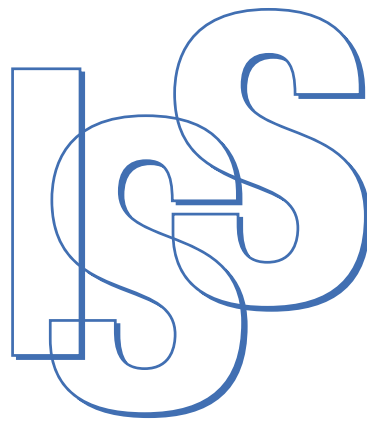


The Journey of Discovery

A Report on the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund



International Social Service
Australian Branch
October 2005

Index

Acknowledgments	1
Executive Summary	2
International Social Service	3
Background	4
Commonwealth Child Migration Scheme	4
The Maltese Experience	5
History of Support Services for Former Child Migrants	5
Government Inquiries	6
UK Inquiry	6
British Child Migrant Support Fund	7
Lost Innocents: Righting the Record	7
The Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund	9
Assistance provided by the Australian Travel Fund	9
Application process	10
Tracing	11
The Effects of Child Migration	12
A look at the psychosocial impacts of child migration	12
The Impact of Reunions	14
First time reunions	15
Visiting gravesites	16
Subsequent reunions	17
What the Future Holds	18
Shortcomings of the Fund	19
Statistics	20
Recommendations	24
Appendix	25
A brother's story	25

Acknowledgments

This project of ISS Australia was made possible with generous funding from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Throughout the project, Departmental staff worked closely with ISS to ensure the demands were met. ISS would like to formally acknowledge Departmental staff for the professional, considerate and co-operative manner in which they worked with ISS during the Australian Travel Fund.

Sincere thanks are extended to those who gave of their time to provide their insights into the child migrant community and to the effects of reunification.

Without the agencies that provide ongoing support to former child migrants, the successes of the Australian Travel Fund would not have been possible. The commitment and dedication of all those who work in the field of supporting former child migrants is to be commended.

Particular thanks are extended to the following people for their assistance in preparing this report:

Ian Thwaites and Lesley McLeod of the Child Migrants Trust
Philippa White, Sjoukje Tarbox and Mark Sachmann of C-BERS Services
Sr. Flo O'Sullivan of the Catholic Migrant Centre
Joan Kerry of the Catholic Child Welfare Council UK
Anne Webb of International Social Service – NSW office

A specific thank you also needs to be extended to Karyn Little of FCm Travel Solutions who arranged flights in a calm and sensitive manner throughout the project and always provided a standard of service that exceeded expectations.

And to all the former child migrants who have confided in us over the course of organising their travel arrangements... A huge thank you for allowing us to catch a glimpse of what this has meant to you.

Jon Colvin
Travel Fund Co Ordinator
ISS Australia

All quotes from former child migrants in this report are used with permission.

The ISS Australian Branch Council of Management extends its appreciation to all staff who have worked and who continue to work with former child migrants. This project has been an outstanding achievement of the organisation and a demonstration of the unique role that ISS plays in having the means by which the global needs of children, adults and their families can be addressed.

Directors

Lis de Vries, Diana Carroll, Margaret Gibson

Travel Funds Co-Ordinators

Jon Colvin, Robbie Leslie, Bridget Forbes, Margaret Gibson

Administration

Anouska Teunen, Aigoul Abdoubaetova, Gemma Robertson

Child Migrant Support Workers - NSW office

Anne Webb, Lynette Toohey, Chrissie Witherdin

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of the issues relating to the former child migrant community in Australia, to celebrate the successes of the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund and to provide some insight into the future for this unique group of people.

Much of the background information in this Report has been sourced from the Australian Senate Inquiry, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, released in August 2001.

During the 20th century, thousands of unaccompanied children from the UK and Malta were sent to Australia and housed in institutions. Many of the children were abused, neglected, lied to and told that they were orphans when they were not.

This Report gives an overview of the Government inquiries into the effects of unaccompanied child migration which were conducted by the UK House of Commons in 1998 and the Australian Senate in 2001. It provides details of the Commonwealth Former Child Migrant Support Fund, funded by the UK Department of Health and administered by International Social Service branches, that operated from April 1999 to October 2002.

One of the recommendations and outcomes of the Australian Senate Inquiry was the establishment of the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund. This fund provided financial assistance for door-to-door reunions with surviving family members or for visits to family gravesites, including a fourteen-day accommodation and living expenses allowance.

ISS managed the Australia Former Child Migrant Travel Fund on behalf of the Australian Federal Government between November 2002 and August 2005. It provided reunion visits to 694 former child migrants and 199 accompanying carers.

The purpose of the Report is to give a detailed overview of the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund, its limitations and the immense benefits it provided.

It also explores the psychosocial effects of child migration, using the findings that were published in *Lost Innocents* and information provided by those who have worked closely with former child migrants over the course of the Government funded programs.

In the recommendations, ISS proposes that continued funding be provided for the former child migrant community to allow travel opportunities for those who have been unable to trace their family origins. It is important that this recommendation be acted upon promptly as many former child migrants living in Australia are elderly and do not enjoy good health.

The Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund has been an enormously successful project that has made a significant difference to the lives of many people.

“It was an exhilarating thrill, full of excitement to actually bond together as brothers and sisters for the first time in 52 years.”

George and Laurie, brothers from NSW

International Social Service - Australian Branch

International Social Service (ISS) is a non-profit, non-government organisation that has no religious or political affiliations. ISS has co-operative correspondent services in a network involving more than 160 countries and is affiliated with the ISS General Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, which has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

ISS Australia was formally established in 1961, it has offices in Melbourne and Sydney and works across international borders with those in vulnerable situations to ensure entitlement and protection under international human rights frameworks.

From April 1999 to October 2002, ISS Australia worked directly with ISS UK to manage the British Child Migrant Support Fund and from November 2002 to August 2005, ISS Australia managed the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund.

In the NSW office of ISS Australia, service delivery that supports former child migrants has been undertaken since 2002. The NSW Government, through the Department of Community Services, provided funding for the employment of qualified social workers to support, in a more general and ongoing way, those former child migrants who are in need of, often quite intensive counselling services. While the arrangements for travel were undertaken by staff in the National office, located in Melbourne, the work undertaken in NSW has been invaluable to former child migrants in that state. The NSW office made 174 applications on behalf of clients to the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund. The support to former child migrants that ISS NSW office offers is ongoing and continues to be funded by the NSW Government.

Close liaison between ISS staff in both the National and NSW offices has been a key to the success of ISS Australia's former child migrant work in general.

For simplicity of reference in this Report, the British Child Migrant Support Fund shall be referred to as the UK Travel Fund and the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund shall be referred to as the Australian Travel Fund.

*“I remembered the front gates after all these years...
it was a very emotional reunion, especially when we left...”*
Fred, WA

Background

Commonwealth Child Migration Scheme

Child migration from the United Kingdom began in 1618 with the most intense period being from 1870 until the start of World War I. During the 20th Century, most of the child migration schemes sent children to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

According to the Senate Inquiry¹ the rationale for the schemes was to help populate Australia with potential members of a healthy and productive white workforce. These children were considered to be a burden in their homeland and were sent from orphanages where many had been placed because they had been born out of wedlock or as a result of the effects of war. It was believed that their life would be better, and the opportunities greater in Australia than if they remained in their homeland.

Lost Innocents recorded that from approximately 1912 to 1968, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australian Governments conducted a joint child migration scheme that shipped several thousands of unaccompanied children from the UK and Malta to live permanently in Australia. The exact numbers are not known due to the loss of records; however it is estimated that between 6,000-7,500 children under the age of 16 were sent to Australia during the 20th century, 3,000-3,500 of whom were sent following World War II.²

Many children were sent without the knowledge of parents or relatives. They were often told that they had no surviving family members or were denied details of their family.

The Australian Government of the time welcomed the scheme and encouraged non-government organisations such as Barnados and Fairbridge to continue settling child migrants who were regarded as being adaptable with potentially long working lives.

Upon their arrival in Australia, children were placed in institutions which were often in isolated or rural communities and mostly run by religious orders. Siblings were separated according to gender, placed in different institutions and often had no further contact with each other.

Many children were sent to institutions that trained boys for farm work and girls for domestic service. There are reports of appalling conditions in which children were provided with little or no schooling and forced to work long hours.

While some former child migrants have made positive comments about their time in institutional care, and have grown into adults who lead very successful lives, many children suffered greatly. Institutional life was harsh and many have commented on the loss of identity that they felt after being removed not only from their family but also from their homeland.

