

Part 3 Consequences of Removal

Chapter 10 Children's Experiences

Most of us girls were thinking white in the head but were feeling black inside. We weren't black or white. We were a very lonely, lost and sad displaced group of people. We were taught to think and act like a white person, but we didn't know how to think and act like an Aboriginal. We didn't know anything about our culture.

We were completely brainwashed to think only like a white person. When they went to mix in white society, they found they were not accepted [because] they were Aboriginal. When they went and mixed with Aborigines, some found they couldn't identify with them either, because they had too much white ways in them. So that they were neither black nor white. They were simply a lost generation of children. I know. I was one of them.

[woman removed at 8 years with her 3 sisters in the 1940s; placed in Cootamundra Girls' Home]

Children's Experiences

Children's experiences following their removal contributed to the effects of the removal upon them at the time and in later life. In this chapter we briefly survey the evidence to the Inquiry concerning those experiences which have had the most significant impacts on well-being and development.

Placement stability

As the following table shows, a high proportion of children (based on the experiences of Inquiry witnesses) experienced multiple placements following their removal.

Placement types, Inquiry witnesses

Placement	Number	Percent
Single institution	88	25.1%
Multiple institutions or institution followed by work placement	95	27.1%
Single foster/adoptive placement	50	14.3%
Multiple foster/adoptive placements	6	1.7%
Institution(s) then foster/adoption or placement followed by institutionalisation	95	27.3%
Other	16	4.6%
Total for whom information available	350	100%

So I went through foster homes, and I never stayed in one any longer than two months ... Then you'd be moved onto the next place and it went on and on and on. That's one of the main reasons I didn't finish primary school.

According to the Australian Association of Infant Mental Health,

While separation and loss may become commonplace for the child who experiences several foster placements, the multiplicity of separations does not make them any easier.

Totality of separation

The overwhelming majority of the children forcibly removed under assimilationist legislation and policies were separated from their Indigenous family, community and culture. They were not permitted to use their languages.

Y'know, I can remember we used to just talk lingo. [In the Home] they used to tell us not to talk that language, that it's devil's language. And they'd wash our mouths with soap. We sorta had to sit down with Bible language all the time. So it sorta wiped out all our language that we knew.

[South Australia: woman taken from her parents with her 3 sisters when the family, who worked and resided on a pastoral station, came into town to collect stores; placed at Umewarra Mission.]

Missionaries in the Kimberley region of WA as late as the 1960s continued to pursue this policy of forbidding the use of Aboriginal languages.

My mother and brother could speak our language and my father could speak his. I can't speak my language. Aboriginal people weren't allowed to speak their language while white people were

around. They had to go out into the bush or talk their lingo on their own. Aboriginal customs like initiation were not allowed. We could not leave Cherbourg to go to Aboriginal traditional festivals. We could have a corroboree if the Protector issued a permit. It was completely up to him. I never had a chance to learn about my traditional and customary way of life when I was on the reserves.

[Queensland: woman removed in the 1940s]

This policy was usually applied by foster and adoptive families as well as missions and other institutions.

We made a series of errors through our ignorance and paternalism. We brought him up separate from the Koori population ... away from the Koori people. The ones we'd heard about in the paper were having big problems, so we thought we will keep him away from these problems till he matures. We didn't understand the full ramifications of invasion, of dispossession or dispersment. We learnt all this later. So we were – in the 1960s we're talking – we were ignorant well-meaning whites. We had some problems of course when he was about 10 – identity problems.

[Victoria: adoptive parents of a year old boy. Contact with family members was at best limited and strictly controlled.]

My mum had written letters to us that were never forwarded to us. Early when we were taken she used to go into the State Children's Department in Townsville with cards and things like that. They were never forwarded onto us.

[Queensland: woman removed and fostered at 6 years in the 1950s]

If we got letters, you'd end up with usually 'the weather's fine', 'we love you' and 'from your loving mother' or whatever. We didn't hear or see what was written in between. And that was one way they kept us away from our families. They'd turn around and say to you, 'See, they don't care about you'. Later on, when I left the home, I asked my mother, 'How come you didn't write letters?' She said, 'But we did'. I said, 'Well, we never got them'.

We were all rostered to do work and one of the girls was doing Matron's office, and there was all these letters that the girls had written back to the parents and family – the answers were all in the garbage bin. And they were wondering why we didn't write. That was one way they stopped us keeping in contact with our families. Then they had the hide to turn around and say, 'They don't love you. They don't care about you'.

[New South Wales: woman removed at 2 years in the 1940s, first to Bomaderry Children's Home, then to Cootamundra Girls' Home; now working to assist former Cootamundra inmates.]

Many children were told they were unwanted, rejected or that their parents were dead.

I remember this woman saying to me, 'Your mother's dead, you've got no mother now. That's why you're here with us'. Then about two years after that my mother and my mother's sister all came to The Bungalow but they weren't allowed to visit us because they were black. They had to sneak around onto the hills. Each mother was picking out which they think was their children. And this other girl said, 'Your mother up there'. And because they told me that she was dead, I said, 'No, that's not my mother. I haven't got a black mother'.

[Northern Territory: woman removed to The Bungalow, Alice Springs, at 5 years in the 1930s; later spent time at Croker Island Mission.]

I was trying to come to grips with and believe the stories they were telling me about me being an orphan, about me having no family. In other words telling me just get up on your own two feet, no matter what your size ... and just face this big world ... and in other words you don't belong to anybody and nobody belongs to you so sink or swim. And they probably didn't believe I would swim.

X

They changed our names, they changed our religion, they changed our date of birth, they did all that. That's why today, a lot of them don't know who they are, where they're from. We've got to watch today that brothers aren't marrying sisters; because of the Government. Children were taken from interstate, and they were just put everywhere.

