

Submission
No 52

INQUIRY INTO REPARATIONS FOR THE STOLEN GENERATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project

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No. 3, Inquiry into reparations for the Stolen
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Dedication

This paper acknowledges all the women who passed through the Parramatta Girls Home and pays tribute to Christina Green¹ a recently deceased Parragirl and member of the Stolen Generations. Her life-long path of healing demonstrated values of courage, persistence, compassion and understanding that she brought to all she encountered. She lives on in our memories as an inspiration, guide and mentor.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into Reparations for Stolen Generations in NSW.

The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct (PFFP) Memory Project in Parramatta, NSW aims to raise public awareness about the history, heritage and legacy of the historic site of the Parramatta Girls Home. As the first site of forced removal of children commencing in 1826 around 30,000 children passed through these institutions where intergenerational legacies of Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians entwine².

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RC) is currently taking evidence from adult men and women who experienced child sexual abuse while in state sanctioned institutionalised care. Women from Parramatta Girls Home in Royal Commission Case Study no. 7³ have as their statement of purpose and intent 'Never Again' to guide the development of Australia's first Site of Conscience that may herald a new awareness of child protection practices for present and future generations.

'Parragirl's is a support network for former occupants of the Parramatta Girls Home whose aim is to preserve the site so their collective stories of criminalisation, incarceration and punishment as 'offenders' can be told in situ. In terms of reparation

¹ Green, C, (2014), *The Life of Riley*, biography, Sydney, NSW

² Djuric, B, (2011), *Abandon All Hope: a history of Parramatta Girls Industrial School*, Perth: Chargan My Book Publisher Pty Ltd.

³ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, (2014), *Child Sexual Abuse at the Parramatta Training School for Girls and the Institution for Girls in Hay*, (Report of Case Study No. 7), Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

paragraph 3 of the Bringing Them Home report⁴ PFFP Memory Project activities encompass acknowledgment of women's personal experiences of institutionalisation coupled with the aim to contribute to public awareness through educational strategies to guarantee against repetition.

Measures of restitution at social, communal and personal levels include memorialisation projects, publication, arts based projects and participation in group events and commemorations.

Rehabilitation is viewed as a shared and collaborative endeavour that recognises personal harms associated with structural issues arising from social policy coupled with government responsibility. A commitment to restorative measures would ensure adequate funding for institution-specific services to address local and particular needs.

The importance of local and particular needs is highlighted in Submission no. 31⁵ from the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), page 9 whose concerns parallel Parragirl's experience when seeking access to counselling services. The men want KBHAC-centred and organised counselling placed within KBHAC and Parragirls similarly want counselling to be available within the Parragirls site. KBHAC Submission 31 also confirms and highlights the importance of group healing events that can be an adjunct to individual therapy or constitute the primary healing strategy. However models of collective healing are not well established and issues of cultural safety, effectiveness and evaluation crucial to positive outcomes. The PFFP Memory Project seeks to address this gap.

Parragirls is a unique project operating within a niche area to address complex trauma arising from past government policy. Its strengths-based foundation is operationalised through participatory and collaborative approaches where Parragirls may occupy dual roles as professionals and participants. Parragirls include Indigenous and non-Indigenous women who are categorised, often by external agencies for funding purposes, into Stolen Generation, children who were forcibly removed from their families due to past government policies or Forgotten Australian groups. In PFFP Memory Projects Parragirls are seen to be one group with similar shared experiences of institutionalisation rather than discrete racial groups.

There is an urgent need for resources to develop innovative healing programs that utilise broad based principles that can be modified and adapted to local circumstance. Similarly there is a need to develop programs that extend the focus

⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997), *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia.

⁵ Kinchela Boys' Home Aboriginal Corporation, Submission to the Inquiry into Reparations for the Stolen Generations in New South Wales, No. 31, 20 October, 2015.
<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/Parliament/committee.nsf/0/9E9296E0C11EF48ECA257EEA007E85B2>

from individual de-contextualised therapy and widen the inquiry to incorporate cultural, societal and historical influences that impact individuals.

The State of NSW holds an important place in Australian colonial history as a site of early first contact and Parramatta a very early settlement. Parramatta is the first site of incarceration of women in the colony, and the first forced removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children to the Parramatta Native Institution (1814)⁶ and non-Aboriginal children alike.

Parramatta Female Factory Precinct is a place of social, historical and cultural significance that could also be a site of renewal through expansion of its current educational activities and open days for the public as well as school groups. It is a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience whose initiatives aim to 'activate the power of places of memory to engage the public in connecting past and present in order to envision and shape a more just and humane future'.⁷

Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project is a social history and contemporary art project centred on the historic institutions of the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct connecting past to present by engaging those who once resided in these institutions to determine for themselves how their experiences are remembered, documented and interpreted.