There have been many reports of physical, emotional and sexual abuse while in institutional care.

¹ Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, Report on Child Migration, August 2001 (*Lost Innocents*). Chapter 2, p12-13

² *Lost Innocents* Chapter 3, p69

*“Malta is a wonderful place and our relatives have welcomed us with open arms.
They cannot do enough for us”
Mary, VIC*

The Maltese Experience

Child migration from Malta did not begin until 1950. Malta was a British colony at the time. The majority of Maltese child migrants were not orphans but came from large families who were finding it difficult to cope with so many children after the war. Parents were often encouraged to permit their children to migrate, usually on the understanding that they were being sent to Australia to get a better education and then would return to Malta.

In terms of identity and culture, Maltese child migrants also had to contend with the loss of their language. They were often forced to stop speaking and using their language once in Australia and many left the institutions with low levels of literacy.

History of Support Services for Former Child Migrants

In 1985, as a result of a number of former child migrants contacting the Catholic Church seeking information about their background, the Catholic Migrant Centre was established. It developed its services to include assistance with tracing and counselling. The Catholic Migrant Centre assisted and supported former child migrants during the operation of the UK and the Australian Travel Funds.

In 1987, Margaret Humphreys established the Child Migrant Trust (CMT) in the UK. It was established as an independent, professional service with no affiliations to religious organisations. The CMT provides tracing, counselling and support services to former child migrants in all countries to which they were sent. In Australia, services were offered in 1988 and in 1990 the Australian Government announced financial assistance to the Child Migrant Trust to establish offices in Melbourne, Victoria (1991) and Perth, Western Australia (1995). CMT has assisted many former child migrants to apply for the UK and Australian Travel Funds and supported them and their receiving families before, during and after their visits.

In 1993 the Christian Brothers issued a public apology for the abuses that had taken place at their child-care institutions. In 1994, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents and Student Services (C-BERS Services) was established. It has provided many former residents with tracing, counselling and support services. C-BERS Services has also funded 248 overseas reunion visits to the UK and Malta (including 33 with accompanying carers). They have also provided assistance to many clients who have applied to the UK and Australian Travel Funds and supported them and their receiving families before, during and after their visits.

In 1996, a group of former child migrants established the Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF) in Perth. It was established as an independent, non-denominational organisation and provided a family reunion program that enabled former child migrants to revisit their country of birth and be reunited with relatives. The ACMF raised funds for child migrants to return to the UK under this program.

“This trip is what I needed, feeling great”

Monique, WA

In 1997, 40 women who were ex-residents of institutions run by the Sisters of Mercy traveled to Britain and Ireland. The trip, which the former child migrants dubbed “the sentimental journey”, was funded by Catholic charities and by the Australian Child Migrant Foundation.

In 1999, the Christian Brothers, the Sisters of Mercy and the Poor Sisters of Nazareth launched PHIND, the Personal History Index for former child migrants to Catholic Homes in Australia. It was a computerised index to help former child migrants locate records about themselves through church and government agencies.

During the UK and Australian Travel Funds, social workers from the Catholic Migrant Centre, Child Migrant Trust and C-BERS Services worked closely with ISS to assist many to gain travel assistance.

Government Inquiries

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a growing number of concerns about the welfare of children who were in, or had been in, institutional and other out of home-care arrangements, were investigated.

In 1985, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare tabled a report “*Children in Institutional and Other Forms of Care: A National Perspective*”. Details of child migration from the UK and Malta were included in the report.

During this period a number of books and television documentaries on child migration were published or produced including:

- *Lost Children of the Empire* by Philip Bean and Joy Melville (1989)
- The documentary, *Lost Children of the Empire*, broadcast by ABC television in 1989
- *Empty Cradles* by Margaret Humphreys (1994)
- The documentary, *The Leaving of Liverpool*, broadcast by ABC television in 1994
- *Orphans of the Empire* by Alan Gill (1997)

These publications led to a growing awareness and understanding of the history and issues surrounding child migration.

In June 1996, the Western Australian Legislative Assembly appointed a Select Committee into Child Migration. The Committee was established to investigate and report on child migration to Western Australia and an interim report was tabled in November 1996. As a result of an imminent State general election, the Parliament did not take up the Committee’s preferred option of continuing the inquiry by establishing an Honorary Royal Commission.³

UK Inquiry

During 1997-98 the UK House of Commons Health Committee conducted an inquiry into British child migration. The Committee travelled to Australia and New Zealand and heard evidence from many former child migrants. The Committee received hundreds of written submissions and a number of former child migrants and representatives of organisations travelled to the UK to give evidence to the Committee.

³ *Lost Innocents* Chapter 1, pp2-3

*“My brother and his family have had some very special family dinners in my honour,
so it has been very emotional catching up with people”*

Joe, VIC

In July 1998 the UK House of Commons Health Committee released the report *The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants*. This report contained 17 recommendations to the UK Government which responded in December 1998 by accepting the Committee’s main recommendations and acknowledging that forced migration was misguided. The UK Government offered their sincere regrets to “those and their families who see themselves as still deeply scarred by their early experiences”.⁴

British Child Migrant Support Fund

One of the outcomes of the UK Inquiry was the establishment of a Travel Fund, known as the British Child Migrant Support Fund.

The UK Travel Fund operated in all countries that received British child migrants. It was funded by the UK Department of Health and had a budget of one million pounds. The Fund was administered by International Social Service in each receiving country.

The UK Travel Fund operated from April 1999 to October 2002 and was governed by strict criteria that determined eligibility. The purpose of the UK Travel Fund was to provide travel assistance to those who could not afford to travel to meet family members for the first time. As a result, the UK Travel Fund was means tested and allowed for first-time reunion visits with parents, siblings, aunts or uncles only.

ISS Australian Branch facilitated 325 reunion visits for Australian former child migrants under the UK Travel Fund. Although the facilitation of the UK Travel Fund was highly administrative, the high levels of anxiety and emotions felt by former child migrants required that the booking arrangements were handled in a sensitive and supportive manner. Referrals were often made to specialist support agencies for counselling as a result of conversations that took place during the organising of the travel arrangements.

Lost Innocents: Righting the Record

In January 2000, the Australian Government response to the UK Report was released after consultations with State and Territory Governments. The Australian Government agreed with the British Government, that all those involved in the child migration schemes, and the organisations currently assisting former child migrants, should work together to produce practical outcomes to improve the welfare of former British child migrants.

In December 2000, the Queensland Government released the closed report on Neerkol and Karrala, two of the institutions that housed former child migrants. The report was conducted by the Forde Commission of Inquiry into abuse of children in Queensland institutions and had been withheld until criminal proceedings had been finalised.

The Inquiry clearly showed that issues associated with child migration to Australia had not been extensively covered and deserved the thorough, Australia-wide attention that a Senate Inquiry was able to deliver.

⁴ Government Response to the Third Report of the Health Committee, Session 1997-98, *The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants*, December 1998. Chapter 2.2

“I had a wonderful trip back to Ireland and I enjoyed the time spent with my mother. It was interesting to observe how alike we are even though we have had so little contact with each other. I met so many relatives, my head was spinning at times.”
Chris, WA

During 2000-2001 the Senate Community Affairs References Committee conducted an inquiry into the history and treatment of unaccompanied children, generally under the age of 16 years who were brought to Australia from the United Kingdom and Malta under approved child migrant schemes during the 20th century.

Invitations for submissions were published in *The West Australian* and *The Canberra Times* and through the Internet. Submissions were also sought from the Commonwealth and State Governments and other interested organisations and individuals. ISS Australia made a submission based on the experience of administering the UK Travel Fund in Australia.

Many of the submissions contained appalling stories of abuse and torment. An opportunity was given for witnesses to appear in private and many accepted the invitation to do so. A large number of former child migrants wished to provide details anonymously. As a result 99 confidential and 153 public submissions were received.

Evidence was heard during February - March 2001 in Canberra, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Rockhampton and Sydney. The Committee also endeavoured to hear from all major organisations with an interest in child migration.

The Inquiry's report, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record, (Lost Innocents)*, was released in August 2001.

The report included an outline and history of the large-scale child migration program, government involvement and legislation of the time, financial arrangements and information on the organisations and churches that ran the institutions where the child migrants were placed.

The Committee heard that some parents had only consented for their children to migrate because of assurances that they would be better off in Australia. There was evidence indicating that parents were lied to about their children's fate and that many children were sent without parental consent. The Inquiry noted that many children were incorrectly told that they were orphans and correspondence was often not passed on to children in institutions.

