

Forgotten Australians

# Real Care the Second Time Around



Helping Hand  
*new aged care*





Helping Hand recognises the critical importance of understanding that every person's life journey is unique and will impact on their needs and expectations as they age.

A group known as Care Leavers has been identified as having many challenges as they face the possibility of aged care.

**The largest category of Care Leavers, some 500,000 nationally, have become known as Forgotten Australians.**

Prior to 1989, children were placed in out-of-home or institutional 'care' through no fault of their own. The variety of reasons included illness or death of a parent, family breakdown (particularly post WWII) or because of pressure being applied by authorities at a time when government and community support to families in need was lacking. For this group of now adult individuals, the ongoing profound impacts of their first experience of being in 'care' has become apparent.

Care Leavers is a special needs category used by the Commonwealth Government to cover Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants. At times they also include the Stolen Generations as well, as all three groups were impacted by government policies as children. Some Forgotten Australians may only identify themselves with terms such as former ward of the state or with care leaver.

This Position Statement was created with a group of Forgotten Australians who generously gave their time and efforts to produce a statement which could help others. Special thanks to Jean, Judy, Peter, Gordon, Roz, Jenny, Alison, Alby, Josephine, Kevin and Priscilla. Thanks also to Mergho, Kelly and Liz from Elm Place, Relationships Australia South Australia.

*No one believed me, especially the welfare people.*

*They stopped letting my Dad visit because they said it made me upset when he left. When I told Dad what it was like, I was punished because I'd said something.*

**As children, many Forgotten Australians were deprived of love and a sense of belonging, and were denied family support and contact.**

**They felt a profound sense of loss and abandonment.**

They were often lonely and exploited, subjected to punishment, rigid rules, humiliation, and suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Many were denied an adequate education and were forced to work virtually as slaves for those entrusted with their care. Nutrition and health care were also poor, and many were subject to forced medical interventions.

This lack of identity, safety and care as children has often produced lifelong negative consequences for their wellbeing as adults. Trust in authority and institutions has been impacted and many have ongoing mental and physical health issues. Family and social relationships and skills were consistently impaired, and incarceration and substance abuse has resulted for many. Challenges with employment, housing and income security have been commonplace in their adult lives.

As they age, in many cases prematurely, the prospect of needing care may provoke a range of feelings including being truly frightened. They are aware that their past experiences may impact on their behaviour, needs and choices as they age.

Helping Hand's challenge is to ensure that Forgotten Australians receive real care the second time around by offering a positive experience.



Helping Hand understands the need for all individuals to be heard, to feel safe and to be cared for. This is especially important for those whose life experiences have caused harm.

At national and state levels, governments have made formal apologies to Forgotten Australians for their treatment and for the range of abuses they suffered. These apologies provide an opportunity and challenge for community organisations to respond to Forgotten Australians.

**For Helping Hand, the starting point is to listen to what Forgotten Australians say about who they are and what they need. This must be an ongoing process and we are learning from these conversations.**

### Embracing Identity

We recognise each person's uniqueness and that this uniqueness is central to caring for them.

- For people whose identities have been stolen, lost or ignored, understanding that "take me as I am" takes on the greatest significance. It is especially so when creating a sense of identity has been so compromised by past actions and is still subject to change as pasts are revealed and unravelled.
- Understand that to be listened to and believed about past events is central to embracing identity.
- Respect that trust is not easily won.
- Accept that affected individuals may not identify with the terms used, nor wish to disclose details of past harms and this does not affect our need to support everyone in our care.

## My Experience

My Father couldn't look after me after Mum died so he placed me in an orphanage when I was little. I didn't see him very often and it was terrible there. I was all alone for years. Eventually he remarried and had more children and I was sent to live with his new family, but it didn't work out. His second wife didn't want me, so I was put into foster care. I had three placements by the time I turned 18 and I was abused by a foster Father. I told the welfare people, but no one believed me. I never felt safe as a child and I never remember having a place that felt like home.

## How this has affected me

It has been a struggle to trust anyone. It's hard to explain what it feels like to grow up not being wanted. I spent years trying to work out who I was and where I fitted in. I married very young but felt that I wasn't good enough for anybody. The marriage was unhappy but I'm glad to have two lovely children, although it was a challenge to be a good parent when you have never seen what good parenting looks like. After my marriage ended, I worked hard to get a place of my own and filled it with my own little treasures.

## Being surrounded by my possessions makes me feel safe and happy.

Anxiety and depression have been my constant companions. As I've gotten older, I have learnt to stick up for myself more. I now understand that none of what happened to me was my fault.

