Eyes of identification: Challenges and opportunities in leveraging highly visible, multiple-level histories

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Abstract

Histories of out of home 'care'[1] have traditionally fallen into four categories: in-house productions, commissioned histories; academic studies and survivor narratives. Each of these is problematic. A more inclusive approach, which encourages a close relationship between historian and those who lived the experience, is offered through projects arising from Australian government enquiries into indigenous, migrant and Australian-born children in care. These projects challenge historians on two main fronts: They defy historians' 'scholarly distance' and require them to embrace alternative, often competing and personally confronting, histories as they seek to incorporate care leavers' voices in published history. A greater challenge, though, is for historians to find effective ways to intersect public history with public policy so that the undesirable legacies of the past do not recur in the futures of the children who are in out of home care today.

Key words: Australia; Care Leavers'; Find and Connect; In-care survivors; Care histories

The historian as witness

As a response to the recognition by governments and 'care' providers that some form of redress for experiences in care is warranted, a new category of out-of-home care histories is emerging, one which demands the historian to have not only the disinterest of the scholar, but the empathy and engagement of a witness to very personal human journeys. This 'witness' model[i] acknowledges the historian's role in assisting care leavers to assert and certify their lived experience and also honours the fact that the historian may be one of the few, and sometimes the first, person to whom the care leaver has disclosed these experiences. It imposes upon the historian the courage to look at the past with 'eyes of identification' (Harrington, 1986, p.181) as well as scholarly expertise.

The goal of the academic historian has traditionally been to explain rather than expose the failure of child welfare organisations to act in response to children's suffering in care (Scott & Swain, 2002). Explanations tended to position institutional abuse as evidence of

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[1] In this document we have not used inverted commas around the word 'care', although we are aware that many people feel that 'care' is not a word to describe their childhood experiences in a home or other institution. We trust that this choice will not cause any offence or hurt.

failed policy that was imposed on, rather than experienced by, children and was, moreover, safely confined to the past (Dickey, 1980 p.18-19; Ramsland, 1986, p.184-5). Even where academic studies have attempted to 'people' the narrative, such as the remarkable early work of Margaret Barbalet (1983), whose approach has been continued by contemporary scholars such as Naomi Parry (2007), Caroline Evans (1994) and Nell Musgrove (2009), the recollections of the 'care' leaver community were not, initially at least, sought. The people whose experiences were being recorded all too often remained 'unknown and anonymous' (Barbalet, 1983).

Academic histories have had little to offer in response to the 'care' leaver's question: 'Why did this happen to me?' Significantly, all of the recent enquiries into the fate of children in out-of-home 'care' have given primacy to personal testimony, the experience of those who were there, rather than historical research.

Government inquiries have actively encouraged the retrieval of those memories which relate to the entirety of the childhood experience and its legacies. There have been three national inquiries undertaken in Australia over the last fifteen years, and each engages explicitly with these histories of out of home care, affirming their importance to personal and national identity and making recommendations in relation to archives, record keeping and memorials, to preserve the lived experience as well as organisational history. Projects to document the history of Forgotten Australians, and to improve their access to archival records, were central to the initiatives announced by the Australian Government in the wake of the apology to forgotten Australians and former child migrants on 16 November 2009.[ii] The individual reports from the inquiries emphasise the importance of history for care leavers who 'do not have the mementoes of childhood that are taken for granted by most Australians: school reports, photographs; and happy memories of birthdays' (Australian senate community affairs references committee, 2004). Evident throughout many of the testimonies upon which the inquiries based their recommendations is an accusation that the accounts on the public record present a far too rosy view of the past – a view that is discordant with care leavers' memories.[iii] The reports and recommendations recognise the role that history can play as Australia strives to base national reconciliation on a broader 'truth', providing both challenges and opportunities for professional practitioners.

