

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 11

Parents Separated from their Children by Forced Adoption or Removal

Between the 1910s and 1970s, up to one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their parents as a result of government policies. These practices were based on the mistaken assumption that the children would have better lives if they were assimilated into white society. These children are known as the Stolen Generations and all will be eligible for aged care by 2023. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities were affected. This has had an ongoing impact on the children, their parents and families and subsequent generations.

For the children, forced removal broke the ties with Aboriginal culture, traditions, language and the connections

to land and family, causing great grief and trauma. Many experienced neglect, abuse, a lack of positive family role models and low levels of education. This in turn contributed to poor employment prospects, relationship issues, depression, mental illness and substance abuse. Many of their parents and family members never recovered from the grief of losing their children. Many never had the opportunity to make maternal and paternal connections with their children.

In the 1950s until the mid-1970s, young, often teenage, unmarried girls and women were also separated from their newborn babies through forced adoptions. It is estimated there were around 150,000 forced adoptions in this period. At that time,

there were no government benefits for single parents and little access to contraception and abortion. Many young pregnant women were sent away by their families to regional or interstate institutions and hospitals to have their children. It was common for them to be prevented from seeing their baby, knowing the baby's gender or giving the child a name. Many mothers were drugged, coerced and bullied into giving their children up and not told of their legal right to change their decision.

Families often covered up these pregnancies or abandoned the young women due to the perceived shame of the community.

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The women lived with secrecy and silence; many not telling their stories until much later in life or ever. They experienced ongoing loss, grief and trauma. While both some of the mothers and their adopted children have sought reunion, both parties have the power to veto reunions. There is no guarantee that reunions will go well and unsuccessful attempts at reunion can re-ignite the trauma. These women are now entering the aged care system.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a national apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008. Prime Minister, Julia Gillard made a national apology to the women who were forced or coerced into placing their babies up for adoption in 2013.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Be aware that events like birthdays, Christmas, Fathers' and Mothers' Days and questions about family background and connections can re-trigger underlying trauma and grief.
- Providers may need to deal with trust issues with government, health, welfare, charitable and religious agencies and their staff.
- Collective healing is enhanced through creating opportunities that bring people with similar experiences together in safe spaces.

For further information,
see **Sheet 17: Resources**
– **Resource Nos. 4, 7, 10, 12,**
20, 27, 32