

Letter to State

Government Inquiry into Religious and Organisational Abuse of Victorian Children

Submission by Helen Dawson

[REDACTED]

In regards to Human Rights and Institutionalisation of Children

Dr. Willie McCarney "Children in Institutions" Human Rights Review, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2011

"No residential institution, no matter how well meaning, can replace the family environment so essential to every child."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In my experience, and the scientific literature of the past 30 years at least, children are best understood by their biological relatives. 84% of behaviour is genetically based, of course a biological parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle is more likely to understand the child's behaviour. It is about time the Judiciary, the Social Work profession and the State Government caught up with this FACT and prioritised Kinship care for children who have a disrupted home life. A grandparent who has to take a child to visit a parent in prison will make sure the child is reassured on the way, and has explanation and learns problem solving skills to deal with a drug dependent parent or a violent parent. The rest of the extended family discuss and act on dealing with this person in the real world, over time, so that the child learns coping skills, and can set boundaries in regards to the parent. The child still has access to brothers and sisters, cousins, extended family events, and holidays.

I have dealt with street kids who are let out of 'Care' to visit parents, and don't have any food to eat for the weekend, because the parent can't get it together to feed the child. The child has NO back up to deal with this situation. It is frightening and awful for the child to be going back and forth from these Court Ordered scenarios with NO help. The Privacy of the individuals in the process is used to isolate the child, and create exactly the vulnerability situations that the system is supposedly trying to avoid. Just ridiculous.

The Victorian Institutions in this Inquiry had less than 2% natural orphans. The rest had families who for various reasons, such as sickness, family break up, lack of access to housing, false reassurance from Churches and professionals, forced adoptions, handed their children over. Many were private placements, and paid fees to the Institutions to care for the children, visited, brought gifts, sent extra money, most of which the children in Care never received. Parents were systematically discouraged from visiting, and children were systematically farmed out to other people. Why? Because the children could then be used as slave labor, and to people who were sexual predators, under the guise of Adoptions and Foster care.

Berry St, Anglicare, Catholic Family Welfare will all swear blue in the face that the Foster care system only has 'lovely, caring people'. How is it then, that young women who have been in Care, consistently report that they have been sexually abused in those placements. While volunteering at Council of Single Mothers and Their Children in the 1990s, it was alarming and incredibly sad, that young women who were pregnant, who had been in the Department of Human Services so called Care, had consistently suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their Carers. This system just DOESN'T WORK.

During my childhood I often stayed in Doongala Rd The Basin, and was aware of the boys from Bayswater Boys home running away and hiding out at The Basin Theatre, which was in a timber and tin shed just a few hundred metres from the Boys Home. The kids would get eggs from the chooks, and the family would call the police, who would take them straight back to the Salvos. It was a case of 'We don't like having to do this, but what else can we do?'

My involvement in dealing with Forgotten Australians, State Wards, Foster Care mums and kids, is from the age of 18 until the present. I have been consistently horrified by the stories, behaviour and distress of survivors. I haven't met ANY of the 'happy, normal' Forgotten Australians that the Salvos and the Catholic Church claim to have produced.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am putting this submission in on behalf of the some of the homeless men and women of Melbourne, who grew up in Institutions, who have no family, who are difficult to deal with, who get released from jail, and have nowhere to go, who are turned away by the Churches on a Sunday, who are collected by the Police at the behest of clergy and dropped off at the Mission in St Kilda, given a \$20 voucher for one night's or one weeks accommodation if they are lucky, and left to cope, or not cope on the streets. The Salvos agencies say 'We've already helped you' to them and hand out a measly \$10 voucher, or no help at all, over and over again. They go to Centrelink and say they can't cope, they really can't cope, and never have, they're a bag of nerves. Salvos Eastcare workers, Homeground, all the workers I have spoken to with Forgotten Australians pleading for help over the years have said that these are the most distressed and saddest people they have to deal with. Forgotten Australians are immensely over represented in the homeless population around Australia, because they missed out on learning to read and write, they missed out on good health, they have PROBLEMS. Next time you see an Aussie beggar on Collins Street, how about stopping for a chat and finding out about their lives.

