

CATHOLIC CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL

Australian Senate Inquiry into Child Migration

SUBMISSION BY THE CATHOLIC CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL

This submission contains the following sections:

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1. **Introduction**

The Catholic Child Welfare Council (CCWC) is a federation of the Catholic Children's Societies, other diocesan social welfare agencies, and some religious congregations, which provide social care services for children and families in need, in the UK. It is an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. It promotes the care and welfare of children and families by providing a forum for coordinating resources, offering advice, guidance and training and encouraging high standards of professional practice.

One of its sub-committees is the Catholic Child Migrants sub-committee, which was set up in 1992 to give a very clear focus to matters relating to child migration, and to ensure that Catholic agencies were working cooperatively and proactively to provide a comprehensive service to former child migrants. This sub-committee currently consists of representatives from eight diocesan agencies, the Sisters of Nazareth, and CCWC, as follows:

Patricia McGrogan	Family Care Society, Belfast (Chair)
Siobhan Clemons	Father Hudson's Society, Birmingham
Sister Austin Donnelly	Catholic Children's Society, Clifton
Sister Aloysius Fairclough	Salford Diocese
Mary Gandy	CCWC
Rosemary Keenan	Catholic Children's Society, Westminster
Michael Lyons	Catholic Children's Society, Southwark, and CCWC

Pat McEvoy	Nugent Care Society, Liverpool
Angela Rigby	Catholic Children & Family Care Society, Wales
Sister Catherine Sweeney	Poor Sisters of Nazareth

2. Background and history

Britain sent many people of all ages overseas to lead new lives in its Colonies from early times. From the 1830s schemes began to be organised by charitable bodies to send groups of children, whom it was thought would benefit from a better life in the countries they were sent to, than by staying in Britain. The Catholic Church and its agencies, as major carers of children in need in the UK in the 19th and 20th centuries, were involved in two main periods of child migration, to Canada from about 1870 to 1930, and to Australia from 1938 to 1963. The Catholic Child Welfare Council (CCWC), which was founded in 1929, is involved because of its role as an umbrella body for the Catholic children's agencies.

From 1938 to 1963 Catholic agencies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland co-operated with the British and Australian governments in nominating children for migration to Australia under the Government scheme. The children selected were those whom it was thought would have better future prospects in Australia than in Britain. In practice this meant that many were either orphans or illegitimate, and most had already spent a substantial part of their lives in institutional care. Our database identifies 1,149 children who came from Catholic children's homes and agencies. Approximately two thirds of these went to Western Australia; the remaining third were spread thinly over the other States.

Enclosure 1: Rosemary Keenan, of the Catholic Children's Society, Westminster, wrote in 1998 a historical summary of child migration as it relates to the Catholic agencies and a copy of Part II, which relates to Australia, is enclosed.

Re Terms of Reference (a): We believe that the children were cared for in British institutions prior to their migration in a safe, proper and lawful way, and that they were all sent to Australia through the proper channels of the Child Migration schemes, organised and funded by the British and Australian governments. Although we are obviously aware of the allegations of abuse in Catholic institutions in Australia, we are not in a position to comment on the safety or legality of the care the children received there, which would have been a matter for the inspecting authorities of the time.

3. Records

For migration to Australia, CCWC holds records centrally for many, but not all, of the Catholic child migrants. Records may also be held by individual agencies or religious orders which looked after the children in this country, but, by today's standards, these records (in common with many others of the period) were usually very scanty. Most

children were sent either by the diocesan child care agencies or by religious orders, such as the Sisters of Nazareth. A few individual children were sent at the request of their families. Some were recruited by Australian institutions in direct contact with Catholic children's homes in the UK and some of these children became known to CCWC later.

A database has now been compiled, on behalf of CCWC, of all known former Catholic child migrants to Australia, containing both historical information and recent contacts.

Enclosure 2: A copy of the most recent analysis of this database is enclosed.

4. Effects on the lives of the child migrants

It is now recognised that the experience of being sent to a country at the other side of the world, away from familiar faces and environments, with no knowledge of their birth families and without any possibility of access to them, had a profoundly adverse effect on many of the child migrants. Many have suffered throughout their lives from a lack of identity and even those who objectively did better by going to Australia generally feel a need to find out about their birth origins and to understand them. For many, time is running out for locating a birth mother who may still be alive, but is now very elderly. For others, personal relationships have always been difficult because of their childhood experiences, and counselling by someone with specialist knowledge of child migrant issues may be strongly recommended.

