



OPEN PLACE

Support Service for Forgotten Australians

Lessons from the Past: Implications for Today

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Outline of presentation

This presentation:

- Provides a brief overview of the Forgotten Australian “care” and subsequent “life” experience.
- Compares past care leaver attributes with current desired outcomes.
- Asks what have we learnt from these past experiences that will help us improve our “care” systems.

The Forgotten Australian “care” experience

- Separation from family members
- Loss of family connections
- Abandonment
- Verbal abuse
- Deception
- Neglect and exploitation
- Criminal levels of sexual and physical assault

How did this prepare children for life?

To survive, children developed *adaptive behaviors*:

- Watchful, vigilant, guarded, distrustful, alone, compliant.

Many children left “care” with:

- Limited or no literacy and numeracy skills
- Limited social and relational skills
- Limited or no family support

Adults and adaptive behaviors?

- Continuing institutionalization; homelessness
- Poor employment prospects
- Mental health and drug and alcohol issues
- Continuing loneliness and isolation
- Poor personal relationships
- Chronic medical and dental problems

What have we learnt?

First: DO NO HARM!!

Then we have learnt that:

- Family relationships matter: maintenance and repair of relationships is a fundamental task
- Community connectedness matters: there must be a life beyond the immediate “care” experience
- External and lasting trusting relationships matter: this is more than the care team!

The task

- The task of child welfare is to repair child trauma and developmental damage and to rebuild families.
- A tough task. Sometimes the role requires that the welfare “assume” care of the child.
- To assume the role of PARENT is an awesome undertaking.
- How should the undertaking of this task be judged?

The fundamental question: *What would a reasonable parent want?*

A reasonable parent will want

..a combination of these qualities for their child

- Curiosity
- Empathy
- Sense of self
- Ability to trust
- Social awareness
- Educated

HOW?

- Remember the State along with its proxy (the “caring agency”) assume the responsibilities of the **parent**.
- What does a parent do? How does a parent do it?
- A parent provides continuing, consistent and **LIFELONG** support.
- A child who has been in “care” can expect the “caring agency” to provide these supports for **LIFE**.

A comparison

How are we doing with:

- Family connectedness?
- Preparation for adulthood?
- Social connectedness?

A future challenge

Kinship care

Now the largest and fastest growing form of OOHC.

- Characterized by an aging group of care givers
- Very poorly assessed and supported.

Is normalization an excuse for lack of affirmative funding?

The past is not dead.

It is not even past.

William Faulkner