I am putting this submission in on behalf of the girls from Abbotsford Convent Laundries who I have met over 4 years of working at Abbotsford Convent as they have visited the site, and talked about their lives. Some were in the Orphanage, some were on Court Orders. The girls who were pregnant were traumatised at the outset on arrival at the Convent, being stripped naked and whipped by the Nuns with cat-on-nine tails even up to the 1960's. This is Convict era barbarity. They were put to work 12 hours a day, their babies taken from them without consent.

They went through a system that was as bad as the Holocaust, fed horse oats and tea, used as child slave labour, beaten for making eye contact with other children, locked up for any infringement, without medical attention, without pity.

They are elderly ladies, who have had a terrible time, and deserve the respect of the Parliament and the respect of the Public Service for their dignity, despite having broken hearts and broken bodies. These people need real Redress from the State Government to deal with their ongoing medical and ageing needs. They are the last people who will ask for it for themselves.

[REDACTED] Surely the

Victorian Government can insist that the Churches contribute to Redress for all of the very few remaining survivors.

The Victorian Government needs to compel the Institutions that profited from child slave labour of Victorian children to pay back the Stolen Wages with interest of the work done in laundries, saw mills, market gardens, farms, roadworks, and other contract work undertaken by the children. The bank accounts held in the children's names were kept by the Institutions, all of that also needs to be returned to them with appropriate interest. This has been done in Europe for the slave labour of the Holocaust, it can be done here.

reference Work of Dr Rosalind Kidd in Queensland "Trustees on Trial - recovering the stolen wages"

[REDACTED]

Over the years there have been various Charitable Foundations and Trusts which have been set up to benefit Victorian Orphans and Homeless people. These have systematically been taken over by the Churches and Organisations that provide 'services' in Victoria.

It is my estimation from dealing with the Salvos and other Charities, that far less than 5% of moneys received to help the homeless actually goes to direct benefit of homeless people. It is time for the State Government to review the provision of services by Not For Profit Sector, as it is inefficient and inadequate, and mostly uselessly spent on offices, social workers, cars and meetings. If the money spent on housing workers was spent on purchasing existing housing in rural areas that is unused, there wouldn't be a housing crisis.

If the Ministry of Housing put solar panels on the roofs of their properties, they could reduce the poverty levels of their tenants and derive an income from the electricity back into State Government coffers.

My request to the Inquiry is straight forward.

Firstly, it would be an improvement to the operation of the Victorian Government if all public servants who in the course of their duties are directly responsible for Children in Care to be tested for sexual response to Child Pornography, so that those who have up until now, and in the future, operated under the aegis of the Government, in whatever Department, are weeded out.

It would be an improvement to the operation of the Working with Children Check if it included a direct test for sexual response to Child Pornography, so that those adults who have a sexual attraction to children do not get access to them in the course of their work or volunteering.

The Victorian Government has reduced the road toll and accident rates on our roads by testing drivers for alcohol and drugs, and put penalties in place for repeat offenders that take the offenders off the roads. The same approach needs to happen in regards to protecting children from sex offenders.

It is no longer valid to allow anyone with a suitable paper based qualification access to children.

The Government operates in a fairyland of paper based 'professionalism'.

Sexual predators will do PhDs in Child Psychology, qualify as Steiner teachers saying yes to teaching in pastel colours,

will happily sign up for night shifts as Child Protection Workers, and take kids on Church camps at every opportunity.

Therefore it is necessary to have a physical, empirical test of an adults sexual orientation before allowing them access to children.

Every large mining company has a test of hand eye co-ordination before allowing workers onto the site.

The judiciary and lawyers, should be drug and alcohol tested on Court sitting days, Parliamentarians on sitting days, so at least they are working to the same standards that they and the Government are demanding of the community.

I am asking the Inquiry to establish a Royal Commission to find the missing Former State Wards, to find out what happened to them.