Children were given the very strong impression their parents were worthless.

When I first met my mother – when I was 14 – she wasn't what they said she was. They made her sound like she was stupid, you know, they made her sound so bad. And when I saw her she was so beautiful. Mum said, 'My baby's been crying' and she walked into the room and she stood there and I walked into my – I walked into my mother and we hugged and this hot, hot rush just from the tip of my toes up to my head filled every part of my body – so hot. That was my first feeling of love and it only could come from my mum. I was so happy and that was the last time I got to see her. When my mum passed away I went to her funeral,

which is stupid because I'm allowed to go see her at her funeral but I couldn't have that when she requested me. They wouldn't let me have her.

[Victoria: removed 1967; witness's mother died two years after their first and only meeting.]

'Your family don't care about you anymore, they wouldn't have given you away. They don't love you. All they are, are just dirty, drunken blacks.' You heard this daily ... When I come out of the home and come to Redfern here looking for the girls, you see a Koori bloke coming towards you, you cross the street, you run for your life, you're terrified.

[New South Wales: woman removed to Cootamundra Girls' Home in the 1940s]

I grew up sadly not knowing one Aboriginal person and the view that was given to me was one of fear towards [my] people. I was told not to have anything to do with them as they were dirty, lived in shabby conditions and, of course, drank to excess. Not once was I told that I was of Aboriginal descent. I was told that with my features I was from some Island and they [foster family] knew nothing of my family or the circumstances.

[South Australia: woman removed to a children's home at 18 months in the 1960s and subsequently fostered by the caretakers.]

In an attempt to force 'white ways' upon the children and to ensure they did not return to 'the camp' on their release, Aboriginality was denigrated and Aboriginal people were held in open contempt. This denigration was among the most common experiences of witnesses to the Inquiry.

All the teachings that we received from our (foster) family when we were little, that black people were bad ... I wanted my skin to be white.

[Victoria: woman fostered at 10 years in the 1960s]

She [foster mother] would say I was dumb all the time and my mother and father were lazy dirty people who couldn't feed me or the other brothers and sister.

[South Australia: man fostered at 5 years in the 1960s]

There was a big poster at the end of the dining room and it used to be pointed out to us all the time when religious instruction was going on in the afternoon. They had these Aborigine people sitting at the end of this big wide road and they were playing cards, gambling and drinking. And it had this slogan which they used to read to us and point to us while they're saving us from ourselves and giving our souls to the Lord. It had, 'Wide is the road that leads us into destruction', which lead up into hell. The

other side they had these white people, all nicely dressed, leading on this narrow road, and 'Narrow is the road that leads us into the kingdom of life or the Kingdom of God'.

When I was 14 years old and going to these foster people, I remember the welfare officer sitting down and they were having a cup of tea and talking about how they was hoping our race would die out. And that I was fair enough, I was a half-caste and I would automatically live with a white person and get married. Because the system would make sure that no-one would marry an Aborigine person anyhow. And then my children would automatically be fairer, quarter-caste, and then the next generation would be white and we would be bred out. I remember when she was discussing this with my foster people, I remember thinking – because I had no concept of what it all meant – I remember thinking, 'That's a good idea, because all the Aborigines are poor'.

[New South Wales: woman removed to Bomaderry Children's Home as a baby in the 1940s; foster placement organised from Cootamundra broke down after 17 months and she was then placed in various work situations.]

We were told our mother was an alcoholic and that she was a prostitute and she didn't care about us. They [foster family] used to warn us that when we got older we'd have to watch it because we'd turn into sluts and alcoholics, so we had to be very careful. If you were white you didn't have that dirtiness in you ... It was in our breed, in us to be like that.

[New South Wales: woman fostered as a baby in the 1970s]

I got told my Aboriginality when I got whipped and they'd say, 'You Abo, you nigger'. That was the only time I got told my Aboriginality.

[Victoria: removed 1967]

Child and adolescent psychiatrist, Dr Brent Waters, has interviewed a number of people forcibly removed in NSW.

The people that I've talked to who were placed in white families were – and I haven't seen any that were absolutely fulsome about their family experience, most of them had some reservations – things seem to have gone quite well until they got into the teenage years. Then they started to become more aware of the fact that they were different. Some of these were quite light kids, but nevertheless that they were different. And it was the impact of what peers were doing and saying which seemed to be most distressing to them. And sometimes their families didn't deal with that very well. They were dismissive. 'Look, the best thing to do is just forget you were ever Aboriginal' or 'Tell them that you came from Southern Europe'. To pass off what was obviously a difference in skin colour. But in none of those families was there

a sense that one way to manage this situation was to recapture your sense of Aboriginality. There seemed to be no honour and dignity in being an Aboriginal, even if you'd been brought up by a family (evidence 532).

Institutional conditions

The living conditions in children's institutions were often very harsh.

And for them to say she [mother] neglected us! I was neglected when I was in this government joint down here. I didn't end up 15 days in a hospital bed [with bronchitis] when I was with me mum and dad.

[Victoria: woman removed at 9 years in the 1950s]

The physical infrastructure of missions, government institutions and children's homes was often very poor and resources were insufficient to improve them or to keep the children adequately clothed, fed and sheltered. WA's Chief Protector, A O Neville, later described the conditions at the Moore River Settlement in the 1920s (Neville had no control over the Settlement from 1920 until 1926, his jurisdiction being limited to the State's north during that period).

