants in the following terms:

We come together today to deal with an ugly chapter in our nation's history.

And we come together today to offer our nation's apology.

To say to you, the Forgotten Australians, and those who were sent to our shores as children without your consent, that we are sorry.

Sorry – that as children you were taken from your families and placed in institutions where so often you were abused.

Sorry – for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, of tenderness, of care.

Sorry – for the tragedy of childhoods lost – childhoods spent instead in austere and authoritarian places, where names were replaced by numbers, spontaneous play by regimented routine, the joy of learning by the repetitive drudgery of menial work.

Sorry – for all these injustices to you as children, who were placed in our care.

As a nation, we must now reflect on those who did not receive proper care.

We look back with shame that many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and nobody to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that many of these little ones who were entrusted to institutions and foster homes – instead, were abused physically, humiliated cruelly and violated sexually.

We look back with shame at how those with power were allowed to abuse those who had none.

And how then, as if this was not injury enough, you were left ill-prepared for life outside – left to fend for yourselves; often unable to read or write; to struggle alone with no friends and no family.

For these failures to offer proper care to the powerless, the voiceless and the most vulnerable, we say sorry.

We reflect too today on the families who were ripped apart, simply because they had fallen on hard times.

Hard times brought about by illness, by death and by poverty.

Some simply left destitute when fathers, damaged by war, could no longer cope.

Again we say sorry for the extended families you never knew.

We acknowledge the particular pain of children shipped to Australia as child migrants - robbed of your families, robbed of your homeland, regarded not as innocent children but regarded instead as a source of child labour.

To those of you who were told you were orphans, brought here without your parents' knowledge or consent, we acknowledge the lies you were told, the lies told to your mothers and fathers, and the pain these lies have caused for a lifetime.

To those of you separated on the dockside from your brothers and sisters; taken alone and unprotected to the most remote parts of a foreign land – we acknowledge today the laws of our nation failed you.

And for this we are deeply sorry.

We think also today of all the families of these Forgotten Australians and former child migrants who are still grieving, families who were never reunited, families who were never reconciled, families who were lost to one another forever.

We reflect too on the burden that is still carried by your own children, your grandchildren, your husbands, your wives, your partners and your friends – and we thank them for the faith, the love and the depth of commitment that has helped see you through the valley of tears that was not of your making.

And we reflect with you as well, in sad remembrance, on those who simply could not cope and who took their own lives in absolute despair.

We recognise the pain you have suffered.

Pain so personal.

Pain so profoundly disabling.

So, let us therefore, together, as a nation, allow this apology to begin healing this pain.

Healing the pain felt by so many of the half a million of our fellow Australians and those who as children were in our care.

And let us also resolve this day, that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story.

A turning point for shattered lives.

A turning point for Governments at all levels and of every political colour and hue, to do all in our power to never let this happen again.

For the protection of children is the sacred duty of us all.

A nation's most fundamental obligation, its most solemn and sacred duty, is to keep safe and cherish its children. For half a million children, our nation failed to do this—for those who were born here and for those taken from their families and brought here from Britain and Malta. Through this failure, they were deprived of their childhood. Through this failure, they were condemned to grow up in cold, cruel, loveless places without a voice, with no-one to protect them, no-one to speak out for them. That is why today, as a nation, we are saying sorry.

Today I want to acknowledge the suffering of the forgotten Australians and the former child migrants using their own words so that the words of those who were abandoned and voiceless when they should have been protected and defended are forever inscribed in the national record, telling it the way they have told me and the way it was told to the Senate over the course of many inquiries. Today I want their voices to be heard in the words they use to describe the loneliness of childhoods lived without love, never being—as a child must be—at the loving, caring centre of family life.

As one person said:

... I was never offered or given anything that even vaguely resembled nurturing. No affirmation of the person I was becoming, no encouragement, no warmth, and absolutely no affection, not under any circumstances ...

Another said:

I never experienced the rich routines of everyday life with a much-loved adult. Without this bonding and learning I was unable to give and receive affection. I saw adults as powerful, strong brutes to be feared.

And another said:

While in care there was an extreme lack of physical contact, I remember loving hair washing day. It was the only adult's touch we ever felt...The nuns dried our hair with a towel, with the child facing in towards them and sometimes our heads would lean on their chests.

For these children there was no love, just the pain of separation from mothers, fathers and siblings:

My brother was put in a separate area away from us. I could only see him from behind a glass window. He was never held or picked up. When he was 18 years old, he committed

suicide. My sister was mentally unstable. Neither of them survived the orphanages.

Why did they separate us from our brothers and sisters? It was only recently that I found out I had two brothers, but because we had no contact during our formative years normal bonding is no longer possible.

And with the loss of family came the loss of identity:

I had been denied all knowledge of my natural family, about the existence of my siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, mother and father. I had no knowledge of who I was or where I belonged. From this background I have nothing, no photos of me as a child, no school reports, no special toy. What I was left with was shame, insecurities, anger. They took my family and my confidence.

Today we all look back in national shame at horrific physical cruelty—the brutal beatings, the systematic humiliation and sexual violation of children.

She would beat girls with her fists and feet. I saw her hit a girl over the head with her bunch of keys and knock her out cold. She seemed to enjoy inflicting pain and humiliation. My brother, who has an intellectual disability, was physically abused and sodomised. We were just throw-away children.

Understandably, this treatment broke the spirit of many children.

Constantly put down and verbally abused, we crept around wishing for invisibility. I and the other children there would always be looking around and listening in fear. I was a child and powerless. There was no-one to turn to for help.

At five years of age I had adapted to institutional life. I maintained an outward appearance of being together, conforming while unaware of my inner turbulence, anger and impenetrable grief.

To this day many forgotten Australians and former child migrants vividly recall the shame and stigma of being orphaned or institutionalised.

We were different. Our clothes were different, our haircuts were different. We had no money for tuckshop. We were constantly reminded that we had no mothers.

I was constantly told by home staff, teachers, host families that I was stupid, recalcitrant, disobedient, totally unworthy of love and always facing threats that I would be put away permanently.

When it came time to leave these institutions, these teenagers floundered and struggled alone in the world outside.

They kicked me out at 15 years old with no life skills, very little education, but I was luckier than most—at least I could read and write.

After four years of working in the nuns' commercial laundry and nearing our 18th birthdays we were called out

of the workrooms, given a small suitcase containing our possessions and a £1 note and shown the door.

Today we also acknowledge the loss of country and the lies that were told to the former child migrants and their families.

While I was out here in Australia my mother went to pick me up from the orphanage and they told her I had a good Christian burial. They told me that I was illegitimate, I had no relations, no friends. They were all killed in the war. When I went to England in 1997 I had two half-brothers and sisters who I never knew existed. And the discovery of family that came too late, a photograph is the only link I have with my mother. She passed on five or six months prior to my finding out that she had been alive all these years. Why was I told that she was dead? Why was I told that she had been killed during the war? All I have left now is a photograph and a death certificate.

As adults, forgotten Australians and former child migrants have told me so many times that the past is always with them and with their families.

My wife suffers from my often irrational behaviour and my lack of knowledge as to what a family is. My children suffer from my not understanding ... I cannot hold onto friendship.

I have brought up three children. I have been overindulgent and overprotective, but I have never been able to say to them, "I love you."

As another person said:

I did get married and then divorced. I couldn't hack it. Anybody who put their arm around me or put their hand on me, even gave me a hug, I would tell them straight out, "Don't put your hands on me."

But they speak with love and gratitude for those who stood by them and who stand by them and with them today—partners, friends and children—who helped them restore their trust in the world and faith in themselves. As one person said:

I often wonder if I hadn't married my husband, how my life would have turned out. He has loved me through all the emotional turmoil.

And as another said:

He loves me unconditionally. We have laughed and cried, laughed and screamed in anger and in joy. He has saved me from a lifetime of bad choices.

I think all of us in this place today would like to add our thanks and gratitude to these wonderful husbands and wives, partners, friends and children.

Those are some of the stories of damaged lives, past and present, of little children who were never permitted to know the innocence and exuberance of childhood—children who were thrown into a world where the

only adult touch that they felt was brutal, cruel or sexually violating. Stories of children abandoned by the nation—half a million children on whom society coldly turned its back. For this, we are deeply and truly sorry. So today, in sorrow and in acknowledgement of this dark and shameful chapter in our nation's history, we offer this apology and stand in shared resolve to do all in our power to make sure that this never happens again.

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 19 November 2009
Page 84
Questioner
Speaker Hall, Jill, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.23 am)—I rise to support the apology that was given in an extremely bipartisan way by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, and by many members on both sides of this parliament. I will say nothing about the previous contribution to this debate other than that I am disappointed in the tone and the nature of that contribution. In relation to the apology, I, like many other members of this House, have had constituents who have been gravely affected by the care that they had as children. These are people who were separated from their parents for one reason or another. Some came from the UK as child migrants and lived in very appalling, uncaring institutions that were run by the state government or privately. The impact that that had on their lives was enormous. I have had people sit in my office and cry about the treatment they have had. I have had people say to me in relation to this apology: ‘The thing that is special about it is that it is a starting point. The apology actually recognises that our lives were impacted on in such a grave and detrimental way.’

My thoughts go back to one of my constituents on the Central Coast who came to Australia as a child migrant. His story has been told time and time again this week by others who were in similar situations. They thought they were going for a holiday somewhere. They thought that their parents were no longer living. They went to another country and then lived in institutions. When they finally went out into the world they did not have the personal skills that they needed to survive. They worked through so many issues. Eventually they married and had their own families, which in itself put in place a number of challenges. Finally, they found out that they did have a mother and they did have sisters. This constituent travelled to the UK. Unfortunately, he did not meet his mother, but he met his siblings, and that was very special to him.

Another of my constituents was brought up in an institution. His mother died and his father could not look after the children so he put them in an institution. He told me how he was always the smallest. When it came to food he missed out every time. He told me about the lack of care and compassion and about the brutality of living in that institution. That story has been told by numerous members in this parliament.

Monday was a very special day. You could see just how important this apology was to all the people who gathered in the Great Hall. It was very moving. You could see staff from FaHCSIA handing tissues to the people who were there to receive the apology.

I would like to put on the record my support for this apology, my support for an unconditional apology, my support for a bipartisan policy and my support for seeing this as a start for the rest of the people who have been affected by this dreadful period in our history. I am absolutely committed to see that this never happens again.

