

Minister Linda Burney
Ministerial Statement in the NSW Parliament
12 November 2009
National Apology to Forgotten Australians
and Child Migrants

Next Monday – 16 November – the Prime Minister will deliver a national apology to the Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants.

This follows the NSW Government's Healing Service and Memorial Unveiling, held in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens in September this year.

The Service was attended by more than five hundred Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants, many of whom suffered neglect, hardship and abuse while growing up in institutional care.

An apology to the many children who grew up in church and charitable institutions was also given at the Healing Service.

That day was an emotional and significant milestone for many former care leavers, and the Government was honoured they chose to participate despite the difficult memories many still carry.

The Premier said in his speech:

“Those with little or no experience of such hardship cannot hope to comprehend the scale and depth of the suffering entailed.

I express the hope that by acknowledging the realities of the past we can begin to heal those wounds, restore those lost families and repair those broken lives.”

Mr Speaker, the Commonwealth *Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians* Report found up to half a million children and young people were placed in orphanages, children’s homes and foster homes across the country.

As many as 200,000 children were placed in institutional care in NSW alone.

Imagine the young child of a returned serviceman, given up to care because the anguish of war had destroyed a family.

Imagine, everyone, the fear and loneliness of young child migrants, forced to travel around the world to be placed in harsh institutions isolated from a family many never saw again.

They were innocent victims. Far too many were mistreated by the system charged with their care.

And far too many continue to live their adult lives severely impacted by a lack of education, poor health, trauma and depression, substance abuse, and a life-long difficulty forming and maintaining relationships.

Former care leaver Dr Joanna Penglase OAM, co-founder of Care Leavers Australia Network, spoke at the Healing Service.

She said:

“We all share one common experience ... we grew up without our parents, in the care of strangers.

We lost our parents, and not only our parents ... we lost our brothers and our sisters, our grandparents, aunts, uncles, all our kin.

And so we lost ourselves.... we lost our identity.”

Mr Speaker, this is a legacy that would be so difficult to bear.

To continue the journey of healing, the NSW Government has committed \$9 million over five years to expand support services for mature aged care leavers.

The new funding will employ caseworkers and counsellors to help care leavers access health, housing and education programs, make it easier for people to find and reconnect with their lost families, and to access personal records from their childhood.

The NSW Government welcomes the Prime Minister’s apology to Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants.

I am pleased to inform the House the Rees Government is providing free return rail travel from anywhere in NSW for care leavers, plus a companion, wishing to attend the national apology in Canberra on Monday.

The NSW Government joins with the Commonwealth in apologising for the suffering and hardship so many children and young people endured in care, and we reiterate our commitment to ensuring the tragedy and horror of past practices will never be repeated.