

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 18 March 2013

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

Ms B. Halfpenny

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Chair: Ms G. Crozier

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Executive Officer: Dr J. Bush

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Witnesses

Mr A. McKeich, senior education and research fellow,

Uncle Jack Charles,

Uncle Howard Edwards, and

Uncle Murray Harrison, Connecting Home.

The CHAIR — In accordance with the guidelines of the hearings I remind members of the public gallery that they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the Family and Community Development Committee secretariat are to approach committee members. I ask that you all turn off your mobile phones whilst you are in the gallery, and members of the media are also requested to observe the media guidelines.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome from Connecting Home, Mr Alister McKeich, Uncle Howard Edwards, Uncle Murray Harrison and Uncle Jack Charles. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Please note that these proceedings are not being broadcast.

Following your presentation — and I believe you are all wanting to present to us — committee members will ask questions relating to both your oral evidence that you are giving to us this afternoon and your written submissions that you have supplied to the committee. I now call on Alister to give the first presentation. Thank you again for being before us this afternoon.

Mr McKEICH — I would like to begin by paying my respects to the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. I also pay my respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country. I would also like to acknowledge all elders past and present, especially those who never made it home, and in particular, Uncle Murray Harrison, Uncle Howard Edwards and Uncle Jack Charles, who are representing the stories of many Victorian Aboriginal people today.

I acknowledge the Family and Community Development Committee, in particular the chair, Ms Georgie Crozier. Thank you for having us speak today. I would also like to thank Florence for her assistance in making this hearing possible.

Connecting Home is a service for the stolen generations — those Aboriginal people who were removed from family, community, land, language and culture as part of past government policies. We work in a number of areas, including case management, education, healing and research, and in this case to assist community members to testify as part of the inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations.

The inquiry committee is of course aware that abuse of various kinds and degrees of severity were perpetrated against children within certain religious and non-government institutions. Upon reading through the testimonies submitted by Howard Edwards, Jack Charles and, on behalf of his cousin, Murray Harrison, the systemic physical, sexual and racial abuse that occurred while wards of the state of Victoria becomes evident. What we can also see from these submissions is something that is unique to the stolen generations — that is, severe cultural loss. The damaging effects of cultural loss may fall outside the inquiry's terms of reference, but Connecting Home believes this is an important factor for the committee to consider.

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 identifies the need for cultural plans for Aboriginal children who are placed in out-of-home care to ensure they remain connected to his or her Aboriginal community and his or her Aboriginal culture. Unfortunately in the past such cultural plans were not in place. Many of our clients remained unaware of their Aboriginality until later in life, and for those who were recorded as being Aboriginal, nothing was done to ensure they remained connected to culture. As a result the languages and cultural practices of many Aboriginal people across the state of Victoria have almost disappeared. Whether this can be considered abuse in the same context as sexual and physical abuse is up for debate, but what remains clear is that the severe cultural loss of removed Aboriginal people has added yet another layer to the pain and trauma suffered as a result of abusive experiences.

Connecting Home deals with the outcomes of these experiences on a daily basis. The effects of institutionalisation are numerous and severe. They include loss of education and employment opportunities, mental and physical health issues, homelessness and increased contact with the justice system.

Consider Uncle Howard Edward's testimony. Included in his submission is a newspaper clipping, which lauds him as a 10-year-old boy as being 'the best scholar, the best sportsman, the most popular boy in grade 4 and the natural choice as leader of his class.' However, by 16 years of age Howard was in and out of Turana youth centre and not long after spent time in Pentridge prison. It is not difficult to see how the effects of abuse while

institutionalised greatly contributed to Howard's transition from a boy of such great potential to someone who, as an adult, would remain in and out of prison and suffer from alcohol and drug-related issues for many years. Uncle Jack's story tells a similar tale, as do many former state wards, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The negative effects of institutionalisation impact not only the person, but the Aboriginal community and family as well. The transgenerational effects of child removal are well documented and account for the high rates of child removal in Aboriginal communities today. Other effects are even more severe, including self-harm and suicide. In fact the 1991 royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody revealed that of the 99 cases investigated, nearly half had been removed as children.