## What I really need

I need to be cared for by people who understand that my pain has shaped my behaviour. For example, I couldn't cope with having a male carer if I was placed in aged care or needed help at home. It would help if I had someone to talk to and who would listen and believe me if I had any worries about what was happening to me. Being treated with dignity and receiving individual care and support is so important.

I am genuinely worried about what my future holds and where I could go and still feel safe.

My children only know a bit about what happened, so privacy and confidentiality is especially important. I don't want decisions made for me by anyone, including my children. I need to feel in control in order to feel safe. I'd need to keep my things around me too, no matter what. They may seem like nothing to anyone else, but to me they are special and help me feel in control of my life.

*We didn't have any books or toys, just a little locker with two uniforms and some underwear.*

*I still remember having my head shaved and being given a kero bath when I arrived. That's not something you ever forget.*

*Nobody loved or wanted me, I wasn't worth anything. I just learnt to survive.*





## Offering Care based on Choice, Transparency and Understanding

For us this means:

- Our staff understanding how to reduce the impact of past trauma on those who we care for now and into the future, and knowing how to support different individuals as they age.
- Demonstrating care and respect for the rights of Forgotten Australians so that they may exercise choice and control over their lives.
- Committing to building trust and offering transparency about our services and care so that there is open disclosure and complaints processes related to care.
- A determination to engage in person-centred care planning that considers past trauma and the wrongs of past care experiences.
- Recognition that exercising choice and control can be a challenge for those not accustomed to such opportunities.



## Support to Realise the Expression of Individuals' Rights

Our determination is to provide care that acknowledges individuals' rights. This requires that we:

- Provide information about care options and ways of respecting privacy and cultural differences, maintaining dignity and independence as this is central to the expression of rights.
- Offer access to support and information about rights, choices and decision-making so that we provide safety to those in our care, particularly for those who lack wider support networks as a result of their life experiences.



## My Experience

I grew up in a children's home run by the church. It was supposed to be a Christian place, but I didn't see much evidence of that. I just worked and worked and the punishment was brutal. It was a miserable childhood.

I was told by the home that my birth Mother was dead. I never questioned it until I got curious as a young adult. What they told me was not true. My Mum was forced to give me up for adoption as she was unmarried when she had me. I guess she was poor and had no support.

When I did find out, it was too late for me to contact her as she had passed away. I also discovered that I had two half-siblings who didn't know about me. I did track them down, but they weren't keen on sharing too much information about Mum with me.

I was so angry; all those lies and wasted years.

## How this has affected me

I guess I'm pretty much alone in this world. I've never really learnt how to love and be loved by anyone. I resolve problems with violence and I don't trust anyone in positions of power. I came out of the home with good manual skills but not much education. Even though I've worked hard most of my life I don't have much to show for it. Like lots of the others I moved around a lot and drank far too much alcohol. Drinking led to some serious conflict with the law, but I didn't know how to stop and didn't care enough about myself to try.

I told my story to a government inquiry a few years ago and got some counselling. That helped me sort out some of the mess that my life had become. I still struggle with being angry about what happened and it's hard to have siblings who don't want to have anything to do with me.

## What I really need

I'm getting on a bit and have finally got some stable accommodation and really need to stay there as life is OK. I can't bear the thought of going back into a home – I won't have it.

**I need people to be honest with me, give me good information and not push me about.**

I need for someone to understand how important it is for me stay put, no matter what, and help me with the best plan to ensure that I do so.

Whoever comes in to look after me better be legit too. I need to be sure that they know what they are doing and are going to treat me with respect. I reconnected with some boys at the inquiry and they are important people in my life now. None of us plan on going into aged care, ever.

*The food they gave us was awful, everything was white and sloppy. We were often hungry.*

*Unless you got married and had a family you end up having no support. People like me were unsuccessful in relationships. I am all alone.*

*It was a violent place. There were lots of fights and the fear of violence was always there.*



*If any of the content of this booklet causes you distress, we encourage you to seek professional support.*

Helping Hand is a not-for-profit organisation offering home care services, retirement living and residential care homes to over 7,000 people in metropolitan and regional South Australia.

Our sites and services are designed to be age friendly, inviting, and accessible for customers, carers, visitors and staff.

The wellbeing and quality of life of our community comes first, and is the heart of everything we do. Our values and beliefs form the foundation on which we work, interact, make decisions and develop a smart strategy that supports our mission:

**Helping Hand provides innovative and responsive services for older people, which support them to have the best quality of life.**

helpinghand.org.au  
1300 653 600



**Helping Hand**  
new aged care