How can you possibly hold an Inquiry without knowing who it is about?

The Catholic Church, Salvation Army and other organisations such as Anglicare, Berry St will lie, and lie and lie to cover up the disasterous results of their Institutional and Foster Care programs. 'They would never have amounted to much anyway, so it doesn't matter what happened to them', seems to be the professional, and religious consensus, 'We've done as much as we can', which is NOT MUCH, really.

The Department of Human Services does the biggest cover up of all, managing to evade any direct scrutiny in this Inquiry yet again, in regards to the 16 Institutions they ran directly, and their so called services, such as Open Place, which is once again, promising help and providing nothing but platitudes and some document searching.

My questions for the Inquiry.

"How many children survived Institutionalisation?"

Open Place has less than 3000 Victorian Forgotten Australians who grew up in Victoria on their books. Where's all the rest?

How is it that the Department of Human Services has no idea what has happened to most of the people who were children in their care?

How is it that the different Church organisations that ran Childrens Homes and Institutions have no idea what happened to the children they brought up from infancy, or separated from their families?

The Institutions were charged with a Duty of Care of each Child.

The Government was charged with a Duty of Care of each Child.

The Courts and Social Workers sent one child after another into Institutions 'for their own good and the good of the community', in blind faith. Blind faith doesn't protect children.

The Federal and State Governments, and the donations of the whole Victorian community, paid for services for each Child.

Each Child needs to be found.

The List can be compiled from:

Childrens Court Records

Police Records

State Ward Records by Number and Identity

Adoption Records

Hospital Admission Records

Mental Health Records

Corrections Records

Centrelink Records

Check the List of Children sent to the Churches and Organisations against:

Births Deaths and Marriages

Drivers Licences,

Police Records

Corrections Records

There will be thousands missing. There are thousands missing. Mostly they have died prematurely.

The suicide statistics for Victorian men have an 'unexplained increase in deaths in Victoria' between 1970s and 1990s, which coincides with the largest numbers of adult Forgotten Australians being in their 20's and 30's, the age group most likely to take their own lives. 25% of the suicides are attributable to migrants, the increase in the rest is 'unexplained'. I would suggest to the Inquiry that there would be a considerable number of former State Wards, Former Child Migrants, Private Placement and Former Incarcerated Children in the Coroners Lists.

Once a list of Children has been established, the List can then be checked off against the following:

Births Deaths and Marriages

Missing Persons

Centrelink former names

Once the List of Missing and Unaccounted for Children is known there needs to be a Victorian Royal Commission, which has the powers to :

Subpoena the Rolls and Day Books of the Institutions for each and every missing Child, those who should be adults now.

There should be a case to answer for every child who was under State Care or went through the Court system, who was under the Duty of Care of the Department of Human Services.

And the time for that to happen is now.

The Churches and Institutions think it is about them, they will paint the town white in the biggest blizzard of paperwork to cover up former and ongoing incompetence and neglect.

Institution reunions can rustle up 50 or 60 former child inmates for yearly reunions, out of the thousands of children who passed through their doors.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Christian Brothers in their submission to the Federal Government Inquiry said:

" They are all grown up with families", on the website for the Mary McKillop centre on the site in Sth Melbourne, it says "They are all grown up with families".

It was evident at the Apology that empirically, at least for St Vincents Boys Home in the 1970s, that this is a blatant lie.

There is an 'anecdotal' Life Expectancy of about age 25 for St Vincents Boys Home, as stated by the Priests to the boys in the 1970's and 1980's, which is worse than the worst remote aboriginal community at the time, that is worse than any country on earth.

How could this possibly happen less than 10km from the Childrens Hospital, less than 5 km from the Department of Human Services head office, in the middle of a well healed, well fed community, that gave donations constantly on top of Government funding to help with the welfare of these kids?

Out of the Victorian survivors who look for family, who approach the Department, who join Self Help Organisations such as CLAN have anecdotally found out that they are LUCKY to be alive. Some of them protest, [REDACTED] have been asking for investigations into Child Abuse for 20 years.