Connecting Home strongly advocates redress in the form of increased funding for healing programs and access to other support services, such as housing and identity tracing. Connecting Home has previously engaged clients and worked in groundbreaking holistic and culturally competent healing programs, such as Marumali and Red Dust, and has seen the positive results such programs can deliver.

Connecting Home also strongly advocates that the state government of Victoria seriously considers a compensation package similar to the one granted by the Tasmanian government to removed Aboriginal people in that state in 2006. Connecting Home has been working with two leading law firms concerning models of compensation, and with culturally appropriate consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal community it could well advise the government on the way forward in this area.

A common misconception of Aboriginal child removal is that we were doing what we thought was the right thing at the time. However, this is in fact untrue. As far back as the 1937 commonwealth conference on Aboriginal welfare, arguments were presented against the institutionalisation of Aboriginal children. Furthermore a report issued by the Victorian government in 1956 also argued against institutionalisation, stating that the setting most conducive to a child's wellbeing and development was 'where there is affection, personal interest and a share in the common life of a small group of people in a homely environment'.

A 1964 report echoed those sentiments and noted that the numbers of institutionalised children had not changed, and reinforced the need for a shift away from congregate care. Both reports also stated the need for adequate training, and funding for training, for child-care workers. In fact the 1964 report stated that this need was filed under recommendations marked 'urgent'. It was only in 1976 that similar reports mentioned the specific needs of the Aboriginal community, recommending that 'Aboriginals ... be given a voice when major decisions are made about children of their own groups'. Sadly for people such as Uncle Howard, Uncle Jack and Uncle Murray, the damage had already been done and their culture had been largely lost.

Unfortunately none of these reports alluded to the abuses that we now know were prevalent within these institutions. However, these reports did make recommendations that were routinely ignored by government, recommendations that may have prevented such abuses from continuing. Through all of this, it is important to remember that the people we represent had their lives radically altered as small children and have been left to deal with the consequences of abuse largely on their own. It is Connecting Home's position that responsibility to redress these effects falls on the combined shoulders of the government and of the religious and non-government institutions charged with the care of these people during their time as state wards.

In conclusion, I would like to again thank you for allowing us to address the committee today, and I hope that Connecting Home can be of assistance in any further investigations and recommendations the committee will pursue.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Alister. I am not sure who is going next. Uncle Howard, would you like to speak to the committee?

Uncle HOWARD — Yes, I would like to speak to the committee. My name is Howard Edwards. I was institutionalised in 1956. At Turana I got myself a certificate for swimming 25 metres. I went up to Ballarat Orphanage, and I spent about three to near on four years there, but one time specifically I got strange feelings about it was when this old man took me up to this swimming event at Beaufort, which is about an hour's drive from Ballarat. I had this feeling of his hands all over me. My mother was a bit of a hassle to the superintendent there, **[In accordance with the procedures observed by Parliamentary Committees when dealing with witnesses, as stated in the *Guidelines for the Rights and Responsibilities of Witnesses*, a section has been expunged from this place in the transcript – future reference to 'text expunged']**, for a lot of trouble we

were getting into. My eldest brother used to look after us and do the backing up for us until he went to the hostel.

We got transferred back to Turana because I was getting an eye for the girls, as they say. We were a handful for **[text expunged, see page 3]**. He said, 'Take your children'. So my mum came and got us, and then she had to bring us back; otherwise she would have been up for kidnapping, abduction or whatever. My sister had run away and had said that Turana was much better than the Ballarat Orphanage. By the time we got back to Turana I think my sister had been sent out to Allambie, or something like that.