In conclusion, I would like to put on the record my thanks to Origins for the fine work that they have done over the years in reuniting families that have been separated—people like my constituent Sue and her daughter. Sue had her daughter when she was 16 and was forced to give her up. The child moved from foster parent to institution and had a very disturbed life. She suffered all the types of things that are mentioned in this apology. It was only through the efforts of Origins that she was reunited with the daughter that she had not even seen. The work that Origins do is invaluable and they should be congratulated for the contribution they have made to alleviate the pain of so many Australians. This is a fine apology, and I am pleased to be associated with it.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 103
Questioner
Speaker Bishop, Julie, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.47 pm)—Childhood should be a time of growing, nurturing and learning; a world of innocence, a world of trust. We hope that all children grow up in a loving environment with adults there to provide all-encompassing support and help heal any hurts. In societies around the world there is universal condemnation for those who rob children of their innocence or who betray their trust. Nelson Mandela once said, ‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’

Today, as we support a national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants, we feel a sense of shame that it was under the care of Australian governments that many thousands of children were subject to horrific abuse. Those of us who grew up under the care of loving parents cannot conceive of a childhood devoid of love or of being subject to mental, physical or sexual abuse, which in some cases went on for years. We ask: how this could have happened such a few short years ago? We are not talking about events of 100 or 200 years ago; these events occurred within many of our lifetimes. These terrible events took place behind closed doors, hidden from the general view of society. It is unforgivable that when children raised complaints of abuse they were in many cases told they were liars and were then subject to even worse treatment. In a submission to the Senate inquiry that produced the report *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, one person said:

We had no one to turn to ... No one believed us, not the teachers at school, not the police, no one.

The report detailed a culture of secrecy, silence and absolute control. Children were subject to a system that dehumanised them. They were robbed of their self-worth and their humanity.

Members of parliament can speak about the circumstances leading to this motion and this apology, but nothing replaces the words, the memories and recollections of the forgotten Australians—now the remembered Australians. One submission among many to the Senate inquiry was:

All my life, as a child in those dreadful homes I was told I was ‘ugly’, ‘would end up a prostitute’ and ‘should never have been born’. It took me years of struggle to even realise I was a person. ... It is only recently I have gained enough confidence to believe I am a decent person and as good as everyone else ... we really never knew what we were.

This process was taken to extreme lengths and to lengths far beyond what could possibly be necessary to maintain discipline. The only explanation for much of the behaviour of those responsible for the abuse is that they were motivated by malice or vindictiveness or just plain cruelty. Another submission from Western Australia revealed the pettiness that was, in its own way, as cruel as verbal or physical abuse. It says:

I received a parcel from an Aunt, it was a beautiful hand-knitted red jumper which I never wore as it was taken away from me and I didn’t know what happened to it until I saw it being used to wash the floor. For a little girl who was so pleased with her new jumper it was devastating.

Another submission from someone who was in a home in my electorate in Perth says:

We were never allowed to keep the presents as the nuns used to take them off us when we got back to the orphanage and would sell them at their fetes.

It is little wonder that it all had such a profound impact on the lives of children subject to such relentless mental torture. Yet another submission says:

Because of being constantly told I was nothing and would end up in the gutter and no one wanted me or ever would, the core negative beliefs I have are my reality. They are the deepest most profound assumptions and expectations I have of myself, and therefore I find it hard to function as a ‘normal’ human being, beyond my frontdoor. This is just the way life is to me now, and these negative core beliefs continue to govern my life and reality.

A submission from someone who was in Swan Homes in WA says:

The punishment inflicted was to have her hair shaved off, and she [a young girl of 7 or 8] was compelled to wear a sugar bag as a dress all day for a period of time ... she even wore it to school, which was a public school some distance from the institution, and the children had to walk along public streets to get to this school. It would be difficult to imagine the trauma, that this child was compelled to suffer, or the effect it would have had on her in later life.

From another orphanage, the submission says:

There was no one to trust, to confide in, to cuddle, to read us bedtime stories. No one gave us an affectionate 'goodnight' or stopped for a chat. And yet all the while I ached with a question that would not go away. What can be so wrong with our parents that makes it better to be brought up by such cruel and uncaring people as this?

We cannot imagine the terror of very young children torn from their families and cast into what must have felt like the pits of hell. The stories that were submitted to the Senate inquiry are as bad as anything Dickens could have dreamt up for his 19th century tales of sordid orphanages and workhouses in London. These children were told that society did not value them, that they were worthless flotsam. The Senate inquiry heard stories of children who ran away from disgusting predators and sadistic people who had been employed to provide care to the children. Again, another submission from someone who was in a home located in my electorate says:

... if any girls ran away, when they were caught they were publicly flogged. Us girls used to have tears in our eyes watching this, but we couldn't do anything.

Another says:

... you knew who ran away because when you got up the next day, the boy was standing in the 'quad' with his hands on his head. The punishment for this was not carried out until that night when he was caned on the hands in full view of the rest of us. If you pulled your hand away you were then whacked on the legs.

And the following description of the treatment of those who ran away and were brought back for punishment to a home, again, in Western Australia which says:

We were all assembled in the gymnasium where we were told to form up in a line in the shape of a horseshoe, the three boys being punished [for absconding] were instructed to remove their clothing ... each of the boys was then told to get on to his hands and knees and they had to scuttle across the floor in this fashion to where the line began, as they did this they were lashed with a rattan cane across their buttocks, as they reached the start of the line they had to crawl between the legs of the other boys and were unmercifully bashed and kicked. ... When they reached the end of the line they had to remain on their hands and knees and were flogged back to the start.

Did anyone ask why they were running away? While these stories of physical and mental abuse are heartbreaking, it is the stories of sexual abuse which are most profoundly disturbing. Again, a submission from a home that was in my electorate says:

The night times were hard on us as the brothers would come in and have their ways with us. There were other kids besides us all getting the same things done to them. We just didn't know when it was our turn to be raped, so that's why I still cannot live with the nights.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 4.54 pm to 5.02 pm

Ms JULIE BISHOP—Before the division, I was recounting some of the horrific stories contained in the submissions to the Senate inquiry. I will finish on this one.

All the time while the priest was assaulting me (or other children) the sister would stand at the door looking the other way. If another sister came she would flash her torch on the ground and the priest would stand behind the partition until the sister flashed her torch again. After this he would resume his abuse. I don't know how often this occurred but would estimate that the priest came 3 - 4 nights per week and would assault several children on the one night. I was raped on a regular basis. The older children were picked more often than the younger ones.

How could anyone read these submissions or hear these stories without feeling an overwhelming sense of shame? As the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition said in the Great Hall this morning, we must never again allow this systematic, institutionalised abuse to occur. We must always ensure that light reaches the darkest recesses of inhumanity and that the most vulnerable receive appropriate mental, physical and emotional care.

Many did not survive the ordeal. As a society we must not allow young children under the care of the state to be cast into circumstances of institutional neglect and abuse of any sort. We must never lose sight of the fact

that, regardless of one's family background, we all have the right to live free from fear and free from the threat of physical and mental abuse.

The state failed more than 500,000 children over many years. For that we are sorry and we apologise. Permanent scars have been inflicted on many thousands of Australians, and for that we are sorry. We cannot heal these wounds, but we hope that our heartfelt and sincere apology helps many to take a positive step on the journey that lies ahead. I support the motion.

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 19 November 2009
Page 77
Questioner
Speaker McKew, Maxine, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (9.45 am)—One of the more extraordinary days that I have seen in the federal parliament was Monday this week when both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition joined in offering an apology to half a million Australians who experienced a loveless and often abusive existence while in institutional care. I think you had to be there to see the faces in the Great Hall, because the stories and the pain of a brutish life were in those faces—some, I think, old beyond their years, others who have battled their demons, with limited success, and yet others who have triumphed over early adversity but still obviously carry the scars.

I think the most frightening thing in the world is to be an abandoned child, to be young and powerless, to lose a parent through death or disappearance and to not have other family or neighbours prepared to step in. I think we are left to wonder about the nature of such a massive failure—a failure of stewardship and certainly a failure of governmental oversight. We have to ask: how is it that there was such a high level of tolerance—and in the 20th century, for heaven's sake—for using children as cheap labourers, for failing to ensure that they had an adequate education? And, in particular, how is it that, when it came to men and women with a religious vocation, there were some who failed to offer mercy and compassion? I think it is important to understand what happened here. So this week I talked to some women whom I know well. They are the Sisters of Mercy and I know they try to live their lives every day for others. Having been educated by the Sisters of Mercy and, on many occasions, having acknowledged their exceptional contribution to providing quality education and health services in this country, I also think it is important to look at the other side of the ledger. We cannot ignore those now remembered Australians who say that, while they were in the care of the Mercy sisters, their own experience was merciless. So what happened?

From my conversations this week with leaders of congregations I believe there is now a profound acknowledgement that some very bad things happened, but I was asked to consider this: many religious organisations were dealing with very large numbers of children and often had little or no training. Many were entirely unsuited to be the guardians of children. Often the hierarchy of orders dictated that the least educated were deemed good enough for this kind of work. But the important thing now is that there is a process underway, and has been for some years, whereby the sisters and many others provide practical help to people who have suffered. It is a program called Towards Healing, and former home children are listened to, their claims are investigated and, in many cases, meetings are facilitated between complainants and the former heads of institutions. Sometimes counselling is sought; in other cases, practical help is sought. I was told that some individuals just want to be able to learn to read and write. That simple request—a plea to be a literate adult—tells us so much about a period of very deep neglect that we must never allow to happen again. I recall the lines of Arthur Miller, the great playwright, on behalf of Willy Loman, who always said, 'Attention must be paid.' Attention was paid this week and rightly so. (*Time expired*)

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 105
Questioner
Speaker Parke, Melissa, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (5.05 pm)—I rise to support this apology to the forgotten Australians and to former child migrants, many of whom experienced suffering, abuse and neglect while in care. I support it on behalf of the people of Fremantle and I add my personal apology as a member of this place. The apology that this national parliament has given today is certainly not made before time, and I understand that it is very welcome throughout the care leaver and child migrant support community. It is hoped that this act of saying sorry will give some comfort and perhaps some additional closure to those who have suffered while in care and that it will also be the springboard for concrete measures to alleviate the ongoing pain and difficulties they continue to experience.

There is no greater act of responsibility, there is no heavier weight of care and there is no larger placement of trust than that which exists in undertaking the care and custody of children who are without the benefit of a secure and capable and loving family. A society's capacity to look after children who find themselves in those circumstances is one of the best measures of its compassion, of its commitment to a broad safety net for the protection of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged, and of its principles of social responsibility and social justice. But when the state or a private organisation or a church under the state's supervision provides care of that kind, it of course does so with the mantle placed upon it of utmost responsibility. It does so with full acceptance of the highest duty of care. So at the same time as we recognise that looking after children who are without a family to provide for them is an expression of human society at its best, we also recognise that taking care of children brings with it a profound responsibility to deliver that care.

Unfortunately we know that children in our keeping—that is, children for whom Australian governments, state and federal, had ultimate responsibility—were not properly cared for. This is made clear in the *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited* report, where it states:

The Committee concluded that there had been wide scale unsafe, improper and unlawful care of children, a failure of duty of care, and serious and repeated breaches of statutory obligations.

We made, at the start of this government, a national and bipartisan apology to Indigenous Australians, in particular the stolen generations. And this apology today, although of course substantially different, is aligned to that earlier act of responsibility and contrition because it too concerns a failure by government to anticipate institutional harm that would be done to the most vulnerable in our society, that would be done to children: a failure to adequately oversee their care and to recognise the harm being done, a failure to stop it occurring at the time and to properly acknowledge what had occurred when the evidence was there to be seen, and a failure to take responsibility and apologise for the grave wrongs committed or left unchecked.

