

SUBMISSION FOR THE VULNERABLE CHILDREN OF VICTORIA AND THE INEPT CHILD “WELFARE” SYSTEMS

I am a Forgotten Australian, I speak to you as a victim of the upbringing of the said department, and as a witness who has seen and heard much suffering from other state wards that were and are around me, some who had died whilst in “care” of child “welfare”, or who died after discharge from damages incurred through abuses and neglect of the said department (we are ignoring the departments name changes over the years as the systems themselves remain the same.)

FAs have some of the best knowledge in this area, as children growing up in the inefficient Victorian child “protection” system, we know as the victims who survived such neglect and abuse what would better helped us when we were vulnerable children, and we know this better than so called professionals... for we did not get taught by a college or university... we were taught from life experience. How many FA become professors to teach these universities?? The answer is very, very few, if any. Most of these lecturers have had excellent family lives themselves., more often than not they would not know what it was like to be a vulnerable child, or to come from a cycle of disadvantage... so how would these professionals really know what is best??

We seen the inefficiency and the lifelong damage that can be done, we seen it in our own lives, as well as many vulnerable children around us. We seen fatalities, and we speak up for those children we know whom the systems killed and silenced forever, many of whom were our mates, or like family to us in a place where we often had NO family at all.

Childhood is such a short time in our lives, but it is also the most IMPRESSIONABLE time in a humans life, and as short as childhood is, it very much shapes the adult personality, fundamentally.

It is common knowledge that DHS – aka child “protection” system has changed its name many times, but seldom changes its inept child “welfare” system.

It is the same system that interfered with my life as a child and thus ruined it, still until this day I am trying to heal and be normal, and yet it is a real miracle that I am here and that I have survived.

Victorians and indeed Australians read too often about the bad, (but honest) press about DHS, the neglect, the abuse and very sadly, the fatalities....

The splitting of loving families that had potential to help become stronger, the children that are left with abusive families and are not helped, the families that are left grieving, ignored and not helped after forced separations by the department.

It is deplorable.

How can Forgotten Australians like myself ever heal when we must read and hear these things and know that other vulnerable children are STILL suffering in ways that we did??

If you really want to change this system for the better, then it would pay to ask damaged Forgotten Australians what could the systems had done to make more positive differences in each ones lives, when we were children in state "care"?

I know from my own experience there is so much that could have been done for myself as a child, and for my family, however this system only damaged me, as well as my relationship with my biological family for a very long time, and I learnt more negative than positive life survival skills that interfered with my life for so long, and still rears its ugly head and interferes with any close relationship I may have, be it with my family, or past boyfriends, etc...

I also know a bit more because I was introduced to this system when I was adolescent, I did not grow up in it, but this made me so much more aware of those children that did grow up in it, I heard their stories, and knew they were much different than me, so much more silent, so much more fragile, or so much more emotionally colder and with an outward appearance of more toughness, and with no knowledge of such common, normal things such as, good family morals or love. Many believed they did not need or deserve things like love and I found that sad at first, until the system lied to me about my family and made me feel that way too, I copied many of the other children's negative survival techniques.

So with what I say in this submission is from what I have learnt personally as a victim, as a Forgotten Australian, and also from what I have learnt from many other victims.

To not only look at what can improve the systems from my adult eyes, but to also take myself back to those childhood days and ask my child self how my life could have been much better, and what would have better helped my situation back then, and also to the things that did not help me.

Separation issues are a big lifelong factor with Forgotten Australians.

The way in which children are torn so heartlessly from their families is often such a horrendous experience in itself. It is very traumatic, and whether or not these memories have been erased or not, it is often imprinted on the sub conscious, to such an extent that many FAs always deeply fear attachments will bring about another dramatic and hurtful separation!!

This interferes with any close relationships a FA may try and have in their lives, with their own partners and even often their own children. FAs will often distance themselves and often not even know why, I even see this in a few of my FA friends who falsely think they have been unaffected by their wardship years.

Some do not even have children of their own due to this fear.

I did not have my own children because I knew how easy it was for this system to steal children off families who love them. :(

Only later in life did I work out that it was due to separation issues and fears that I encountered when I was so heartlessly torn from my own loving, caring family and lied to by the system and their workers by being told my mother did not want me. :(

The ways in which children are separated and removed from their families need to be changed.

The systems workers must remember that whether abusive or not their homes are the only home they have known, and their families are the only one they have known, and that no child want to see their family members upset.

In so many ways the workers need to gain a heart and remember what it was like to be young and voiceless.

