

Improving Access to Victoria's Historical Child Welfare Records

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Abstract

Public records play a crucial role in the lives of Australians affected by their past institutionalisation as children. To these 'Forgotten Australians', Child Migrants and members of the Stolen Generations, records represent the hope that they will learn the story of their childhood and why they grew up in an institution when living within their own family was not possible. In this article, we share some insights from a recent workshop at PROV, and show some of the ways that items in PROV's collection are being used to form new understandings about the history of 'care' in Victoria. We also discuss how the Find & Connect web resource is creating new documentation about PROV's child welfare records so that they are easier to locate and access. We argue that archivists can empower marginalised communities such as Forgotten Australians to use

historical records, while these new users in their turn are taking part in discussions about ways of managing the collections that can broaden the skills of the archival profession. Digital technology and interventions like the workshop held at PROV provide opportunities to improve access to records, and for new users to participate in the way that archives are described, used and understood.

Introduction

Most Australians live their lives firmly embedded in a web of information. They know where they were born. They know whether their parents liked each other. They know what it looks like when an adult brushes their teeth. They belong to interconnected groups, like a family, a neighbourhood, a religion, and they have experiences that constantly reinforce what they know. Together, these bits and the threads that bind them add up to an incalculably crucial body of information, providing not only a medical history but a sense of self. It's almost impossible for most of us to imagine not knowing these facts about ourselves, and yet this information was systematically taken from children in twentieth-century Australia. Even now, in the wake of Rudd's apology, much of it has not been given back.[1]

More than 100,000 Victorians are among those dubbed the 'Forgotten Australians' – people who grew up in orphanages, children's Homes[2] and other institutions and in substitute families (fostered or adopted) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Christine Kenneally so eloquently puts it, access to information is a key element of restoring justice for 'care' leavers in Australia.[3]

This article will explore some of the ways that public records held by institutions like PROV can play a crucial role in the lives of Forgotten Australians and others affected by the past institutionalisation of children in Victoria. For many people who lack a coherent family history and its associated mementoes, objects and memorabilia, public records take on added significance. Records play a key role in the construction of these people's sense of identity, and can also provide some answers to the questions that haunt those who were in institutions as children. Records can be vital in the process of reconnecting with lost family members. Additionally, records can provide evidence of past wrongs, abuse and injustice.

Many 'care' leavers have a hunger for information about the past that could be considered a particular strain of 'archive fever'.[4] The trauma of being separated from and sometimes losing all connection to family can lead to bewilderment and a lasting sense that one lacks identity and self-worth. Advocate and curator of the Care Leaver Australia Network (CLAN) National Orphanage Museum, Leonie Sheedy, illustrated this point in her submission to the 2004 Senate inquiry into children in institutional care:

I feel like a second class member of the community. I feel different, I have no sense of belonging to a long line of extended relatives, no parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, second cousins. My loss is also my children's loss as they have no extended relatives on their mother's side either. I feel that I have no past, that my life only began at 3 yrs old. The documents and family photos of a normal family life are missing.[5]

Knowledge about one's family plays a vital role in developing and reinforcing one's sense of identity. It provides individuals with a sense of belonging and a sense of place, which are important components of a person's mental health. Judith Etherton notes that family history can have a therapeutic role, particularly for 'care' leavers. She stresses that records, including public records that contain personal information, can play a vital part in the formation of identity and improvement in mental health.[6]

In March 2013, PROV hosted a workshop in which a group of stakeholders explored ways to improve access to the child welfare records in PROV's collection. Workshop participants came from the Find & Connect web resource project, CLAN, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and PROV.[7] The records that Forgotten Australians are seeking are distributed across the collections of church and charitable organisations, government departments, hospitals, government archives, historical societies and cultural institutions. Other problems with gaining access to personal records that are obtained under Freedom of Information (FOI) and Information Privacy legislation include inadequacies in both the amount and quality of information that has been kept, the lack of historical context, and redactions exercised under interpretations of third-party privacy rules. This leads many to seek alternative sources of information to flesh out the meagre or contestable personal records held by government and non-government agencies. Though many of these records are by law closed to public access,[8] there is a wealth of information of great significance to Forgotten Australians that is already in the public domain. PROV's collection is one particularly rich source of information about Forgotten Australians and the contexts that shaped their childhoods.

However, these archival records are currently difficult to access, particularly for the uninitiated.[9] Generally speaking, Forgotten Australians face a number of extra barriers: many lack confidence and may have low literacy levels, while some have issues with authority and bureaucracy. As one person making a submission to the Forgotten Australians inquiry described it: 'My self esteem was low, I felt less than, inadequate, I could hardly look at people let alone communicate, I felt that people would find out how inept I was. I had a great fear of judgements and criticism. I had a fear of public places and couldn't for example go into a bank or a library':[10] This can make approaching a reading room, not to mention navigating the complicated web of finding aids and records, an intimidating experience. Forgotten Australians have a greater need for guidance and support than other users of the archives. Providing this extra assistance is one component of what Gudmund Valderhaug calls 'archival justice'. [11]

PROV's workshop with Forgotten Australians provides one example of how archives can reach out to new communities. The workshop found that currently, while many records in PROV's collection may be 'open' (such as ward records which become available to the public 99 years after the date of their creation,[12] or open access records series such as correspondence files), some are little understood, under-researched and under-utilised. Furthermore, the fact that these records are not closed under the *Public Records Act 1973* does not mean that they do not contain highly personal, sensitive and potentially traumatic information. The workshop participants agreed to work together to improve the documentation and knowledge about these records, and to facilitate access to them in a way that is appropriate and sensitive to the needs of Forgotten Australians and all those who have 'care' leavers in their family tree.