The truth is that there were aspects of the system of institutionalised care of children in Australia and of the system of child migration that were wrong in themselves—some that can perhaps be seen more clearly now than they could have been at the time, but some that ought to have been recognised as being of great potential harm even then. And that is in addition to those aspects of the system of care that were not inherently bad, but which were administered or practised badly, harmfully, abusively, neglectfully. And so we apologise today for all of those wrongs and for the harm and hurt and suffering that was experienced by many of the 500,000 children in care and the 7,000 child migrants.

I encourage all interested Australians to consider the most recent report from the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, whose 2009 inquiry report, *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited*, forms the foundation of this national apology and builds on the two earlier reports of that committee: the *Lost innocents* report of 2001 and the *Forgotten Australians* report of 2004. I commend both the current members and the former members of that committee who contributed to the work of those earlier inquiries and reports. I particularly want to pay tribute to former senator Andrew Murray's perseverance and courage. Above all, I thank the inquiry participants, especially the care leavers and former child migrants who were part of the process which has delivered this positive step today, but which may have caused them further pain. I commend the Prime Minister and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for the government's

response to this issue and the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their extremely moving addresses earlier today.

As I have said, the apology itself is but one of the recommendations listed in the report *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited*. Other recommendations go to issues like the need for reform to the existing national freedom of information and privacy legislation so that care leavers are not unnecessarily obstructed in their effort to repair those lost family connections.

The issue of redress, especially in the form of financial compensation, is critical to providing a real and meaningful response to those who suffered institutional harm and neglect. Redress schemes, which operate at the state government level, are vitally important and the government of Western Australia deserves credit for being one of only three states to have established a redress fund. Redress WA was set up by the Carpenter government, with \$114 million in administrative support services and redress funds. I am glad to see that, in her submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Dr Joanna Penglase, Co-founder and Project Officer of Care Leavers Australian Network, described Redress WA as 'the best redress scheme operating in Australia', but I am sorry that the current Barnett government of Western Australia has chosen to dramatically reduce the redress payments available to individuals under the scheme. I support the member for Swan, the WA Labor opposition and others who have called for the WA government to reconsider this shameful decision.

Aged care is one of the critical policy areas when it comes to addressing the current and future needs of care leavers, because those who have experienced institutional abuse and neglect have an entirely understandable revulsion at the prospect of, again, entering a similar, though benign, care environment. For that reason, I fully support the consideration and funding of appropriate models of aged care through the aged-care innovative pool and I applaud the federal government's decision, announced by the Prime Minister today, that care leavers will be considered as a special needs group for aged care.

I want to talk briefly about two Fremantle constituents who are here in Parliament House today: Mr Laurie Humphreys and Ms Margaret O'Byrne. At the age of four, Mr Humphreys was given to the care of Nazareth House, an orphanage in Southampton, upon the death of his mother, who died giving birth to twins. Mr Humphreys subsequently migrated to Australia, arriving in Fremantle on the ship *Asturias* in 1947. He became a Bindoon boy at the Boys Town facility, operated by the Christian Brothers in Bindoon. Incidentally, Mr Humphreys' friend Mr Eddie Butler, now of Balcatta, who arrived on the same ship with him in 1947 and was also a Bindoon boy, is also here in parliament today. Mr Humphreys has written a book about his life entitled *A Chip Off What Block?: A Child Migrant's Tale*, which details the time he spent in care, his experience as a child migrant and his later attempts to reconnect with his wider family.

Recommendation 30 of the *Lost innocents* report called for the Australian government to acknowledge that the Commonwealth had promoted child migration schemes. It is interesting to see how the perceived benefit of those schemes was understood in Australia at the time. Mr Humphreys was landed in Fremantle on 22 September 1947 and, on 23 September, the *West Australian* newspaper reported a statement by Dr Prendiville, the Archbishop of Perth. I quote from that article, as reprinted in Mr Humphreys' book:

His Grace said that he was glad to welcome not only the children, but also other migrants who were disembarking here. At a time when empty cradles were contributing alarmingly to the problem of Australia's empty spaces, it was necessary to seek external sources of supply.

To some degree, the transport of child migrants to Australia was seen as remedying a shortage of supply. In effect, it was a shortage of labour. This was reflected in the lives of child migrants in WA, who, even if they were not abused or directly ill-treated, as many were, still spent their early years doing hard menial work. Because Mr Humphreys is plainly a resilient, resourceful and good-humoured man, his account treats the circumstances of his care and the emotional consequences of his upbringing in a very even, matter-of-fact way. While he was not subjected to the worst forms of abuse and neglect that are known to have occurred he did, nevertheless, experience a hard young life—a life in which he was put to strenuous and sometimes dangerous physical labour, a life in which he was physically punished and at times punished arbitrarily and brutally, a life in which education and training were minimal and which were provided without reference to his interests and wishes and a life in which the truth of his living relatives was not presented clearly to him. He was told his father was dead and that he was alone in the world, only to have news of his father later relayed to him and then, out of the blue, he was joined at Boys Town by his younger brother, Terry.

In his book Mr Humphreys describes what happened when they were introduced:

One of the men standing nearby said, 'Go on, show some emotion,' but for some reason I couldn't. It was a shock to discover after all this time that I actually had a brother and I didn't know how to react. Terry told me years later that it was good having a big brother at Bindoon as the Brothers left him alone.

Later in life, Mr Humphreys took it upon himself to seek out and reconnect with his siblings and half siblings and their families, most of whom lived in Britain and Europe. He writes about the complex nature of rediscovering family:

In relation to blood lines there was no doubt of where I fitted in, but from lifestyle and habits formed I was completely different. ... The emotional scars from these reunions are another story. Mary and I were never able to say goodbye. For both of us the emotion has been too much. ... Most of the migrants I have spoken to have said that their reunions have left them in limbo. Some became even angrier. It was like tasting something pleasant and forgetting the name of it, thereby creating the fear that you might never taste it again.

Laurie Humphreys has made an enormous contribution to community life and the Fremantle electorate through his participation in local government with 21 years as a councillor for the City of Cockburn; as a representative for the Australian Timber Workers Union and, later, the Transport Workers Union; and as an advocate for child migrants. He is the WA representative of the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and he has formed a WA group called FACT: Forgotten Australians Coming Together.

At the end of his book Laurie Humphreys writes:

Overall, my life has been extremely blessed. I consider that I have worked hard: I have devoted much of my time to better the life of workers and the community. But most of all I value my family. I am not rich. I wasn't well educated, but the life I've created for myself was built on a never-give-in attitude. I've travelled through life with my sense of humour intact, something I do share with my family. I imagine that my fortitude for not giving in was developed during those 4-14 years, when I was on my own with no one to advise me or show me how, and when I was, to all intents and purposes, an orphan.

Another Fremantle constituent, Margaret or 'Margo' O'Byrne, who is here in parliament today with her husband, Eitan, has also written a book called *Left Unsaid*, recently launched by Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, which documents her and her brother Michael's experiences in Queensland institutions after they were taken from their mother. The flawed nature of the system under which children were institutionalised was highlighted in the Brisbane Children's Court decision in which the judge found Ms O'Byrne, then aged 12, and her brother, aged 11, guilty of the charge of being neglected children.

Like Mr Humphreys, Ms O'Byrne found the process of writing a book cathartic. It is humbling to see that after all that Ms O'Byrne and her brother suffered through neglect and poverty; through the suicide of their father and the alcoholism of their mother; through the cruel, brutal treatment they had at the hands of the nuns and priests charged with their care, that both Ms O'Byrne and her brother have determined that they will not be the lifelong victims of their treatment. They have adopted the attitude that you can get bitter or you can get better, and their strength of spirit in outshining the damage done to them is something I acknowledge and celebrate today. Ms O'Byrne is now an accomplished facilitator within the Fremantle area.

I have been a representative of the Fremantle electorate for nearly two years and almost every week I undertake work or meet constituents, and make representations that remind me of what a privilege it is to be a member of this place. This is never more true than on occasions like this one. We are all transients here in the federal parliament, but we are part of a continuity that reaches back to 1901 and that casts forward into Australia's future for who knows how long.

Today we rightly apologise, as a government and as a national parliament, for wrongs that were allowed to occur by the Australian government in previous incarnations. They may be wrongs that we, as members, do not feel personally responsible for, but I would observe that collective responsibility means nothing if the responsibility is not in some way felt by the individuals who make up that collective, from representatives to citizens.

Let us remember that the echoes of the cognitive mistakes of the past carry through into contemporary Australia. There was an unrecognised danger in regarding child migrants as the solution to a labour shortage. The same danger exists in the way we have approached, in recent times, short-term migrant labour. These people are not children, but they are often at a disadvantage because of their financial circumstances and their language skills. Some have been exploited and abused. The lesson for government is that people are not units of labour; that a society is not the same thing as an economy. It is the same lesson, but I suspect we will go on learning it for some time yet.

Finally, we should perhaps reflect that Australian governments in the future may well be obliged to apologise for our errors and failures. So by taking responsibility for things that have occurred in the past, as we do today, we also have the opportunity to remember that the duty of care, which was not discharged to the forgotten Australians and child migrants, is the same duty of care that we must remain ever vigilant to uphold.

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 19 November 2009
Page 84
Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (10.30 am)—I rise today to speak on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants and the motion moved by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. But, firstly, I acknowledge and thank all those who have worked so hard for so many years to make this apology happen. I also rise to speak on behalf of those in my electorate who have suffered as child migrants and forgotten Australians. I apologise to all of those people in my electorate.

As many previous members have stated, childhood should be a time of learning and growing in a nurturing environment and of simply being a child. Children should be able to grow up with a loving family and/or in a loving, secure environment that they can trust. However, as we continue to hear, so many of these basic rights and opportunities were robbed from many tens of thousands of forgotten Australians and former child migrants, and many of those are in my electorate.

This week we have heard a range of stories and recollections of painful childhood memories. No-one can understand, seriously, what these people have gone through and, while we in this parliament can speak, we do not understand, because it was not us. But I would like to acknowledge one person, one of my colleagues, Steve Irons, who was exactly one of those people who were so affected. I would like to acknowledge Steve's commitment, passion and hard work. I congratulate him on not only his journey in life but also his very dignified speech in the parliament on a day that would have been particularly emotional. I congratulate him as well on how, in spite of the beginning that he had, he has lived his life, and how he has gone on to be a balanced individual who has got so much to offer not only to this parliament but to the community. He is an inspiration to all those who, in any way, shape or form, have suffered and are suffering with challenges in their lives. So, Steve, I thank you as well, and I offer you my apology as well.

Monday's remembrance ceremony formally acknowledged what happened in the past—firstly, that it did happen, and, secondly, that it was wrong. The ceremony was also a stark reminder to the broader community of the reality of what happened to those people—something that happened to children so many years ago and continued for so long.

A local newspaper in my electorate recently ran an article regarding a constituent from the town of Collie who suffered abuse whilst in government children's homes. The article stated:

TORTURE at the hands of a foster mother and further abuse in a government children's home so damaged 55-year-old Collie man Johnno ... that he still carries the scars, mental and physical.