I will try and number a few things that need to change so that you may be able to better understand my submission.

1. Instead of forced removals which can often be traumatic and even violent, the workers need to separate families more gently and use COMMUNICATION skills and not FORCE, they need to try and work more WITH families instead of against them. If there is no chance of that, then removal from school, or such place away from where the children can see their guardians responses.

There is too much dysfunction in families now due to the systems inefficiencies which actually encourages dysfunctional family units in Australia, and we wonder why societies continue to decline? When heartless systems with no human *respect* teaches others to become heartless at such a young age what else can you expect??

These workers need to come across as people who CARE and want to HELP, and not like heartless, robotic power pushers.

If society sees child abuse, often they will not report it, or get involved, because everyone in this country (despite their ignorance) knows how much of a bad name the child welfare systems have!! Many witnesses of child abuse fear reporting the abuse in case child “welfare” depts take the child and abuse and neglect it even more than ever!!

It seems that the child “welfare” depts in this country suffer from as much stigma and bad reputation as Forgotten Australian victims do. :(

all this brings me to the number 2 thing that DHS needs to change...

2. The child welfare system (DHS) has got to change its reputation, just as the FAs try and improve theirs. It should be seen as a human service department, as such should treat their clients as humans by being HELPFUL, understanding, and communicative., and not so dictating, authoritative, brutal, patronising, and heartless!

I think DHS workers have the nerve to tend to think they are superior to the human race and this is how they separate themselves from their clients, and the human children in their duty of care..

3. Children need the right encouragement, they need praise, they need to be told they can achieve anything they put their minds to so that they can be the best people they can be!! Instead welfare workers all too often ignore children and deliver no praise.

In some cases kids are told to be grateful as they were nobody's before entering the system, they come from nobody's (their biological parents) and will leave the system as nobody's with no hope and become nobody's. It is brain washing at its best and these kinds of repeated reinforcements always do damage to lives.

Control issues are another lifelong impact that many Forgotten Australians must deal with and are caused from having no control or no say at all over our young lives and no rights, and limited or no decision making allowed, and too often we were told things to lead us to believe we will never control our own lives effectively to the extent that many either believe it fully and become either totally conformable to everyone else's wishes but their own, or continuously rebel against controlling people or those in position of authority, or any kind of authority, while subconsciously themselves craving power.

This control issue factor too can also interfere with any close relationships that the FA may attempt.

4. Vulnerable children need love more than any other child in this country. It does make these children easier targets for pedophiles and too often these types of predators will get into child care work. Vulnerable children need Love, attention and affection, as does ANY child does in order to grow up well rounded and better adjusted for life. All too often these child "carers" give out the wrong types of "love" and "attention" in the form of child sexual abuse, and yet not enough of the right types of love and attention. In my experience welfare workers can be too cold, insensitive and robotic. Welfare workers seem to separate themselves from vulnerable children and those children's feelings in order to be more "resilient". If a child needs a hug then its the least they should get, if the child doesn't want a hug that's ok, but it needs to be questioned as normal well rounded children with no disabilities don't normally feel that way.

It should be OK to hug children if those children need it, hugs should not be considered child sexual abuse, unless the genitalia is actually touched.

When children are raised with no love, they turn into tough heartless adults, with little respect for other people or themselves.

5. Educate families, HELP families to become better. I know they try this in ways but the way they slightly attempt to do it is ineffective. My mother took one of their courses to try and get me back into her custody. However the course was highly flawed, and mostly only tried to teach my mother how to be a foster carer for me! The course concentrated on teaching too much about discipline and control... it only drove me further away from my mother. This course was not teaching enough about tolerance,

understanding, patience, love, praise, encouragement, and the more positive things that must be learnt to have a positive, well rounded family and a stable secure more positive future life for the child once it becomes an adult.

6. Welfare workers need to listen to the children more. The children need to have enough trust in the system and its workers in order to communicate effectively. This change can only be brought about if welfare better themselves so that they are more trust-able to society. By just considering, listening and HELPING these children, the system can start rectifying their bad reputation.

If the child is considered by the department to come FIRST then the child's thoughts and feelings should be listened to and considered!!

Instead of referring to what the worker learnt at college, university or TAFE, the workers should begin by asking the child what the child themselves feel is best for them!!

I think these colleges and universities that teach child welfare need to revise what they teach and consider the thoughts, feelings and opinions of child welfare victims such as the Forgotten Australians and care leavers, for there is so many things that can be learnt from this group of victims to improve things vastly in these "services" for vulnerable children.