The Department of Human Suffering staff have walked past their monthly CLAN protest for the last 5 years, thinking,

'There's only a few of them'. Well there is only a few of them for a reason.

They were thrown to the Wolves by the Judiciary, by the Department.

They were given to Wolves in Sheeps clothing, who were above suspicion and above reproach, whatever they did was in 'Gods Name', so it must have been appropriate.

They went through a system with no identity.

The system said 'Carers are Good', 'Children are Bad'.

They went through a system where the Carers told them they were BAD every day.

They went through a system where they were deliberately isolated from their brothers and sisters and families, told that other family members were dead or didn't want them.

They went through a system that condemned them to further incarceration and cast a shadow over their entire lives. They have barely survived their childhoods, and they are haunted by their knowledge of all the children that didn't survive.

One of the reasons the Sole Parent Pension was established by the Whitlam Government is that the Council of Single Mothers presented them with the evidence that more than 50% of Relinquishing Mothers had attempted suicide in the months after the birth of their child. The Alfred Hospital had done a survey of their admissions, and was able to back up their claim. Mothers who had managed to keep their children but had no means of support couldn't get medicine or help with sick children. It was a grim reality of complete deprivation and social ostracisation. It was horrendous. It is still sickening.

There are so few survivors because there are so many that died in care, or soon after, or in their 20's.

The big statistical bump in Male Suicides between 1970 to 1994, can be partly explained as 25% of non-Australian background, as coming from post WWII immigration. The other 75% is unexplained. Anecdotally many FAs who were institutionalised in Victoria committed suicide or died by other means in their late teens, 20's and 30's.

ABS Epidemiological distribution of suicide in Australia 1964 - 1997

Adult and elderly suicide rates in the states of Victoria have declined since 1964. Conversely, there is a trend of increasing suicide rates for youth. This trend was also apparent for both young men and young women in the State of Victoria, which covers the time span of this Inquiry. Since the mid 1990s the rate of suicides in this age group as declined.

Lets get to the empirical evidence, that has NEVER been analysed, that has NEVER had a University study, that has NEVER been examined. The State Archives and the Department of Human Services hold the State Ward Register, the Courts hold the Record of Children Placed in Care or Custody.

To the People in the Department of Human Services who will say it can't be done, I have this to say:

It HAS to be done.

It is the duty of this Government Inquiry to establish if the Government's Duty of Care has been carried out.

That can only be empirically established by finding ALL of the people who have been through the Government and Institutional and 'Care' systems.

I attended the Salvation Army National Apology at Old Parliament House in Canberra in November 2010.

Out of 35,000 children who went through Salvation Army Childrens Homes, as a number on a toothbrush rack, as a soul to be saved, the Salvation Army National couldn't find even ONE person alive who could say it was okay to have been through their system. Not ONE. The media, were shut out of the event of 200 upset angry former inmates, and the speech by the President of CLAN detailing the terrible suffering metered out to the children was suppressed. [REDACTED] other men up to the age of 84, went outside to the media, rolled up their sleeves and showed the scars they had, from systematic beatings with barbed wire, that they endured while being child slave labour, on Salvation Army properties.

The Salvation Army in Victoria still denies to the law firms, still denies to the Government that they had a timber mill at Bayswater, still denies they used children every day as slave labor, still denies they let staff and Salvation Army officers rape, torture and kill children systematically with impunity across Australia for over 50 years. When are they going to be brought to justice?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In the 1950's 1960s and 1970's thousands of State Wards were lobotomised at Prince Henry's Hospital, after being held at the Observatory Mental Institution next to Government House, opposite the Shrine, as they were deemed 'uncontrollable'.