Moore River Settlement had rapidly declined under a brutal indifference. Here 'economy' had taken the form of ignoring maintenance and any improvement of buildings, reducing to a minimum the diet of 'inmates' and doing away with the use of cutlery – the children in the compounds being forced to eat with their hands. The salaries of attendant and teachers had been reduced and anything that was not essential to the rudimentary education available was removed. Even toys, such as plasticine, were removed from the classroom. Unhappiness and the desperate anxiety to locate and rejoin family members led to a sharp increase in absconders and runaways. Punishment was harsh and arbitrary and the 'inmates' feared the Police trackers who patrolled the settlement and hunted down escapees.

Doris Pilkington described the conditions as 'more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Aboriginal children' (Pilkington 1996 page 72).

Young men and women constantly ran away (this was in breach of the Aborigines Act). Not only were they separated from their families and relatives, but they were regimented and locked up like caged animals, locked in their dormitory after supper for the night. They were given severe punishments, including solitary confinements for minor misdeeds.

The situation did not improve with Neville's return. The per capita funding for the Moore River Settlement was half that of the lowest funded white institution (the Old Men's Home). In 1936 Western Australia spent less per capita on Aboriginal affairs than any other State. In 1938 the *West Australian* newspaper wrote of the 'crowded and unsuitable schoolroom' at the Settlement where over one hundred school age children carried out 'a campaign against two greatly-handicapped teachers'. The children were taught basic literacy, numeracy and hygiene, with a view to employment as domestic servants and rural labourers. There was no equipment for vocational training, therefore these skills were learnt by working on the settlement. Inmates were flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails.

Conditions in other children's institutions are also remembered as harsh. Melbourne law firm Phillips Fox summarised the experience reported by their clients.

... the consistent theme for post-removal memories is the lack of love, the strict, often cruel, treatment by adults, the constantly disparaging remarks about Aboriginality – and the fact that the child should be showing more gratitude for having been taken from all that – and of course, the terrible loneliness and longing to return to family and community. Some commented that 'I thought I was in a nightmare'. 'I couldn't work out what I'd done wrong to deserve this'. 'It was like being in prison'. 'It was very strict – you weren't allowed to do anything'.

X

There was no food, nothing. We was all huddled up in a room ... like a little puppy-dog ... on the floor ... Sometimes at night time we'd cry with hunger, no food ... We had to scrounge in the town dump, eating old bread, smashing tomato sauce bottles, licking them. Half of the time the food we got was from the rubbish dump.

[Northern Territory: man removed to Kahlin Compound at 3 years in the 1930s; subsequently placed at The Bungalow.]

It's a wonder we all survived with the food we got. For breakfast we got a bit of porridge with saccharine in it and a cup of tea. The porridge was always dry as a bone. Lunch was a plate of soup made out of bones, sheeps' heads and things like that, no vegetables. For dinner we had a slice of bread with jam and a cup of tea. After our dinner we were locked up in a dormitory for the night.

[WA woman who lived at Moore River Settlement from 1918 until 1939, quoted by Haebich 1982 on page 59.]

We didn't have enough meal. We used to go jump over the fence to the garden and steal rockmelon, watermelon, whatever we can get hold of, just to fill our stomachs for the night.

[Western Australia: man removed at 6 years in the 1940s to Beagle Bay Mission in the Kimberley.]

Institutional regimes were typically very strictly regulated.

Dormitory life was like living in hell. It was not a life. The only thing that sort of come out of it was how to work, how to be clean, you know and hygiene. That sort of thing. But we got a lot bashings.

[Queensland: woman removed at 5 years in 1948]

Children's well-being was sometimes severely neglected.

These are people telling you to be Christian and they treat you less than a bloody animal. One boy his leg was that gangrene we could smell him all down the dormitories before they finally got him treated properly.

[New South Wales: man removed to Kinchela Boys' Home in the 1960s]

Many witnesses related receiving or witnessing severe punishments.

At the time, we used to get a lot of coke. You got to fill the coke bins up. That's what you got to kneel on – on the coke [as a punishment]. You got no long trousers, [only] shorts and bare-footed. You know what we got to eat? Straw and buns. That was our tea. That's besides getting the cane. Get straw and buns. Quite naturally you're going to pull the straw out and chuck it away. You do that and you get caned. You're supposed to eat it.

[New South Wales: man removed to Kinchela Boys' Home at 9 years in 1950]

I remember the beatings and hidings [they] gave us and what I saw. I remember if you played up, especially on a Sunday, you got the cane. You play chasing, you had to drop your pants, lie across the bed and get 3-5 whacks. If you pissed the bed – another 3-5. I remember seeing, when I was about 7 or 9 – I think it was IM get pulled by the hair and her arm twisted behind her back and hit in the face ...

[South Australia: man removed to Colebrook at 2 years in the 1950s]

They were very cruel to us, very cruel. I've done things in that home that I don't think prisoners in a jail would do today ... I remember once, I must have been 8 or 9, and I was locked in the old morgue. The adults who worked there would tell us of the things that happened in there, so you can imagine what I went through. I screamed all night, but no one came to get me.

[Queensland: NSW woman removed to Cootamundra Girls' Home in the 1940s]

I've seen girls naked, strapped to chairs and whipped. We've all been through the locking up period, locked in dark rooms. I had a problem of fainting when I was growing up and I got belted every time I fainted and this is belted, not just on the hands or nothing. I've seen my sister dragged by the hair into those block rooms and belted because she's trying to protect me ... How could this be for my own good? Please tell me.

[New South Wales: woman removed to Cootamundra Girls' Home in the 1940s]

They used to lock us up in a little room like a cell and keep us on bread and water for a week if you played up too much. Stand us on a cement block outside in the rain with raincoats on if you got into trouble – for a month, after school, during playtime.

[South Australia: man removed as a baby in the 1950s; first placed at Koonibba Mission, then a Salvation Army Boys' Home where he experienced above punishments, then on to reform school and prison.]

