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Senate Community Affairs Committee

Re; Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports.

From; Cheryl Campbell

Please note I have no objections to being called as a witness to this inquiry!

I have only recently gained knowledge of this inquiry, and I am a former 'Ward of the State' in both New South Wales and Queensland, and I am a parent of two children lost to past wrong doings.

I agree whole heartedly with many of the recommendations that have been put forth, and I wish to submit this into your inquiry.

Concerning recommendation 36, 37 & 38.

After a bad reunion with a son I lost to these past practices, and after hearing my councilor tell me he will be much older before he really wants to know the truth....I wanted to write something about that truth which I could leave behind for him should I die before he feels the need to know.

The files child welfare kept on me in both states have been lost or destroyed, but they were not lost or destroyed before many details from them were noted in the file that was kept on my second child. I have what I was allowed to have of my sons file, and from it I have learnt two very important things.

A] My son is never going to know the truth if he ever seeks it in way of this file child welfare has on him!

B] I also doubt he is ever going to know the truth if he seeks it from any of those who personally raised him!

He was too young at the age of five months to remember that he, I and his dad all went camping on week ends. Back then his dad could not stay over night with us, so we got away from all who might have some thing to say, and we went camping. His dad bought a gold detector, and while we tried to reconcile our differences, we searched for gold in the creeks around town.

When he reads the file on that time in his life; he'll see some one say I left the caravan park with an unknown man in a car, he will not read that that man was his father. He will also read that I was going all the way back to my home town every weekend, and I took him with me, but he will not read anything to support that. He will read that I was leaving him with irresponsible caregivers, but he will not read anything to back that up either.

During the same period of time he will read that his father and I were not even together, he will also read that we were together but having a lot of fights. And he will read that I was leaving him in town with a babysitter every week end, but he will not read a thing about how he nearly fell out of the car while we were camping.

I doubt he will be able to make any sense of it all and in that he will not find the solid ground he may go looking for.

During my study into the stolen generations I have heard it said by wards of the state and adopted children that they were disappointed that there was nothing or little left behind for them to know who their mothers and fathers were. These recommendations may allow me to tell my story of being a ward of the state in two different states, but it does not cover the stories that mothers have to tell their children made wards of the state or placed up for adoption.

I think this recommendation should be broadened to include the stories of other family members and I think it should include publications of such stories in retail stores.

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Below is just a short history of some of things from my own life.

Up until the age of fifteen I had been made subject to many abuses within my natural family. My only knowledge or contact with child welfare during this time came about through my absence in school. During this 15 minutes of contact with child welfare, my mother was told I could leave school if I so wished.

* No real inquiry was made regarding why I was absent from school, and at school *no inquiry was made into why I was cutting myself.

So at fifteen I ran away from my family and the place they called home.

When I was detained as a runaway, again *no one wanted to know why, and after telling me I would be returned to my family, I flew into a rage. To contain this rage I was pinned to the cell floor and given a shot to sedate me. Still *no one wanted to know why I did not want to go home.

After being transported (with an escort) two thousand kilometers back to my family, my family (in N.S.W) then placed me in the local jail and charges were filed against me. Still *no one wanted to know why I did not want to be at home. The result of these charges left me with a criminal record, and the absence of question allowed my family (the real criminals) to go free. *no charges were ever filed against them for their wrong doing, and *no one sought to get some sort of counseling for me concerning these things.

I was flown to a juvenile detention centre (Jail) called Minda in Sydney N.S.W. and held there till my sixteenth birthday. After that I was placed in a residential care facility in Hurstville N.S.W. In this home I was bullied, harassed and beaten by others my age, so I

requested permission to be fostered out to a family back in my own home state QLD. This request was granted because of the abuse I was copping from others in the residential care facility.

Then it was discovered by my foster family that I was pregnant (the father of the child my older foster brother), and they put me on a plane right back to the residential care facility in Hurstville. Once there I was given two choices. A] I abort the child and return to my home state or B] I have my child, which they would take from me for adoption and then I could return to my home state. My choice was not to give my child up into the hands of adults such as these, to give to others that may well be like my own parents. And my choice was to not spend any longer in this facility where I was continually abused by others. So I gave my child up to god through abortion. Once again *no counseling was offered me for the procedure I endured.

