



Care Leavers

A person who was in institutional care or other form of out-of-home care, including foster care, as a child or youth (or both) at some time during the 20th century is defined as a Care Leaver. Care-leavers include Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and people from the Stolen Generation.

It is estimated that 500,000 children have experienced life in an orphanage, children's home, jail, training school, adult psychiatric (asylum) hospital, or in foster care and other forms of out-of-home care in the 20th century in Australia. The reasons children were placed in institutional care varied:

- Some were removed from their parents and made State Wards and/or placed in State care, because the State considered their parents unfit or the children at risk.
- Some had parents who were dead, in prison, missing or otherwise unable to care for them.
- Others were placed by their parent/s because the parent/s could not provide for them. Sometimes these parents had to work and used the children's home as a form of child care. If they could, they paid maintenance to those running the institution. Many children were in children's homes simply by reason of poverty, in an era of almost no community or government support for families in crisis or need; many children had fathers and mothers who returned traumatised from war service.
- Some children were placed in institutions simply because their parents had separated or divorced.

The Forgotten Australians include Indigenous children, many of whom were removed because of their race, and child migrants.

The Stolen Generations are included in the category as Care Leavers. They are many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who were separated from their family, community, traditional culture and traditional country. "Separated" can mean you or a family member or members were removed under past Government Acts i.e. Native Welfare Act, Aboriginal Welfare Act, etc.

(<http://linkupvictoria.org.au/>)

Where will you find Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers?

Many Forgotten Australians are already in the health and welfare system, seeking and receiving help for conditions such as mental illness or substance abuse. They may approach service delivery agencies because of a specific issue such as homelessness or family violence or unemployment. They may come to the notice of child protection agencies or the criminal justice system; they may already be in prisons or in mental health facilities. They will almost certainly be among your existing clients, usually without mentioning their life experiences. Many Indigenous children were among the Forgotten Australians, losing their connection with their culture and land.

Long Term Impacts

Being separated from their families as children, most Forgotten Australians grew up deprived of the love, support and individual attention children need. In addition, many suffered physical deprivation and abuse. Forgotten Australians may have complex and specialised needs which are often not being met. It must be emphasised that the lasting impacts outlined below by no means apply to all adults who were in institutions as children; but the Senate report concluded that the outcomes for those who have left care have, in the main, often been significantly negative and destructive.

Forgotten Australians are survivors. Many have great strengths. Others retain childhood coping strategies that can make dealing with other adults difficult. Among the lasting effects may include:

- A lack of trust and security
- A lack of social skills
- Risk behaviours
- Inability to form and maintain loving relationships
- Inability to parent effectively
- Mental Illness

Source: Alliance for Forgotten Australians – Supporting Survivors of Institutional and Out of Home Care

This document is created by Lisa Tribuzio, Diversity Advisor from the North Metro Sector Development team. Diversity Advisors are funded by both the Victorian State Government and the Commonwealth and support HACC-PYP and CHSP funded organisations to undertake diversity planning. For any questions regarding this document, email lisat@hwpcp.org.au

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