A more accountable narrative

Historians were trained to assume that they could build a boundary between the present and the past, but in this area, as in many others where personal testimony comes into play, the two are, sometimes uncomfortably, intertwined (Attwood, 2008). The 'complex truths' of the past are 'at risk of being sorted and pressed into the simplifying imperatives of the present.' (Harrington, 1996, p.181). Including those who were there in the documentation of history enables those complexities to be incorporated into the public narrative. In building up the documentary record on which the Stolen Generation enquiry and report were based, and in their subsequent co-written survivor narratives, Peter Read and Anna Haebich pioneered a collaborative model of research, based upon a concept of shared authority, first expounded by Michael Frisch (1990) in relation to the practice of oral history. It is not a top down or benevolent model but rather one of standing alongside

and learning from each other, recognising complementary skills and knowledge sets. Such an approach has proved productive not only of broadly-based work but of a range of individual stories, collaboratively written, which, together, continue to add to the evidence base from which both scholars and campaigners can now draw (Mellor & Haebich, 2002; Powell & Kennedy, 2005). However, it is not a model without risks, leaving historians open to challenges of becoming too close to their subjects or distorting evidence to support their own political causes (Attwood, 2008, p.93).

To no small degree, these risks are mitigated by the nature of the historian's role as collaborative witness, which subjects the historical record to far greater scrutiny – not only by professional peers, but by people 'who were there', and 'there' was not confined to Australia, for the uncovering of childhoods in care is an international endeavour. Historians in Germany, Ireland and several of the Scandinavian countries are engaged in projects designed to explore and document the experiences of former residents of child welfare institutions.[iv] With the establishment of its truth and reconciliation commission, Canada is going down a similar path.[v] Such ventures into public history bring higher levels of both responsibility and accountability, not only to government and national populations, but also to the people whose lives will be more directly affected by their findings (Byrnes, 1998, pp.15-16; Attwood and Magowan, 2001).

In the UK, the Scottish Human Rights Commission commissioned the Care Leavers' Association (CLA) to work with the Scottish Institute of Residential Childcare (SIRCC) to enable the views of Scottish care leavers and abuse survivors to be 'taken into account in how the "Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum" is set up and run' (Goddard, 2011). The results of this research were preceded by the Scottish government's decision to implement a pilot forum, 'Time to be Heard' (SIRC, 2011) and the authors were concerned to ensure that the race to hear did not diminish the commitment to be accountable to what was said. As Professor Alan Miller, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission explained:

> [Accountability] not only meets the demands for justice of those who have suffered violations of their human rights – and that would be sufficient justification - but also is in the public interest in that it is the principal means of protection of the dignity and human rights of all of those vulnerable individuals who are in need of care today and tomorrow. Accountability is the means of shifting the balance of power between those charged with the responsibility of providing care and those vulnerable individuals in need of care (Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2010).

Evaluations from In Care Survivors Service Scotland (ICSSS)'s 'Making a Difference' conference in March 2011 highlighted the importance of including the voices and perspectives of care leavers at events from which they would have traditionally been excluded or at best only been in the audience. Both positive and negative evaluations highlight the appreciation of and desire for input by care leavers, who seek to influence the services and policy environment that are ostensibly being developed to support them.

As one respondent concluded, 'We are the ones who need to be heard and provided a service'; and another, 'Hear me!' (In Care Survivors Service Scotland, 2011).

Personal challenges for the witness historian

In 2009, the Western Australian Government introduced a scheme, Redress WA, that enabled people who had been in care as children in that State to apply for an 'apology and acknowledgement that harm has occurred, access to support and counselling services and, for eligible Applicants, an ex-gratia payment' (Redress WA, 2008, p.12). As part of the Redress WA scheme, people could get assistance writing their application from funded providers whose role was to relate the historical narrative and demonstrate how that had impacted on the applicant's current quality of life and future prospects. Their role was to bear witness and help certify those experiences in a collaborative effort with the applicant.

In an institutional history, the historian may confront physical and sexual abuse as part of a broader discussion of life in the homes, clearly identifying the points at which such treatment deviated from official and community standards. They may note the circumstances that allowed such abuse to arise, and end a chapter with a tribute to the resilience of their informants (Barnard & Twigg, 2004 are an example of this). When the historian is helping a care leaver make an application for redress, the process of documenting the history is poignantly enhanced by the presence of a person in the room or on the telephone, previously silent and forgotten, trying to make sense of a fractured and traumatic past. In assisting with the application, the historian becomes not only a witness to the care leaver's struggle to relate their experience, but a translator of that highly personalised account in a format that addresses the bureaucratic assessment criteria. As Harrington (1996, p.181) observed in relation to medical histories, a further complication is that the historian's 'act of "looking" is partly "pre-interpreted" through a range of intense personal and collective present meanings.'

