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Author/s:

Evans, J;Golding, F;O'Neill, C;Tropea, R

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All I Want To Know Is Who I Am: Archival Justice for Australian Care Leavers

Joanne Evans, Frank Golding, Cate O'Neill, Rachel Tropea

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Archival and recordkeeping failings loom large in reports from the many inquiries and commissions held in a number of countries over the past two decades into the physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect suffered by so many people who were in institutional 'care' as children (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, 2009, 2001; Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse 2009; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Survivors have testified repeatedly about the barriers they have faced in gaining access to records about their childhood experiences, as well as the ongoing discrimination and disadvantage that they suffer. They have repeatedly questioned why the rights of organizations and institutions to own, administer and arbitrate access to records are put ahead of those who have been so severely impacted upon by child welfare systems.

Part of the overall campaign for redress for childhood abuse and neglect in Australia has been the quest for archival justice. Care Leavers¹ have demonstrated the impacts existing archival and recordkeeping regimes have on their ability to meet their identity, memory, accountability and redress needs and are asking for fairer, equitable, more respectful and less harmful systems. To support archival justice, organizations and institutions must recognize Care Leavers' rights to their childhood records, and take action to represent and enact these rights.

In this chapter we will critically examine the response of the Australian archival and recordkeeping community to these calls, focusing in particular on the archival actions delivered through the Australian Government's Find and Connect Program (Department of Social Services 2015). We will identify the roles archival and recordkeeping professionals are, and should be, playing in the ongoing struggle for equity in records and recordkeeping. We will question the extent to which archival and recordkeeping regimes embedded in existing power structures can meet the needs of the Care Leaver community. We ask whether the profession is up to sharing, and if necessary relinquishing, archival control in order to deliver on social justice.

The quest for records

All he wants is to know who he is. He is entitled to know his heritage. Our children and our grandchildren are missing their heritage. (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, Confidential Submission 32)

It is often very difficult to equate the term ‘Care’ with what an estimated half a million children experienced when they came into contact with Australia’s child welfare systems throughout the twentieth century.² Children separated from their families as ‘Wards of the State’ and/or otherwise placed into Children’s Homes, often lost all contact with their siblings, their parents, their wider family and place of origin. Some were told they had no parents or, if they did, that their parents wanted nothing to do with them. Institutions actively discouraged parents from visiting, and many children were left with unanswered questions about why they had been taken from their family and put into Care.

Many had a tough time in Care. They had no love. Instead, they were cruelly abused – emotionally, physically and sexually – and had their childhood and development needs severely neglected. Children who tried to report their abuse were not believed and often punished for their impudence. They had no childhood photographs, no medical histories, no school reports or personal mementos. When they were sent to work, many left younger siblings behind and never saw them again. In other cases, brothers and sisters were placed in different institutions and given different surnames. Some have found out about these siblings only when, many years later, they have finally been allowed to access their records.

The introduction of Freedom of Information (FOI) laws at state and federal levels in Australia in the 1980s was the mechanism by which Care Leavers began to gain access to records – at least for those lucky enough to be aware of it. Many have borne a lifelong sense of unfinished business and gained renewed hope that finding and accessing ‘their files’ would help on their journey of self-discovery and authenticate their childhood memories. But FOI processes were not designed for this purpose, and the legislation, despite intentions, “perpetuates traditional information asymmetries between the citizenry and the state” (Stubbs 2008, 670–71) the reality has fallen far short of these expectations.

Gaining access to their records has not been easy for Care Leavers. Where to start? Some could barely remember the name of the orphanage where they were held and many Homes were long since closed with the organizations that ran them no longer in existence. Others remembered being passed around several institutions and foster homes. Did the record follow the child, or was there a new file at each placement? Some were Wards of the State and others were not; others were not sure. They did not know that this made a difference to what was recorded and archived. They also were not aware that FOI legislation may not apply to records held by non-government organizations, and that these organizations developed their own policy and procedures for accessing records. Many were utterly confused.

Some Care Leavers found their way to the right place to ask for their records only to experience long delays and a bureaucratic runaround (Victorian Auditor General 2012; Victorian Ombudsman 2012). Many were heart-broken to be told that files had been lost or destroyed or could not be found. Others were disappointed with what was found: superficial facts, large gaps in their life story when nothing was recorded,

incorrect dates, misspelled names, insulting and defamatory comments and hurtful gossip about themselves or their parents. Some expected to see basic information like family medical history, school reports or a birth certificate, but were profoundly disappointed that such information was never recorded.