In this article, we will share some discoveries and insights from this workshop. The institutionalisation of children is an emerging narrative in Australia's history, one that has been slowly gaining prominence since the *Bringing them home* report was released in 1997. [13] Senate inquiries in 2001, 2004 and 2009 into child migration and institutional care resulted in the apology in the Australian Parliament on 16 November 2009. [14] The apology was accompanied by funding for a number of projects to help commemorate and record the history of Forgotten Australians,[15] including the development of a national web resource, www.findandconnect.gov.au. The Find & Connect web resource team is constructing a public knowledge space about the history of 'care' – the network of institutions, policies, laws, events and organisations – and documenting information about the complex distributed archival collections of 'care' records so that they are easier to locate and access.

The federal government's funding of these initiatives demonstrates an acceptance at the national level of the vital significance of records for Forgotten Australians and others affected by the history of institutional 'care'. In Australia currently, the role of records-as-evidence is highly topical, with the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse both under way.[16] The policy response to the Forgotten Australians report is fertile ground to examine the multiple functions of records in society – as identity, as memory, as evidence, as symbols – and the roles archivists play in 'facilitating public memory making'.[17]

Ward Registers – The Official Record

Nicole Llewellyn, PROV's Coordinator of Access Services, reported to the workshop that a series of great significance to Forgotten Australians, and to the history of Victorian child welfare in general, will soon be added to PROV's growing collection of digitised records. The Ward Registers (VPRS 4527) date back to the passage of Victoria's first child welfare legislation, the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864*. [18] They document information about children committed to the 'care' of the state in Victoria; for example, the child's name, sex, date of birth, native place, religion, ability to read or write, date of commitment, committing bench, date of admission, term, cause of commitment, whether parents are living, vaccination details, previous history, where placed, licensing out details, details regarding discharge and half-yearly report information.[19] This record series extends up to 1965, ending with the record for ward number 84,818. (Each state ward was allocated a unique number by the government department – many Forgotten Australians remember their ward number for the rest of their lives – indeed, many 'care' leavers signed off their submission to the Senate's Forgotten Australians inquiry with their 'identity number', a sad reflection of the suppression of children's identity while in institutional 'care')

For many people institutionalised as children, the bureaucratic information in the Ward Register has to 'stand in' for the web of information contained in memories, personal and family memorabilia that most of us take for granted. As one witness before the 2004 Senate inquiry stated, 'state wards often only have the state ward file to go back to for family information'. [20] For former state wards, accessing their entry in the Ward Register is often the starting point of the journey. The Register contains key information about each person's time in 'care', the circumstances that led to their admission, and the places they lived during their wardship. Often the Ward Register also has information about the child's family members, particularly parents and siblings (and, if they were also wards of state, their ward numbers), providing names, dates of birth, marriage and death, and the address of the family at the time of committal. This series is an example of how the records of an impersonal bureaucracy can take on huge symbolic (not to mention practical and legal) significance for individuals, families and communities.

For many Forgotten Australians, their entry in the Ward Register provides the scaffold for the construction of a new life story:

Survivor narratives ... constitute 'narratives of lost origins' attempting to make sense of both a childhood and contemporary self in the absence of 'reliable markers about what happened, and why'. In the construction of such narratives, 'care'-leavers often access institutional records in the hope that they will be able to replace family as the repository of personal histories.[21]

News of the digitisation of the Ward Registers was met with great enthusiasm by the workshop participants. The digitised Children's Ward Registers (VPRS 4527/P2) from 1864 to 1912 are now available online through PROV's website (with more records becoming available each year, under the '99 year rule' mentioned above).[22] This digital resource will make possible new understandings and discoveries about people's individual and family histories, and also has great potential for new research into the intergenerational aspects of the institutionalisation of children. It is clear that the experience of institutionalisation profoundly affects people's attitudes to relationships and parenting.[23] It would also seem from preliminary research and anecdotal evidence that many Forgotten Australians have a family history of involvement with the child welfare system.[24]

I became a state ward at the age of about seven ... I am the third generation in care; I reared the fourth.[25]

In Australia, the transgenerational effects of trauma have been investigated in the context of Indigenous communities, in terms of colonial violence as well as the removal of Indigenous children from family, community and country,[26] but the legacy of 'historical trauma' in the families of Forgotten Australians has yet to be explored in depth.

Other Places to Find Your Story

Discussions about Forgotten Australians and their need to access records are often confined to the issue of an individual's personal files. But like anyone doing family history research, answers to questions about identity are likely to be found in many other types of records. For many people, the pursuit of genealogy is about trying to gain a sense of 'generational memory', a sense of their place within a larger story – to link their life story into the story of their family, and also to locate the family story within a broader narrative of collective memory.[27]

At the PROV workshop, Forgotten Australian and author Frank Golding presented on what he has learned about his family over years of research. Golding's search for his own records from years spent in Ballarat Orphanage and elsewhere soon widened to include research into other family members. He has now uncovered the stories of 33 family members who experienced institutionalisation as children in Victoria. The Sinnett/Golding family's involvement with 'the welfare' in Victoria dates right back to the beginnings of the colonial child welfare system, when Edward John Sinnett (Frank's great-grandfather) was charged with neglect in 1865 under the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864*.

Golding's presentation covered the 'historic' records of child welfare – most of which are on open access – and how these records may contain vital pieces of information that can solve family mysteries, uncover secrets and make sense of a family's story. His experience shows that sometimes the 'private' information routinely blanked out by 'care' provider organisations releasing records to former residents[28] is already available in the public domain. Personal and family information can be found, for example, in war service records, police gazettes, newspaper articles, inquests, and departmental correspondence. For many searchers it is a matter of knowing where to look.