In order to find out more about the needs of former child migrants at first hand, and how best to meet those needs, CCWC's Chairman and General Secretary visited Australia in March 1995. Their Report of that visit, compiled at the time, highlighted the main issue as the need for provision of services in both the UK and Australia, especially in relation to tracing and making contact with family in the UK. A whole range of developments in the second half of the 1990s have underlined the importance of providing these specialist services for former child migrants.

5. Our service

The Catholic diocesan agencies in the UK provide information and assistance for former child migrants, as part of a general aftercare service for people who were in their care as children. Throughout the 1990s the numbers of people coming forward to seek help or information has increased steadily, reflecting both general trends in the search for origins, and because the subject of child migration has been given a high public profile over recent years.

While individual diocesan agencies assist those who were formerly in their care, CCWC recognised the need for a comparable service for those who were cared for in the UK by one of the religious orders, with no connection with a diocesan agency (nearly two thirds of the child migrants sent). Therefore we set up a central service in 1992, which is only

made possible by funding grants from the Sisters of Nazareth and the Christian Brothers.

We assist former child migrants in various ways, including:

- accessing our own and other records.
- working with the information to try to discover living family members, or, if this proves impossible, as much background information as possible. (This may take a long time, because the original records often give scanty information, and the process which needs to be followed, which hopefully will eventually lead to family, is a slow one.)
- acting as intermediary with family members if located.
- supporting the former migrant during a visit to the UK.
- preparing and counselling family members in the UK.
- locating graves of deceased relatives.
- liaising with agencies in Australia who are providing local support to the migrant.

In summary, we cooperate fully in whatever ways we can over records, locating family, counselling, hospitality and general support. Our practice is guided by standards of good social work practice and pastoral care. We have no budget to give any kind of financial assistance ourselves, but will assist child migrants to access funding from other sources.

Numbers of former child migrants requesting information or accessing our services:

Our Database Analysis (Enclosure 2) records that of the 1149 known Catholic child migrants to Australia, 621 have made an enquiry over the years since their migration, and over two-thirds of these have been since 1990. There have also been 140 enquiries from family members. These figures are likely to be underestimates, particularly for the early years.

The number of former child migrants assisted by the central CCWC family search service between July 1992 and October 2000 was 280. The number of these cases that were active as at November 2000 was 51.

6. Co-operation with other agencies which assist child migrants

In the UK: It will be seen from the above that CCWC has been pro-active in the field of assisting former child migrants for many years, since setting up our sub-committee to deal with matters relating to child migrants in 1992, and our research service in the same year. In addition, it was through the efforts of Rosemary Keenan that a Sending Agencies Group came together in 1997, which now meets regularly. We liaise with other agencies, including the Child Migrant Trust, on a case-by-case basis as well as to discuss policy and practice. Since the UK Inquiry into the Welfare of Former Child Migrants in 1998, and the subsequent Report, we have been represented at Department of Health meetings on Child Migrants and on the Index Project Steering Group.

In Australia: Particular benefits flowed from the visit to Australia in 1995. Since then

we have worked in close co-operation with the Christian Brothers, Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Nazareth in Australia, the Catholic Migrant Centre in Perth, the Christian Brothers Ex-Residents Services (C-BERSS), the Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF), Centacare Australia, and, recently, the Joint Liaison Group on Child Migration (JLG). We have assisted these bodies in a variety of ways to improve their own services to former child migrants, and have co-operated over the development of databases. We have recently been in discussion with the JLG over the possibility of co-operating over a new model of service, jointly funded by Australia and Britain, to be more pro-active over offering services to all former Catholic child migrants.

7. The needs and issues now

We believe that **the main areas of need** of the former child migrants and their families are:

- Access to information and records
- Assistance in tracing family and origins
- Assistance in travel and reunions
- Specialist counselling

Substantial measures have already been taken to provide the services needed. We believe that offering appropriate services to meet current needs is the best way to help those people who suffered from the mistakes of history. As time is running out, it is becoming more and more urgent to make sure that all former child migrants have the opportunity to access the services they need. It is also important that they have choice in which agency they receive services from.