In working on their histories with applicants for Redress WA, five key challenges to 'normal' historical practice were evident: ownership of the narrative, dealing with emotions, the potential to do more harm, understanding 'why', and assaults on personal memories. Each of these challenges poses questions and choices for the historian to heed and ponder, before and during the process. The challenges were intensely obvious in the redress application process, but are equally pertinent to the historian's ability to practise the witness model in other contexts.

Unlike much historical scholarship, the ownership of the redress narrative always remains with the applicant – the applicant 'owns' the story of their lived experience. If the historian knows about the social and policy context, is it their role to 'educate' the applicant so that the lived experience is 'normalised'? If the experiences as related by the applicant are relatively 'minor' on the continuum of abuse, is it the historian's role to 'dig deeper' to uncover memories of more serious events? The historian must not disclose the narrative unless the applicant agrees, and this includes only removing/adding content to the applicant's satisfaction and possibly not making an application at all, however compelling a case it makes to the historian.[vi]

There is a potential for deep emotions to emerge as the narrative unfolds. It is not only the care leaver who is open to emotional trauma, the historian is also vulnerable. Given the confidentiality of the process, the historian may wish to seek professional support to deal with issues that arise in the course of the application. Is the historian a 'friend' in this process? How does the historian maintain a 'scholarly disinterest' sufficient to produce a useful application, yet remain empathetic to the care leaver as they relate their narrative?[vii]   Should all contact with the care leaver cease once the application (i.e. the 'professional relationship') is finalised?

There is a potential to do more harm. How does the historian balance the need to document the 'worst' sequelae, yet honour the resilience of the care leaver? Can the historian ensure that the applicant is 'no worse off' through their interaction? What can the historian do to minimise the detrimental impact (e.g. heightened sense of victimisation) of their interaction with the care leaver during the application process? (Kirton, Feast & Goddard, 2011; Tropea, Elkner & McCarthy, 2010; Kertesz, 2011).[viii]

Disbelief and the challenge to personal histories can arise because some care leavers have warm and happy memories of their time in care and have enjoyed satisfying lives as adults. Enquiries and redress schemes bring these care leavers face-to-face with allegations of abuses occurring within the Homes of their childhood. This can be extremely confronting, because it can call into question and even sully their own memories. When the allegations are raised by someone whom they knew (and/or presently know) as a close friend, the impact is heightened and they can experience significant distress as they try to assimilate a completely different childhood experience. The historian must be sensitive to the challenge this brings to people when the institution was the only childhood they knew, and the bonds formed there are the only bonds that remain from childhood.

The final challenge for the witness historian is perhaps the most personally confronting. There is a key question, 'why did this happen to me?' to which there is no one, meaningful and satisfactory response. When the historian is assisting with an application for redress, this question will be raised with them again and again. However, paradoxically, it is this question that the witness historian can now attempt to address more effectively than at any other time in the past. And the reason for this optimism comes from the change in emphasis driven not only by an information society where technology facilitates the search for identity and general interest in genealogy and family history, but also by a 'sea change in relations between citizens and the state' (Kirton, 2011, p.912) which have brought forth the voices of care leavers themselves and their increasingly influential advocates.

Recent initiatives in Australian historical research have helped to bring the historian's understanding of social welfare contexts into partnership with care leavers' needs to understand why these things did happen to them and to others like them. While access to individual records remains a pressing issue in Australia as elsewhere (Horrocks & Goddard, 2006),[ix] resources such as the Find & Connect web resource aim to give care leavers a place they can 'go back to' to find historical material relating to their experience of the past, and, significantly, offer people the opportunity to bring their own narratives into the collected material and critique the official, institutional account (Frisch, 1997, p.43).[x]

Multi-level histories – the Find & Connect web resource

The Find & Connect web resource www.findandconnect.gov.au attempts to decolonise the child welfare archive in order to develop new historical understandings of 'care'. No personal records are held on the site, but organisational and related records are plentiful. Find & Connect conceptualises the records that contribute to that understanding as existing on a continuum that is spherical rather than linear, serving purposes that may be 'inconceivable', having meaning for the past, present and the future, and informing not only individual and organisational histories, but also becoming part of a community narrative. In the Find & Connect web resource, crisp, legal notions of records ownership 'comes up against ethics, embedded protocols and human needs' (Frisch, 1997, p.43). Australia's federal governance structure has exacerbated the diversity of experience that care leavers have in trying to access information about their time in care (Goddard, Duncalf & Murray, 2010), so the Find & Connect web resource's national scope has the potential to make a unique contribution to individuals as well as to public history.