The article detailed the story of just one forgotten Australian, and I would like to take this opportunity to share some of his story from that article.

Johnno's father was an alcoholic war veteran who married Johnno's mother after the war. The article says:

Probably because of the bashings she took from her husband and her lifestyle as an entertainer ... she developed her own alcohol problems.

Johnno's parents split when he was just three years old, and his mother was unable to care for him or his siblings. Johnno clearly remembers the day that the police arrived at his house and handcuffed his eight-year-old brother, his six-year-old brother and him to the police car so they could not run away while they were searching the house for their parents. Johnno was put into care for eight years, away from his brothers for most of the time.

Initially, he was placed in an institution called Turana. He was then put into foster care with a woman who had five children of her own and took him purely for the money she was paid to care for him. However this was only a short-lived arrangement as Johnno was put into the Menzies boys' home after the foster mother tried to kill him. Johnno's suffering continued at Menzies boys' home, being forced to eat his meals alone as it was said that the damage from his former foster mother forcing his face onto the lighted gas stove 'would put the other

children off their food'. His foster mother's sister repeatedly reported the abuse to the authorities. However, the government did not listen to her.

This is a story that is continually repeated. This was a common occurrence. No-one wanted to listen and no-one wanted to acknowledge that these actions were actually taking place, because someone would have had to have taken responsibility. As you can see, Mr Deputy Speaker, Johnno was a defenceless child like the so many others subject to ongoing physical and mental abuse. I was so pleased that Johnno from Collie and Bob were able to be part of the apology in the Great Hall on Monday. I am absolutely sure that this process will have a profound effect on Johnno, as it will on all of those who were present and even those who were not there. Speaking afterwards to many of the people, including Johnno, simply reinforced the value of the ceremony, the value of the apology and how important the whole day and experience was for them. As the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition said in the Great Hall, it was a very important day for each of the people who were there. In conclusion, while we will never be able to take back the suffering of the forgotten Australians and former child migrants, I hope that this week's recognition and sincere apology are a step in the right direction. I repeat my apologies to all of these people in my constituency for what they have suffered. I support this motion.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Robert**) adjourned.

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 19 November 2009
Page 82
Questioner
Speaker Ruddock, Philip, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (10.08 am)—I do not speak on the motion on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants with any alacrity. It is a very tragic situation that brings us to this point and, like many who have spoken on this matter, I intend to inform the parliament and hopefully the people of Australia of the circumstances that some people have suffered and continue to suffer. When I spoke on the apology to our Indigenous brothers and sisters I talked a little about the reconciliation movement because I think it is appropriate to remind people that the genesis of it was in fact after the Second World War in the organisation that a former leader of the Labor Party and, before him, his father was associated with—Moral Rearmament.

Moral Rearmament is a very interesting organisation. It has had a name change. It is now called Initiatives of Change and it has, over a long period of time, conducted what is euphemistically known as second level diplomacy. It works to resolve those issues that often divide people and can have tragic results. It played a role after the Second World War in bringing people together from Germany and around Europe. That was its genesis, but it later played a role in the industrial movements in some of the differences between employers and employees. It played a role in relation to Indigenous peoples. It had an active role in what was happening in South Africa. It is interesting that South Africa had a reconciliation commission, which functioned after the first democratic elections, which I witnessed, in 1994. In Australia I do not think it is recognised that a gentleman called John Bond, who is very much associated with Moral Rearmament, Initiatives of Change, has worked on the issues affecting our Indigenous people. He organised the last conference in Europe, which I participated in. He spent many years here in Australia promoting the concept of reconciliation.

A lot of us do not understand, as I have mentioned previously, that reconciliation has two parts to it. The first is an apology from those who may have been guilty of some very unfortunate activities or acts. But it also is meant to evoke a basis upon which you can move on together, and that is the concept of forgiveness. In relation to a lot of the issues that we are dealing with, there is a quest for apology but the circumstances that can give rise to the second element of forgiveness are often not there. That is something I am going to speak to today. I note that in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 16 November there was a very interesting article by Hugh Mackay, the social commentator. He is a person I have known over a long period of time. He does not always agree with me, I might say. I once included him on an advisory committee for the former government. I do not know how much he relished that. But I have always respected his opinions. He writes:

It's a sorry state of affairs when forgiveness is not the main objective.

He goes on to say in this article:

So we're to have another ... apology ... This time, it's the turn of the "forgotten children"—those who languished, and were often neglected or abused, in institutions ...

He goes on to say:

No doubt an apology is called for.

...

But there's a terrible gap in this process that no one seems to be acknowledging. You can easily identify that gap if you ask yourself: what is the purpose of an apology?

The glib answer is that an apology is an admission of wrongdoing and an expression of regret for harm caused to another person by our actions or by our failure to act. We apologise to get all that off our chest, and who doesn't feel better once that's done?

But is that all an apology is about? Is that all we try to achieve when we apologise—feeling better? I don't think so. An apology is more than a declaration; it's not just a message we send to the injured party. It is also, importantly, an appeal to the injured party to forgive us for what we did to them.

An apology without a corresponding act of forgiveness is only half the story. If the forgiveness is withheld, the apology is left hanging in the air, like a gift you offered someone that they never formally accepted or thanked you for. Worse, an apology that is not met with forgiveness ends up looking like a solo performance: something we did to the injured party, rather than something we did together in the true spirit of reconciliation.

I think they are very, very telling words. He goes on to say of an apology:

Too easy, in fact: to say “we’re sorry” without having negotiated our way through to a meeting point where forgiveness can also occur is simply to have taken the first step.

It is in that context that I want to talk about some litigation in the state of New South Wales. The matter involves Shane Paul Nicholls and the state of New South Wales as the defendant. In this judgment, His Honour, Justice Malpass, says this:

The plaintiff was born on 3 October 1957 (he is now 48 years of age). Since the commencement of the proceedings, he has changed his surname to Bell.

He is the same person that Tony Abbott mentioned in his comments earlier this week. The judgment continues:

The plaintiff became a ward of the state on 21 February 1973 (when he was about 16 years of age). He remained as such until 1979 (when he was 22 years of age). He did not return to the family home.

It recounts how he was brought before the Penrith court, charged with being uncontrollable. That was in 1971. It continues:

In October of that year, the plaintiff was committed to an institution. He remained institutionalised till 1979. During this period, he exhibited ... symptoms (one of which was nocturnal enuresis). He was still bedwetting at the age of 20. His appearance disclosed, inter alia, constant smallest of stature and excessive thinness. He was treated as being mentally retarded and his education was neglected.

... Prior to institutionalisation, he had suffered an unfortunate home life. He was one of eight children in a household of poor financial circumstances. He suffered, inter alia, sexual and other abuse ... After institutionalisation, he had little contact with his mother.

What becomes apparent is that, while he was taken into care, little was done to address his circumstances—and this is in the time that I have been in this parliament. This man was committed in 1973, in a period in which I would have expected that some attention would have been paid in institutions in New South Wales to the needs of the young people entrusted to their care.

This litigation retails medical opinions about the way in which, in later life, conditions that should have been identified were found. I read here a letter from a Dr Ryan in 1993:

You can be assured that I am doing everything that I can to seek an early settlement of your claim. I have given advice to the Department that your condition should have been diagnosed when you were in the departments care.

This is a man of whom the judge says:

... when he was discharged from the wardship, he was functionally illiterate ... he had few, if any, life skills. He has never held a serious job for any length of time ... he is now realistically unemployable.

He is clearly a person whom we—our generation—failed.

What was this litigation about? This litigation was about when this man had identified that he had certain claims that might ordinarily be addressed through our legal system. Those who are dealing with these issues now in the state of New South Wales used legal remedies available to them to ensure that that claim could never be addressed. We all know what they are. They are statutes of limitation, which demand that even if you had no knowledge of any rights and entitlements to bring forward a claim, no advice that suggested that there might be a difficult issue that had to be addressed, if the time that has elapsed—in this case, three years—is too long, unless you receive a special waiver from a court, which has to be obtained in very limited circumstances, you have no remedy. The very point I want to make is that, at a time when we are seeking to apologise, there are people in this country, governments in this country, who have resisted any inquiry into their handling of these issues and continue to do so, who ensure that even the legal system will deny a remedy to a person deserving one.

If you cannot guess, I have come to know Shane Nicholls over a period of time. He is not an easy person to deal with. He is a person greatly wounded by what he has been forced to endure, and he does seek a remedy. I think people wanted to have him here in Canberra for this apology, but he feels the apology without at least some effort to get those responsible in New South Wales to address these issues is hollow. I do not know what the relationships are in these matters, but we apologise and he is denied a remedy. We say to him, 'Are you prepared, having received an apology, to forgive?' I do not like to say it, but, unless we are prepared to pick up some of the points that Hugh Mackay has made, in a lot of these situations we are not going to move forward.

I think the very least that is required in New South Wales is for those in authority—and for those here who can speak to those in authority in New South Wales—to say, 'We will no longer use statutes of limitations to deny people the opportunity to have their claims heard and addressed on their merits.' It is a pretty simple step but one that I think would, in the context of these issues, help some people to address those matters and move forward. Likewise, I see the resistance that has occurred in my state of New South Wales to an inquiry in relation to these issues. In the time that I have been sitting in this parliament, I have heard about the way in which people were physically abused—were wounded—by those who were entrusted to care for them. As it said in this litigation, they were not even given an education which would enable them to go out and get a job. Those in authority kept them institutionalised until 22 years of age and then tried to get them off on benefits so that, hopefully, they could survive.

I think we still have a long way to go in addressing these issues before some of the wounds that are there are healed. I hope some, particularly in New South Wales, if this speech of mine is read more widely, might recognise that they have some responsibility if they endorse this apology to take the practical steps to provide some remedies for redress. Equally, I think it ought to be clear to governments that this litigation—this case; I have it before me—was resolved by the judge simply saying: 'Because of statutes of limitations, I have no basis upon which I can provide a remedy.' I hope some people will take on board the pain that that sort of approach by those in authority evokes amongst those whom we recognise have suffered a great deal.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 15
Questioner
Speaker Marles, Richard, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry) (1.37 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, what you have just heard—the stories of Steve Irons—are just a few among half a million: each just as sad, each just as powerful. Collectively they represent a well of pain and a great wrong which today our country acknowledged. The member for Blaxland, Jason Clare, gave thanks to a number of people who have been involved in the apology on this day and I add my voice in thanking Andrew Murray, Steve Irons, Abbie Clark, Corrie McKenzie, Caroline Carroll, Harold Haig, Ian Thwaites, Leonie Sheedy, Joanna Penglase and all the senators who heard the initial inquiry. I would also like to extend my thanks to Jason, whose wisdom and perseverance have been critical to this day. The journey that we have walked together has given me the gift of his friendship, which I cherish greatly. I would particularly like to thank the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, who has been devoted to this cause. I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his dignified words today and I would like to thank the Prime Minister for giving the apology and accompanying it with a beautiful speech. It will change the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Today is Andrew Murray's day. Today is Steve Irons's day. Today is Rod Currie's day. Today is Trish Sumic's day. It is the day of half a million Australians. But it is also Joanna Penglase's and Leonie Sheedy's day. These two have been at the core of this. They were the driving force behind the Senate inquiry. They were the driving force behind today's national apology. Their shoulders have provided support for a multitude of forgotten Australians. Their ears have heard a thousand stories and in the process they have provided relief. They are great Australians. They are an example of a truth that I have come to learn in all the work that I have done with the Care Leavers of Australia Network: that the forgotten Australians and child migrants as a people, having dealt with the greatest adversity at the outset of their lives, are a determined and courageous people. Amidst all that we do on this day it is so important that we honour and celebrate that fact, because the forgotten Australians and child migrants are wonderful Australians and our country is much the richer for their being among us.