The Inquiry revealed stories of child exploitation, virtual slave labour, criminal physical and sexual assault and profound emotional abuse and cruelty. Evidence was given of children being terrified in bed at night as religious brothers stalked the dormitories to take children to their rooms for sexual acts, and of children being severely beaten with leather straps, belts, wood or other weapons. Often when children ran away from the institutions and told of their terrible experiences, they were either not believed or merely sent back to the institution where the matter would be covered up.

The Committee made 33 recommendations including that the Commonwealth and State Governments supplement the travel funding of the UK Travel Fund.

*“I am looking forward to going to my homeland”
Margaret, NSW*

In May 2002, the Government responded to *Lost Innocents* with a package including:

- \$125,000 per year for three years to the Child Migrants Trust to fund family tracing and counselling services
- \$100,000 contribution to State-initiated memorials to commemorate former child migrants
- \$1 million per year for three years in travel funding to assist former child migrants of

British and Maltese origin to return to the UK or Malta to reunite with family members or to visit family gravesites.

The Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund

The Australian Government established the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund in November 2002. International Social Service Australia was appointed as administrator of the Australian Travel Fund.

As the potential demand on the fund was unknown, priority categories were established to determine greater need should the allocated funding be insufficient for all applicants to be able to travel.

The priority groups were identified as:

- Those who had never returned to their birth country
- Those whose parents were still living
- Those over 65 years of age
- Those on a pension
- Those who had indicated interest in the UK Travel Fund but were ineligible to apply.

Those who had received support from the UK Travel Fund were not eligible to apply for the Australian Travel Fund.

The Australian Travel Fund differed from the UK Travel Fund in that:

- It was not means tested
- It was not restricted to first time visits
- It allowed for visits to a broader range of family members such as cousins, nephew and nieces
- It allowed for visits to family gravesites
- It was available to Maltese former child migrants.

Assistance provided by the Australian Travel Fund

The Australian Travel Fund provided support for former child migrants to visit a family member or gravesite in the UK or Malta for a two-week period.

It provided for the costs associated with transport from the applicant's home to their nearest airport, an economy class airfare and airline taxes, 17 days travel insurance and an allowance to travel from the airport to their relation's home.

*“It really was a trip of a lifetime and meeting my relatives after
so many years was wonderful”
Sylvia, WA*

A 14 day accommodation and living expenses allowance was also paid to the applicant before their departure and for those who did not have a passport, any costs involved in obtaining a passport or a residents return visa were reimbursed.

In exceptional circumstances, provision was made for an accompanying carer to travel with the applicant to assist them with their medical needs.

Age and health prevented some former child migrants from traveling internationally. In exceptional circumstances arrangements were made for a family member to travel from the UK or Malta to Australia to be reunited with the applicant.

An allocation of \$1 million per year was allocated for each of the 3 years that the fund operated.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) worked in close consultation with ISS to ensure that sufficient funding was made available to provide travel for all approved applicants. They wanted to make sure that all approved applicants would have the opportunity to be able to travel back to the UK or Malta to connect with their birthplace and their family.

The number of applications was much higher than first anticipated. This was closely monitored and over the 3 year period the amount of funding was increased from \$3 million to just over \$5 million.

Each year, the highest demands on the Australian Travel Fund were made during the months of the Northern Hemisphere's summer. In January 2005, at the request of ISS, the Fund, which was due to close on 30 June 2005, was extended until 31 August 2005 to allow more people to travel during the warmer weather.

In its three years of operation, the Australian Travel Fund received 826 applications, of which 771 were approved to travel, including 215 who were approved to travel with a carer due to medical reasons.

Not all of those who were approved have been able to travel, generally because of ill health, but the Australian Travel Fund provided reunion visits for 694 former child migrants, of which 199 had accompanying carers.

The Application Process

To be eligible to access the Australian Travel Fund, two main criteria needed to be met:

- That the applicant came to Australia under an approved child migration scheme, and
- That the applicant had been able to trace family and had a gravesite to visit or that the family member that they were travelling to meet would welcome the reunion.

*“Mother is not so well, but is to be expected for 88yrs.
I’m having a heavy time, both sad and happy...”
Kevin, WA*

During the time that many former child migrants arrived in Australia, there were various other migration schemes in operation, including youth migration, family migration and assisted passage schemes.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) defines ‘child migrants’ as children under 16 years of age who had been living in institutions in the United Kingdom and who were brought out to Australia under various schemes and who had no family ties or contacts in Australia. The Department noted that the term ‘child migration scheme’ has often been applied to a range of significantly different child, youth and family migration schemes, operating, at times concurrently, from the post war period to the early 1980s. The Department noted that children and youths migrated to Australia under a variety of schemes, some of which, like the Big Brother Movement, were voluntary and involved the migration of youths (largely 16 years and over) to take up employment opportunities. Some organisations, notably Barnardos, took both ‘child’ and ‘youth’ migrants often leading to a blurring of the distinction between the different schemes. Under other schemes, such as the one parent and two parent schemes, children migrated in advance of, or accompanied by, one or both parents.⁵

Tracing

It appears that the attitude of the times (1940’s and 1950’s) was that it was better for a child to think that they were an orphan, than know they were born out of wedlock. Many former child migrants, having been told that they were orphans and that they had no family, have spent their whole lives believing that they had no surviving relatives. During their time in care, contact with siblings in other institutions was not encouraged and there are reports that correspondence and gifts sent from relatives were not passed on to the child in care.

The result of these deceptions has meant that many did not begin their search until they were well into their adult years and had families of their own. For many the search was instigated by a need to know their background so that they would be able to tell their own children and fill in the gaps for them.

Access to records, bad record keeping, falsifying of records and past attitudes towards family contact has made tracing of family a long and difficult process. For some who had, for example, been found on the doorsteps of a church it has been impossible. It is unlikely that the identity of their parents was known, and therefore registered on their birth certificate.

In the UK, staff from the Child Migrant Trust and the Australian Child Migrant Project have offered invaluable assistance to many former child migrants in relation to locating family members. They offer an incredibly competent level of tracing services involving sifting through birth, deaths and marriage registers, being aware of historical factors influencing the record keeping of the time, contacting the sending and receiving agencies to track down old documents and then systematically contacting people from all over the world. It has meant that the search, for some, has taken well over a decade and for many is still ongoing.

⁵ *Lost Innocents* Chapter 2, p12

“What joy seeing my sister, what a lot I missed out on...”

Maria, VIC

Once contact has been made with family, then the process of acceptance begins. For most former child migrants there has been a gap of 40-50 years. Their mother may have remarried, had other children and grandchildren and be aged in her 70s or 80s. There are reports that when parents returned to the orphanages to collect their children, they were told that their child had died, so the parent, aunt, uncle or sibling has spent their whole life not knowing that they were living in Australia.

Organisations such as the Child Migrant Trust, C-BERS Services, the Catholic Migrant Centre and International Social Service have provided valuable services to former child migrants and their families over what is a very difficult and emotionally challenging process of reunification. Counselling and support offered during tracing, Travel Fund applications and before, during and after the reunion visits has been of immense value.

The Effects of Child Migration

A look at the psychosocial impacts of child migration

Much has been written on the subject of the psychological and socialisation issues involved with the forced migration of unaccompanied children from the UK and Malta. The issues are many and varied and this report does not intend to offer a comprehensive reflection of the psychosocial effects of child migration. The following comments offer views and observations made by those who have worked closely with former child migrants during the course of the travel programs and which have also been explored in *Lost Innocents*.

There have been devastating, long-term psychological and social consequences for a high proportion of child migrants. Their childhood experiences have moulded their lives and caused their potential for self-actualisation to be restricted. It has also taken many years for the child migrants to be given the opportunity to speak of their traumatic experiences and the ongoing suffering they face.

The consequences of their treatment as children have been by no means uniform. Children suffered different levels of abuse and neglect with the level of care also being variable between institutions.

Physical assault and sexual abuse often compounded the sense of rejection, isolation and loneliness that the child already felt by being institutionalised. There are reports of degradation, shaming and public humiliation and in such climates of hostility children often learnt that no one could be trusted.

Some have become indifferent to their own suffering and have acquired a learned helplessness, believing that regardless of their efforts, there is no point in attempting to change their environment as the outcomes will always be negative. Others have developed an inability to empathise and have become similarly abusive and exploitative in their own adult relationships.

