

**Stolen Generations Advisory Committee Meeting  
20 May 2019**

**Communique**

The Stolen Generations Advisory Committee met in Sydney on 20 May 2019. This meeting followed a preparation meeting of Stolen Generations Organisations (SGO) representatives in early May 2019 which was independently facilitated by Mr Grant Sarra. SGOs also held out-of-session discussions with several government agencies to discuss the progress of various commitments relating to the Government's response to Unfinished Business.

Stolen Generation survivors met with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Don Harwin, and took the opportunity to introduce themselves, their organisations and to outline some current issues that are important for survivors and their descendants. The range of issues included, funeral costs particularly for those who wish to return to Country, the conservation and use of former sites of the Aborigines Welfare Board homes as museums and educational centres, additional support including counselling for SGOs, the need for trauma informed aged care facilities, concerns about the incarceration of young aboriginal people and the establishment of suitable long-term office accommodation and keeping places for SGOs.

The Minister congratulated committee members on their recent re-appointments and the extension of the committee for a further two years until 2020. The Minister said these re-appointments reflected how Government values the committee's contribution and expertise on the implementation of Unfinished Business. The Minister acknowledged the significance of the Stolen Generations survivors attendance at the recent Opening of the 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament of NSW and the opening statements that acknowledged the value of Aboriginal cultures in this State.

Government agencies provided brief updates on work being progressed on Unfinished Business commitments including implementation of Family and Community Services Priority Areas for SGOs agreement, Stolen Generations Healing Fund and the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme, and Transport for NSW Memorials and Public Acknowledgements dedicated to the Stolen Generations.

The Committee also discussed the following agenda issues.

**Trauma Informed Workforce Development**

Survivors explained for the Minister that the trauma they carry as a result of their childhood removal is complex, collective and intergenerational. They asked that Government understand this to help provide avenues for healing, including workforce training across the public sector to be trauma informed, healing aware and culturally competent.

The Public Service Commission provided an outline of work completed on the NSW Government's commitment to building a trauma informed public sector workforce. The mandatory training for all public service employees will be a bespoke e-learning training package and set a baseline level of trauma awareness training with information about the impacts of past forcible removal policies and practices on Aboriginal communities.

Survivor representatives encouraged the government to ensure aboriginal employees completing the training were adequately supported as some content would be confronting. Survivors said one of the impacts of their removals from family and culture were descendants who were unsure of themselves, their culture and spirituality and these Aboriginal staff should be supported in exploring

their aboriginality and injustices of the past. Survivors wish all public service employees to be supported in this training to enable positive change both now and in the future.

### **Keeping Places and Former Sites of Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) Homes**

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) updated the committee about the status of land tenure for the sites of the former AWB homes. DPC outlined the former sites of Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home and Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Home are owned free-hold by the Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC). DPC offered to complete scoping work with the SGOs to better understand the significance and unique stories and aspirations for each organisation for using the former sites.

SGOs requested the government begin some scoping work, to understand how SGOs would like to use former sites and keeping places and ways that would not disadvantage the land owners or the survivors and descendants. SGOs agreed to work with DPC out-of-session to consider this issue further and update the committee.

Survivors consider truth telling and education are priorities for healing, the sites are significant and the development of curriculum and education resources regarding the Stolen Generations is very important. Survivors advised it will be helpful for SGOs to be resourced and supported to prepare materials on their stories, to support the work they do attending schools, including teacher development workshops and for other events, to speak about their experience as Stolen Generations survivors in NSW.

### **Funding and resources for Stolen Generations Organisations**

Survivors identified key areas that require long term funding commitments to support their organisations providing assistance for survivors and implementing Unfinished Business. The organisations currently have short term lease arrangements in place for office accommodation, this needs to be a longer term commitment to secure sufficient suitable space to accommodate all their requirements.

In addition to the challenge of securing suitable long term office space and keeping places, survivors discussed the challenge that short term and uncertain funding creates in engaging and retaining staff to continue the important work of the Stolen Generations Organisations.

### **Ministry of Health Roundtable**

NSW Ministry of Health are progressing plans for a roundtable discussion with SGOs to address key areas in public health policy and service delivery for health care and disability services, aged care design and outlined key participants for these discussions would include the Secretary for Health as well as executive from Local Health Districts and the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council.

