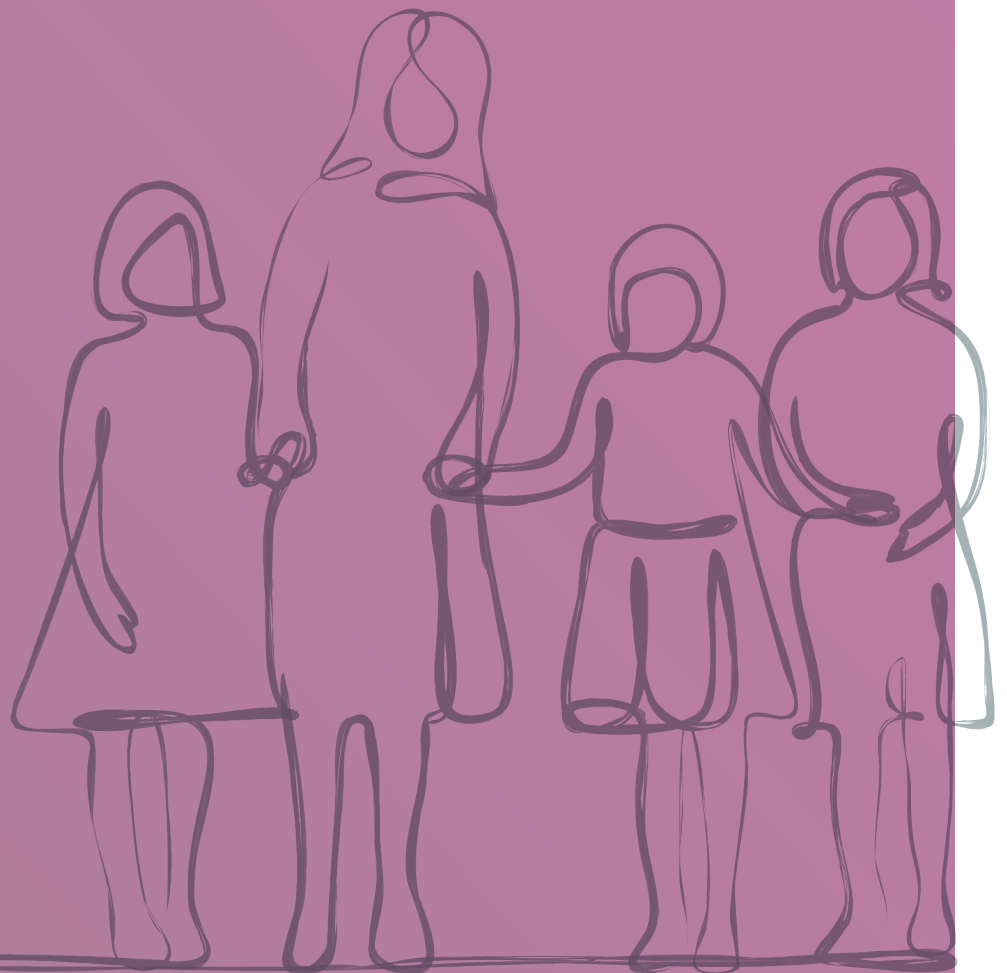


RESEARCH  
STUDY

# Remembering, honouring and acknowledging former residents of Good Shepherd Homes:

AN ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH STUDY

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**Suellen Murray**  
RMIT University

# Remembering, honouring and acknowledging former residents of Good Shepherd Homes: An Oral History Research Study

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## **CONTENT WARNING**

This research report contains content that may be distressing to some people.

# Remembering, honouring and acknowledging former residents of Good Shepherd Homes:

## An oral history research study

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## Foreword

**I congratulate Professor Suellen Murray and the research reference group for undertaking this portrayal of the voice from the 'other side'. To the women who generously shared their experiences as participants, I say thank you.**

Thousands of young children, teenage girls and women have been cared for by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd since 1863, including during the dark days of the Great Depression and Post World War 11. In response to diverse social needs and government policies, people were accommodated in Good Shepherd institutions for a range of periods, mostly between six months and two years.

We recognise the deficiencies of institutional care where the needs of the individual were subsumed by the apparent needs of the whole. In these post institution days, it is important for us to listen to what it was like to be the recipient of what was previously considered to be adequate care. We are listening. We are finding ways to reach out and honour people's stories.

The Sisters continue to engage directly with former residents, and Good Shepherd's Heritage Engagement program is helping people discover parts of their personal history. Our ongoing work to respond with respect and acknowledgement will be informed by this research.

**Sr Monica Walsh,**  
**Province Leader Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand**  
Sisters of the Good Shepherd

**On behalf of Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) I am pleased to present this oral history research documenting experiences of former residents of Good Shepherd's institutions. We remember, honour and acknowledge all former residents. Funded by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, GSANZ commissioned RMIT University to undertake this research to increase our understanding of the experiences of former residents and to say publicly 'we hear you, we believe you, and we want to learn from you'.**

We hope that heritage practitioners, researchers, advocates and former residents will find this report helpful. Using direct quotations from the participants, the report identifies and synthesises major themes. As an applied social policy research study, the report places the individual experiences of participants within the context of social history but this context should never be interpreted as providing excuses for harm done.

This research is about a past era when large institutions played a significant role in child welfare, a past still very present for the people who live with its impacts. Our history and learning continue to inform our current work of enabling fullness of life for vulnerable women, girls and families, reminding us that our policies and practices must always place people at the centre.

The current era has been called the 'age of regret' because as a society, and as individual organisations, we seek to offer restitution for harms caused by past policies and practices. GSANZ commits to a transitional justice approach that acknowledges and is accountable for past failings and promotes openness and continuous improvement. The acknowledgement of former residents' experiences through apologies, redress, memorials, archive and access services, and documenting stories, is at the heart of this approach.

The official history of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Tahiti, *Pitch Your Tents on Distant Shores* (2006) recognised that the stories of former residents remained largely untold. This current report documents the experiences of 12 former residents and is the next step in our ongoing process to reach out and listen to people who experienced institutional care. However, to fully tell a history requires many different voices and GSANZ recognises and regrets that this research represents only a fraction of the thousands of former resident stories, most of which remain unheard.

The process of analysis of the women's experiences also inevitably creates another voice, and it was important that this research was rigorous, independent and ethical. We are grateful to the researcher, Professor Suellen Murray, from the School of Global, Urban and Social Science at RMIT University, for agreeing to undertake this project. We especially thank her for her integrity, patience and deep commitment to gathering and honouring the accounts of former residents.

The research was advised and supported by an expert reference group, and GSANZ thanks each of the members for their insight and dedication. We particularly thank those who are themselves former residents, Forgotten Australians, or care-leavers, for sharing the learning process with us.

Above all, we are deeply grateful to the research participants, from whom we have learnt so much, for their generosity, courage and trust in sharing their personal stories for the common good.

**Stella Avramopoulos, CEO**

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand  
2020

## Acknowledgements

**I sincerely thank the 12 women with whom I spoke who provided vital information about their experiences in Good Shepherd Homes and their lives since leaving. Without their contributions, this project would not have been possible. While their accounts varied, all were highly affecting. Talking about times in their lives of great vulnerability requires courage and generosity. I acknowledge the women's strength, resilience and kindness in agreeing to participate in the research.**

I also thank the reference group members for their commitment to the research and their insightful contributions to its development and the analysis of findings. Reference group members were: Maureen Cuskelly (care-leaver), Frank Golding (Care Leavers Australasia Network), Lynette Langanke (Open Place), Jenny Glare (MacKillop Family Services), Shurlee Swain (Australian Catholic University), Anne Dalton (Good Shepherd Sister), and Cath Campbell, Fran Jenkins, Kathy Landvogt and Susan Maury (Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ)). I especially thank Maureen, Frank, Lynette, Cath and Fran for assistance with the recruitment of participants. I also acknowledge Phillipa White and Susy Vaughan at Tuart Place (WA) and Jeremy Palmer and Anne Neilsen at Wattle Place (NSW) for their assistance in recruiting participants. Debbie Benjamin and Stella McNerney at GSANZ in Sydney and Perth respectively both provided invaluable support.

Kathy Landvogt had oversight of the project at GSANZ and I thank her for her support throughout the project and her willingness to share insights about the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and GSANZ. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd funded the research commissioned by GSANZ and I acknowledge their commitment to better understanding the experiences of former residents and to exploring ways of responding to them.

**Professor Suellen Murray**

RMIT University  
20 January 2020



## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

A brief biography of each of the 12 women interviewed in this research is presented here. Unless they agreed to have their own name used, pseudonyms have been used to protect their privacy.

### **Alice**

Alice is a 90 year old woman who came to the Good Shepherd Home in Ashfield, New South Wales at 16 years of age and has lived with the support of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd since that time. From a baby she had been in the care of other Catholic institutions and had some contact with her mother until 8 years of age. Alice worked for many years in the Ashfield laundry. She also supported the girls and women in the Home and later in the residential units. Alice now lives in a retirement village. She has retained close friendships with many of the Sisters with whom she lived in the Home.

### **Eleanor**

Eleanor is 64 years old and, from 13 to 18 years of age, lived at the Western Australian Good Shepherd Home in Leederville and then a Good Shepherd hostel. Before that she had been in the care of another Catholic children's home and with extended family due to her father's alcoholism, mother's ill health and her parents' separation. Eleanor went on to further education as an adult, has worked in senior professional positions and raised a foster child.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth, aged 64, migrated with her family from the United Kingdom as a child. From the age of 8 to 19 years she lived at the Good Shepherd Home in Abbotsford and then Marian Hall hostel in Albert Park, Victoria. Her entry into care came about due to family violence, her father's drinking and her mother leaving the family. Elizabeth did well in school but she believes she was not given the opportunities to make the most of her potential. She has had a career as a senior administrator, raised her child as a single parent and has had the care of a number of foster children. She has experienced serious ill health in recent years.

### **Faye**

Faye is an 80 year old woman who came to the Good Shepherd Home in Abbotsford, Victoria as an 11 year old where she remained for seven years. She had experienced sexual abuse by a close family member which precipitated her entry into care. Faye received a poor education in the Home, largely because she spent much of her time working in the convent kitchen. After she left the Good Shepherd Home, Faye worked for many years, married and raised a family of four children. Faye has experienced serious ill health and financial hardship in recent years.

### **Janet**

Janet is 62 years old and was in St Aidan's, the Good Shepherd Home in Bendigo, Victoria as a young child, and then later from 13 to 16 years of age. Earlier in her childhood she was also a resident of another children's home. Her entry to care was precipitated by her mother's ill health and later death. She received a poor education and has undertaken further study to maintain a career in social care. She married and had two children. Her life now is characterised by financial hardship and in recent years she has experienced serious ill health.

### **Jenny**

Jenny is a 64 year old woman who was in the Good Shepherd Home in Abbotsford, Victoria from the age of 12 to 17 years. Her family struggled financially and some of the children in her family were placed in care for periods of time. Jenny believes she received a poor education in Abbotsford and that her education did not prepare her well for her working life. She married and raised a family. Jenny has retained friendships with other women with whom she was in the Home.

### **Joan**

Joan is 79 years old and was in care from 8 years of age in a Catholic children's home in rural New South Wales. At 14 she came to the Good Shepherd Home in Ashfield where she resided until 23 years of age. Her entry to care came about when her mother left the family and her father was unable to care for the children. Joan worked for many years and was married. She retained a close relationship with her two sisters with whom she was in care. Joan now experiences financial hardship and in recent years has experienced serious ill health.

### **Julia**

Julia, aged 62 and the child of European migrants, was in care at the Good Shepherd Home in Ashfield, New South Wales where she resided from 14 to 16 years of age as a result of her father determining she was 'uncontrollable'. As a teenager, Julia enjoyed walking in the neighbourhood and she believes her father objected strongly to this behaviour. Upon leaving Ashfield, she commenced working and 'left the Home behind'. Julia married and raised two children. She believes she received a poor education in the Home and is particularly proud of her children's academic achievements.

### **Margaret**

Margaret, 66 years old, is a former resident of the Good Shepherd Home in Leederville, Western Australia from the ages of 13 to 16 years. Her mother was a 'severe alcoholic' and Margaret was cared for by extended family before her entry to care. During her time in the Home she spent much time working in the laundry. After leaving care, she worked in a wide range of jobs, married and raised five children. Margaret has retained friendships with other women with whom she was in the Home. She has experienced serious ill health in recent years.

### **Pamela**

Pamela is a 68 year old woman who came into care due to the death of her parents. While she was in the care of extended family for a period of time, at 12 years of age she came to St Aidan's, the Good Shepherd Home in Bendigo, Victoria. Pamela was an only child and feels the loss of her family keenly. After leaving the Home at 19, she worked in a wide range of jobs, married and raised three children. Pamela now experiences financial hardship.

### **Sophie**

Sophie, aged 57 years and the child of European migrants, came to a Good Shepherd hostel in Sydney, New South Wales from a state government facility where she had been placed due to the death of her mother. Sophie was at the hostel for three years from 16 years of age where she went to work and then married and raised four children. She describes her experiences with Good Shepherd as very positive and supportive. Sophie is particularly proud of her children's achievements.

### **Valerie**

Valerie is 66 years old and the child of European migrants who came to Australia as Displaced Persons after World War II. She was in care for much of her childhood, coming to the Good Shepherd Home in Leederville, Western Australia when she was 12 years old. She described her father as a 'violent alcoholic' and her mother experienced mental ill health. While at Leederville, Valerie experienced periods of mental ill health. She left the Home at 15 and went on to work, marry and raise four children. Valerie's life now is characterised by financial hardship and she has experienced serious ill health in recent years.

## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research commissioned by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) that analysed first hand accounts of the experiences of people who lived in Good Shepherd residential institutions in an effort to better respond to former residents of Homes and hostels. The research sought to answer two research questions, as determined by GSANZ:

- What were the experiences of former residents in Good Shepherd institutions?
- How can these experiences inform how former care providers acknowledge and respond to former residents?

GSANZ had not previously sought the accounts of their former residents and so this research was an opportunity for their voices to be heard in the context of the wider project of acknowledgement. While of particular interest to GSANZ, it is expected that the findings will also be of interest to other former residential care providers and their heritage practitioners, historians, social policy, social work and related researchers, and former residents themselves.

### **Research design and participants**

Using a qualitative oral history methodology, this applied social research project collected accounts of former residents' experiences before, during and after their time residing in Good Shepherd institutions. The analysis of their experiences then informed suggestions to GSANZ about future social policy and service delivery.

The research involved a literature review, site visits and in-depth oral history interviews with 12 women who spent time as children and women in Good Shepherd institutions during the period from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s. The research was overseen by a reference group comprised of a former resident of a Good Shepherd Home, staff from GSANZ, a Good Shepherd Sister, a senior academic historian, the social work manager of another Catholic heritage service, a member of a care-leaver advocacy organisation and a staff member from a Victorian care-leaver support service. The reference group was involved in the development of the project and provided expert guidance in matters such as the history of Victorian child welfare and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the recruitment of research participants and the presentation of the research findings.

The 12 research participants were restricted to a group who came to institutions as children and young women entering care. Consequently, the research was unable to comprehensively draw out the possible range of experiences and forms of recognition for the wider population of boys, girls and women who had resided at Good Shepherd institutions. Thus it is important to acknowledge that this research engaged with a small sample of the lived - and living - experiences of former residents and many voices have not been heard. No Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women participated in the research. As well, it must be noted that this may be a particular group of women who shared some common characteristics that lent themselves to particular life outcomes and reflected high levels of resilience – all knew why they came into care, most had ongoing family contact while in care, and many developed a strong caring relationship with a Sister or other religious, for some continuing over many years after leaving the Home.

At the time of interview, the majority of the women who participated in the research were aged in their sixties with the average length of time of five years in Good Shepherd care (excluding the longest period of 74 years). The most common ages spent in care among the group were 13 to 16 years of age. The women lived in four institutional settings in Melbourne (Abbotsford), Bendigo (St Aidan's), Perth (Leederville) and Sydney (Ashfield). Three women spent some time in Good Shepherd hostels, with the youngest woman interviewed only living at a Good Shepherd hostel.

### **What were the experiences of former residents in Good Shepherd institutions?**

Poverty, parental ill health, violence and family break-down were among the reasons why the research participants had been institutionalised, characteristic of all children who entered care in this period. In addition, and highlighting the gendered nature of welfare responses, there was some evidence that concerns about 'moral danger' also influenced decisions about their institutionalisation.

All but one of the women lived in a large institutional Good Shepherd setting surrounded by high walls and with little contact with the outside world. This severe environment, which included strict daily routines and a lack of freedom of movement, were key themes of the interviews. Institutional work was a major part of the children and women's lives, and children did the work of adults, ensuring the financial sustainability of the Homes. This work typically occurred at the cost of their education, which was to have long term implications for employment and financial security and, for some, physical ill health, as they aged. While some women described physical punishment and forms of emotional abuse that have had long lasting effects consistent with other reports of experiences in Good Shepherd Homes, others felt cared for and supported, and some women described contact over long periods of time.