I went from Turana to Box Hill Boys' Home, where I did see sexual abuse going on with this young fella. It just sort of made me feel sick that a thing like this could happen. I saw this man and this young fella **[text expunged, see page 3]**, and I blacked out, so I do not know what I could prove. It was listed that my mum could not get me to go away on holidays. But there was a man at Box Hill **[text expunged, see page 3]**. That was the name he went by. I spent two months there, and I have three memories.

There was a big fire in the Dandenongs in probably May 1963 or 1964. A koala was burnt in a tree. A big coloured woman tried to catch it and it scratched her. I went fishing with that fella. He got really wild because I had not really been out fishing, eeling, before, and I dropped an eel in the grass and everything got tangled up as it would. He got pretty loud at me about that. The other time there was a snake following my brother, and I threw a stick and killed the snake. But those are the only memories I have of the two months I spent at this fella's place.

I would go out with other families. I had been two years with this other family. They were different. They went down to Rosebud. They were good times. That was most probably just before I was transferred to Turana. I can remember those times, but I cannot remember the times before.

Then I started getting into trouble. I started running away. I was beaten lots of times; not only myself, but my brothers were, too. I have this long, lingering pain in me that something has made me this person that I am, where I think I am no good to anyone. I think I am a little black brat or a little black bastard. I have never had anything nice said to me. In my later days in life if anyone speaks nicely about me, I get pretty emotional, because most probably I have never had that emotion showed to me or had people talk to me in that way before — emotion.

I went straight from the boys home to the prison system. I had run away from the boys home. The screws were hurt — not by me. I just grabbed the keys to get out. I went to Pentridge. About two or three times a week the screws would come in. They knew what I was in for. They would beat me around with their batons, strip-search me and throw my stuff all around the cell. Until we went to court we had to scrub D division — the ground floor. We had a piece of rag, a bucket with water in it and a scrubbing brush, and we had to scrub all that bluestone bottom and all the catwalks up the two tiers. They would come every morning and say, 'The three volunteers from Turana, can you come out?'. I just hoped that it would not go on once I got over to the other side, but once I got to the other side I became the schoolteacher's runner, running the school messages around the prison. He would help me bring the papers in, read and do a bit of maths or whatever.

At the time of getting out, they were going to keep me behind on a YTC sentence that I did not do. The teacher thought that was a bit rude. They asked me what kind of job I would like. I said, 'Well, I wouldn't mind going to sea'. I tried the royal navy, and they would not have me. The army would not have me. So I tried the merchant navy. They asked around, the stevedores, and I had just about given up. Then I went in one day for a medical. This is where the priest did come in handy. The second time I went in for a job interview, and when I got back to prison everyone had to stay where they were until it was lockdown time. I was 17 going on 18. At lockup time I was on one side of the grille until I got the all clear that everything was accounted for. I was talking to this priest on the other side of the grille, and we started talking about what I had done that day. I told him I had gone in for a job with the merchant navy, and he said, 'Oh, I know a shipowner. I'll see what I can do'. A week or two later I was out. I would have jumped a queue that long to get into the merchant navy. The priest did something good then, but after that it was just pure victimisation and racism by the magistrate and the police.

When I was off the ship, I could not gather with people without the police picking on me all the time. Three times I have been jailed for vagrancy. I have got a lot of resisting arrest and assaulting police charges behind

me, and I have been on drugs since 1968. I have been to South Africa. I have seen apartheid. I have been to the mother country. They would not let me enter. I had a trip of three months; I did 28 days locked up. Just out of Tahiti; I injected every day. The Italians said, 'We'll see what we'll give this fellow today and make him forget he had ever come on an Italian ship'. I get back to Melbourne and I am jailed for vagrancy, two years for perjury — said I was receiving money, I was not, from the merchant navy. That started my life in and out of prison from 67 to 79, and with the kind of abuse and victimisation, racism and all up there, I say I am a government-made man. I have been accustomed to being looked after, you know, and I would love to be looked after in my older days as I would like to look after my children, just like any of you would like your children to be looked after. That is my complaint, and that is where I stand at the moment, I think.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Uncle Howard. I know that members will want to ask questions to various of your members.

