

CHAPTER 8

SERVICES REQUIRED BY FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS

There is too much discussion about what happened in the past and not enough focus on what needs to happen now...help is needed in the present.¹

8.1 This chapter deals with term of reference (c) (iii) that raises the issue of the effectiveness of measures by Australian governments and the receiving agencies to provide counselling or any other services that are designed to reduce or limit trauma caused by the removal of child migrants from their country of birth.

8.2 In addition to access to records and travel, which are discussed in the previous chapters, a number of other services required by former child migrants were discussed with the Committee. They were counselling, accommodation and aged care, social security entitlements and remedial education.

Counselling

Need for counselling

8.3 The need for counselling for former child migrants was discussed extensively during the inquiry. In particular specialist counselling was required to deal with the trauma of past experiences, to deal with the acute difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships, and social difficulties as part of the process of information disclosure when personal records are released, and pre and post family reunion.

8.4 For many former child migrants, living with both the displacement caused by child migration and the traumas of institutional life have resulted in long-term problems. As noted previously, these problems have included family breakdowns, clinical depression, post traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism. Broken Rites pointed to the long-term needs: they ‘have had psychiatric problems and substance abuse problems all of their lives, and their low income status has meant that for periods of 10 to 20 years they have never been able to get treatment. They have just accepted that that was what life was like...Understand that most of this has only broken in the last 10 years and so they have only had access to these things for, say, a decade.’²

8.5 The Catholic Church’s Joint Liaison Group on Child Migration (Joint Liaison Group) stressed that ‘counselling and more intense forms of therapy are often needed to assist former child migrants to address the various personal ramifications of their

1 Submission No.45, Additional Information, 4.5.01, p.2 (C-BERS).

2 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.259 (Broken Rites).

earlier life, including institutional care, child migration and the transition from an institution to society'.³

8.6 Former child migrants provided the Committee with harrowing accounts of their distress including flashbacks of their time in institutional care. They talked of the difficulties they have with their families and every day life.

I have suffered from depression all my life and it's also a legacy from my childhood. My own children had to live with my rage and anger at times, I love them so dearly but when you have a black hole inside of you with so much pain in it, no one else is able to totally reach you or understand, how could they, that black hole is still with me today.⁴

I have never had a successful personal relationship, nor have I been able to give and receive love or show compassion to other people.⁵

I have talked about fear, but many of us, and me in particular, continue to suffer the horrors of memory. That is, seeing young boys—my mates—being flogged, punched and abused in manners that decent human beings would find offensive even to read about.⁶

I have been working on this document since 18 September and have had nightmares every night, waking bathed in sweat and feeling nauseous. I have put my wife as well as myself through hell to make this submission and hope something positive comes out of it.⁷

Even when I had to come before this committee to give evidence, every now and again they chase me around the bedroom in my dreams. I get belted all the time and I wake up and I think, 'Oh my god, I'm still here.' So when I get under pressure it comes back to me quite a bit.⁸

8.7 Evidence was also received about the process of the release of personal information. Agencies indicated that the records contained comments which would not be used today, and which could be 'either paltry; surprising; written in offensive language; and in other ways impact negatively on the recipient'.⁹ Counselling at this time was seen as necessary to help in coming to terms with this information. The importance of this process was recognised by most agencies, which either provide counselling through their own staff or seek help from suitably qualified professionals. Barnardos stated that when a file is provided, counselling is undertaken by Barnardos

3 Submission No.54, p.11 (JLG).

4 Submission No.71, p.2.

5 Submission No.66, p.2.

6 Submission No.123, p.3.

7 Submission No.87, p.15.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 15.2.01, p.57.

9 Submission No.45, p.2 (C-BERS). See also Submission No.54, p.11 (JLG).

as the file is read or Barnardos arranges for a reputable person in the local area to deliver the file and to provide counselling.¹⁰ The Fairbridge Foundation, Fairbridge London and NCH indicated that they directed recipients of information to counselling services.

8.8 However, the Child Migrants Trust (the Trust) stated that some agencies still take little account of the potentially damaging impact of providing information without counselling facilities. The Trust described how one former child migrant discovered that she had been adopted before migration to Australia. No counselling was provided and the former child migrant was devastated by the disclosure.¹¹

8.9 The discovery of information about identity can also have traumatic effects upon the child migrant's family. This can be particularly so for mothers who believed that their child had been adopted into a good family and was living in Britain and for siblings who are told late in life that they have full or half brothers or sisters living on the other side of the world.

The affect on my mother when she learned of my fate was devastating. She was overcome by guilt and self-blame.¹²

The Child Migrants Trust supported my mother with regular visits while she gradually came to terms with the pain and guilt of knowing that her son was never adopted and did not grow up in a loving family.¹³

8.10 The process of reunion with families is an integral part of the 'healing process' for former child migrants. However, reunions are highly emotional and traumatic times for both the reunion family and the child migrant. The Trust noted that 'separation from family and feelings of rejection and abandonment are strong and powerful. These feelings can hardly be separated from the family reunion experience'.¹⁴

8.11 The Trust went on to state, 'it is not desirable for families who have been separated for more than forty years to be reunited without the option of support from skilled professionals experienced in this delicate and specialised field of work'.¹⁵ The need for counselling to ensure a positive outcome for all parties was also supported by the Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF):

In our experience, an important element in the process is that of locating parents, usually the mother, seeking a reunion, which usually entails travel

10 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.470 (Barnardos).

