

Submission to the Senate Mental Health provision of service Inquiry By Origins Incorporated Supporting People Separated by Adoption

Origins Inc has given submissions and evidence to the 2005 Senate Inquiry into Mental Health and is following on from that Inquiry with suggestions to facilitate mental health services to our clients.

An overview of Origins Incorporated Supporting People Separated by Adoption

Origins Inc is a non-profit incorporated association that support clients affected by Adoption, Ex- care leavers from children's institutions and indigenous clients from the "Stolen Generations".

Origins Inc has been in existence from 1995 and to this date has received little funding from State or Federal government, small funding grants from local clubs have maintained an office at Bonnyrigg Community centre for the past 4 and a half years.

Origins provides counselling, information and welfare services to client s who have been separated from their families by past adoption practices and state removal policies.

Adoption separation alone directly affects at the very least 5-6 million persons in Australia. There is an estimated 300 000 women who lost children to adoption. Ex-care leavers or children who have been brought up in institutions make up another 500 000, plus an estimated 2000 children shipped from Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict and many other inter-country and cross-cultural adoptions, the numbers rising with increased current demand for adoptable children from overseas. The Aboriginal Stolen Generations number in the tens of thousands also make up the final picture.

So the committee can appreciate that the numbers of people affected by family separation in Australia alone are staggering. It would be no exaggeration that persons affected by these issues represent one of the largest groups affected by mental health problems

This organisation has researched the lifelong mental health damage of these groups for over a decade and a half and the amount of material written on the psychiatric and emotional damage of these issues is well documented and preserved by our organisation.

Currently services for these groups are not only very thin of the ground, but also do not address the major mental health difficulties suffered by these affected by these issues. In many cases the services provided by inexperienced mental health workers has increased the emotional and psychological trauma to a state where future help is refused and subsequent self abuse is the result.

The very few funded organisations that were set up to deal with these clients are not qualified or professional enough to deal with people presenting with major mental health problems. In states

such as Queensland clients are “counselled” by the very government departments responsible for the damage.

Or as in the case of New South Wales, and other states benevolent institutions are also responsible for counselling clients, these are also institutions that were responsible for the harm caused to their clients, as one client described it graphically as “it’s like going back to your rapist for a pap-smear test”

Not only it is well known by State governments and church and benevolent societies that they have caused or contributed the major mental health damage to its clients but it is well known by workers within those departments they, the employees do not have the capacity to deal with the extent of this major problem in our society.

Therefore we believe that each State and the Federal government should work towards not only addressing the widespread groups that this organisation supports, but recruit independent organisations to provide services to those who have been affected

On behalf of Origins Inc. SPSA our organisation would like to make the following submission into the provision of services and suggestions for person affected by the above issues. We would also like offer some suggestions on how to move people on regaining self worth, identity and dignity

RE: Point One

Ongoing efforts towards improving mental health services in Australia, with reference to the National Action Plan on Mental Health agreed upon at the July 2006 meeting of the Council of Australian Governments, particularly examining the commitments and contributions of the different levels of government with regard to their respective roles and responsibilities.

Firstly on behalf of the clients of Origins and people who have experienced unlawful and harmful adoption practices, Origins Inc would call for the Committee to recommend a National Senate Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices. This Inquiry should be representative of a Truth Commission on the crimes committed against citizens of this country.

It is established that when abuses or deprivation of civil liberties by governments have been acknowledged, the climate is the right to deal with the issues that come from the exposure of such human rights crimes, hence the need for a Nation Inquiry to gauge the level and degree of physical and mental health damage

This will also enable the present adoption and inter-country adoption practices to be fully investigated and input into the relevant and necessary changes to these practices comes from those affected by adoption in the past so that the damage done in the past is not repeated nor ignored.

The financial cost of this action is far less than the cost of inaction. The financial burden placed upon the health system as a result of past adoption, state ward, inter-country adoption practices as well as the Aboriginal Stolen Generations is huge and ongoing. People who come from a broken home seldom have lasting and meaningful relationships. This creates a cycle of broken families and the affects are passed on from generation to generation.

Some of the resulting emotional and psychological issues are:

- Depression, self abuse, anti-social and violent behaviour
- Inability to create emotional connections and relationships
- Domestic violence

- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Relationship breakdowns and divorce
- Suicide
- Psychological and emotional child abuse

These are only a few of the emotional and psychological issues placed in the hands of inexperienced mental health workers and the health system.

Point 2 (d) Identifying any possible remaining gaps or shortfalls in funding and in the range of services available for people with a mental illness

Currently there are few, if any resources to inform professionals on the effects of past abuses of State and religious institutions some of these abuses to name a few range from:

- Physical and sexual abuse
- Emotional and mental health abuse
- Institutional abuse
- Torture and trauma
- Depersonalisation
- Identity deprivation
- Slavery
- Neglect
- Medication abuse
- Forced operations
- Solitary and unlawful confinement
- Kidnapping
- Assault
- Ritual abuse

These are some of the issues that survivors of the above groups have to deal with on a day to day basis

Origins Inc would like make the following recommendations for service provision in helping those affected

- Specialised counselling for torture and trauma victims
- Detailed information documenting psychiatric injuries of clients to be distributed throughout the national health system
- Specialist mental health professionals equipped to deal with childhood abuse
- More research and funding into the issues of those affected by past abuse
- More funding for independent community based organisations to help and support clients at a local level
- More help with issues of housing, alcohol and substance abuse, Mental health problems
- More awareness by correctional and prison authorities into the over representation of clients in jails and detention
- Freedom of information and access to medical and social records
- Government funded informational record search facilities and lawful access to all records regardless of institutional liabilities and policies
- Financial support from the government to help with the costs of overseas stays, travel and record searches for inter-country, cross-cultural adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents

- Provisions in the international visa and immigration treaties to allow extended visas for inter-country and cross-cultural adoptees to complete searches and cultural exploration.
- Government funding for training and ongoing support for mental health workers to help with resolving the relationship issues created by adoption and the ongoing affects this has on families.
- Government funding for the creation of an education package for prospective adoptive parents with ongoing support
- Required training of health care professionals in the areas relating to adoption, state ward and Aboriginal stolen generations.
- Sensitivity training for all departments that deal with those involved in adoption, state ward and Aboriginal stolen generations, so that issues are not reinforced but are resolved with understanding.
- Special visa that allow residency and reunion for children who were adopted and taken overseas before the order is finalised, and birth mothers who's adopted children migrated to Australia.

- **Services for members of the Stolen Generations submitted by Mary Hooker
Representative for Stolen Generations Alliance**

- More female indigenous counsellors
- Training existing Link up counsellors in trauma remedies
- Home visit by counsellors to elderly clients
- More funding for indigenous organisations that provide cultural counselling
- More funding for traditional native therapy programs
- Access to mainstream mental health resources. i.e information material specific to
- Stolen Generation issues
- More information to Indigenous people de-stigmatising mental health “labelling”
- More access to Freedom of Information
- Specialist services for children who are being removed in today's society
- Research in to the drug and alcohol and over representation of “Stolen Generations” in prisons, etc