Uncle HOWARD — Yes.

The CHAIR — I will just ask Uncle Murray if he could make a few comments to the committee, and then I will ask Uncle Jack if he would not mind making a couple of comments also to the committee. Please, if you would like to.

Uncle MURRAY — Madam Chairperson, committee members, I trust you have read my submission?

The CHAIR — Thank you, yes.

Uncle MURRAY — Also, as you would notice at the end, I would like to speak on behalf of a family member. I am the only one of that family left to speak for him. I would like to do that if it is permissible, please?

The CHAIR — I beg your pardon?

Uncle MURRAY — I said I would like to speak on behalf of my cousin, if that is permissible?

The CHAIR — That is fine.

Uncle MURRAY — As you would know, I was taken from my auntie and uncle in 1949; I was 10 years old. We were taken from a place called Bruthen in East Gippsland. We went into the Turana youth centre for a short period of time. As I stated in my submission, the Turana youth centre was a very traumatic experience for me. But as I say, listening to some of the other submissions that I have heard, my experience at Turana was a very minor part of what I would like to express for my cousin John because of what happened to him in places like the Bayswater home and The Basin. Both of those places had a very traumatic effect on my cousin John. He came to the Ballarat orphanage in 1950, and he was still showing signs of the abuse that he had suffered in those two places. He really did show signs of being physically abused. The marks were still on him. I said the physical marks will fade but the traumatic, in the mind, does not go away. As I said, my experience at Turana youth centre was a very, very minor part compared to what my cousin John and his family had put up with. Again, it really is something that I would like to express to you at the committee on behalf of John and his family because he is not here to voice what he would have to say. I hope that you will bear with me and hear me out on his behalf. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Uncle Murray. Uncle Jack.

Uncle JACK — Hi. My life is pretty much an open book since I outed it in the documentary *Bastardy* and the follow-up play through Ilbjerri theatre's *Jack Charles v. The Crown*. I was taken under the assimilation policy and placed into a home with all the forgotten Australians. I was the only Aboriginal person during my whole 12-year tenancy in the Salvation Army home at Box Hill. But I received and copped a lot of the abuse from the officers, as much as the forgotten Australians. When I was in my last jail sentence 10 years ago I was asked by a bunch of fellows in Loddon jail to give them my phone number. They wanted to give my phone number to Ryan Carlisle Thomas; they told me there was a class action against the Salvation Army and the treatment, and I would be the perfect person to give credibility and validate the stories of what went on at Box Hill Boys' Home. And I did say — they mentioned one of the names of one of the officers there and I said, 'When you mention that name you open a certain can of worms for me that I have been trying to keep in the back of the old grey matter' and that.

So I was released, and certainly enough Ryan Carlisle Thomas contacted me and I was able to give them evidence. In telling them what happened at Box Hill I had to expose what happened to me because my bed was the first bed where he would come along and do certain things with me and that. They did ask me: would I join the class action. I still had that religious streak that was shoved into us at Box Hill. I did leave Box Hill originally at 14 a devout Christian — whitewashed, completely; my Aboriginality lost totally. It was not until I became a failed foster kid and met all the other failed foster kids and adopted kids in the Royal Park home for juvenile offenders, Turana. If you failed, you foster kids, that is the place where you had to go. I am mainly now looking at what was missing during my time after I left Box Hill Boys' Home.

There was no counselling. The child protection people were not interested in my stories of having met my brother a month before I left home. Just about a month before I left Box Hill Boys' Home a group of Aboriginal kids came through — my first sighting of Aboriginal kids. They were all the Edwards brothers. And amongst them was my brother Arthur; he said he was named Arthur. I can recall saying to him, 'It would be funny if we were brothers' and that. I told these stories to the child protection person that was looking after me when I was fostered to the widow Murphy up in Blackburn. But there was no interest in seeking further members of my family and that.