11 Submission No.132, p.35 (CMT).

12 Submission No.97, p.4.

13 Submission No.110, p.1.

14 Submission No.132, p.18 (CMT).

15 Submission No.132, p.30 (CMT).

to the United Kingdom or to Malta, and, importantly, providing pre- and post- reunion counselling. Our experience suggests that in the absence of such counselling—and in particular in the absence of assent on the part of the parents to the reunion—the outcomes can leave former child migrants even more scarred than before the attempted reunion.¹⁶

8.12 The Foundation also stated that counselling pre-and post-reunion was of such significance that it should be a condition of any person being funded for reunion purposes. It was noted that ‘parents also had rights and they needed counselling in the sense to be able to come to a position of accepting that they were going to meet’.¹⁷

8.13 One child migrant told the Committee, ‘I was counselled before I went on the trip in 1997. It did help, but when I came back, that is when I fell to pieces—after the trip and when I met family I did not know I had. That is when I needed counselling but I had nowhere to go’.¹⁸ Another child migrant acknowledged the assistance provided by the Trust in post reunion counselling:

Mrs Humphreys has continued counsel in the post-reunion phase of this very exciting time of my life in which there has been emotional turbulence: elation at finding family; grieving at the loss of family life; anger at the scheme that separated me; the beginning of acceptance of what has been.¹⁹

8.14 The Christian Brothers’ Ex-Residents & Students Services (C-BERS) strongly supported the importance of post-reunion counselling and stated that it had found that the period of euphoria following a successful first meeting with family could quickly give way to depression over the small prospect of future visits and meetings. As a result, post-reunion counselling was a major feature of C-BERS Services.²⁰ Barnardos also indicated that there was an unmet need for counselling and indicated that it was looking at providing a more in-depth counselling service for former child migrants.²¹

8.15 C-BERS noted that the need for counselling had not diminished over time. The ‘treatment’ can be long-term and involve a ‘family counselling model’ as the effects tend to impact on the person’s subsequent family unit. One former child migrant stated that he had been receiving counselling for six years and ‘I can see no light at the end of the tunnel...It could be that this deep anger and the nightmares and the utter frustration of not being able to be in control might well stay with me for the rest of my life’.²²

16 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.105 (ACMF).

17 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, pp.109, 114 (ACMF).

18 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.83.

19 Submission No.86, Additional Information.

20 Submission No.45, Attachment, p.1 (C-BERS).

21 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.470 (Barnardos).

22 Submission No.44, Additional Information, 17.2.01, p.4 (CMFS).

8.16 C-BERS also noted that, given the Canadian experience, the children of former child migrants ‘commonly seek connection with the family of origin of their fathers and also often present with second generation problems which have as their source, the traumatic experiences endured by their parent’.²³

Specialised counselling services

8.17 Many former child migrants argued that specialist services were required. One explained:

Some people say it is worth it if you can get it. I have taken up being counselled by C-BERS. I have been counselled about once a month, on average, for nearly six years. My question is: where are the experts in this counselling? When does it stop? I go there and it is gut-wrenching to tell your story, you have a hell of a hangover from it, and I feel that you need real experts to do this counselling for child migrants. I think myself you have to go through it, you have to be a child migrant to understand what we went through. It is just hopeless.²⁴

8.18 The South Australian Department of Human Services stated that the lack of specialist counselling services exacerbated the problems faced by child migrants, ‘further adding to their despair and sense of powerlessness’.²⁵ Child migrants complained that when they went to general counselling services they were required to retell their stories and provide historical information. As a result:

some of the people described going to counsellors who, having heard the story for the first time, were very shocked and personally moved, and the person going to receive the counselling felt that they did not have the opportunity to receive proper counselling because the counsellor himself or herself was dealing with his or her reaction to the story.²⁶

8.19 The South Australian Department also acknowledged that individuals have diverse needs. The numbers of former child migrants in South Australia are only small, and having a generic service which was expected to meet the needs of all of them was not as important for the Department as ensuring that each individual referral was made to a service best able to meet individual needs. The Department concluded that ‘rather than some specific service for child migrants, it is important that there be a small range of people who have a good, solid knowledge of the history and the context and that every single referral that we make is made on an individual and personal basis, according to the needs of the person’.²⁷

23 Submission No.45, Attachment, p.2 (C-BERS).

24 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.83.

25 Submission No.127, p.2 (SA Department of Human Services).

26 *Committee Hansard*, 16.3.01, p.295 (SA Department of Human Services).

27 *Committee Hansard*, 16.3.01, p.295 (SA Department of Human Services).

8.20 The JLG likewise commented that generic counselling services were not as effective as access to counsellors with some specialist knowledge and experience. The JLG noted that the take up rate of generic counselling offered by the Western Australian Department for Family and Children's Services was poor and that:

Former child migrants emphasise that the only people who can really understand what they have gone through are other migrants. For this reason, it often takes time for a counsellor to build rapport and to establish credibility with a former child migrant client. An understanding of the particular issues that arises from the child migration experience is important.²⁸

8.21 The International Association of Former Child Migrants and Their Families (the International Association) also indicated that counselling had to be done by a service experienced in dealing with former child migrants: 'preparing to meet your family after 50 years should not be done by letter or by sending reports to a State Government social worker who knows nothing about us or our families'.²⁹

8.22 Barnardos and C-BERS highlighted the problem of providing services to former child migrants in regional areas. C-BERS indicated that about a third of its clients live in regional areas or other States and that there was limited choice for people wishing to access specialised counselling services such as those it provides. In order to provide services to its clients, C-BERS offers telephone counselling and conducts a number of counselling sessions across Australia. It also contracts private providers if required and liaises with organisations such as Centacare.³⁰

8.23 Former child migrants emphasised to the Committee the importance of an independent counselling service and especially a service that they could trust.³¹ Some former child migrants are unwilling or strongly resist the opportunity to take up the offer of help from certain services as there was either a perception that they were not independent of the receiving agencies or that there was such a strong resentment at their treatment while in institutional care, they could not bear to be in contact again. One former child migrant stated 'I would never go back to the church for help, because that would be psychologically like going back to get another serve'.³²

8.24 Other witnesses indicated that there was a need for choice of services. Some former child migrants have sought assistance from receiving agencies and felt comfortable doing so.³³

28 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.484 (JLG).