Also if this was to happen, it would mean that many FAs past suffering, neglect and abuse would not be for nothing and we could better heal and begin to maybe move forward.

Also the same could be said for the grieving families of children who's life's have been lost to child welfare services.

7. In today's age of technological advancements, there should be more in place! To me this just shows how much our government really cares about vulnerable children placed in their care. Cameras have been fitted in stores to detect criminal activity for decades now. Now days they are also being installed and fitted in schools, streets and city centres. So why can we not put surveillance in foster homes and places such as disabled institutions?

Children can be given the option of say being provided with a personal mini micro recorders to have while in care of their own biological families, in care of foster families, or while in care of the state? To a child this could be its only real weapon against a paedophile, an adult with so much strength and power over the child. Surveillance could also have the added benefit of a defence for the welfare system and the state government if these depts are later taken to court by the "care" leaver, as welfare may have footage to prove the victim has no case.

This would be money far better spent, especially in the long run, for both the system and for the vulnerable children.

When people do not want surveillance they must have something to hide, so I wonder why welfare continue to hide. Private talks and meetings between welfare and the child should be recorded for both parties. These recordings should be released to the care leaver under the freedom of information act. If this had happened for me then I would not have been black mailed into becoming a ward of the state myself, when I did not know what was really happening at the time.

8. All vulnerable children must be kept away from ALL those with priors and convictions for crimes unto children, or have been suspected of crimes unto children or interfering with a child's life, and also those whom show they have the potential to damage children (ei: anger management problems, etc...) The screening methods for carers and welfare workers need to be completely thorough, just as they need to be more thorough about researching the families who have been reported to welfare.

9. Find out why there is problems in the family, work and communicate with both the adults AND the children, help the family to resolve their problems, to learn and improve themselves. Separating children from their biological families should be a last resort after all other efforts to HELP have failed.

Those families who are proven to be violent, criminal to the extent that they show no respect for other people's safety, have a history of sexual or physical abuse..., these things are not acceptable in any way and the children should be taken away as peacefully and as gently as possible when it comes to matters where their safety is in danger.

10. Compulsory child care courses should be provided to all those parents or biological families who wish to have their children back in their care, these courses must teach what the parents lacked or needed to learn and they must be EFFECTIVE. The more serious the reason for the children be taken in the first place, then the longer these courses need to run for! The parents should have to sit an exam to see if they have learnt the lessons that are needed and only if they pass the exam, and the children want to return, should they be allowed to have their children back.

Children should NEVER be given back to paedophiles under NO circumstance!!

11. More worrying is the agencies in which child welfare places Victoria's vulnerable children. For example children have been placed into the churches abusive and neglectful "care". This is often no better than the government paying abusive sects to enlist as many vulnerable children as possible so that they can become brain washed into future members that will continue to fund the [REDACTED] agency/church, which often force their

own beliefs down others throats, brain washing and scaring those in their care for their entire life with fears, abuses and neglect.

By teaching such things as... say, Catholicism has taught... such as man can sin and it will be all forgiven, and that victims should just put up with it and forgive. These agencies and churches are doing more harm than anyone [REDACTED] These agencies need putting under the microscope and scrutinised to the fullest if they are ever to be safe for children!!

To say these agencies and churches are spiritual, or good is a lie that is covered up to society by their “charity” when they believe in such negative things, that humans can sin and do crimes unto children and be forgiven in the name of god, is nothing but pure evil!!

Although I greatly appreciate this enquiry into DHS child welfare, more importantly there needs to be a federal royal commission into Australia's past and present practices of the systems, agencies and churches. [REDACTED] need to be brought to light and publicly condemned and [REDACTED] need to be paid for so that the mistakes are less likely to be repeated!!!!!! This will **ensure** that the child protection system WILL change and begins to live up to its name in the more positive ways.

There is no other way to better these systems, for when criminals are simply allowed to do crimes, they will continue to do so! The state governments control this countries different states and territories, therefore the state governments MUST deter these crimes, when they do not do this then it must become a federal matter!!!!!!

12. If a child wishes to remain in touch with members of their biological family then that should be supported and helped to the fullest. The child should be able to access to their family as much as THEY wish and not as the workers or even parents wish for them.

13. Vulnerable children need to be listened to and feel as they have been heard, They need to feel important and that they can make decisions for themselves, especially teenagers, as this better prepares them for life as an adult.

14. There needs to be a 24hr 7day free phone service for children with troubles, especially for vulnerable children in the care of DHS and this should be a three digit number that's easy for children to remember, much like the national 000 number.

15. Children do not run away for no reason. This should be emphasised that when a child is happy, content and secure where they are living there is no need to run away from it.