So what I am suggesting now is that because our prisons are privatised there needs to be — since I have left jail I have been trying to get back into Victorian prisons. That is my role in life as an Aboriginal elder: to go back into prisons and share the journey. I have a lot of credibility in Victorian prisons. My job in there was to set up pottery shops. I would be shanghaied from a walled prison to open camps, and I would set up a pottery shop. I called my jail pottery shops Psychoceramica; it is virtually the name of a crackpot. But I was able to teach and engage with people, both black and white. I saw that I had a lot of pull in prisons.

So when I left I thought, 'Well, I should return to prison to keep on focusing on sharing the journey that there is life beyond drugs, alcohol, crime time, homelessness, et cetera'. But it has been difficult. I mean, the only jail that has ever invited me back is way over in Albany, a high-security jail. When I was at the festival last year over there I was doing *Jack Charles v. The Crown*. Before bumping into Perth to finish off the festival season there, the high security governor of the jail down there invited me in. It was the best gig I have ever done. Those of us with the lived experiences have the certain words that we could throw at the people that we are trying to engage — counsel and that. I ran with it, and it was such a success. Because I am the one who can say, 'Well, look. I am here to tweak your black consciences'. There were 70 blackfellas and about 3 whites. 'I am here to tweak your black consciences. Real blackfellas do not shoot white powder. Real blackfellas know where their kids are'. It expands on this, and it worked. It took the governor about half an hour to prise me from the clutches of the prisoners.

That is why I am saying that I think that the privatisation of jails does not allow ex-prisoners to go back into jail to share the journey and to be a significant counsel person to show a future and to give guidance and directions. That is my role in life. If I had my druthers I would stop being a you-beaut actor going around Australia following the festival circuits. I like to say now that I have become a festival junkie. I would rather focus on the humanities; that is my role in life.

There is that element missing. You need to take people with the lived experience seriously, and that is why I wrote *Jack Charles v. the Crown*. In the third act I am doing an Eddie Mabo at the High Court. I want my criminal record sealed for the required 99 years so I can set up my own thing and buy a workshop over here in Collingwood or Fitzroy and go back into prisons and institutions and schools at will to talk and share the journey. It comes best from the people with the lived experience. Thank you very much for listening to me.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Uncle Jack, and I thank all of you for sharing your stories with us and your thoughts on this very important issue. Uncle Howard, in your submission that you supplied to us you say that, 'Some of us want a healing place; some of them want healing'. Can you clarify for me whether the healing comes for those people seeking it from the healing place? Does that go hand in hand, or is it separate?

Uncle HOWARD — No, it goes hand in hand. We definitely need healing. We need healing places. The biggest thing of all is that we definitely need housing for stolen generation people who are way down the list. That is why our jails are full, because of overcrowding, and then drugs and alcohol comes into it.

The CHAIR — It is a supporting — —

Uncle HOWARD — Yes, to be supportive. People want healing. People would like money. It covers quite a bit, I guess.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Uncle HOWARD — We all need a bit of healing.

The CHAIR — Thanks for that clarification.

Mr McGUIRE — I would like to acknowledge every one of you for the fortitude you have shown here today in testifying before this inquiry. You have all been through an extraordinary time from the stolen generation to institutionalisation and then to cases of sexual abuse. Uncle Howard, I would like to ask you first of all if you can just for the record explain a little bit more about the sexual abuse that you witnessed, because obviously we are focusing primarily on that issue. If you could just explain what you saw, what happened to you or what were the circumstances that you saw?