29 Submission No.129, p.34 (IAFCM&F).

30 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.148; Submission No.45, p.2 (C-BERS).

31 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.71 (CMFS); *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.556 (IAFCM&F).

32 Submission (Confidential).

33 Submission No.54, p.12 (JLG).

8.25 The Joint Liaison Group responded to the issue of the need for independent counselling services:

It must be recognised that this view of what constitutes ‘independent advice and counselling services’ creates a dilemma for those organisations that originally were receiving agencies for child migrants in Australia. On the one hand, if advice and counselling services are made available by Church organisations, they can be condemned as not ‘independent’. If such services are not provided, then the same organisations may be condemned for being indifferent to the needs of the former child migrants!

Past experience indicates it is quite possible to offer highly professional services funded by the religious orders and other organisations involved in child migration, particularly counselling, yet which remain functionally independent and maintain a high degree of professional integrity and service delivery.³⁴

8.26 One former child migrant commented in relation to C-BERS:

I found the service all right, but it took me a while to get to trust. I am dealing with an organisation that I had to know was impartial. I could never directly get involved with the Christian Brothers. In talking to some of the counsellors I am convinced that they are impartial. I have found the service reasonable but nowhere near as good for family searches as the Child Migrants Trust.³⁵

8.27 The Child Migrant Friendship Society (CMFS) put the view that the Commonwealth should ensure the availability of counselling services but it believed that the receiving agencies should share the responsibility with government for the funding of such services.³⁶ The International Association went further and stated that while governments and the church and charitable organisations should be responsible for funding the services, it did not want the agencies to provide the services, ‘as this would give them another opportunity to continue their control’.³⁷

8.28 C-BERS also pointed to the need for further funding and stated that ‘we see the child migration as an area that is inherently and constitutionally part of the Australian Government ambit and would like to see funding made available at that level’.³⁸

34 Submission No.54, p.12 (JLG).

35 *Committee Hansard*, 15.2.01, p.40.

36 Submission No.44, p.6 (CMFS).

37 Submission No.129, Additional Information, 23.4.01, p.3 (IAFCM&F).

38 Submission No.45, p.2 (C-BERS).

Counselling services provided to former child migrants

8.29 Counselling services are currently provided to former child migrants from a number of sources both non-government and government.

8.30 The Child Migrants Trust provides specialised counselling services in Perth and Melbourne. Instead of offices, the Trust has leased houses in order to provide a more conducive atmosphere for its work. For those living in other areas, the Trust may be contacted by telephone. For more intense counselling the child migrant is required to travel to either Perth or Melbourne, although the Trust also provides ad hoc counselling by having a staff member visit other locations. In response to the needs of South Australian former child migrants for the Trust's specialist services, the South Australian Government has announced that funding will be provided for a Trust counsellor to visit South Australia three or four times a year.

8.31 C-BERS advised that at June 2000 it had 393 clients on its books, of which 114 were 'active' with 25 per cent of active clients being 're-presenters', that is, clients who came back after an interval. During the March-June quarter 2000, C-BERS staff conducted 81 interviews for counselling for reunion travel, had 96 general counselling contacts and conducted 129 telephone counselling sessions. C-BERS described this as their normal workload.³⁹

8.32 In addition to providing counselling services to ex-residents of Christian Brothers' institutions, C-BERS is now providing services to female former child migrants who were in institutions run by the Sisters of Mercy.⁴⁰

8.33 The JLG indicated that about \$1 million has been spent by Catholic religious orders on counselling and related services. Such services are offered through functionally independent agencies (e.g. C-BERS), occasionally through the Church's Centacare network or via a referral to another counsellor acceptable to the former child migrant.⁴¹ In the UK, the Catholic Child Welfare Council also provides support and counselling services such as preparing and counselling family members in the UK before a family reunion.⁴²

8.34 Barnardos, through its After Care program, provides counselling and guidance services. Support for family reunion is provided through Barnardos UK. The Fairbridge Foundation does not employ counsellors but has a policy of providing counselling if an Old Fairbridgian requires it or before releasing files if the material to be released is distressing.⁴³ Fairbridge London does not have counsellors but uses a

39 Submission No.45, p.2 (C-BERS).

40 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.73 (CMFS).

41 Submission No.54, p.13 (JLG).

42 Submission No.51, p.4 (CCWC).

43 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.446 (Fairbridge Foundation).

qualified organisation such as the Child Migrant Trust.⁴⁴ Similarly, NCH stated that when a former child migrant sought information from records, they were asked to make contact with a social work or counselling agency local to them, so that the information could be conveyed through a suitably qualified person. In the UK, counselling is provided by the NCH's Child Migrants Adviser.⁴⁵

8.35 The British Government's Child Migrant Support Fund also provides for up to three hours counselling per eligible client in addition to the travel and the subsistence allowance.⁴⁶

8.36 Counselling services are also provided by State Governments. In Queensland, the Aftercare Resource Centre provides counselling and support to former residents of homes. It will fund counselling services for those former residents who live in rural areas and former Queensland residents living in other States. The Centre also offers general support to enable former residents to identify what their needs are so that they can be referred to the most appropriate service.⁴⁷

8.37 In Western Australia, counselling is offered through the Department for Family and Children's Services, but as has been noted, the take up has been small.