In some cases administrators were admonished for their treatment of inmates or residents. Former WA Chief Protector, A O Neville, described in his 1947 book some of the treatments meted out by his staff at the Moore River Settlement.

One Superintendent I had, because he suspected him of some moral lapse, tarred and feathered a native, and he did the job thoroughly, calling the staff to see the rare bird he had captured ... Another Manager I did appoint, an ex-Missionary, and a good man too, I had to dismiss for chaining girls to table legs ... Indeed, it was found necessary to provide by regulation for the abolition of 'degrading' and injurious punishments and the practice of holding inmates up to ridicule, such as dressing them in old sacks or shaving girls' heads (Neville 1947 pages 112-113).

Verbal complaints and formal petitions were dismissed by one superintendent who told the commissioner, 'the natives generally feel that they must always have some complaints when you visit them'.

In 1927 Mrs Curry, a former employee at Cootamundra Girls' Home in NSW, alleged that girls had been 'flogged, slashed with a cane across the shoulders, and generally treated with undue severity and lack of sympathy, the use of the cane being a daily.

In 1935 the NSW Aborigines Protection Board commissioned a report on the conduct of the manager of Kinchela Boys' Home following receipt of allegations of insobriety and ill-treatment of the boys. Upon consideration of the report late in that year, the Board determined to 'strongly advise' the

manager 'to give up taking intoxicating liquor entirely' particularly when in the company of the boys and to inform him 'that on no account must he tie a boy up to a fence or tree, or anything else of that nature, to inflict punishment on him, that such instruments as lengths of hosepipe or a stockwhip must not be used in chastising a boy, that no dietary punishments shall be inflicted on any inmate in the Home'. He was also to be told that the practice of loaning out boys to local farmers was disapproved (NSW Aborigines Protection Board Minutes of Meetings, 4 December 1935).

Almost 1 in every five (19%) Inquiry witnesses who spent time in an institution reported having been physically assaulted there.

Sexual abuse

Children in every placement were vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. The following table indicates the placements in which Inquiry witnesses for whom the information could be extracted report having experienced sexual assaults. It should be noted that witnesses were not asked whether they had had this experience and that there are many reasons, personal and procedural, for deciding against volunteering the information.

Sexual assaults reported by Inquiry witnesses

Placement	Males		Females	
	Reported	Not reported	Reported	Not reported
Institution	10 (8.5%)	108 (91.5%)	19 (11.7%)	144 (88.3%)
Foster family	5 (10%)	45 (90%)	21 (29.6%)	50 (70.4%)
Adoptive family	1 (4.8%)	20 (95.2%)	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)
Work	0 (-)	19 (100%)	4 (10.5%)	34 (89.5%)
Total	16 (7.7%)	192 (92.3%)	50 (17.0%)	244 (83.0%)

Girls were more at risk than boys. For girls in particular the risk of sexual assault in a foster placement was far greater than in any other.

Almost one in ten boys and just over one in ten girls allege they were sexually abused in a children's institution.

There was tampering with the boys ... the people who would come in to work with the children, they would grab the boys' penises, play around with them and kiss them and things like this. These were the things that were done ... It was seen to be the white man's way of lookin' after you. It never happened with an Aboriginal.

[Western Australia: man removed in the 1930s to Sister Kate's Orphanage]

I was being molested in the home by one of the staff there ... I didn't know what she was doing with me. I didn't know anything about sex or anything like that, we weren't told. I can remember a

piece of wood shaped like a walking cane only on a smaller scale, like the candy striped lollipops they make today approximately 30cms long. She was telling me all about the time she was with my mother when she died and how my mother had told her how much she loved me. She also had a large bag of puffed wheat near the bed, because she knew how much I loved it. All this time she was inserting this cane into my vagina. I guess I was about 9 or 10. I know she did this to me many times over the years until she left the Home when I was about 14 years old.

We were totally isolated in the Home. You never knew anything of the outside world. We didn't know if that was right or wrong. Every time I knew she was coming, when matron was going on holidays, I would beg to matron not to go, because I knew she'd be there. She was always there – in my life, in my life in the Home. Her bedroom used to open out onto the dormitory ... I'd hear my name being called ... It was always me ... One night I hid under the bed. I held onto the bed and she pulled me out and flogged me with the strap. She is my biggest memory of that home.

[Queensland: NSW woman removed to Cootamundra Girls' Home in the 1940s]

When I was at Castledare I was badly interfered with by one of those brothers. I still know the room [in the church]. I was taken, selectively taken, and I was interfered with by one of those brothers. And if you didn't respond in a way, then you were hit, you were hit. I never told anyone that.

[Western Australia: man removed at birth in the 1940s]

One in ten boys and three in ten girls allege they were sexually abused in a foster placement or placements.

I ran away because my foster father used to tamper with me and I'd just had enough. I went to the police but they didn't believe me. So she [foster mother] just thought I was a wild child and she put me in one of those hostels and none of them believed me – I was the liar. So I've never talked about it to anyone. I don't go about telling lies, especially big lies like that.

[Victoria: woman removed at 7 years in the 1960s]

I led a very lost, confused, sad, empty childhood, as my foster father molested me. He would masturbate in front of me, touch my private parts, and get me to touch his. I remember once having a bath with my clothes on 'cause I was too scared to take them off. I was scared of the dark 'cause my foster father would often come at night. I was scared to go to the outside toilet as he would often stop me on the way back from the toilet. So I would

often wet the bed 'cause I didn't want to get out of bed. I was scared to tell anyone 'cause I once attempted to tell the local Priest at the Catholic church and he told me to say ten Hail Mary's for telling lies. So I thought this was how 'normal' non-Aboriginal families were. I was taken to various doctors who diagnosed me as 'uncontrollable' or 'lacking in intelligence'.

