

**Submission to Select Joint Committee on Elder Abuse**

**Forgotten Australians**

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**Priscilla Taylor  
Kevin O'Neil  
Mergo Ray**

## Foreword

### WHO ARE FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS?

I Priscilla Taylor, have asked for my personal aged care story to be included at the end of this submission to the South Australian Joint Select Committee on Elder Abuse.

I am hoping by sharing my story to give people an understanding and some further knowledge of what myself and 350,000,000 (mostly) non-Indigenous Australian born children endured while under so called care. My story does not give details of any of the sexual, physical or mental abuse, but you could try to imagine a three year old child going through this.

There were certainly differences between our care, but now we all seem to have similar disadvantages and problems.

While attending The Mullighan Inquiry I said to Ted, "I have a range of problems, how are other Forgotten Australians?" Ted said, "You all suffering".

While listening to a talk given by the lead lawyer of Know More Legal Service (the legal company for Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse) he said; "to be Forgotten there can only be two reasons. One: Australia is too embarrassed or secondly: people just don't care". I would go further and say we are not only 'Forgotten' but not known.

The South Australian Government states that say we are the financial responsibility of the Commonwealth in aged care. The Commonwealth say we are the responsibility of the State. Oh, we still don't know where we belong.

We now deserve and must be given acknowledgement, so our fears of Institutional care abuse is known and not mistaken as difficult, demanding and misunderstood persons.

Thank you very much for this wonderful opportunity to share our experiences with the South Australian Joint Select Committee.

Sincerely

Priscilla Taylor,  
SA Ambassador for Forgotten Australians.

## Introduction

Relationships Australia SA's (RASA) main objective as a Non-Government Organisation is providing family and relationship services which alleviate the suffering of children, adults and families with high levels of distress and complex needs, and in particular reducing distress, suffering and helplessness caused by domestic violence, child abuse, trauma and dislocation. Our vision is for a just, equitable society in which relationships are respectful, diversity is valued, and people have a sense of belonging and an opportunity to learn. Elm Place at RASA provides trauma informed counselling and case management services for people who have experienced institutional and out-of-home care including Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations.

RASA has a strong engagement with Forgotten Australians through our Elm Place services comprising of Find & Connect, Post Care and the Royal Commission Community Based Support Service. A central feature of this service is the Consumer Reference Group (CRG) and through this our association with the Alliance of Forgotten Australians (AFA).

## Background

The language around Care leavers is multilayered with people identifying as care leavers, exwards of state, survivors, Former Child Migrants, Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians. The latter, the term Forgotten Australians, is also used to describe the older care leavers population who were in out of home care prior to 1989.

The Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (2004) reported that more than 500,000 children experienced life in an orphanage, in children's homes or other out-of-home care during the last century. The Forgotten Australians' Report<sup>1</sup> made recommendations with a view to explicitly recognise and meet the specific needs of older care leavers. Recommendations from this report are yet to be implemented<sup>2</sup>.

Within this context it becomes clouded who the Forgotten Australians are as it describes three distinct population groups being; Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations. Although there are commonalities in the experiences of childhood, there are clear differences in their history into Institutional care.

The Forgotten Australians were predominantly non-Aboriginal children who ended up in out-of-home and institutional care through a variety of reasons. For some children parents had died, or fathers had died in war, were missing or returned with PTSD followed by separation. Poverty was a big issue. Many came from single parent households who may have been unable to care for all of their children placing some or all in a Home whilst paying

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<sup>1</sup> Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children, © Commonwealth of Australia 2004

<sup>2</sup> The Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (page 316-319 Commonwealth of Australia 2004): These were in the development of health prevention programs, especially mental health, depression, suicide prevention and drug and alcohol prevention programs, recognise and cater for the health needs and requirements of care leavers (recommendation 25) and within models of aged care services focussing on the specific needs of care leavers. (Recommendation 26).

maintenance to the Home to look after their children. Connections with families were broken and parents found it difficult to have their children returned once their circumstances changed. The State looked down on anyone who would not attend church and would remove the children into a church based institution. Only few children were removed because they were truly at risk. There was a gradual move away from institutional care to kinship and foster care from the 1970s and into today's out-of-home care system.

The Former Child Migrants came in the years following World War II. Children constituted a particularly attractive category of migrant as they could assimilate more easily, were more adaptable, had a long working life ahead and could be cheaply housed in dormitory style accommodation. A sanctioned negotiation between the British and Australian Governments saw thousands of children arrive from United Kingdom and Malta. Untruths were told about the existence of parents and siblings, resulting in ongoing searches in later life for family back home. The Child Migrants Trust assists former Child Migrants with searching and reconnection.

The Stolen Generations resulted from official Government policy in Australia until 1969 that removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and country. The ongoing issues of disconnection to country and culture are still real for the members of the Stolen Generations and their families today.

The current National Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted the abhorrent environments in which many Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations found themselves. Many of the children and young people suffered from neglect as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuse while in care. The trauma experienced in care continues throughout adult life and as people age.