Uncle HOWARD — I really cannot remember anything at Ballarat, but I did see this man, [text expunged, see page 3]. — there was this young fella who was giving him oral sex, and there were quite a few boys there. I do not know what it was all about, but just seeing that — after that it is a blackout; but it did go on behind closed doors, when you are taken away and when you are not on the premises — that is about it. But I did see it go on in the institutions and I did see it go on in prison, and I thought, ‘What a horrible culture I am mixed up with here’. That is about all I can say on it, but it did go on. It must be horrendous for the people. As people say, ‘Yeah, you’ve been touched’. I am on a rollercoaster; I get my highs and my lows and, as I said, if anyone says anything nice about me, I get emotional, because I think I am not that person — I am a dirty blackfella, a boong. I have been molested, and it has left a bad image on my lifestyle that does not help me to improve the situation that I have got myself into and that I have been in for a long time. I think I am still here today thanks to the victimisation of the police and because I was in and out of prison so many times. I could have been out there dead in the gutter. I have died a couple of times; I must admit that, but I am here by the grace of the great spirit, and I am here to try to fight for people’s rights. We have rights.

The next fight I am fighting is jurisdiction. Where do I go to from here? It has been a struggle and a pain in my head for the last 40 or 50 years. I just wonder when it is going to end; when it is going to come to the end of it all. I do not know; there is probably another 20 years in me, but blackfellas do not live long these days. I am here by the grace of my children and my grandchildren. I have never had long relationships with women. I have three children by three different wives, and I have been in and out of relationships for most of my life. It is all part of the institutional upbringing and the molesting. You just cannot lead a normal life.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Uncle Howard, for answering Mr McGuire’s question. In your answer an allegation was made, so as Chair I formally advise you and members of the media and the public gallery that pending a review of publication of the Hansard transcript, all reporting of your evidence will be suppressed pending further notice and order of the committee. That was just in relation to your answer to the first part of Mr McGuire’s question. As long as you understand that?

Uncle HOWARD — Yes, that is fine.

Mrs COOTE — Uncle Murray, Uncle Howard and Uncle Jack, thank you for sharing your stories today; they were very powerful. I have a question for Alister, and it is really more a point of clarification on your submission. On page 2 you talk about working with the stolen generations and you say that your clients face a number of challenges regarding the impact of sexual abuse while confined in institutions compounded by the experience of cultural loss, and that the rate of sexual abuse among Indigenous clients who were institutionalised is extremely high. Do you have some empirical evidence in relation to Victoria for that statement? Could you point us in the direction of seeking that empirical evidence to support that statement?

Mr McKEICH — I would not say it is empirical evidence, but you can refer to the *Bringing them Home* report, which came out in 1997. That would probably be the best. It was an Australia-wide report which talks a lot about the rates of sexual abuse within the stolen generations.

Mrs COOTE — It was more about Victoria, and I am aware of that report. It is more about what happened here in Victoria, because we have a slightly different set of circumstances.

Mr McKEICH — Sure, yes.

Mrs COOTE — You cannot point us in the right direction for that?

Mr McKEICH — The majority of it is just mainly through clients' anecdotal testimonies that we are working with at the moment.

Mrs COOTE — Okay. Could I just ask also whether it is actually the rate of Aboriginal children that were institutionalised at the time which was greater than what happened to the rest of the population or was it that in institutions the children of the Aboriginal culture were more abused than the other children in those institutions?

Mr McKEICH — Probably more the previous part of your statement. I would say within the Victorian Aboriginal community the rates of children having been removed and placed in institutions was very high comparatively speaking to non-Indigenous population. There was a higher rate of removal of Aboriginal children than non-Aboriginal children, particularly I think during the 50s and 60s.

Mrs COOTE — Do you have anywhere that you could tell us to go to back that up?

Mr McKEICH — I could probably find something when I get back to the office in terms of some of the reports that we review and some of the statements that we have.

Mrs COOTE — That would be particularly interesting. I am just interested in Victoria, not Australia wide. If you have any empirical data, that would be very useful. Thank you all very much indeed.

