

October 2003

NEWSLETTER

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS EX-RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS SERVICES

Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

Our SUBMISSION on YOUR BEHALF

In our last edition, we reported that a Senate Committee was conducting an inquiry into the quality of care received by children who, for various reasons, have lived away from their family home in institutional or foster care in Australia.

As well as investigating whether children living under such arrangements have been subject to abuse or neglect, the Committee has been asked to examine the long-term social and economic impact of such childhood experiences, both on individuals and families, and on Australian society as a whole.

The Senate Committee Inquiry has been taking submissions on these issues and will report by the end of the year completing a trilogy of inquiries which began with the inquiry into the Stolen Generation, followed by the inquiry into Child Migration and, now, this final part of the trilogy.

The institutional experiences of C-BERS clients will be considered as part of the current Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care.

On behalf of all our clients, the C-BERS management committee and staff have made a submission to the Inquiry outlining some of the longer term consequences that the institutional experiences of former child migrants have had on their personal, family, social and economic wellbeing as adults.

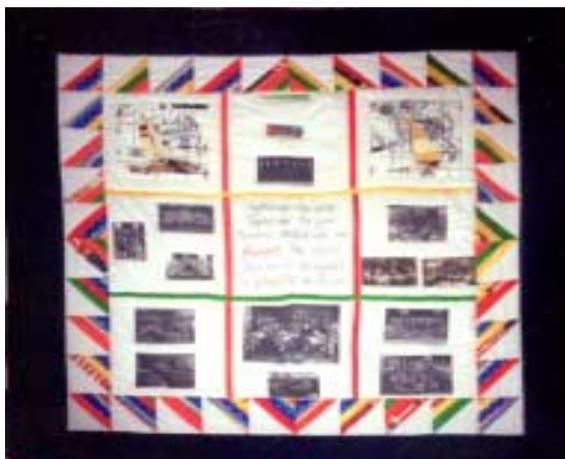
In making our C-BERS submission, we have drawn on and brought together the many stories our clients have shared with us over the years (although no-one has been personally identified).

The C-BERS submission highlights, in particular -

- ◆ the damage to former child migrants who experienced early childhood abuse
- ◆ factors and services that have helped former residents to deal with these experiences
- ◆ ways in which abuse in institutional care settings may be prevented in the future.

All of us at C-BERS hope that the Senate Inquiry will help to bring to public attention the unique problems associated with institutional care, both past and present, as well as providing recommendations that will ensure that children who are unable to live with their families of origin receive the best of care from here on in.

BECAUSE... a Picture Paints a Thousand Words



With the centre-piece inscription

*"Together over the waves,
Together over the years
Memories stitched with love,
Friendship the thread
That bonds us together
In Friendship, we are one"*

On display and greatly admired at C-BERS this year has been a unique quilt depicting migrant girls, sailing vessels and Nazareth House in Geraldton.

The quilt is on loan to C-BERS and dedicated to all Child Migrants sent to Australia under British and Maltese Child Migration Schemes.

It was made by Maureen Briggs-Trewin to celebrate 50 years in Western Australia (1953-2003).

Maureen is actively involved in the welfare of former Child Migrants, and her story is featured on pages 3-4 of this issue of C-BERS Ex-Press.



**WE'RE OPEN
FOR BUSINESS**

**between 8.30 a.m.
and 4.30 p.m.
Monday to Friday**

ON STAFF

Administration

Manager— Mary Kearns
(Tuesdays, Wednesdays,
Thursdays)

Clinical Supervisor

Dr Mark Sachmann
Wednesday)

Counsellors

Dr Michael Anderson
(Tuesdays, Wednesdays,
Fridays)

Sjoukje Tarbox
(Mondays and Thursdays)

Administration

Lorraine Hipkins
(Mondays, Tuesdays)

Sue Fullerton
(Wednesdays and Fridays)

**MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

Dr Maria Harries

(Chairperson)

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Help to Trace Families

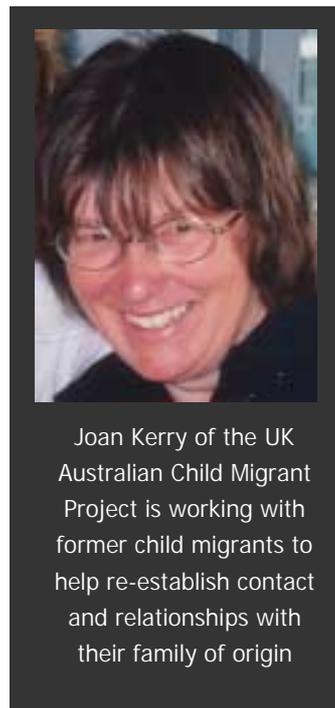
Joan Kerry of the UK Australian Child Migrant Project visits Australia regularly to help former child migrants track down and make contact with long distant and/or lost relatives in the UK.