I get two sheets of paper with about 9 or 12 lines on it, I look at these two sheets and I am devastated, 18 years of my life on two sheets of paper. I ponder and wonder this can't be all of my 18 years on two sheets of paper. (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, Confidential Submission 3)

Most perplexing were the redactions. Other people were mentioned in their records, so those names and other identifying details had to be censored—even when the ‘third party’ was a close relative.

The Department decides I cannot have certain information about MY parents. Why should the Department staff get to read the file about my parents and then relate it to me? How dare the Department decide that I cannot read about MY parents. (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, Submission 167)

Redaction also extended to the rare cases when letters from family members were included in the files. In many cases there was no explanation for these redactions. The ubiquitous ‘s33(i)’ (a clause in the Victorian FOI Act that deals with third party privacy) scrawled in the margin of the censored document was the only clue. Photographs, another rare and valued record, were also released with faces blurred or heads cut out in clumsy attempts to protect the privacy of ‘third parties’ with no record to the emotional impact this would have.

In many cases, record holders were unsympathetic and lacked empathy.³ Some indicated that they were too busy with other duties and did not rate access to historic records by Care Leavers among their priorities. Some discouraged requests because the records were not indexed and bureaucrats did not relish the work entailed in locating the right file. Care Leavers who asked for ‘my file’ were put in their place: this is not ‘your file’; it belongs to the Department, or the agency that compiled it (Recordkeeping Innovation 2015). Yet, when they asked why it was being kept in the archives, nobody seemed to be able to give a plausible answer. This led some Care Leavers to form the view that the record holders had something to hide. This was reinforced when repeat requests for access to records would turn up different files, without adequate explanation.

Some Care Leavers also dreaded having to return cap in hand to the places where they were abused as a child to ask for assistance with their records. But where else could they go?

Care Leaver campaigning for social and archival justice

The forgoing summarizes the obstacles and challenges that Care Leavers have had to face in striving to discover, access and use the records of their childhood. Care Leaver activism and advocacy has played a large part in a succession of inquiries (Swain 2014a) which have highlighted the lifelong impacts of brutal and punitive child

welfare systems and the inherent tendency of archival regimes, designed for information elites, to perpetuate the trauma (Gilliland 2015). Hard won improvements to access practices have come about through tireless individual and collective campaigning for archival justice by the Care Leaver community.

Prior to the establishment of latest inquiry, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA), in 2012, Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) saw the 2003-4 Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care by the Parliament of Australia's Senate Community Affairs References Committee as their peak achievement after years of struggle. In fighting for an inquiry CLAN had met Commonwealth and State Ministers, lobbied all political parties, courted key advocates inside and out of politics, conducted monthly protests at public venues and orchestrated a letter-writing campaign. At the opening of the CLAN office in Bankstown, Sydney on 6 March 2004, then Senator Andrew Murray declared that the Inquiry:

would never have seen the light of day had it not been for the commitment and energy of concerned activists...Their persistent lobbying efforts in the halls of Canberra and elsewhere did much to ensure I procured the necessary political support from the Labor Party to establish this Inquiry (Murray 2004).

Following his leading role in this Senate scrutiny of the short and long term impacts of child abuse and neglect suffered by those in institutional and other out-of-home care, Murray was one of the six RCIRCSA commissioners investigating how a wide range of institutions have handled allegations of child sexual abuse.

Reports from the Senate Inquiry were handed down in 2004 and 2005, with the *Forgotten Australians Report* (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004) dedicating a whole chapter to highlighting the issues around identity, records and access and making seven recommendations for improvements, based on the rights of Care Leavers to be able to view all the information relating to themselves. It is worth noting that with nothing in the Senate Committee's terms of reference about records it was the weight of evidence from Care Leavers that led to the Committee identifying it as a major issue, with its own chapter and specific set of recommendations. This has been repeated in the latest inquiry. The RCIRCSA developed a consultation paper on records and recordkeeping practices in 2015 response to what they were learning in private and public hearings (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2016).

