

Forgotten Australians

Families Australia's policy

Vision

Forgotten Australians receive recognition and respect, together with the support they need to restore and enhance their wellbeing

Introduction

Families Australia is Australia's national peak, independent, not-for-profit organisation which promotes the interests of families. Families Australia undertakes research and consults families and family and community service organisations on current family-related issues. The outcomes are disseminated to a wide range of stakeholders. This policy statement concerns Forgotten Australians.

Who are the Forgotten Australians?

The people who identify as Forgotten Australians are generally now aged from around 50 up, though some will be younger. They are survivors of the roughly 500,000 children who found themselves in orphanages, Homes or other out-of-home care in Australia in the 20th century, between 1930 and the 1970s. The reasons varied:

- some were in State care, because the State considered their parents unfit;
- some had parents who were dead, in prison, missing or otherwise unable to care for them;
- others were given up by their parent/s because the parent/s could not provide for them. Sometimes these parents had to work and used the Home as a form of child care. If they could, they paid maintenance to those running the Home;
- children of sole parents, particularly girls, were often removed because of "moral danger".

Findings of the Senate Inquiry

The Senate Community Affairs References Committee conducted an Inquiry and in August 2004 produced a report, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*. The Inquiry allowed many people who had been children in the Australian institutional care system to tell their stories – often for the first time. It revealed a history of neglect and cruelty, of abandonment and exploitation that have left roughly half a million Australians, as well as many child migrants, physically and psychologically scarred.

“...children were for many reasons hidden in institutions and forgotten by society when they were placed in care and again when they were released into the ‘outside’ world...These people who spent part or all of their childhood in an institution, children’s home or out-of-home care....have been the forgotten Australians....It is now time for all Australians to recognise and acknowledge the painful and haunting experiences and memories of this vast number of fellow Australians.”(1.16)

“Apart from specific acts of emotional, mental, physical, psychological and sexual abuse, institutional life itself is inherently abusive.” (2.2)

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

The report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, August 2004.

“It must be acknowledged that children formerly in institutional care are not an homogenous group, and their experiences varied considerably. Some found adults who supported and cared for them; many, unfortunately, found a lack of love and care and even extreme abuse. Their needs for support and assistance will vary considerably. To those whose experiences have scarred them indelibly, we as a nation need to respond with appropriate help.....all levels of government have responsibility for the well being of Australian children.”

Australian Government Response to: *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children.*

The Senate report also dealt with the repercussions, examining current issues confronting this group. Many of these issues were further explored at a conference convened by the Australian Government in June 2006.

Families Australia’s policies

- Families Australia works to achieve family wellbeing for all Australians and their families.
- Families Australia recognises that people who were separated from their families as children and grew up deprived of the love and support children need have suffered from that experience. The sense of abandonment, the confusion and the self-blame create long lasting trauma, often exacerbated by harsh treatment, humiliations, accusations of worthlessness and lack of education or adequate health care.
- The failure of those who had responsibility for these children to care properly for them is reprehensible. There can be no excuse for abuse or neglect of children, and all Australians and governments owe these survivors both support and a commitment to ensure that such horrors never happen again.
- To support the wellbeing of Forgotten Australians and their families, Families Australia believes the following is required:
 - respect and understanding (awareness raising with services, governments and all Australians, access to personal histories),
 - appropriate services (tailored services, increased capacity for services and training to address unique needs),
 - community support (public awareness and education).
- Families Australia supports the struggle of the Forgotten Australians and their families to restore and enhance their wellbeing. We acknowledge their horrific experiences and the continuing impact of those experiences on their lives and those of their families. We admire the strength and resilience of the survivors and respect their views on their own situations and needs.
- Forgotten Australians are entitled to have their history told and to have supported access to their own personal histories. They are entitled to receive full acknowledgement of, and apologies for, the suffering they experienced.

Reparation may include: formal statements of responsibility and regret, financial redress, personal financial assistance, appropriate and adequate services or a combination of these.

- Forgotten Australians are entitled to respect as they promote the needs of their cohort. They are entitled to both emotional and practical support as they strive to improve their lives.

Current situation

- At the Forgotten Australians conference, the people who had been in institutional care as children determined to adopt the Senate Committee's name for them, "Forgotten Australians", and to set up a coalition of interest groups. That coalition has been named "The Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA)". Families Australia was represented at the Forgotten Australians conference and, along with other organisations, committed to supporting AFA.
- As part of the Australian Government's response to the Senate Inquiry, the sum of \$100,000 was made available to support organisations assisting Forgotten Australians. AFA member organisations have selected representatives to serve on an AFA Steering Committee. An additional \$120,000 has since been made available to AFA by the Australian Government.
- AFA was formally launched in October 2007 by its patron, (then) Senator Andrew Murray. AFA now has an additional patron, actor and presenter Jack Thompson.
- A booklet, *Forgotten Australians: Supporting survivors of childhood institutional care in Australia*, available from Families Australia, aims to educate health and welfare workers about the experiences and needs of Forgotten Australians.
- The AFA website is at: www.forgottenaustralians.org.au

Priorities for Action

- A commitment by all governments and past providers of institutional care to provide ongoing assistance to organisations supporting Forgotten Australians, including seed funding for new organisations forming in States or Territories where no group currently operates.
- Ongoing funding for the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, to enable present and future support groups to work productively together at the national level, promoting the interests and needs of Forgotten Australians.
- Targeted, informed and appropriate services, delivered with respect and understanding to Forgotten Australians and their families.
- Cooperation by State governments to ensure Forgotten Australians can access good quality services wherever they live.
- Improved cooperation between State and Federal governments to deliver better health care, aged care, housing and other shared services to Forgotten Australians.

Families Australia's activities in relation to the Forgotten Australians

Families Australia has auspiced the funds, provided secretariat support and produced the booklet and website (listed above) on behalf of the Alliance for Forgotten Australians in 2007 and 2008.

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