8.38 On 20 December 2000, the New South Wales Government approved funding of \$60,000 for one year to provide counselling and family-tracing services to former child migrants. These services will be provided through International Social Service (ISS).

8.39 The Victorian Department of Human Services, through its Adoption Information Services Branch, provides support to all Victorian former child migrants including short term counselling on grief and separation issues, assistance in understanding the information in retrieved historical records, and pre and post reunion counselling.

8.40 In South Australia, counselling is provided through the Department of Human Services although, as already noted, funding is now being provided to the Child Migrant Trust to visit South Australia for specialist counselling.

8.41 The Commonwealth funds specific counselling services through the Child Migrants Trust. In evidence, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) referred to the casework undertaken by the Trust:

The current grant continues to fund some casework, while at the same time encouraging the Trust to develop strategies to improve former child migrants' access to mainstream services as well as to improve the capacity

44 Submission No.43, p.4 (Fairbridge Foundation).

45 Submission No.98, p.3 (NCH).

46 Submission No.48, p.3 (ISS).

47 *Committee Hansard*, 21.3.01, p.418 (Qld Department of Families).

of mainstream service providers to respond appropriately to the needs of former child migrants. If the Trust is successful in such a program, more former child migrants will be assisted throughout Australia because mainstream services will be better equipped to assist them.

8.42 This approach of improving the responsiveness of mainstream service providers, is similar to that adopted with other organisations receiving CSSS grants. The objective is to focus limited resources on working with mainstream service providers to help them respond more effectively to needs of diverse clientele.⁴⁸

Conclusion

8.43 The Committee received evidence of the life-long impact on former child migrants that has arisen from their migration experiences: they felt rejection, abandonment, despair and loneliness. Many had been placed in homes where, at best, there was little attention to their emotional needs, and at worst, there were deeds of emotional cruelty, physical and sexual abuse and criminal assault. As a result some have suffered profound psychological, physical and social problems.

8.44 Many former child migrants have accessed information about their histories and families. This information may contain new and, at times, distressing details. Former child migrants have eagerly sought family reunions. However, such events impose significant emotional challenges not only for the former child migrant but also for the family being visited.

8.45 The Committee considers that there is a significant need for on-going counselling services to former child migrants. Of primary importance is the need for appropriate services. The traumas suffered are often complex, long-term and do not relate to just one event. As a consequence, in many cases services need to be delivered by specialist providers with an in-depth knowledge of child migrant issues. The Committee also notes that groups such as the Child Migrants Trust and C-BERS have built up extensive knowledge and expertise of issues facing former child migrants and the connections and backgrounds of the institutions they attended. This should not be lost.

8.46 The Committee strongly believes that there needs to be choice of specialist services provided for former child migrants and family members and descendants detrimentally affected. Evidence was received that some former child migrants would never seek help from a service in any way connected with the agency responsible for their traumas, while others indicated that they were quite content to do so and were satisfied with the support provided. The most important point is that former child migrants need to know that specialised counselling is available, and from where and by whom.

48 Submission No.42, Additional Information, 9.4.01, p.1 (DIMA).

8.47 The Committee, while acknowledging that the number of former child migrants in some States is small and that all former child migrants do not live in metropolitan areas, supports the provision of specialist counselling services. The effective provision of appropriate services to these former child migrants may be difficult and expensive, but they are necessary. The Committee's recommendation concerning funding for the Child Migrants Trust is in chapter 5.

Recommendation 23: That, to ensure that choice in counselling services remains available to former child migrants, the Commonwealth Government urge agencies and other State Welfare Departments providing counselling services to maintain those services and expand them where necessary.

Accommodation and aged care – now and in the future

8.48 The issue of suitable accommodation and aged care services for former child migrants was also raised with the Committee.⁴⁹ Some submissions indicated that a major problem faced by many former child migrants was that their poor literacy skills had restricted their access to anything other than low paid employment. This factor in turn has contributed to their poor housing status—with some homeless or highly marginalised and others in either high cost private rental accommodation or in the public housing sector.⁵⁰

8.49 Broken Rites stated that, for some former child migrants who are now in their 50s and 60s, housing is going to emerge as a 'major issue'. This is particularly the case for some who, often as a result of trauma preventing relationship development, have either never married or who have been living alone for a considerable time – as health problems begin to emerge these individuals often drop out of their usual social networks and some increasingly rely on rooming house-type accommodation.⁵¹

Accommodation needs

8.50 There is little data on the accommodation needs of former child migrants. One study that has examined this issue was an accommodation needs survey of former residents of Christian Brothers' institutions in Western Australia commissioned by the Christian Brothers in 1998. While the survey referred to former residents who were not exclusively child migrants, the majority of the men whose needs were being considered were former child migrants.⁵²

49 Submission No.44, p.9 (CMFS); Submission No.57, p.12 (Broken Rites).

50 Submission No.57, p.12 (Broken Rites); Submission No.44, Additional Information, 26.2.01, p.2 (CMFS); Submission No.44, Additional Information, 17.2.01, p.6 (CMFS).