Before I was eighteen and still a ward of the states, I found myself pregnant again. The father of this child the same as the first and we had been together since I was fifteen. Not wanting to loose my second child to abortion or adoption, I went into hiding with extended members of my family. I did not tell the father of my child for fear his parents would find out and send me back to Hurstville again.

I gave birth to my son before I turned eighteen, so until my eighteenth birthday I remained with members of family. During this time there were no visitors from child welfare coming to our home.

Then when I turned eighteen I went back to the town my sons' father lived in. About a week after this move child welfare landed on my doorstep to inspect my living conditions. But I lived alone in my caravan and was aware his father could not spend the night. Then within two weeks of this move my family allowance was cancelled and I was told to either get back with the father or sue him for maintenance. To regain my family allowance I lied and told them his father volunteered to pay maintenance and then I moved into a cheaper caravan.

Without my having knowledge of it; a complaint was filed by a member of my family (one which provided me financial assistance after family allowance was cut). It was reported that I was neglecting my five week old child (who was five months old) and leaving him alone day and night. Of cause my son was not neglected thanks to financial assistance from this family member, and living in a caravan park there were times when my son was sleeping that I used the amenities close by.

* This is a good example of how the truth was being manipulated. My Grandmother had concerns over how long she may have to support me financially. Although she felt some sort of obligation toward me and her great grand child, it was not something she wanted to do. Contributing to this complaint was one of my foster mothers, who had been to my caravan while I was at the amenities, and my son was home alone sleeping. The distance between where he slept to where I was at the cloths line was relatively the same as it was for me as a child, and many others.

*No action was taken against me because of the truth in the matter, but as they continued to try and sway me into giving my son up to them, reference to this complaint was written over and over again in their reports. Although the complaint was never substantiated, each time word was written on this particular complaint, it became more and more exaggerated.

So basically the very beginning of the complaint was abbreviated to read like it was nothing but negative and workable as some kind of evidence against me, and then that written evidence was exaggerated in the negative to also work as some kind of evidence against me.

I collected my family allowance from the police station each week, so when it was reinstated my son was seen in good health by police officers. But even after that, welfare sent a social worker, who was on my doorstep uninvited every week.

* Child welfare did not have an office or officers working in the area I lived, and every now and then they traveled to our town. So clearly after the police and social worker had seen there was no neglect, harassment continued through these weekly visits by the social worker, and it was many weeks later before a child welfare officer actually came to my door.

Weeks after we had started going camping, I had concerns about my son falling out of the car, or hurting himself while we were camping. So during one of those uninvited visits from the social worker I raised this issue with her.

This social worker offered/provided me with a baby sitter while I reconciled with his sons father, and then a few weeks later, child welfare was on my doorstep. When this officer and the social worker arrived, my son was with the babysitter. They had come to tell me that I was not eligible to use the child care facilities, and I was to cease using them immediately. After they finished condemning me for using a babysitter, and making me feel I could not take on this responsibility 24/7 alone, they picked my son up from the babysitters and took him back to the city they come from. It was 200 miles from where we had been living.

* Banned from asking for help from others! These people were not going to leave my home that day without my son in care, and there constant badgering led to me giving them to him voluntarily. A procedure they said would ensure I would get my son back. I knew I had to agree to something with them on the day or they were just going to take him, and I was given plenty of advice on how hard it would be for me to get him back if they had to remove him without my consent.

They told me what was written on the paper, and then showed me the line to write the response on. Reason for application was something they filled in themselves, and they wrote it up as physical harm. Which was the reason I had asked for a babysitter, and it was not because of physical harm he could have or might have received from me.

Another manipulation abbreviated as something that might be used against me, and also another that was raised again and again, with the addition of other manipulations that were exaggerated, and based in this abbreviated statement.

They also told me that it was not in their policy to take a child for a short period of time to help the likes of woman like me. I was confused by this because they were banning me from asking others for help.