The intergenerational experience of institutionalisation at least means that it is likely that there are rich documentary traces of one's family in public archives. As Chris Hurley has noted, 'totalitarians are notoriously good recordkeepers': the child welfare system in Victoria, like the bureaucracies set up to 'protect' Aboriginal people, exercised a remarkable level of surveillance of and control over the people it dealt with. One consequence of this is archival records of great volume, often recording the lives of individuals and families in minute detail.[29] Clearly, however, the records of the child welfare bureaucracy portray a family's past through the distorted lens of the state, and the value judgements that were made about children and parents and recorded for posterity can cause many people great distress and anger. For example, Frank Golding's mother was well known to 'the welfare'. Her sisters had been made wards and two of them had been inmates of the Ballarat Orphanage. Moreover, she was living with the father of her two boys but was not married to him. When the question of the education of one of her boys arose, the department's answer turned not on the boy's abilities, aspiration or merit but on the character and assumed motivation of 'the mother':

Undoubtedly, all the boys will return to the mother and Golding in due course and it is just a matter of whether he should be retained and given an education at the expense of the State when his future earnings will probably be collected by the mother.[30]

Golding's family and its dealings with the authorities left traces in police and court records, hospital and asylum records, inquests and ward records, as well as in registers of births, deaths and marriages. Military records have also been a rich source of family information. The *Forgotten Australians* report drew attention to the high incidence of 'care' leavers who went on to join the military as adults:

I eventually became institutionalised as all my life I've had to be in some sort of institution, i.e. the R.A.A.F or the army. I was at a loss when on my own.[31]

Given the large proportion of *Forgotten Australians* whose parents were in the armed services, military records can be particularly important sources of family history (First World War dossiers contain more personal and family information than Second World War dossiers). But much more needs to be done to document the context of this historical area.

New Contextual Frameworks

One of the broad objectives of the Find & Connect web resource is to create new contextual information frameworks for resources that are relevant to the history of institutional 'care' in Australia. The site aims to provide authoritative, trustworthy and meaningful information about the 'care' system, and to link this information to important resources – including archival records, published resources, digital objects, personal testimonies and oral histories. This new contextual framework will help to make sense of individual records, and individual stories, linking them to a 'bigger picture' which hopefully helps to make sense of a painful past.

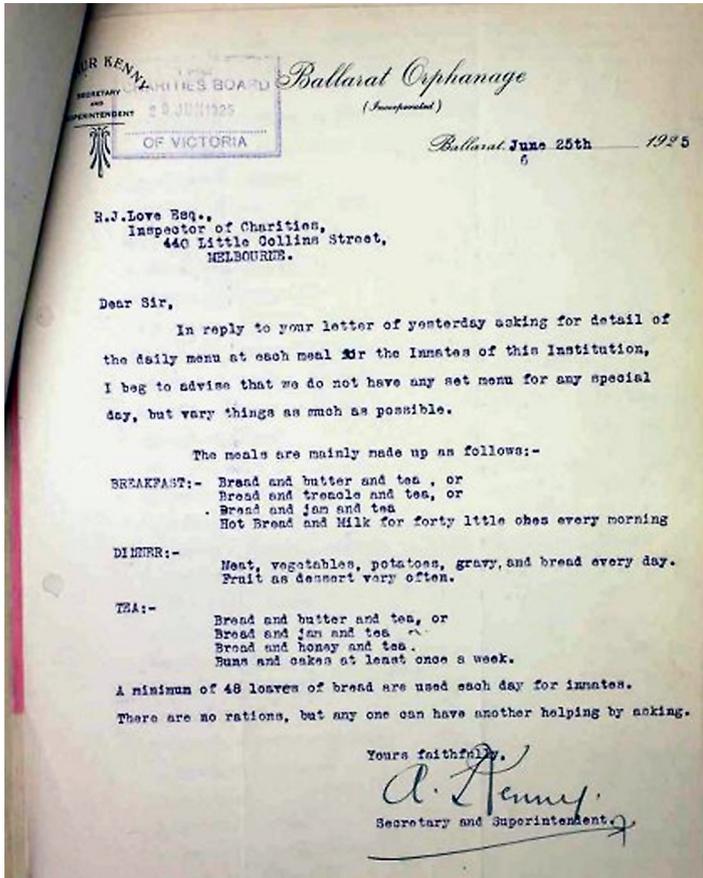
At the workshop, researchers from the Find & Connect web resource team shared some discoveries that have been made in open access records series held by PROV. Information about children's institutions in Victoria within PROV's collection is not always found in what might seem to be the obvious places. Golding's presentation made it clear that Child Welfare Department records are but one of many sources in which he has found evidence of his family and its involvement in the child welfare system. For this reason, researchers need to be encouraged to participate in systems to document PROV's archival

holdings so that the full range of relevant sources in the collection is identified and made better known.

“Closed” Agency and General Correspondence Files 1923–1983’ at first glance would not seem a promising resource for *Forgotten Australians*. This series at PROV (VPRS 4523) comprises files created by the Charities Board (1923–48) and then by the Hospitals and Charities Commission (1948–78). These two government agencies played a role in Victoria's child welfare system, having some responsibilities for the oversight of charitable institutions in Victoria, which of course included orphanages and children's Homes. The records description list for the registers to this series (VPRS 4525/R1, which is only available currently in hard copy in the Victorian Archives Centre Reading Room in North Melbourne) includes a significant number of correspondence files in VPRS 4523 relating to children's institutions. Examination of a sample of these records reveals a wealth of information, captured when these institutions happened to come into contact with the government agency. The agency also kept newspaper clippings about different institutions on these files.