This capacity to acknowledge the support that they received may in part be because of the time of life at which the women were interviewed. Their interviews were highly reflective, drawing out their memories, and their analysis of these memories, from the perspective of their lives at late middle to older age.

### **How can these experiences inform how former care providers acknowledge and respond to former residents?**

GSANZ's stated purpose is to 'enable fullness of life for women, girls and families experiencing disadvantage'. Moreover, GSANZ's values of 'audacity, zeal, justice, the value of each person and reconciliation' guide their work and the organisation has a stated commitment to wider system change (GSANZ, 2019d). These principles can be applied to responses to former residents of Good Shepherd institutions.

Framing the suggested ways of further acknowledging and responding to former residents are three key principles:

- All initiatives will require GSANZ to continue to collaborate with former residents. Co-design is now considered a good practice model in developing new programs across a range of client groups.
- All these developmental activities need to be conducted in ways that properly pay attention to the breadth of former residents' experiences and ensuring such engagement is embedded in trauma informed practice.
- There is urgency to this work due to the ageing population of former residents and the possibility of failing health. Further work must be done without delay.

While most of the women involved in the research had engaged with acknowledgements of their time in care in some form, only half had been involved directly with GSANZ in doing so, and most only minimally. This may be simply because they do not know what GSANZ has on offer, and some are only recent developments. For example, the supported access to records service has only been established since 2017. The findings of this research suggest that GSANZ takes the following actions to rectify this situation of lack of engagement and to ensure former residents are acknowledged:

- Facilitate former residents' awareness of GSANZ's initiatives by their increased promotion on the GSANZ website and in other forums.
- Provide adequate financial support to former residents to ensure economic security and access to health services (including dental, psychological, medical and other support).
- Explore and establish alternative financial redress initiatives, especially as the National Redress Scheme responding to institutional child sexual abuse is unlikely to fully meet the needs of former residents of Good Shepherd Homes.
- Review GSANZ processes for handling allegations of abuse or reports of other forms of harm in care to ensure they are best practice.
- Erect memorials at each of the Good Shepherd sites and conduct ceremonies that sensitively and respectfully pay accord to those who lived there.
- Establish an oral history collection, ensuring the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander accounts through targeted recruitment.
- Develop a heritage museum curated by former residents.

- Revise Good Shepherd's history in the light of former resident-centred perspectives. For example, the text on the GSANZ website could be rewritten to better reflect the perspectives of former residents and include acknowledgement of these contested histories.
- Further resource GSANZ's Heritage Engagement program to ensure adequate and timely support for accessing records and assisting family reunification.
- Consult with former residents about the need for, and form of, GSANZ-facilitated reunions, and act on this advice.
- Ensure that all GSANZ staff are well equipped to work with former residents, drawing on the specialist expertise of advocates in professional development.
- Advocate for best practice responses to former residents, social policy reform and improved resourcing in collaboration with care-leavers, care-leaver advocates, government, former care providers and other community agencies.
- Remain open to the possibility of other means of acknowledgement and consider these as they arise.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### BACKGROUND

Commencing in the 1860s, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd ran institutions for women and children across Australia until the mid-1980s. Unlike other institutions that provided residential care for children, Good Shepherd Homes also provided care to women, including those who had remained there since childhood, and others who came as adults and remained for varying amounts of time, including into old age. It was intended that access to care was determined by need rather than age. Most of the children were girls and only one institution took (young) boys. The majority of girls entered from around the age of 12.

Good Shepherd has 'played a significant role as a residential welfare provider in Australia' (GSANZ, 2019a). Over more than a century, around 30,000 individuals across 66,000 placements were accommodated in Good Shepherd Homes (Landvogt, 2018: 6-7). Between 1945 and 1974 there were approximately 17,000 admissions to 13 Good Shepherd sites across Australia (Faithfull, 2016). In 1971, not long before the Australian Homes closed, there were 293 girls and young women between the age of 11 and 18 years in all the institutions, and another 59 younger children, including boys. There were a further 430 women aged 21 to 90 years in the care of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (Scott & Co., 1972).

Consistent with the intentions of the French founder of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, St Mary Euphrasia, the Sisters who set up the Australian institutions established communities that were:

dedicated to rescuing delinquent girls and women, and those in moral danger. Later their scope extended to alcoholics and deserving cases that might be tempted because of the pressure of financial hardship (Byrne, 2002: 5-6).

These groups were broadly understood in earlier times as 'fallen women' and others at risk of 'falling'. In practice, by the 1950s, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were a major care provider for children who were wards of the state and those who were placed voluntarily by their family. In addition, young women with custodial sentences as a result of offending were also placed in Good Shepherd Homes. As well, adult women resided at Good Shepherd Homes including those with intellectual disabilities and women who sought refuge during times of crisis, such as circumstances of escaping family violence, mental ill health or recovery from alcoholism, at a time when few other such supports were available. Some women stayed living at Good Shepherd Homes, received care, and became part of the religious community or otherwise continued to contribute to the sustainability of the institution. These various groups of women and girls were categorised by 'class' which then determined their location within the Homes and the activities that they engaged in while resident there.



From the 1860s the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were funded by the individual states to provide residential care for wards of the state and custody of young women who had committed offences. The institutions were also sustained financially by the establishment of industrial laundries, and it is for this that they are most well known in the wider Australian community (Kovesi, 2010: 68). While the Irish Magdalen laundries are now infamous (McAleese, 2013; Office of the Ombudsman, 2017; Smith, 2007), much less is known about the Australian experiences beyond that described in the official Good Shepherd histories and some material informed or produced by former residents (Byrne, 2002; Mollenhauer, 2017; Johnston, 2013; Kovesi, 2010; National Museum of Australia, 2012a). These publications make clear that the laundries' success had depended on the hard labour of residents, including children, and Sisters alike.

According to Kovesi (2010: 204), the Australian institutions followed:

the model of all Good Shepherd establishments in [that they were] set apart from any other surrounding buildings, substantially constructed on a monastic model, and set in peaceful grounds.

Characteristic of the Good Shepherd institutions was that they were built in 'locations of peace and relative isolation' and 'intentional solitude and tranquillity' (Kovesi, 2010: 39, 191). Also typical of Good Shepherd institutions were the high walls that surrounded a cluster of buildings and the Sisters' cloistered self-sufficiency. Describing the Abbotsford convent as 'a site of confinement', Kay (2013: 70) notes that 'walls surrounded the complex, the windows were barred and the buildings did not have direct access to the streets, but opened onto enclosed courtyards'.

Within the high walls, the imposing buildings and other facilities included the convent, dormitories for the various classes of children and women, kitchens and refectories, an industrial laundry, a chapel, school, recreational facilities such as a swimming pool and netball courts, vegetable gardens, orchards and pens for farm animals. The institutional model of care that was in place and its 'system' included the 'strict segregation of each category, or "class"' of children and women through separate locked buildings across the site' (Kovesi, 2010: 40). This model, according to Kovesi (2010: 183), was consistent with 'contemporary secular understandings of deviance and its appropriate management, as well as religious understandings of the importance of providing a safe haven for the world's lost sheep'.

These large institutions that typified Good Shepherd Homes were in existence until the early 1970s, by which time significant changes in child welfare, and within the Catholic Church and Good Shepherd itself, brought about shifts to smaller congregate care and, over time, a focus on the delivery of other services and to wider client groups. Today, the organisation that is now known as Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) provides a range of services such as integrated family services, dedicated family violence support, parenting programs and supported playgroups, education and skills building programs for young people, a youth homelessness service, No Interest Loans (NILS) and financial counselling and coaching. GSANZ also continues to respond to the legacies of Good Shepherd's history as a residential care provider (GSANZ, 2019b).

This project is an aspect of GSANZ's 'continuing journey in our relationship with former residents, providing access to records, creating memorials, giving apologies and redress, and making public the life stories of former residents' (GSANZ, 2019a). As part of this ongoing work, for the first time, GSANZ commissioned an oral history research project to gather and reflect on the first hand accounts of the experiences of people who lived in Good Shepherd institutions, in an effort to better respond to former residents. The research was undertaken to acknowledge former residents, increase understanding of their experiences and inform development of future responses to them. Until this time, Good Shepherd had not actively sought the accounts of their former residents and so it was an opportunity for their voices to be heard in the context of the wider project of acknowledgement. While of particular relevance to GSANZ, it is expected that the findings will also be of interest to other former residential care providers and their heritage practitioners, historians, social policy, social work and related researchers, and former residents themselves.

It was not intended that this research document and present individual life stories but rather analyse accounts and draw out key themes that would assist with GSANZ's future work. Other work by GSANZ is planned that will collect and document detailed accounts of experiences in Good Shepherd institutions. Due to the ageing population of women who have lived in Good Shepherd Homes there is urgency to this research and other related projects to ensure that their findings have the greatest possible impact for the survivors of these institutions and to have preserved records of these Homes from the perspectives of former residents.

### **Terminology**

While I acknowledge concerns about the use of the word 'care' as some who were in care do not believe they experienced care, in this report I use the unqualified term. The report demonstrates that care had a range of different meanings to the women who were interviewed. To differentiate between a female sibling and a nun I use the terms 'sister' and 'Sister' respectively. While acknowledging that the term 'Mother' was also used during the period in which some of the women lived in Good Shepherd Homes, and some of the women interviewed used this term, in this report, the capitalised form of 'Sister' refers to any female religious with whom the women had resided. I differentiate between 'home' (where children had lived with their family) and 'Home' (the Good Shepherd institution where care was undertaken).

During this time, all residents of Good Shepherd Homes, including children and adult women, were known as 'children' (Kovesi, 2010:11). Unless reproduced in a quotation, I only use the term 'children' in its conventional sense. Good Shepherd used the term 'class' to refer to the different categories of children (mainly girls) and women who were resident in their Homes. When used in this sense, I use 'class' rather than class. I only use 'girl' when I am referring to the women during their childhood. As all of the research participants had entered Good Shepherd Homes as children or young women (aged up to and including 16 years of age), sometimes the term 'care-leaver' is used (although one of the women interviewed did not leave Good Shepherd care); alternatively, a woman may be described as a 'former resident' or as a 'research participant'. GSANZ is used to refer to the organisation as it exists today. Good Shepherd and Good Shepherd Homes and hostels refer to the organisation and the settings in which care was undertaken at the time when the women lived there.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The project sought to answer two research questions, as determined by GSANZ:

- What were the experiences of former residents in Good Shepherd institutions?
- How can these experiences inform how former care providers acknowledge and respond to former residents?

As noted, the purpose of the research was to inform GSANZ's responses to former residents of Good Shepherd Homes. Using an oral history methodology, the applied social research project collected accounts of former residents and then analysed their experiences to make suggestions to GSANZ about future social policy and service delivery. This report, while drawing extensively on the experiences of former residents, is contextualised by the histories of child welfare in Australia and Good Shepherd Homes and, to some extent, presents multiple perspectives of institutional life. At times there are clear differences between the ways that former residents experienced their institutionalisation and the intentions, and actions, of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. This approach by which former residents' experiences are contextualised is not intended to minimise or justify what occurred to them but rather to provide evidence of these contested histories.

The researcher, Professor Suellen Murray from RMIT University, worked with a reference group including a former resident of a Good Shepherd Home, staff from GSANZ, a Good Shepherd Sister, a senior academic historian, the social work manager of another Catholic heritage service, a member of a care-leaver advocacy organisation and a staff member from a Victorian care-leaver support service. The reference group was involved in the development of the project and provided expert guidance in matters such as the history of Victorian child welfare and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the recruitment of research participants

and the presentation of the research findings. The research was intentionally informed by the views of a range of stakeholders, via the reference group as well as the literature review and the perspectives of former residents themselves, consistent with an approach known as the 'knowledge diamond' comprising service users' (former residents') experiences, policy perspectives, practitioner wisdom and research evidence (Humphreys & Kertesz, 2012: 31).

Ethics approval was gained from GSANZ and the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee. Considerable attention was given to the method of recruitment and ensuring participants were well supported with the processes in place consistent with trauma informed practice. Recruitment of research participants occurred through three sources: GSANZ services (three participants), networks of reference group members (one participant) and, primarily, care-leaver support services in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales (eight participants). These support services are government-funded and independent of GSANZ.

To ensure that participants were supported a requirement of ethics approval was that they were aware of and were currently supported by, or had been in the past, a support service or other form of professional emotional or psychological assistance (such as a private psychologist or counsellor). While this limited the scope of participation, such trauma informed practice was a means of ensuring reliable access to support and minimising risks to mental health and wellbeing of the participants. Other means of ensuring the participants were well supported included routinely providing information about local support services, informing them that they could have a support person attend the interview with them, checking on their welfare over the course of the interview and offering breaks, and contacting them in the days immediately after the interview to confirm they were well and reiterating the availability of relevant support services.

The research was undertaken using a qualitative approach and comprised a literature review, site visits and in-depth oral history interviews with 12 former residents of four Good Shepherd Homes located at Abbotsford, Bendigo, Ashfield and Leederville and three Good Shepherd hostels in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, in three Australian states (Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia). Oral history interviews are a well-established research method that are used in such circumstances (Thompson, 1988; see also, Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Maynes et al., 2008).

In preparing to undertake their interviews, three of the 12 women clearly articulated that they 'really did not have much to tell'. By this, they revealed, they were not harmed in care. In the wake of a number of public inquiries, apologies and the ongoing work of advocacy groups, having been abused has become a common public narrative about care and, in turn, has opened up opportunities to speak about such abuse. That some of the women 'really did not have much to tell', of course, was not to be, as each had a unique and compelling story to tell about a range of matters concerned with their experiences before, during and after their time in Good Shepherd Homes. This highlights one of the ways in which the nature of memory plays out, that is, in this instance, in relation to the experiences of abuse. As historian John Murphy (2015: 299) has noted, memory is not 'an unchanging record' but rather 'a process of re-shaping stories in the work of producing a coherent self'. This is not to suggest that research participants 'make things up' or that memory is 'intrinsically unreliable' but rather that 'remembering ... is a process of making sense' (Murphy, 2015: 300), especially as we age and reflect upon our lives, as is evident in this research.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one and face-to-face using semi-structured questioning. Each interview was conducted for at least one hour and up to 2.5 hours. The average length of time was 1.5 hours. The interviews were undertaken in a conversational, free-flowing style with some key questions asked and occasional prompts to further elicit information around particular themes as they arose. This approach was to allow participants to recount their experiences in ways that made sense to them rather than imposing a particular conceptual framework or chronology. Key themes were:

- Their experiences of being in Good Shepherd institutions
- Their life events leading to being in Good Shepherd institutions
- How their life has been impacted by being in Good Shepherd institutions
- How they think it would be meaningful for these sorts of experiences to be recognised now

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed. Individual transcriptions were offered to the participants as a record of their interview and to invite additional comments. Participants were also invited to check the extracts from the transcriptions that were included in the report. The transcriptions were analysed using a thematic approach seeking common themes, and differences, in the data, drawing on key issues that have been identified in previous research and also leaving space for new and unexpected topics to emerge (Ezzy, 2002; Yin, 2011).

Site visits in Abbotsford, Ashfield and Leederville were undertaken to gain a better understanding of the physical environment in which the women had lived. While not all the buildings have survived, the sites continue to provide some sense of the scale and style of the institutions. Further information about these sites (as well as St Aidan's in Bendigo) was derived from the two histories of the Australian Sisters of the Good Shepherd (Byrne, 2002; Kovesi, 2010; see also, Kay, 2013, 2015).

### **Limitations of the research**

There are two limitations to the research. First, even though the research was intended to have 'depth' (in-depth interviewing with a small number of research participants) rather than 'breadth' (research with a large number of participants gathering more superficial responses) it was expected that there would be more than 12 (and up to 20) participants. Nearly twice as many people expressed interest as were actually interviewed. A number of issues arose – most notably ill health – that delayed or in some cases meant that the interview did not proceed. Considerable time was spent engaging participants, arranging and rearranging interviews, and following up. Due to these various delays, recruitment occurred over seven months from September 2018 to March 2019.

As the research occurred in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and at the time of the apology to victim survivors and the development of the National Redress Scheme, it is possible that while these activities may have increased interest in the research due to the greater media attention, there also may have been other effects on potential participants. For example, the outcomes of the Royal Commission may have engendered a more cautious approach to participating in the research and an unwillingness to being asked about childhood experiences in care due to heightened feelings of vulnerability or distrust.