The Find & Connect web resource acknowledges that we are all engaged in 'composing' a story of our life that can help us to reach a state of 'composure', the process of finding a story about the past that we can live with (Dawson, 1994; Murray, 2009). This task is rendered even more difficult for care leavers, cut off from the family memory keepers and the mementoes, family photographs and oral traditions 'through which family memories and identity are regularly revived and reinforced' (Care Leavers' Association, 2011). Even more concerning is the fact that so many records have been destroyed over the years (Department for Community Development, 2004).[xi] These new web-based, relational resources provide a gateway to digitised items such as photographs, news clippings and objects - the ephemera of childhood that for intact families is preserved in family albums. Providing a range of digitised resources enables the care leaver to collect whatever is most meaningful to their life experience, and become part of their own, personal archive (for example, Birmingham City Council, 2011). Another aim of the Find & Connect web resource is to bring together historical information in a way that provides care leavers with the contextual story of 'care'– the institutions and organisations acting in loco parentis, the changing laws, policies and attitudes relating to child welfare. Three assumptions underlie this approach: the contextual knowledge that can be gained from historical resources can be equal in importance to personal information held on a person's file; sometimes the only information that is retrievable is the contextual background; and events, policies, places and other people all help create identity. The Find & Connect web resource attempts to develop content that can provide a meaningful context for an individual life story.

The web resources can't fill in personal details about the family circumstances into which care leavers were born, nor why they went into care when they did, but background information about institutions, laws, policies and social attitudes can help answer some of the 'why?' questions about the lived experience, and may help alleviate those all too common feelings of shame, self-blame and bewilderment. Reciting from his poem at the launch of the Forgotten Australians Memorial in Western Australia (CBERS, 2011), Paul

Thomas Irvine reflected, 'Lost was my childhood in shame, which even today brings me shame…'

Influencing contemporary practice

Scholars have been interested to understand why accessing records of those lost childhoods has been so difficult for care leavers, and to work with past providers and governments to make improvements. Two key studies in particular (one in the UK, one in Australia) highlight not only why access to records is problematic, but also provide insight into the greatest challenge for historians: how to influence contemporary practice (Kirton, Feast & Goddard, 2011; Tropea, Elkner & McCarthy, 2010; Kertesz, 2011).[xii] What these studies clearly illustrate is that those organisations which are currently involved in providing care are busy and, largely, under-resourced for their scope of responsibilities. The issues around 'clearing' historical information for release are complex enough in an environment focused on present-day problems of keeping children safe; and even where there is some element of casework assessment to discern the care leaver's state of health prior to releasing the records, there is no systematic evaluation of sequelae at the agency level which can be fed into analysis of current programs.

But does there need to be? Arguably, current social work and government standards for out of home care are based on what is known about what can go wrong. In Australia, the new National Standards for out of home care have been based on evidence that 'the experiences and quality of care received in out-of-home care can be critical to determining whether a child or young person can recover from the effects of trauma' and thus be 'more able to access opportunities in life' (FaHCSIA, 2011). This evidence base was established, and the new National Child Protection Framework (COAG, 2009) will continue to be informed by, a comprehensive research audit spanning the years 1995-2010 (McDonald, Higgins, Valentine and Lamont, 2011). The basis of the national framework is that child protection is a shared responsibility, with the 'children's interests firmly at the centre of everything we do.'(COAG, 2009).

Does our profession share responsibility for child protection? What more can we bring to the table? Largely, the lived history of out of home care is recalled in anecdotal 'stories of the past'. While these richly illuminate individual experiences and are invaluable in raising awareness and a sense of outrage about past practices, historians also have an opportunity to incorporate quantitative research into their armoury so that they can bring the prevalence of sequelae and incidence of pre-cursors into the light, and contribute authoritatively to discussions around economic costs and benefits[xiii] .