A further report in 2009 reviewing the progress (or lack thereof) in implementing recommendations from the *Forgotten Australians Report* and the *Lost Innocents Report* from the earlier 2001 Inquiry into Child Migration (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2001, 2009), along with further lobbying and campaigning, eventually led to the Prime Minister making a National Apology on the 16 November 2009 (Prime Minister of Australia 2009). This was followed by national government commitment to enhanced family tracing and records discovery, access and support services, with A\$26.5 million over four years made available for developing an integrated suite of Find and Connect Services and Projects to better support Care

Leavers in their search for identity, memory, and family (Department of Social Services 2015). A key feature of this program has been its collaborative development with a range of stakeholders – the advocacy organizations representing Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Care Leavers, support services, state and territory governments, records specialists and non-government record holders. A further A\$9.7 million has been provided to continue the Find and Connect Services through to mid 2019.

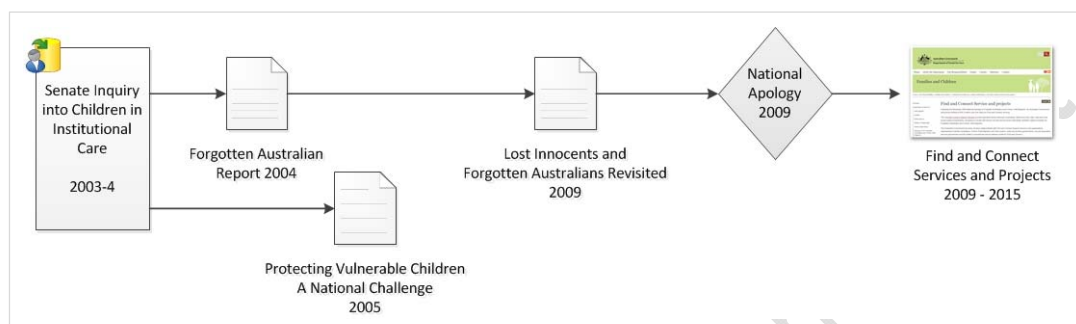


Figure 1: Senate Inquiry, Reports, Apology and Find and Connect Program Timeline

Responses from the Australian archival and recordkeeping community

What has been the role of the Australian archival and recordkeeping community in this campaign for social justice? Where has been the voice of Australian archivists and other recordkeeping professionals in this quest for rights to records?

Sadly not at the forefront of advocating for Care Leaver's archival needs and being part of the campaigning for inquiries. While some individual archivists had worked to factor the access needs of the Care Leaver community into their practices, there was no collective advocacy across the profession. The Australian archival and recordkeeping community has instead been one of the groups called on to respond to inquiry recommendations and address the glaring deficiencies in archival practices (Eberhard 2015). The words from the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997), which brought to the nation's attention the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families under a range of assimilation and welfare policies – the Stolen Generations – are stark.

... access to records must be made easier and less hurtful (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, 299)

Far from being neutral and benign, archival access frameworks, designed from organizational, institutional and governmental perspectives, have added to past injustices rather than alleviating them. The *Lost Innocents* (2001) and *Forgotten Australians* (2004) reports reiterated these issues for the Former Child Migrant and Care Leaver communities.

In response to inquiry recommendations, a number of directories and specialised guides to records have been developed by government and non-government record

holders.⁴ Name indexing projects have also been undertaken, particularly for records relating to the Stolen Generations in Commonwealth and state government archives given the recommendations in the *Bringing Them Home Report* to establish and resource Records Taskforces. We argue that these responses, despite the good intentions behind them, have not gone far enough in addressing social justice issues. They have soothed symptoms with some improvements to access – most welcomed by individuals and impacted communities – but in our opinion need to go further to address the challenges that the inquiries reveal.

To justify these assertions we look initially at one of the earliest of these directories, *Connecting Kin*, published by the New South Wales Department of Community Services in 1999. It documented what was known at that point-in-time about records relating to institutional Care. It was essentially a print publication although also made available online as a pdf. This format meant that it lacked a mechanism for easy updating as new and more detailed information came to light particularly through the indexing projects and other Records Task Force activities, or for changes in access conditions and procedures. Inevitable inaccuracies and incompleteness were exposed which has made guides like this less and less useful and reliable (Swain 2014b). This has perhaps inadvertently contributed to the distrust Care leavers have of records holders. What have they got to hide if they can't give me a simple and up to date answer to the question of where the records relating to my childhood are?

