

The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs References Committee  
Suite S1 59  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
[Community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:Community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

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My name is Dianne Hughes C/- The Clan. P.O. Box 164, Georges Hall NSW 2198.

I was a state ward from 1960 until approximately 1968 the reason being my father was in and out of jail and my mother couldn't pay the rent, in those days there wasn't any financial assistance such as pensions. I had four brothers and three sisters; I was nine years old and the eldest. The Child Welfare Department supposedly took us to protect and give us a better chance in life. I and a few of my siblings were taken to Bidura Children's Depot at Glebe whilst two of my brothers were taken to Royston Boys Depot. Upon our arrival at Bidura we had our hair doused in kerosene and tied in rags. I also have a doctor's report in my file that states I was internally examined for venereal disease. In another document that is stamped by the Department of Child Welfare it states that I am unplaceable for fostering as I was very dull, didn't smile and a bed wetter. (How could any child taken from the only family she knows and not understanding what is happening be anything but scared, being the eldest it automatically comes to you to be the one to look out for the younger ones which I was not able to do reinforcing my feelings of being a failure.) I remained in Bidura Children's Depot for several months during which time I watched as my brothers and sisters were taken away. I didn't get to see any of them again until many years later.

I was eventually sent to Linnwood Hall at Guildford at the age of twelve. Mrs Daphne Davies was the superintendent at that time who ran her school for girls like some sort of Nazi officer making us scrub and polish floors for hours on our hands and knees for being disobedient which might I add was for minor things such as loosing your hair brush, talking when you were not supposed to be talking, answering back etc.

We were supervised of an evening for showers which were for three minutes and were instructed when to turn the water on and when to turn it off. We attended school on the grounds two days a week. I have no recollection as to what the lessons consisted of. The other three days were a day in the laundry, a day in the kitchen and a day mending and sewing. The girls that were in Linnwood Hall at that time maintained the institution. There was never any recreational time given. Officers only supervised the girls to carry out the everyday running and maintenance. Mrs Davies also had an isolation room which apparently the Child Welfare Department was aware of. The room consisted of a mattress on the floor, a metal potty, a window that was boarded up from the outside and a small opening in the bottom of the door where meals were passed through three times a day, the light switch was on the outside of the room. I spent many 24hour periods locked in isolation at the age of twelve to sit and stare at a wall. On one occasion I became hysterical, two officers came into the room, one held me down while the other forced a tablet down my throat, neither officer asked what was wrong or made any attempt to offer any form of comfort.

During my time there many things that to this day I do not understand were carried out, for example, the girls that had their periods were escorted three times a day to a bottom bathroom facility to attend to themselves, we were given cloth nappies which we had to show the soiled ones to the officer and then line up at the hand basins and rinse them out to be placed in a bucket to go to the laundry to be boiled. There was no privacy.

Mrs Davies was a cruel woman who used humiliation & intimidation as a method of control. Compassion, understanding, humanity or empathy were not in her vocabulary. She was obviously unaware that even children have a sense of dignity and words do hurt, that instead of treating us so badly she was in a position to speak on our behalf and help model us into effective members of the community for when we were old enough to be released. We were never called by our name it was always e.g. "the girl Hughes." She would sometimes refer to me as the glamour girl because I was always tidy but if I wasn't tidy I would have been in trouble. She demanded respect without deserving it. We would often sit in the dinning room where a fresh bowl of fruit always sat on her table taunting us girls who hardly ever had fruit at all.

Our hands were to be kept busy at all times and this was done by having us mending clothing or darning socks. Whenever VIP's would attend Linnwood Hall, Mrs Davies would have a quarter of an apple and orange handed out to the girls and we were instructed to make sure we behaved ourselves whilst they were there or we would be in trouble when they left. It was the only time we saw a piece of fruit.

Not surprisingly I absconded several times and upon my return I was either punished by having to scrub floors, privileges such as desert were taken or I was placed in isolation, sometimes all three.

I was moved on to the *Glebe Girl's Shelter* when I was thirteen and a half where I was subjected again to an internal examination. I was asked by the doctor prior to being examined, "are you a virgin". After examining me the doctors report which I have in my file, confirmed "the girl Hughes is a virgin". Within a weeks time frame I was taken to court from *Glebe girl's shelter* and committed to *Ormond Girls Training School* at *Thornleigh* where I was again subjected to an internal examination which also states that I was still a virgin. I had only traveled from *Glebe* to *Thornleigh* escorted at all time yet the Department felt the need to perform yet another internal examination.

At *Ormond* the punishment there for being disobedient, such as talking when you weren't supposed to consisted of scrubbing cement courtyards on your hands and knees with a tooth brush ( I have always been curious, with the amount of girls scrubbing courtyards with toothbrushes why the department never wondered why so many were needed).

Other forms of punishment were 24hour periods of isolation, hours of bed drill, which consisted of stripping the bed and each sheet and each blanket would be inspected by an officer and if it wasn't correct with envelope corners and no wrinkles you would be instructed to remove it and put it on again until the bed was completed, then start the procedure over again and this could go on for a few hours at a time.

The shower cubical consisted of half doors where an officer would be continually watching you; again you were given no privacy. Every Saturday

morning we would have to go into a cubical, undress, wrap ourselves in a towel and an officer would instruct us one at a time to come out of the cubical and she would look over our bodies, legs, arms then we would be instructed to drop the towel for further inspection.

We attended school on the grounds of Ormond two to three days a week the rest of the time we were washing, cooking, cleaning and mending.

