



CARE LEAVERS AUSTRALASIA NETWORK

CLAN is a National, Independent, Peak Membership Body which supports, represents and advocates for people who were raised in Australian Orphanages, Children's Homes, Foster Care & Other Institutions.

PO Box 164, Georges Hall, NSW, 2198

**Comments on the National Strategy to
Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Final
Development Consultation Paper.**

CLAN - Care Leavers Australasia Network is a national, independent, peak membership body which represents and advocates for those who were raised in Australia and New Zealand's Orphanages, Children's Homes, Missions and Foster Care. There were more than 500 000 children in Australia who grew up in 900 plus Orphanages, Children's Home, Missions and Foster Care. CLAN's main objective is to assist and support Care Leavers and their families through the wide variety of work we do including but not limited to advocacy, counselling, casework, records searching and publishing Care Leavers' stories.

CLAN would like to thank the National Office for Child Safety for giving us the opportunity to comment on this consultation paper. Unfortunately, CLAN is all too familiar in dealing with child sexual abuse. The majority of Care Leavers were abused as children in a multitude of ways and represented the biggest cohort involved in giving evidence to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. CLAN believes this is indicative of the rampant nature of child abuse (not just sexual) in Institutional care and the very important role churches, charities, government and other non-government organisations play in the prevention and response to child sexual abuse.

Vision, Objective and Values

In general, CLAN is in agreement with the proposed vision and objective. However, we would argue for the inclusion of an extra more specific value. In an ideal world ALL children and young people would be protected and safe from sexual abuse. However, because of the Royal Commission we now understand that some groups, and some children are more at risk than others - children in care, being one of these at-risk groups. The Senate Inquiry (2004) estimated that there were 500 000 children in care in Australia during the 20th Century and from what we understand the majority of these children were abused. Whilst child sexual abuse is perpetrated in a variety of contexts, we are aware that outside familial situations, children in care have one of the highest risks of being abused, sexually and also physically and psychologically.

What is now known as Out of Home Care (OOHC), is a system and an institution with rules, regulations, and laws unto themselves. It is of the utmost importance that the National Strategy recognises this fact and has in place specific values to deal with this large group of children and the system that they find themselves in. Whilst sexual abuse can occur in a variety of situations and contexts, no other 'institution' or context has specific laws/systems in place which highlight the vulnerability of the child. It is for this reason that CLAN would be advocating for children in care to be recognised as a particular group with extremely specific needs under the values that have been developed.

Furthermore, it must also be recognised that the intergenerational effects of children in care are tremendous. The abuse that children have suffered in care has had ongoing effects throughout their lives and into those of their children's and so forth. Sexual abuse is not an isolated trauma incident but one that has lifelong effects. For children in care it adds onto the narrative of being parentless and feeling unwanted. For many Care Leavers who were raised in this way it can then be incredibly difficult to grow up and parent the next generation of Australians. There has been limited statistical data to document the intergenerational effects of children in care, no government wants to admit that they have failed yet another generation of children. From CLAN's own research and the anecdotal evidence we hear on a daily basis, these intergenerational effects are ever present and very

real. Stopping the cycle needs to be a priority for any national strategy in preventing child sexual abuse.

It is also vital that within a particular value regarding children in care, the role that governments, churches, charities and other care providers play in their responsibility to protect and keep safe children in care, is highlighted. To date, past providers of care (many of whom are still current providers of care) refuse to participate in Care Leaver awareness training to become more informed as to the impact their past practices and abuses have had on the children they were responsible in caring for. Many still refuse to acknowledge or accept responsibility for the abuses that were perpetrated on children in their care. CLAN wholeheartedly believes that these organisations need to learn from their own history and their own mistakes. Nothing will improve for children in care if these organisations refuse to accept and acknowledge the experiences of Care Leavers. Therefore, we urge the National Strategy to include that past providers of care (who are current providers) need to undergo not only trauma informed training, but Care Leaver awareness training also, to understand the impact of their actions and past practices. They cannot be trusted to move forward unless they have accepted and acknowledged their past mistakes and crimes.

Additionally, CLAN would like to see in the proposed vision it be stated that children and young people are valued. The Care Leavers that CLAN now support were never valued as children, and came from an era of the mentality 'children should be seen and not heard'. Unfortunately, in some families and institutions this is still the mentality. Children need to know they are valued, and with this knowledge a sense of safety and protection also comes regarding child abuse. Children who know they are valued and believed are more likely to disclose when something is uncomfortable and doesn't feel right, or when something has been perpetrated upon them. We therefore feel it is important to specifically mention that children are valued in your proposed vision.

Strategic Priority Themes

Whilst we are in general agreeance with these themes, it would really depend on the 'what' and 'how' these themes are executed. CLAN would again argue that there does need to be an understanding that children in care are subjected to laws and regulations that other children are not, making them more vulnerable and perhaps harder to target under the National Strategy. As such it is our belief that there needs to be a willingness from all those involved in the child protection and care systems to integrate the National Strategy into their everyday practice and perhaps some of the laws and regulations governing the care system. As part of the Education and building child safe cultures CLAN believes that ALL providers of care should be given mandatory Care Leaver awareness training to understand what happened to children in care in the past, the abuses and crimes committed upon them, the circumstances which allowed this to happen and the impact this has had on the Care Leaver. This would also integrate into the prevention and intervention theme also.

Working in Partnership

Once again, Care Leavers and children in care are not mentioned as a specific group for the National Strategy to work in partnership with. Whilst it may fall under victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, it seems there is no differentiation between the unique circumstances that Care Leavers and children in care were and are subjected to. The care system is a system of its own that needs to be targeted and worked in partnership with. Not recognising the differences and challenges that makes

this system unique highlights ignorance and only perpetuates the vulnerability of these particular children. Care Leavers have been recognised as a special needs group by the Australian Government, however they continue to be left off as a distinct group in every single piece of paperwork and initiatives which are government and non-government led. In developing a National Strategy to prevent child sexual abuse, if a proven majority group is ignored how can the Australian Government claim to even be trying to protect and keep children safe?

CLAN are the largest peak membership advocacy network representing Care Leavers – the largest number of people who gave evidence about child sexual abuse at the Royal Commission. If the governments and care providers are serious about learning from the past and preventing future child sexual abuse in care, then they are more than welcome to consult with CLAN and our network.

CLAN would be more than happy to be involved in the design and implementation of individual actions under the National Strategy. As we have already mentioned we would be glad to offer our training services, and advice, to help care providers and governments to learn from their past mistakes and understand the context in which child sexual abuse in care was so prevalent.