



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

Family History Unit

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Records about adoption, fostering and institutions

Governments, churches and welfare bodies removed Indigenous children from their families from the first days of British colonisation. These children may have been adopted, fostered out to white families or brought up in institutions. Many experienced all of these - first removed to an institution, placed out in a foster home, or as a domestic servant/labourer, and later adopted.

The institutions included Homes for children from all backgrounds and institutions exclusively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Some were separated into dormitories on missions (run by religious groups) or stations/reserves (run by governments).

Why were Indigenous children sent to both types of institutions?

Across Australia, from colonisation until the 1970s governments removed Aboriginal children from their families. From the 1950s onwards many followed 'assimilation' policies to separate children from their Indigenous families and raise them to become white Australians.

- Some Indigenous children were removed under Aboriginal protection and welfare laws and sent to segregated Indigenous institutions.
- Indigenous children with lighter skin were separated and adopted, fostered or institutionalised under 'mainstream' child welfare legislation and sent to 'mainstream' institutions.
- Many children were passed between these two systems and spent time in both types of institutions.

During the 1970s Aboriginal protection and welfare legislation began to be repealed and the majority of segregated institutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were closed down. However some continued to operate until the 1980s-1990s. Indigenous children continued to be adopted, fostered or institutionalised under 'mainstream' child welfare law.

The key point for family history research is that there were separate bureaucracies (different government departments) with different ways of keeping records about children in care.

Access to records is limited to protect privacy

Records about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care are very personal and subject to strict access conditions to protect their privacy. This includes access to historical records and access to name indexes. Generally you can access records about yourself or very close relatives depending on the age of the records and your relationship to the person.

All state and territories have special teams that assist people to access their records.



Contact information

Where to get help has comprehensive contact information for accessing records in each state and territory.

Stolen Generations

Since the publication of the Bringing Them Home Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (April 1997) Australian governments have created special teams to assist people to apply for access to their records and special indexes that make these records easier to find.

Link-Up services have been established in most states and territories to assist members of the Stolen Generations. See: Stolen Generations for more information.

Contact information

Link-Up services has comprehensive contact information for Link-Ups in each state and territory.

Forgotten Australians

In 2004 the report of the Senate inquiry into children in institutional care was published. This report was titled, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*.

The Find & Connect web resource – www.findandconnect.gov.au was developed to provide information about children's homes across Australia, including homes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

The site provides short histories of each institution and information about what types of records have survived about the children who lived there, where the records are held and how to apply for access to them. Find & Connect was set up to help people who were in out-of-home 'care' as children to learn more about their histories and to locate and access their personal records.

On this site you can:

- find historical information about government and non-government institutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- trace the history of institutions that started missions and were taken over by governments and later came under Aboriginal community control
- trace the name changes of institutions over time
- search for information about institutions in different ways – who ran them, where they were located, when they opened and closed
- read information about and view images of children's homes

- get help to find records about your childhood in 'care'
- view an interactive timeline of child welfare in Australia and find brief histories of child welfare in each state and territory
- find information about accessing records and freedom of information/privacy legislation in each jurisdiction
- connect with support services in your state/territory.

No personal information or private records are shown on the Find & Connect website.

To locate Find & Connect resources specifically about Aboriginal people, search the site using the term 'Aboriginal'. You can then limit the results by state or time period.

<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/browse/>

For more information about the records and accessing them, see Find & Connect – Information about records. <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/information-about-records/>

For help with searching the Find & Connect website download the Induction Pack

<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/resources/find-connect-web-resource-induction-pack/>