The second limitation is in relation to the diversity of participants. While there is a spread of Good Shepherd Homes and hostels of which participants were resident and in geographic locations across three Australian states and in inner city, suburban and regional areas, in other ways there is restricted diversity in relation to gender, age, ethnicity, length of time in care, and type of care, including 'class'.

Overall, there were relatively few boys who grew up in Good Shepherd Homes and, despite efforts to do so, no men were recruited to the project. Regarding age, most women were in their sixties, with an uneven spread in other decades from their fifties to nineties. The women aged in their sixties is a group who are old enough to have grown up in a Good Shepherd institution and still be alive and well enough to be involved in the research (although many of the women interviewed experienced ill health). Greater participation among this age group may also relate to a particular willingness to reflect on their lives, at a time when they may be gaining grandchildren, leaving paid work or experiencing other major life milestones.

In relation to ethnicity, that the research did not include the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a major limitation. In future research a targeted recruitment process is needed to ensure the inclusion of this group. While the majority of women were of Anglo-Australian heritage, there were three women who were children of European migrants (including one whose parents were post World War II Displaced Persons) and another who migrated to Australia from the United Kingdom as a child with her family.

Regarding length of time in care, research participants spent around a minimum of two years resident in Good Shepherd Homes. This criterion was in place to ensure that the length of time was sufficient for them to have had a range of experiences while in the Home, and to be able to distinctly remember them. It is also the case that this length of time in the Home, rather than a shorter time, would have had greater impact in terms of the need for honouring and acknowledgement. However, in this period, girls who came to Good Shepherd Homes with custodial sentences due to offending would have typically had shorter stays of weeks or months (rather than years) and consequently were likely to have been excluded in the recruitment process.

As noted, unlike other children's homes, Good Shepherd institutions accommodated adult women as well as children. Some women remained in the care of Good Shepherd as adults after living there as children, sometimes as child carers (or 'auxiliaries'), and others came seeking shelter and support as adults. Another group of residents were adult women and children with intellectual and other disabilities, known to the research participants as the 'Holy Family'. The group of women who were interviewed were only those who were in Good Shepherd institutions as children, some of whom stayed

longer than the statutory age of care (18 years) but most had left by this age. One woman came to Good Shepherd at 16 years of age and has received support over her lifetime, moving from a 'care' relationship to one of practical, emotional and social support. Roughly half of the group of research participants entered care as wards of the state; the others were placed voluntarily. That the participants were all 'care-leavers' (including one woman who did not leave the care of Good Shepherd) is largely due to the success of the recruitment that occurred through care-leaver support services.

With the assistance of GSANZ, efforts were made to recruit women who came to Good Shepherd as adults but were unsuccessful. These women, if alive, are necessarily older than those who came as children at the same time. It also may be the case that they are less likely to be engaged now with GSANZ in any way. For those that remain supported by GSANZ, most are frail or are for other health-related reasons unable to participate in the research. The research was not approved to interview women with intellectual disabilities so members of the 'Holy Family' were not included as participants.

It is possible that the limitations in relation to the number and diversity of participants were at least partly produced through the use of the trauma informed approach to recruitment. Recruitment of research participants can occur through a range of ways, including advertising widely through social and other forms of media and word of mouth, and where it is not required that participants are engaged with services or other forms of support. With such additional recruitment approaches it may have been the case that more participants came forward and that this group then represented a wider cross-section of former residents. However, the mental health and wellbeing of participants are always a priority concern when conducting research with potentially vulnerable groups and justified the use of the more limited recruitment process.



## Summary of research participants' characteristics

### *Gender of research participants*

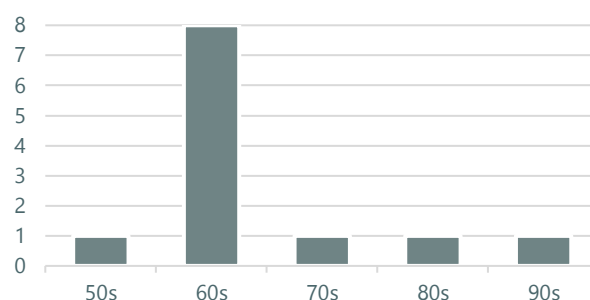
Twelve women were interviewed in this research.

### *Ethnicity of research participants*

None of the research participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Three of the women were Australian-born children of adult migrants from European countries reflecting patterns of post-World War II migration to Australia. One participant had migrated from the United Kingdom with her family as a child. The other eight participants were Australian born of families of Anglo-Australian backgrounds.

### *Age at interview of research participants*

At the time of interview the women's age range was from late fifties to early nineties with an average age of 68 years. Eight women were aged in their sixties.



**Table 1.** Age at time of interview

### *Sites of care of research participants*

Women experienced care in seven Good Shepherd settings in three Australian states. Two women each experienced care in two Good Shepherd settings. Three women are former residents of Abbotsford, two Bendigo (St Aidan's) and one of a Good Shepherd hostel in Albert Park (Victoria); three women are former residents of Leederville and one of a Good Shepherd hostel (WA); and three women are former residents of Ashfield and another of a Good Shepherd hostel (NSW).



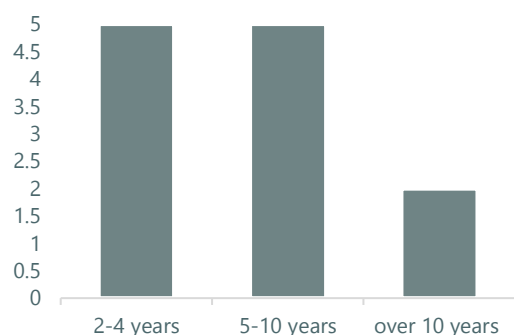
**Table 2.** Sites of Good Shepherd care

### ***Age in Good Shepherd care***

The range of age in Good Shepherd care was from 3 to 90 years. (However, the eldest participant moved from a relationship of care to support over her lifetime.) The most common age while in care was 13 to 16 years, with eight of the 12 women being in care at 13 years, nine being in care at 14 years, ten being in care at 15 years (two women came into care at 16 years) and eleven being in care at 16 years (one woman left care at 15 years of age).

### ***Length of time in Good Shepherd care***

The range of length of time in Good Shepherd care was from two to eleven years and the average length of time was five years (excluding the longest period of 74 years).



**Table 3.** Length of time in Good Shepherd care

### ***Length of time in all care***

Eight of the 12 women spent time in homes other than those of Good Shepherd and for all women this occurred prior to entering the Good Shepherd Home. The range of length of time in all forms of care for the women was two to 15 years with an average length of time of eight years (excluding the longest period of 90 years).

## **OUTLINE OF REPORT**

This chapter has outlined the background and research design. Chapter 2 is a summary of the international literature relevant to the research topic. Chapter 3 responds to the first research question, 'What were the experiences of former residents in Good Shepherd institutions?', by considering the circumstances of their entry to care and what happened during their time in care. Chapter 4 responds to the second research question, 'How can these experiences inform how former care providers acknowledge and respond to former residents?', by considering what occurred after they left care, their perceptions of the impact of care on their lives and their views on acknowledgements by former care providers. Chapter 5 draws together the findings of the report and presents its conclusions.



## Chapter 2

### Literature review

This literature review contextualises and informs the oral history interviews by paying attention to, first, state philosophies and policies of care, particularly related to women and girls and the impact of low socio-economic status and poverty during the period of the 1940s to 1970s when the women who were interviewed were in care as children and young women. Second, organisational responses to past abuse are considered in the literature review. To frame these aspects of the literature review requested by GSA NZ and acknowledging that the 12 research participants are all care-leavers, literature was also examined from a range of sources regarding experiences in care and their lifelong impact. Furthermore, the literature review is largely focused on the experiences of the group of Australian care-leavers known as Forgotten Australians, rather than former child migrants and members of the Stolen Generations, as this best reflects the ethnicity and cultural backgrounds of the research participants. This literature review draws on Murray (2015) and Murray and Goddard (2014).

#### STATE PHILOSOPHIES AND POLICIES OF 'CARE'

In Victoria, in the aftermath of the gold boom in the 1850s, the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* attempted to respond to the increase in homeless and abandoned children. Subsequently, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd established reformatory and industrial 'schools' at Abbotsford for children who, respectively, had been 'convicted of petty offences' or "'either deserted by their parents, or not under their control'", and with both groups sentenced by the courts (Kovesi, 2010: 71). A further group of children were voluntarily placed by parents (or a guardian) in situations where they were unable to support them or as a result of either or both of their deaths (Kovesi, 2010: 72). In effect, however, there was to be little difference in the ways these groups of children and young women were to be treated in terms of their incarceration, a model that was replicated across the other Good Shepherd sites over time.

Good Shepherd's approach was shaped by the wider social and political context. The child rescue movement of the late nineteenth century challenged earlier understandings of children as a threat (Dalley, 1998: 5; Mason, 2017; Raftery & O'Sullivan, 1999; Swain, 2014a). Children were then perceived as victims with a need for 'protection from parents or guardians who were failing in what were now defined as their core responsibilities' (Swain, 2014a: 7). Protective child welfare policies emerged from these initiatives of the child rescue movement and ultimately legislative and policy changes were intended to shift the focus from the state's interests to the 'best interests of the child' (Swain, 2014b: 9). But as noted by Wilson and Golding (2015a: 38), it could still involve 'punishing the young victim of poverty or domestic abuse or neglect, exactly as if their plight constituted a criminal offence'. Wilson (2013: 84) draws attention to the 'entirely normal paradigm', and 'accepted practice until

very recently', that saw children who were state wards 'incarcerated' for the reason only that they were state wards. Whether 'delinquent' or 'neglected, destitute or abused', children continued to be sentenced to similar institutions, as is evident in the Good Shepherd Homes, with Carrington (2011: 33, cited in Wilson, 2013: 85) attributing this outcome to what was understood by the welfare system as the 'dysfunctional family'.

Swain (2017: 81) argues that "'faith-based welfare" has always been central to the way in which [Australia] provide for the disadvantaged'. Similarly, Howe and Howe (2012: 320) highlight the religious influence on Australian social policy due to the domination by faith-based welfare agencies in the delivery of welfare services. Catholic (and other religious) organisations were central to the provision of children's homes, and this was a means of ensuring that resident children received a Catholic education (Kay, 2013). The Sisters of the Good Shepherd opened schools at all their major institutional sites across Australia (Kovesi, 2010: 80) which were also attended by children in neighbouring areas.

Swain (2017: 86) notes that the institutional 'homes' for children removed from their families, as well as others for babies, unmarried mothers, the homeless, aged and people with disabilities, were often 'poorly regulated' and tended to employ workers on the basis of their 'call' or 'mission' rather than their professional skills or qualifications, as was the case at Good Shepherd. These employment practices were to change over time, and from the mid-twentieth century there was increasing professionalisation of state childcare services (Musgrove, 2013). At this time, the state began 'taking greater responsibility for looking after children's welfare, and [there was] the increased use of legislation to enforce appropriate standards of care' (Tomison, 2001: 50). Others have argued that the state failed in these responsibilities (Swain,

2014b; Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004). As noted by Swain (2014b: 3) 'the complexity of child welfare provision weakened lines of responsibility, creating a space in which children were both powerless and at risk as they navigated their way into adulthood'.

Shifts in understanding of child welfare are also reflected in the form of care provided to children whose families were deemed to be unable or unwilling to care for them. The large nineteenth-century reformatories and industrial schools, such as those of Good Shepherd, housed hundreds of children. Over time, and with greater understanding of child development and the importance of attachment to caregivers, residential institutions reduced in size and number from around the 1950s (Barnard & Twigg, 2004; Dalley, 1998; Howe & Swain, 1989; Swain, 2014b). There has been increasing use of home-based foster and kin care rather than institutional or residential forms of care in recent decades but the shift away from institutional to foster care was not without resistance (Pollock, 2011; Kay, 2013).

By the 1970s, there were significant changes occurring in Good Shepherd Homes. In commenting on the impact of Vatican II on the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Kovesi (2010: 285) notes that, 'given their semi-monastic lifestyle and their previous concentration on protecting residents from the world at large', they 'embraced the task ... with extraordinary energy and courage, and it is hard to think of a religious community whose way of life was to be more radically affected'. In response to a 1971 consultation about the future of the care of girls, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd suggested changes including 'smaller groups and a cottage system; more work with girls within their own family; the increased use of hostels, especially transition hostels; more preventative care through counselling; more after care follow up; the establishment of night shelters; more

individual treatment for girls in care and, care for unmarried mothers through special homes' (Scott and Co., 1972, cited in Kovesi, 2010: 311). From late 1973, the Sisters in Abbotsford were informed that they would be 'occupied primarily with counselling, visitation of girls in their own homes, and with the establishment of small hostels' (Kovesi, 2010: 316). At Leederville, however, some of these reforms were already underway due to the work of a small group of progressive Sisters who were to later leave Good Shepherd and set up another religious community (Kovesi, 2010: 308-11).

### **Socio-economic disadvantage and poverty**

Wider social policy – particularly in relation to income support – significantly influenced the use and provision of care. Social attitudes also were influential: in earlier decades, charities differentiated between the 'deserving poor' who were 'impoverished but respectable' (Musgrove, 2013: 12, citing Swain, 1976) and the 'undeserving poor' who had "'lives of vice and crime'" (Musgrove, 2013: 12). Historically, and internationally, one of the main reasons children entered care was due to family poverty (Raftery & O'Sullivan, 1999) and Musgrove (2013: 49) notes that poverty was the main reason for children entering state care in Australia until World War II. As we have seen, Good Shepherd Homes were initiated in response to destitute and abandoned children and, as noted by Kay (2013: 76), 'the majority of girls at the convent were not criminals but victims of poverty'.

Other reasons for children being placed in care typically involved one parent being responsible for the care of their children, and in turn could lead to serious economic disadvantage due to the difficulties in both earning an income and caring for children. These reasons included death or the serious ill health of a parent, 'illegitimacy' of the child as a result of single motherhood, incarceration of a parent or family breakdown. There was little financial support for single parents before the 1970s and caring for children and earning an income were typically incompatible. Moreover, women's wages were significantly less than men's. Access to financial and social support, then, could be a major factor in whether children were placed in care or not (Musgrove, 2013). But it was also the case that women were expected to 'mother' and men were not, and 'motherless' children were typically placed in the care of extended family members when available.

Over time, there were social policy changes that enabled children to remain at home in family circumstances of impoverishment (Dalley, 1998; Swain & Howe, 1995). Material and financial assistance became available to support families in efforts to prevent children coming into care. The single mother's pension, implemented during the 1970s, reduced significantly the number of children in these circumstances. Ensuring women had access to financial support meant that they were more likely to care for their children, rather than them being placed in the care of the state or adopted. Instead of funding institutions to care for children, these financial resources, in effect, were directed to families to support them to keep their children at home (Swain, 2014b). And it was at this time that significant changes were made to the model of services delivered by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

## Gender

Swain and Musgrove's (2014: 3) analysis of women's status in nineteenth-century Australia provides a backdrop to the period under review: 'Women's chastity was understood as a commodity to be closely guarded – by others if need be – and "uncontrolled" women were threats to national morality'. Similarly, '[C]hildhood', according to Musgrove (2013: 4) 'was understood in gendered terms, and girls were considered more vulnerable than boys, particularly as they were seen as susceptible to sexual advances from men'. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd shared these views and, as noted, their work was 'dedicated to rescuing delinquent girls and women, and those in moral danger' (Byrne, 2002: 5-6). Swain and Musgrove (2014: 3) also point to the impact of class and gender, also relevant to the experiences of women and girls who came to Good Shepherd Homes:

All women lived in a world in which they were victims of an unconstrained male sexuality which remained largely uncensored. But class-based assumptions about women's latent sexuality, as well as the many social structures in place to protect the virtue of colonial elite women, meant that poorer women were far more likely to be the targets of interventions which often culminated in incarceration.

A speech given by Archbishop Mannix in 1927 at the Abbotsford Home to former residents and pupils gives some indication of the ideal femininity that was promoted:

Modest, gentle, and good Catholic girls have come from the convent of the Good Shepherd ... They are contented and find the greatest happiness in attending their husbands and children without endeavouring to attract noise outside, or seeking pleasures away from their homes (Mannix, 1927, cited in Kovesi, 2010: 225).

Victoria's *Children's Welfare Act 1933* institutionalised gendered differences by introducing 'categories of neglect that distinguished between male and female children' with specific reference to 'prostitution, "indecent" behaviour, and unsupervised girls in public space at night' (Musgrove: 2013: 45). These gendered concerns were influenced by the wider social and political context. For example, Bingham et al., (2016: 414) writing in the UK context, note the shift from concern in the earlier twentieth century with girls' sexual exploitation and their "'moral welfare'" to a focus on 'sexual promiscuity' and a moral panic about "'the good time girl'" during World War II:

In many cases of child sexual abuse, teenage girls were dealt with as 'in moral danger' and 'in need of care or protection', for which some of them were placed in residential approved schools (in place of formal proceedings being taken against an assailant) (Bingham et al., 2016: 422).