[New South Wales: woman removed at 3 years in 1946; experienced two foster placements and a number of institutional placements.]

One in ten girls allege they were sexually abused in a work placement organised by the Protection Board or institution. Other exploitation was known and condemned, but not prevented. By 1940 the NSW Board's record with respect to Aboriginal girls placed in service was well-known and even condemned in Parliament.

It has been known for years that these unfortunate people are exploited. Girls of 12, 14 and 15 years of age have been hired out to stations and have become pregnant. Young male aborigines who have been sent to stations receive no payment for their services ... Some are paid as little as sixpence a week pocket money and a small sum is retained on their behalf by the Board. In some instances they have difficulty later in recovering that amount from the Board.

In WA even the Chief Protector himself recognised the sufferings of many of the children he had placed 'in service'.

A good home with a kindly mistress is heaven to a coloured girl of the right type, yet failures are often due to the attitude of employers and their families. It does not help matters much to have the children in a family refer to their mother's coloured help as a 'dirty black nigger' or a 'black bitch' – such are amongst the complaints that the girls used to bring to me.

One lad told me that when he asked for his wages, the Boss said, 'What does a black — like you want with money, you ought to be shot' ... I must confess that as regards some of the homes I personally visited, I could not blame the employee, indeed I felt like apologising to him for being the means of placing him in such a position (Neville 1947 page 190).

X

When I was thirteen I started contract work. I did not ask to go to work. The white officials just told us we had to go to work and they wrote out a contract for us. My first job was on L. Station,

Winton. I was employed to do housework but I had to do everything. Looking after Mrs E's invalid mother – including bathing her and taking her to the toilet. I did washing, ironing, house cleaning, cooked and served meals, looked after the yard, chopped wood, milked cows, did bore casing, rod placement, water pumping and did fencing with Mr E.

I had to eat my meals from a tin plate and drank from a tin mug, I ate my meals on the wood heap. I was given different food to what the E's ate. Sometimes I was just allowed a couple of eggs – I was often very hungry. I had a room at the end of the shearer's shed (the shed could accommodate up to 24 shearers, during shearing time). It was small, windowless and there was no lighting. I had a wogga for a bed – made out of hessian [stuffed with straw], a bag for cover and a potato bag for a cupboard. I was very nervous there especially coming from the dormitory life where we were either guarded or locked up.

I was thirteen at the time Mr E wanted to rape me. I rushed around to his car pulled out the shotgun and instead of shooting him I pushed him in the bore tank. He never tried anything else since. I told Mrs E and she told me that it was a lie, that he wouldn't touch a black person. I told the Superintendent at Cherbourg. He wouldn't believe me.

[Queensland: woman removed in the 1940s]

One NSW employer pursued her servant's former employer with rape charges. 'In 1940 she arranged for a state ward formerly in her charge to sue her [previous] employer for assault'. This servant, a Koori girl of only 16 at the time the allegations were made public, had been raped by her previous employer. This was confirmed by two subsequent medical examinations. Nevertheless, the Aborigines Protection Board officials to whom the matter was reported 'accused the girl of being a "sexual maniac" who had lived with "dozens of men". In 1941 this young woman was 'committed to Parramatta Mental Hospital where she remained for 21 years until the authorities discharged her as having no reason to remain'. No charges were ever laid against her attacker.

John was removed from his family as an infant in the 1940s. He spent his first years in Bomaderry Children's Home at Nowra. At 10 he was transferred to Kinchela.

John

We didn't have a clue where we came from. We thought the Sisters were our parents. They didn't tell anybody – any of the kids – where they came from. Babies were coming in nearly every day. Some kids came in at two, three, four days old – not months – but days. They were just placed in the home and it was run by Christian women and all the kids thought it was one big family. We didn't know what it meant by

'parents' cause we didn't have parents and we thought those women were our mothers.

I was definitely not told that I was Aboriginal. What the Sisters told us was that we had to be white. It was drummed into our heads that we were white. It didn't matter what shade you were. We thought we were white. They said you can't talk to any of them coloured people because you're white.

I can't remember anyone from the welfare coming there. If they did I can't remember ... We hardly saw any visitors whatsoever. None of the other kids had visits from their parents. No visits from family. The worst part is, we didn't know we had a family.

When you got to a certain age – like I got to 10 years old ... they just told us we were going on a train trip ... We all lined up with our little ports [school cases] with a bible inside. That's all that was in the ports, see. We really treasured that – we thought it was a good thing that we had something ... the old man from La Perouse took us from Sydney – well actually from Bomaderry to Kinchela Boys' Home. That's when our problems really started – you know!

This is where we learned that we weren't white. First of all they took you in through these iron gates and took our little ports [suitcases] off us. Stick it in the fire with your little bible inside. They took us around to a room and shaved our hair off ... They gave you your clothes and stamped a number on them ... They never called you by your name; they called you by your number. That number was stamped on everything.

If we answered an attendant back we were 'sent up the line'. Now I don't know if you can imagine, 79 boys punching the hell out of you – just knuckling you. Even your brother, your cousin.

They had to – if they didn't do it, they were sent up the line. When the boys who had broken ribs or broken noses – they'd have to pick you up and carry you right through to the last bloke. Now that didn't happen once – that happened every day.

Before I went to Kinchela, they used to use the cat-o'-nine-tails on the boys instead of being sent up the line. This was in the 30s and early 40s.

Kinchela was a place where they thought you were animals. You know it was like a place where they go around and kick us like a dog ... It was just like a prison. Truthfully, there were boys having sex with boys ... But these other dirty mongrels didn't care. We had a manager who was sent to prison because he was doing it to a lot of the boys, sexual abuse. Nothing was done. There was a Pommie bloke that was doing it. These attendants – if the boys told them, they wouldn't even listen. It just happened ... I don't like talking about it.

