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The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House Canberra
ACT 2600.

Re : Inquiry into Child Migration

We wish to make a submission to the current Inquiry into the Child Migration Schemes of the recent past. Such an inquiry is long overdue. However, we want to draw the attention of the Committee's members to an unfortunate situation which will result from the Senate's holding of this particular Inquiry. Although we support wholeheartedly the aims of the Inquiry, we regret that its terms cannot be broader, to cover the very similar experiences of some thousands of Australian citizens.

In the course of its investigations, the Committee will be hearing from a relatively small number of persons who are living in Australia and who, as children sent to Australia as "migrants", had experiences of institutional life which featured emotional deprivation, exploitation, brutality and sometimes sexual abuse - along with the severing of family ties and the loss of a sense of identity. We are writing today as representatives of CLAN - Care Leavers of Australia Network - because we want the Senate Committee members to understand that there are also Australian children who, for a variety of reasons, grew up in very similar circumstances, with similar consequences, as did the Child Migrants.

CLAN was founded in July last year (2000) by Leonie Sheedy and Joanna Penglase. Leonie was a state ward in Victoria, who grew up in a Catholic Home. Joanna grew up in NSW, in a non-government residential Home which was run as a business under licence from the Child Welfare Department (now DOCS). Our childhoods covered the immediate postwar decades, the 1940s, 50s and 60s. We set up CLAN to raise awareness of issues arising from childhoods which we have felt to be unacknowledged and even invisible. Over recent decades, as a society, we have become increasingly aware of groups of people who as children underwent experiences which have caused them ongoing trauma and suffering and had detrimental effects on their adult lives. Child migrants are one example; others are past adoptees and the Aboriginal 'stolen generations'. State wards and Home children, who have had childhood experiences which are similar (and in many cases identical) to those suffered by the groups described above, still remain invisible as a group warranting similar recognition, support and assistance.

Older Care Leavers were subject to a child welfare system - whether state or non-state - which, unlike today, made little or no attempt to take account of children's feelings, needs, or family ties. In NSW, wards were almost always fostered, or lived for years in state Establishments for dependent wards considered too "difficult" to foster. Children in non-state care in NSW grew up in Church or charitable Homes, which in all other states were the most common form of out-of-home care. As public inquiries such as the one which resulted in Queensland's 1999 *Forde Report* have shown, residential care in this era all too often involved high levels of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Furthermore - and this is not so generally recognised - the policies and practices characteristic of the management of residential Home care in this earlier time resulted in

children feeling completely abandoned and emotionally neglected, cut off from both family and community ties and stigmatised as "rejects of society".

Many of the children in care in Australia in this period lived in the same Homes and institutions as Child Migrants. And also like the Child Migrants, many wards, through state interventions (such as fostering) lost all contact with their siblings and with their family and place of origin,. They consequently share with Child Migrants the same confused and unstable sense of self and of identity. Many wards have only a hazy knowledge of their own childhood histories. Many have led their adult lives as "parentless people", feeling that they belong nowhere. Many still feel isolated and alone, believing the traumas of their childhood years were somehow their own fault. Like the Child Migrants, Care Leavers from this earlier system still suffer today both from their experiences in care *and* from the ongoing consequences in their present lives of the policies applied to them in the past. As you listen to the histories of the children who were part of the Child Migration Schemes, you will hear the same themes repeated as we at CLAN hear every day in letters, phone calls and emails.

We realise that the Terms of Reference for the present Inquiry will not provide any opportunity for these people to tell their stories or to put their case to the Australian Parliament in respect to acknowledgment, access to support services, or aid in searching for parents and siblings. However we write this submission in order to draw the attention of the Senate Committee members to the existence of these tens of thousands of Australians who grew up in care in this period. What we are seeking is an acknowledgment that within Australia policies existed which subjected thousands of Australian-born children to similar experiences as those of the Child Migrants.

Joanna Penglase was recently awarded a Ph.D. from Macquarie University, Sydney, for a thesis based on her own Home experience and that of 90 interviewees. It is called *"Orphans of the Living": the Home Children NSW 1939-1965*. Little else has been written in a general sense about the experiences of children in care in this period. Although this thesis is a personal account, it is also an attempt to put such events into the perspective and context of the times. It can be made available to the Senate Committee on request, at the cost of expenses.

We thank you for this opportunity to express our views and would be happy to provide you with any further information that could be of use to you in understanding these complex and traumatic episodes from Australia's still quite recent past.

Sincerely,

Leonie Sheedy & Joanna Penglase, on behalf of all members of CLAN