Historians may also add value to the ongoing development of contemporary standards, policies and practice guides. In Australia, an historian would not qualify to join one of the nation's key influencers in contemporary child protection, the Association of Australian Social Workers, even if the body of their historical practice had been in the history of out of home care.[xiv] Historians, if they believe they have something to offer, need to actively reach out and penetrate these types of professional organisations and list-serves such as the child protection mailing list operated by the Australian Institute for Family Studies (AIFS). There is certainly a belief in Australian policy circles that providing practitioners

with accessible and meaningful information about child abuse and neglect will improve service delivery and support systems. Child Family Community Australia (previously the National Child Protection Clearinghouse) has, since 1995, operated from the AIFS to collect, produce and distribute information and resources, conduct research and provide specialist advice on the developments in child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care (CFCA, 2011). Historians who have been involved in multi-level historical research also have the advantage of knowing how varied childhood memories and their resultant legacies are, a helpful perspective to bring to a policy environment that seeks to keep the interests of children at heart.

The insights historians gain through working with care leavers on submissions for redress and in projects like the Find & Connect web resource, gives them an authoritative voice for participation and, on the whole, productive relationships with stakeholder groups who can facilitate that participation.

Conclusion

Like care leavers around the globe, Forgotten Australians had been left out of the public history, confronted by a cultural silence that denied them the language and voice with which to construct and narrate their own experiences. Historians were complicit in this silence, working from traditional historical models that did not recognise the authority of the lived experience. As a result of enquiries that have given primacy to the testimony of 'people who were there', historians have the opportunity to collaborate in bearing witness and creating public history that embraces the complexity of multiple truths in the history of out of home care.

The Find & Connect web resource challenges historians to demonstrate, in the type of information that is brought onto the public record that care leavers have expertise to bring to the public narrative. In welcoming feedback from care leavers, historians have additional challenges to face, but those challenges also offer opportunities to enrich the data that is being presented.[xv]   The materials collected are already informing 'amateur' historical projects and the creation of testimonies and storytelling through digital media and social networking. The challenge to historians is to integrate such new perspectives into the wider historical narrative and contemporary practice. The shared history approach does not allow for complete academic detachment. The historian's role as witness may have a profound impact on the shape of the care leaver's picture of self and, indeed, the historian's own self-regard. Confronting 'real life' and the often damaging legacies, raw emotion and uninhibited rushes of personal disclosures that might suddenly spring forth, can challenge the historian to remember their professional role. The historian must be careful not to speak for care leavers and their support groups, but should be prepared to step forward at their request when an academic voice can add credibility to a cause. However, it is important to acknowledge that even such a collaborative approach will not produce a mutually agreed or uniform account, and this can cause personal distress in an historian who doesn't wish to 'disappoint' a care leaver, or seem to be unsympathetic. Historians will almost always be seeing a broader and more varied canvas, and should seek to represent it in all its nuances and complexity, remembering at all times

that their histories are grounded in the lives of real people, many of whom suffered and continue to suffer real pain and are now looking to have those experiences validated.

The contribution that lived experiences can make to the shape of current and future practice is greatly enhanced by the accessibility that is achieved by enabling those voices to be heard through projects such as the Find & Connect web resource. Historians can leverage the 'visibility' of these projects to claim an authoritative voice in the development and assessment of contemporary child protection practices, but this demands that their 'eyes of identification' see outside their own discipline to actively engage with policy makers and influencers and work with researchers who can translate the lessons of the past into the language (and the economics) of the present.

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[i] We are using a broad definition of 'witness', where a witness is "someone who has firsthand knowledge about an event, or in the criminal justice systems usually a crime, through his or her senses (e.g. seeing, hearing, smelling, touching) and *can help certify important considerations about the crime or event*." [emphasis added]. Wikipedia, "Witness," accessed 16 September 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness

[ii] Details of these national history projects can be found at
http://forgottenaustralianshistory.gov.au/index.html

[iii] The submissions made to the two Senate inquiries are available online via the Find & Connect web resource at:
http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/australia/bib/FP0000006.htm (Forgotten Australians) and
http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/australia/bib/FP0000007.htm (Lost Innocents - child migrants).

[iv] In Sweden, for example, the Inquiry on Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutions and Foster Homes, sought to 'invite people to interview and where appropriate offer psychological support and help to order archive material.' (p.16) In their summary of international perspectives, the Swedish interim report described inquires in three other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Iceland), Ireland, Wales, Australia and Canada: 'A few inquiries were tasked to scrutinise a number of named institutions whilst others have invited all those willing to do so to describe their experiences. Some inquiries wanted to look into both positive and negative experiences. Others, like the Swedish inquiry, have focused on abuse and neglect…. All the inquiries have gathered information from interviews with victims.' (pp.20-21). Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU), "Inquiry on Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutions and Foster Homes 2 2006:05 Official Government Report Sou 2009:99 [Sweden]," Statens Offentliga Utredningar,
http://www.sou.gov.se/vanvard/dokument/SammanfattningDelrapportENG.pdf 22 September 2011.
http://www.sou.gov.se/vanvard/dokument/SammanfattningDelrapportENG.pdf accessed 22 September 2011.