We never went into town ... the school was in the home ... all we

did was work, work, work. Every six months you were dressed up. Oh mate! You were done up beautiful – white shirt. The welfare used to come up from Bridge St, the main bloke, the superintendent to check the home out – every six months.

We were prisoners from when we were born ... The girls who went to Cootamundra and the boys who went to Kinchela – we were all prisoners. Even today they have our file number so we're still prisoners you know. And we'll always be prisoners while our files are in archives.

Protection

Chief Protectors, Protection and Welfare Boards and State welfare officers frequently failed to protect their charges from abuse in placements they had organised.

They [foster family] started to get very nasty towards me. Every time I would sit down at the table for meals [they] would always have something to say to me: about my manners at the table, how to sit, how to chew, how to eat, when to eat. If I would make a mistake they would pull my hair bending my head until it hurt. I would cry saying sorry. I couldn't understand them. It seemed like I was always in the wrong. I started to feel very uncomfortable. I kept crying and thinking about my family. I wanted to go home. I was sick and tired of this sort of life. I hated it.

I was very upset with this family. I couldn't even see anybody to tell them what was happening. A lady from the welfare came to see me. I told her how I was feeling. She just took no notice of me and done her reports saying I was very happy with [them]. I just had to put up with it all. So one day I went to Port Adelaide and stole a pocket knife from one of the stores just so I could get into trouble and leave this family.

[South Australia: man removed at 7 years in the 1950s; his second foster family treated him well and assisted his reunion with his natural father.]

The thing that hurts the most is that they didn't care about who they put us with. As long as it looked like they were doing their job, it just didn't matter. They put me with one family and the man of the house used to come down and use me whenever he wanted to ... Being raped over and over and there was no-one I could turn to. They were supposed to look after me and protect me, but no-one ever did.

[New South Wales: woman removed to Parramatta Girls' Home at the age of 13 in the 1960s and subsequently placed in domestic service.]

My sister saw our welfare officer when she was grown up and he told her that he'd always thought our [foster] house was

abnormal. He thought us kids were abnormal. He thought we were like robots, we had to look at her [foster mother] before we said anything. When an officer comes along they're supposed to talk to you on your own. She [foster mother] insisted that she had to be in the room because they could sexually assault us while she was out of the room, so she wasn't going to allow it. Being the minister's wife, they agreed that she was allowed to sit there. So we never had the chance to complain. Welfare never gave us a chance.

[New South Wales: woman removed as a baby with her sisters and placed in an emotionally abusive foster home until the age of 13 years.]

Bonds of affection

The developmental needs of children were imperfectly understood until the 1950s and even later. However, there was an early appreciation of the damage incurred in institutions (highlighted by the NSW Public Charities Commission Inquiry in 1874). Non-Indigenous children soon benefited from this new awareness. Indigenous children did not. Their needs were met only to a limited extent in some institutions during some periods.

The example of Colebrook Home in South Australia during the tenure of Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter is acknowledged. Bomaderry Children's Home is perhaps another. The key feature was the encouragement of close attachments between older girls and babies, infants and young children. As we now know, attachment to a primary carer is essential for the infant's emotional, intellectual and social development and for his or her happiness. The bonds permitted in these more enlightened institutions went some way to overcoming the many other damaging effects of institutionalisation for many Indigenous inmates. Many Colebrook people have spoken fondly of Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter.

We were fortunate because we were just like brothers and sisters in Colebrook. We never ended up in reform. Our brothers and sisters were able to keep ourselves together. Because the Sisters were able to give us the Christian upbringing, we were able to keep some sort of sanity about ourselves. We were brought up very well. I think we had nothing but the best in Colebrook.

When you were in Colebrook, the older kids took you on. The two Sisters could not give you the love that a mother could give you but the older one of mine was Emily, that did my hair, she was more than your sister, she was your mother/auntie. The older ones sort of took the younger ones under their care. So you got your love in a different way. Matron couldn't give everybody hugs and loves and kisses, but that minder was more like my mother. There was somebody missing that she took that place as that warm caring person and each one had their older one looking after them.

[South Australia: woman removed at 7 years in the 1930s]

We were all happy together, us kids. We had two very wonderful old ladies that looked after us. It wasn't like an institution really. It was just a big happy family. I can say that about that home – United Aborigines Mission home that was at Quorn. Y'know they gave us good teaching, they encouraged us to be no different to anybody else. We went to the school, public school. There was no difference between white or black.

[South Australia: woman removed with her brother at 5 years in the 1930s; spent approximately 8 years at Colebrook.]

Some children were also fortunate to find love, care and comfort, and often a considerable measure of understanding of their Indigenous heritage, in foster homes and adoptive families.

I was very fortunate that when I was removed, I was with very loving and caring parents. The love was mutual ... My foster mother used to take me and my sister to town. Mum used to always walk through Victoria Square and say to us, 'Let's see if any of these are your uncles'. My sister and I used to get real shamed. I used to go home and cry because I used to get so frightened and could never understand why my mum would do this to us, when it made us upset. Only when I was near 29 did I realise why ... I know my foster parents were the type of people that always understood that I needed to know my roots, who I was, where I was born, who my parents were and my identity ... I remember one day I went home to my foster father and stated that I had heard that my natural father was a drunk. My foster father told me you shouldn't listen to other people: 'You judge him for yourself, taking into account the tragedy, that someday you will understand'.

[South Australia: woman fostered at 4 years in the 1960s]

Education

Witnesses to the Inquiry removed to missions and institutions told of receiving little or no education, and certainly little of any value.

The authorities said I was removed from my parents so I could receive an education but the fact is the nuns never gave me that education. I didn't receive an education. I was very neglected.

