



The Parliamentary Apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care

Thursday 8 February 2024

Today we acknowledge a shameful chapter in our history, and the experiences of a group of Victorians who have fought for a long time to be heard. From 1928 to 1990, thousands of children were entrusted to the state, religious organisations and charitable agencies.

To those children, who were abused and neglected during their time in care, we humbly and unreservedly apologise.

That you were needlessly separated from your brothers and sisters – sometimes growing up within the same four walls – but never being allowed to know each other.

For the grief of being removed from your parents, often without explanation – and the years spent fighting to find your family, sometimes in vain.

To those who died without getting the respect or recognition they deserved.

To the children who lost their lives while in the guardianship of the state, whose voices were silenced forever.

And to the families who were broken, permanently.

We failed you. For this, we are deeply sorry.

There are countless ways to harm a child, and all of them leave a mark.

We apologise, that instead of reading, writing and arithmetic, many instead learnt of floggings, beltings and brutality.

That you were often cruelly, and purposefully, punished for the most minor of infractions – and far more often, for things entirely outside of your control.

That too many of the men and women, organisations and institutions, entrusted with your care, perpetrated the very opposite.

For the physical scars you bear to this day, we say sorry.

We also recognise that many of you bear the emotional scars.

The humiliation. The stigma. The neglect.

That you were made to feel so worthless when you were – and are – worth so much.

For the heartbreak and humiliation dealt to you, we say sorry.

For those of us who grew up safe, connected and nurtured – it's impossible to imagine. But for those who lived it – the impact is not only historical but enduring.

To those with families of your own, we apologise that the burden of your experience often carries on in your relationships with your children and grandchildren.

And we apologise to those whose experience of so-called "care" made having your own family an impossibility.

We also acknowledge the challenges many of you have faced in building healthy, loving relationships.

And we acknowledge your courage – and the incredible support and understanding of your husbands, wives, partners and families – in proving that love is always possible.

Many of you were also denied that most basic right – knowing who you are.

Instead, you were forced to piece together your identity and history from your records – documents that were either incomplete, blacked out, or littered with lies made up about you and your family.

We are sorry this made the wounds even deeper.

We also apologise for the opportunities missed and the potential left unrealised.

For the way your health was neglected – often with a lifetime of consequences.

For the lies and low expectations that curled up and took root inside your hearts.

To those bright children full of life, who could have done anything, been anything, but instead had their childhood and education cut short.

For the unpaid child labour – work that should have belonged to adults. Boys forced to toil on farms, in vegetable gardens, and other manual labour, and girls in laundries, scrubbing floors and long hours looking after younger children.

To you, we say sorry.

Because it's not just what happened in those institutions, but also outside of them.

When you were old enough to leave, many of you were simply discarded – often with no more than the clothes on your back.

You went from having every element of your life controlled, regimented, and policed to being completely alone.

Nowhere to fall back on. No one to turn to.

You were left unprepared for a world that had, until that point, treated you with disdain and indifference.

For all this and more – we say sorry.

But sorry is just a word.

It requires action and even more, commitment.

Today as a Parliament, we take the first step towards righting those wrongs.

And commit ourselves to doing more and doing better to protect Victoria's children – past, present and future.

Hon. Jacinta Allan MP

Premier of Victoria