Significant events at a children's institution – for example, the death of a child, an outbreak of disease, structural or organisational changes – often resulted in the Charities Board creating records that provide new perspectives on these Homes. Other files in VPRS 4523 came into being when an institution requested grants to carry out building works or renovations. These records can reveal details about the physical aspects of the institution and the conditions in which its residents lived. Requests for new dormitories or staff quarters can offer insights into changing thinking about the best way to accommodate children in 'care'. Details about the 'bricks and mortar' Home can be particularly valuable if the building is no longer standing.

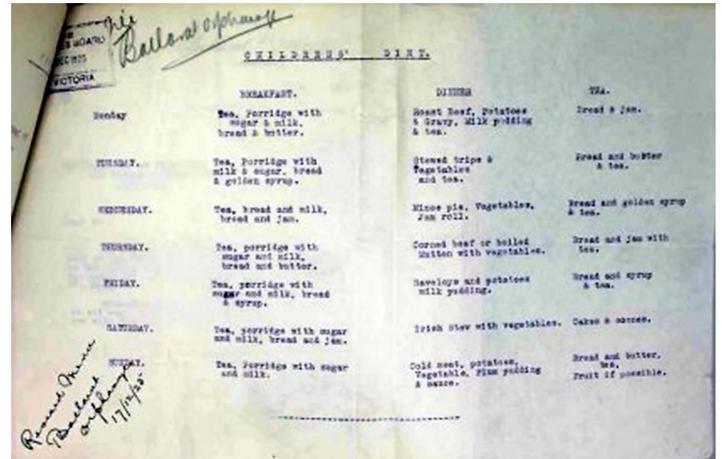
Other records in this series containing ephemeral or incidental correspondence can serve as unique windows into the past. One file relates to the diet of children living in Ballarat Orphanage in the mid 1920s (see Image 1).



PROV, VA 2707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS 4523 'Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 52, File 490, 25 June 1925.

This file contains details of the orphanage's menus from this period, the weekly schedule of meals served to (but not necessarily consumed by) its residents. The Inspector of Charities wrote to Superintendent Arthur Kenny in June 1925, requesting details of the daily meals served to the children. Kenny's reply includes a sample schedule of meals provided. The superintendent's response assured the inspector that the children's diet was 'varied', despite the prominence of 'bread and butter' on the menu. This file also contains another item, a 'revised menu' from 17 December 1925 (see Image 2). This menu features more variety and more nutritious fare for the orphanage (at least porridge was replacing bread and butter a few times a week).

These records provide evidence of a change in practice at the orphanage, no doubt prompted by the inspector's attention.



PROV, VPRS 4523/P1, Unit 52, File 490, 17 December 1925.

Particularly in the items of correspondence in this series from the 1920s it is clear that the newly created Inspector of Charities fielded correspondence from a broad range of individuals and organisations about an even broader range of topics. In some cases the inspector even became involved in the cases of individual children, and the series contains correspondence about a number of state wards. One record shows how in 1928 the Inspector of Charities took the step of directly contacting the superintendent of Ballarat Orphanage, requesting that the orphanage take in a 14-year-old 'lad' to protect him from his violent, drunken father and ease his mother's burden.

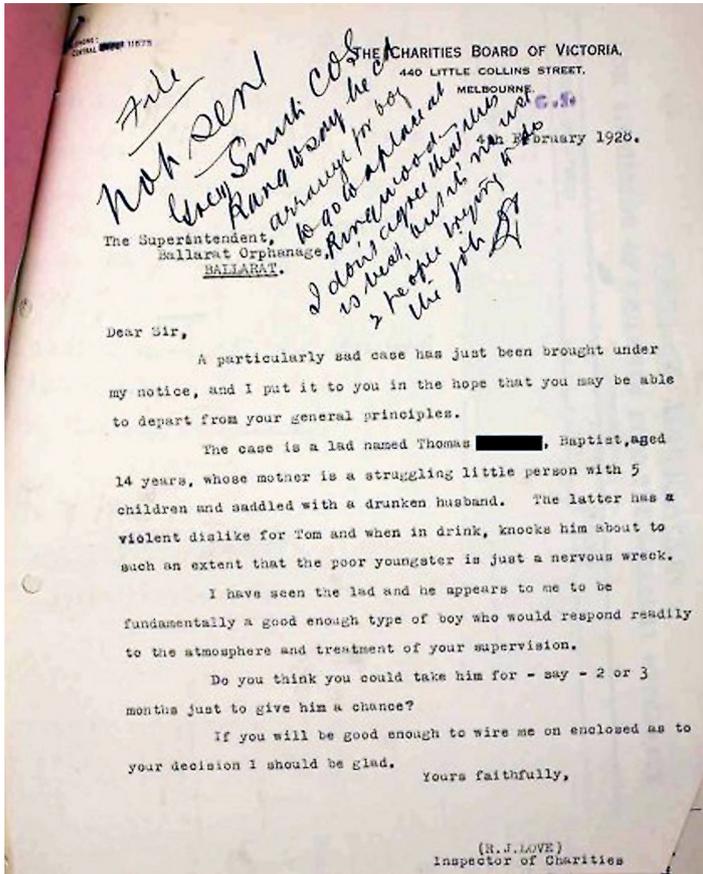
The circumstances which led to the creation of this letter can only be guessed at. The inspector wrote:

I have seen the lad and he appears to me to be fundamentally a good enough type of boy who would respond readily to the atmosphere and treatment of your supervision. Do you think you could take him for - say - 2 or 3 months just to give him a chance?[32]

The letter also has an annotation made by the inspector, which reads:

G. Smith COS [Charity Organisation Society] rang to say he could arrange for boy to go to a place at Ringwood. I don't agree that this is best, but it's no use 2 people trying to do the job.