[Quoted by WA Aboriginal Legal Service]

I don't know who decided to educate the Aboriginal people but the standard was low in these mission areas. I started school at the age of eight at grade 1, no pre-school. I attended school for six years, the sixth year we attended grade 4, then after that we left school, probably 14 years old.

[Queensland: man removed to Cherbourg in the 1940s]

I didn't have much schooling ... Now, thinking about it, we were told from the outset that we had to go to the mission because we had to go to school, but then when we got in there we weren't forced to go to school or anything.

[Gertie Sambo quoted by Rintoul 1993 on page 89]

What education was provided generally aimed at completion of their schooling at the level achieved by a ten year old child in the State education system. It emphasised domestic science and manual training, thus preparing the children for a future as menial workers within the government or mission communities or as cheap labour in the wider community (Loos and Osanai 1993 page 20).

I finished school in fifth grade. I think I was 17. I did alright at school but they wouldn't allow us to go on. They wouldn't allow us to be anything. I would have liked to be a nurse or something but when I finished school they sent me to work as a domestic on stations.

[Queensland: woman removed at 7 years in 1934 to the dormitory on Palm Island]

Aspirations were trampled.

I wanted to be a nurse, only to be told that I was nothing but an immoral black lubra, and I was only fit to work on cattle and sheep properties ... I strived every year from grade 5 up until grade 8 to get that perfect 100% mark in my exams at the end of each year, which I did succeed in, only to be knocked back by saying that I wasn't fit to do these things ... Our education was really to train us to be domestics and to take orders.

[Queensland: woman removed at 5 years in 1948 to the dormitory on Palm Island.]

... as I stood with my father beside my grade 8 teacher, he told her of my ambitions to study medicine, and she responded that I didn't have the brains to go on to high school ... notwithstanding that I had always had an above average academic record through school.

[NSW Aboriginal Magistrate Pat O'Shane 1995 page]

I was the best in the class, I came first in all the subjects. I was 15 when I got into 2nd year and I wanted to ... continue in school, but I wasn't allowed to, because they didn't think I had the brains, so I was taken out of school and that's when I was sent out to farms just to do housework.

[Woman removed to Cootamundra, NSW]

Work and wages

Although Aboriginal children were expected to take on the responsibilities of work at a very young age, they were not trusted with their own wages. In NSW regulations provided that they were only entitled to retain a small proportion of their meagre earnings as pocket money.

Most girls considered the pocket money they received to be too small to buy anything decent and spent it on items such as beads. Others used it to buy small amounts of food when they had the opportunity. Many girls simply never received the pocket money.

The rest had to be paid to the Board which had the right to spend the money on the child's behalf and hold the balance in trust until the child turned 21. Many apprentices never received the money that was rightfully theirs.

Fraud on wards' accounts was common from the early days of the apprenticing system. In Queensland in 1904 an official inquiry found that the protectrice of Aboriginal girls in service had been defrauding their savings accounts. She was forced to resign and a system of thumbprints was introduced for endorsement of withdrawals in an effort to overcome the problem.

They sent me when I was 16 from Parramatta Girls' Home out to M, a property 137 miles from Nyngan. We never had a holiday. We weren't allowed to go into town with them. If you did go in or go anywhere and you saw any Aboriginal people, you weren't allowed to speak to them. So you had to live that isolated life. We never, ever got our wages or anything like that. It was banked for us. And when we were 21 we were supposed to get this money, you see. We never got any of that money ever. And that's what I wonder: where could that money have went? Or why didn't we get it?

[Queensland: NSW woman removed to Cootamundra at 2 or 3 years in the 1940s, spending the ages of 13-16 in Parramatta Girls' Home.]

[Chief Protector] Neville got our money. We were working on a station. Some of them worked six or seven years. And the money come down here to that office here in Wellington St [Perth]. When I finished up, coming back from the Territory, I told who I was and I said, 'There's money supposed to be here'. I got 30 shillings – one pound ten – a red, white and blue blanket, and a pass to the Settlement [Moore River]. I said, 'Hey, I don't want your pass to the Settlement. I can go to the Settlement. That's my home'.

[Western Australia: man removed to Sister Kate's Orphanage in 1933 and probably working during the 1940s.]

I was sent out when I was eleven years old to [pastoral station]. I worked there for seven and a half years. Never got paid anything all that time. [Even] Aboriginal people I was working with used to get 30 bob. Yet we didn't get nothing. I used to say, 'Where's my money?' 'Oh, they put it into the trust account.' So I worked there for them. Oh rough, hardly any food or anything, put out in remote area on me own, drawing water and that, looking after cattle ... no holiday, no pay. I never received one pay that seven and a half years I was there.

[Northern Territory: man removed to Kahlin Compound at 3 years in the 1920s; subsequently placed at Pine Creek and The Bungalow.]

Sarah

When I accessed my file, I found out that the police and the station people at B... Station felt that my mother was looking after me. And they were unsure of why I was being taken away. They actually asked if I could stay there. But because I was light-skinned with a white father, their policy was that I had to be taken away. I was then the third child in a family of, as it turned out to be, 13. I was the only one taken away from the area [at the age of 4 in 1947].

The year that I was taken away, my [maternal] uncle wrote a letter to the then Native Welfare and asked if I could be returned to him, because he had an Aboriginal wife and he was bringing up his child. And he gave an undertaking to send me to school when I was of school age and to ensure that I was looked after. The letter that went back from the Commissioner of Native Affairs said that I was light-skinned and shouldn't be allowed to mix with natives.

My mother didn't know what happened to me. My eldest brother and my auntie tried to look for me. But they were unable to find out where I'd been sent.