I have spoken with many forgotten Australians over the last few weeks in the lead-up to today's national

apology. Naturally forgotten Australians deal with their childhood experience in different ways. There are some who carried it as a weeping sore into their adult life. Many talk of feeling ashamed when thinking about their childhood and of feeling embarrassed to tell their story. For these people the national apology has not come a day too soon. Then there are others who I have particularly spoken to and who have buried their childhood experience deep inside and have said to me how unexpectedly emotional they feel about today's national apology. While they know that this is a moment of great national significance, a great national act, it is also an act that comes with pain. In all cases it has been impossible to talk to the forgotten Australians about today's national apology without tears. In each case people talk of this day as being a new beginning.

And so to those forgotten Australians and child migrants who do feel ashamed about their childhood, all of us here say to you that you do not deserve to feel shame. The shame is upon your nation, and today it has been acknowledged. To those of you who feel embarrassed to tell your story, all of us say to you that your story, good and bad, now forms a part of the nation's story, good and bad. And to those of you for whom today opens a door into a painful part of your heart: it is so vital that all Australians—in the weeks, months and years ahead—stand shoulder to shoulder with you to help the healing. To all the forgotten Australians and child migrants: for all the embraces that you did not receive in childhood today—with all its failings and inadequacies and in the knowledge that what was taken away can never be given back—we give, with the deepest sincerity of heart, an embrace at last from your country. Today we say to the forgotten Australians and child migrants: we will not forget what you have suffered; as a nation we are sorry, and what you have endured is no longer a dark secret but a period of history on record for all Australians to remember.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms JA Saffin)—I ask that members please rise to signify support for the motion.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank honourable members.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Albanese**) adjourned.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 111
Questioner
Speaker Baldwin, Robert, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (6.05 pm)—I rise today to speak to the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. Today we sat in the Great Hall and listened to the Prime Minister read the apology—a very heartfelt speech—and we listened to a very heartfelt speech by the Leader of the Opposition. We saw the gathering of people and we saw an outpouring of emotions. Then we gathered in the chamber and listened to the presentation by Minister Macklin and then a speech by the shadow minister, Tony Abbott. But the one that hit me was the speech by Steve Irons, the member for Swan. While many members can stand up and speak about the emotions of their community, none of us can truly understand what people like our friend and colleague Steve Irons has been through. Many tens of thousands of children went through what Steve went through.

It would be a mistake to believe that every child was abused, that every child was not cared for as they should have been; but many, many were abused. Listening to Steve talk about his brother and those lost years was very emotionally charged. Andrew Murray, a former Democrat senator, was a person I got to know during the time I served as the Chair of the Public Accounts and Audit Committee. The *Sun Herald* reported on 30 August 2009, after the announcement that there would be an apology, that Andrew Murray said:

... the apology represented the culmination of a decade-long Senate campaign.

And further:

... it would be a symbolic and emotional “Rubicon” for hundreds of thousands of people who had been let down by governments that had failed in their duty of care.

The Leader of the Opposition quoted from *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* today, which uses Nelson Mandela’s words:

Any nation that does not care for and protect all of its children does not deserve to be called a nation.

I am proud to be a member of parliament and represent my constituents in this place but I am somewhat embarrassed and somewhat concerned by guilt when I think that there were people who stood in parliament, like I do now, in years gone by, who not only allowed this to happen but actively promoted the stealing of children.

Between 1947 and 1967 there was collusion with the British government, when over 7,000 children were sent to Australia from England, children who were packed up and sent. They went to the wharf with a variety of stories. They were not bad children. One thing I believe is that no child is born bad; they are the creature of the environment in which they are raised. That is perhaps why the Nelson Mandela quote is important. We should not only protect our children; we should nurture our children. We should give them the best opportunities they can have in life.

The Commonwealth’s push to ‘implement good white stock’ into its dominions was nothing more than a cruel action by governments of the day, blinded by obsession at the expense of young people who knew no different. These were young people who were told they would be coming to Australia for a better life, young people who may have been told that their parents were deceased when they were not, young people who were told that they would be cared for and looked after and that this was the land of opportunity. Sadly, they were disappointed.

I can remember that as a young fellow at school we would have fundraisers. There would be fundraisers for things like the Barnardo homes and a variety of others. We would hear about these homes. I was very fortunate because I came from a very loving family but I can always remember that when I was a little bit mischievous my dad would say to me, ‘If you play up you’ll be going to the boys home.’ So if they used that as a threat to try and bring you back in line how bad was it for the people who were living there—who were growing up there?

As much as we, as members of parliament, might think that we can understand, unless you have been there you can never experience the emotional cruelty, the beatings and the torment. When I talk to young people who

have experienced these things they say to me—and it is probably true too of people who suffer domestic violence—that they will stay and suffer the punishment because at least they feel loved in that environment. But can you imagine being placed into an environment where you are getting beaten, abused and raped and nobody loves or cares for you?

Perhaps the greatest crime in all of this was the fact that these kids had no-one to turn to. No-one believed them and the more they brought up the issue the more they were beaten and abused. Governments failed them; churches failed them; charities failed them; but, importantly, communities failed them. Communities knew what was happening and at the time they failed to bring churches, governments and charities to account. And that is something that is very hard to forgive. While I stand here today as a proud Australian participating in this apology, can I tell you I also feel like a guilty Australian because I am part of that generation that allowed it to continue.

As I have connected with people in my community I feel it is important to recount some of the stories from those people. One such story is from a local resident, Norma Collins, who in 1954 started her journey as a forgotten Australian. After the passing of her mother, eight-year-old Norma was too innocent and too young to understand. She was institutionalised at Rathgar Home for Girls, South Grafton, with her older sister. At the same time the bond with her older brother was lost when he was sent to work on a rural property.

Norma spent her formative years as one of half a million orphans neglected and forgotten by governments, churches and charities. Norma was not given the love and attention that an eight-year-old child should have been given. She was a child wanting the simple thing that we take for granted—love from a mother. She wanted love from a mother who died too young. Norma craved individual care; instead she often felt isolated and lonely. Norma recalls one night when she reached out for human kindness by creeping into a matron's bedroom, requesting a simple hug. But like so many others, this simple display of affection was rejected; instead, she was smacked and sent to bed. For Norma this is a lasting reminder of how she and others in the home were treated like sheep. They had basin haircuts, a shared wardrobe and a long list of daily chores. You were no longer a child with a personality and needs; you were simply a number—one of many without a loving home to call your own.

What Norma missed was the love and attention that a family home could have provided. Norma was a strong child and made the best out of an otherwise hopeless situation. She made friendships that continue today. After four years in Rathgar, Norma was finally released into the care of family. However, she was so shy from shame and embarrassment that she regularly hid from other children and family members. This poor self-perception was only perpetuated when she learnt how others viewed and treated orphans from the school. She once heard that other local children were told to stay away from the orphans, who were seen to be a bad influence. This made Norma retreat even further from the community she could have been a part of.

Patty, also from my electorate, tells of the heart-breaking story of her experiences at Rathgar in the 1970s. After losing her 36-year-old mother from heart problems, Patty and her three sisters and brother found themselves facing an uncertain future and were placed in institutionalised care. Patty's strength, despite her troubled childhood, is evident today. She remembers better not her own story but the stories of her sisters and brother. Being separated from her siblings at such a young age forced bonds to be broken that never should have been. She tells harrowing stories of her sister being sexually abused by her holiday parents. Another sister was sent to a prison like Parramatta Girls Home for being rebellious. Her brother was shunted from home to home. Patty attributes the lack of a father figure in his life as a major contributor to his gambling problem now.

Patty recalls two loving house mothers during her time at Rathgar—Mrs Tibbs and Mama Joyce—who tried their best to bring up the girls in a close-to-normal environment where possible. In another harsh reminder, she realised she was not part of a real family when these motherly figures retired and the centre was taken over by a husband and wife whose approach to the home was very different. Suddenly, contact with the outside world ceased and so, as a 14-year-old, she ran away looking for a better life.

For girls like Norma and Patty and the other half a million forgotten Australians, childhood had to be survived rather than enjoyed. The Australian government robbed them of the chance to be children, a right which every person in this nation deserves, and for that I am deeply sorry. Today's apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants is a milestone in our nation's history. It was a sad era which will never be repeated.

Those who attended the apology today, listened to their radios or watched at home on the television acknowledged the survivors, remembering their stories and allowing the Australian government to shelve the responsibility for decades of pain and suffering in institutionalised care. We can only hope now that this burden

has been lifted from the shoulders of orphans and migrants who believed for years that they were to blame; they were not.

As I sat in the great hall watching the apology this morning, I could not help but recall my own childhood. I was one of the fortunate few children that emigrated from Britain with loving parents wanting a fresh start for me and my siblings. Even with the constant and loving support, the transition to a new country and culture was very, very difficult. I cannot begin to imagine what life would have been like if I had migrated alone, as 7,000 former child migrants were forced to do through historical migration schemes.

Through three unanimous Senate inquiries, the consequences of institutionalised care were frighteningly illustrated. With emotional and physical deprivation and shocking levels of neglect and abuse, children lost family connections and, in the process, much of their identity. As adults, many still grapple with the demons of their childhood and yet have been brave enough to come together today to share their stories with the nation. Thank you, Norma and Patty, for being amongst those with enough courage to say, 'I will not be forgotten any longer.' You are certainly survivors, having now raised your own loving families despite the failure of your government as a protector.

So I stand as the member for Paterson, an elected member of the Australian parliament, to echo today's apology, which is long overdue. I understand that this will not change the past or the lasting legacy of these experiences for those who suffer. However, with sincere respect, I place my apology on the public record for constituents like Norma and Patty, who have travelled to Canberra today to take the first step in their journey towards healing. They also hope to rediscover their fellow orphans who took the place of extended family. Norma was quite adamant that her message should be passed, reinforced and remembered by others. 'Leave the shame in the past', she said. 'Let others know you were in and out of home care. This way, institutionalised brothers and sisters may be able to find one another again and reform the bonds that were lost.' I promise Norma and Patty and the other forgotten Australians and former child migrants, 'You will now and forever be remembered Australians.'

SPEECH

Date	Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source	House
Page	128	Proof	Yes
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Stone, Dr Sharman, MP	Question No.	