On the other hand, it is also true that many former child migrants are caring and adaptive people, who continue to put a great deal of energy into their families and communities.

Abused children who were released from care without preparation, living skills or any form of support have carried strong negative beliefs about themselves. Some of the thoughts and feelings

“Wouldn't have missed this trip for anything...”
David, NSW

that have remained with them throughout their lives are of being worthless, useless, unlovable and unequal to others. Such lack of self-confidence and self-esteem has often been expressed in anger, feelings of shame and guilt, criminality, depression and acts of self-harm, in particular in the misuse of alcohol and other drugs and tragically in suicides. There are a number of former child migrants who lead an itinerant lifestyle; never being able to settle in one place and moving on as soon as they feel they are forming ties to a community.

Some have had difficulties in developing and maintaining intimate, non-violent relationships. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the former child migrant community is over-represented amongst those who have never married or formed long-term partnerships and also amongst those who have frequently married. The severe trauma and emotional deprivation of their childhood has left many unable to develop close and fulfilling relationships with their own children, compounding their own sense of dislocation, loneliness and grief and transferring it to the next generation.

The harsh conditions of institutional life did not allow for children to be nurtured. Children grew up in uncaring and often hostile environments, without any affection or sense of being wanted or valuable. For many their illegitimacy was a cause for scorn by those in whose care they were placed. As one man put it, the first person to say that they loved him was his wife and by this time he was aged in his 20's.

Many former child migrants experience depression and a high level of anxiety, making even simple tasks confusing and stressful. There is also a great deal of anger directed at government and church. Former child migrants have often compared themselves to the 'stolen generation' and feel that the injustices committed against them are greater because they were also removed from their homeland. Due to media attention, there is a perception that much more has been done to assist the 'stolen generation' than to assist them, resulting in feelings of injustice and discrimination.

It is to the credit of many child migrants that they have identified their need for and actively sought counselling services. Having lived with intrusive visual images and memories of the abuses they suffered, many have realised the need to verbalise their story and to also implement strategies that enable them to live with those memories. Ongoing supportive and sensitive counselling services are vital for the healing process to continue.

There is a great deal of anguish for many former child migrants caused by their loss of identity. The absence of family and their homeland has created a sense of emptiness and has profoundly affected their lives and those of their partners and children. Not knowing why they had been removed from the UK or Malta has caused a chronic sense of loss and grief. Many former child migrants have spoken of their feelings of loneliness, abandonment, rejection and guilt. Searches for families have been of paramount importance in the former child migrant's search for identity.

In some institutions contact with families was deceitfully severed and children were told that their parents were dead or that they did not want them. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, these lies were believed. The sense of injustice and anger was further heightened when they did begin searching for their families and found out that it was too late. It has been a devastating experience to find out that a parent had only recently passed away and that there may have been a chance of knowing each other if they had only been told the truth.

“We had a great time meeting up with my brother again, unfortunately I can’t say the same for my sister, she hates my mother so much that she can’t bear to have anything to do with us, but that is her loss and we will accept it.”

Margaret, VIC

Former child migrants have made many positive contributions to Australian society and some have led extremely successful lives. These positive outcomes however should in no way suggest that there has not been psychological scarring by their experiences as child migrants. The legacy of childhood will continue to have implications for the quality of life of many, particularly for those who have suffered the consequences of the lack of educational opportunities. It has meant that they have struggled in poorly paid and insecure employment, which has compounded their long-term psychological vulnerability and placed strain on relationships. For some it has meant that home ownership is beyond their reach and has left them with little hope of financial stability in their retirement. These problems have often been exacerbated by poor physical health, which is the direct and indirect result of childhood abuses.

Despite the losses, sufferings, deprivations and abuses suffered in childhood and the struggle for psychological equilibrium in adulthood, many have formed close and supportive relationships with other former child migrants. Their shared experiences have allowed for strong bonds and life-long friendships to be formed, the importance of which cannot be over estimated. These human relationships bear testament to the resilience and fortitude of a group of survivors of a most shameful period in Australian history.

The Impact of Reunions

Without doubt, the most successful reunion visits have been those in which both the former child migrant and the receiving family have been well prepared.

Visits back to the UK or Malta were emotional experiences. There were expectations around what their family would be like, how they would be accepted and what life for them would be like following the reunion. Emotions were high, not only for reunions or for visits to family gravesites, but also to places of personal significance. Being back in the town of their birth or visiting the orphanage that once housed them allowed many memories and emotions to surface.

“It was an amazing moment to be standing there, the three of us, waiting for this man to meet his sister for the first time. We knocked, the door opened, and there she was - looking at him and him at her. This is an event that I will never forget for the rest of my days. A truly unique experience - brother and sister meeting in essence for the first time ever. It was a very emotional experience and you could have cut the air with a knife.”

Tony, a carer for a former child migrant from WA

The support agencies, both in Australia and in the UK have provided, and continue to provide, invaluable services to former child migrants. Without their dedication and their ability to successfully facilitate family reunifications, the Australian Travel Fund would not have been as successful as it was.

In the UK, staff from the Australian Child Migrant Project and the Child Migrants Trust (UK) worked closely with Australian support agencies and facilitated reunion visits. Counselling and support in preparation of the visit was provided to the receiving families and many former child

“It’s great to be back in the old country and staying in my old home”

Monica, WA

migrants were met at the airport upon their arrival in the UK. This level of support to former child migrants and their UK families ensured that all parties were well prepared for the emotional demands of such a reunion. The support offered from someone familiar with the circumstances and sensitive to the issues involved was a contributing factor to the success of the experience.

It was reported that those who had travelled to visit a gravesite often became distressed once they stood in front of the grave. To have someone to offer emotional support and to have the opportunity to be able to talk to about how they were feeling was vitally important.

The offer of an overseas trip meant that many former child migrants contacted support agencies in order to make application to the Travel Fund. This created an opportunity for the former child migrant to become aware of the range of support services that such agencies offered. For many, suppressed feelings and emotions surfaced as a result of the application process. Many reported life changing benefits from the counselling they received as a result of being in contact with specialised support agencies.

First time Reunions

Often those travelling had never been on a plane before and the prospect of the travel time and the size of Heathrow airport in itself was somewhat daunting.

Reunions were often highly emotional experiences with many, many tears shed over discovering loved ones and over what might have been. They also provided an opportunity to ask questions and ‘fill in some of the gaps’.

“I’ve been with my brother almost every day and night. The weather’s hot, the skies are blue, the food is nice, the people warm, my son has discovered an uncle and the world is good”

Charlie, VIC

For many former child migrants, the chance to discover why they were placed in care and to reach an understanding of the circumstances surrounding that time has helped them with their search for identity and their sense of belonging.

Those who were able to meet with their mother, even if she was not well, were provided with a sense of a mother–child relationship. It was reported that this had a profound effect on them and also affected their relationships with their own spouse/partner and children.

The receiving families also had to deal with the emotions around ‘finding’ the former child migrant. For many the reunion allowed for disclosure of the ‘family secret’. This process of disclosure was often a difficult and emotional task but many have reported that it was as if a ‘weight had been lifted’ from them.

“I ended up meeting my younger sister! She knew I was over and made contact with my cousin and asked if we could meet.”

Kath, NT

Often former child migrants were surprised by the similarities in looks and mannerisms of the family members they met. Having a family also gave answers to things such as family medical history, something they had not been aware of throughout their whole life and always had to overlook when filling out forms.

“Both of my brothers at different times said they had a lot of feelings of ‘what ifs.... what if we had all grown up together, what would we have shared?...’ But my ‘what if’ has been satisfied by meeting my brothers and getting to know them, briefly, but really feeling comfortable with them and liking them.”

David, NSW

Some were surprised at the humble standards of living of their family members. They had imagined a kind of ‘fairy tale’ of lost family and were surprised by the poverty and social problems that were present in the UK or Malta.

Many said that their trip made them realise how lucky they are to live in Australia. They were surprised at the cost of living and the quality of life overseas. They said that visiting the UK/Malta had made them realise the value of the lifestyle available to them in Australia.

Some reported that it felt like they were “going back home” even though they had spent over 50 years living in Australia.

It’s not to say that all reunions were successful. Some former child migrants had expectations that they would be welcomed with open arms and that relationships would be instantly formed. Family of origin members often did not wish to hear of the childhood traumas that had been suffered by the child migrant, yet the former child migrant felt an urgent need to tell them of their experiences. There were expectations about being accepted that stemmed from a “Hollywood” view of family life and when these expectations were not met the sense of rejection and failure was increased. Due to the age and the health of the former child migrants or their parents/family there were also often feelings of regret, sadness and grief over so much time having passed and knowledge that the newly formed relationship would have so many limitations.