Since her last visit to Australia just under a year ago, Joan has successfully reunited 26 former child migrants with their UK family members (including three who had been searching, unsuccessfully, for over 20 years). This makes a total of 42 since Joan's appointment two years ago!

At the end of August, Joan spent four weeks in Perth (based at the Catholic Migrant Centre and at C-BERS), meeting former child migrants who were wanting to trace family members, before moving on to make similar contacts in Geraldton, Bunbury, Melbourne and Newcastle NSW.

Joan reports there's also been some significant progress on family tracing in Ireland. Thanks to the Sisters of Nazareth, the UK Former Child Migrant project has been able to employ an Irish social worker on a half time basis. Joan says that having someone on the spot who understands the Irish way of life is helping a lot.

The UK Australian Child Migrant Project is funded by all agencies in the Catholic Dioceses and Archdioceses in both the UK and Australia who either received or sent Child Migrants to Australia. The UK Sisters of Nazareth also make a significant contribution to the project.



Joan Kerry of the UK Australian Child Migrant Project is working with former child migrants to help re-establish contact and relationships with their family of origin

UK Families "Get-Together"

A group of "recently discovered" family members of former child migrants took part in a "get-together" in the UK at the end of July.

The meeting was organised by Joan Kerry of the UK Australia Child Migrant Project in response to a request from some of the families who had gone through the process of discovering and being reunited with a previously unknown family member and felt it would be helpful to have contact with others who had shared similar experiences.

Considering the age of many family members and their spread throughout England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere, Joan says she is delighted with the turn up of 12 people for the first meeting. A further five families said they would have

liked to attend but couldn't due to other commitments.

As well as sharing common experiences and sometimes confronting feelings, the meeting talked about the best way to help future reunions run more smoothly for the benefit of former child migrants and family members yet to make personal contact.

Joan plans to make a video of relatives' views which can be used as a resource to make the reunion experience as pleasant as possible for both sides of the family connection.

Family members who took part in the July meeting were keen to meet again and a second meeting has been planned for 6th January 2004.

At this stage, the meeting is open only to the relatives of Former Child Migrants of Catholic origin.

If any of our readers have UK relatives who they think would like to attend, please make contact with Joan Kerry either through C-BERS or direct in the UK on 001144 1675 434002.

RELATIVE ISSUES

Joan Kerry has also produced a video, called *Relative Issues*, which features the daughter of a deceased Child Migrant talking candidly about how her father's experiences have affected other family members. This moving 15 minute video is an important contribution to the lessons to be learned from the Child Migrant experience. It is not yet available publicly but it can be viewed at C-BERS by arrangement.

Quest for "An Identity"

A Personal Story...

Maureen Briggs-Trewin came to Australia in 1953 from an orphanage in England when she was just eleven years of age.

She spent the next five years living at Nazareth House in Geraldton before being sent to Moora to work as a domestic at age 16.

A determination to reconnect with her own personal past has translated into an equally strong passion to help other former child migrants who have been similarly disconnected. Maureen told her story to C-BERS Counsellor, Sjoukje Tarbox.

My story begins much the same way as that of many other Child Migrants. I was born to a single mother who, although she desperately wanted to keep me, was forced by family, social and religious pressures to place me into a Catholic orphanage in Hammersmith London.



As an expectant child...

How did I get to Australia? I remember one September day the Archbishop came to visit with some other very important people. The Nuns assembled us into the hall and these people told us all about the wonders of Australia. At the end of the talk, we were asked if we would like to go to Australia. Thinking it was a day trip, I put up my hand.

What a journey... first it was off to hospital to have my tonsils out, then onto the ship, the *New Australian*, for six weeks. The trip wasn't too bad except that we weren't allowed off the ship at any of the ports along the way. The only bad memory I have is when they

cut my beautiful long wavy hair. I can still see it falling to the floor.

Boy did I get a shock when we arrived in Fremantle. There were two Nuns from the Hammersmith Orphanage waiting for us. I wanted to know where was the Aunty and Uncle they had promised?"

The Nuns gathered us together and took us to an orphanage in Wembley. Next day it was onto a bus for what seemed like a very long trip. I chattered and asked so many questions, but kept being told to be quiet. The trip ended at an orphanage in Geraldton, where I was to stay until I was 16 years of age.

Life at Nazareth House was ruled by very strict discipline; lots of hard physical work and, while some of us were subject to physical, mental and humiliating abuse, it was also my safe haven with my familiar friends.

At aged 16 a very scared young girl was given a battered suitcase, some second hand clothes, two pounds, and a nametag and sent on yet another long bus journey. I had no idea where I was going, how long it would take, and why was I being sent away from my friends to some place called "Moora". (I now know - it was because the Nuns were no longer being paid to keep me!). My fate was to work on a farm in Moora, as a domestic.