Yet despite the shortcomings, record holders still choose this form to disseminate information about their record holdings. Most recently, the National Archives of Australia published the 2015 second edition of its *Tracking family guide to Aboriginal records relating to the Northern Territory* in book form, with the online version being the book chapters reproduced as html pages (National Archives of Australia 2015). It is a worthy and weighty tome, but its form is static and unwieldy. Those seeking records about their childhood must first translate their request into the language of the bureaucracy. We ask whether our records discovery systems should better address the needs of those the records document, rather than just reflecting the organisation's world of documentation. We also question whether pdf/html versions of published guides are really the best that the archival and recordkeeping community can do to harness digital and networking capabilities in improving access.

Apart from the issue of information losing currency, these finding aids perpetuate the existing power differentials of the system of institutional Care. Just as the records were created about, rather than for, children in Care, discovery and access tools too often reflect what the records mean to the record holder, not what they mean to Care Leavers. As Gudmund Valderhaug writes

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, signifying something new, something unknown, something strange—and sometimes even frightening. They approach us with their demands for justice, with their angst

and their hopes, with their wants and their desires; they are coming to change their lives. The archives are strange to them; they know little about what may be found there, but they know that the archives are part of the same public system that some years ago neglected or mistreated them. And they may even be strangers in the archives, because their lives are poorly documented—and sometimes totally absent—in the records (Valderhaug 2010, 20).

We assert that despite the range of finding aids and indexing projects that have been undertaken, it is clear that while Australia's archival and recordkeeping community is addressing recommendations regarding records access in the inquiry reports from organizational perspectives, it has "yet to make the shift to 'pluralised recordkeeping' practices" (O'Neill, Selakovic, and Tropea 2012, 32). From Care Leaver perspectives, the records are still deeply embedded within the system in which they were created. Records discovery and access systems too often end up reflecting an authoritarian, risk-averse and self-protective culture of record holding organisations and institutions. In continuing to 'protect' former residents, record holders have played a role in re-traumatising; in effect becoming a continuation and extension of the regimes under which they suffered abuse and neglect as children.

The final report of the RCIRCSA identifies the problems as 'systemic and enduring' and notes that

the fact that survivors told us they were still experiencing considerable difficulty and distress in accessing records indicates that problems have not been overcome by reforms in response to the recommendations of earlier inquiries. The records and recordkeeping practices of many institutions operating today may still not meet the standard required to promote child safety and institutional accountability (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, 8:439).

For some recordkeeping and other professionals, coming face-to-face with Care Leavers and gaining an understanding of their records access experiences has led to a questioning of the power and privilege bound up in traditional archival and recordkeeping frameworks, processes and systems (O'Neill, Selakovic, and Tropea 2012; Humphreys et al. 2014; Evans et al. 2015; McKemmish, Faulkhead, and Russell 2011). The growing realization of the social injustices built into existing archival access and control frameworks is leading to calls for archival activism and becoming part of the community calling for change (Evans et al. 2015). Enabling archival autonomy – the ability of individuals and communities to be participatory agents in recordkeeping and archiving for identity, memory and accountability purposes – requires transformation rather than just incremental reform.

Find and Connect Web Resource

The development of the *Find and Connect Web Resource*⁵ as a centerpiece of the Find and Connect Program is an example of archival thinking, systems and people starting to take a more prominent role in improving records access services for Care Leavers, and advocating for more radical transformations. Developed as part of the package to support locating and accessing records of childhood Care experiences, particularly in support of family reconnection, it was conceived as a national, online, single access point to overcome the fragmented and complex mazes of guides and finding aids that

Care Leavers had to navigate. The *Find and Connect Web Resource* brings together publicly available information about records and other historical resources relating to institutional ‘care’ in Australia, using Records Continuum and Australian Series System principles to map the complex contextual network that surrounds the records to help in discovery, accessibility, interpretation and use (McCarthy and Evans 2012).

