

To Whom it May Concern,

CLAN have previously written a submission to your Royal Commission into Mental Health in January regarding the Terms of Reference. The information that was in this submission is still current and relevant to all aspects of your Royal Commission into Mental Health in regards to Care Leavers.

CLAN would like to briefly add to this information that we previously supplied and also request to present at your Royal Commission at either Public Hearings or to attend the roundtables that will be held in conjunction with this Royal commission in order to provide information and evidence regarding Care Leavers.

Currently, CLAN are aware that one of the biggest issues facing Care Leavers is the current National Redress Scheme. The difficulty of the application form combined with the inefficiency of processing and assessing these applications has left many Care Leavers who experience mental health issues being triggered and becoming more anxious and depressed while experiencing a seemingly never ending wait.

A current client of CLAN completed the Redress Forms and believed he would be capable of doing so with no assistance. Unfortunately due to the extensive information that these 44 page applications require, it is an immediate barrier for Care Leavers. Commonly, Care Leavers received little to no education, and have difficulty completing forms due to literacy issues. CLAN's client, was unaware of the importance of providing specific vital information, which he unintentionally failed to include in his application. This client received a very poor offer of only \$50,000 and contacted CLAN in distress. In viewing his forms, CLAN could identify it was obvious he was confused as pivotal information was missing, or was incorrectly input. These forms are ultimately setting Care Leavers up for failure in completing them without any assistance. To expect those with limited education and literacy to complete such a complex form accurately is completely unreasonable.

CLAN is aware that not all cases will meet the 'Assesment Matrix' requirement for \$150,000 and will not fight for all Redress offers to be increased. However it was very obvious in this instance that our client had been confused when he completed the form and provided conflicting information. Not ONE Redress Scheme Decision Maker or Assessors made contact with our CLAN member to clarify the mistake. Supposedly all workers within the Redress Scheme have been 'Trauma Informed', and if this were the case they would be aware of possible inaccuracies and issues that Care Leavers would face in completing these complex forms.

On the other hand, there are other Care Leavers who are not eligible for the Redress Scheme. This has left a large group of individuals who already have psychological issues being retraumatized because their trauma 'doesn't count'. These are people who have suffered physical, psychological and emotional abuse, who may have been abandoned by their parents or forcibly separated from their family. They may have been neglected, deprived of an education, used for forced labour and lack an identity and support system because they have never been able to have ties to their biological family. The mental health issues that these Care Leavers suffer with due to their experiences are now being exacerbated because they have been excluded from this redress scheme and the Royal Commission which came before it. We sincerely hope that the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health does not perpetuate this cycle and continue to ignore Care Leavers with mental health issues.

Furthermore, CLAN would also like to briefly mention that Care Leavers really struggle with their mental health on 'anniversary days'. Birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Mothers Day, Fathers Day and any other special occasions always prove to be difficult and tolling on their emotional and psychological state. These occasions are usually solemn reminders of their childhood and their lack of family, support, and a sense of normality in the wider community. Getting through these sorts of occasions every year is an achievement for many, and deserves mention as an ever lingering effect of a childhood in care.

Finally, CLAN would like to reiterate the importance of this Royal Commission in examining the role medical and allied health professionals have in dealing with Care Leavers and their complex issues. It has been a recurring theme for CLAN to hear our members complain that their GP or psychologist has no idea about the Care Leaver experience and the trauma and abandonment issues that is associated with being a Care Leaver. Recently, CLAN were told by a Victorian member who lives in rural Victoria that they went to see their GP about the intense depression they were experiencing. The Care Leaver tried to explain to this GP who is Russian about their experience being a Care Leaver and why they are feeling so depressed, only to be told 'lucky you didn't grow up in a Russian orphanage'. This Care Leaver felt shut down, made to feel inadequate and belittled with this comment and understandably has been too scared to pursue mental health treatment through their GP.

This really highlights two major issues; firstly the lack of training, understanding and experience in Care Leaver issues, secondly the lack of suitably trained and experienced health professionals in rural areas. CLAN are aware that indigenous Australians who are part of the Stolen Generation have instant recognition and to some degree an understanding of what their experience must have been when they identify as part of the 'Stolen Generation'. Unfortunately, 'Care Leavers' (many of whom many grew up in Institutions with members of the stolen generation) have little to no understanding of what their experience must have entailed and why they would suffer with mental health issues. When Care Leavers use the words 'State Ward' they find that health professionals don't know what to say and don't ask anymore questions as they don't know what to ask. This sort of response only serves to stigmatise the Care Leaver experience even more. Whilst we at CLAN do our best to educate and disseminate information about Care Leavers, their experience and the mental health issues that they live with as a result, there needs to be a change from the top down in policy and in training practices so that health professionals (regardless of where they practice) have adequate knowledge to help the 500 000 plus Australians who lived in Australia's Orphanages, Children's Homes, foster care, training homes and other Institutions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this in addition to our previous submission. We hope to hear from you regarding taking part in one of your roundtables or hearings to provide invaluable insight into the mental health issues that are facing Care Leavers.

Regards,

Care Leavers Australasia Network Inc.