It is vital that the Forgotten Australians as described above are recognised as a distinct group when addressing the prevention and intervention of Elder Abuse and this submission speaks to this. From the 500,000 Forgotten Australians nationally we can assume that approximately 35,000 Forgotten Australians would reside in South Australia with a large number having experienced institutional care under the Guardianship of the South Australian Government. This was recognised when on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2008, the Hon. Mike Rann MP together with the churches held a formal State Apology to those harmed in State Care. This was followed by an official Australian Government Apology by then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd MP on 16th November 2009.

### **Issues for ageing Forgotten Australian**

The recent report, *No Child Should Grow Up Like This: Identifying Long Term Outcomes of Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and The Stolen Generations*, Fernandez Et Al 2016 highlighted the negative effects of institutionalisation; difficulties with extended family (65.2%), difficulties in providing emotional care to children (63.6%), 70.2% reported having a mental illness and 65% reported experiencing suicidal ideation. Compared to general community Care leavers reported very high (38%) or high (21%) levels of psychological distress. This compares to the psychological distress of Forgotten Australians presenting at

Elm Place. Forgotten Australians are characterised by poorer health and socioeconomic outcomes and could have a compromised life expectancy.

Most Forgotten Australians are now reaching the age where either they are already eligible or are fast approaching the need for aged care services. For many, past institutional 'care' resulted in lifelong grief, loss and trauma with ongoing consequences including mental ill health, drug and alcohol issues, PTSD, financial and social deprivation and reduced networks and educational opportunities. The prospect of being dependent on Aged Care services or re-institutionalised leaves them highly vulnerable to re-traumatisation. Many Forgotten Australians have expressed they would rather 'kill themselves' than go back into an institution.

The recent Long-term Outcomes for Forgotten Australians study highlighted lack of trust because of childhood experiences. Out of the 700 participants, 87% were worried about their own ability to trust people in authority, 66% were worried about not taken seriously, 47% worried about further abuse by the aged care system and 40% worried about quality of care.

The Australian Government has recognised Forgotten Australians as a chronically disadvantaged group moving the aged care. They are referred to as 'Care-Leavers' and are now classified as a special needs group within the Aged Care Act 1997 (Special needs groups - Section 11.3)

### **Issues to be considered:**

Forgotten Australian's experience their most acute response in later life when faced again with the possibility of being dependent on institutions for their care. Entry to aged care represents a return to vulnerability.

To increase the prevention of Elder Abuse for Forgotten Australians we recommend the following:

- That Forgotten Australians are recognised as a vulnerable population in their own right. This would require an understanding of 'who' the Forgotten Australians are and a recognition that their needs are different from the needs of the Stolen Generations and Former Child Migrants.
- That Forgotten Australians are recognised and included as a key stakeholder group when addressing Elder Abuse
- That Forgotten Australians are included in any public awareness campaigns about Elder Abuse. Already existing materials have been developed through the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing<sup>3</sup> and could be directly incorporated into future campaigns.

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<sup>3</sup> *Caring for Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations Information Package* © 2016 Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health

- That specific resources and education campaigns are developed with and for Forgotten Australians to increase resilience and understanding of their rights within Aged Care.
- That free and supported mediation is available to assist Forgotten Australians in negotiating appropriate care in later life. This would provide opportunities for Forgotten Australians to be supported in expressing their needs to family as well as aged care services.
- That strategies are implemented within the aged care sector to increase the understanding of the long term impacts of childhood trauma through the implementation of a trauma informed policies and practices.

Priscilla Taylor – Ambassador for Forgotten Australians  
Kevin O’Neil – Co Chair of Consumer Reference Group  
Mergho Ray – Co-Chair of Consumer Reference group /  
Manager Elm Place, Relationships Australia SA

Elm Place,  
191 Flinders St  
Adelaide, 5000  
1800 188 118

## PRISCILLA'S AGED CARE STORY

*Priscilla Taylor has been a long-term advocate of the enhancement of Forgotten Australian. She has been an active member of the Consumer Reference Group from its inception, a proxy for the Alliance of Forgotten Australians, a member of Care Leavers Australia Network and a South Australian Ambassador for Forgotten Australians.*

**June '17**

My name is Priscilla Taylor. I am a Forgotten Australian which means I have lived experience of the consequences of having been institutionalized at the age of 2 in 1954.

I became a ward of the state because of neglect – however I don't agree with that. Our mother left an abusive marriage whilst pregnant with me. She also took my sister who is two years older – she is my only sibling.

I think my father was abusive because of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after World War 2.

With no home and money, she went to stay at Fullerton refuge. Mum gained employment as there were no Government payments in those days and she left us at the refuge. Mum was told that we would follow her to her employment – doing home duties for a business man.

Mum said she was lied to. Instead we were removed and made wards of the State.

The first placement was an institution in South Australia called Seaforth.

From there I was placed into the first of foster homes where I suffered every form of abuse.

The Government made inquiries but the Inspector said 'No we were okay'.

This was the beginning of 60 different home changes until the age of 18. Every time a foster home placement broke down I was sent back to Seaforth.

Reading through my files I saw that it was written what drugs I was to be given before being taken to the next foster home. I had unrecognized PTSD so they wanted to keep me sedated. Mum was only allowed to visit 1 hour a month with written permission from the Welfare.