Without doubt, the secret of the successful reunion lay in the amount of planning and preparation that went into it.

Visits to Gravesites

“... I will go to visit my mother’s grave. It will be very hard for me but I will take her some nice flowers and say good bye and that will be a closing for me.... Still my thoughts go back to the day when I made the biggest journey of my life...”

Anon, SA

Unlike the UK Travel Fund, the Australian Travel Fund allowed for visits to family graves. For many, by the time tracing was completed, their parents or other family members were deceased.

*“Some family questions have been answered, but more have surfaced...
some issues will remain a mystery...”*
Robert, WA

These visits were often sad experiences as questions regarding the former child migrant’s identity were still not answered and there was often a sense of loss and of hopelessness.

Many people were surprised at the high level of emotion they experienced when visiting a gravesite. Those that had traveled alone or were inexperienced travelers felt a sense of isolation, almost as if their country and family had rejected them again.

*“We have gone the full circle in life – Mission accomplished! Spoke to a man at the cemetery who had the plan of the gravesites, we would never have found it as the grave was unmarked.
It has been a closure for us”*
Margaret and Minnie, NSW

Some visited graves that were unmarked referred to as “a pauper’s grave”. A few were able to erect headstones or plaques that they had brought from Australia or had commissioned in the UK or Malta. There were many who felt grief that their family member had died too poor or with no one to erect a headstone for them. They felt that if they had been given the chance to know each other, perhaps things would have been different.

Some took flowers and said their good byes to someone they had never known or only had faint memories of.

Many commented that it provided an opportunity for closure and that the physicality of standing in front of the grave allowed them to let go of the past.

“It was never going to be an easy journey, and there is still some healing to do, but our mission was a success. The crematorium where our dad rests is not well tended so that added to the bleakness of the morning, I know we will finally be able to put some ghosts to rest ... ‘Mum and Dad, we turned out OK, I think you would have been proud”
Robert and Gordon, brothers from NSW

Subsequent Reunions

Those who had travelled under the UK Travel Fund were not eligible to access the Australian Travel Fund, however the Australian Travel Fund was not restricted to first time reunion visits. If someone had previously travelled back to the UK or Malta under a C-BERS Services or a self-funded trip, they were still eligible to access the Australian Travel Fund. This allowed for the development and strengthening of relationships that had already been established.

Many said that at their first meeting, the time spent together had gone by in a blur due to the excitement and strong emotions they were all experiencing.

Upon their return to Australia, the effort to remain in contact through phone calls, letters and e-mails had transformed the relationship from one of strangers to being friends. The sense of being part of a family was being nurtured.

*“I’m a very fortunate person. I have a nice family and a lot of the past
I’ve been able to put in the past”
David, NSW*

A subsequent face to face meeting allowed for deeper bonds to form. Relationships developed because there was an opportunity to spend quality time together. When someone had travelled so far to visit, there was often a great deal of effort put into making the visit worthwhile. Meetings and reunions were organised with extended family and often the receiving family would co-ordinate trips to places of significance. It was reported that a second or third meeting allowed them to feel part of “a normal family”.

What the Future Holds

Maintaining relationships is important for this group of people. It is well documented that former child migrants struggle with their sense of identity. Having grown up without family or a sense of belonging, then establishing relationships with family members after such a long time of separation, it is vital that these relationships are nurtured.

The visit does come to an end and often after such happy experiences involving intense emotions, the returning traveller can feel de-ated

*“...It was wonderful to catch up with my sister after 50yrs...the hardest part was having to say
goodbye...we are hoping she will come and visit us in a couple of years...”
Barbara, WA*

Many former child migrants are pensioners or have very limited funds and do not have the financial means to travel back to the UK or Malta.

There is a sense that they have been given something wonderful, the opportunity of family and identity, but it is a bittersweet gift in that, for those with limited funds, there is little hope of ever seeing each other again. There is often a great deal of sadness in the knowledge that they would not be able to afford to return should their parent become ill or to be able to attend their parent’s funeral.

Due to literacy problems it is not always possible for contact to be maintained through letters or e-mails. In many instances the unfortunate financial reality is that beside written, telephone and electronic communication, the relationships may never again enjoy personal face to face interaction. This is the source of much frustration and resentment for many former child migrants and their relatives in the UK/Malta.

For those with the financial capacity, ongoing visits to their country of origin are a clear life long goal. Many have eagerly spoken of the prospects of welcoming family from overseas to their home in Australia, although the family members’ age, health and financial situation often make this unlikely.

In our dealing with former child migrants while managing the Australian Travel Fund there has been an overwhelming sense of gratitude to the Australian Government for providing travel assistance for former child migrants to be reunited with family or to say their goodbyes at a gravesite. It would be remiss of us not to pass on sincere thanks to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) on behalf of those who have received assistance through the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund. This opportunity has changed the lives of many, many people for which there are no words to express its significance. However the Australian Travel Fund did have some shortcomings.

*“A truly rewarding trip for my brothers and I”
David, ACT*

Dennis was able to travel to the UK for his mother’s 80th birthday. He had met her before but they had met in secret, as she had not told her other children of Dennis’ existence. On this visit his mother told her other 11 children about Dennis and he was able meet them all at his mother’s birthday party...

“Mum was so happy to witness all her family together and I’m sure it was a huge burden off her shoulders to see everyone thoroughly enjoying each others love and mateship. It was a very emotional time for me and for my wife, we are most grateful for (the Travel Fund) making our dreams a reality. It’s very unfortunate that the Australian Former Child Migrant Travel Fund has finished at the end of August 2005. The connection with my family members at this stage of my life is unbelievable and to me it represents “The Start of the Beginning” that can only be nourished and enhanced with further face to face reunions. Both of my adult boys have never experienced an extended family and the prospects for them meeting all their uncles, aunties, numerous cousins and grandmother is never ending. I strongly urge that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs reconsider the continuation of the Travel Fund to assist in the fostering of more family reunions. It is difficult for me to express all my feelings now that I have met my six sisters and five brothers. Being back in Australia and so far away from them, this amazing experience and sense of belonging makes me at times feel frustrated and eager to see them again, as soon as possible. It is great to help us to find our families, but what about now? How do we go on from here? It is a bit like asking a child to blow out the candles on his birthday cake and then taking away the cake from him - look at it, feel it but you cannot really taste it...”

Dennis, WA

Shortcomings of the Australian Travel Fund

Travel assistance was not provided to visit places of personal significance. This created problems for two groups of people.

The eligibility criteria required that the former child migrant had been successful in tracing family members or gravesites. This meant that a large number of former child migrants were not eligible to apply for the Australian Travel Fund. As mentioned previously, due to records not being maintained, many have been searching for family members for years with no success. These people feel disadvantaged and rejected once again. The UK Inquiry recommended that when a travel fund was established, there would be provisions that would allow for visits to sites of personal importance.⁶ Neither the UK nor the Australian Travel Funds provided assistance for those former child migrants unable to trace family. It could be argued that these people are the most needy in relation to their search for identity and that there would be very positive psychological benefits involved in visiting their place of birth or the orphanage in which they may remember a happier childhood.

A few people tried to overcome this restriction by asking the support agencies to trace and locate family only to enable them to access the Australian Travel Fund. They only wished to visit places of significance and had no desire to get to know family or to include them in their lives. There were family members in the UK who were left devastated when the former child migrant came over,

⁶ United Kingdom House of Commons Third Report: The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants Recommendation 105. July 1998

*“Found my mother’s sister who is 81 yrs old! She was overwhelmed,
it was a very happy and emotional reunion”
John, NSW*

asked lots of questions and then returned to Australia never to be heard of again. If travel assistance had been provided for visits to places of personal significance this situation could have been avoided.

Many former child migrants needed to have their partners with them to provide emotional support, but only applicants with poor health received funding for partners.

The reunions were often highly emotional experiences and the level of stress and anxiety could be very high when confronted with meeting family members after such a long time of separation. There were situations where a former child migrant, aged in their 60s or 70s, who had never been on a plane before, travelled to the UK to meet a sibling or parent they had only recently discovered.

Many former child migrants are very dependent on their spouse or partner who has become their ‘tower of strength’. Some applicants had the financial means to be able to travel with their partner or a family member who was able to provide emotional support for them and they have often reported that they could not have made the trip without that support. For those who had to travel alone the experience was much more stressful.