51 Submission No.57, Additional Information, 15.5.01, p.6 (Broken Rites). See also *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, pp.254-55 (Broken Rites).

52 Clare, B, *Needs Survey – Accommodation Needs of Former Residents of Christian Brothers' Institutions in Western Australia*, May 1998; *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.485 (JLG).

8.51 The study found that the provision of housing was not perceived to be a major problem for a large majority of ex-residents who are coping well or well enough in the community, currently employed and are able to access mainstream services available to the community generally.

8.52 The group identified as most at risk was those former residents now in their 50s and early 60s who have lived transient lifestyles, experienced long-term relationship difficulties and who have significant health problems, often related to chronic alcohol abuse. This group was characterised as highly marginalised and prematurely aged. It was not estimated to be large in number – probably no more than 20 in the Perth area, although the figure is likely to be an underestimate because of the transience and ‘invisibility’ of this group.⁵³ These men now live in private boarding and lodging houses in the inner city of Perth, or in accommodation provided through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) or Homeswest.⁵⁴

8.53 The study found that the needs of this highly marginalised group of former ex-residents ‘will continue to grow as they age’ and they will have less and less capacity to care for themselves into old age. The demand for services is therefore likely to increase for the next five-to-ten years.

8.54 The study remarked that the absence of a caring network is of particular significance to this group. The study also noted that the Maltese migrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s appear to have greater access to such a network because of the reunification of many boys with their families. As a result ‘it is less likely’ that this group will require services specifically designed for this particular group of men.⁵⁵

8.55 The study noted that at present there is an ‘adequate provision’ of accommodation services for marginalised, prematurely aged men in Western Australia. Both short and long-term options are available, with SAAP agencies able to provide crisis and interim accommodation and both private and public sector services able to meet the needs of this population group. However, the report noted that there is growing concern about the continued supply of this type of accommodation due to government funding priorities which have reduced the amount of funding available to non-government agencies working in the area.⁵⁶

8.56 The report stated that this marginalised group of men is generally below the target age group for hostel and nursing home care and are also unlikely to find ‘retirement village’ style care acceptable. Many are fearful of ‘institutional’ care of any sort because of their previous experiences, and professionals in the area argue for the development of small-scale units providing care for groups of four-to-six men with

53 Needs Survey, pp.12-14,17.

54 SAAP is a joint Commonwealth-State program that provides recurrent funding to over 1200 agencies that provide services and assistance to people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

55 Needs Survey, p.18.

56 Needs Survey, pp.18-19.

arrangements for similar small-scale hospice care when home care is no longer a viable option.⁵⁷

8.57 There are a range of schemes in Western Australia which make such arrangements feasible, for example, special housing programs available through Homeswest. However, the study noted that the lack of funds for staff, particularly outreach workers, pose significant difficulties in either accessing potential clients or servicing these semi-independent living options. The Child Migrant Friendship Society (CMFS) also noted that Homeswest was approached to supply a house so that former child migrants who were ‘in the gutter’ were assisted to ‘get on their feet’, but that this request was rejected because they did not meet the eligibility criteria.⁵⁸ Broken Rites argued that child migrants now in their 50s and 60s should have access to hostel-type accommodation and at an appropriate time be able to move to a ‘situation of greater and then full care’.⁵⁹

8.58 In relation to the situation of former child migrants already in public housing, Broken Rites raised the issue of the provision of their future housing needs through the structuring of compensation payments. They argued that it is important that where a person pursues a claim for financial compensation against an organisation, that the compensation should be constructed in such a way that a proportion of it can be used to assist the person to purchase their property. Broken Rites added that:

The cases that we have pursued... are where so many former child migrants we find have been living in publicly provided housing, but they do have an option to purchase the property. In this era of state governments getting out of building and constructing housing estates and putting in public tenants, they offer existing tenants the option to purchase the property. We believe that is the way to go.⁶⁰

8.59 Broken Rites also argued that where individuals have sought compensation payments, their housing needs have seldom been recognised by the charity or religious organisation in question. The sums of money paid to claimants ‘has rarely been sufficient to meet this need for housing’.⁶¹

Conclusion

8.60 The Committee believes that both the short-and long-term accommodation needs of former child migrants should be addressed. While there is little information on the overall housing situation and accommodation needs of this group, the limited evidence available to the Committee indicates a possible need for boarding house and

57 Needs Survey, p.19.

58 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, pp.76-77 (CMFS).

59 Submission No.57, Additional Information, 15.5.01, p.6 (Broken Rites).

60 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.257 (Broken Rites).

61 Submission No.57, p.12 (Broken Rites).

supported accommodation options for many of the more socially and economically marginalised former child migrants especially those now aged in their fifties and early sixties.

Recommendation 24: That the Commonwealth and State Governments in providing funding for boarding house and supported accommodation programs recognise the housing needs and requirements of former child migrants.