There are a few survivors. Some are in the boarding houses, and Public Housing, some are in State Care, some have been found by their extended families. Some are known to me personally. Their Records say 'schizophrenic' or some other diagnosis. This was and is a crime against Humanity, perpetrated by the State of Victoria, with the full knowledge of the Medical Board and Prince Henry's Hospital. It is an operation that is done in 10 minutes, and doesn't leave a scar. It destroys memory, it destroys functionality of the frontal lobes, it destroys lives. This is the ultimate betrayal of the life of a child, beside murder, this is a living twilight zone.

How to get better outcomes for the Children.

Victoria has the highest rate of Youth Homelessness in Australia. 26,132 clients

What works best?

Support to maintain a family connection.

What needs to be done in future?

Early intervention programs such as Reconnect, which works with schools and families, have shown to be effective

in reducing Youth Homelessness.

Increased supported accommodation.

Increased services and better planning for young people transitioning out of State Care.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 1 July - 30 September 2011 (SHSC).

From Council to Homeless People Recommendations chp.org.au

Over the last 30 years I have put time, energy and money into supporting my children and other parents and their children as best as I can.

In my opinion, a child is more secure with their biological mother in most circumstances.

Mothers with problems need extra help.

Over the last 25 years I have taken in homeless families into my own home, and street kids, and sick stranded overseas students.

My children have grown up with other Mums and other small kids in the house, who got a chance to get their act together, it just takes a lot of time, effort and extra money to provide a safe home.

When you live in Public Housing, you get a different perspective, because perpetrators will speak freely to you.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It takes a village to raise a child.

In Victoria we have a village full of people who are paid to criticise mothers.

There is nothing more useless on this planet than a Social Worker with a clipboard, who won't lift a finger to help.

There is nothing more useless than a patronising, judgemental Salvo staffer or St Vinnies volunteer sneering in the kitchen, 'You shouldn't waste money on fridge magnets' to a disabled mum who has just been through extreme domestic violence.

There is nothing more agravating than a snotty 22 year old Child Protection Worker criticising your parenting with the benefit of NO RELEVANT life experience.

This is Government money down the drain.

The Child Protection System needs to be staffed by people with at least 10 years life experience of parenting themselves, to even start to deal with the complexities of the situations they have to deal with.

You need to be able to recognise when a child is extremely ill, badly bruised, left out on the step in the rain, and ACT immediately.

Take the child to the Royal Childrens Hospital. If it turns out to be a false alarm, so be it, the child has had a check up.

If it isn't then get into action immediately for a Court Order to REMOVE THE PERPETRATOR, not the child.

Children need to be able to stay in their home, stay with their siblings, stay with their friends at playgroup, kinder, school.

Children who have to be relocated need to go to a safe environment within their extended family or local community, not shunted away to strangers or 'Facilities' where their carers are a roundabout of different people.

If there is no other option than round the clock care for a child in the Foster Care System, then the Foster Carer needs to be paid a proper professional wage and be on the staff of the Department of Human Services, so there is direct accountability and supervision.

It would be useful for the State Government and the Law Reform Commission to review the Statute of Limitations on Child Sex Offences. In my opinion the Statute of Limitations needs to be entirely removed for ALL violent and sexual offences against children.

ie.

Dr Ben Mathews (2003) Limitation Periods and child sexual abuse cases: Law, psychology, time and justice.

Torts Law Journal 11(3):pp. 218-243

<http://eprints.qut.edu.au>

I am personally fed up with dealing with a patriarchal misogynist Government culture, Departments and charities.

I have dedicated much of my time and efforts to helping Forgotten Australians, their children, and people who are homeless in my community on an ongoing basis and will continue to do so. This is my community and my responsibility.

It is time that the Churches and Charities had their tax free status reviewed as to the BENEFITS they provide the community of Victoria. If they do not provide any benefits to the community, and in fact continue to cause harm, by promoting sectarianism, superstition, support and cover for child abusing maniacs, then their tax free status should be withdrawn. A bit of Land Tax would surely cause some pause for actual CONCERN by the Board Members of the Churches and Charities, to clean up their books, and provide REDRESS to the Forgotten Australians, and the children who have subsequently been abused in their Care.

Yours sincerely

Helen Dawson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]