Sometimes the spouse or partner who was unable to travel with the former child migrant experienced a feeling of jealousy about the newfound relationship. They felt excluded from the excitement of the reunification and found it difficult to share the richness of their partner’s experiences when they returned home.

In order for the newly established relationship to develop, it is important that not only the former child migrant and the overseas relative remain in communication but also that their partners and children are able to be involved in the relationship. The purpose of family reunification is to unite the family in Australia with the family in the UK/Malta. The visitor from Australia was given the chance to be included in the family but returned without their partner/children having the opportunity to establish those face to face connections. A means tested provision that allowed for a partner/child to accompany the former child migrant in order to provide emotional support would have been beneficial.

Statistics for the Australian Travel Fund

Analysis

ISS has maintained a database during the 6 years it has administered the UK and Australian Travel Funds. This database lists approximately 1,400 former child migrants including the 325 who travelled under the UK Travel Fund and the 771 successful applications made to the Australian Travel Fund.

Lost Innocents indicated that there were between 6,000-7,500 children sent to Australia during the 20th century. Of these it is estimated that between 3,000–3,500 children arrived post World War II. Therefore there are a substantial number of people with whom ISS has not had contact despite newspaper advertisements, articles and referrals from relevant agencies.

“I remembered a lot about Malta when I got there, but the one thing that was great was to see my cousins”
Charles, QLD

One explanation for this could be that as former child migrants experience a high level of health problems, many are no longer alive. There are also reports of high suicide rates in the former child migrant community.

There may be a large number of people who have not contacted ISS because they have not been able to trace family and were therefore ineligible to apply for assistance with the Travel Funds. Some former child migrants have severed ties with people and organisations that remind them of their time in institutions.

A number of former child migrants, having had successful careers, may have been in the financial position to have already returned to the UK or Malta and establish strong connections with their families. There could be a proportion of former child migrants who decided not to contact ISS for travel assistance and allowed the funding to be provided to those who were not in the financial position to travel independently.

Some former child migrants may not have heard of the Fund. Despite six years of travel funding, media coverage and advertising, ISS still receives phone calls from former child migrants who claim that they have only just heard of funding for reunification.

These figures would indicate that there are a number of former child migrants who are unaware of the Travel Fund or who have decided that they do not wish to take advantage of it.

From the following statistics we can see that many applicants are pensioners, with almost a third being older than 65 years of age.

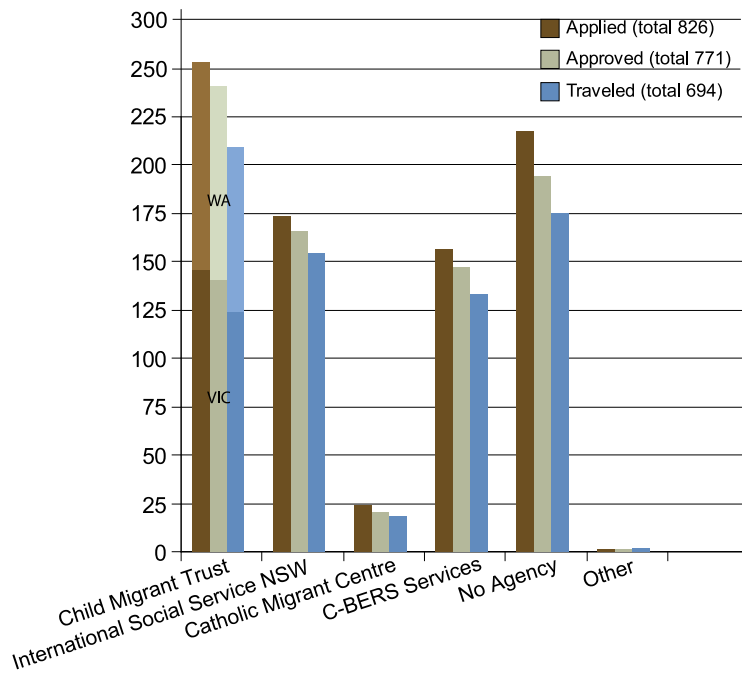
The statistics show that a high number of applications were received via one of the agencies offering support services to former child migrants. ISS strongly endorses applications being made via support agencies. This process allows for need assessments and also provides opportunities for other services, such as counselling, to be offered.

175 applicants travelled without seeking the assistance of a support agency. This group of people would have needed to have been successful with tracing and be competent in completing the application and the gathering of supporting documentation that was required to make application to the Travel Fund.

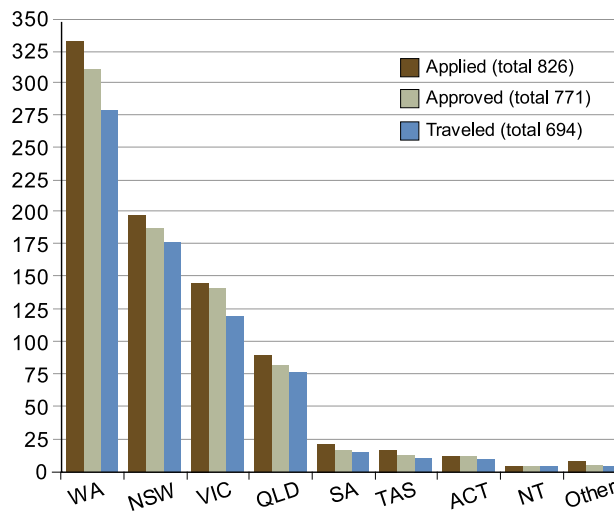
From the following figures we can see that the majority of applications were received in the first year that the fund operated. This is not surprising considering that many were unable to trace family within the time period, or were not eligible under the criteria of the UK Fund. The travel patterns show that the highest demands on the Travel Fund were made when the weather was warmer in the Northern Hemisphere.

We can also identify that the majority of applications were received from residents of Western Australia which is where many of the institutions that accommodated former child migrants were located. Of interest is the number of applications received from NSW. Since 2002, the NSW State Government has provided financial assistance to former child migrants residing in NSW and it is likely that this has increased awareness among eligible people in that State.

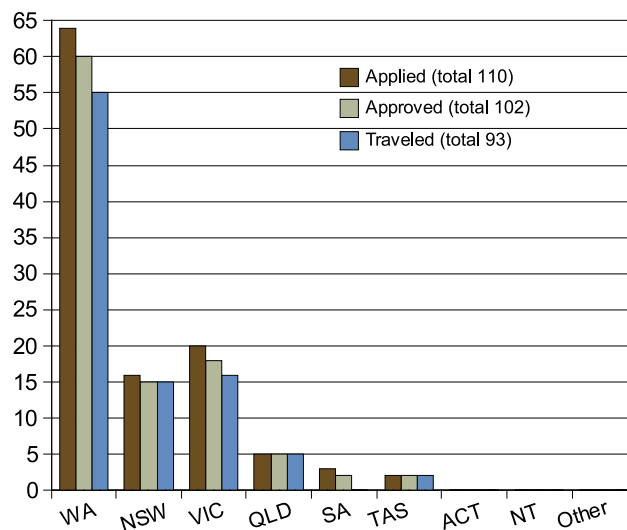
Applications made via Support Agencies



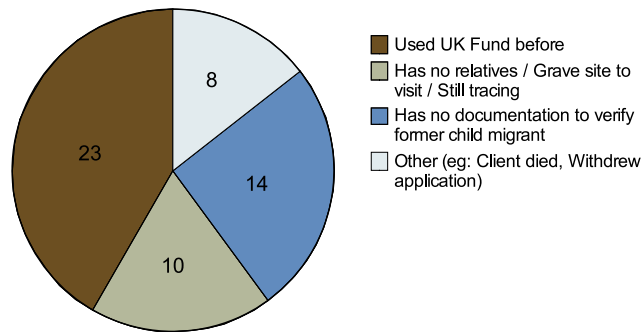
Applications made by State (total)