Their police and court records reveal 'complex life stories that include unhappy relationships with parents, running away, and encounters with men that were clearly unwanted or shaped by limited choices' (Bingham et al., 2016: 422). Similarly, in Australia, during the 1950s:

anxieties about girls' sexuality ... framed the ways in which girls' behaviour was interpreted by child welfare workers. The labels of 'promiscuity' and 'sexual waywardness' or uncontrollability could be used to take a girl into care (Quadara, 2017: 15).

Such gendered understandings also played out in relation to mothers (and in other ways, to fathers) who sought the return of their children from care (Musgrove, 2013), or indeed, in relation to whether they were taken into care in the absence of one or other parent, as noted above.

## SOURCES ABOUT CARE-LEAVERS

As this research sought to gather the perspectives of the women who had resided in Good Shepherd Homes themselves, in this section of the review, literature was targeted that was written by care-leavers themselves or by others who had directly engaged with care-leavers seeking their perspectives. These sources, in which care-leavers themselves have been central to the accounts of care and its impact, include memoirs, online publications, oral history collections, public inquiries and research studies. Few sources include material written by former residents of Good Shepherd Homes about their experiences in these institutions (see Franklin (2013) and Romero (2014) for a range of these sources).

A further source is institutional histories, although, not uncommonly, they are primarily concerned with the staff, the buildings and the environment in which the work occurred, rather than the lives of those who lived in the institutions (Wilson & Golding, 2015a). To a large extent this is reflected in the Good Shepherd's own history. As Kovesi (2010: 17) notes, in referring to the scope of her history of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australia:

More problematic [than a greater focus on the Abbotsford institutions] has been the question of the stories of those numerous girls and women who found themselves the occupants of the many institutions of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Victims of a society which saw women who deviated in any way from the norm as outcasts, they have stories, often of excruciating pain and heartbreak.

While acknowledging that the focus of her book is 'the Good Shepherd Sisters themselves and their work', Kovesi (2010: 17) explains that she tried to include some of the stories of the former residents. She goes on to suggest that her work 'might provide a foundational backdrop for others to publish work on the lives of the former residents and inmates whose stories need telling'.

In contrast, the history of the founding agencies of MacKillop Family Services – the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Christian Brothers – purposefully set out to include the first hand accounts of those who lived in the institutions and others who worked there (Barnard & Twigg, 2004). Moreover, as noted by Jacqueline Wilson (2013: 81) in reflecting on institutional histories of 'sites of incarceration', including children's homes:

the natural next step is to begin to rewrite those sites' histories to reflect the disparity between their official purport while operational and the realities that came to light in the inquiries. Such historical revision must incorporate as fully as possible the myriad human stories the sites embody.

There is a body of autobiographical literature, including memoirs, that recounts experiences in and after care in Australia, including Golding (2005) Penglase (2005) and Szablicki (2007), and one written by a former resident of Good Shepherd. Molly Dyer, who lived at the Good Shepherd Home in Abbotsford aged 10 to 15 years, was the first Aboriginal child to be a resident there (Dyer, 2003). Dyer (2003: 12) recalled her time at Abbotsford as being at boarding school, and she was one of 68 boarders at that time. She noted the 'strict routine' of life in the Home which was 'at first an intimidating contrast with the freedom and beauty of the bushland' where she had lived with her parents and grandparents. Dyer's mother visited her regularly and she had school holidays with her family. In the earlier years Dyer (2003: 13) described her time there as 'lots of fun and I grew to love every minute of my life during those days'. While there, Dyer commenced music lessons (and was to become an accomplished musician) and completed a business course learning typing, shorthand and bookkeeping, skills that she was to later draw on during her working life.

Oral history collections, such as that undertaken by the National Library of Australia (2012; Mellor & Haebich, 2002) and an exhibition by the National Museum of Australia (2012b), have also been important means by which the perspectives of care-leavers have been recorded and preserved. At least one former resident of a Good Shepherd Home included material in the exhibition titled *Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions*. Maureen Cuskelly's photo of her crossed hands draws attention to the hard labour she had undertaken at Abbotsford and St Aidan's (Bendigo):

Too much work as a child ... folding sheets, polishing and scrubbing floors has meant my hands have aged years ahead of their time ... Being unable ... to write Christmas cards, hold cutlery, fumble and struggle to grip money ... difficulty dressing and being unable to change my grandson's nappy. These are the daily living things I struggle with (National Museum of Australia, 2012a).

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians (2011) has produced an audio-visual resource of the lives of a small group of care-leavers and the Care Leavers Australasia Network has a dedicated space on their website for their members to publish short pieces about their life as a form of counter-narrative to what has been written about them in their personal records during their time in care. In recent times with the advent of social media platforms, former residents, including those from Good Shepherd Homes, have been able to re-connect and establish ongoing communication and contact, having possibly not been in touch for some decades since leaving the Home. As noted by Kovesi (2010: 370):

There is at least one passionate discussion forum in which women from Abbotsford and other institutions of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australia share their experiences. In this informal forum, women are open and, with very few exceptions, negative about their experiences in institutional care.



The internet has provided other opportunities for individuals to publish material about their experiences in Good Shepherd Homes. Former resident of a Good Shepherd Home, Rachael Romero (2014), has created a website, a collection of art and films documenting her experiences at The Pines in Adelaide. She describes her experiences overwhelmingly as negative and herself as having been 'enslaved', which is also the title of an art exhibition in which she presents images of the women and girls at work in the laundry, and that are also published on her website.

As summarised by Franklin (2013: 74), drawing on a range of first person sources of girls and women who resided at Good Shepherd Homes (and other institutions that also had industrial laundries such as those of the Sisters of Joseph and Good Samaritans) including some mentioned above:

Memories of conditions in the convent laundries by those who were in them are overwhelmingly negative. The complaints detail a pattern of verbal abuse, shaming, lack of love and extremely hard work. Any one recollection might be put down as exaggerated, but the story is consistent.

Moreover, Franklin (2013: 93) concludes that 'there is both convergence of evidence from different sources and a clear picture of emotional abuse ... It remains unexplained why so many individual nuns should have done [the severe behaviours] and why their culture supported it'. At the same time, Franklin (2013: 74) acknowledges diversity in these accounts stating that 'there are a few less negative comments' among the reports by former residents.

Public inquiries have been another means by which detailed evidence of the lives of care-leavers have been revealed. Sköld (2013: 13) notes that 'knowledge of how life turned out for adult care leavers was sparse before the inquiry commissions started asking these questions of the care leavers themselves'. However, as noted by Swain, Wright and Sköld (2017: 10) it is only since the late 1980s that inquiries actively sought survivor testimony:

Historical institutional abuse inquiries provide a critical means by which the past abuse of children is now documented and acknowledged. In contrast to earlier official inquiries into child welfare, which typically silenced the victim and supported institutions, testimonial driven inquiries privilege the voice of survivors and challenge institutional accounts. This has fostered new perspectives on the history of children's 'care' and recognition – and in some cases redress – for adults who were abused as children in institutional settings.

Key Australian national inquiries include those that investigated the experiences of members of the Stolen Generations (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008), child migrants (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2001) and Forgotten Australians (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004). Other inquiries were concerned with experiences of abuse in care and institutional responses to abuse (Family and Community Development Committee, 2013; Forde, Thomason and Heilpern, 1999; Mullighan, 2008; Tasmanian Ombudsman, 2006; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Each of these inquiries included large numbers of care-leavers who presented to hearings or otherwise contributed submissions about their time in care and its effects.

Kovesi (2010: 370) notes that there were 17 submissions from former residents of Good Shepherd Homes to the inquiry later to be published as *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children* (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004) which 'compares favourably to those received concerning other institutions'. It is unclear what is meant by 'favourably' but those who contributed to the inquiry detailed experiences of hard physical labour, severe punishment and deprivation (Parliament of Australia, 2005). Valda Hogan, for example, in her submission, explained that she resided at the Abbotsford Home as a young child and later as a teenager. She worked in the kitchen and later the laundry for which she was not paid, and also missed out on going to school. She experienced punishments such as being hit with a bamboo stem and locked in the cellar. In another submission, the anonymous author, who lived at Abbotsford as a young child and later as a teenager in St Aidan's (Bendigo), described experiences of 'child labour' stuffing horsehair into mattresses and emotional abuse as a result of wetting the bed. Later she worked in the industrial laundry. She explained that she survived 'extreme deprivation' and has been left with 'deep emotional scars'.

Research studies have used five main approaches to gathering information about care-leavers' experiences of care and its aftermath: surveys (e.g., Care Leavers Australia Network, 2008; Fernandez et al, 2016; Raman & Forbes, 2008); in-depth interviewing (e.g., Murray et al., 2009); auto-ethnography (e.g., Golding, 2010; Wilson & Golding, 2015b; Wilson, 2013); evaluations of specialist care-leaver support services (e.g., Australian Healthcare Associates, 2014; Frederico & Long, 2013) and mixed methods analysis of pre-existing Royal Commission interview transcripts (Katz et al., 2017). None of these research studies has specifically targeted former residents of Good

Shepherd Homes. Among this group of research studies there are collaborations between academic researchers and care-leavers such as those by O'Neill, Selakovic and Tropea (2012) and Swain, Sheedy and O'Neill (2012) and others again who are care-leaver academic researchers (e.g., Michell, 2015; Wilson & Golding, 2016). In particular, there is a shift towards co-design where care-leavers are arguing that 'a mere "voice" is not enough – what is needed is agency, in the design and execution of research' (Wilson, Mendes & Golding, 2018: 1).

### **EXPERIENCES IN CARE AND IMPACTS OF CARE**

The brief overview of sources suggests that there is a significant body of evidence about the experiences of care-leavers, but little specifically about former residents of Good Shepherd Homes. There is diversity among these accounts, but the literature also identifies common themes, much of which is concerned with the negative experiences of care (Wilson & Golding, 2015a). Among the published sources of Good Shepherd, as indicated in the previous section, much of it focuses on the poor quality of care and hardship. It is important to bear in mind that while some care-leavers report positive experiences of care, the evidence largely reflects circumstances that were harmful, partly because, in the case of public inquiries, their purpose was to investigate abuse and poor treatment. On the other hand, in research sponsored by the institutions themselves, it may be the case that those who had positive experiences are more likely to contribute, both because of ongoing engagement with the institution and that they want to ensure that the range of experiences are reflected in the historical record.



First, in relation to experiences in care, the key themes include:

- explanations for why children came into care
- circumstances in which children entered care
- physical environment in which children lived
- day-to-day life in care
- contact with siblings, parents and other family members while in care
- identity and knowledge of family and culture
- significant relationships with other children in care and staff
- access to education while in care
- abuse and lack of care
- preparation for life after care and leaving care

(e.g., Fernandez et al., 2016; Henwood, 2015; Katz et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2009; Penglase, 2005; Raman & Forbes, 2008; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004).

Second, in relation to the long term harmful impacts, scholars have noted that there are likely to be a range of factors influencing outcomes of care. Murray and Goddard (2014) suggest that these factors include the reasons for entry into care, prior life experiences, age while in care and length of time in care. It may also become more difficult to draw links between care experiences and adult outcomes as the time period since life in care increases (Pecora et al., 2010: 14). Regardless, care-leavers consistently report that the outcomes of care experiences have been a contributing factor – sometimes a major factor – to their adult lives post-care (Fernandez et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2009; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004).

While little is known specifically about the outcomes of care in Good Shepherd Homes, from these various sources and others that investigate more broadly the association between child abuse and maltreatment and adult outcomes, a number of harmful impacts can be identified:

- socio-economic disadvantage
- mental ill health
- physical ill health
- poor educational outcomes, including in relation to life skills and subsequent restricted employment opportunities
- difficulties with interpersonal relationships and parenting
- loss of identity, fractured family relationships and cultural disconnection
- lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the plight of care-leavers by the wider community, including a need for justice and redress

(e.g., Ashton & Wilson, 2014b; Baldwin et al., 2019; Blakemore et al., 2017; Bunting et al., 2018; Fernandez et al., 2016; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1999; Katz et al., 2017; Metzler et al., 2017; Murray, 2017; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004).

Consistent with these sources, and as indicated in the experiences of former residents of Good Shepherd Homes identified in the previous section, there are recurring themes, such as limited access to education, hard institutional work and physical and emotional abuse, and their long term impacts including physical and mental ill health.

## ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSES

According to Wright (2017) two key factors have resulted in increased attention to the abuse of children in care and other institutional settings and led to its recognition as a major social policy issue. First, 'media exposure of severe and systemic forms of maltreatment and cover-ups by institutions and people in positions of authority' and, second, 'the organization and activism of victims and survivors' have led to action, including the establishment of public inquiries and other responses (Wright, 2017: 10).

In response to the range of outcomes of harmful care experiences listed above, national and state governments, as well as non-government organisations such as religious and secular bodies that provided care, have taken steps to redress these injustices. In summary, these organisational responses include:

- establishment of inquiries
- participation in inquiries
- criminal justice responses to abuse in care
- internal organisational processes to respond to allegations of abuse and harm including reporting to external agencies
- public apologies
- financial redress schemes
- individualised support such as funding to access counselling, dental treatment and other health-related care (often in addition to financial redress)
- memorials and other forms of acknowledgement such as oral history collections, museum exhibitions, specialist museums and heritage centres
- access to records and family reunification services
- specialist support services
- professional development to support a skilled workforce across specialist and generalist services
- support for care-leaver advocacy and promotion of co-design and other forms of care-leaver input and action on policy and practice matters

(e.g., Ashton & Wilson, 2014a; Daly, 2015; Murray, 2015; Sköld & Swain, 2015).

### Good Shepherd responses to former residents

In 1993, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd began to 'discuss the best and most helpful response to any allegations of psychological, emotional or sexual mistreatment in any institution or service run by the Good Shepherd' (Kovesi, 2010: 367). With advice from community specialists, over time, an internal complaints process was developed and, in 2002, Good Shepherd adopted the Catholic Church's 'Towards Healing' process. Little information is available about the outcomes of this complaints process. What is known is that in the period from when the first complaints process was set up in the mid-1990s until 31 March 2019, there have been 233 complaints lodged by individuals who had formerly been in the care of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Not all of these complaints were followed through by the complainant. Of the 233 complaints, 44 contained allegations of sexual abuse. Most of the sexual abuse allegations have been assessed by independent investigators and, by May 2019, three have been found to have no basis for further action. The sexual abuse was alleged to be by a variety of persons, including a visiting priest, holiday host, older women or carers in the institution, or other girls (Walsh, 2019). In the period 2000 to 2009, 69 claims of a range of abuses by former residents of Good Shepherd Homes were settled (Kovesi, 2010: 371-2). In 2019, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were declared a participating organisation in the National Redress Scheme introduced by the federal government in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (GSANZ, 2019a).

While private written apologies were part of these earlier settlements when requested, in 2009, in advance of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's national apology to care-leavers, Good Shepherd expressed regret at 'any harsh and negative treatment experienced by residents' and endorsed the federal government's actions (Kovesi, 2010: 272). Since then, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have issued a public apology which in part reads:

From the late 1860s to the late 1970s, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd provided residential care for children and young people who were unable to live with their families, had no accommodation within the community or were not attending school. During these times, charitable organisations and religious orders were called on to shelter children and young people who were neglected or abused. We recognise and acknowledge that the conditions within these shelters were tough and isolating for many. We recognise and acknowledge the pain that many children and young people felt at that time.

**The Sisters of the Good Shepherd apologise whole-heartedly to those who experienced mistreatment and neglect whilst in our care. We empathise with the suffering that children and young people went through—and the unresolved grief they live with today.**

This apology is part of our ongoing commitment to acknowledging our mistakes and ensuring the wrongs of the past are not repeated ... For over 25 years, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have communicated with and supported people who experienced institutional hardship while they were in our care. We will continue to reach out and listen to those who have been affected (GSANZ, 2019c, bolded text in original).

Good Shepherd acknowledged former residents at a reunion at the Abbotsford site in 2013 as part of their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. This event sparked criticism from some former residents who in media reporting drew attention to the harsh conditions under which they had lived and, at that time, the lack of a public apology (Chynoweth, 2013; Webb, 2013). In 2018, a memorial in the grounds of the Good Shepherd Chapel, Abbotsford was erected to 'honour the thousands of women and children who lived in Good Shepherd Homes' across all of Australia (GSANZ, 2019a). GSANZ's Memorial Committee plans to have acknowledgement plaques recognising women and children at other sites (Landvogt, 2019).