The Charity Organisation Society had been established in Victoria in 1887 to coordinate the work of Melbourne's growing number of charitable organisations, including those working in the area of child welfare. The document cited here provides evidence of systems at work that are outside the official structures and processes of the Children's Welfare Department (and presumably, of the official function of the inspector), and also hints at skirmishes between the various agencies about jurisdictional boundaries.



PROV, VPRS 4523/P1, Unit 52, File 490, 4 February 1928. [Surname obscured to protect privacy – Editor] .

Find & Connect Victoria has created an entry about VPRS 4523 that documents this series in a way that is substantially different from documentation in PROV's catalogue – it describes the series in terms of its relevance to children's institutions and what Forgotten Australians are likely to be looking for.[33] This entry provides an example of how digital technology makes it possible to 'extend the story of records and data to communities beyond the walls of repositories and institutions'.[34] The description on Find & Connect is linked to the description on PROV's website and is also linked to relevant Find & Connect 'entities' like Ballarat Orphanage.[35] The entry on Find & Connect Victoria is creating a new contextual framework for these records and making possible another entry point to PROV's collection. Find & Connect Victoria has also published an additional finding aid to the series, a list of the files relating to children's institutions.[36] New contextual frameworks for Victoria's child welfare records such as these will enhance access to information for Forgotten Australians, while also making new metadata about records in PROV's collection available in a way which allows for new cultural and historical aspects not captured in many existing archival descriptions. This

in turn makes records more discoverable to diverse audiences, and supports new uses and interpretations of the records.

Putting Records to New Purposes

Leonie Sheedy from CLAN provided the workshop with a fascinating example of how new users of archival collections bring their own insights and experiences to records and 'repurpose' them in ways that would never have been envisaged by the records' creators. Sheedy has many years of experience searching for records in her work supporting Forgotten Australians, as well as seeking her own records and those of lost family members. Over time she has also built up an impressive collection of objects which are now part of the collection of the CLAN National Orphanage Museum.[37] She has described how her hunger for the past stems from a sense of loss:

History is very important to me. I've had a hunger to know my history and my family's history for the last fifty-seven years but I am still a work in progress. Over the years I have spent many hours in bookshops and libraries trying to find a book on what it's like to be a state ward, any book that would explain the feelings of what it was like to grow up without your family in an orphanage. Sadly I would come away with frustration and anger at the lack of stories about our experiences.[38]

At the workshop, Sheedy spoke about her work researching the *Victoria Police gazette*, copies of which are available to the public in PROV's reading rooms. The *Gazette* is a resource in the public domain with rich information about individuals – family historians have known about its potential for a long time.[39] Sheedy was first introduced to this publication at a workshop for Forgotten Australians held at PROV in June 2012. Since then, researchers from CLAN have been compiling lists of information from the *Gazette* and putting them to a use that would never have been foreseen by its creators.

The *Victoria Police gazette* provides valuable information about such matters as maintenance payments, deserters of wives and children, missing friends, court cases, admissions and discharges from prison. Sheedy demonstrated how her knowledge of the system and of the names of Victorian families who were in 'care' gives her the ability to interpret the *Gazette* in new ways and uncover its relevance to Forgotten Australians. For example, a girl who is reported missing simply from 'Victoria St Ballarat' may actually be a 'Homie' because she knows that the address is that of the Ballarat Orphanage. CLAN is using the *Gazettes* to create new indexes that workers can use to help locate family information for their clients.

Part of CLAN's research has involved compiling lists from entries in the *Gazette* about registered absconders from children's institutions. Across Victoria in an eighteen-year period there were more than 3000 absconders – one every second day (and not all absconders were reported in the *Gazette*: many, perhaps most, were captured and returned before a notice could be published).[40] The results of this research by CLAN have been presented to the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations in a written submission and discussed at length at a hearing in December 2012.[41] Appearing before the parliamentary committee, Sheedy drew links between the contents of the *Police gazette* and the plight of children experiencing abuse in Victorian institutions:

We strongly suggest that many of these child absconders were running away from child rape, sexual and other forms of criminal assault; for many, it was a cry from the heart. What did the police do with absconders when they caught them? They simply returned them to their abusers, so the cry from the heart was never heard. There are many care leavers' accounts telling the police of their abuse, but the police saw their job as simply to take these children back to the home, not to listen to allegations of abuse. They did not ask questions of the children, they did not ask why they were running away, they did not inquire as to their wellbeing, and they did not call in the welfare department. They simply returned these children back into the hands of their abusers, no questions asked.[42]

Although children absconded for a variety of reasons, and further research is needed, the early results of CLAN's research show a correlation between Homes with high absconding rates and testimony from survivors about endemic child abuse.[43] As new evidence emerges as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, further links may be made to the information in the *Police gazettes*.

At the workshop Sheedy said that the girls and boys listed in the *Gazettes* as absconders were 'heroes' to her because in trying to escape they were escaping from the role of passive victim. CLAN's research into the *Police gazettes* can be seen as part of a social history project to restore 'agency' to the girls and boys in 'care' in Victoria whose voices can be so hard to locate in the public records of the child welfare bureaucracy.[44]

Sheedy's research provides an example of what can be learned and achieved through interventions to extend the skills and services of archivists to new users and communities. Valderhaug argued in 2011 that the archival profession had to be prepared to 'encounter the stranger'. He wrote:

Individuals who approach the archives to find documentation of injustice committed against themselves are very often strangers to the archives. They have never been to an archive before; they do not know how to use our finding aids; they may not even understand the record's bureaucratic rhetoric. They represent a new kind of user.[45]

The workshops at PROV have shown how records can be repurposed to shed light on the lives of this new kind of user.