Uncle MURRAY — Could I perhaps clear something up here. If you take a white person and put him in an institution, nothing changes. It is just that he has gone from whatever he was doing somewhere else. If you take an Indigenous person out of their environment and put them where there are things white people are expected to do yet Aboriginal people do not seem to be expected to do that, it makes a whole lot of difference to people's attitudes to us. If you are a good white person or even half good, you get treated that way. However, if you are an Aboriginal or Indigenous person, that does not come into their thinking at all; you are just nobody. In fact do you remember when we got the vote — 1967. We were not recognised as anything until then, and that was because attitudes towards us did not make any difference. If I am sitting here next to you, you would get preference over me. That is just the way it was.

The CHAIR — Thank you. We have heard a lot of very difficult stories from a lot of people during this inquiry, and thank you for your contribution.

Ms HALFPENNY — I want to ask you, Uncle Jack, about your time at the Bayswater Boys' Home — —

Uncle JACK — Box Hill. I was not naughty enough to be removed to Bayswater.

Ms HALFPENNY — Box Hill, sorry — run by the Salvation Army. We have heard a lot about the Bayswater institution. In terms of the class action and what came out of that, you say in your submission that you were pretty disappointed in the attitude. Can you explain a little about what happened, how you were dealt with and what came out of that action?

Uncle JACK — As I said, I never wanted to sue, but Ryan Carlisle Thomas pulled me into the office and said, 'Listen, we're not working for the stolen, Jack; we're working for the forgotten, and you were lumbered in there with them and you copped it, and many of them have validated the stories of what happened to you because they saw you on telly'. I was blown away by that fact. I did find a measure of closure because I got a large sum of money and was happy with that, but the letter that came with it about the alleged offences just blew me away, but it is finished business with me now. I have had to put it in a certain chapter. Because I am able to weave what has happened in my life in my stories, like *Jack Charles v. the Crown* and a future book et cetera, I am able to find healing in my own right. They never admitted totally to it — they were alleged offences. I suppose I am running with it. I am happy that I got a large measure of compensation. That was exciting. They admitted that something happened out there. I was totally blown away by the fact that legal people would take my word for what went on and that people believed what went on. That has helped me enormously, that nobody was pulling me out.

But I do say that Box Hill Boys' Home embedded in me a streak of gayness that does not sit too well with me now as a self-proclaimed elder, but I have to run with it because my life is an open book and everybody knows it. It has been beaut now having done that — that is all part — and white Australia is beginning to understand what went on through our stories, but particularly through mine doing the documentary *Bastardy*. That was an eye-opener for many people here in Australia and around the world. *Bastardy* also embellishes my life further. I have found a measure of closure, but, as I say, being gay does not sit too well with me as a self-proclaimed elder.

Uncle HOWARD — One more thing. I was also called in to Ryan Carlisle Thomas, and I was given a very small sum of money because I did not have my head together, I did not have my papers together and I did not have my psych report — I did not have all that. I got a measly sum and no apology. There are two sides to that point.

Ms HALFPENNY — Was that from the Salvation Army or the Catholic Church?

Uncle HOWARD — From the Salvation Army.

The CHAIR — Thank you for pointing that out.

Mr O'BRIEN — That was where my question was going to go to, and I would like any or all of you to answer it. I am looking at your formal submission, and two of the recommendations in dot points on the last page are, firstly:

The Catholic Church should exclude any confessions of sexual abuse from their vow of silence. There should be mandatory reporting for such allegations.

The second is:

There needs to be an acknowledgement that abuse has occurred in the past, and all past allegations need to be fully and openly investigated.

What does that mean, particularly the acknowledgement that abuse has occurred in the past? I am conscious that it might be a crossover for you as all one experience, but in terms of how the issues are categorised in society, we have the sexual abuse in non-government institutions, which this inquiry is looking at, and you have had previous inquiries looking particularly at the stolen generation, and there has been obviously the Prime Minister's apology on that. I note, Uncle Murray, that your article was prior to that. Perhaps drawing on your experience in relation to the effect of the apology in relation to the stolen generation and how much detail there needs to be for individual cases, what do you mean when you ask that there needs to be an acknowledgement that abuse has occurred in the past and that all past allegations need to be fully and openly investigated, particularly for sexual abuse?