When I was sent to Sister Kate's in '47, the policies of Sister Kate, even though she'd died the year previous, were still very much in hand. There was possibly something like one hundred kids there and we were brought up in various stages by various house mothers – who were usually English ladies who were not really interested in us. So it was a situation where the younger kids were looked after by the older kids and they were really the only parents that we knew.

We were constantly told that we didn't have families and that we were white children. It wasn't until we went across the road to school that we were called the names of 'darkies' and 'niggers' and those sorts of names. So when we were at school we were niggers and when we were home we were white kids. The policy of the home was to take only the light-skinned children because Sister Kate's policy was to have us assimilated and save us from natives.

We were sent to school. We were given religious instruction seven days a week. We were all baptised, then confirmed in the Anglican faith. Usually the boys were sent out at an early age to work on farms;

and the girls too, as domestics. So all of our training was consistent with the aim that we would become subservient to white people as domestics or farmhands. We started doing our own washing and things like that from the time we went to school. And we were also involved in the main washing at the big laundry – that's the sheets and things.

But generally your own washing was done on a weekly basis at the house that you lived in, which was a cottage arrangement.

You all had chores before and after school. There was a main kitchen which did all the meals for the home, and once you started school you were old enough to go over early in the morning and peel vegetables for one hundred kids. So that was all part of the training to be domestics.

We had cows at Sister Kate's. So the boys had to milk the cows and make sure the milk was ready every morning. The boys did the gardening and the general labouring work. The boys were basically being trained as farmhands or labourers and the girls as domestics. There was no thought of any other alternative.

We were discouraged from any contact with Aboriginal people. We had to come into Perth to go to the dentist and the hospital and we would usually be sent in with a house parent or one of the older girls. And you'd come in on the train to East Perth. Our instructions were quite explicit: run across the park, don't talk to the natives. Go to Native Welfare, get your slip, go across the road to the dentist, get your dental treatment done, back to the Native Welfare to report in, run across the park and catch the 3.15 home. You were never allowed to catch the next train. If you missed that train you'd be in trouble when you got home because you might have talked to natives.

But the problem was that a lot of the people who were in the park, while they were drinking or just in groups, actually knew some of the kids, and used to yell out to you. And you had then little hints that somebody knew you. Not so much me, because I was from the country. But other kids had a feeling that those people must know somebody.

As we got older, some people's family used to turn up and they were discouraged, they were sent away, or the kids were removed from that particular area.

We were sent out to families for holidays. That didn't occur until my upper primary school years. And I used to go to a place in G. And they had one little girl there. I wasn't overly sure why I was being sent there because I didn't like it. It came to a head one Christmas when I found out. I got up in the morning – Christmas morning – and the little girl had been given this magnificent bride doll, and I'd been given a Raggedy Ann doll. So I asked could I go home and I was taken home. I got a good hiding and was sent to bed and told how ungrateful I was because those people wanted to adopt me. I didn't know what 'adopt' meant. But I said I couldn't go somewhere where I didn't get the same

as the other kid.

There was no love or anything in the home. That only came from the other kids. But you never really had a chance to confide in anybody about your problems. You found out the hard way about the facts of life. Girls with menstrual problems, things like that, nobody ever told you about it, they just happened.

Children would disappear from Sister Kate's in the early '50s but we didn't know where they went to. We later found out. The scars on the kids are still there. If you were naughty – and naughty could mean anything – if you were extra cheeky or if you ran away overnight or played up with the boys – if you were just caught mixing with the boys too much – the girls were sent to the Home of the Good Shepherd. One girl that I grew up with was sent there for three years from the age of eleven. She never knew why. She just disappeared one morning. That was a lock-up situation at the Home of the Good Shepherd. They were never allowed out of the compound itself. At that time, they did all the washing and ironing for the private schools. That's the sort of hard life those kids had and there was constant physical abuse of the kids ...

Some of the boys that disappeared, we discovered they'd gone up to Stoneville, which was the boys' institution at that time. One boy at one time ended up in Heathcote [psychiatric institution]. I don't think we know to this day why he ended up in Heathcote. But it just seemed to be that the power was enormous. We were able to be dealt with just like that.

In 1957, with two other children, I was told that I had to go to court. I couldn't remember doing anything wrong. But I was taken down to the Children's Court. I was made a State ward because I was declared to be a destitute child. And I still to this day can't work out how I was declared to be a destitute child when the Government took me away from a mother who was looking after me. Being made a State ward gave Sister Kate's another income, a regular income until I was the age of 18. They then didn't have to depend on Native Welfare for the six pounds a year or whatever they used to get for us. They got extra money and when I turned 18 I'd be eligible for a clothing allowance, even though I was going to be sent out to work earlier.

I was told I was going to be sent out as a domestic. I was told if I didn't do well I'd go out as a domestic. I put my head down with about six other kids. And we got through second year [high school] and then third year, so we were saved from being domestics.

When the Presbyterians took over the home in the mid '50s, they then added an extra lot of religion to us. We used to have religion from the Presbyterian faith as well as the Anglican faith.

So we weren't sure what we were. And the policies of Sister Kate's were still adhered to in as much as we were discouraged from having any contact with families.

In my second year [high school] I received a letter from my second eldest brother and a photograph telling me he'd had information from a girl my same age who was in Sister Kate's but had gone home [about] where I was and all that sort of information. So he sent me a letter asking me to write back. I don't know how I managed to get the letter. But I went to see Mr D. [the superintendent] and was told that people do that all the time; I should ignore that because some of these people just want us and they would take us away and we'd be with natives. We had a fear of natives because that had been something that had been part of our upbringing. So we were frightened.

[Sarah was finally traced by a nephew when she was in her thirties.]

And suddenly I met a mother I never knew existed and a whole family that I didn't know. My mother blamed herself all those years for what happened. Because I was the only one who was taken away, she thought it was her fault somehow.