The project's strength is its aim to interweave accounts of the past that include experiences of trauma with stories of resistance and endurance and hopes for the future. Through raising awareness of the values of social inclusion, sense of belonging and identity and the importance of living with compassion and care a forward focused social justice human rights approach is maintained.

The problem of articulating past abuse is not limited to formal therapy or counselling settings but extends to the person's family and community. The 2007 play 'Parramatta Girls' is an example of the juncture between creative arts and therapeutic activity. The play was written using composite characters from the testimony of former residents of Parramatta Girls Home and subsequently taken up in Higher School Certificate Drama studies. Parragirls, their families and others with lived experience of institutionalisation as audience can choose the level and detail of

⁶ *A history of Aboriginal Sydney*, University of Sydney, 2010-2013, <http://www.historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/about>.

⁷ International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2016, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/members/parramatta-female-factory-precinct-project/>

personal or collective disclosure to significant others.

Case studies, such as the Parrgirls Play are increasingly used in higher education within critical pedagogical and indigenous research methodologies as a component of de-colonising practice.⁸

The PFFP Memory Project is developing new ways for stories to be told. Creating a distance between past experience and the person through expressive arts provides a safe reflective space where therapeutic change can occur. A PFFP Memory project is for example currently working with the Parragirls on 'Living Traces', a collaboration with artists that provides a reflective space for women to document their experiences through creative writing, visual and performance arts and poetry.

Norman Denzin, one of the world's foremost authorities on qualitative research writes 'the current historical moment requires morally informed performance and arts-based disciplines that will help indigenous and nonindigenous peoples recover meaning in the face of senseless, brutal violence..'.⁹ He sees participatory approaches as part of a democratic practice required for the new century.

Notable changes have occurred in the way trauma, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing is conceptualised and operationalised in NSW. Services are moving towards use of Participatory Action Research for program evaluation (FAHCSIA)¹⁰, trauma informed services (ASCA)¹¹, recovery-oriented mental health services (NSW Mental Health Commission)¹² and collective healing (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation)¹³.

⁸ Grande, S, 2008, 'Red Pedagogy: the Un-Methodology', in Denzin, N, Lincoln Y, Tuhiwai Smith, L, eds. *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc, Chpt 12, pp. 233 – 254.

⁹ Denzin N & Lincoln, Y, 2008 in Denzin, N, Lincoln Y, Tuhiwai Smith, L, eds. *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc, p. 13.

¹⁰ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA), (2012), '*Research In Action: A Guide to Best Practice in Participatory Action Research*', Commonwealth of Australia.

¹¹ Kezelman, C., & Stavropoulos, P. (2012). *"The last frontier": Practice guidelines for treatment of complex trauma and trauma-informed care and service delivery*. Kirribilli, NSW: Adults Surviving Child Abuse.

¹² NSW Mental Health Commission (2014), '*Living well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW*'. Sydney, NSW Mental Health Commission.

¹³ Blignault, I, Jackson Pulver, L, Fitzpatrick, S, Arkles, R, Williams, M, Haswell, M & Grand Ortega, M (2014), *A resource for collective healing for members of the Stolen Generations: planning, implementing and evaluating effective local responses*, Canberra: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation.

The PFFP Memory Project's arts-based projects are at the forefront of innovative practice through linking art and therapy in community based rather than clinical settings. The work extends boundaries further through incorporating history and educational strategies using peer educators. By extending activities into the community project activities align with recovery models in mental health that focus on creating hope and empowerment, trauma-informed care with attention to safety and collective forms of healing through group rather than individual counselling / therapy. This also has significant value as a model for other sites.

Funding for counselling and mentoring services to Parragirls within a collective and community based healing model would provide a form of cultural safety as women engage in documenting their stories, peer education in groups and as ambassadors at public events.

Funding for project evaluation, documentation and dissemination of findings would also contribute knowledge to the wider field of practice.

Recommendation:

Funding allocated to site- specific survivor groups such as Parragirls to access support workers /therapists whose skills and experience align with project aims and values.

'Failure to acknowledge the reality of trauma and abuse in the lives of children and the long-term impact on the lives of adults is considered to be one of the most significant clinical and moral deficits of current mental health approaches, with only the most inadequate forms of service delivery available'

- Russell Meares (in Kezelman & Stavropoulos)¹⁴

¹⁴ Kezelman, C., & Stavropoulos, P. (2012). *"The last frontier": Practice guidelines for treatment of complex trauma and trauma-informed care and service delivery*. Kirribilli, NSW: Adults Surviving Child Abuse.

Thank you for reading this paper and for the opportunity to make this submission. If you want further information or discussion please contact us.

Kind regards,

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Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project - Parragirls

W: www.pffpmemoryproject.org

www.parragirls.org.au

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/PFFPMemoryProject>