The Role of Archives in Restorative Justice

Ever since the release of the *Bringing them home* report into the Stolen Generations in 1997, Australia's public archival institutions like PROV have been closely involved in efforts to improve access to records for people who were removed from their families as children and placed in institutional 'care'. Strategies have included issuing standards and giving advice about retention and preservation of records of permanent value, projects to improve access to records, and engaging with the broader recordkeeping sector to increase collaboration and improve practices.

Past recordkeeping practices and a lack of foresight have left a frustrating and sometimes devastating legacy for Forgotten Australians. Many significant records have been lost, destroyed or are otherwise inaccessible. In April 2013 at a hearing of the Victorian inquiry into child abuse, Captain Malcolm Roberts of the Salvation Army admitted to failures on the part of past providers:

... file keeping was not as rigorous as it is now ... at that time, and we are talking sort of 30, 40 years ago, nobody I think appreciated the file that they had and the value that that file would have to a child or to a committee such as this.[46]

The current Victorian inquiry into child abuse and the Royal Commission have given the issues of recordkeeping and accountability higher public prominence than perhaps ever before.[47] The Victorian inquiry has heard evidence of alleged breaches of requirements and sheer incompetence, reinforcing findings of the Victorian Ombudsman from 2012.[48] 'Care' leavers have taken their message to the streets with placards proclaiming: 'You have the records of our abuse'.[49]

The archival profession's involvement with 'care' leaver issues is broadening beyond projects to improve access to records. Records will be key to the current inquiries into child abuse in institutions, as has been stressed in a number of public submissions.

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The Australian Society of Archivists' submission to the Royal Commission's terms of reference stressed that 'The role of records is not restricted to investigation but is also core to issues of identity, reconciliation, and understanding by victims'.^[50] The Who Am I? project's submission to the Victorian inquiry pointed out that the distributed archival collections of the 'care' system 'hold important historical information which can inform current and future legislation, policies and protocols to prevent criminal abuse of children. They also contain evidence of the abuse suffered by children in institutions, and how organisations responded'.^[51]

The inquiries into child abuse, and post-apology projects like the Find & Connect web resource, provide opportunities for archivists to embrace their changing role and the changing value of archives in society – 'their use in the construction of the self and sense of community'.^[52] The participation and perspectives of communities like Forgotten Australians also help us to see the inherent biases and gaps in the 'care' records. Despite the vital importance of records to these inquiries and to individuals searching for their identities, they are but fragments. To get a complete understanding of child abuse in institutional 'care', the archival records will not be enough.

Conclusion

Through initiatives like the workshops held at PROV, archivists are encouraging and empowering marginalised communities such as Forgotten Australians to use archival records, to share their findings with the public and to take part in discussions and debates about how to manage these collections. Increasingly, there will be new opportunities for users to participate in the way that archives are described and located on the web. Find & Connect Victoria is creating new links to PROV's existing descriptions of its collection, and will ultimately link to other public knowledge spaces like the National Library of Australia's Trove website.^[53] Currently, PROV is developing a new website to replace the PROV wiki, acknowledging the importance of collaborating with users and creating new ways for users to share their knowledge of archival records to enhance access and make possible new interpretations of the records. Creating these links and relationships is another way to bring new users and 'strangers' into the 'archival multiverse'.^[54]

The March 2013 workshop at PROV was timely, given the upsurge in interest among Forgotten Australians and their families in recovering the records of their childhood. For them, records are not just collections

of files and documents that some unknown officials once wrote in about them or their siblings and parents. Among these papers may be fragments of new information about their early years and the reasons why they were placed in an institution. Not all of their hopes will be realised: some records have been lost; others will be released in redacted form; still others will contain gaps and errors of fact; most will require interpretation. PROV and the other agencies that hold these precious records can work together to make the process of retrieving these stories more straightforward by improving the flow of information and providing better guides to those who are searching. There is work to be done to build on the work of the past and apply the goodwill that exists to make things even better.

Endnotes

[1] C Keneally, 'The forgotten ones', *The Monthly*, August 2012, p. 32.

[2] In our use of the upper case, we are following an established convention in the literature and signifying that a Home was an institution as opposed to a 'normal' residence.

[3] In this article, we use the term 'care' in inverted commas to indicate that many people feel that 'care' is not a word that accurately describes their childhood experiences in a Home or other institution.

[4] The term was first coined by Jacques Derrida in *Archive fever: a Freudian impression*, trans. E Prenowitz, University of Chicago Press, 1996. Derrida's concept has subsequently been taken up by archival theorists exploring the role of archives in the postmodern world.

[5] L Sheedy, submission no. 33 to the Forgotten Australians inquiry, available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/submissions/sublist, accessed 14 October 2013.

[6] J Etherton, 'The role of archives in the perception of self', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, no. 27, vol. 2, October 2006, pp. 227–46.

[7] Other organisations also help Forgotten Australians to look for records in Victoria. These include Open Place and the various heritage services associated with past providers. VANISH is primarily focused on adoption records, but there is a degree of overlap with Forgotten Australians.