Since 'their foundation in Australia, the sisters kept meticulous records' but there are very few records of the former residents and they are 'usually restricted to dates of entry and exit for the institutions only'. For those who were sent to the Homes by the courts, there may be some records of visits by inspectors (Kovesi, 2010: 372-3). In 2017, GSANZ set up a Heritage Engagement program that provides supported access to records and is modelled on the best practice work of MacKillop Family Services (GSANZ, 2019a; Murray et al., 2008).

At the same time as the oral history project that informed this report was being conducted, GSANZ undertook a second project to investigate good practice in the collection of oral histories of former residents. The project's focus was on developing a co-design approach that utilised trauma informed processes (Perera & Landvogt, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

A range of sources provide insights into aspects of institutional life in Australian orphanages and children's homes, and their outcomes. While the history of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australia has been well documented, less is known about the lives of the women and children who lived in their institutions. A small number of submissions to public inquiries and online and other publications have begun to reveal the experiences of those who grew up in these Homes, with common themes including limited access to education, hard institutional work and physical and emotional abuse.

The available evidence suggests that like former residents of other institutional care, some of those who lived in Good Shepherd Homes experienced harms for which there have been long term consequences. On this basis, GSANZ has established a range of acknowledgements, with this research intended to assist in considering what else might be done and, in and of itself, contribute to the public record about life in Good Shepherd institutions. To find out more about these experiences of life in Good Shepherd care, we now turn to Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### Life before care and experiences in care

Most of the research participants lived in Good Shepherd Homes as children and young women during the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s, with the three eldest in the 1940s and 1950s and the youngest during the late 1970s. The majority of the women, then, were there during a period of significant social change in the wider community. As girls and young women they would have been, to some extent, exposed to more open attitudes towards gender and sexuality and greater support for women's independence through increasing work and educational opportunities. As well, as noted in Chapter 2, during this time there were significant changes in the Catholic Church and in social policy that affected the institutional care and custody of children. While some of these innovations are revealed in the women's interviews, such as the experiences of the youngest woman who only lived in a hostel, many of those interviewed had left by the stage in which the changes had been fully implemented. In contrast, at Leederville, from the late 1960s, a small group of Sisters had implemented a range of reforms and three of the women interviewed lived there at this time.

This chapter responds to the first of the two research questions: 'What were the experiences of former residents in Good Shepherd institutions?' To answer this question, first, the chapter considers the circumstances from which the women entered Good Shepherd care and, second, their experiences while in care.

#### **CIRCUMSTANCES FROM WHICH GIRLS ENTERED CARE**

To begin to understand their lives in care, an appreciation of the circumstances from which the women came is vital. Consistent with other research, the women's accounts highlighted poverty, violence and parental ill health as key reasons for entry to care. There were also differences to other research, partly due to the mostly older age at which the women entered Good Shepherd's care. The most striking

difference is that the women knew why they were in care because they had some ongoing contact with parents and family for at least part of their childhood and through these relationships they had some understanding of how they had come to live at the Good Shepherd Home.

#### **Single motherhood**

Of the 12 women, there was one who was born to an unmarried mother. Alice spent her earliest years at a babies' home and then a Catholic orphanage until 16 years of age, at which time she came to the Good Shepherd Home in Ashfield. In the period leading up to the early 1970s, social stigma and the lack of financial support commonly resulted in the children of unmarried mothers being placed in care from infancy (Swain, 1995). Although Good Shepherd

institutions did not take in newborns and babies, St Aidan's (Bendigo) and Abbotsford took children as young as 2 or 3 years of age and one of the research participants came for a period at this age due to her mother's ill health. At Leederville, during the period when these women were in Good Shepherd care, only teenagers were admitted. In this research, there were others for whom single parenthood occurred later in their childhood for other reasons which precipitated entry to care, as described below.

### **Poverty**

All but two of the 12 women described circumstances of poverty in which they grew up. Financial resources were strained by a number of factors including the ill health of one or both parents, difficulties in gaining and maintaining paid work and family size. Two of the families had ten or more children, and there was an average of five children across all 12 families.

Participants recalled as children not having enough food to eat. For example, Faye, aged 80 and at Abbotsford from 11 to 18 years of age and who was an older child in a family of 15 children, explained that her mother worried 'that we had enough to eat ... and clothes on our back'. Eleanor, aged 64, who was in Leederville from 13 to 16 and the middle child of three, remembered going to school without having eaten for a day or more. Jenny, aged 64 and in Abbotsford from 12 to 17, described tough economic circumstances with the family of ten children moving from country town to country town as their father sought work. They could not afford to support all their children and the frequent moves disrupted their schooling, with her mother particularly concerned that they received a Catholic education. Jenny understood her time at Abbotsford as attending boarding school and some of Jenny's siblings were in care for at least part of their childhoods.

Valerie, aged 66, and in Leederville from 12 to 15, remembered always being hungry and that there was never any extra money for activities at school. This lack of day-to-day resources was compounded by the way she dressed and wore her hair, as determined by the social and cultural values of her European parents. She experienced these differences with her peers through racist remarks such as being called a 'wog' and having teachers draw attention to her inability to provide materials for classroom activities. Valerie's parents had come to Australia as Displaced Persons after World War II. Their early life had been difficult:

When they got them here [to the migrant camp in rural Western Australia] the men got sent away to work to pay off their passages which they didn't know that was going to happen. The women were left alone with the kids, they weren't even allowed to eat with their kids ... Mum told me stories, it was very hard there.

Later, after periods of time in Perth and a country town where Valerie remembered a happier family life, her mother moved to another country town with her five children, including Valerie and a younger sister who were yet to start school. At this time, her father had been gaoled and her mother struggled to provide for her family. She took up a position in a hotel close to where they lived, checking on her children left alone at home over the course of her working day. 'But', as Valerie explained, 'the nuns got wind of it at the school and come and said to Mum, you can't be doing that, you can't be working [and leaving your children] ...' Her mother had no other social or financial support and little English: "'Let our nuns look after the children so you can work'", she was told and 'the next thing we were all put in this car and driven up to Perth to the orphanage'. After a number of tumultuous years in and out of care, at the end of primary school, Valerie was to come to the Good Shepherd Home. Little is



known about the experiences of the families of the Displaced Persons who came to Australia and, 'although their path to the wider child welfare system may have been different, their experiences of "care" have undoubtedly cast similar long shadows as those who were part of the now notorious child migrant schemes' (Agutter, 2016: 230).

### **Parental ill health and death**

Among the mothers of this group of women, there were eight who experienced serious long term ill health. In some cases, the ill health, in combination with other factors, precipitated entry to care. Three mothers died, and both Pamela's parents died within a short time of each other when she was a young child. Pamela, aged 68, was at St Aidan's (Bendigo) from 12 to 19 years of age, after a period of time in the care of extended family members. In the event of the death of a mother, her serious ill health or other reasons for single fatherhood, it was not usually expected that a man would care for his children on his own, because they were 'motherless' and, due to gendered expectations, men were unable to 'mother'. For example, Sophie, aged 57 and in care from 16 to 19 years of age, was cared for by extended family members after the death of her mother because it was deemed that her father was not capable of doing so. When these arrangements broke down Sophie entered state care and later a Good Shepherd hostel. Margaret, aged 66, and at Leederville from 13 to 16 years of age, described her mother as a 'severe alcoholic'. Her mother left her family which resulted in Margaret not being cared for by her father but by extended family members and later entering Good Shepherd care. In contrast, it is possible that women would be expected to care for their children despite the difficulties this would present, notwithstanding claims about the needs of 'fatherless' girls.

There were four fathers who were described as experiencing alcoholism, including Eleanor's father, which contributed to the lack of money to support the family; for three this condition

was seen as contributing to the breakdown of the family and the children's entry to care.

### **Family violence and violence against children**

Violence that had occurred between parents or against children was disclosed in half of the women's families. In four families, family violence was evident. However, none of the women entered care directly as a result of state intervention in response to family violence. At this time there was little understanding of the gendered nature of family violence and very limited support for women. Women were expected to keep their children safe from their father's violence, rather than men being held accountable for that abuse except in extreme situations. And keeping children safe usually meant women had to leave the relationship and secure an income while caring for their children. Due to the difficulties in caring for children and participating in paid work, family violence contributed to the subsequent entry into care.

As well as the impact of the violence between parents, the research participants experienced violence from their parents. For example, while Eleanor's mother left her husband to escape his violence, Eleanor was then to endure long term severe emotional and physical abuse from her mother. Valerie, too, experienced severe physical abuse from her mother. For Faye, experiences of sexual abuse led directly to her entry into care, with her father gaoled for his abuse against her and her sisters. There were also disclosures of sexual assault perpetrated by others who were deemed to provide care to them. Prior to coming to the Good Shepherd Home, Valerie experienced sexual abuse in a holiday home provided by the orphanage where she lived at the time and 'coming back and ... not even knowing what had happened to me, not being able to tell a nun, not even knowing the words to say things'.

### **'Moral danger'**

As explained in the history of the Good Shepherd Home in Leederville (Byrne, 2002: 5-6) and noted in Chapter 1, St Mary Euphrasia set out to establish communities that were 'dedicated to rescuing delinquent girls and women, and those in moral danger'. While there may have been elements of concern about the moral dangers posed for young women which contributed to their entry to Good Shepherd Homes, this was not starkly evident among the accounts of the women, except for one in which it was specifically identified as the reason. For one of the women who did not describe experiences of socio-economic disadvantage as a child, her circumstances highlighted the ways in which social attitudes towards sexuality and gender could directly precipitate entry to care. Julia, aged 62 and in care at Ashfield from 14 to 16 years of age, entered care as a voluntary placement because she was deemed to be 'uncontrollable' by her father, as recorded in her personal file. Julia explained that as a teenager she liked to walk in the neighbourhood and her father objected to her doing so. She disobeyed his direction and he acted to restrict her movements. While she came to understand that her father may have been concerned about her safety through her placing herself in 'moral danger', at the time, she did not know why she had been placed in the Good Shepherd Home and had no awareness of such 'risks'. She now attributes his response to being a migrant and holding conservative views about women's sexuality and gender. If she was a boy, Julie believed she would not have been placed in a children's home. Moreover, she believes that her father's interpretation of her behaviour was not questioned at her admission to the Good Shepherd Home.

There were others for whom elements of perceived moral danger may have influenced decisions about their institutionalisation. Janet, now aged 62 and who was a ward of the state, resided in a small Catholic family group home with eight other children in which she described experiencing abuse and neglect. She remembered sleeping outside or locked in a garage and receiving little food and water. At 12, Janet moved to St Aidan's (Bendigo) on the grounds, according to her personal records, that she was 'uncontrollable', and where she remained until she was 16 years old. Janet had attempted to escape from the family group home because she was upset her closest friend had left. It may have also been the case that rather than the close living situation of a mixed gender family group home it was considered by government officers that she be moved to the more confined institutional environment.

For others, the benefits of the constraints of the 'semi-monastic' setting, may have also figured in officials' decision-making about the placement of young women, many of whom were entering puberty, and this is suggested in Valerie's account as she reflected on the content of her personal records. She revealed that when she came to the Home, 'I wasn't a bad kid – I really wasn't bad. I hadn't even slept with a boy although they say I was interested in boys...' In the Home, Valerie, and the other young women, were to then have their behaviour restrained. And once in the Home, this concern with the expression of feminine sexuality remained. Eleanor reflected on:

the sermons in the church. I think a lot of the sermons were aimed at us because we were seen as these deviant, wayward girls so they had to save us and if they didn't save us from our own evil thoughts and our own evil ways of being as humans then God was going to strike you down forever and the only life you were going to have was going to be burning in the fires of hell.



But Eleanor also acknowledged that this 'wasn't any different from being raised in a Catholic school', which most of the women had attended prior to their entry to a Good Shepherd Home.

It may also be the case that through the information provided by the child welfare department of the day the Sisters of the Good Shepherd knew of sexual abuse that some of these girls had experienced, even though, at the time, the girls may not have been aware that others knew, or even known what these experiences were. Rather, the protective environment of the Home was intended as an antidote to the 'moral dangers' to which they had already been exposed. Unfortunately, if this is the case, and in accordance with practices of the day, little appeared to have been done to support these girls and young women to deal with these traumatic experiences.

### **DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN CARE**

The women's accounts showed remarkable consistency across sites, in particular in relation to their experiences of institutional settings and the work that was embedded in their daily lives. As well, these themes bear strongly on their life after care, their access to education, to people who supported them, and contact with family.

#### **Family contact**

Eleven of the research participants experienced some or most of their childhood living with their family of origin and all knew who their parents and siblings were from childhood. Alice, who came into care as a newborn baby, had some contact with her mother until she was eight years old but never lived in a family setting. The participants' knowledge of their family is partly explained because most of the women entered Good Shepherd care after 10 years of age, and even when they had been in other care beforehand it was either with extended family or in institutional care where contact with family had been retained or they had returned to their family before entering care again in a Good Shepherd Home.

This contrasts with the experiences of care-leavers who may have never known their parents or other family members (particularly in the case of children of unmarried mothers who were placed in care from infancy, although Alice did have contact with her mother for her first eight years) and those who were placed in care from an early age and separated from siblings or who were never told who their siblings were. This lack of knowledge of family can result in significant identity issues but this was not strongly evident in this way among this group of women. There are, of course, other reasons why contact with family members is important, not the least the potential for comfort and security, advocacy and protection, and engagement with the world external to the institution.

Eight of the 12 women had already left their family and lived in institutional care for periods of time before coming to a Good Shepherd Home. Leaving family to enter institutional care can be traumatic, as Julia explained. She was shocked to discover she was to live at the Home, having been placed there upon her father's request and with no inkling of the reason or appreciation of the circumstances that had led up to his decision. She said 'she cried for a week', leaving behind her parents, her sister and her life attending the local high school. In contrast, Pamela had mixed emotions when she came to St Aidan's (Bendigo). On the one hand she felt 'devastated'; on the other, her entry to the Home marked an escape from an intolerable situation. After her parents' death, Pamela lived with extended family members who were uncaring and neglectful of her. It was a starkly different environment to her previous life with her loving parents, and in the interview she described her relief at coming to the Good Shepherd Home.

Once in the Good Shepherd Home, among the women there was varied ongoing contact with family, largely dependent on family circumstances and the constraints of institutional living. All but one of the women had siblings (although Alice was not to learn of hers until decades later) and, in most families, other siblings were also in care. Contact with siblings could be limited, and enabled, by a range of factors. One of the limiting factors was the institutional model of care that was in place and, typically, due to age differences, siblings were placed in different dormitories but shared a common courtyard ('the yard').

Among the research participants, five sets of sisters were in care at the same time. Elizabeth, for example, aged 64 and in care at Abbotsford and then a Victorian Good Shepherd hostel, went into care at the same time as her older sister. Because of the age difference they were not in the same dormitory but she did see her sister regularly because her father would collect them on weekends and take them to see her brothers who were in care at other Catholic institutions in Victoria. Faye was in care with three sisters but she explained she had little contact with them because she left school at a very early age to work in the convent kitchen whereas her sisters continued their education. Jenny had ongoing contact with her family as she went home for school holidays as well as having a sister in care with her for some of the time although they were in different dormitories.

As well as contact with siblings, the women did have contact with other family members, meeting outside or inside the Home. Some women had visits from their parents, or a parent, but not as regularly as some hoped. During the three years she was in the Home, Valerie remembered two visits from her mother but, she acknowledged 'she might have come more'. She also understood why these visits were infrequent:

to get the time off work and then to get the train up to visit us [in Perth, from the south-west of Western Australia], she hardly ever came because then she'd have to pay accommodation and she said every time she did come to visit us the nuns wouldn't let her see us unless she had money.

After she came to the Home, Margaret received regular monthly visits from her older sister and her father, to which she looked forward. But 'after a while it stopped, it all stopped so I'd be sitting there on the first Sunday of the month waiting for my name to be called out but it stopped'. Margaret disclosed that she was close to her father as a child and she missed her family. Alice, too, expressed sadness at not having visitors, both her mother and also friends she had grown up with at the orphanage where she had previously lived. Her mother no longer had contact with her and she was told by the Sisters that her friends were not allowed to visit her in the Home. Alice said, 'I had no-one to come and see me so – that hurt me.'

There were other family members who were particularly important with whom there was some contact. Eleanor recalled the time when her beloved grandfather was unwell and a Sister took her to see him in hospital just before he died. It became a significant event that has stayed with her over her life. Coming from a family where she had been abused and felt unloved his words held great meaning. Eleanor remembered that her grandfather told the Sister to 'look after Eleanor, she's a good girl. There's nothing wrong with her'. It is unclear the extent to which Good Shepherd facilitated contact with family members inside the Home, but the women's accounts do not suggest that it was discouraged as in other institutional settings. Such visits could be a highlight for the girls, at least partly because it meant they had the opportunity to spend time in 'the parlour' and have special food.