The *Find and Connect Web Resource* is not just the pages on the web but the whole ethos that has surrounded its initial and on-going development. It was based on the pioneering *Pathways Victoria*, a key outcome of the 2009-11 ARC Linkage Who am I? Project, which brought together social workers, archivists, and historians with community sector, advocacy organizations, and government to investigate and drive changes to social work, archival and recordkeeping practices (McCarthy, Swain, and O’Neill 2012; O’Neill 2012; McCarthy and Evans 2012; Humphreys et al. 2014). Not only does the *Find and Connect Web Resource* itself aim to lift the layers of bureaucracy and shrouds of secrecy around Care Leaver records, but the program of workshops that accompanied its initial development aimed to nurture a community who could better respond to Care Leaver needs in their archival practice. Using the Knowledge Diamond approach of the Who am I? Project (Humphreys and Kertesz 2012), with its emphasis on the exchange of ideas between key stakeholder perspectives (Service User/Consumer Experience, Research Evidence, Policy Perspectives and Practitioner Wisdom), these workshops brought the Care Leaver experience to the fore, shared examples of empathetic practices, and discussed the conundrums and systemic barriers to better service provision.

One of the outcomes of this Knowledge Diamond approach has been the development of ways of describing records to reflect Care Leaver experiences and needs. Entries in the *Find and Connect Web Resource* may document record series in ways that are substantially different from documentation in the record holder’s system, to describe their relevance to Care Leavers and ensure the key information they are likely to be looking for is included (Golding, O’Neill, and Story 2013).

Swain (2014b) describes the ways in which entries were shaped through dialog with the Care Leaver community. Feedback was encouraged through the web interface as entries from pre-existing print and online directories initially went live – warts and all. The community was quick to respond pointing out the inaccuracies and outdated information, as well as the ways in which the descriptions represented the biases of official sources. The Pirra Girls’ Home in Victoria was one example, where the rosy picture of young girls enjoying a rural lifestyle was quickly contested.

The current entry reflects a long process of both negotiation and research, using the voices of former residents and staff, accessed through evidence presented to a range of inquiries, unpublished reminiscences, and published autobiographies as well as feedback to the website. It acknowledges both the contradictions and coalescences between these various accounts as evidence that there is no single way in which Pirra can be remembered (Swain 2014b, 42)

Find and Connect Web Resource historians and archivists have also worked with record holders to come up with ways to more sensitively deal with records absences.

For example an entry for records relating to St Cuthbert's Boys' Home acknowledges that some records are likely to be found in the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat Archives, but at this stage 'it is not known exactly what is there' (O'Neill 2015). It then encourages those seeking records to contact the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat Archives so that they can do what they can to help. Such an entry rarely exists in a traditional archival finding aid, designed around documenting only what was known when the finding aid was created about extant record holdings. It is an example of owning up to the limitations of the documentation, the shortcomings of appraisal systems which have seen so few records survive, and seeking to establish a relationship with the person looking for their records.

A further example of the way in which documentation about the absence of records has been developed with community input is provided in the entry for the records which Child and Family Services (CAFS) Ballarat holds (Guy and Tropea 2017). Care Leavers report that they have often been told that records have not survived due to fires, floods and other kinds of disasters and given the climate of distrust can be very skeptical of the veracity of these claims. Given that CAFS did experience a flood in their archives in 1992, where files were damaged and lost, at the suggestion of Care Leaver and advocate, Leonie Sheedy, the entry now includes this information along with a citation to the newspaper article in which the flood and loss was documented.

The entry takes further heed of advice about what matters to Care Leavers with a 'highlights' section to indicate the availability of records which may have documented their daily life, like menu books and photographs. It also features a photograph of the then heritage worker Sharon Guy along with references to the volunteers (often Care Leavers) who together worked to build the archives access service. These are small ways in which to reveal that while the CAFS archive houses paper records and other objects, it is also a community of evidence and memory, run and maintained by people and encompassing many individual stories.

More recently, a new image policy for the web resource has been implemented which challenges conventions around archival titles (Find & Connect Web Resource 2017). Names of superintendents and other staff have been removed from titles and are relegated to descriptive notes. Where staff are known abusers then they are named as such, with references to the newspaper articles, court cases, or other evidence of their actions and its impact. Other hurtful titles – as identified by Care Leavers - have been treated in a similar manner. They are not removed entirely as they provide key information used to identify an archival item, however, the hurt they cause is acknowledged. Participants in the Who am I? Project and the community engagement associated with the development and management of the *Find and Connect Web Resource* advocated for and negotiated these changes (Wright 2017). Building these relationships, listening to the concerns, and working together to find an acceptable solution are all part of enacting archival justice.