My files also contained copy of letters mum wrote asking to see us. But she was not allowed to whilst in foster homes. At first, I didn't know this lady was my mum. My ward files say that mum had to pay for my care but was never told about the abuse. We had to sit in a glass room next to the matron's office. And I think this was so mum could not take us with her. Mum fought to have us back home with her but the foster mothers and the staff at the institutions told us that she didn't want us. I felt that I was no-bodies child.

I had now also been lied to.

Mum did get these righteous people back once though (huh..) – She wrote to the Attorney General and I spend a week with my mother. All my birthdays came at once. Mum didn't return me so they sent a police escort out to get me.

I was only with my sister until I was 8. I didn't see her again for a long time and I haven't seen her for over 40 years now. I think she had been so traumatized that she couldn't even have feelings for me.

In the institution we were numbers. We had to stand in line on certain days with dirty clothes to be given clean clothes. I was quite often supported and seemed to be liked and given attention by teachers. I once wrote a story which I received so much praise and attention for. I did like this rare positive attention.

From my files I learnt my teacher had sent my story to the matron at Seaforth with a note saying I was a loving and intelligent little girl and hoped that they would find a loving and suitable foster family for me. This was not to be.

I went to live in a cottage home in Kensington Park when I was 9 years old.

I became close to 2 Indigenous sisters. Wow – we shared a bedroom and did everything together. I loved these girls and felt love which mum was not allowed to give me. I am very fortunate to still have their love today.

One night, I would have been in high school then, I was not able to stop crying so the police once again picked me up and I was locked up in a reformatory cell at Windana.

Several years later I became pregnant. I had a baby boy but just like my mum the Government took him away.

They had stripped me of everything and then they even took my baby. I was 17 yrs

This practice has now become known as Forced Adoption.

Because I had so many different homes, I didn't have a stable education and later couldn't have a career. I suffered disadvantage which still exists today.

I was so lacking in self-esteem and social skills that I couldn't even order the sandwich I wanted from my first pay!

When I was 18 I received a letter stating 'goodbye and good luck, you are no longer a ward of the state'.

The government did not give me any help to learn how to be an adult and I never heard from them again.

I stumbled through life as best I could.

I married a man and it didn't work.

I got married again and had another two sons.

I struggled to parent them because no one had ever parented me. I had never been given an example of parenting. I did the best I could and my sons are my world.

It hurts that I don't have family for my sons. People often can understand the loss of family for a child who is placed in a home. But for me now, as an adult, the pain doesn't go away and I see more evidence of what my sons and I have lost and what was taken.

I have really fought to stay here. I have suffered from depression for years and have been diagnosed with PTSD and stress which causes my tremor.

I have never been drunk in my life because my life as a child was so out of my control that now I don't want to ever be in a position where I can't look after myself again.

Ten years ago I went to the Mullighan Inquiry. This was an enquiry into sexual abuse in out of home care in South Australia. I wasn't going to go but then I realised I needed to go for myself and for all those others who couldn't.

The Mullighan Inquiry lawyer told me when reading my files that he could see the change of starting off as a normal happy toddler into becoming a traumatised person. At the Mullighan Inquiry I was told of over a decade of abuse from 7 different perpetrators. So 'no I can't just get over it'

I was 54 years of age and it was the first anyone had ever asked or wanted to know about my years of abuse.

It was the first time I had told anyone what had happened to me.

I was thanked and told that they had learned a lot from me.

I walked around in shock for days after, all those years I hadn't shared that information with anybody.

Through encouragement, and through the Mullighan Inquiry, they set up our first support service.

This is when I met the three younger Forgotten Australians who told the story how they had lived their happiest years with this loveliest lady until she died. This lady was my mother. She died at 50 of a heart attack but I say a broken heart. These Forgotten Australians sprinkled my mum's ashes on her rose bushes. This left no grave for me to connect to my mother. They told me that my mum had a shoe box of returned letters she had written to us.

Even though I had been lobbying for Forgotten Australians for years before, the Inquiry put me in the public eye. During that time, I became a member of Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN). I also became a member of the Consumer Reference Group, the proxy for the representative for the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and continue to be an ambassador for Forgotten Australians.

Through my advocacy work I thought I was helping others, then I realised I was also helping myself.

I am involved in this project because I will be 65 soon and I am really worried that my health is not good and I know the aged care sector will be in my future.

There have been too many years of trying to sort out the hurt and disadvantage and I haven't really lived my life.

I didn't have a carefree happy childhood and I don't want that to be repeated as I get older.

I need people to have knowledge of Forgotten Australians and what we went through.

I need to be acknowledged as a person and not a number.

I don't want to be a burden to my kids, when I have to go into nursing home care.

I need communal living. I think there is safety in numbers.

I need flexibility of care provision and to have my own belongings

I need my dog!

I do not need sympathy I need to be understood.

I was so traumatised as a little girl that I hardly spoke and now I am speaking up for the senior lady I have become!

I don't want to be re-traumatised, I just want to live as peacefully and stable as possible with compassion and ACCEPTANCE. No longer is this Seaforth kid the lowest of people.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.