[v] The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's plea for statements positions the importance of lived experience in creating a national history for all Canadians: '*Your* statements, documents and photographs are very important and *can help Canadians understand* what the schools were like, what happened inside them and how the experience affected people for generations to come [emphasis added].' Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=102 22 September 2011.
http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=102 accessed 22 September 2011.

[vi] In the authors' experience, it is not uncommon for people to find the process of applying for redress too painful to complete. Likewise, as Murray suggested, a sense of shying away from the most painful memories is

frequent, with applicants saying things like, "I won't go into that just now" or "there's other stuff but it's best forgotten".

[vii] Practical issues such as "should I be taking notes while someone is crying?" or "what if I cry?" need to be contemplated. A supply of tissues is mandatory.

[viii] There is considerable debate about the potential harm to people who gain access to the records of their time in care. Redress WA did not require applicants to base their application on historical records and these were more likely to be unavailable at the time of application. Kirton, Feast and Goddard surveyed local authorities and voluntary organisations in the UK to establish, *inter alia*, the extent to which record-keepers believed social work support was needed by care leavers accessing the records of their time in care. The study found a broad diversity of practice and considerable use of discretionary judgements exercised at the individual agency level and the observations included in their published account demonstrate the tensions around the 'need to know' and 'how to find out'. These themes are given further expression in the Australian context in Tropea and Kertesz' *Who Am I?* project research papers.

[ix] As Horrocks and Goddard (2006, p.266), observed 'in terms of written documents, there can scarcely be any that are more sensitive and salient to our sense of self and self-discovery than information that is written down about our families and our childhoods.'

[x] In 1997, Michael Frisch the eminent oral historian was contemplating the contribution historical scholarship could make to a multidisciplinary understanding of memory. Citing what was then forthcoming work by David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, Frisch observed that there were "important and suggestive connections historians will find worth exploring between how people make, remember and historicize individual, family, and vernacular experience and how they understand their place in history (with a capital "h") and its place in their lives."

[xi] The general approach taken for the research underlying the Western Australian guide to care leavers' records, *Signposts*, was in the absence of an individual's record, to at least try to provide contextual information.

[xii] It is not our intent to revisit the issue of access to data that these studies consider. Rather, we are interested in the 'burden of work' issues that they raise.

[xiii] We are suggesting here that it is important not only to discuss the prevalence of sequelae (ie how many care leavers report particular sequelae) but also to work with child protection researchers to estimate incidence of pre-cursors in children presently in the out of home care system (ie how many issues are being presented which may lead to particular sequelae, eg multiple placements, for example). Redress schemes will contain data about reported sequelae in finer detail, but information is also available in the public domain through analyzing submissions to public enquiries.

[xiv] According to its website, accessed on 26 September 2011 at www.aasw.asn.au/membershipinfo/membership-eligibility : 'Membership of the AASW is available to applicants holding either an AASW approved social work qualification from an Australian tertiary institution or qualifications from overseas that have been recognised by the AASW as comparable to an AASW approved social work qualification.'

[xv] On 2 February 2010, the Pathways website received this feedback by email: *why are there no pictures of Winlaton, baltara, allambie, turana....where are the names of staff members and supers? there are many pictures of orphanages, older homes but none of these.... when is the victorian government going to stop hiding them? Yeh i am angry... all these places are hidden away like a dirty little secret and i am the dirty little*

illegitimate child of the victorian government!.... This website is bullshit! Shame on you all! On another occasion, Pathways received a complaint about the term 'unwanted babies' in a caption accompanying a digital image. The team amended the entry, to make it clear that the offensive term was used by the newspaper that published the photo in 1968. In response to another complaint, a more substantial rewrite was made in relation to the entry for Pirra, which incorporated care leavers' recollections into the source material used to describe the entity and pointed explicitly to the fact that it was difficult to source 'accounts of Pirra from the perspective of the girls themselves', which is essentially an acknowledgment that alternative, equally authoritative, histories do exist if we could only 'discover' them. See http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/vic/biogs/E000193b.htm and go to the link, '+Read more'.

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