[8] See Chapter 9 of *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004 for a discussion about the vexed issue of access. Frank Golding has written many pieces about this issue and recently, in a submission to the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into child abuse, he wrote of how ‘... the widespread redaction of information about third parties mentioned in personal files under section 33(1) of the FOI Act 1982 constitutes a massive barrier to resolving important matters. Former wards often want their records precisely for the purpose of getting information about other people such as the identity of their “carers” who are also sometimes their abusers and other people who came into their lives whilst they were children.’ See http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Submissions/Golding_Frank.pdf, accessed 14 October 2013.

[9] M Jones, “‘Encountering the stranger’: working digitally to connect records and data for communities”, paper presented at the International Council on Archives Congress, Brisbane, 2012.

[10] ‘Karla’s story’, submission no. 192 to the Forgotten Australians inquiry, available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/submissions/sublist, accessed 14 October 2013.

[11] He writes, ‘A living democracy depends on every citizen’s right to access, understand and use public information, including current and archival records, for their own individual – or collective – purposes. This right must form an integral part of what might be called an archival justice.’ G Valderhaug, ‘Memory, justice and the public record’, *Archival science*, vol. 11, nos 1–2, 2011, p. 21.

[12] Records about ‘personal or private affairs’ are closed to public access under the *Public Records Act 1973*. Records relating to adults are closed for a period of 75 years after the creation of the records, and records for children are closed for 99 years. See ‘PROVguide 14 Records Information – Special Access’, available at <http://prov.vic.gov.au/provguide-14>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[13] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1997.

[14] Senate Community Affairs References Committee (SCARC), *Lost Innocents: righting the record: report on child migration*, 2001; SCARC, *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, 2004; SCARC, *Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians revisited: report on the progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians reports*, 2009.

[15] The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs funds a number of initiatives for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants. These include an oral history project, a travelling exhibition and the Find & Connect web resource – see the booklet *You can’t forget things like that: Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, 2012 and the project website; and the National Museum of Australia exhibition, ‘Inside: Life in Children’s Homes and Institutions’. This exhibition was on show at the National Museum in Canberra from 16 November 2011 until 26 February 2012, and travels to the Melbourne Museum from 29 August 2013 to 27 January 2014.

[16] Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee, Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations, from 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, from 2013.

[17] L Duranti, ‘The concept of appraisal and archival theory’, *American archivist*, vol. 57, no. 2, Spring 1994, p. 341.

[18] PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary’s Department, VPRS 4527 Ward Registers.

[19] For discussion of the Ward Registers, see also C Farrugia, ‘Convicted and neglected: researching Victoria’s wards of state records 1864–1961’ in this issue of *Provenance*, and S Swain, ‘Making their case: archival traces of mothers and children in negotiation with child welfare officials’, *Provenance*, issue 11, 2012, available at <http://prov.vic.gov.au/publications/provenance/making-their-case>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[20] SCARC, *Forgotten Australians*, p. 277.

[21] S Murray, J Murphy, E Branigan and J Malone, *After the orphanage: life beyond the children’s home*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009, p. 53, quoted in S Swain and N Musgrove, ‘We are the stories we tell about ourselves: child welfare records and the construction of identity among Australians who, as children, experienced out-of-home “care”’, *Archives and manuscripts*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2012, p. 6.

[22] The existing index to the Ward Register, which was produced by the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies, covers the period 1864–97. (This index is currently available on microfiche in a number of reading rooms, as well as on the ‘ancestry.com.au’ website.)

[23] Care Leaver Australia Network, ‘A terrible way to grow up: the experience of institutional care and its outcomes for care leavers in Australia: an overview of some findings from the CLAN survey 2006–07’, November 2008, see pp. 15–16. See also *Forgotten Australians*, pp. 152–3.

[24] See for example CLAN’s submission to the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry in 2011, ‘Learning from the past: using Victoria’s child welfare history to inform current practice’, available online at <http://www.childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au/submissions.html#submissions>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[25] SCARC, *Forgotten Australians*, p. 152.

[26] See for example, J Atkinson, J Nelson and C Atkinson, 'Trauma, transgenerational transfer and effects on community wellbeing', in N Purdie, P Dudgeon and R Walker (eds), *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 2010, pp. 135–44.

[27] See T Hareven, 'The search for generational memory', in DK Dunaway and WK Baum (eds), *Oral history: an interdisciplinary anthology*, 2nd edition, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California, 1996, pp. 241–56. Recently, researchers have linked individuals' resilience and self-confidence to having a 'strong intergenerational' self: see B Feiler, 'The stories that bind us', *New York times*, 15 March 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html?smid=pl-share>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[28] When records are released under legislation like the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, sometimes information about 'third parties' is redacted to protect their privacy. The *Bringing them home* and *Forgotten Australians* reports discuss how this can mean that 'care' leavers are unable to reconnect with family. See for example, SCARC, *Forgotten Australians*, pp. 276–8.

[29] C Hurlley, 'The evolving role of government archives in democratic societies', *Association of Canadian Archivists bulletin*, vol. 27, no. 2, November 2002, p. 6, quoted in RGS Carter, 'Of things said and unsaid: power, archival silences, and silence in power', *Archivaria*, no. 61, p. 224.

[30] Ward record 66851, 16 April 1952, obtained from the Department of Health and Community Services by the former ward under the *FOI Act* on 24 September 1994.

[31] SCARC, *Forgotten Australians*, p. 161.

[32] *ibid.*, correspondence dated 4 February 1928.

[33] "'Closed" Agency and General Correspondence Files (1923–1983), Public Record Office Victoria', Find & Connect Victoria website, available at <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/vic/biogs/E000723b.htm>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[34] Jones, 'Encountering the stranger'.