While some record holders are shifting their thinking and practices through engagement with the Find and Connect Program, others are more reluctant to

proactively share information and consider reforming their attitudes, processes and systems. The RCIRCSA forced some of these organizations to take action in order to protect themselves. On being told how responsive record holders had been to RCIRCSA requests for records, Care Leavers could not help contrasting that with their own experiences. The RCIRCSA also noted that:

On a number of occasions the Royal Commission received more complete records about individuals in response to our summonses than the individual received in response to their own access requests (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, 8:98)

Find and Connect Access Principles and Best Practice Guidelines

While the *Find and Connect Web Resource* enhances the discoverability of records, improving access processes for Care Leavers is also paramount. Those creating entries for the web resource experienced first-hand just how complex the network of record holders and access procedures can get. Records are distributed across government and non-government agencies, coming under differing legislative provisions, and managed with varying degrees of professional expertise.

Recommendation 16 of the *Forgotten Australian* Report called for an agreed set of access guidelines, across jurisdictions, which enshrine the right of Care Leavers to access and receive copies of all records about themselves in a timely manner, free of charge and which feature “flexible and compassionate interpretation of privacy legislation to allow a care leaver to identify their family and background” (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, 286). *Find and Connect* workshops highlighted the ongoing frustrations for Care Leavers in inconsistent and uncaring interpretations of privacy and FOI legislation, with record holders also keen for official guidance.

Through the Find and Connect Program a project was established in 2014 to consult with record holders and Care Leaver advocacy and support communities on these issues, leading to the development of a set of Access Principles and Best Practice Guidelines in 2015 (Recordkeeping Innovation 2015). They particularly take up the challenge of shifting access practices away from rigid interpretations of legislative mandates which hinder rather than support a Care Leaver’s search for identity.

The Guidelines support a proactive approach to releasing records to enable maximum access to those who are the ‘subject’ of the records. This approach recommends a liberal approach to access, not relying solely on the provisions of the various legislative instruments that govern access (particularly to government records) in each jurisdiction (Recordkeeping Innovation 2015, 10).

The Access Principles and Guidelines are a useful resource for record holders and those providing records access services, but their existence alone is not enough evidence of change. They are aspirational and, despite promising shifts in some jurisdictions, they are yet to be comprehensively endorsed, embedded and monitored across all record holders. Disappointingly soon after their release, when an agency asked its state privacy commissioner about releasing photographs to a Care Leaver, it

was given advice contrary to the principles. This suggests a strong need for the work of the Records Access Working Group, the coalition of Care Leavers, archivists, historians, government, advocates and support service staff that advocated for the development of the principles, to continue.

A pessimistic reading could be that the Access Principles and Guidelines are an acknowledgement that the work done over the past decade in responding to recommendations has not delivered major improvements. What might be holding this back? It is noted that while consultation was a feature of their development ultimately the Guidelines favour government and other record holder perspectives over those of Care Leavers. For example Section 4.9 which asks “What rights do Care Leavers have over the records?” states

Care Leavers often assume that the records about them, belong to them.
Unfortunately this is not the case. (Recordkeeping Innovation 2015, 10).

A further example of where Care Leavers are not equal players lies in the discussion in the preamble that the principles

will require endorsement or adoption by each State and Territory jurisdiction, and private Records Holders, where applicable, before they become community practice (Recordkeeping Innovation 2015, 6).

What about also seeking endorsement from the Care Leaver community?

Evaluating the social justice impact of the Find and Connect Program

What has been the social justice impact of the Find and Connect Program? What kind of archival justice has been achieved? A 2014 evaluation report shows the “considerable progress” which the Find and Connect Services have made towards meeting the needs of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants (Australian Healthcare Associates 2014). But does this mean that the program is delivering social justice outcomes?

Barbara Klugman (2010), in a case study brief for the Center for Evaluation Innovation, discusses a value based approach to evaluating social justice advocacy. In that report she defines social justice advocacy as:

work[ing] for structural and enduring changes that increase the power of those who are most disadvantaged politically, economically and socially. It tackles the root and avoidable causes of inequities for those who are systematically and institutionally disadvantaged by their race, ethnicity, economic status, nationality, gender, gender expression, age, sexual orientation, or religion. (Klugman 2010, 3)

By this definition the Find and Connect Program is an example of social justice advocacy as it is working to promote and enact the rights of Care Leavers in records and recordkeeping processes, a structural cause of inequities.