Dr STONE (Murray) (11.59 am)—I too rise to speak on the motion on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. On Monday some of the nation stopped to listen and acknowledge the terrible damage done to wards of the state and child migrants who were raised in institutions run by churches and charities, at so-called homes, farms and other places. The only crime of the children who were sent was that their parents were poor, their mothers unmarried or they were orphaned. Over much of the 20th century more than half a million children suffered terribly, many damaged permanently, as the state, federal and local governments looked the other way.

Organisations and churches were paid to exercise a duty of care, to nurture, nourish and educate these wards of the state. Preparing them for a happy and productive life as adults in Australia was their charge. Clearly these agencies failed to exercise humanity, kindness or care for the most precious and vulnerable of the nation's children, and they stand condemned for that. Too often, children were physically and sexually abused, poorly nourished and not educated. They were forced to work for the agencies, who profited hugely from the whole business. The boards, the elders, the trustees, the priests, the nuns and the neighbours in places like Hay, Ballarat and Box Hill simply looked away.

The institutionalised children with living parents or siblings were often lied to about the existence of their families or cruelly denied access to brothers and sisters also made wards of the state. Surviving parents were also often lied to about the fate of their children or even their whereabouts. This is a most shameful part of our history and a part of our history which we must acknowledge and understand. It is also a shameful part of the history of Britain and other countries who also agreed to send or take migrant children in an extraordinary effort to breed their country white.

This era echoes the abuse of Indigenous children in Australia referred to as the 'stolen generations'. For the non-Indigenous children, their experience was no less damaging in the lifetime consequences. Many of those children talk, as adults, of the denial of their country and their identity, of having no experience of love or intimacy, of finding it impossible to form long-term, trusting, meaningful relationships, and of suffering long-term debilitating health problems associated with their early neglect and abuse, the hard physical work at too young an age and the poor nutrition, hygiene and shelter. The wonder is that so many children did survive to become proud, competent adults able to form families and independence in a country that for too long failed to believe their childhood neglect and suffering.

Often it is through coming to know the stories of individuals that the true cruelty of the experience and exploitation of these children becomes more deeply understood. That has certainly been my experience. I have been privileged to come to know Daryl Sloan, a constituent of mine in the Murray electorate. His life is an extraordinary example of human endurance and triumph through adversity. Not only is he a survivor of these institutions in the true sense of the word, but he and his wife now foster and love at-risk children who in the past would have been subjected to neglect and abuse in institutions like the one he was placed in.

At the age of 25 months, on 12 November 1963, Daryl and his two brothers aged four and six were charged in a court with having 'no settled place of abode and no visible means of support'. The little boys' punishment for this crime was immediate commitment to institutions as wards of the state. Daryl was the youngest of 13 children—some his father's children, some his mother's. His mother had endured and then ended an abusive marriage, but because her husband was a returned serviceman she was required to leave the war veteran provided family home, making her and her children homeless. Daryl's mother was able to accommodate some of her children, her older children, with grandparents. She worked, but without any extra welfare support she had to give up some of her family into so-called care so she and they could survive.

Toddler Daryl was moved between Allambie, Turana and Ballarat children's homes. The three brothers were separated according to their age in the three sections of Ballarat Children's Home, so they were denied any access

to family, or support for one another. When their mother tried to see them, she had a near impossible task. She had to travel by train from Shepparton to Melbourne, then back down to Ballarat, and try to see the three boys in three different places all in half an hour or so. You can only imagine the distress of that mother trying to stay in contact with her boys.

Daryl recalls the big plates of stale sandwiches regularly fed to the boys, apparently leftovers from a charitable nearby pub and taken carefully to Ballarat Children's Home. He soon learned to reach for a sandwich from the middle of the plate because it was not so dry and curled, and there was more cigarette ash and beer spills on sandwiches at the edges of the plates. They had no pillows on their beds and the poorest of clothing. On reflection now Daryl can see that the people rushing frantically between cots trying to silence the babies were mere girls themselves, older wards of the state, with the far too heavy responsibility of looking after the rows of babies and toddlers. Daryl remembers wondering why so many cried, because he thought, 'What is the use of crying.' Daryl knows of others, little boys in the dormitories, who waited in fear each night, rolled tightly into a foetal position, dreading that the footsteps would stop at their bed, because it would be their turn again to endure violation at the hands of the paedophiles in charge of those young lives.

I agree with Daryl and so many others that the perpetrators of these and other crimes should now be identified wherever possible and prosecuted. No less than a royal commission in Victoria may be needed to ensure that these vile men and women, so far protected by the institutions that hired them, are flushed out and their deeds made public. Their victims deserve nothing less than to see them successfully prosecuted, along with others who so comprehensively failed in their duty of care to the most vulnerable and defenceless.

Daryl's mother eventually formed a new relationship and the children in care were released back to her. But a life of great instability continued for Daryl. In all, he attended 17 schools and he left home as soon as he possibly could, at 15. You would expect Daryl's life to then conform to a pattern that often follows poor education, poverty and a disjointed and dysfunctional family. And for a while it did. By his late 20s, however, Daryl had taken control of his life and was determined to make his mark in a fairer, kinder Australia. Daryl has now fostered in his own home with his family and their own children a succession of wards of the state—children like him who had been dealt an unlucky hand in life. He is now offering these children the continuity of care and love that he missed out on.

But Daryl, a highly intelligent, caring man, is not content to simply observe that the system of care for neglected or at-risk children today remains a serious and ongoing problem. With others, he is acutely aware that the system of foster care and carers is being driven into the ground, in particular in Victoria. The statistics speak for themselves. There were 5,500 foster carers in Victoria in 2002. By 2007, five years later, there were fewer than 1,000. The supply is in free fall and the Victorian government needs to ask why. The answers are self-evident. They do not take very long to discover.

There is a serious lack of support for foster carers, who, classified as volunteers, are expected to provide the additional, intensive support for their fostered children with very little financial or other assistance. Clearly, if you have several children of your own and are fostering others, often with very high needs, the ideal is for one of the parents to be able to offer that parenting full-time. In fact, however, in order to make ends meet, both parents usually need to work outside the home to pay the mortgage. How many good, loving, potential foster carers simply cannot afford to offer their services? Alternatively, how many of the 4,500 foster carers who used to help raise some of the country's most troubled and needy children have simply been forced to cease fostering because they cannot afford to continue to do it—because they cannot make ends meet?

This is a disgraceful and shameful situation in our country, when we know that the alternative—institutional care in places sometimes called 'cottages'—will continue to be less than ideal for a young child needing a nuclear family, some continuity of care and a lifetime of relationships with caring significant others. This is a hopeless situation now given that institutions are paid very substantial recompense to offer group care for wards, and I have to worry that this is potentially creating a new generation of forgotten children. Children who leave institutional care with no ongoing relationship with a caring, parent-like figure and no sense of family have diminished feelings of self-worth and a shattered identity. We see the consequences of such institutional care every day in an electorate like Murray, which has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the country. It is not surprising when we look at the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, SAAP, that over 40 per cent of those seeking help through that program have previously been institutionalised or brought up in so-called 'care'.

Along with Daryl and many others who now seek to give every child a chance in this country, I call on the Victorian and federal governments to look very hard at the next generation of forgotten children. They are already

with us. We know of the damage and distress that a life of neglect and lack of love leads to, particularly in early childhood. It is absolutely incumbent on all of us who stood in the House or in the Great Hall on Monday and who wholeheartedly embraced the motion of apology that we do not now rest and say the job is done. The job is just beginning for those who are recently enlightened.

I have Daryl Sloan to thank for helping me to understand more particularly what a cruel blow life can deliver to an innocent young child but how you can triumph despite that blow and how you can lead a better life through your work for so many others, but foster carers like Darryl need a lot of understanding, better attention and support.

I also believe that we should not rest in trying to bring to justice those who perpetrated the cruelties and the criminal acts in the deliberate neglect of innocent young wards. Many of them are still well and truly with us in the community, some continue to hold positions of responsibility. I believe as a nation we also need to seek out and prosecute those who are found guilty of very serious charges. We cannot do any less for the victims.

I certainly will continue to be concerned, particularly for those in my electorate. We did have a Presbyterian boys home based in Dhurringile, which is now a prison. At the time numbers of boys from overseas, migrant children, were sent to that place. I am not aware personally at this point whether any of those children suffered a less than proper experience there, but I intend to find out.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 13
Questioner
Speaker Irons, Steve, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (1.22 pm)—Today I rise to speak on the motion put to the House by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Ms Jenny Macklin, and responded to by the coalition shadow minister, Mr Tony Abbott. I also thank the member for Blaxland for his kind words and I look forward to the member for Corio's address after mine. I support this motion. Personally it is a privilege and an honour to be able to do so. I only hope that, in the time that I have, I can do justice to the people who so richly deserve the apology delivered this morning by the Prime Minister of Australia and the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, in such a bipartisan manner. Wasn't it just an emotionally charged, electric situation? I think it was just fantastic. Well done to you, Malcolm, and well done to the Prime Minister.

I would first like to acknowledge a few people today, on indulgence. I would like to say hello to the CLANNies, to the forgotten Australians, to the Maltese and UK migrants who are in this chamber today and to those across Australia watching or listening. I welcome you and hope this day begins a new journey for you. I know the apology will never take away the memories and the pain of your childhood, but I live in hope that we will see the Australian community embrace you and we will see you, our fellow Australians, as our sisters and brothers and we as a nation will love you as sisters and brothers.

Talking about brothers and sisters, I would also like to welcome my brother Robert Dix, who was at the apology this morning and is in the chamber now. Hi, Bobbi. Robert and I were separated when I was six months old and reunited when I was 35 years of age. I am proud to have you here today, Bobbi. It is special for me. I am pleased you could make it here today to see the apology to our fellow Australians. Even though we missed 34 years of our lives together, we will make up for it with our remaining years. We can never make up for the loss of our brother Raymond and our sister Jennifer, who are both deceased. Both of them suffered in orphanages. I am fortunate to be here today to speak on their behalf.

The disconnection from family that many people experience when institutionalised or removed from their family and placed in care is something that only someone who has been in that situation could

understand. The family—the mothers, the fathers, the grandparents and the siblings—left behind also experience disconnection and pain from the separation. I know from discussions with Robert that this deeply affected him when he was younger. He did not know where his siblings were, if they were being looked after or if he would ever see them again. Then he had to deal with his own levels of abuse at home—physical abuse from our dad and mental abuse from our mother. This is just an example of the dilemma and confusion and sorrow of thousands of Australian families and siblings who were left behind to ponder and wonder about the fate of the children entering orphanages.

But today is about an apology to all of you here today and to all those who could not make the journey but who are watching and listening. This apology has not just occurred without years of hard work by some very dedicated people. Some of them are here today. I acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues Richard Marles, Jason Clare, Senators Claire Moore, Rachel Siewert and Gary Humphries and, especially, former senator Andrew Murray, who drove this process from a parliamentary point of view from the start, single-handed. I also acknowledge Jo Gash, who I know has taken a particular interest in this. I acknowledge Leonie Sheedy—how are you, Leonie? Where are you? Do not hide up there! How are you going?—and Joanna Penglase, the co-founders of CLAN, otherwise known as the Care Leavers Australia Network. They have toiled for nearly 10 years with this apology at the top of their agenda. About eight months ago I received a call from Leonie saying: 'Hello, Steve. I have searched you. I have brought up your speech in parliament. You're a homie. You're one of us.' I did not know what she was talking about, but I do now. It has just been a great pleasure to have been involved with this last eight months of the journey. Leonie is a fantastic person. You deserve everything you get, Leonie. I acknowledge Harold Haig, whom I met through this apology process, and Caroline Carroll, from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians. To Caroline Carroll and Harold Haig, well done. They served on the apology committee. To Minister Macklin and the FaHCSIA staff who are also on the committee, I acknowledge your work and the dedication to bring this event to fruition.