## **Institutionalisation**

The settings in which the women lived as children in Good Shepherd Homes were major aspects of their accounts of their time in care. For two women, their experiences were significantly different to the other ten. Sophie, the youngest research participant, only spent time in a Good Shepherd hostel setting where she had the freedom of movement to attend work and engage in other activities outside the suburban house in which she lived with a small number of other young women and a staff member. Alice, the eldest research participant, has spent in total 74 years in Good Shepherd care or living with their support. From 1945 when she came to Ashfield until 1979 when the Home was shut down, Alice had at first been a young woman 'in care' and then later became a carer of girls and young women. After this she remained living in the religious community even though she was not a Sister nor auxiliary. While her life was different to that of the girls and young women she cared for, she did also experience the restrictions of the institutional setting. Over time there were changes, including the development of residential units and shifts to other forms of support that increasingly provided Alice with more freedom of movement and independence. The other ten women spent up to eleven years (and an average of 5.5 years) in the confines of large, restrictive institutional environments. (Two women spent some time in Good Shepherd hostels as well as institutional care.)

Some of the women remembered first approaching the Good Shepherd Home and being shocked by the imposing appearance of the buildings. Eleanor recalled when she saw the Leederville site 'I felt my heart sink'. This site and the other three in Ashfield, Bendigo (St Aidan's) and Abbotsford, were similar in that they had high walls enclosing a number of large buildings with lush gardens (where the children were typically disallowed from spending time and not without supervision). But in contrast to what was commonly believed by the residents, according to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's official history, '[h]igh walls were meant not to keep women and children in, so much as to keep others out' (Kovesi, 2010: 39-40). However, in the early 1970s the conditions at Abbotsford were described 'as not being "consistent with modern concepts of residential care and the environment generally is one of custody rather than rehabilitation despite efforts which have been made to upgrade the conditions"' (Scott and Co., 1972, cited in Kovesi, 2010: 311). The following discussion suggests that indeed 'custody' was characteristic of the women's time there.

As the girls got to know their new home, two features were striking: the daily routines and their lack of freedom of movement. Strict routines were characteristic of the Good Shepherd approach: 'constant regulation was believed necessary to save these weak "children" from their own weak tendencies' (Kovesi, 2010: 40) and 'the girls were to be kept busy so they would not have the time or energy to think about their former lives' (Kovesi, 2010: 42). Strict routines, then, were used to manage large numbers of children, and they were children that would have been perceived by the Sisters as otherwise 'unmanageable' or even 'uncontrollable'.

The days were organised around going to church, cleaning (and, for some, laundry work) and other work (discussed further below), schooling, meal times, and limited 'free' time. There were strict timetables for each activity, as described by Eleanor who lived at Leederville:

you'd get up in the morning and you would go to church, and you'd come home from church ... and then you'd go and work in the laundry and then from the laundry you'd go to the dining room and have breakfast. After that you would go back to the laundry until it was time to go to school then you'd all line up in the basketball court and they'd open the door and you'd go to school, you would stay in the school until lunchtime, you went back to the dining room for lunch then you went back to the school, school finished, you went back to the laundry and worked in the laundry and then depending on what group you were in then your group went off and showered and then after that you would go for your evening meal and then after your evening meal you went into your group and that's where you would do sewing again.

The other women described similar routines at Good Shepherd institutions elsewhere but with cleaning and other jobs substituted for laundry work in some circumstances. Strict routine was part of the overriding lack of autonomy that they experienced.

The loss of freedom of movement was another recurring theme in the interviews. Eleanor expressed her shock as she arrived at the Leederville Home:

when we went through those double doors and we were sitting in the foyer area there, that was okay, and then we went into what was [the senior Sister's] office and that's then when it hit me because it was locked. And that's what shocked me more than anything, was my next move. I could not move unless a nun let me move and I had never experienced that before, and I didn't understand why but you were then indoctrinated into 'well we have to do this because you're going to run away'. I said I had no intentions of running, I wasn't streetwise and so I was a very quiet, shy, withdrawn child in those days.

At Leederville, in the room with other children from her dormitory known as the 'group room' and supervised by one Sister, Eleanor described other ways that this loss of independence deeply impacted her:

you're in your group room and I wanted to go to the toilet. Well I couldn't go because the nuns wouldn't let me out to go because if they let me out somebody had to walk with me and there was only the nun so you know you had to – you could only move in a group so there's no privacy, there was nowhere where you could sit in a corner and cry or whatever.

The concept of a 'group' of girls was actually an innovation. At establishment, the Good Shepherd Homes were based around the girls being discouraged from forming friendships by always being together with at least two others, and different combinations every day (Kovesi, 2010: 42), and quite possibly with even less freedom of movement.

At Ashfield, Julia remembered that:

... it was all lock and key. It was like a gaol, really, because every time you moved from this section to that section to that, it was all with the nuns with their keys and lock this door you go through, lock that door behind you ... no, you didn't walk anywhere without a lock and key ... you couldn't go up to the dormitories during the day because they were locked and so on. And in the morning, you only were allowed out when they unlocked the doors.

Similarly, at Ashfield, Alice recalled that when she arrived there 'I nearly died because they locked the door behind me ... well they had to keep the kids in but I mean I was upset because the door was locked'. Alice had come to the Good Shepherd Home from an orphanage which was 'open' where she described occasions when they had gone out walking, attended outside activities and caught the bus to other places. Like Ashfield, Janet described St Aidan's as 'high walls, fence, hedges, gates, padlocks, chains ... basically you were a prisoner'. Kovesi (2010: 274-5) notes that from the 1950s the residents were 'slowly allowed increased contact with the world outside the walls'. However, 'for the most part', this only occurred when 'medical emergency impelled it'. Certainly, the women who were interviewed described very little contact with the outside world other than Alice who over time became a carer and had more opportunities to leave the Home for periods of time to undertake activities in the wider community such as dressmaking and music lessons.

Their experiences draw attention to the ways in which the girls were controlled and confined within the institutional walls. While it is acknowledged that this enclosed environment reflects the Good Shepherd spiritual approach and to 'keep others out', the women's descriptions point to a heightened concern by the Sisters with their escape. Moreover, as apparent in Alice's description of her earlier life in an orphanage, the high level of security was not typical of Homes where children were there for non-custodial reasons. As none were there for reasons that appeared to require incarceration, this environment is likely to have been a means of 'protecting' them as young women from the impact of the expression of their emerging sexuality.

#### **Punishment, fear and loss of trust**

Another way in which control was exerted in the Homes was through punishment, the fear of punishment, and abuse, and six of the women described such experiences. As noted in Chapter 2, these aspects have also been previously identified in earlier published accounts of former residents of Good Shepherd Homes. At this time, corporal punishment for non-compliance and perceived misbehaviour were commonly experienced by children in homes and schools. That children experienced such abuse is not surprising. Having said that, a key element of the establishment of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd was that 'corporal punishment was never to be used' (Kovesi, 2010: 43). What then is surprising is the severity of the punishments that the women recalled experiencing and observing.

At St Aidan's (Bendigo), Janet observed what she described as 'a lot of torture' and also experienced herself from one of the Sisters:

There was one in particular ... who carried a piece of wood under her habit and without warning she'd come up behind you and give you a damn good whack so you would end up with slashed legs and bleeding from God knows where, wherever she decided, she'd take out her frustrations on you and just belt you, she'd just zero in on you. Nasty. So, I don't know what her problem was, but she didn't like kids let alone teenagers.

As a result of fighting or swearing among a group of girls, Eleanor described them then having been 'locked underneath the stairs ... being shut in upstairs in this dark, filthy, dodgy place where they'd just thrown some mattresses on the floor for us so that was pretty horrific'. Jenny remembered the use of 'the ruler and the feather duster' for minor infractions such as not sitting up straight in class. However, on reflection, Jenny thought that these kinds of punishments were 'deserved', according to the attitudes of the day. But she also remembered that the extent to which the punishments were meted out for similar misbehaviours seemed unfair as some girls received worse treatment than others.

Faye reported feeling like she was punished in the Home for having been sexually abused, which had resulted in her admission to Abbotsford. In care she 'had that feeling that [the nuns] didn't trust me, that I'd be man-hungry'. She was told she was 'too mature' and 'too grown up' and was put to work in the kitchen rather than being allowed to continue her education. Faye believed she did not give the Sisters any reason to think this about her, especially as she was a quiet and compliant child. She felt blamed for the abuse and that the Sister had not shown understanding of what she had endured.

Valerie described one of her first memories of a Sister soon after she had arrived at an orphanage where she lived as a child of about 4 years old:

I remember I was in the playground crying 'Mummy' ... and this nun came, and she goes 'oh I'll give you Mummy. Oh, you want Mummy? Yeah, I'll give you Mummy, come on, I'll give you Mummy'. She's holding my hand and taking me and I'm 'oh Mummy, you know? She took me in this little room and put me across this bed that had no mattress on it and got - hoops in those days were made of cane. Well the nuns used to have them cut in half. 'Here's Mummy, here's Mummy, here's Mummy, here's Mummy -'

While it was not a Good Shepherd Sister who perpetrated this abuse, Valerie recounted how this experience instilled in her a deep fear of the nuns, a lack of trust and a belief that such violence could recur. She was to experience other forms of severe punishment, such as being locked in a room for three days after having run away, as she said she did, 'a fair bit'. Valerie's account described a highly troubled child for whom it seemed the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were ill-equipped to support. However, during her time in the Home she experienced serious mental ill health about which she was later to discover upon reading her personal records she was receiving treatment.



Elizabeth described the actions of a Sister who 'beat me for years' including having been pushed downstairs and hit with a relay baton. Like Valerie, Elizabeth revealed how such actions resulted in a loss of trust. At the same time, she also acknowledged the difficulty in looking after a large number of children with few adults. She explained that four Sisters looked after about 100 girls, but three of them had other tasks to which they were dedicated that did not involve the day-to-day care of the girls.

And punishments were not only perpetrated by the Sisters. Some of the women described occasions when girls fought among themselves in their groups and that some were targeted to be beaten because they were different in some way. Pamela, for example, remembers herself being 'different ... they were rougher than me' and, soon after she arrived, she was going to be 'beaten up' by a group of other girls but was saved by one who decided 'she's alright and so [Pamela] was left alone'. Others also remembered that some girls were 'bullies' and 'physically abusive', acknowledging that this was typically a means of survival in such a harsh environment.

The older children victimised the younger ones. At Abbotsford, Elizabeth, who first came as an 8 year old, recalled that 'if you wet the bed the sheet was put over your head and you just stood there in disgrace'. At this age it was the older girls who came into the dormitories to wake the children. When she was older, and it was her turn to wake the younger children each morning, Elizabeth resisted this practice and protested to others that they should not do it either.

Another way in which the women experienced fear, especially around attempting to escape, was through threats that they would end up on the 'other side' with the 'naughty girls' in the Sacred Heart 'class'. There was a strong sense of 'us' and 'them' and, even though some were aware that these young women may actually be little different to themselves, they were concerned that life would be much harder there. Even some seemingly innocuous – or even positive – aspects of life in the Home could be perceived as potentially punishing. In the mid-1960s the Leederville Sisters acquired a dog to keep intruders away. According to the Leederville history 'his wagging tail and floppy ears were a great favourite with the girls' (Byrne, 2002: 152). The dog, mentioned by all three women interviewed who had resided there at the time, was described by them as a 'watch dog'. They recalled the dog's purpose was not to prevent unwelcome visitors entering the Home but rather to deter girls from escaping by barking and alerting the Sisters when attempts were being made. If a girl tried to escape, there was also the threat that the dog would be 'put on you'.

In contrast to these accounts of punishment and abuse, Julia recalled Ashfield as a 'pleasant enough environment' and while some girls who had been rude had to 'go and stand in a corner or go and see the superior downstairs ... it wasn't a punishable place, really'. Joan acknowledged that while you might be punished for disobedience by not being allowed to watch a movie or that you would have an additional job, overall, 'they were good ... I never felt threatened or anything like that ... we didn't have a problem'. Also at Ashfield, Alice explained:

They were all so lovely about everything and they never threw anything up to you about not having parents or being here or anything, no. I mean you'd get a telling if you did the wrong thing, well that's fair enough. I mean why should everybody get away with everything?



Margaret explained that living at the Good Shepherd Home made her 'feel safe'. Even though Pamela saw other girls being beaten by the Sisters, 'they never ever did anything to me' and was not frightened of them; indeed, she explained, she was more frightened of some of the other girls.

And in further contrast, Sophie, who was the only woman not to have lived in an institutional setting, described living in the Good Shepherd hostel as a very positive experience. A key element of Sophie's experiences was the support she had received from the Good Shepherd Sister during her time living there, discussed further below. Eleanor, too, lived in a Good Shepherd hostel (within the grounds of the Leederville Home) and she remarked on the freedom she gained at that time. While the hostel residents could not go out on to the street, they were allowed to walk around the hostel freely, and they had their own bedroom. Importantly to Eleanor, she could now 'go in and shut the door and have a shower' in contrast to when she had been in the Home and showering had involved groups of girls at the same time, with a Sister present and no privacy. In retrospect, though, she expressed concern that the hostel where she lived with a small group of other young women was part of a research study being undertaken by one of the progressive Sisters who supported reforms to the way that they were looked after. At the time, she was not made aware of her participation in this research and now feels that she was exploited for purposes other than necessarily her own best interest.

### **Institutional work**

As indicated in the description of daily routines, institutional work was a major part of the children's lives. As well, as noted in Chapter 2, these aspects have also been identified in earlier published accounts of former residents of Good Shepherd. Indeed, the children did the work of adults as there were insufficient numbers of adult women to do all that was necessary to care for all who lived in the institutions. Children were required to work, including undertaking cleaning, child caring and assisting in the kitchen. There were other jobs that were done as well that varied according to their age, 'class' and the particular Home. The work that the women undertook was highly gendered consisting primarily of household tasks and consistent with the attitudes of the day of what was considered to be 'women's work'. While the institutions did have gardens and animals which produced food for the Homes during the period the women lived there, they did not do this work; the risk of escape no doubt overriding the benefit of the opportunities to learn additional vocational skills. In earlier times girls did work in the gardens (Kovesi, 2010). At other institutions in Victoria at this time, children – possibly only boys – did do farm work so such practices were not unknown (Barnard & Twigg, 2004; Howe & Swain, 1993).

At Abbotsford, for example, Faye ceased her schooling soon after arriving and worked in the Sisters' kitchen. At Leederville, the three women interviewed all worked in the industrial laundry for long hours despite being of school age and attending school during part of the day for at least some of the time while they were there. At other institutions, some did not work in the laundry at all. At Abbotsford, where children of all ages resided, in addition to household jobs Jenny lived in the same dormitory with, and took care of, babies and infants for a period of time during her five years there. In some settings they had to look after a younger child including waking them in the morning, assisting them to prepare for the day and doing their laundry.

Work was relentless, as Jenny explained: 'we had clean-ups all the time, we had jobs in the morning, we had jobs at lunchtime, we had jobs after school'. Catering as they were for 100 or more women and children, meal times involved many jobs:

it was probably about seven that we'd get up ... And then we'd get dressed, our beds had to be made, everything around our bed had to be tidy and then we'd go down to breakfast and then you'd either go back and sweep the dormitories was one job, cleaning the refectory was another one, cleaning the dishes in the refectory was another one. Someone was always responsible for going down and getting the breakfast from the kitchen and getting all the meals from the kitchen was a job for each meal, you'd have to go down and bring the food back. Making the tea in the refectory was a job. There were two older ladies that had never left that sort of ran the kitchen and the refectory as well. And you'd just help them, they'd tell you what to do.

The meals-related jobs continued throughout the day before and after lunch and dinner around time spent in school, and on weekends. It was hard physical work, and memorable, with cleaning and laundry work as the two main forms of work that the women described in the interviews.

Saturday morning was the 'big clean' and everyone had an area to clean. This involved scrubbing floors, cleaning windows, polishing floors and cleaning bathrooms and toilets. One time, Jenny was deemed to have cleaned the bathrooms unsatisfactorily and she was instructed by a Sister to redo it using a toothbrush. Another big job was polishing the floors. At Ashfield, Julia remembered 'waxing the floors on our knees' and, at Abbotsford, Jenny used 'big floor polishers that I've seen adults just get flown across the room trying to use them'.

But Elizabeth recalled kneeling while polishing the floors at Abbotsford which she believes has seriously damaged her knees. At St Aidan's (Bendigo), Janet recalled being given extra jobs as punishments such as cleaning the 'nun's cells' and the boys' toilets.