Klugman identifies “three broad and interconnected values” to guide evaluations of social justice advocacy namely:

1. Resources should be distributed so that everyone can live a decent life
2. Human beings all have equal human rights, and should be recognized in all of their diversity

3. All people should be represented and be able to advocate on their own behalf. (Klugman 2010, 3)

In short she argues for setting and evaluating advocacy goals in terms of “whether they increase marginalized groups’ access to resources, social recognition and participation”. Mapping the Find and Connect Program to these social justice values is an illuminating exercise. Table 1 shows how activities have addressed and/or incorporated these values, suggesting that overall the Program may be on the right track for enabling social justice outcomes for the Care Leaver community.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

A promising start but to what extent do the reforms meet the archival and recordkeeping needs of the Care Leaver community? Are barriers to access, social recognition and participation removed or do traditional attitudes and practices continue to dominate?

The above mentioned 2014 evaluation report of the Find and Connect Program highlighted some of the ongoing challenges, with records access continuing to be a major area of concern (Australian Healthcare Associates 2014). Delays in obtaining records, complicated search processes, varied application processes, variable outcomes and legislative barriers were all identified as issues which impacted on the ability of the support services to meet the needs and expectations of the Care Leavers using their services. While this evaluation predates the release of the Access Principles and Guidelines discussed above, it does seem to emphasize their aspirational nature, rather than being a codification of existing practices. This suggests that the improvements to services brought about through the Find and Connect Program fall short of the archival justice that Care Leavers are ultimately advocating in having their rights to childhood records recognized and represented in archival and recordkeeping frameworks, processes and systems (Golding 2015b). For example in gaining access to records, Care Leavers are increasingly concerned at the one-sided story that they tell, and in so doing, how they can contribute to re-traumatization and on-going marginalization (Selakovic 2010; Recordkeeping Innovation 2015). Concerns are being raised about the capacities of archival systems to allow for the righting of the record by telling another side of their story, not just as an annotation, but as an integral part of the record. Questions are also being raised by Care Leavers about having a say over future access to their files, including a right to be forgotten (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2016).

However where they have had an impact is in mobilizing sections of the archival and recordkeeping community to be part of the campaign for social justice. Through the advocacy and activism of Care Leaver and other communities facing identity, memory and accountability crises a growing awareness of the systemic failings of existing archival access systems is prompting calls for their radical transformation. Leading archival scholars (Cook 2013; Gilliland and McKemmish 2014a, 2014b) are calling for interventions to transform archival and recordkeeping systems so that they

represent, manage, and respect multiple rights in records. Without such a transformation, these systems reinforce the power and privilege inherent in “dominant, gendered and age bound notions of single provenance, agency and authority that govern so much of records creation and also archival practice” (Gilliland 2015).

While the Find and Connect Program has opened up access to records for the Care Leaver community, it also can be used to point to the further actions that need to be undertaken by the archival and recordkeeping community in order to meet social justice objectives. Klugman’s framework can be used for this critique as illustrated in Table 2.

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

To address these needs, archival and recordkeeping scholars and practitioners have joined forces with community advocates to form the *Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Initiative* ⁶. The Initiative convened a National Summit in May 2017 bringing together a wide range of community, organisational, government and professional perspectives to address the ‘systemic and enduring’ failings of recordkeeping and archiving systems for those who experience childhood out-of-home care. At the end of two days of facilitated discussions, participants resolved to advocate for and develop a unified, collaborative and strategic plan aimed at transforming recordkeeping and archiving infrastructure so that rather than being the passive ‘subject’ of organisational records, children, young people and their adult selves have voice, agency and autonomy in their records and in recordkeeping processes (Evans 2017).