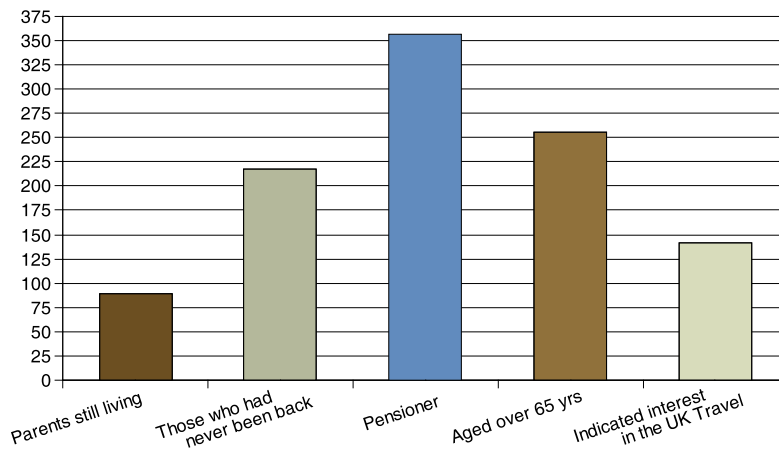
Maltese Applications made by State



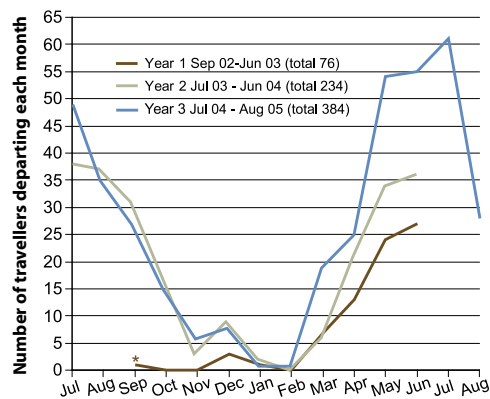
Reasons for not Approving Applications



Priority Groupings for Approved Applicants



Travel Patterns



* 1 application was approved for reimbursement of travel taken in September 2002.
(The Australian Travel Fund began in November 2002).

Recommendations

Recommendation One:

That the Australian Government provides further funding in order to facilitate travel to the UK or Malta for former child migrants.

That provision is made in this funding to allow for:

- Reunion visits to places of personal importance for those former child migrants who have not been able to trace family members and therefore not received support from the UK or Australian Travel Funds.
- A partner or other family member to accompany the applicant for emotional support.
- Two subsequent visits, at a limited level of assistance, for those who wish to develop relationships that have been established with support from the Australian or UK Travel Funds. Recommendation 20 of Lost Innocents suggested that subsequent visits be limited to payment of land travel and airfare expenses. ISS would support the implementation of this recommendation.

ISS would stress that such funding needs to be implemented as soon as practicable.

Recommendation Two:

That State and Federal Governments continue to provide funding for specialist services, particularly in relation to family tracing, counselling and financial assistance for this unique group of people.

Recommendation Three:

That specialist services be made available to the adult children of former child migrants

Appendix

Appendix 1:

Report of a brother's visit to Australia to meet with a former child migrant

This unsolicited account of the effects of migration on one former child migrant and his family was sent to ISS by Brian's brother once he had returned to the UK after visiting Brian in Australia. Brian was sent to Australia in 1952 when he was 8 years old. He had made contact with his surviving family members in the UK and visited them in 1998. The visit had not gone well and resulted in contact being discontinued. Brian applied for the Australian Fund in October 2003. As he was unable to undertake international travel for medical reasons, it was agreed that his brother would travel from the UK and visit him in Australia. Joyce is Brian's counsellor who has worked regularly with him for a number of years and has assisted Brian in obtaining housing and various support services.

All names have been changed to protect privacy.

Report of my visit to Australia June 2005

Once I had arrived, I met with Joyce as agreed. It was very necessary to have a briefing session on the current situation that Brian was in, particularly as I had brought with me some preconceptions that needed clarification and/or obliteration as appropriate. I had to offload them in order to meet Brian with an open mind and a fresh viewpoint.

Joyce kindly told me of Brian's domestic situation and his general improvement in commitment to life going forward. I learned that Brian still also carried some baggage from the previous meetings and that he had some questions and needed some assurances. I learned that he also had a fear of meeting me again because he held me in awe and that he considered himself to be a failure based on his limited knowledge of my lifestyle and my status. I did query with her if this was a ploy on his part to put me at a disadvantage and to make me feel guilty, and I indicated that I did not feel guilty at all, as I had played no part in the development of Brian or his life. I confirmed to her that I understood the reasons for his institution lifestyle be it in the orphanage or the prison, and that I thought he had chosen to live that way after he left the orphanage because it gave him a reasonable chance of staying safe in a world that denied him basic human rights. Additionally he got three meals a day and warmth when he was in prison, and this no doubt caused him to volunteer confessions when life on the outside got unbearable.

I learned that he also had a very active campaign against the Catholic Church, in his mind if not in fact and carried the burden of hate for them and all their representatives.

The house he lives in is a two-floored flat, managed by "Anglicare". He pays a rental for it from his disability allowance/pension.

Joyce asked that I be prepared to answer some points that had troubled Brian from previous encounters, all of which when I listened to them, were borne out of misconstruing the comments of my brothers and sisters. I admit that I wondered if this misconstruction was purposeful for sympathy or not. Brian had admitted that his visit to the UK was a disaster, mainly of his making, but had not elaborated on the detail. Joyce and I found much common ground during my confirmation of the details of that disaster, all of which were caused by Brian not appreciating the real nature of the family he was meeting and being badly prepared before that visit. He had sought to gain affection from the family by right, and when that was not forthcoming, resorted to constructing elaborate and easily seen through ploys of future wealth, imminent death etc. This eventually and in fact quite quickly caused the other members of the family to reject him

completely, and several months after caused our mother to return to a state of denial that it had even occurred, which remained with her till her death.

It had become obvious to me that Brian had a very romantic view of what a family is, and I agreed with Joyce that it would be necessary to disabuse him of this romantic view if progress was to be made. No doubt this view is the result of childish wishes and stories made up in the orphanage, and I must admit I thought it reminded me of the Lost Children's hopes and dreams from Peter Pan. It made me rather sad that the treatment in the orphanage could have generated such a rich but incorrect romantic ideal.

The following day we had tea together, after meeting at Brian's home. I have to say that the flat he lives in is beautiful, and it is better than I might have hoped. He keeps it scrupulously clean, and not a thing was out of place. Photos of my family were evident on the walls, and occupied pride of place on shelves and walls. He appeared to have kept everything that I had sent him ever, they were obviously treasured and of great importance to him. Over mid-morning tea in a local motel we had a good conversation that addressed the queries referred to earlier, the replies to which he seemed to accept. I had brought with me, in preparation for the visit, various photographs of our mother and grandparents, which I was sure he had never had. One of our grandfather and an uncle, vintage 1935-ish, showed him just how physically similar he is to our grandfather, and one of my mother aged about 15 years old, that Brian noted the remarkable likeness to my eldest daughter. He seemed very pleased to receive them. I also had prepared a family tree, which I talked him through and which I gave to him. Like most family trees it became a little vague beyond one generation before my grandparents, but I felt it did give him a "family" to have an identity with.

It was agreed that was enough for him to absorb for the first meeting and we parted company about lunchtime. Over lunch with Joyce, she confirmed she thought everything had gone very well. It was obvious to me that Brian was almost hyper sensitive and his mind was going 15 to the dozen and his speech was also very fast and butterflyed about from subject to subject. I had to constantly get him to slow up, and calm down. There was still an underlying but constant tendency to refer backwards to the orphanage and maltreatment etc, and not much real looking forward or bonding opportunity.

The next morning we met again and I was told he had had to go to the hospital the previous day after I had left. He claimed he was hyperventilating and that his tablets were having a negative effect on him. I met with a friend of his, Lisa and we went out to visit local attractions. I must say this was an extraordinarily nice day, and Lisa filled me in on much of Brian's background over the time that they had known each other. I am not sure how this friendship started, but assume it came out of Brian's visit to the garage in which Lisa worked, however it is very valuable to them both. Lisa is married to a member of the police force, and several times Brian commented that he never thought that he would ever have such a good relationship with a member of the police force, considering his criminal record, and this appeared to be a major factor in his "recovery". I know that both Lisa and her husband have had a great influence on Brian who looks to Lisa's husband for sound advice.

I was disquieted that Brian and I were not getting any quality time together, and I began to wonder if there was going to be any possibility of bonding, as he seemed not to want to spend any time with me on our own. I had many hours alone waiting for him to come around and I did really start to think that I was wasting my time. I suggested this to Lisa, and hoped that the next day would present an opportunity. Brian was still in the "you've been so lucky and I've wasted my life" mental state. She wisely suggested that maybe I ought to get Brian to go somewhere that allowed him to show me things that he was expert in that I had no knowledge of, so we arranged that next day that we would go to the local heritage village.

