

## **Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Child Migration**

### **Submission on behalf of Fairbridge WA (Inc) – November 2000**

#### **Background and History**

The Fairbridge Scheme saw approximately 1,200 children, as child migrants, pass through the Kingsley Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra WA, in the years 1913 to 1959 inclusive. Although still in use as a "children's home" until 1981, the migrant intake during that period was mainly family groups with one (1) parent. Fairbridge acted as a caretaking institution until such time as the families could be settled into the community as independent family units.

The history of the Pinjarra Farm School is well documented and supported by published personal accounts of the lives of some former child migrants. Some of these publications are listed in Attachment A.

1983 saw the dissolution of the Board of Governors of Kingsley Fairbridge Farm School and the establishment of Fairbridge WA (Inc). The latter body was charged with the task of restoration of the village facilities and presenting the site as a suitable place for youth development, social groups, sporting and cultural group activities as well as affordable accommodation for family and other holiday groups. There was also strong emphasis on heritage and ecological values as a basis for Fairbridge operations.

The children who successfully "graduated" (for want of a better term) from Fairbridge in the main availed themselves of available opportunities to become useful and productive members of society in home, business, sporting, cultural and professional capacities. For many the opportunities to succeed were more available in Australia than in their home country.

#### **Responses to Terms of Reference**

Fairbridge WA (Inc) wishes to state that it was not the receiving agency for child migrants, having only existed from 1983. However the following are points it wishes to express to the Senate Committee.

- \* Fairbridge WA (Inc) is unaware of any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children at Fairbridge (Pinjarra). Any such instances if they ever occurred could only properly be verified by evidence from the parties concerned at the time those instances occurred.
- \* Fairbridge WA (Inc) is unable to provide (financial or other) assistance for the reunification of child migrants with families. Nor can it provide counselling services, designed to reduce or limit trauma engendered by the act of child migration, to former child migrants.
- \* Fairbridge WA (Inc) recognises that it has a role to play in the following ways:

- The records of former child migrants housed at Fairbridge (Pinjarra) have been lodged at the Battye Library within the State Library of WA. There are strict protocols in place for access to these records. Application may be made to Fairbridge WA (Inc) or the Old Fairbridgians Association for access to these records and for copies of any pertinent documents to be made available to the child migrant or immediate family of the child migrants. Mrs P. Wilson, Secretary of the OFA and a member of the Board of Governors of Fairbridge WA (Inc), is the only person authorised to access the records. Such authorisation is endorsed by the Battye Library authorities. The records are not open to scrutiny by the public nor by any persons other than those referred to above. The person(s) desiring such access must provide "proof" of eligibility for access to the records.
- Fairbridge WA (Inc) manages a grant/loan fund, established following the closure of Fairbridge (Pinjarra), designed to provide financial assistance to former child migrants and/or their families. Such assistance is directed towards educational, medical and domestic needs but is not available to fund trips to the country of origin of the child migrants for family reunions or tracing family origins. The protocols for administrating the fund, which currently stands at approximately \$40,000, are clear and well defined.
- There is a strong recognition by Fairbridge WA (Inc) of the role of the Old Fairbridgians Association in the redevelopment of Fairbridge Village, the access to the village by Old Fairbridgians for specific functions such as Anzac Day, Founder's Day celebrations, and for the preservation of historical material reflecting the activities of Fairbridge as a child migrant home as well as the heritage value of such materials.

Fairbridge WA (Inc) recommends to the Senate enquiry that in cooperation with the WA Government Department of Family and Children's Services,

- resources be made available to support the ongoing operation, of the WA Child Migrant Referral Index information on which would be available from the WA Government.
- A special fund be established to provide financial assistance for travel and accommodation expenses to those former child migrants wishing to return to their country of origin for tracing family linkages and for reuniting with family members.

NB Many former child migrants from Fairbridge Pinjarra have returned to Great Britain, for the above reasons, at their own expense. Consideration could be given to some form of reimbursement for those persons, providing adequate verification of expenses incurred is available.

Finally it should be noted that following the enquiry conducted into child migration by the British Government, resources are available, on application, to assist former child migrants to visit/reunite with families in the country of origin. The protocols for this process are attached to this document (Attachment B).

Fairbridge WA (Inc) fully endorses and promotes any means the Senate Committee of Enquiry finds are appropriate to support family reunification, and, where it can be established, provide means to assist former child migrants deal with any hardships resulting from their migration to Australia.

There is also a need to publicise the contributions made by former child migrants to the total life of Western Australia and Australia.

## ATTACHMENT A

1. Fairbridge, Kingsley (1927). The Story of Kingsley Fairbridge. DUP London
2. - (1974). Kingsley Fairbridge His Life and Verse. Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo.
3. Fairbridge, Ruby (1948). Fairbridge Farm (formally known as 'Pinjarra') Paterson Press LTD, Perth WA

Note: 1-3 (inc) are no longer in print.

4. Halls, Joan (1999). Miracle of Fairbridge. Hesperian Press, Carlisle WA
5. Lane, John (1990). Fairbridge Kid. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, WA
6. Sherrington, Geoffrey and Jeffery, Chris (1998). Fairbridge, Empire and Child Migration. UWA Press, Perth WA