Conclusion

However adept it has been in addressing some of the systemic failings, the Find and Connect Program's ongoing effectiveness is dependent on a broader, active community that includes Care Leavers, record holders, those providing access and support services, advocates, researchers, past providers and government as equal partners. One of the Program’s key impacts has been to foster this community of participation and to embolden the archival and recordkeeping professional and disciplinary community to take on a leadership role. After years of campaigning for archival justice by Care Leavers, the profession is now starting to see things differently. In shifting from responding to government recommendations towards working WITH and FOR Care Leavers, ‘their’ campaign can now become ‘our’ campaign. We can join together in

re-imagining recordkeeping and archival systems in support of responsive and accountable child-centred out-of-home care and as enablers of historical justice and reconciliation ... [and] re-position[ing] recordkeeping and archiving, not as bureaucratic overheads, but as drivers of high-quality, efficient, and effective person-centred child protection and out-of-home care services. (Evans, McKemmish, and Wilson 2016)

Understanding “the role that records play in people’s lives” and with that knowledge being prepared to fight against archival and recordkeeping injustices is revitalizing for the profession and discipline in the 21st century. If not for this then it is just much ado about boxing and shelving or curating of bright and shiny objects for information elites. The campaigning for reforming of archival frameworks, processes and systems for recognizing and respecting multiple rights in records is now part of the Care Leaver campaign for archival and social justice.

Being asked to write this chapter and address the question of evaluating the impacts of archival and recordkeeping interventions in the Care Leaver campaign for social justice has enhanced our understanding of what has been done to date and what still needs to be done. Applying a simple evaluation framework like Klugman’s in a critical and reflective manner is one way in which more nuanced understanding of how archival actions can work towards and against the social justice needs of marginalized communities. We feel that we have much more to gain than lose in campaigning for archival and recordkeeping frameworks, processes and systems to be re-designed around multiple rights in records.

Coda

With the handing down of the RCIRCSA final report on the 15 December 2017, Australian governments and other organizations began responding to its recommendations. The Royal Commission emphatically linked good recordkeeping to child safety and wellbeing and developed a set of recordkeeping principles to promote institutional best practice. This includes recognising ‘to the fullest extent’ rights to access and amend records (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, 8:10). A national Redress Scheme for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse has also been established from 1 July 2018 in response to RCIRCSA recommendations. The RCIRCSA emphasised the need for the Redress Scheme to be survivor centred, and as with the Find and Connect Program and the RCIRCSA itself, work with survivor advocacy communities in all aspects of its design. It is therefore disappointing to write that that has not been the case with survivors now trying to make sense of a Redress bureaucracy that puts institutional needs ahead of their own. It is a reminder that gains in achieving social justice can all too easily be lost. We hope that archival responses to the RCIRCSA recommendations do not make the same mistake and ensure that they work with the Care Leaver community to continue to progress their quest for archival justice.

Endnotes

¹ Throughout this chapter, we have generally chosen to use the term Care Leavers, rather than Forgotten Australians. Some people reject the term ‘Forgotten Australians’ for its “connotations of perpetual passive victimhood” (Golding 2015a). We have used capital letters to “signal the ironic connotations” of the word Care (Wilson and Golding 2016). We capitalise the word Home when referring to orphanages and other institutions, to mark the contrast between these institutions and

‘normal’ family homes. The authors provide this explanation to minimise offence to anyone who favours one term over another, and to draw the reader’s attention to the problematic nature of terminology when writing about the institutionalisation of children.

² Constitutionally child welfare policy in Australia is a matter for each State and Territory and, over time, each jurisdiction has developed a hybrid mix of programs run by government, churches, charities, even some private individuals and more recently commercial providers. It has been described as a ‘history of failures to meet a fundamental social obligation, namely protecting children and young people from abuse and exploitation’ with a lack of effective coordination and chronic lack of resources (Bessant and Watts 2016). The legislative hotchpotch is reflected in a fractured and fragmented records landscape.

³ The records of the institutional Care of children are dispersed across a range of organisations in Australia. Record holders can be government departments responsible for the child and family welfare function, non-government organisations with a legacy of running children’s institutions in the past (and sometimes these organisations are also still involved in providing out-of-home Care on behalf of state governments), churches and charities that have inherited the records of institutions run by religious orders, as well as cultural institutions such as state libraries, government archives and collecting archives.

⁴ For a list of these resources which provided a starting point for the Find & Connect web resource, see ‘Key Resources’, in <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/about/acknowledgement/>.

⁵ See <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/>

⁶ See <https://rights-records.it.monash.edu/>

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