Future aged care needs

8.61 Evidence to the Committee emphasised that it was important to recognise the needs of former child migrants in the area of aged care, especially as they represent an ageing group. For example, the average age of former child migrants sent to Catholic institutions is now 60 years.⁶²

8.62 The Child Migrant Friendship Society (CMFS) stated that:

Aged Care is a priority for many. The question is “who is going to care for us?”. They wish nothing more than anyone else...Many have no home to sell, are alone and unable to care for themselves prior to the need for “high care”.⁶³

8.63 Submissions pointed to the need to have access to hostels and nursing homes, including priority access to these facilities.⁶⁴ The CMFS stated that:

It is possibly a matter of priority...because they are a former child migrant when the need arises for aged care...perhaps they [should] be a priority in whatever is available with regard to state government facilities. I do not believe that they are asking for added funding...but perhaps a priority entry.⁶⁵

8.64 Access to residential aged care facilities is based on an assessment of a person’s care needs by Aged Care Assessment Teams and payment of fees takes into account a person’s financial position. While all residents in these facilities have to contribute towards the costs of their care, how much they pay depends on their means. ‘Concessional residents’ are those residents with limited financial means and as such pay a ‘concessional’ level of fees. For example, full pensioners pay 85 per cent of their pension to the care facility to help cover the cost of their daily care needs and do not have to pay an accommodation payment if their assets are below a certain level. The Commonwealth pays an additional subsidy for concessional residents, and providers are required to set aside a certain number of places for them.⁶⁶ Many former

62 Submission No. 51, Attachment 1, p.4 (CCWC).

63 Submission No.44, Additional Information, 26.2.01, p.2 (CMFS).

64 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, pp.77,85 (CMFS); *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.257 (Broken Rites).

65 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.77 (CMFS).

66 Information provided by the Parliamentary Library.

child migrants with low incomes would probably qualify as concessional residents thus it would be difficult to give ‘priority’ access to this group in particular, over and above other groups who may also be socially and economically disadvantaged.

8.65 Evidence to the inquiry indicated that there needs to be a careful assessment of the type of residential aged care facility provided as many former child migrants are suspicious of ‘institutional-type’ facilities. One submission noted that ‘the thought of being in a hostel with very little of their pension left is horrifying. Independence and empowerment are taken from them once again’.⁶⁷ Barnardos also emphasised that it was important to consult with former child migrants on the most suitable form of aged care facility. The organisation noted that it was imperative to determine what particular system would enable former child migrants to have a comfortable retirement.⁶⁸

8.66 One suggestion put to the Committee to assist with the retirement needs of former child migrants was the construction of retirement villages.⁶⁹ Dr Coldrey and Mr Gill both suggested that a retirement village could be constructed in Western Australia funded by governments and agencies with its management charter arranged to favour priority residence by former child migrants.⁷⁰ Dr Coldrey added:

At the time I first made the suggestion or at least discussed it with a number of people...the Christian Brothers owned a very considerable amount of land between Aquinas College and the old Clontarf Orphanage. The idea was that a section of that land...could have been set aside for that. The idea was that the retirement village have in it a social centre, research centre and non-denominational chapel.⁷¹

8.67 The Christian Brothers advised the Committee that the idea of a retirement village is not under active consideration by the Order. The Christian Brothers noted a number of concerns with the option – ‘would all former child migrants want to live in such a setting with exclusively other former child migrants? Would this be a healthy and constructive way to go?’.⁷²

8.68 C-BERS also argued that ‘our inclination at the present time – and it is what we have said to the [Christian Brothers] province – is, rather than establishing obviously a little enclave of older former child migrants, that if they were going to do

67 Submission No.44, Additional Information, 26.2.01, p.2 (CMFS).

68 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.472 (Barnardos).

69 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.257 (Broken Rites).

70 Submission No.15, p.4 (Dr Coldrey); *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.222 (Dr Coldrey); *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.512 (Mr Gill).

71 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.222 (Dr Coldrey).

72 Letter from the Christian Brothers to the Committee, dated 8.5.01.

anything it would be to fund some sort of community housing cooperative in conjunction with one of the providing agencies in Western Australia'.⁷³

8.69 The Christian Brothers argued that there were various resources in the general community relevant to the accommodation needs of older persons with limited economic means. The Brothers argued that a more realistic way to proceed would be for C-BERS to adopt the role of a referral and information agency that would assist men with needs in this area to access accommodation resources in the wider community. To this end C-BERS has undertaken to formulate a proposal along these lines with regard to accommodation needs.⁷⁴

Conclusion

8.70 The Committee considers that given the increasing age of former child migrants and, in many cases, their disadvantaged socio-economic situation there needs to be an assessment undertaken of the future needs of this group in relation to aged care services. The Committee further believes that any assessment should take into account any special requirements of former child migrants including possible alternatives to traditional residential care arrangements.

Recommendation 25: That the Department of Health and Aged Care commission a study into the aged care needs of former child migrants; and that Commonwealth funding be directed into areas of need identified in that study.

Social security entitlements

8.71 During the inquiry, a number of issues were raised in relation to the social security entitlements of former child migrants, especially in regard to those who have returned or wish to return to the United Kingdom.

8.72 The International Association argued that the Australian Government's decision not to pay pensions after February 2001 to former child migrants now permanently living in the UK to be with their families should be reviewed. The Association argued that this measure is 'grossly unfair' given that these people have spent their entire working lives paying taxes in Australia.⁷⁵ One submission also noted that 'if I leave Australia before I am of pension age I will lose my rights to an age pension even though I have worked and lived here for 50 years...I feel the Government should establish a concession for Former Child Migrants to be able to claim an age pension from England if they wish to permanently return home'.⁷⁶ Another submission argued that the Australian and United Kingdom Governments

73 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.143 (C-BERS).

74 Letter from the Christian Brothers to the Committee, dated 8.5.01.

75 Submission No.129, p.41(IAFCM&F). See also Submission No.40, pp.2-3; Submission No.74, p.1.

76 Submission No.74, p.1.

should work together to ensure that former child migrants are not penalised in relation to their pension entitlements if they decide to return to the UK.⁷⁷

8.73 The Committee notes that the arguments stated above are based on a misunderstanding concerning the nature of the former Social Security Agreement with the United Kingdom and the specific features underlying the Australian social security system, where pension eligibility is based on certain residency requirements.