When a child runs away from home, school, foster homes, institutions, etc... then there is something that makes the child prefer to be elsewhere, then there must be something wrong and it needs serious attention! It is not good for young children to be by themselves without supervision as anything can happen to them, and the world can be very a dangerous place especially when a child has limited knowledge and experience in the world. This is something I know from personal experience as a child runaway from state "care".

If a child runs away then welfare needs to seriously look at the situation in which the child is living in, and listen to the child and ask the reasons why they are running away.

16. When you're a vulnerable child, social workers and the like come and go, some say they care, only to find they don't, it's easy to feel this way as a child when we are shuffled from one worker or carer to another. Children can become emotionally attached to workers especially if they are meant to TRUST them, however the worker often leaves the job for another, or for their own biological families, or because the system has discharged the child..., and the child is left to feel deserted yet again. The workers are too often told to separate themselves emotionally from their clients, but they are not just clients, they are vulnerable CHILDREN in need of attention and help! Real parenting is an ongoing commitment, real people don't just turn their backs on their children after they have grown!! This creates large issues based on TRUST and SEPARATION which causes great difficulties with trusting other people, this kind of damage can often last for life.

This is an example of bad parenting of the state, and this does not lead society by good example. DHS Welfare and similar state depts should be a good role model and influence to all. Australia could indeed be a luckier country by improving its child welfare systems and becoming a internationally good influence for other systems around the world. By learning from Australia's dark history, by being truly sorry by allowing justice for victims and change in the child welfare systems of today, by doing this Australia can once again begin to look a little more humane than what its beginning to look like internationally in regards to our vulnerable children.

17. PLEASE stop drugging our youth and children against their wills!! Be honest with drug education!! I know from experience how dangerous this can be. Firstly is there not enough research into the long term effects of a lot of these drugs or what they do to the children's physical or psychiatric health once they become adults.

An government initiative ad campaign in the 1990s they admitted that substances like drugs and alcohol are **not good for young minds that are still growing and forming**. Yet the same government drugs these young growing minds with of all things, mood control drugs, tranquillisers, or even worse. All they told me was to "take the pills whenever I felt upset", I was upset all the time because I wanted to go home. :(

Child welfare, my legal guardians at the time taught me a lesson for life and a very negative one... that bad or sad feelings can be controlled by substances... this led me into a life of escapism through alcohol and drug experimentation upon being released and discharged from being a ward of the state. This is why I am so lucky to be alive today, and speak out for those that are not, like my girl friend, another ward of the state who died at school age 14 through shooting air up her veins because she had no substance to control or escape her feelings at the time. :(

The state needs to stop pushing drugs into children, and teaching them that substances are good, and instead start helping them to communicate, resolve or manage their feelings correctly. If you push drugs into children many of them may feel its ok to grow up and push drugs onto others, or to become dealers of illegal drugs, and be drug proactive. This is cyclematic, generational and affects Australian society.

This is the cycle... the vulnerable children grow up get themselves drug habits, have children of their own while addicted to drugs, which are taken by welfare too, because of the parents desire and their knowledge which is reinforced by the departments lessons that they can escape their feelings through substances!!

I have never had my own children but many other FAs around me have, and sadly I have seen the outcomes. I chose not to have children as I did not enjoy being held down as a child and injected with powerful tranquilizers, powerful enough to knock me right out for anywhere up to a couple of days. I did not enjoy being given a bottle full of mind control pills at age 12 and being told to just have one whenever I was upset. These things had a big impact on my life, and I know many others would never speak out about this, because of the bad things it has done to them, and the wrong paths they have gone down, after all who wants to admit they have experimented with substances whether they be legal or illegal??

18. When children must be taken from their biological parents for the sake of the safety of the child, then all efforts must be made to research the extended family and make sure there is no other biological member of the family who is able to and wants to take care of the child. If the it is at the childs preference then keeping the vulnerable child with the biological family should be maintained and assisted at all costs and the removal of the child from their biological family should be a last resort, or at the request of the child.

19. It is up to welfare to make vulnerable children feel secure and safe, so that they are able to express their feelings without worrying for their safety.

20. It is up to the state as legal guardians to make sure their vulnerable children has access to a decent education, so that they are able to read, write and do maths in later life as adults, as well as positive life survival skills.

21. Also in places such as foster care where there are children of mixed gender there needs to be sufficient sex education, not just the type you get in school, but the type well rounded kids learn from their parents...

such as teaching little boys respect for females, and teaching little girls respect for themselves and their bodies. That their bodies belong to only THEM and nobody else, and about personal privacy in regards to their bodies and their genitals.