In some settings, girls still in school did not work in the laundry at all, or for some only outside school hours. As Julia explained, at Ashfield, it was 'people older than me and didn't want to go to school, they had to work in the laundry, and they worked there with the Holy Family and with the auxiliaries and some of the nuns even worked there as well'. But Julia did work in the laundry after school and during the school holidays when she said she 'did mainly the ironing ... I ironed quite a few shirts [and], I tell you, I'm not bad at ironing shirts'. She did not work on the mangle as this was reserved for those who were no longer at school. Alice came to Ashfield when she was 16 after she had finished her schooling and worked in the laundry for more than 40 years. During this time she worked with and supervised others including women with disabilities, specialising in ironing and using the press. During all these years she was not paid for her work, but instead received care in the Home.

Janet and Elizabeth did not work in the laundry at St Aidan's or Abbotsford respectively because, as they explained, that was done by the girls 'on the other side', by which they meant those in the Sacred Heart 'class'. But Pamela, who was also at St Aidan's, after she left school, worked in the laundry and derived some satisfaction from this work, explaining that she had experience in all the different tasks and had been in charge of one of the jobs for a period of time.

At Leederville, in the period when the three women who were interviewed resided there, all worked in the laundry during the day while still at school, as is evident in Eleanor's description above of the daily routine. As early as 1937 the Good Shepherd laundry had a reputation as Perth's 'most reliable' (Byrne, 2002: 100). The engagement in laundry work had been envisioned as part of the life of residents from when the Leederville Home was first established in 1902:

The Laundry was to be a major feature of the Sister's work. The discipline was seen as therapeutic for the 'Children' committed to the Sisters' care ... By supporting the rehabilitation of wayward women and girls, householders could feel that they were contributing to a worthy cause (Byrne, 2002: 19-20).

But, 'having established laundries as an effective means of raising income for the institutions' it meant that the girls and women residents (and Sisters) had to continue working in the laundry and, in so doing, 'keeping the laundries viable and coping with the huge demands of such work' (Kovesi, 2010: 277). Valerie worked in the laundry every day, working over time, doing all the different tasks with the mangle, washing, ironing and packing. She earned 25 cents per week but was punished for swearing and other forms of disobedience by having her pay docked. Margaret described working 'like dogs' in the laundry and Eleanor highlighted her fear of using the mangle: 'I always remember the heat of the mangle and [was] petrified because they used to say "be careful of your hands" ... very frightened of these big rollers because if your hand went in you were a goner.' While the Good Shepherd history notes that some of the Sisters suffered serious injuries such as this no mention is made of specific harms suffered by the girls (Kovesi, 2010: 157; Webb, 2013). It was also acknowledged that this work was 'terribly hard on residents and sisters alike' (Kovesi, 2010: 280).

## Education

Two of the women interviewed, Alice and Sophie, did not attend school at all while in Good Shepherd care; both had come when they were 16 years old by which time they had completed their formal childhood education. In contrast, Faye was taken out of school to work in the convent kitchen soon after she came to the Home at 11 years of age and she regretted not having had the opportunity to have had more formal education. Another eight women completed their education in the Home, usually by 15 years of age, with it being typical of girls to finish their schooling at this age in this time period. This, however, is not to say that they should not have been given further opportunities; rather, many reported feeling discouraged from education, at least partly because they believed they were not clever enough to continue. Only Jenny completed 12 years of education, which she did when she returned to live with her family for the final year.

Jenny attended Abbotsford's St Euphrasia's school but after two years was awarded a scholarship to a private Catholic school; unfortunately, she struggled there, and she attributed this to the poor quality of her prior education. She also realised later that she would have benefitted more from joining the 'commercial' stream that was on offer at this time at St Euphrasia's as this would have set her in much better stead for work opportunities. At the same time, although she felt she had not been given a choice, 'back in that era, [as a child,] you just did what you were told'. Unlike Jenny who would have preferred to have been in the commercial stream, Elizabeth was not allowed to do studies other than that available in that stream and regretted that this decision had not set her on a pathway to a better career. Nonetheless, the 'commercial school' at St Euphrasia's was a mid-1960s innovation that responded to changing times and highlighted women's interests in learning a broader range of vocational skills (Kovesi, 2010: 291).

For others, their memories of attending school while in the Home involved being taught by underqualified teachers, who were Sisters and later lay staff, and undertaking what they considered to be largely meaningless activities. Some were taught 'by correspondence' but did not receive any extra help if they needed it. Like others, Janet felt that they 'gave up' teaching her when she turned 15 years old. She was deemed to be 'unteachable'. Faye disclosed that she experienced emotional abuse most particularly about her intelligence and future prospects. She said that they thought she was 'too stupid'. Similarly, the Sisters told Eleanor that 'I wasn't going to amount to anything ... because academically I didn't have it'. She finished her formal education as a child in grade 4 but has since gone on to successfully complete postgraduate studies. In particular, these remarks that the women received about their intellectual abilities have stayed with them and they remain highly affected by these forms of emotional abuse. Their sense of humiliation and shame was still evident decades later.

There was some recognition of the context in which schooling was provided in earlier decades. For example, Elizabeth acknowledged that 'in those days' children were taught in very large groups and this would have contributed to the lack of assistance, and not dissimilar to the experiences of children in other educational settings at that time. In contrast, Margaret was very appreciative of the education she had received as they had 'taught her a lot' and 'given her chances' she would otherwise not have had. For example, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd had arranged an apprenticeship for her but she did not complete it. Margaret now realises it was a lost opportunity.

In addition to formal education, Good Shepherd created institutional environments in which girls and women could learn and practise vocational skills. Alice, for example, understood the work that she did with the girls and young women in the Good Shepherd laundry and cleaning the Home as ways of teaching them such skills. Others now believe that while these activities taught them the ethic and routine of work, it was primarily a way that the Sisters were able to maintain the buildings and sustain the institutions financially. Indeed, the nature and amount of work the children were involved in clearly suggest that these activities were not simply intended for them to develop vocational skills. And their engagement in these activities came at a considerable cost. As they worked rather than went to school many of the women felt that they had missed out on a decent education altogether, which could have been partly because of the quality of the education they received before entering a Good Shepherd Home as well as what they had received there. Their experiences of this work, rather than continuing their education, was to then impact on their potential future employment. Unless they returned to education later in life, as some did, this childhood work meant that their adult employment choices were highly restricted.

Most of the women mentioned the extra-curricular activities that were part of daily life in the Homes, such as sewing, ballet, music and drama. Some of the women learned to sew in the Home and Alice spoke fondly of the time that she had spent supporting the group of around 24 girls teaching them to sew and knit. As well, as a younger child, Alice had learned music at the orphanage before she came to the Good Shepherd Home and was to then have further lessons, teach music to girls in the Home and become a part of the Home's orchestra. Annual concerts that they performed at the Homes were a highlight for some. Alice, who participated in these concerts as well as supervised the girls' contributions to them, remembered both the preparation and performance with great joy. It seemed these were particularly memorable occasions as the staff and children had fun together. These educational and vocational activities were all highly gendered but not inconsistent with that occurring in schools in the wider community at this time.

### **Support and significant people in the Good Shepherd Homes**

Other research has identified the importance of significant people in the lives of children in care and upon leaving care (Biehal, 2014). While some of the women highlighted the importance of their sisters and other family members, friends and other adults, some individual Sisters were identified as significant. As previous sections suggest, there were some who experienced harsh treatment, but most of the women identified at least one Sister (or an auxiliary) who had been special to them. Having said that, Sisters were discouraged from 'special friendships' and were not to discuss 'personal matters with their charges' (Kovesi, 2010: 42). This was confirmed by the memories of a Sister who later regretted this approach: 'in hindsight now, I think I could have done a lot more had we known their circumstances. We didn't know one thing about them, which didn't make us as

understanding as we could have been' (Hanrahan, 1995, cited in Kovesi, 2010: 281). In contrast, Alice's memories were that 'some kids were very distressed about things so the nuns would have a little talk to them and help them, they'd feel better.' Alice, herself, came to have long term friendships with many of the Sisters she worked with over the 74 years she has lived in the Good Shepherd community.

As a teenager in St Aidan's (Bendigo), Janet 'had nobody to go to ... you got no support and no love' but she remembered as a much younger child in the Home there was a nun who was 'more cuddly and motherly'. Elizabeth acknowledged that there were 'a few nice ones' and Jenny said there were 'some lovely, kind ones'. In particular, there was a Sister who looked after the babies who was 'gorgeous' and 'she loved those kids. She was very kind and caring'. Jenny acknowledged that there were many children and few nuns and that to have individualised, caring relationships would have been very difficult. Having said that, she has retained contact with a Sister since leaving the Home who she stayed with when she travelled interstate as a young woman and another Sister who was part of her life until she died.

While Valerie believed that 'none of the nuns liked me', she remembered the two auxiliaries who were 'lovely' and taught her how to sew. Julia recalled the Sisters as 'kind' and Pamela felt 'cared for' and experienced compassion from the Sisters. In particular, she mentioned a Sister who was 'this beautiful, beautiful person' with whom she would have liked to have remained in contact after she left but, at the time, 'I didn't think anybody cared'. Faye, too, had a caring relationship with a Sister – she was 'good ... I could always go to her and talk to her and she was really good, yes'. But Faye qualified this expression of kindness by noting that 'she's just one nun, she was just one nun'.

Margaret 'really loved' a Sister and her granddaughter is named after another. (She only had sons.) Although she left the Good Shepherd Home through an escape which resulted in her being gaoled, Margaret had a strong bond with the Home, visiting after her first child was born and returning again many years later. She described something of the impact of this bond:

And when I left, [the Sister], she held me so tight – I swear this – I was crying, and I looked up at the sky and it went all funny – that's the first time I'd ever felt anything like that. And she says to me 'oh we're sorry, I am sorry' and I said 'no, we loved you and [another Sister]'. Yeah and the way she held me because you weren't allowed to touch them ... So yeah, it was a very, very emotional thing, very, very emotional thing it was.

For Sophie, her experience of the Good Shepherd hostel and the Sister and lay staff with whom she lived were to have a lasting impact on her life. She said, 'they took me under their wing, showed me how I could become something', and encouraged her to return to education. Before she came to the hostel at 16 she had little education and there she was supported to learn how she:

was going to get a job with the tools that I had [and] keep the job, learn how to save money, learn how to shop and just the daily grind of life, you know, make my bed, cook my meals, pay rent. Become a member of society.

It was, Sophie explained:

very supportive. Always, you know, 'how are you? How did you go today?' If there was a problem, where you thought you might lose your job or you weren't doing so well, you could sit down and talk, and you would always have a Thursday day night meeting to talk about budgeting.

Sophie, whose mother had died when she was young, became pregnant while she was still at the Good Shepherd hostel and, at 19, left to marry. Subsequently she was given practical and emotional assistance. Despite the prevailing social and religious attitudes towards unmarried motherhood, the Good Shepherd Sister welcomed the news of the baby and told Sophie she 'couldn't think of a better woman to be a mother'. The Sister supported Sophie through this pregnancy, and her second, and they remained in contact over many years, coming to their home for dinner each month. During this time, Sophie described herself as being 'cared for'.



## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided some sense of the women's lives before and during their time in care. Their entry to care was precipitated by circumstances typical of many children in this period, including poverty, violence in their family, and parental ill health. Good Shepherd's intention to protect girls and young women also draws attention to perceptions of moral danger to which they were exposed and which in some cases were likely to have contributed to the decision for them to reside in a Good Shepherd Home. This protectiveness manifested in the institutional environment in which they lived and was experienced as restrictive and custodial. Strict routines added to the institutional settings, and hard work was interpreted by most as punitive and unreasonable and came at the cost of a decent education. Despite the fear and distrust of the Sisters that some women interviewed reported, most were able to identify sources of support and care within the Home that, for some, sustained them over many years.

These accounts of time in care are somewhat different to those who grew up in other homes. First, in ways that were protective and sustained them, typically, the women knew why they were in care, many had retained family contact and most could identify significant relationships with family, Good Shepherd Sisters or other carers, during their time in the Home. Second, in ways that lent themselves to longer term harmful effects, their experiences are also different because of the level of confinement in the Home and subsequent deprivation of external contact, and the intensity of their involvement in institutional work from a young age. In the next chapter, then, we consider what the longer term consequences of their experiences have been.



## Chapter 4

### Life after care and acknowledging care

As other research has shown, despite adverse beginnings, many care-leavers show great resilience (Katz et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2009). This is not to minimise the consequences of care-leavers' harmful childhoods but rather to highlight their fortitude. Among this group of women who grew up in Good Shepherd Homes, their Catholicism, even when they had experienced harm from the practices of the Church, had been sustaining for some. For others, dedication to their work or children have been important ways that they derived meaning from their lives. Even so, at middle to older age there are ongoing pressures. For half, their lives are characterised by financial hardship. While not necessarily attributable to their time in care, serious ill health has affected many of the women and for some it is ongoing.

This chapter describes what happened after the women left care. It considers what they perceive to be the impact that it has had and what, if any, support they have received to deal with the adversity of their childhoods.

#### LIFE AFTER CARE

In seeking to understand life after care, the women were asked about a range of issues including their working lives, interpersonal relationships and experiences of parenting. First, they recounted what happened when they left care.

#### Leaving care

Before discussing the range of ways the women left care it is important to note that one woman has continued to be supported by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and this reflects the Good Shepherd approach of offering lifelong support. Alice has remained within the Good Shepherd community since she was 16, although for many years she has lived relatively independently compared to the earlier years in the institutional setting. At 16, without family and with no support to live in the community, she came from an orphanage to Ashfield. Alice described

herself as 'too young, I had no-one. I was frightened of the world at that time'. While she had considered becoming a Sister, and there was the possibility of being an auxiliary, she chose to be what she called 'a free agent', living in the Home, caring for the girls and other women and working in the laundry but without having to meet the requirements of their spiritual commitments. After the Home closed down, Alice remained living in the religious community. By this time Alice was aged in her fifties and she felt she did not have the support in the wider community that she would have needed to live independently. Moreover, the Sisters had become her family and friendship network. Good Shepherd has honoured its commitment to Alice's care and she has continued to contribute to their work in other ways over many years.

The other eleven women left Good Shepherd care aged between 15 and 23 years of age. While some of the women received support to leave, others did not. Elizabeth, for example, said she had not been prepared for life beyond the Home. However, among those women who left Good Shepherd care, a common theme is regarding the level of support they received to gain employment that is less evident among the leaving care accounts of others who grew up in institutional care. Three of the women left from a Good Shepherd hostel, from which two were already working and living relatively independently. When the hostel shut down, Good Shepherd assisted one of these women to move to a boarding house where other women who had been in the Abbotsford Home stayed. Another woman left the Home to return to live with her family, continue her education and complete high school locally and, later, she too came to live at the boarding house where others who had grown up in the Good Shepherd Home then lived. Faye and Pamela left to become a live-in housekeeper and nanny respectively, arranged by Good Shepherd, simultaneously gaining accommodation and employment. Good Shepherd found employment for some of the other women and given the routines of work firmly embedded in their daily lives, this transition seemed expected and they were prepared in ways that other young women leaving such circumstances may not have been. In contrast, Janet returned home to care for her grandmother but was not supported to gain employment. Rather she said 'I wasn't qualified for anything' although 'eventually' she got a job cleaning in the local hospital.

Others returned to live with their family and when these arrangements broke down, or had already fallen apart, Good Shepherd assisted them to get accommodation typically boarding with other families. Julia, for example, on turning 16, and unwilling to return to live with her family, left the Home, boarded with an older woman and was supported to find employment. At 16, Eleanor returned home but soon after was sexually assaulted by a family member and left immediately seeking safety in the Home. She was unable to tell the Sister what had happened but told her simply that 'I can't go home'. She was treated kindly and stayed for some time in the Home before being supported to find board nearby, from where she moved soon after to live independently.

### **Working lives**

On leaving the Home, the women took up unskilled work in sites such as shops, offices and hospitals and were employed as housekeepers, cleaners, kitchen hands, shop assistants, laundry workers, nursing aides or clerical staff, for which their time in the Home had prepared them. As noted, many were given support by the Home to gain employment. Their experiences of work routines and employment practices in the Home may well have made them highly employable compared to other young women. While arduous and typically at the cost of a better education, the daily work in the Home facilitated a move to some level of financial independence upon leaving.

Most of the women worked over many years before and after marriage, and only Julia did not undertake paid work at all after the birth of her children because, she said, even though she wanted to continue, her husband did not allow her. Faye left the Home for a job as a live-in housekeeper which provided a very small income and somewhere to live. She soon tired of this work as she found working in private homes too restricting and later worked in hospitals and lived independently. Even though Elizabeth had not wanted to study commercial subjects she has had a successful administrative career rising to a senior professional position.

Four of the women undertook further education and training as adults and three of these women secured better paid and more satisfying employment. Sophie considered herself to have had a very poor education and initially working in unskilled jobs. She then undertook specialist training resulting in a professional career in a health-related field. Eleanor first worked in health settings and was inspired to return to education, completing postgraduate studies and working in senior professional positions. Janet initially worked as a hospital cleaner and after further training has had a long career in social care.