As we know, today is about the forgotten Australians and the lost innocents. This is your day. I would

now like to relate some stories I have heard from these people. They are graphic, but it is important that these stories are told and that all Australians know about the physical, mental and sexual abuse that you suffered. Ralph Doughty today gave me some background information and I promised I would read one part of it. The report of the Senate inquiry into children in institutional care report concluded:

... that there has been wide scale unsafe, improper and unlawful care of children, a failure of duty of care, and serious and repeated breaches of statutory obligations.

It found:

Such abuse and assault was widespread across institutions, across States and across the government, religious and other care providers.

In other words, the abuse and cruelty occurred nationally, as was the case in Ireland.

Now I am going to talk about Cheryle Warner, who wrote to me recently about a redress scheme. Part of her letter was very powerful, and I thought I would read it out today. Cheryle, are you here in the chamber? Welcome, Cheryle. Cheryle recently spent some time in my office to tell her story to the local newspaper. She also took the time to send me this note. I will take some of those thoughts and relate them to you:

I was 49 when I began my redress application. I am 51 now.

I am standing at my third REDRESS.WA rally now, thinking how I had tried to tell the government they had opened a Pandora's Box. We are talking about restoring peoples honor, dignity and self worth. We were talking about possibly the most abused child generation in the state, we are certainly talking about one of the most impoverished, both economically and psychological target groups in the state.

... ..

This REDRESS.WA idea, as honorable and genuine as I believe it was, has never been important in the eyes of this Government.

There has been no processes or procedures implemented.

We are still in wading through the bleak black ice we know as "bleak depression" in limbo waiting for something....ANYTHING... to happen. Some sort of show of good faith, at least,...like where is the memorial we were promised, at the very least where is the blueprints or pictures of ideas for this memorial...where are the free psych sessions, how do you access them, etc...

Instead, here we are two years later, still attending Rallies outside Parliament house, crowds of fragmented, damaged and broken people waiting for Moses to lead us out of misery.

... ..

The plan was to make amends to those thousands of forgotten, abused and not afforded the duty of care all child have a born right to, by previous governments. These applicants had been wards of the state and had been neglected by the governments of their times. Consequently children and babies were left open to the mercy of predatory, cruel, tortuous inhumane foster placements and subsequently these once innocent children's lives had been affected socially, psychological, physically, for decades, and some continue to be to date, and others that may never thrive. Some have passed down their demons to their children without awareness.

Many countries around the world that have taken steps to acknowledge, apologise and make amends offer genuine support, with most countries offering an ex gratia payment. I have never made any secret that I see this as an obscene amount from the WA government—between \$10,000 and \$80,000. It was an indecent proposal to begin with. Good Lord! How does one arrive at any fair dollar value on these sorts of heinous crimes against children? What price for lost opportunities, lost childhoods and lost lives? Who can say?

Cheryle goes on to say:

Hence there was no negotiating. I knew from the start \$80,000 would seem like a lot of money to the lower socioeconomic group. In reality I knew it could make things a bit more comfortable for the abused and their immediate families for the short term but would not be life changing for the majority. Many applicants have subscribed to my views about the money but if you look at it in real dollars it just does not add up. When you consider that on average I was beaten and tortured 6,000 times between the ages of 13 months and 16 years, this works out at about \$6 a beating, a rape, an indecent assault, assault and battery and, in some cases, torture in all of its military style. I have spent over \$50,000 in psych fees. I am only one of the thousands with stories like this, and others have worse. However, I chose to go along with the Redress process. I figured I would get some benefit from it, be it emotional or cathartic, but I got that wrong. I thought I would be able to help my kids out—give them a small holiday and a small investment somewhere. Thus I chose to put in an application. Money is a great motivator to those in lower socioeconomic brackets. However, greater than this is the opportunity for me to reclaim my sense of dignity and autonomy. With these thoughts I opened the application form and began writing.

This is another letter written by Brad, who wrote about his experience in care:

During the Christmas period of 1979, in the early days of my admission to Parkerville, all the kids left in the home who had no-one to go to for Christmas were herded into one of the old disused cottages, St Pat's. From memory there were approximately 20 children, possibly more, aged from younger than me to late teens, crowded into a cottage, and two hippie social worker types were employed to look after us. There were a few other adults who dropped by but they seemed to be friends of the two hippie types. This was a small one-bedroom cottage across from the cottage in a chapel. It was called Blue Cottage. It was rented by an ex-resident who was around 17, I guess. He used to hang around the

group cottage a fair bit and some of the others had been to his cottage with him to listen to records. On my visit to Blue Cottage he played Pink Floyd's album *The Wall* album, at my request, and after smoking either a cigarette or a joint, I can't remember, he had a bit of a play around with my penis. By this time I had been regularly abused by my stepfather so he wasn't exactly Robinson Crusoe in my sex life, and thus it's never really been a big deal for me in the context of things. And therein lies the problem. Isn't it a bit sad that a nine-year-old boy can push the situation of being abused to one side both mentally and emotionally without a second thought? As an adult, I think that's sad.

From Bruce, one other Western Australian who contacted me:

I called your office last week as you are a friend who knows my journey and the effect it has had on my life. I thought I was one person who really needed to hear the 'sorry' word. I am a retired minister of religion currently on a disability support pension due to ill health. I was made a ward of the state of Victoria in 1954, born 1952. I was in St Anthony's Home in Kew, St Joseph's Home in Surrey Hill and the Taurana Boys Home. These days what I do recall has had a huge effect on my life in every way—ways that have seen much trauma, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, loss and separation in my life. I recall my days as a little boy working at Surrey Hills from the age of four in a laundry, being bashed and beaten, always being filled with fear, having one meal a day, no toys and no mummy or daddy to say they loved me and tuck me in of a night in a warm and secure home. No Christmas, no birthdays, just being beaten, seeing your little mates falling down in the laundry exhausted from malnutrition and at times falling down dead. Just the regimental discipline of the Black Cape Brigade (the nuns) waiting with canes to flog us again. Steve, we ate the moss off the walls, we drank our own urine and even at times tried to eat our own faeces. We were so hungry and neglected, while in the distance we could smell in the air the kitchen that provided them with their daily meals, while at night we were locked up like animals in cages, with a cyclone gate and padlock, to await another day of the same.

I have said in this place before that I began my life as a ward of the state of Victoria. I spent three years in an institution as a child and I was then taken into foster care. Even as a foster child I was a ward of the state; a responsibility of the Victorian government. All the children who were wards of state—and there were those who entered institutions without being made a ward of state: all the child migrants from Britain and Malta, all the children in foster care—were the responsibilities of the governments of the day.

I welcome this apology and support the motion and encourage all my fellow colleagues to support it and the forgotten Australians. We must not forget reparation. I call on the governments, churches and charities to deal with this now, not later. We can now only be judged as a nation by our ability to repair and rebuild these Australian lives, because we have failed these children in the construction of them. We have failed them in the

nurturing and care that they would have expected to get from institutions, the nurturing and care they would have got in a family home. We have failed them by treating them with systematic abuse.

Everyone asks about the reasons for children being in orphanages—whether it was an economic situation or a breakdown of the family unit. There are numerous reasons, and I have even heard of people putting their children into orphanages to prevent them from being a burden on the rest of their family.

In closing, today we have heard stories from forgotten Australians with a range of emotions and experiences. We have heard about having trouble creating relationships, about having trouble trusting particularly authorities but anyone, about the abuse that these individuals suffered and about the lack of nurturing and care and love. They all have their own stories. They are all stories that must be told, and we need to recognise them, particularly in our role as parliamentarians as we go out into the community to make sure that we advise and look after those people and create an environment where all future children in Australia will be nurtured and cared for and loved. To all the forgotten Australians I can only say that I will continue to work to make sure that you are remembered.

SPEECH

Date	Wednesday, 18 November 2009	Source	House
Page	131	Proof	Yes
Questioner		Responder	
Speaker	Ley, Sussan, MP	Question No.	

Ms LEY (Farrer) (12.23 pm)—I am pleased to speak on the occasion of this parliament's national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. The apology is long deserved, and the sadness is that it has ever been necessary. We as a nation must acknowledge the trauma and abuse that this generation of people suffered, and we must work with them to improve their lives and allow them to reconcile with their past.

It is reported that more than 500,000 Australians have experienced life in an orphanage, home or other form of out-of-home care during the last century in Australia. Many of these were child migrants who were transported from Britain to these shores, bringing with them the hopes of their families for a better life. Many of us have met someone who lived in an orphanage or a 'naughty' girls or boys home, as they were known when I was growing up. In Albury, St Johns at Thurgoona was for many years a Catholic orphanage, as was St Anne's Home of Compassion girls home in Broken Hill.

I am not critical of St Johns or St Anne's as I do know that they offered a safe haven from difficult and traumatic family situations for many who lived there. However, I also know that life was tough for the girls who lived there. The nuns were hard taskmasters. They were strict disciplinarians and they could not understand behaviour that was not mainstream nor offer comfort or affection in times of sadness. I am sure for those nuns these girls were from almost alien backgrounds and they were ill-equipped to deal with the emotional trauma that resulted from being separated from families and homes.

One of the most dreadful facilities in all of Australia was the Hay Institution for Girls. It is also in the Farrer electorate. It opened in 1961 and operated as a secondary punishment centre for girls from Parramatta who were considered incorrigible or failed to meet minimum standards. Many had undiagnosed mental health conditions. Most came from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Many had been state wards from a very young age. Some were Indigenous stolen generation children and, most importantly, none had committed any criminal offences. They were simply the lost and forgotten children of Australia's welfare system.

Girls were transferred at night by train to Narrandera and then to Hay in the back of a lock-up van. On their arrival they were issued with a set of institutional clothes, given routine instructions and had their hair cut short to a depersonalised institutional bob. Their introduction to hard labour in Hay was a 10-day stint locked in a cell where they were forced to scrub paint from the walls back to the brick surface. This was followed with repainting the surface for the next unfortunate arrival. Cells were furnished with a single iron-frame bed, a thin mattress, a blanket, sheets, a pillow, the Bible and a night can. The girls were only allowed 10 minutes twice a day to talk between themselves, eyes to the floor at all times. They were only allowed to talk to a staff member by raising their arm and awaiting a response and at all times they had to be at least six feet apart from each other—no visitors, no mail in or out, no privacy, every movement monitored, controlled, every response signalled by procedure or order. At night they were issued only four sheets of toilet paper and ordered to sleep on their sides, facing the door and checked every 20 minutes.

