

Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

KEVIN PARKER'S SUBMISSION
June 16, 2009

Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out of home care as children.

Introduction: My name is Kevin Parker, I was a ward of the state of Victoria over a span of 17 years. I was raised for 14 years at St Josephs Boys Home, Sebastopol Victoria. At 14 years of age I was transferred to St Vincent's Boys Home, Sth Melbourne. I left institutional care in 1972 at the age of 17. I am now 53 years of age.

While I write this submission, I have in mind all those innocent and forgotten kids who experienced with me our childhood years at St Josephs Boys Home, Sebastopol Victoria where we encountered years of abuse and neglect at the hands of those we were fatefully placed into the care of.

I hope this humble submission has some influence on our governments to take affirmative action (as some states and churches have already) on the senates recommendations, and that abused and affected care leavers receive sincere recognition and dignified reparation and compensation from our Governments and carer organisations responsible and accountable for our suffering. It is a great opportunity to return some dignity and make up for the enjoyment of life that we lost as children under state care.

It is only because of the CLAN newsletter that I was made aware of this senate inquiry and given the opportunity to respond.

My response to Recommendation 1

I am of the opinion the Australian Government issue a formal statement acknowledging what happened in these institutions and accepting responsibility and accountability for past Governments failures. The Australian government should take full control of the senate's recommendations to instill a sense of national responsibility and accountability for our forgotten Australians and our country's recent history.

My response to Recommendation 2.

As a victim of institutional abuse I am unimpressed with the government of Victoria's acknowledgement and apology. In the States apology, there appears to be little acceptance of accountability except for the pittance funding of 1.4 million over 3 years to organizations such as Vanish and Clan.

Although the state premier of Victoria apologised in 2006, the state still hasn't taken action to implement an appropriate compensation arrangement for those who suffered and still suffer from the various abuses, assaults and neglect under state care. In its apology, the state premier announced the State Government was paying compensation and delivering extra support and services to help victims. I am disappointed with the lack of communication to myself and I assume most other care leavers in need of the services and other support made available to care leavers as a result of this apology. I feel there wasn't a genuine attempt by the state to contact/communicate to me of these services. During a moment of curiosity I stumbled across CLAN on the internet in 2007. I pay my \$10 yearly subscription and now receive the CLANICLE news letter which I find pretty informative but emotionally upsetting as it contains care leavers stories of their institutional experiences. I can relate to their stories and the effects their childhood experiences have had on their lives.

My response to Recommendation 5.

I agree to the government's response to 5. To date, I am unaware if any progress has been made on this whistleblower legislation recommendation.

But the States and Territories must also include professional and accountable auditing systems and procedures, if they haven't done so already.

As a former State Ward over 17 years, I do not recall social welfare officers asking me if I was being cared for properly. After reading my state ward file, it appears the state social workers and carers back then appeared to focus more on whether my mother was fit to have me home for the weekend, while at the same time neglecting to investigate whether my carers were providing me with a safe and caring upbringing, or if they were even fit for the task! There are no records in my file that demonstrate any such audits. Maybe the state governments back then assumed that because I was cared for by a religious organization I was in god's safe and loving hands.

My response to Recommendation 6.

I disagree with the Australian government's response to Recommendation 6.

I believe the Australian government should take responsibility to manage recommendation 6 and ensure there is a consistent national scheme so all genuine claimants receive reparation and compensation consistent to their counterparts in each state or territory. They also are provided with any suitable support to compensate and provide healing for the rest of their lives. To finance this reparation and compensation a special Tax arrangement or levy such as a Forgotten Australian Compensation Tax be introduced (FACT) similar to other Taxes and Levies tax payers have paid to support other fellow Australians from time to time.

Sincerely

Kevin Parker