Uncle MURRAY — First of all, as I noted earlier, we needed to be recognised as people, and it seemed to be that we were not recognised as anything. It was just 'those black so-and-sos' but nothing else. This is where we needed first to be acknowledged as people and then we get on to what had happened to us. I feel that this really is the crux of the whole thing, because if we were not recognised as people, they just did not bother with us. They did not bother to ask, 'Are you hurting? Have you missed something?', or whatever. All they did was just say, 'That's a black person; we don't care'. That seemed to be the attitude.

Mr O'BRIEN — That was particularly prior to 1967, and I know you are all older than that. Are there any other answers?

Uncle JACK — I wanted to say that I do not remember anything being said across the table to me at the out-of-court sessions at the legal precinct up the road that we were not allowed to disclose the sum or what happened and all that. My role as an Aboriginal is that I will out it in any case because I intend to write the book, regardless of whether I have been told, 'You will be given this sum of money as long as you — —

Nobody has asked me to sign a paper, I do not think, not to disclose what went on or how much I received. I do not think I should be keeping it dark anyway.

The CHAIR — Uncle Howard, would you like to make a comment to Mr O'Brien's question? You do not have to if you do not.

Uncle HOWARD — No. I did not really hear or understand it too well.

Mr O'BRIEN — I was just asking what a detailed acknowledgement of the abuse means. What would that mean?

Uncle HOWARD — What does the detail of the abuse mean?

Mr O'BRIEN — A detailed acknowledgement that the abuse has occurred is one of the things you are seeking and you say this inquiry should deliver. Could you describe the sorts of things you would like to be said as part of that, particularly if anything is left unsaid that you think should be said at the moment?

The CHAIR — You might not have a view. It is fine if you do not.

Uncle HOWARD — I do not think I have a view at the moment.

Uncle MURRAY — For me personally, the apology meant that we were recognised as somebody and we are able to heal. Maybe an acknowledgement of being abused will also go towards helping healing. It really is something that is very real, because when the then Prime Minister, Kevin, gave the apology I could see in all the people around me that it was what we needed to make us heal. We were recognised as people. Up until that time the stolen generation was a myth in people's minds. We were nothing. Because of being recognised through the apology, we were able to heal and get on with our lives, and hopefully the same thing will happen here. Recognising that the abuse did occur to people will certainly go a long way to making sure that they are able to get on with their lives.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thanks, Uncle Murray. Alister, do you want to add anything?

Mr McKEICH — I want to reiterate what Uncle Jack Charles mentioned before. The statement from the Salvation Army upon settlement said that they were only alleged offences. I think we have discussed this before. Also, in Connecting Home's experience the 2008 apology did make a lot of difference in many people's lives from the Indigenous community. For some people it did not, but I would back Uncle Murray's statement that a formal apology from some of these church groups would go a long way towards the healing of people such as Uncle Jack.

Uncle HOWARD — I met Mr Rudd at the apology. I had my clap sticks, and everyone was walking in. I was down near the end, and I got up to Mr Rudd. He said, 'What do you think about the day?', and I said, 'It's been a long time coming, Kev, not without compensation or treaty'. I said, 'It's all a question of balance'. I said a few more words that I cannot repeat, but Kevin 07 remembers.

The CHAIR — I am sure he does.

Uncle HOWARD — The apology meant a lot to me, and it meant a lot to all the people who were involved up there. While I had the platform, I got up there and sang 'We shall overcome one day', and it is deep in my heart that we shall overcome one day.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I note that in your submission to us you refer to the royal commission, so no doubt you will want to present to them too. On behalf of the committee, I thank you all very much for appearing before us this afternoon. Your evidence has been most helpful. Thank you again.

Witnesses withdrew.

The CHAIR — That concludes the public hearings for today, so I will ask members of the public gallery to leave so we can continue with in camera sessions. Thank you very much for your attendance.

Proceedings in camera follow.