Several weeks later his father and I moved into a place together, and my son was returned to my care, but he was not released from the voluntary application. Several months later when his father and I separated I used the babysitter to seek appropriate accommodations

for us. A few days later and welfare was back on my doorstep again telling me I could not use babysitter, and if I did so again they would remove my child from my care. They also told me they would be back in a few days, and if my accommodations had not improved, they would remove my child from my care.

Once again I went into hiding, but this time I did so with a new found friend and not family. Month after month I took care of my son without any other persons help, and held out the hope that his father and I might be able to work out differences. When it seemed this was not going to happen, I decided to look for work so I could earn the money I needed to get back to the town I had grown up in.

At first I was offered some work housecleaning and the lady I cleaned for had no objections to me having my son with me.

When the lady offered me more work, which I could not take my son too, I called welfare and told them I wanted to move back home where I had friends, and I could not do this without some help from a baby sitter. They told me I could place my son in short time foster care while I made the money for fares and accommodation back home, and I made the mistake of trusting them on their word. Didn't have much of a choice really because child welfare banned me from asking others for help!

Several weeks later when I had the money to get us home and accommodate us, I went to collect my son. Upon my arrival in the city welfare told me that my son had to stay in foster care for twelve months while I sorted myself out. Before being able to see my son they made me sign an agreement that I only visit every six to eight weeks. I was furious! No matter how much I pleaded and begged for them to give him back to me they refused, so months later I went back to my home town without my son, where I lived with my wealthy grandmother (same family member said to have made the complaint of me neglecting my child and leaving him alone day and night.)

I worked a seasonal job for six weeks, then made another request my son be given back to me, but this time I made the request through my home town office for child welfare. This time I did not have to plead and beg and this time my son was given straight back to me, and this time I was given the relevant forms to have him released from the voluntary order they got from me the first time they offered their help.

Then my abusive mother returned to town from N.S.W and started visiting with the same step father who abused me as a child. It was my grandmothers house, so I could stop them from coming over, but when they started asking me if they could have my son, I wanted to move again. Thinking that my home town child welfare office would be fairer to me then the previous, I went to them for help. Again I needed to work to save the money for my own place, and again I was offered short term care for my son while I did this. At *no time was I offered a safe place that the two of us could have gone to get away from my abusive mother and her abusive boyfriend. Foster care was the only help they could provide me with.

They put my son on a plane to the city he had been in previously, and it was fifteen hundred miles from my home town. When I moved out of my grandmothers and into a one bedroom, air conditioned flat I was told that this was not suitable accommodation. I was told that if I wanted my son back I would need a two bedroom home, which was something I really could not afford on my own.

Then I got a newspaper clipping from the foster mother. Turns out the city where my son was fostered had just celebrated its first children's week, and they used my son in the

picture taken for the local news paper. Then I got a call from the welfare department there, to tell me that his father had seen him in the paper and requested custody. I quit my job and traveled the thirteen hundred miles to see his father about that. I arrived back in his fathers home town late in the afternoon, and the very next morning I was served with court orders at the house of my own foster parents place, where I had stayed overnight.. When I got to the welfare office in the city I was told that my signature was required on a form concerning 'emergency medical care', and that was the reason for the papers I was served with. I signed, seen my son, and went back to my home town to look for a good paying job that could afford me a two bedroom apartment.

Shortly after that I got a letter from welfare saying a whole lot of things I knew nothing about. I was once again told that if I wanted my son back I had to live in the city they fostered him in. They knew how I felt about living in the city. And then they told me that I would more then likely have to take them to court if I wanted my son returned to my care. They also knew how I felt about courts! It seemed no matter how many of their demands I met, they were always going to make things harder for me then they really needed to be. So I lost my second child to welfares 'conditions and expectations' as well because I did not want to live where I did not want to live again, and I did not want to go back to court a second time, knowing I had done nothing wrong a second time either!

I am forwarding you a copy {Part B} of my story written by me, including FOI documents, and the circumstances relating to my own story and that of my sons. This also is part of my submission into your inquiry.

Yours Sincerely
Cheryl Campbell

Part B. My book and FOI documents.

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