The institution closed down on 30 June 1974, and in 2008 the Outback Theatre for Young People produced a play titled *Eyes to the Floor* by Alana Valentine based on the experience of the girls from Hay. Over the years there have been many reports into institutional care for children, some in fact date back to the 1800s when it was determined that institutional care was not the best outcome for children. One report in 1945 into a Sydney industrial school found many shortcomings which they said at the time could be matched at institutions throughout the Commonwealth, and yet we still continued to allow these facilities to operate.

A British report in 1956 called the Ross report strongly criticised Australia's children's institutions for their lack of trained staff, isolation from the community and the poor educational and employment opportunities provided, and yet we still allowed them to continue to provide care. In 1961 the Schwarten inquiry into the Queensland correctional centre for boys, Westbrook, drew attention to the many issues, including the poor standard of food, inadequate hygiene and excessive drill. The inquiry focused particularly on the institution's

punishment regime, noting that: the strap was used excessively and too often; punishment for disciplinary breaches was unduly harsh and excessive; and boys were physically assaulted by certain members of staff in a vicious and brutal way, a story echoed across Australian institutions. Yet we still allowed it to happen to these most vulnerable of humans—children.

I could continue on with the many other reports but I will focus on the one that I have had some involvement in and which I believe has been instrumental in the apology this week. That is the report entitled *Forgotten Australians* released in August 2004 by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee. At the time of the Senate inquiry into Australians who experienced institutional, out-of-home care as children I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs and so I met personally many of those people who made submissions to the report. I feel this week as I felt then the extraordinary feelings of their suffering and helplessness and have just some very, very small idea of how they must have felt on the day of the apology this week.

But it is no less heartbreaking five years later to think that we as a supposedly civilised country turned our backs on children in this way. It is unbelievable. While it does seem totally at odds with our culture and our beliefs, it still happened. The Senate committee was due to report in December 2003 actually, but due to the sheer volume of evidence that required processing and the complex issues that the inquiry unveiled the reporting date was extended to August 2004. The committee received 614 submissions from care leavers who had been in institutions or foster homes across all states in Australia from the 1920s to the 1990s.

The Senate committee said at the time that without doubt this inquiry has generated the largest volume of highly personal, emotive and significant evidence of any Senate inquiry. The committee members and the staff of the secretariat and the department were overwhelmed at the events described in the evidence. It was as unthinkable to them, and in fact to me, that human beings could treat one another, let alone such young and helpless people, in such a psychologically and physically abusive manner. The submissions that I read at the time were almost surreal in their intensity. I would like to quote from one care leaver whose submission was included in part in the introduction of the inquiry report:

In some ways I feel like wasted potential, I feel that because I was full of potential as a child and if I'd had a different childhood I could have done anything and been anyone I wanted but instead I was lumbered with a childhood where I had no rights and the government "carers" did whatever they felt like doing to me, so instead of being anything I wanted I've had to deal and cope with the horror of my childhood. This is something that I will keep doing for the rest of my life. I also ask, "what if what happened to me, happened to one of your children"? That's how you need to view me, as a child as valued as your own because I am someone's daughter, my parents just aren't here.

I believe that this quote eloquently and clearly outlines to us as a government that we must take some responsibility for this dark period in our history, and that this apology will go a long way towards us as a nation accepting what happened.

I still keep in contact with some of the care leavers, and it saddens me that many still do not believe that they have the right to live a better life—that they are not worthy of good things—and that they face great difficulties in improving their situation. Over the past few years I came to know Sherry, who lives in my electorate. She has been married a couple of times, she has children with whom she often had a difficult relationship and her youngest daughter is a talented musician. The first time Sherry told me her story, in her quiet, self-effacing way, it moved me immensely. She had been belted in her home by the heavy bunch of keys that the carers carried around on their belts, and she told me of girls being branded with hot irons. She told me of her escape from the institution and of her awful life on the streets. When your life begins with such hardship it is almost impossible to get it back on the rails, and Sherry's life has never been easy. But she has great spirit. She studied and she gained a certificate in aged care. She is a fabulous mother to her own daughter and she has reconnected with her own mother, difficult though that surely must have been.

I could recite many stories which are included in the submissions to the Senate inquiry, but I want to mention one particular person who deserves to be acknowledged. She has been acknowledged by many members of the parliament. My first contact with CLAN, or the Care Leavers Network, was through Leonie Sheedy. She was a care leaver herself but also a volunteer who had inadvertently started a helpline for other care leavers. She was passionate, loving and absolutely exhausted, because she had heard thousands of stories from care leavers and she just did not know how much longer she could continue to physically and emotionally help them. But still she went on. What was amazing to me was that she had very little assistance or financial support. She was obviously

trying hard to be all things to all people, and the emotional impact on her was immense. She had so few resources to help her with this huge task. For me to see her big smile during the apology on Monday was just fantastic.

The circumstances of these forgotten children are unique. Many do not know who their parents were, or even their correct name or date of birth. They have been subjected to abuse and ignorance, and they do not believe they deserve love or assistance, so they will always struggle with acceptance and trust. The apology and the many reports have gone some way to proving to care leavers that they are deserving of assistance, but we must work with them and their children and their partners to ensure that they get all of the help, love and support that they deserve. This week we have taken the first step of what will be a long journey, but the years ahead will be hard because, of course, this apology is no miracle cure. We must build more specific support systems for this group of people into the future, and I very much support the measures that the Prime Minister outlined as a good start.

I would like to provide a short but insightful quote from Solzhenitsyn, which came to him during his time in the Gulag:

It was only when I lay there on the rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart ... If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

When we look at those who stood by and saw the evil deeds committed in the name of churches, charities and state governments, it is too easy to say that these were evil deeds committed by evil people in another time. To think that would be wrong and would lull us into a false sense of security. The reality is that children are still victims, are still betrayed and still need all of us to exercise continual vigilance on their behalf. We cannot fix it for the forgotten Australians but we can pledge to do all we can to make sure that this shameful period of our history is not revisited for any child in anyone's care. On behalf of all the people of Farrer who I represent here in the federal parliament, may I offer my sincere and heartfelt apologies to the forgotten Australians for the wrongs done, the hurts inflicted and the childhoods lost.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

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Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (1.06 pm)—May I say how pleased I am to have this chance to add something to the fine speech which we have just heard from the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and to the very moving speeches that we heard earlier today in the Great Hall from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Let me begin by thanking all of those forgotten Australians who have graced us with their presence in this building today. There was obviously a lot of pain in the Great Hall earlier, but there was a fine spirit. Let me say to all those members of that generation that they have clearly suffered but they have not been defeated, as was obvious today. They are rightly proud today, as they should be, to take centre stage here in the national parliament and to, perhaps, bring out a rare touch of bipartisanship and even a little tenderness from our national leaders.

When all is said and done, it is the job of this parliament to help bring out the best in Australians, so this apology is important and necessary. It should bring healing to people who have suffered greatly, but it should also help this generation to avoid at least some of the mistakes of our forebears. We are apologising to those 500,000 Australians put into institutional care as children. Many were mistreated; some were sexually abused; almost all were denied the support, the companionship, the encouragement, the tenderness and the love which should be the birthright of every child.

Today we are not especially singling out the institutions and the individuals who directed these former centres of institutional care. Inevitably, some were worse than others; some were oppressive, even by the harsher standards of those days. The bad food, the harsh discipline, the floggings and the sexual predatoriness were not the whole story, but there was more than enough of that for this generation to feel rightly ashamed of what has happened. Perhaps as bad as anything were the lies that were deliberately told by officials to reinforce the sense that these children were utterly alone and had been abandoned.

In general, this generation is not morally superior to those who have gone before us. Still, there are some important lessons that we have assimilated: that the support we give to people is as important as the demands we make of them; that people's duties and obligations matter, but so also do their

needs, especially the need to feel loved, sustained and nurtured by a system of human relationships.

I would like to make a personal confession. In the aftermath of the announcement of this apology, I was taken to task for stressing the ideals of at least some of the institutions concerned, and the good intentions of at least some of the people who worked there. Some people were indeed helped, while many were damaged. For many individuals there were entries on both sides of the ledger. But as David Hill, a former Fairbridge boy as well as a former managing director of the ABC, was at pains to point out to me, there had been a fundamental failure of humanity, which compromised the entire system. I want to thank David Hill for bringing this to my attention, and also for his fine book, *The Forgotten Children*, which is a thoroughly researched, deeply humane, balanced and moving account of the experience of those children. As David Hill's mother remarked after visiting the Fairbridge school at Molong in New South Wales, 'it was like something out of *Oliver Twist*'.

Although many Fairbridge children have good memories as well as bad, and although most Fairbridge staff had strengths of character as well as flaws, there was no love. There was no love. As one of the children told David:

Fairbridge taught us to work hard from 6.00 am until after tea. You did not show any emotion and you never let anyone know you were upset about anything. I don't think anyone would have put an arm around a child there. I don't recall hearing anyone ever say to a child, "You did well."

David says:

The typical Fairbridge children had no-one. They arrived in Australia alone and later left to go out into the world, still completely on their own. They were likely to be poorly educated; socially and emotionally incomplete; lost, alienated and poor; and some went on to suffer mental illness, spend time in prison or even to commit suicide.

The children of Fairbridge are lucky to have found such a champion, and in telling their story, David Hill has helped to tell the story of all the forgotten children, of all the forgotten Australians to whom we apologise today.

There was this institutional coldness that affected all of them, but it was not just the emotional distance

characteristic of that period that some people endured. Alas, there was psychological cruelty, physical torment and, in some cases, terrible sexual abuse, including repeated rape. In some cases these horrors went on for years because people refused to believe that those in authority were capable of such evil. I am personally indebted to Shane Nicholls, who has made this something of a personal crusade, for alerting me to the depravity that characterised some institutions of that period. Even the different standards of care prevalent in those days were clearly breached in his and in many other cases. Wherever possible, the perpetrators of these crimes against children should be brought to justice, and I applaud those state governments that have launched royal commissions into these abuses and call on those states that have not yet done so to have royal commissions, which can demand documents, can cross examine witnesses and, where necessary, recommend charges. Where the standards of care have clearly been breached, restitution should be made by those institutions and their successors.

For all Australians who have been subjected to the austerities of institutional care, today should be a day of healing. But for those of us who are making this apology, I fear there are no grounds for self-congratulation, because there are as many children in care as ever. Today, thankfully, little of it is institutionalised care, but that does not mean that every child's needs are being fully met. We cannot be confident, for all our good intentions and for all our deeper understanding, that future generations, with their insights, will not be as critical of us as we now are of our forebears.

Today, though, should be an occasion to renew our commitment to all children in care. We can never do enough for them, but we should always be looking for ways to do more. Every day in this place all of us in our own way struggle with the largeness and the smallness of humanity, with our own flaws as well as the flaws of others. I think all MPs have been both humbled and uplifted by the proceedings so far. Our forebears let down those forgotten Australians and today we are indebted to them for the lessons that they have taught us. I should say, in closing, how pleased I am that the next speaker for the coalition will be a member of the forgotten generation: Steve Irons, the member for Swan, who is testimony that it is possible to draw strength even from great adversity.