We believe that **the issues relating to provision of services** are:

FUNDING: We cannot express too strongly that the major need is for more funding to be made available to meet the ongoing needs of former child migrants and their families. We believe that we can provide the necessary services for those formerly in Catholic care, but that the Governments of both Britain and Australia have a responsibility to assist with funding, which would enable wider provision or improvement of the following:

- **Family search and reunions:** This can be time-consuming and costly. The Catholic diocesan agencies have no funding for the work, although they believe they have the obligation to do it, and in fact they give it high priority. CCWC's own service is currently funded by two religious orders, but we cannot necessarily expect this funding indefinitely. Funding from our Department of Health has been turned down on several occasions. Although experience shows that enquiries by the descendants of migrants are likely to continue, the number of actual child migrants still alive is finite and diminishing and the service offered to them needs to be adequately funded for as long as it is needed. **We believe that some Government funding should be made available both to sending agencies in the UK and receiving agencies in**

Australia to support and assist in the cost of this work and we hope the Australian Senate will give consideration to how this might be achieved.

- ***Travel and visits:*** If family are located, (or sometimes even if it is not possible to find living family), a visit becomes a priority, and airfares, accommodation and other expenses are beyond the means of many former child migrants. Some bodies in Australia, notably C-BERSS, make grants for visits, and many former child migrants are now making use of the Travel Scheme set up by the British Government after the 1998 Health Committee Inquiry. However, this Fund is for three years only, and the evidence shows that it will be fully taken up during that time, and that there will still be people needing assistance with travel at the end of the 3 years. **There is therefore a need for a continuing fund to assist with travel and family reunions, and we hope the Australian Senate will give consideration to this issue.**
- ***Counselling and support:*** There has been a growing awareness of the need for specialist counselling, both as part of the process of sharing background information from original records, tracing and family reunion, and for other problems and emotional needs. This is provided at present as part of our overall service, but again we are limited by budgets. Because of geographical considerations, **counselling often needs to be carried out by an agency in Australia, and we hope the Australian Senate will give consideration to making some Government funding available for agencies providing this service.**
- ***Professional training:*** Staff in agencies need appropriate training in order to provide a proper professional service to former child migrants and their families. **We hope the Australian Senate will include this in any recommendations relating to funding.**
- ***International conference:*** We believe that there is a need for an international conference to enable sharing and development of professional practice and research. **We urge the Australian Senate to recommend government funding and support for a conference which will meet these aims .**

CHOICE: We believe that the paramount consideration should be the provision of appropriate services to former child migrants in order to meet their needs. In many cases this is suitably done through the sending and receiving agencies, and for many people renewing contact with their sending agency and receiving help from them is a positive part of the healing process. Others, however, feel strongly that they do not want to contact their sending or receiving agency and, for them, the Child Migrant Trust or another independent body is appropriate. We strongly believe that the migrant should have that choice. **We therefore ask the Australian Senate to recognise the need for a variety of agencies to be providing services and also for them to be liaising and working collaboratively, with recommendations for appropriate funding.** This would provide a basis for a comprehensive professional service to meet the ongoing needs of former child migrants.

Re Terms of Reference (b): Paragraphs 4-7 above describe measures taken by our agencies to assist former child migrants. Since the late 1980s the Child Migrant Trust has offered an independent service, which has become increasingly well publicized.

Re Terms of Reference (c): Paragraphs 4-7 above describe measures taken by our agencies, especially during the last ten years, for assisting former child migrants obtain information, searching for family members, reunification, and counselling. In earlier years, enquirers to Catholic agencies were provided with information, but in a less coordinated or comprehensive manner. It appears to us that the British and Australian Governments have taken little part in this process other than to provide some funding to the Child Migrant Trust.

Re Terms of Reference (d): We believe that it would be helpful for the Australian Government to issue a formal acknowledgment of the extensive role it played in the child migration scheme, along with a statement of apology and regret for the human suffering which arose from it.

We do not wish to comment on Terms of Reference (e) or (f).

Mary Gandy,
General Secretary, Catholic Child Welfare Council,
December 2000.

Authorised by Terence Connor, Chair, Catholic Child Welfare Council.

Enclosures:

1. Historical summary of Catholic child migration to Australia (pp 11-16).
2. Brief Report on Child Migrants to Australia (Based on Analysis of CCWC database).

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