This really was a turning point. At the village I learned of his skills with cattle and horses, and saw his knowledge of tack and the outback come out in a never ending stream when prompted by the merest question from me. I was not surprised by that knowledge, but it allowed me to get him to talk and realise he had a specialist expertise, and from that allowed him to gain face and substance for himself. There was also little if any talk of the injustices he had endured. We by chance managed to talk with one of the local volunteers at the centre, who was very interested that Brian could and would be prepared to help with leather repairs to the saddles and tack generally. I left Brian's contact details with the volunteer with the request that he contact Brian. In the afternoon we drove out of town and he again relaxed and continued to let me have all his knowledge in a never-ending stream of facts about the bird and wildlife that we saw. He explained the trees, remedies for various insect bites, how to rid my garden of aphids and the like. The fount of knowledge was impressive. Later that evening I took Brian for dinner, where he ate a steak the size of a mountain, which I am sure, would have defeated most athletes!

During this day we had the opportunity to discuss what he might do for his future. He agreed that the possibility of a happy one was directly proportional to his ability to put the past in a sealed box, literally, and to concentrate on making more friends. He needed to forget the "convict" label that he had used as a defence and sympathy tool, and to listen to other people with sympathy, forgetting his own need for sympathy. He lives with a bunch of men who each are either ill or recovering from some trauma, mental or physical, but he does not seem to wish to integrate with them or indeed others. Brian admitted that he was lonely and that he spent most of his time in his flat because he did not want them to get close to him. I was able to convince him to plan to stow his papers of the orphanage in a box and seal it, so that he was not tempted to keep living in the past. He seemed to accept that he would do well to integrate, if not with his neighbours, with other people who might become friends, the volunteers at the heritage village being a good example.

I have now to say that I was not totally satisfied this is really what might happen. I have to acknowledge that Brian has an ability to say what he thinks his listener wishes to hear, there were many examples of this in our conversation, and in conversations I witnessed him have with others. This is a real skill that he has, and no doubt has been learned from experience in gaining advantages for him over a long period. It is dangerous to accept what is said as really being true, if it exposes the listener emotionally or financially. That sounds very harsh, but it would not be right not to include it in this summary. There is still the old "con-artist" ability lurking in his persona.

Brian and I continued to have good meetings and I took him out on several excursions. My visit had gone well and it was time to consider my homeward timetable. I discussed my leaving plans by phone with Joyce and it was agreed that the BBQ organised by Lisa and her husband for the Monday evening should be regarded as a final farewell party session, though she, Brian and I would meet on the Tuesday for private farewells. She said that she thought the visit had been very successful, and referred to a conversation she had had that morning with Brian, who was in an excited mood and who told her that he felt he had been "born again". Though this appears very good and is accepted so, it is a really religious phrase, and not one I expected. It could be that he thought this was an expected answer, but I choose to take the more obvious meaning in his case.

The following day Brian and I shopped for some housekeeping items that I thought he needed, so that I could have some confidence that he had a larder of food to take him over till his next payday and also feel confident that the money was used to advantage. Then we went for a ride into the country and returned to his home for him to get some rest before the "barbie". The barbie was a masterstroke, and allowed me to be part of his clan, with only one person missing from his group of close friends. Lisa had kindly invited Joyce. The evening was wet and windy and held in the porch area, and it was a gentle evening, with "thank you's" all round. Brian went home at about 9.30, which left the four others to chat about the results and the situation.

I took the opportunity to ask Brian frankly about his health. He had noticeably stopped using it as an excuse from doing things with me. He confirmed that he no longer had cancer, but was subject to routine endoscopy checks. This is a major step forward for me, as I had received information that the cancer was terminal.

I learned from Lisa's husband, that he had been trying to get some legal representation for Brian, but that no one seemed willing to take on the case. We discussed the Australian Statute of Limitations and how it might apply, and it was thought it was long past that limit. We also discussed what might be the best way forward for Brian and there was a consensus that to keep him occupied with tasks was probably the best. We had identified leatherwork for the heritage group, gardening for the local hotel, horse tending and saddle repairing for Lisa's friends, plus all contacts outside his domestic circle that could be made. He is going back to TAFE to sign on for more computer and literacy courses, and will continue to help with the Alcoholics Anonymous evenings, I think.

This relies heavily on the carers and friends that Brian has, and I fully appreciate the help they already give. It is staggering to me that so much goodwill towards Brian exists so close at hand. I must find ways of thanking everyone, but hope that will be appreciated in writing.

What started out as a very trying situation, with potential disasters appears to have been successful on the surface. Arrangements have been made to enable Brian to correspond directly with me, and I will be prompt in replies and feeding him with family updates. I consider he has the answers he seeks up to the limit of available information, and I note that he finally referred to my dad as "dad" also.

I have to say that the part played by the Governments of Britain and Australia leave me in some doubt that they have really taken on board and acted upon the recommendations of the Select Committee into Child Migrants published in about 1998. Nor have they ensured that the various churches have accepted and acted upon the recommendations either. We have to bear in mind that this was not restricted to the Roman Catholic Church, recognise that these migrant children were seen as a source of revenue, rather than a source of citizens by the receiving establishments. That they also had absolute power over the children, inasmuch as they were appointed their legal guardians, seems to have corrupted them absolutely. That the local Governments appear not to have protected the children is reprehensible and beggars belief.

I would hope that the Governments might review the progress made since that Select Committee Report, but I have doubts that this will occur, the end of the lives of those concerned is too close for that to be attractive enough to revisit this particular can of worms.

I would like to think that some special provision might be considered to make the final parts of the orphans' lives more comfortable than hitherto. I accept that this also might not happen, but just a small increase in their pensions would make things so much easier and in turn give them a better reason for conforming to normal standards, which in Brian's case must be beneficial to both the State and society in general.

I still have worries about Brian's resolve and ability to carry out his promises. I will continue to support him morally, but am not able to do anything locally nor greatly on the financial front. This area is in the hands of what I have come to call his carers and friends.

The eventual real success of my visit therefore rests in the care of Brian's local support agencies and what has or has not been achieved during my week with him will only be decided in the fullness of time.

Special note

As I was asked to write something for the Child Migrants Society after Brian had visited the UK, I attach a copy of that here for you. It may not be published without my consent and is my copyright. It seeks to consider the situation from my mother's point of view, and is therefore extremely personal. It does however sum up the tragedy that Brian and Mum endured, and no doubt is mirrored in all the cases that were involved. So far neither Brian nor Mum have seen it, and I am still not sure that he should. I leave you each to react to it as you might choose.

After the Visit

*She wonders what God will say
Well you secretly do when your hair is grey
She seeks his forgiveness each morn
And in solitary moments is deeply forlorn
No one sees it, no one hears
That self-punishment's lasted some 50 years
She knows she's not clever
She never was, but must she bear her guilt forever.*

*It is hard to remember when eight-one
The promises given when depositing a son
Into safekeeping evermore
To Gods few "called" – who his uniform wore
But "A good sweet Living"
Summed it up – and allowed that bitter giving
NOW, who was betrayed, him or she
By the "servants" of him who died on a tree.*

*Each year on his birthday – she secretly wept
Not knowing that the promises were all unkept
Whilst sins of each kind
Were practiced on him which throttled his mind
And taught him to cheat, to steal and lie
To get what is basic to you and I
Till lying obtained him a way to live
And that's all the promises managed to give*

*A new life in a new nation
For him whom she hoped enjoyed God's confirmation
As a little child drawing nigh
Pure of heart and soul – no need to cry
But instead of that hope, remembered now
She learned that she became "That heartless Cow"
In the mind of that boy
Who was robbed of his childhood, innocence and joy.*

*She's learned this in her closing years
This truth, since his visit, confirmed unthought fears
Exaggerated, perhaps, here and there
Which still pours more guilt on her, quite unfair
So she cries, as he cries
For a lost life, a destroyed love for both he and she
And enforced re-parting again
Ensures a new mourning with new guilt will remain*

International Social Service, Australian Branch

National Office

Level 2, 313-315 Flinders Lane
Melbourne Victoria 3000 AUSTRALIA

Phone: (03) 9614 8755

Fax: (03) 9614 8766

Email: iss@iss.org.au

NSW Office

Suite 8, Level 1
13-15 Wentworth Avenue
Sydney NSW 2000 AUSTRALIA

Phone: (02) 9267 0300

Fax: (02) 9267 3886

Email: iss@iss.ngo.org.au

www.iss.org.au

ISBN 0-9592354-4-2