It was hard work, long hours with no wages and no holidays, just board and keep. At Moora, I came to understand that I was "a nobody", no identity, nobody cared! I ran away twice, and the Welfare people brought me back. Noone, not even the Welfare people, would answer my questions.

I learnt that the only way I could leave was to resign... so I did.

I made my way back to Nazareth House only to be told "you can't stay here, this is not your home". They did let me stay the night. Next day I travelled to Perth and joined the girls going to work at St Thomas Moore College. It was there I got my first-ever pay packet £7.10.0. My life took a different turn, it was much happier, although always eating away at me was the question "who am I?"

For years I questioned and questioned — religious orders, governments both here and overseas only to be told "you are an orphan. Your parents were killed in the War". Any documentation given to me had false information.

I tired of domestic work and tried my hand at nursing. Many of the matrons I worked for encouraged me to do formal training, but my fear of failure prevented me from even trying.

As a Child Migrant, I felt alone. The only people I could turn to were fellow Child Migrants. I didn't have the skills or knowledge to know where to go for help or even if help was available.

In my twenties, I met Colin (now my ex-husband) and gave birth to two beautiful sons. Colin, who was a Police Officer wrote to the Police in Manchester and other organisations such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and many others, to try to track down information on my family background. He was supportive but the "monkey on my back" of not knowing my identity became an obsession for me.

Colin also helped me with my education which had been very limited. He arranged for me to have correspondence lessons, pushed me to study and helped me prepare for my interview to become a Prison Officer and for my exams, which I was required to take after my first year of probation. He taught me to investigate, and how to ask for what I needed to know.

Had it not been for Colin's support and guidance, I would not have become the person I am, nor would I have had the career I have today.

Continued next page

Quest for “An Identity” Continued from previous page...

Then, after years of searching, in 1991, the Child Migrant Trust contacted me with news of my family.

Finally, I was a somebody. I had an identity and... I had a brother. Never again would I carry the stigma of being an orphan.

The night I was told this news I wanted to stand on the roof of the hotel and tell the world. Sadly, I was too late to meet my mother who had died at age 57.

In May 2002, I celebrated my 60th birthday. As part of a week long celebration, I re-visited many of the phases of life: St Thomas Moore College, where they put on a luncheon; the site of Mt Henry Hospital; Fremantle Jail and many more.

At times it was an emotional roller coaster ride but it made me realise what a unique family we Child Migrants are.

Throughout our early lives we had only each other, and we were there for each other.

That friendship and sense of extended family remains to this day.

The whole process of trying to find my own identity, and particularly my contact with the Child Migrants Trust in the 80s, made me more aware of the issues facing Child Migrants.



I became obsessed with wanting to help other Child Migrants.

I felt that we needed to be heard and our stories needed to be told. So I did television interviews and radio talk backs. These days, I am also involved with a Committee for a Commemorative Plaque honouring the Child Migrants.

Whilst my life has had its share of adversity, I look forward to the future with great anticipation.

In just a few weeks, my brother and his family arrive from England for their first holiday in Australia. All my family are excited and even my grandchildren can't wait to meet their "pommy" cousins.

Shortly, I hope to retire after 30 odd years in the prison service, and retreat to my hills home to share retirement with my partner of eight years.

But, as my partner says, "a hermit you won't become, not while there are still Child Migrant issues to address and not while there are still people less fortunate than you".



WANTING CONTACT

Castledare: Alf Spiteri (Tardun 1950s) wishes to contact **John Nikloch** who was in Castledare around that time. John was known of as "Johnny Bee". Please phone C-BERS for details.

Brian (Bryan) Pratt Bindoon: We have been asked by the family tracing section of the Salvation Army if we can help locate Brian who was placed at Bindoon over the period 1947 to 1950. If you think you can help, please phone Mrs Lois Sutton on 08 9227 7010 or let us know at C-BERS.

Bindoon & Clontarf: **Jim Green**, a former Child Migrant now living in the UK was placed in Castledare, Clontarf and Bindoon between 1947 and 1953. Jim would like to hear from old friends **Phil Smith, Maurice Richardson, Brian Carver** and others who may remember him. Please phone C-BERS for Jim's contact details.

MEMORIAL

Celebrating the Life of Michael Bowman

On the anniversary of the death of Michael Bowman who died in the 1955 Clontarf bus accident, a celebration of his life is planned

at Clontarf
9.30 am on 15 December 2003.

There will be a brief ceremony at Michael's gravesite, (which, by then, will have been restored to its original condition) followed by morning tea. All former students and residents of Clontarf are welcome to attend.

British Former Child Migrants

We have been asked to publicise the **Self-Help Organisation for Child Migrants (SHOCM)** who wish to gather support to petition the British and Australian governments on the needs of British former Child Migrants. For further information, contact Ann Ashton on 07 385 4195 or Agnes Claridge on 07 5497 6749 or via email seng01@bigpond.com