

Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse

Re: Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services. (Issues Paper 10 Response)

1. FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS AMBASSADORSHIP PROGRAM

Many of those who were sexually abused as children come from State “care” situations.

It would make so much difference for care leavers to deal with people who have at least a basic understanding of the background, issues and needs of this section of society.

That is why it is so important to get a functioning Forgotten Australians Ambassadorship Program up and running.

Funding became available to train 12 Australians as Ambassadors for Forgotten Australians after the National Apology. The training was done through Relationships Australia’s Institute of Social Relations in Adelaide with a number of Ambassadors being sourced from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) and the rest being on recommendation from the State-based services. Good money was spent on training the twelve of us, but then (after a change of government) no funding became available to run the program.

It is imperative that this funding be made available so that the Ambassadors can educate and inform government and non-government organisations, community groups and the public about who this group is, what their needs and issues are and how each one of us can contribute and assist in redressing harm done in times past and fairly treating people who have historically been treated very badly.

You can’t help people out of disadvantage when no one understands the problems.

2. GOLD CARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

So many “Forgotten Australians”, “Former Child Migrants”, “Stolen Generations”, “Care-leavers” or people who spent time in Australian children’s institutions during the last century have a resulting myriad of medical, dental, psychological, housing and social services needs that it is vital that a Gold Card be granted to this group to provide priority access to services.

3. ALLOCATED FUNDING FOR REGIONAL AREAS

State based services all have to apply some of their funding to regional areas but I want to suggest there should be a *specifically allocated minimum* amount that MUST go to regional areas to ensure a fair share for regional groups and individuals.

4. ESTABLISHED REGIONAL PEER BASED SUPPORT GROUPS SHOULD BE FUNDED

A group which has been successfully functioning for a few years, especially in regional areas where the client base cannot access the services, activities and opportunities offered by the state-based services in the city, should be funded to deliver advocacy and assistance and run their own programs. Now-Remembered Australians Inc. is one such group, based in the Northern Rivers regional district of NSW. Our members regularly receive newsletters from the state-based service which is full of activities that our members up here cannot access due to distance. Although that state-based service has been very supportive of Now-Remembered Australians Inc., the group needs a specific allocation of funding available each year so that as we determine the group’s needs we can fulfil them locally. One way or another, there needs to be more funding for peer support groups. I cannot stress the importance of this enough.

5. ACCESS AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE OF LIVED-EXPERIENCE PRACTITIONERS

Nothing equates to the knowledge, insight and understanding of people with lived experience.

The value of lived-experience is slowly being recognised in various fields and service-users experience is being taken more and more into account, but it does not yet go far enough. No service should operate without consultation with those with lived experience. High value needs to be placed on this experience and knowledge. Those whose knowledge and experience is accessed should always be compensated for their contributions. All services who don't have in place an alternative method of accessing lived-experience knowledge should employ a lived-experience practitioner as a consultant or community liaison staff member.

6. FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND LITERACY

As so few people who spent time in children's institutions during their formative years had any sort of reasonable education, it would be fair to establish a system to redress this lack. Free education should be available to this group and funding needs to be available to assist people in navigating pathways through or within existing education systems. In some cases existing education systems may not be adequate or appropriate and in this case funding should be available to establish specialist education programs.

7. TARGETING THE MOST VULNERABLE

There are some groups that are more vulnerable than others and have special needs which must be taken into consideration. These vulnerable ones include prisoners and those detained in hospitals, the homeless, illiterate people, those very disengaged from society and people living in remote areas. It also includes those who are living in the lowest socio-economic bracket. Some considerations for these people would include the provision of free funerals, viable alternatives to aged care homes, targeted radio and television advertisements and specialised education, rehabilitation and outreach programs.

Easily accessible telephone counselling with trained professionals who understand the particular needs and issues of care leavers is of vital importance, particularly in regional or remote areas. In regional and remote areas, the likelihood that the local counsellor is a relative, friend, colleague or previous acquaintance prevents a lot of people from accessing that help, as does the perceived stigma of potentially being seen walking into a place like that.

8. OTHER SUPPORT FOR PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Peer support is a proven style of support for people recovering from trauma. Yet so little support is given to these groups that often spring up from the concerted efforts of an individual or a core few dedicated people. Some supports that small groups would find useful apart from generally getting more funding include:

- Assistance with printing brochures, cards, notices, newsletters etc.
- Access to education for group leaders
- Access to trained volunteers who can assist in things like grant submissions, accountancy, tax and business law, web design, newsletter writing and editing, social media. It must be remembered that the members of support groups like these usually don't have a huge skills base or high educational achievements and therefore external assistance would be helpful.
- Support with networking (e.g. funding to liaise with other key people and support services)