Survivors outlined critical areas they wished to see on the roundtable agenda which included trauma informed service delivery, information about services provided by Aboriginal Medical Services including performance reporting, and additional assistance including transport for burials on traditional country.

### **Issues Relating to Commonwealth Government Responsibility**

NSW Government committed in the response to Unfinished Business to advocate with the Commonwealth Government regarding Commonwealth services, including better access to health and mental health services, pharmaceutical benefits for medication and aged care. Government also

committed to advocate regarding the role and title of Social and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellors, to ensure there is a clear focus on the provision of services to Stolen Generations survivors and their families.

These issues have been discussed at previous advisory committee meetings and survivors have requested clarification of the information provided to date by the Commonwealth Government. Survivors are concerned the reported information is not accurate, based on survivors first hand experience. Recent requests for the Commonwealth to discuss these issues directly with the SGOs have not been progressed and survivors expressed their disappointment in the delay, including the delay during the election caretaker period. Survivors urged the Commonwealth to take a more proactive approach to communicating with their organisations and are interested to have a similar advisory committee with the Commonwealth as is established in NSW.

SGOs are particularly concerned about federally funded Social and Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) Counsellor positions. SGOs requested the Commonwealth consider funding a SEWB worker in each of the four SGOs as a matter of urgency to assist the organisations to address mental health support directly with survivors and the SGO staff members impacted by trauma. Survivors advised the current model for accessing and reporting on Commonwealth funding for survivors was not sufficiently trauma informed or flexible for SGO organisations. The Commonwealth committed to address Commonwealth funding arrangements at roundtable discussions with the SGOs.

The Commonwealth acknowledged that information sought by the SGOs previously to clarify health and aged care services funded by the Commonwealth had not yet been provided and committed this would be addressed in the roundtable discussions. Commonwealth indicated roundtable discussions would occur in August and suitable dates would be organised with the SGOs.

### **Survivors concerns about current removal of Aboriginal children into Out of Home Care (OOHC) and adoptions.**

Survivors raised their concerns with the Committee about high rates of removal of Aboriginal children into OOHC and recent changes in adoption laws reinforcing permanent removals. Survivors understand the experience and impact of intergenerational trauma and are distressed by the ongoing disproportionate over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system and specifically OOHC.

Survivors are distressed and concerned about the irrecoverable trauma of experiencing forced removals, particularly where police officers and use of force are involved in removing children and separating families.

Survivors reported that families are not being properly identified in case work or notified about children under notice. Much more support and practical assistance is required for families at a stage before removals occur.

Survivors explained permanent removals and the associated adoption laws are traumatic for Aboriginal people, children and culture. Aboriginal people who are willing to foster through their cultural responsibility – shared care of kinship care, are being deterred and traumatised by adoption laws. This is not culturally appropriate or culturally safe, it is re-traumatising survivors and families that are already impacted by the Stolen Generations assimilation policies.

## **Incarceration of young Aboriginal people**

Survivors continue to be concerned by the disproportionately high rate of young Aboriginal people in detention and incarceration, and the trauma pathways from out of home care into custody. Survivors reported the effects and distress this has on their mental health, families and communities.

Survivors recommend that better, trauma informed and culturally safe services are needed to support young people and families dealing with intergenerational trauma and issues that lead them into custody, particularly mental health and drug and alcohol services. Survivors explained that services need to work in a culturally safe and trauma informed way, and work more closely with families to build trust. Young people are reluctant to use services and young parents fear the services they do need are not available and their children will be removed if they ask for help. Families are carrying significant trauma burdens caring for younger generations and family members who aren't receiving adequate culturally safe services.

## **Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme and Commonwealth Redress Scheme**

Survivors discussed their concerns about the application of strict eligibility in the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme and requested Government be mindful of the impact for applications from siblings and eligibility across families. Survivors welcomed the update that government records on the interactions between the Aborigines Welfare Board and the Child Welfare Department are being used to gain a better understanding of the Government's assimilation policies for reparations assessments.

The Committee has requested clarification about the impact of previous payments under the Stolen Generations Group Action and applications being made to the national redress scheme for people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education are working closely with the Department of Justice, and other key NSW agencies involved in responding to the national redress scheme, to consider legal advice and an agreed policy for reporting previous payments made through the Group Action. NSW Government will report back to survivors on this issue at the earliest opportunity.

NSW Health circulated a list of redress scheme support services funded by the NSW government as requested by survivor organisations.