At the age of 14 and 9 months I was instructed that I was deserving of another chance in the community. (What had I done as a child to not be deserving of my place in the community?)

I could easily fill many pages with details as to what happened during my time in the hands of the Children's Welfare Department and the institutions that I was sent to. At this time I believe I should tell you how I feel my treatment has affected my life.

Do I often wonder what it would have been like to have been left in a loving home with my family intact, to share Christmas morning with all my brothers, sisters, grandparents and mother? Sure I do! I do not delude myself that it would have been all roses and always loving. We would have had many trying situations but we would have had the only unconditional love that is available, that of the love of family. I would be fairly certain that my schooling would have been far more than I actually received, I have no doubt that my natural bonding with my siblings would have made it easier to bond with other people during my life. Would I now have a profession, who knows? I may have had to leave school earlier to gain work being the eldest but at least I would have had a home to return to each evening. I would have been sent out into society already knowing how to interact with other people; I would know how to catch a bus and to read a timetable. I would have had interaction with my siblings when they came home from school that would have helped me to know what was happening in their schools and lives which in turn would have helped me grow as a person. I sit here and wonder how it is that people with the education that I didn't receive, in positions of authority that could make change could not see the damage that was done to eight children, not to mention my mother and extended family, would it not have been far more beneficial not only financially to use the money that it had cost the government having eight children in either institutions or foster care pay

the rent on our home and assist with some of the bills, I'm sure it would have been cheaper. It's so obvious that this would have been a far more beneficial outcome for all. What were people thinking?

Prior to being taken from my mothers home I have no recollection of having to scrub floors with toothbrushes, being naked in front of total strangers whilst they examined my body, being locked in isolation for 24hours at a time at the whim of yet another person who saw me as just another charge. I seriously doubt that any member of my family would have examined a nappy I was wearing when I had a period or for that matter being made to wear a nappy. Would I have been internally examined at nine years of age? I seriously doubt my mother would have had me lay out all my underwear to inspect the crutch prior to doing the washing.

Fruit would have been something that was taken for granted not just given to me to make an institution look caring when VIP's visited.

Has this affected me? You bet! I do not have a close relationship with any member of my family; I have contact with just one sister. It has taken years to train myself into not cleaning my home so that it shines and just accepting it as a home that's ok to have a little untidy at times. My own children suffered during the time it took me to realise this. My kids were never allowed to be dirty. I would empty an ashtray every time someone would use it. The kitchen table would be washed down every time I walked past it. These were things I would do habitually and not realise that it made my guests and friends uncomfortable.

It has always been difficult to show affection to my partners, children and friends, it feels so foreign. I know it's something that most people feel comes naturally and it probably does but it's something which also needs to be nurtured, it never was, I have no recollection of ever receiving so much as a hug from someone during my time in the system, rather we were not meant to be too close to others incase we were conspiring to do something. I believe this alone was a severe form of isolation. Could you imagine being a child and not ever being held when you were scared or lonely, not ever being able to give or receive the comfort of a hug.

All through my adult life I have panicked at the thought of internal examination, needing to have friends take me to appointments, breaking out in sweats and nearly passing out. Having had so many problems in this area it has been an enormous problem through my life and has caused a great deal of anguish.

Would better schooling have helped me raising my children? That goes without saying, I would have felt more comfortable helping my children if I had the confidence and knew more than I did. I would have put less pressure on my eldest child instead of making her the one the others turned to for help. I seriously doubt I would have had to pay someone to come in and help my kids with their homework. Filling in forms or writing a letter for any reason would not have me feeling so inept if I had been shown the basics. My confidence would not so easily be shaken if I had been given a better education I wouldn't have to read through everything two or three times or worse still have my children read them for me to ensure that I understood what was in front of me.

Would I have been able to get better jobs? I did the only thing that these institutions taught me. I cleaned and I cleaned. Other people's homes were as spotless as mine and the institutions that taught me, no other skills were given or offered, no advice was given, I was unaware when I left the institutions that you were able to get an education from places like TAFE and by the time I was I already had children which because of my own upbringing were more important to me. I made sure that my time was their time. I ensured they had everything I didn't. When they came home from school they had food and drinks in the fridge, they didn't have to drink water from the taps in the bathroom or wait in line to get their meals. Small things to some but very important to me.

I have problems with confinement, my bedroom door is never closed I only close the bathroom door if I have people in my home that I don't know very well. The front and rear doors of my home are very rarely closed even now and even in the dead of winter.

In today's society if I was a drug user or addict I would be given housing assistance, rehabilitation, and counseling, depending on my drug of choice I

would be put on a program or have the use of a injection room where trained staff would ensure I didn't overdose.

I wasn't in the system because I committed a crime, what could a nine year old girl do to warrant the treatment I received at the hands of the Welfare Department? Would the Department of Corrections be able to take away to civil rights of convicted criminals? The Department of Welfare certainly did! When you hear a story from one child it's easy to put it down to an overactive imagination but when you hear the same story from child after child it's time for the people in authority to take a look past what they are being shown to go beyond people like Mrs Davies and talk to these kids, after all they are kids. They have no ability to be manipulative at the age of nine or for all of them to stand by a fictitious story en mass. Were we failed by the system? Yes!

Where and when did Child Welfare actually look after my welfare?

I looked up in a thesaurus the word welfare and found these words, wellbeing, interests, benefit, happiness, good and safety. None of these can I relate to my time when for my own benefit and safety I was taken from my mother and home by Children's Welfare.

Dianne Hughes.