

19 Jan 2007

The Benevolent Society today responded to the Senate Committee's Report, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children.*

The Benevolent Society has been providing services to children and families since 1813. Part of our role was to provide residential care for children at Scarba House in Bondi from 1917 until 1986.

The Benevolent Society has a strong commitment to working with children and their families in need of support. It is because of this commitment that we wish to make a public statement of apology about past practices in our provision of residential care. The Board and staff feel strongly that we should acknowledge our history and the role that we played in providing any inadequate care for children placed with us.

The Benevolent Society apologizes unreservedly for any abuse, mistreatment or harm experienced by children in our care.

The report of the Senate Committee, 'Forgotten Australians', gives us a clear, highly distressing picture of what life was like for tens of thousands of children who spent all or part of their childhoods in an orphanage or children's home. We believe that it is crucial that such histories are known, heard and acknowledged; and that such practices are never again experienced by any Australian child.

It is now recognised that out-of-home care for children needs to include frequent and meaningful family contact, placement with siblings, consistent care givers, opportunities for children to emotionally process what they have experienced and freedom to express their views and wishes for their future care. The Benevolent Society feels deep sadness and regret for the children in our care who did not receive the consistent, loving care that they needed and deserved.

We welcome the Senate Inquiry into Institutional Care and its recommendations. It gives agencies such as our own the opportunity to acknowledge past wrongs and to try to address them appropriately. In particular, we are putting in place services to ensure that we will respond promptly, compassionately and respectfully to anyone who wishes to approach us to talk about their time in Scarba House as children.

the benevolent society | initiating change

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