[35] 'Ballarat Orphanage (1909–1968)', Find & Connect Victoria website, available at <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/vic/biogs/E000031b.htm>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[36] See 'VPRS 4525 List of files re children's homes', Find & Connect Victoria website, available at <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/vic/objects/D00000458.htm>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[37] The CLAN website page has images of some of the museum's objects: see <http://www.clan.org.au/museum.php>, accessed 23 May 2013. A number of items were loaned to the National Museum of Australia for its 'Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions' exhibition.

[38] S Swain, L Sheedy and C O'Neill, 'Responding to "Forgotten Australians": historians and the legacy of out-of home "care"', *Journal of Australian studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, p. 18.

[39] The *Victoria Police gazette* for 1885–1900 is available through the Find my Past website, available at <http://www.findmypast.com.au/content/victoria-police-gazette-1885-1900>, accessed 23 May 2013. Police gazettes are not publicly available everywhere. In Western Australia, for example, they are restricted for fifty years – at last check, they were only open up until 1958. See catalogue entry: <http://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b1543831~S7#.US73Rzd5f8k>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[40] Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee, Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations, Care Leavers Australia Network transcript, 17 December 2012, p. 9, available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/CLAN_17-Dec-12.pdf, accessed 14 October 2013. In another hearing, Angela Sdrinis from legal firm Ryan Carlisle Thomas contended that many cases of absconding were never reported or followed up: 'I have read the ward records of hundreds of former residents of Victorian orphanages. These records show that children as young as eight would abscond — and no evidence to suggest that any steps were taken to find these children or to report their disappearance to the police'. Ryan Carlisle Thomas Lawyers transcript, Melbourne, 17 December 2012, p. 3, available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Ryan_Carlisle_Thomas_Lawyers_17-Dec-12.pdf, accessed 14 October 2013.

[41] See Submissions to the Inquiry at <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/fcdc/article/1789>, in particular "'Our child welfare ideas are medieval": A Submission by Care Leavers Network Australia (CLAN) to the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations', available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Submissions/Care_Leavers_Australia_Network_CLAN.pdf, and CLAN transcript, 14 October 2013.

[42] CLAN transcript, 17 December 2012, p. 9.

[43] A preliminary review by the authors found that the scholarly literature about absconding from children's Homes (and other institutions like hospitals) has historically focused on the problems absconding presented for the institution, rather than exploring the child's reason for running away; see for example BJ Brown, NR Druce and CE Sawyer, 'Individual differences and absconding behaviour', *British journal of criminology*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1978, pp. 62–70. The earlier literature depended on institutional records and the views of staff, and saw absconding as an interaction between personality traits (including having an 'absconding personality') and environmental factors; see for example D Thornton and S Speirs, 'Predicting absconding from young offender institutions', in DP Farrington and R Tarling (eds), *Prediction in criminology*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985, pp. 119–34. More recently, articles have recast absconding as a 'means of resistance'; see for example D O'Driscoll and J Walmlsey, 'Absconding from hospitals: a means of resistance?', *British journal of learning disabilities*, vol. 38, 2010, pp. 97–102. An article from 1981 about absconding from a residential facility took the unusual step of actually asking the young women why they ran away, and found they had many and varied reasons – the most common being the facility's restrictive regime and staff attitudes: JW Ackland, 'Institutional reactions to absconding', *The British journal of social work*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1981, pp. 171–87.

[44] See Carter, 'Of things said and unsaid', *passim*.

[45] Valderhaug, 'Memory, justice and the public record,' p. 20.

[46] Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations, Melbourne, 11 April 2013, Salvation Army transcript, Witness: Captain M Roberts, Territorial Legal Secretary, p. 4, available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Transcripts/Salvation_Army_11-April-13.pdf, accessed 14 October 2013.

[47] See for example B Zwartz, 'Poor record-keeping holds back pursuits of justice', *The Age*, 5 April 2013, available at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/poor-recordkeeping-holds-back-pursuits-of-justice-20130405-2hcay.html>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[48] Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into the storage and management of ward records by the Department of Human Services March 2012*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 2012, available at http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/resources/documents/REPORT__Investigation_into_the_storage_and_management_of_ward_records_by_DHS_-_Mar_2012.pdf, accessed 23 May 2013.

[49] E Marie, 'Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse: banners said "You have the records of our abuse"', *The Australian*, 3 April 2013, available at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/royal-commission-into-institutional-responses-to-child-sexual-abuse-banners-said-you-have-the-records-of-our-abuse/story-e6frg6n6-1226611754618>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[50] Submission by the Australian Society of Archivists Inc. on the consultation paper regarding the establishment of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, 26 November 2012, available at http://www.archivists.org.au/icms_docs/142647_ASA_Submission.pdf, accessed 23 May 2013.

[51] Submission to the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations from the Who Am I? project, September 2012, p. 4, available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Submissions/Who_am_I_project_University_of_Melbourne.pdf, accessed 14 October 2013.

[52] H Little, 'Archive fever as genealogical fever: coming home to Scottish archives', *Archivaria*, no. 64, Fall 2007, p. 112.

[53] On the technology and philosophy underpinning the Find & Connect web resource, see GJ McCarthy and J Evans, 'Principles for archival information services in the public domain', *Archives and manuscripts*, vol. 40, no. 1, March 2012, pp. 54–67.

[54] A Gilliland and S McKemmish, 'Recordkeeping metadata, the archival multiverse, and societal grand challenges', in Proceedings of the international conference on Dublin core and metadata applications 2012, pp. 106–15, available at <http://dcpapers.dublin-core.org/pubs/article/viewFile/3661/1884>, accessed 23 May 2013.