

## **Apology to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants**

**Senator MOORE** (Queensland) (7.31 pm)—

Today is the first anniversary of our country's apology to the people we used to know as the forgotten Australians. In this place last year on 16 November, a number of us made very short speeches—the important thing was that they were short. Nonetheless, what we said and what I said in this place was that these people were no longer forgotten, that the people who had been identified as forgotten were now no longer silent and their voices had been heard.

Today in the parliament there was a small commemoration of the fact that the one-year anniversary had arrived. There was a lot of emotion around. Some of the people had been here many times. As you know, Madam Acting Deputy President Crossin, from the many years that we have worked together in the Senate on a number of inquiries, so many people who had the experience of being in institutions and having lost their family connections had no sense of identity and they were fearful and afraid and felt somehow guilty about their circumstances. Many of those people had the tremendous courage to come forward and share their experiences with those of us in the Senate who had the enormous privilege of coming to know them and working with them to get an understanding of what they needed to get back their identities. We could not give these people back their childhoods but what we could do as a government, as a parliament, was ensure that they knew that we cared.

On that day last year, there were many people here, in the Great Hall, as well as people across the country who were linked in by various video connections. The emotion was real and it was powerful. When our Prime Minister stood up and said 'we as a nation say sorry' and went on to say that we believed those people had done nothing to deserve what had happened to them, it was an enormously powerful moment for so many people. Many had been carrying around some sense of guilt or shame, the feeling that they had done something wrong that had caused their lives to be blighted in so many ways. Then the Leader of the Opposition spoke. I will always remember that one of the key sentences in his contribution was 'we believe you'. You could not have felt more special than you did at that moment. There was a silence that went across the room and, I am sure, across the country—absolute silence which then turned into a burst of applause and cheering, because they were the words that people had needed to hear. As we found out in our various Senate inquiries, no-one had believed their stories. No-one had listened to them, even those who had the ability to speak out. They were pushed aside and ignored, and that made the pain even greater. In many ways this day, 16 November, is a very special day, because we as a nation, through our parliamentary leaders, said to all those people: we have heard you.

But that is by no means the end of the journey. It is important that we as a nation understand that we have to keep going, to help rebuild the lives of these people who have been so damaged by various decisions over the years. The apology was one of the key recommendations of the series of Senate reports that we shared in this place. It was an important recommendation and it has been achieved, but that is not the end of the story. There needs to be ongoing work, and this government has been part of a series of the ongoing activities that have to happen.

Jenny Macklin hosted the small luncheon that was held upstairs today, and the welcome and appreciation that she got were an acknowledgement that a lot of the work that was done was driven by her as the minister, and possibly the action taken might not have been taken if there had not been such a person in the job. They acknowledged that. I could sense how much Jenny has appreciated the experience she has had of growing so close to so many people. But today she talked about the fact that the government accepts there is more to be done.

No-one can represent everyone's story, but three people at the luncheon talked about their own experiences and what today meant to them: Leonie Sheedy from CLAN, Harold Haig from the child migrants group—the people who were brought over mainly from England but also from other countries; they had no say in that decision—and also Caroline Carroll from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians. Each of them has been intimately connected with the range of events that connected to the apology and the ongoing action. Many of the people with whom I spoke said that one of the things that have meant the most to them is that in this year's federal budget a specific amount of money was put aside for programs that would work directly with people who I call 'no longer forgotten'. This was the first time ever in a federal government budget that there was a special allocation for people who had been in institutions. This was very meaningful for the people who had had that experience, and for their families and friends and those who work with them.

A number of services have come forward. One that was mentioned a lot today was the Find and Connect Service. That will be open and launched, I am hoping, with another round of celebrations in April next year. This service is about having a national website and a single online access point to help the no-longer forgotten Australians and former child migrants to find their records held by past care providers and government agencies and also to work with a national phone hook-up so that they can find someone who can help them through the maze of trying to work through finding records and archives. A lot of the stories of the people who came to our Senate committees were that they did not have personal history. When they had attempted many times to find records of their own experience, records had been lost or destroyed or were no longer there. So there were these huge gaps when people just wanted to find out who they were and where they came from and even if they had family. The Find and Connect Service will help people, who choose to use it, to have some knowledge, if they can find it, of their past. This is a major step forward and something about which people have been asking for many years. We also need to have special Find and Connect workers in every state and territory because often the people who were placed in care lost any contact with their families and moved interstate as they got older and found new lives. One of the restrictions of the current services that are offered mostly around this country is that it is often state based. We consistently hear stories in Queensland, where we have a very strong support network at the Queensland government level, but if people had not had their care in Queensland it would have been even more difficult for them to find support or to have any access to records. We are hoping that the Find and Connect Service, when it is up and running next year, will move some way to allow people, no matter where they live, to be able to have help and support to find information about their families.

Another key part of our recommendations through the process was to ensure that the stories were not lost and that their histories would be known. Through the National

Museum and the National Library, we have funded processes where living histories, stories that people have and wish to share, will be kept. We also have a service that is hopefully going to be able to work well with people who were in care as children, as they become more mature, facing the horror of perhaps returning to an institutionalised arrangement through aged care. A special aged-care program, counselling and knowledge base have been developed so that people who have had this experience can work with care providers to see that their own experiences are taken into account.

Today is a marvellous day because people can share, celebrate and also look to the future. The government has made a very small DVD about the apology last year. I watched some of that today and, if it were possible, I think my heart stopped when I saw the faces of the people as that apology was being made. It is important that we as a government and as a parliament continue to accept our responsibilities to work with these people and continue to make that commitment which we made 12 months ago that no longer are these people forgotten; they are part of our history.