8.74 All payments made under the former Agreement, either in Australia or in the United Kingdom, will not be affected by the termination of the Agreement as transitional provisions in the Agreement protect the rights of current pensioners. Australian pensioners in receipt of indefinitely portable pensions, such as the age pension and disability support pension, who migrate to the United Kingdom; and Australian pensioners who are there temporarily will continue to receive indexed pensions under Australian social security law.⁷⁸ The Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) also noted that permanent residents of the United Kingdom, including new migrants, are also able to apply for means-tested income support payments under UK domestic legislation for those in financial hardship. In the United Kingdom, these payments are, unlike the national insurance system, non-contributory, but require a person to meet a residency test.⁷⁹

8.75 The Agreement with the United Kingdom provided that the country where a person *permanently resides* takes responsibility for providing social security payments for that person. The Agreement with the United Kingdom therefore did not include provisions for former Australians residing in the United Kingdom to claim Australian benefits. The Department noted that permanent residents of the United Kingdom are not able to claim new Australian pensions, regardless of whether they had previously lived in Australia or not. The Department added that:

The Australian social security system is based on residence and only allows the grant of pensions to people who reside in Australia or in countries with which Australia has a social security agreement that allows for this. The Agreement with the UK was a “host country” agreement and did not allow for the grant of Australian pensions to people residing permanently there. This has not changed with the termination of the Agreement.⁸⁰

8.76 The Agreement with the United Kingdom was terminated because the UK Government refused to index its pensions paid in Australia. The Department stated that the United Kingdom Government consistently declined to include such a clause in its Agreement with Australia and its pensions paid into Australia were therefore ‘frozen’. This meant that UK pensioners in Australia increasingly relied on Australian

77 Submission No.126, p.5.

78 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, dated 21.5.01, p.2.

79 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, p.2.

80 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, p.2.

income support to ‘top-up’ their pensions at a cost to Australia of approximately \$100 million per year.⁸¹ The Australian Government was effectively subsidising the UK national insurance system as a result of the action of the United Kingdom Government. This was the reason why the Australian Government terminated the Agreement with the United Kingdom. The Department stated that ‘the Australian Government has signalled its preparedness to enter into a new agreement, provided this issue is addressed’⁸².

8.77 Termination of the Agreement will affect a certain number of former Australian residents living in the United Kingdom. It will affect former Australian residents who have never made any contribution to the UK national insurance system, by preventing them from using periods of Australian residence deemed under the Agreement to be contributions that allow access to the non-means tested contributory retirement pension.

8.78 It will also affect Australian residents who have contributed at least the minimum amount of contributions to gain access to a partial UK national insurance system pension. This usually involves contributing for 11 years. It will do this by preventing them from using periods of Australian residence to increase their contributory history and hence qualify for an enhanced or full retirement pension.⁸³

8.79 In relation to Australian residents migrating to the United Kingdom, the Department stated the UK Government has announced that it will protect the pension rights of people who have periods of Australian residence before 6 April 2001. The UK Government will ‘top-up’ the pensions of people with periods of residence in Australia before 6 April 2001 with an extra statutory payment if they would have received less than the full rate of basic pension.⁸⁴

Temporary absences

8.80 The issue of the payment of pensions and allowances during temporary absences overseas was also raised with the Committee. The International Association argued that social security arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that former child migrants currently receiving benefits are ‘not penalised for travelling to be reunited with their family overseas, as if they are going on a holiday...Rents still have to be paid and bills do not stop when we finally manage to return...to meet our families after a lifetime apart’.⁸⁵

81 Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, *Termination of the Social Security Agreement with the United Kingdom*, Report No 27, December 1999, p.8.

82 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, p.2.

83 Treaties report, p.11.

84 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, p.2.

85 Submission No.129, p.41(IAFCM&F). See also Submission No.132, p.4 (CMT).

8.81 FaCS responded to these concerns advising that all payments are portable for up to 26 weeks temporary overseas absence. Age pension and disability support pension (for people who are severely disabled) are payable indefinitely overseas. Disability support pension for those who are not severely disabled is portable overseas for up to 26 weeks. Wife pension is payable overseas for up to 26 weeks and indefinitely in the case of ‘entitled persons’.⁸⁶

8.82 The Department also noted that from September 2000, for the first time, ancillary benefits such as rent assistance and pharmaceutical allowance ‘are now portable for temporary absences of up to 26 weeks, assisting people who travel with ongoing costs in Australia’.⁸⁷

Other issues

8.83 Some submissions raised issues relating to enhanced pension entitlements and associated benefits. The CMFS argued that the United Kingdom Government should provide all former child migrants from Britain with a non-means tested pension in addition to any Australian pension currently received.⁸⁸

8.84 The International Association argued that relocation packages should be provided for former child migrants who wish to return permanently to the UK to live with their families.⁸⁹ One submission, commenting on their decision to move to the United Kingdom, stated that ‘that move cost me \$10,000 and the expense is a direct consequence of the child migration schemes’.⁹⁰

Conclusion

8.85 Evidence to the inquiry suggested that some former child migrants now residing permanently in the United Kingdom or intending to in the future, especially those under age pension age, may be disadvantaged in relation to access to income support payments. While the Committee did not receive evidence on the numbers likely to be affected, it considers that the Commonwealth Government should closely monitor this situation and urge the United Kingdom Government to review its social security arrangements, if cases emerge of former child migrants living in the United Kingdom being disadvantaged in gaining access to income support payments, as a consequence of the termination of the Social Security Agreement with the United Kingdom.

