

7thMay, 2009

I went to the hearing for the Senate Inquiry into, "Forgotten Australians" and "Lost Innocents" Melbourne and have read the recommendations in the book. I think all of the recommendations are needed but I would like to add to some of those recommendations situations you might not be aware of which need to be expanded on and extra things we need for you to help us.

Re: Senate Enquiry "Forgotten Australians" and Lost Innocents"

Recommendation 1-National Apology

I would hope that you make reference in a public national apology the further pain we feel given that as a Western Nation we would condemn such treatment of children in a non western country and would be putting out our arms to hug them and heal their pain. The admission of neglect and courage to put your arms out to us. We send soldiers overseas to fight for the life and rights of those less fortunate than others but we have received no apology and acknowledgement for those we've neglected in our own country and to add insult to injury we are told we are "lucky in Australia".

Recommendation 6-National Repatriation Fund

...for victims of institutional abuse and out-of-home care settings and that: in determining claims, be satisfied that there was 'reasonable likelihood' that the abuse occurred.

Very important to survivors given that our childhood was traumatic enough without having to try to prove what in many cases we cannot prove. Should also apply to care leavers released into the care of an abusive parent as it was a mistake by the State Welfare Department and lack of adequate follow-up that this occurred.

Recommendation 8

...a national Commissioner for Children with Human Rights & Opportunity Commission as suggested in HAN submission:

to continue to have public hearings and place on record the accounts of abuse and neglect by people who have grown up as children placed in institutions, group homes, foster care and detention centres.

I would like to add to the above:

That such children also be able to report to the above, government departments such as Centrelink and Job Network Providers who dismiss the impact of such a childhood to those on welfare payments and participation requirements.

:Recommendation 20

"ongoing funding to CLAN"

I believe that we need CLAN as much as any other advocacy and support group as it is the only national support network we have whose founders are past care leavers and the only network that is independent. For this reason it is the only support group some will trust because there is a sense of betrayal in reaching out to other networks as some feel that a parent was also wronged in the past system of child care. It feels disloyal for some to go to a support service which is part of a department or organization previously involved in the administration of child care. If you look in a phone book to find the number for child protection it is under the heading of the

Department of Human Services. I think it's very important to recognize this issue which faces many care leavers if you are to help us access support and that this is why CLAN needs to exist and be adequately funded. Counselors have not been trained to help us because they don't know about us so CLAN is all some of us have to reach out to and it includes every Forgotten Australian from every state in Australia. It is the responsibility of the governments, churches and agencies to provide the funding needed to allow past care leavers and their children (they suffer too) to access this independent support, now and into the future. A responsibility which wasn't met in the past. While some of us may have children of our own we don't have the rest of our family and extended relatives. Otherwise some have a very dysfunctional and mixed up family. We need CLAN for us and to tell our story to our children in the future.

Recommendation 21-Provision of support services

..assistance to people who were in "care" as well as their families.

Recognition that some parents lost their children to an illness beyond their control and this has long term effects to the child as they then can become the parent's carer in the future. When the child leaves care they may live with the ill parent at some point in the future or still be involved in their care even when they later live independently. Many of these parents such as my mother who suffered a breakdown and schizophrenia are left behind and the child who leaves care has to pick up the pieces. Much support (including financial) is needed here and the advice to access support.

Recommendations 25 to 28-Health care, housing and aged care programs

Subsidize home help (if not already) available so that past care leavers can remain out of aged care homes for as long as possible and that aged care buildings and their design are not like institutions. That staff trained in the trauma of past care leavers including Forgotten Australians and Lost Innocents be assigned to past care leavers. That staff training includes the understanding of the trauma of being separated from family and the subsequent reminder of past loneliness and isolation in homes (the waiting for family or friends to come visit).

That those children that are still in mental institutions are not forgotten about and that much help and counselling is given to the lost child inside them and that they are offered the support of an independent care leaver network.

The homeless children (care leavers)

to recognize that you may have to put in place measures to find them or help them come forward to access all of the support outlined in all of the recommendations. To recognize that if they do come to government departments for help they are probably clients who can't access government housing due to the nature of all their other problems and addictions having caused them to not pay their rent. All the other recommendations of the Senate committee report need to be implemented for this to work.

Recommendation 31, 32, 33

Government welfare policy

Ensuring that Job Network providers are also trained to understand that past care leavers suffer long term effects and trauma which are barriers to employment even if those effects are not diagnosed by any medical professionals or counsellors. That past care leavers cannot always cope well in programs such as work for the dole because they do not have the ability to handle the discriminatory remarks they hear in such programs. That such stigma is a reminder of a traumatic past and is detrimental to a

past carer leaver who survives but who in many respects only exists and functions in society. That the “anonymous” complaints procedure for welfare recipients allows for disclosure of complaints to job network providers or Centrelink thereby making it obvious who complained. Past care leavers will place no faith in such a system and it is biased given that to change job network providers a person requires permission from their current job network provider to do so.

I quote from a letter I received in reply from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in relation to feedback I gave about a job network provider,

“Your feedback....will be made available to both the Departments Contract Manager for this employment service provider and the manager of the program for their attention. The feedback...may be made available..., but not in a way that identifies you.” This means nothing when the complaint itself will identify me.

Two further points I would like to add to the recommendations is in regard to past care leavers who are parents on Centrelink participation agreements which commence when the youngest child is six.

In reality the majority of employers are not flexible enough to make hours of employment for parents and want staff 24 seven availability in our casualized workforce and job networks do try to pressure parents into working early mornings, evenings or on weekends. A past care leaver fears this as it brings back all the memories of an era when a parent could lose their child for neglect if they left a child at home on their own, it causes much stress and job networks fail to understand that past care leavers are very disadvantaged. We do not have family or friends to mind our children early mornings, evenings, weekends and for the two weeks during Christmas when no school vacation care operates at all. Even partnered parent care leavers may have a husband who is employed on call casual so he can't stay home either. Parents who have the help of family have more opportunity to re-enter the workforce and much sooner.

My last point relates to past care leavers on participation agreements who have medical conditions that they won't get treated because of the abuse issues in their past. It needs to be recognized that some medical conditions may not be a result of the past care either but the treatment method brings back bad memories from things which happened in the past and causes more bad dreams. Some of these people are not on disability payments but on the lower payments requiring them to look for work when they are extremely limited in what they can apply for. They are also living in poverty with the added problem that their medical products, although not necessarily prescribed cost them quite a lot. They are also not eligible for assistance to buy what they need to help them look for work such as a hearing aid because they have a health care card and not a pension card. (I am one of these people). This is why recommendation 6 is very important because we need an extra financial allowance to recognize this or a card which pays us (upfront) an allowance to buy our medical products. Also, to recognize that many past care leavers may have undiagnosed learning difficulties or mental illness which has prevented them from receiving equal education and job opportunities and that for some these conditions may still not be unrecognized because they are older and are lost in the system.