22. Equally as important is to teach these disadvantaged and vulnerable children about bullying and respect for other peoples feelings.

23. Welfare workers should not rip children from their families, without ongoing support to the families as well as the children. Parents should be not just left alone to grieve. These workers need to treat these families with respect, honesty and efficiently as possible, and provide counselling if its needed.

24. Children also need to be in touch with their biological culture! There is much evidence around to show what damage it does to lives when you separate them from their culture, and people. Indigenous children need to be in touch with their culture and preferably raised by indigenous carers, and Australian children need to be placed with Australian carers and not foreigners or migrants.

I am not discriminative but I have heard of so much sadness and confusion when children grow up thinking they belong to a race of people only to find out much later that they are not who they thought they were, and that they are not in touch with their roots, ancestry, culture, people, laws, morals or feelings.

23. To help families we must also try and help the parents and extended families of the vulnerable child so that if possible a good family unit can be created and maintained, initially that would be in the best interests of the child as well as all others around the child. Do not give up on families, split or destroy them, give them a go at change first, do not ignore problems, continuously work on resolving them. For example at the moment it is easier for the depts to separate child from its drug addicted parents and ignore the parents ongoing problem. When the parents die of a drug over dose because of the problems ignored, do you think this will help this orphans adult life? Do you think these actions help other children these "bad" parents come into contact with and the example

they set for others? Too many problems are continuously ignored and too often only fed further by the departments.

I know of people who have children to pay for their drug habits, and when the children are taken because of neglect they continue to give birth to more. :-/

24. Children should be encouraged to be themselves and to be someone they can like and be proud of. Too many of us were taught to act different to please welfare or to be released, which taught a lot of adults to be good actors!! It taught me this that well that I can very effectively cover up many of my mental disorders so that I appear to be fully sane and functional to others, when I am not, in reality I indeed sadly suffer alone inside myself a lot and in much silence because I was taught to cover up my personality and feelings, and be someone others would rather I be and not myself. It can be very frustrating and it can be very difficult for me during the times I have tried to reach out to professionals for help. (which I have never received.)

26. Those who have proven they are bad parents that cannot be changed should be sterilised to prevent further victims born into the world and to prevent further costs to society. I agree with many when they say there should be an exam and licence program to be a parent!!

This would also help combat the worlds population problems.

27. Pull for tougher laws, so that bad parenting and crimes onto children are deterred!! Maybe then the perpetrators will think twice before committing their crimes, at the current moment there is no laws efficient enough to deter, or prevent these crimes onto vulnerable children.

To conclude this letter before the dead line, I must say that I have only mentioned some of the important things, but nowhere near everything!

In order to mention all the things that would make vulnerable children more happier, safer, secure and stable where they reside, so that they do not desire to run away from the places in which welfare places them to live, to do this I would need to write a booklet, much like the size of the booklets written for recommendations in parliament, and as you would know this would take much longer to do then the time you allowed to lodge in these submissions.

I would suggest for further helpful information into this subject the departments should consider enquiring with Forgotten Australians, The Stolen Generation and Child Migrants into the ways in which the child “welfare” depts could have HELPED their life's and not hindered.

Learn from the mistakes that have been done to us, study us and how these mistakes have affected us in negative ways through out our lives, and show some interest.

Learn from your mistakes, change the systems for the better and try and eliminate these mistakes, so that the vulnerable children of this country can feel they CAN have the kind of lives and privileges that are available to everyone else!

This helps stop the cycle of disadvantage in society and not to continue feeding it!!

I would like to see more interest from departments like DHS into the lifelong ramifications of being a child of the state, I would like to see them ring us, ask us more questions, study us, collaborate with doctors and psychiatrists and the likes about us, do surveys, hold discussions and meetings with FAs.

When these systems start to want to learn and change for the better, finally I will be able to start healing from the damage that was done to me by these departments and their government paid workers, who have lovely families, nice cars and comfy cosy homes who do not give us and our disadvantageous lives a thought, let alone any help!!

Who come to their work places and tell us “oh lovie we know how you feel you *poor* thing”, how patronising to us victims of these departments and their workers who usually have NO IDEA!!

DHS says they are a department of human services, so as such they should be serving us humans, HELPING us, and not sending us off into cycles of further disadvantage!!

Thank you very much for this long overdue enquiry, I do hope it’s a successful one this time, and thank you for taking the time to read some of my views.

Yours respectfully

Sherrin “Magpie” Caird

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