8.86 In relation to the payment of pensions and allowances for people temporarily overseas, the Committee considers that the current arrangements provide adequate

86 An ‘entitled person’ is defined as – a women who has been an Australian resident for a period of at least 10 years; and a women in receipt of a widow B pension. See letter from FaCS to the Committee, pp. 2-3.

87 Letter from FaCS to the Committee, p.3.

88 Submission No.44, Additional Information, 26.2.01, p.4 (CMFS).

89 Submission No.129, p.46 (IAFCM&F). See also Submission No.74, p.1.

90 Submission No.126, p.5. See also Submission No.74, p.1.

coverage to meet the needs of most former child migrants wishing to make overseas visits for reunion purposes. The Committee believes that what appears to be some confusion over entitlements could be overcome if information on access to benefits while overseas were to be widely disseminated to welfare services, former child migrants and child migrant organisations.

8.87 In regard to relocation packages, while the Committee did not receive extensive evidence on the numbers likely to be affected, it suspects that numbers would be few and believes that the Commonwealth Government should introduce relocation packages for former child migrants who wish to return permanently now or in the future to the United Kingdom or Malta to be with their families.

Recommendation 26: That the Commonwealth Government urge the British Government to ensure that former child migrants living permanently in the United Kingdom are not disadvantaged in gaining access to income support payments following termination of the Social Security Agreement with the United Kingdom.

Recommendation 27: That the Commonwealth Government provide a prospective one-off grant of \$10,000 to former child migrants wishing to return permanently to the United Kingdom or Malta who can prove that they will permanently relocate in those countries.

Remedial education

8.88 Some evidence suggested that there was a need for remedial education services to be provided to former child migrants. As noted in chapter 4, due to the lack of education received in many institutions, many former child migrants left the institutions with a serious lack of literacy and numeracy skills – which have remained with them throughout life. During the inquiry some former child migrants indicated that they would have liked to further their education in later life – some have succeeded, although others have indicated that they found further education too difficult for a variety of reasons, others have succeeded by pursuing further studies at their own expense.⁹¹ The International Association argued, however, that for many former child migrants who are now in their advanced years, it is too late—‘many cannot change...we would have preferred this to have happened 30 years ago’.⁹²

8.89 Even so, a range of services are currently provided. C-BERS provides adult education classes for ex-residents who wish to improve their reading, writing and other educational skills, such as, computer skills, although the take-up rate is not high. In the first course, initiated three years ago, eight men started the literacy course and six graduated. C-BERS noted that some dropped out ‘because they actually did not

91 *Committee Hansard*, 15.2.01, p.35; *Committee Hansard*, 15.2.01, p.54. A number of child migrants received remedial education from the Army.

92 *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.563 (IAFCM&F).

want to be doing this in a group; they wanted to do it individually. They were all at different levels'.⁹³

8.90 As a consequence of this initial experience, C-BERS now arranges courses tailored more to an individual's needs – 'we are now funding, on an as-needs basis, different literacy skills, educational skills to different individuals and it is much more individualised'. Courses are contracted with a providing agency, usually associated with a Technical & Further Education (TAFE) facility, though only three or four men are currently on courses. C-BERS noted that 'not only have they improved their literacy and numeracy skills, but they are now quite active on PCs and have the ability to use the Internet, and that has given them a totally new horizon altogether of which they can take full advantage'.⁹⁴ Fairbridge WA also manages a fund to provide financial assistance to former Fairbridge child migrants for educational, medical and other needs.⁹⁵

8.91 In Queensland, funding for educational expenses among other things is available through the Forde Foundation which has been established to meet the needs of individual former residents of institutions in that State.⁹⁶ In South Australia, the Department of Human Services indicated that it would organise literacy classes where this was a need identified by individual child migrants and that information about the literacy programs for adults in South Australia would be provided to the Child Migrants Trust.⁹⁷

8.92 The Committee raised the question of who should provide these services – individual service providers, such as C-BERS, or mainstream services. The Joint Liaison Group stated that an advantage of courses run by groups, such as C-BERS, 'is that people are with other people who may have gone through the same difficulty and perhaps feel the same inhibition or sense of shame about this area. Therefore, they may feel more comfortable in coming to this group and working on it there'. The Liaison Group conceded, however, that some people 'may not want to come to such a group and would prefer to do it in the general community'.⁹⁸

8.93 The Committee believes that, while the demand for remedial education services is uncertain, literacy and numeracy courses and associated adult education courses should be made available to former child migrants where they feel that they would benefit from such courses. The Committee further believes that the Commonwealth and the States should widely publicise the availability of such courses

93 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.141(C-BERS).

94 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.141 (C-BERS).

95 Submission No.136, p.2 (Fairbridge WA); *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.122 (Fairbridge WA).

96 Queensland Government, *Queensland Government Response to Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions*, August 1999, p.43; *Committee Hansard*, 21.3.01, p.416 (Queensland Department of Families).

97 *Committee Hansard*, 16.3.01, pp.296-97 (SA Department of Human Services).

98 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.502 (JLG).

to child migrants and organisations associated with, or providing services to, former child migrants.

Recommendation 28: That the Commonwealth and State Governments widely publicise the availability of remedial education services and associated adult education courses to child migrants and child migrant organisations.



The International Association of Former Child Migrants and Their Families gives evidence at the Canberra hearing