### **Interpersonal relationships during adulthood**

Most of the women had long term intimate relationships during their adult lives and two did not marry. Five described unsatisfactory marriages, including four who experienced violence and abuse from their husband. Valerie, for example, explained that she had been treated as 'a doormat'. Julia, Pamela and Faye endured decades of emotional abuse and other controlling behaviours from their respective husbands. Of the ten women who had siblings, four described relationships that were difficult, and continued to be so over their adult lives, and three others that were very close and supportive. Four had retained relationships with other girls with whom they had grown up in Good Shepherd and they derived pleasure and support from these interactions. Alice retained close relationships with the women with whom she worked in the Good Shepherd Homes.

Valerie had lost contact with former residents and was keen to re-engage as she felt lonely and isolated from not being able to share these experiences.

Most of the women had not shared their experiences of their time in the Good Shepherd Homes widely. While typically their husbands and children were aware that they had spent time in an institution as a child, very few had disclosed beyond their immediate family in any detail. Julia, however, had told her husband but had never spoken with her two children about her time in the Home. Joan's husband was aware that she had spent time in an orphanage and they did not have children of their own, but it was only with her two sisters with whom she had shared time in the Home more than 60 years ago had she discussed this part of her life until very recently: 'we'd reminisce between the three of us but other than that it never went out the door.' Two months before the research interview in which Joan had participated her niece had asked her:

'what did you do when you're a kid?' ... I said, 'well, what do you want to know for?' She said, 'I like to hear things like what you did when you were growing up.' So I thought 'oh, I'll take the chance and tell her'.

Her niece had been interested in and accepting of what her aunt told her. Joan was pleased to begin to share her experiences. Eleanor revealed that she did not tell people because if they knew they 'view you differently'. She followed this up by explaining further:

the shame and stigma of being in Shepherds, has been something that has sat with me all week [after the interview]. This comes from how the community viewed Shepherds and those who went there. As a result it becomes the hidden part of my life both publicly and with my family. I have throughout my life diverted questions when asked things like 'what school did you go to? Have you been to your school reunion? Why did you start work so early? Where did you grow up? Even in the family it is not talked about, it is hidden, my niece and nephews have no idea. So it's always about hiding that part of my life, which continues to impact emotionally.

The women who were still in contact with others who had been in Good Shepherd care were the only ones who felt they could speak freely of their time in the Home. This sense of stigma is not uncommon among care-leavers (Raftery & O'Sullivan, 1999; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004).

Some of the women had significant people who had supported them over their adult lives. Eleanor, for example, became friends with a family through an outside activity when she was living in the Good Shepherd hostel. During her young adulthood they greatly supported her by inviting her to live with them when she was recovering from a serious illness, including her in family occasions and taking her on holidays. Over time she grew to feel that she had been 'adopted' by them, and these feelings were reciprocated, and ongoing, evident in the close and loving relationships that have endured. Eleanor has also made solid friendships through work and these people had inspired and encouraged her to return to study and pursue her career. A key figure in Sophie's life other than the Sister who worked at the hostel and supported her through her first two pregnancies was her mother-in-law. Sophie's mother had died when she was a child and she developed a strong, caring relationship with her husband's mother, which steadfastly continued after their divorce.

### **Children and parenting**

Three of the women did not have any children of their own and the other nine women have 27 children between them (and also grandchildren and great grandchildren). Eleanor, one of the three women among the research participants without children, had fostered a child and continues this loving relationship into her young adulthood, maintaining ongoing contact and retaining a room in her house for her. Another woman with a child of her own had fostered three children from within her extended family. Despite herself having a fraught relationship with her siblings, she saw it as important to care for their children having been through a similar experience herself. None of the women's children had been in care reiterating a point made by other care-leavers in previous research that having had the experience themselves they would not want their own children to do so (Murray et al., 2009).

Elizabeth believes her parenting has been affected by difficult relationships with both her parents and her time in the Home. She described herself as 'not maternal' and acknowledged that she had been too tough on her daughter. Others, though, did not think that their parenting had been affected by their time in the Home; if anything, it made them more loving. For example, despite her difficult childhood and married life, Valerie described loving relationships with her four children. Julia believes she has been 'a better parent to my children than my mother or father had been to me'. She described their relationship as 'close', unlike that with her own parents, and she noted that she had raised her children well.

Many of the women expressed great pride in their children's achievements. Six women identified their children's educational and work successes as making them particularly proud. For this group of women who, by and large, regarded themselves as having received poor schooling, their children's educational success was of great significance. Children from at least four of these families are university educated and are now working in professional positions. Sadly, Pamela felt her daughter had become 'too successful', moving up in the world and 'leaving her behind'. For Sophie, it was not just their educational and vocational success but also that they were 'contributors' to society. All of the women cherished the love and kindness their children showed to them. Faye is very appreciative that one of her three surviving sons is her carer. Faye experienced a difficult childhood and an abusive marriage, and 'for the first time in my life', she declared, 'I've had someone that's really looked after me'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF TIME IN CARE

As the previous chapters suggest, there were mixed views among the women about their time in Good Shepherd care and the meanings it held in their lives now. It is also important to note that, for some, these feelings had changed over time. As they age and reflect on their experiences in the context of their lives, for some, there has been greater willingness to appreciate the positive things the Sisters had done, and the challenging circumstances under which this care had been undertaken. On the other hand, there remained awareness of the difficulties they had experienced and the impact they had. In the light of both their memories of their time in the Home, and their reflections on these memories, the women offered their insights on acknowledgements and the responses of former care providers to those who grew up in care.

### Reflections on their time in care

In the previous section of this chapter we have seen how the women experienced their lives after leaving Good Shepherd care. Their reflections reiterate some of these experiences but also provided further nuances to their understanding of their impacts. Pamela's experiences in the Home were not among the most punishing but as she spoke she expressed a reflective note:

I'm just thinking how much that they did for me. Without them, without their compassion, and they did have compassion - they weren't aware of what was going on in here [pointing to her head and her heart] but they did have compassion for me ... I didn't get into any trouble. I didn't have anything that went wrong in my life there ... going back I'm thinking they were so good to me ... there was nothing bad with them.

While it was not considered an excuse for cruelty, among the women it was noted that there were relatively few Sisters and many children in the Homes which contributed to the harshness and inadequate care that they received. Moreover, as Jenny explained, the 'strictness' that the Sisters employed, was 'how children were treated then'. Jenny was one of the more forgiving of the women, and also one who reported less harm than others. She noted that:

some of the ones in our area complained bitterly about how they were treated ... they've been resentful for it all their lives. And I can't speak for them but all I can say is ... that at least at the convent we had a roof over our head, we had the same bed to sleep in every night ... So at least we had stability.

Jenny compared her experience to that of children today who had childhoods that were characterised by instability and multiple foster placements or periods of time spent with parents who were unable to care for them properly. Similarly, Janet reported that a close friend of hers 'had a worse time of it from orphanage to orphanage of abuse so she's had it a lot worse than I did. A lot of them had it worse than me, you know? So really I consider myself a lot luckier.' Indeed, she acknowledged that:

opportunities and everything would have been a lot better had I had a better experience and had the help especially with schooling, I wouldn't be working where I am probably ... [but] ... that's just the cards you're dealt with, you just have to - you know?

As we have seen, on the one hand, many of the women regretted the poor education they had received as children and the implications it was to then have for their working lives. On the other hand, on reflection, some acknowledged that the poor quality of education they had received was not considered unique to the time and was attributed by some to the large number of children in classes, which was typical of the period. But as Janet acknowledged in the previous quote, her education meant that her job opportunities had been limited and her current ill health restricted the amount of work she could do. All in all, it meant she would need to keep working until she was entitled to receive the Age Pension but, even then, she had nothing to fall back on, living as she does 'from pay cheque to pay cheque'.

Unlike those who used the wider societal context to understand their experiences – and to minimise their effects – for others, there was an increasing awareness of the toll that the harms they had experienced in childhood had taken. Memories of their time in care continued to be highly affecting. For some, their harsh treatment was highly individualised: there were some Sisters who they had experienced as cruel and unkind, and this had deeply impacted them emotionally. Moreover, they felt stigmatised from having been a child who had grown up in care through no fault of their own. Their reflections also suggest that they recognised that some aspects were systemically harsh, rather than individualised, such as living as a child in an enclosed environment. These views are reiterated by Eleanor, reflecting on the emotional impact of having grown up in the Home:

A deeper impact of being at Shepherds I would say is the psychological effect that has had a lasting impact. This relates to the way [a Sister] worked with us and in general the punitive approach by the nuns. The nuns not understanding the emotional impact and vulnerability of girls and the impact of being placed there would have. The feeling of abandonment, loss, etc. The lack of trust of the world around them and not understanding why. All impacted by the fact you were in prison and sent to work. They compounded these issues.

While some described having had these varying negative experiences in the Homes, they have since 'moved on', not wishing to dwell on the past any longer. Despite a failed attempt at reconciliation (described below) and acknowledging that her time in the Home had affected her, Faye had now found happiness in the care of her son and among the friendships of the retirement village where she lives. These relationships showed Faye that she was valued and loved. She said that the Home:

did affect me. I thought that nobody would ever like me or want to trust me because they used to say terrible things about me and that ... [but] not anymore, not anymore, no, the people here [in the retirement village], they know me and they'll tell you.



Even though Margaret's time in the Home involved a number of escapes, she reflected that 'a lot of the nuns had compassion when you look back' and they had given her opportunities that she would otherwise not have had. Indeed, she 'really didn't have bad, bad things to say about that ... and the nuns, they did their best'. In particular, they had given her religion, which like some of the other women, had been an ongoing support to her. (For others, they had turned their back on religion as a result of their time in the Home.) Margaret's only concerns were that they had changed her name (to symbolise a new beginning in the Home, in keeping with practice at the time (Kovesi, 2010), although only two other research participants revealed this) and that they had made a lot of money out of the labour of the girls and young women who lived there. Pamela is also reconciled to her time in the Home and expressed concern about the 'anger and aggression towards the nuns and towards everything ... it was very depressing to hear them'. She urged those who continued to be unhappy about their experiences in the Home to consider what their circumstances would have been if they had not been there.

And in further contrast, in retrospect, at least three of the women declared that their time in the Home had not impacted their lives negatively at all. Julia remained unconcerned about her time in the Home explaining that she put aside her experiences when she left, 'never looking back'. For others, as we have seen, the Home had impacted positively and they continued to be grateful for the care that they had received. Sophie has retained her belief that her time in the Good Shepherd hostel was life changing, with her 'pushed in the right path ... I was guided in the right way'. And Alice, who has remained in the care of Good Shepherd, explained that she has 'had a good life here. I can't complain'. As a young woman she was sad that she did not have parents and she missed having visitors, but she acknowledged that 'was no fault of the nuns' and 'the nuns made up for what they could'.

### **Acknowledgements to date**

Given this range of views, responses to the ways in which acknowledgements could occur were also varied. All of the women were aware of financial redress and other forms of acknowledgement and only Julia had not engaged in any way. She did not feel any acknowledgement was relevant to her, or necessary, and nor could she say what might help others. While Janet thought that it was 'all too late', others agreed that, generally, public and private apologies, financial support, memorials, practical targeted support (such as counselling and dental treatment) and access to records services, could all be useful and demonstrate responsibility for inadequate care by the relevant organisations. The sources of these acknowledgements could vary, as they derived from government funded support services, or directly from state or commonwealth governments, or Good Shepherd or other organisations that had provided care.

In relation to apologies, Elizabeth thought they were 'meaningless' and was scornful of their value and the sincerity of the organisations involved. In contrast, Margaret was pleased to have received an apology in the context of a compensation payment and Eleanor wanted a public apology. For Pamela, no apology was needed, in her mind, she had been 'safe', and the Sisters had 'done their best'. Rather than seeking an apology, Faye sought to express her appreciation to Good Shepherd. Even though her time in the Home had been difficult she acknowledged that she had received benefits from her time there and she wished to reconcile this part of her life. Faye enlisted her sister's help to find the Sister to whom she wanted to express her gratitude and then:

I wrote a letter to [Sister] to thank her for showing me how to sew and everything and what they did, taught me religion and that ... but I never got an answer back ... So I tried to do the right thing. I tried to show my appreciation for the little bit of things they did to me but – no.

Even when her sister had made contact directly with this Sister, there was still no response to Faye and, indeed, 'she was very nasty to her [sister]'. It had meant a lot to Faye to reach out to the Sister and to receive such a negative response was hurtful.

Some of the women had received limited financial assistance. Although she did not want to accept such support, Faye was very appreciative of the help she had received from a government funded community service to pay some medical and other living expenses. Offers had also been made to assist her to pay the fees at the retirement village where she lives. She would otherwise be unable to stay living there in her home of the past two decades. Even though she struggles to make these payments living on the Age Pension she continues to do so preferring to retain her independence. Jenny had received support to access dental treatment, rectifying problems with her teeth that were derived from poor dentistry when she was in the Home. Sophie had received counselling support as a younger woman for which she was appreciative.

Others, too, would like to receive financial support for ongoing dental, medical and other health related problems. Joan, struggling financially and with significant health issues, had sought financial assistance through a redress scheme but was deemed ineligible. Eleanor was concerned that the processes for accessing redress could in themselves be abusive requiring as they can for applicants to recount traumatic experiences and be assessed on their impact.

Most had sought their records and two of the women wanted further support in finding family members. However, there was some disquiet about accessing personal records due to the often limited information that could be recovered, and the 'devastating' effect that this could have. Faye, for example, found that 'they wrote terrible things about me' which only served to confirm what she had always thought the Sisters' views about her had been. There were also concerns about the length of time it could take to receive records and it seemed there was limited support at the time when the records were received. Eleanor reiterated the need for the life histories of former residents to be collected and for official histories to be 'corrected' but that it should include 'good news stories' to help change community attitudes to those who had grown up in care.

For care-leavers who have been interviewed in other research, returning to the site of their childhood Home can be emotionally significant (Murray et al., 2009); this group had varied views. Julia had returned to the site of the Ashfield Home which is now a retirement village and nursing home when she was looking for accommodation for her mother. The site held no meaning and she would otherwise not have gone. In contrast, Jenny had visited the Abbotsford site on many occasions, including for the memorial ceremony, and said that:

it's important to have something like that so that people can go and that it's there. I think it's lovely that the convent didn't get pulled down ... it's lovely to go back to the convent. I enjoy going back there and walking around the gardens that we were never allowed to walk around.

The Abbotsford site is now a multi-arts precinct and Jenny enjoys meeting friends for a coffee there. Importantly, too, 'it's lovely to see it being used for good'. Faye had also returned to the Abbotsford site. She explained that 'I did want to go back and see it' but 'it just broke my heart when I went down to see all those floors and that I used to have to scrub and everything and oh god'. Despite this sadness, Faye was keen to return to visit the History Centre in Good Shepherd Chapel where there were photos of life in the Home.

While some of the women had visited the Memorial Garden at the Chapel, Eleanor was most concerned that the Leederville site did not have such a memorial. While a memorial to the auxiliaries has been erected, there is no acknowledgement at what is now the Western Australian Catholic Education Centre that it had previously been the home of thousands of girls and women. The Memorial Garden in Abbotsford is not easily accessible, or necessarily meaningful, to women who grew up at other Good Shepherd Homes.

A small number of the women retained contact with others who had lived in Good Shepherd Homes, and at least one other was eager to have this contact but did not know how to go about it. As well, some of the women had attended reunions, with mixed responses. For some it had been significant to revisit the past with others who had shared similar experiences; for others it had highlighted the different ways in which former residents had made sense of these experiences and lived their lives after care.

## CONCLUSION

For most of the women interviewed, their time in care had a lasting impact. In one way, their routine engagement in work in the Home, and the Sisters' support upon leaving, enabled their ready employment. At the same time, the poor education that many had received both in and before the Home resulted in limited employment options over their lifetime. This has had a direct impact on their economic security in middle to older age, with financial hardship characterising many of their lives today. Compounding this is the ill health experienced by half of the women at this time. Most of the women saw benefits in a range of acknowledgements but there appeared to be little engagement with Good Shepherd directly to access support although some had received financial and practical support from government funded or other sources.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This research set out to better understand the experiences of former residents of Good Shepherd Homes with the intention of both acknowledging those experiences and informing GSA NZ's work in recognition of this group. After brief summaries of the research design and the demographic characteristics of the women who were involved in the research, the conclusion responds to the two questions posed by GSA NZ that the research sought to answer.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

Using a qualitative oral history methodology, this applied social research project collected accounts of former residents' experiences before, during and after their time residing in Good Shepherd Homes. The analysis of their experiences then informed suggestions to GSA NZ about future social policy and service delivery. This analysis is contextualised by the histories of child welfare in Australia and the Good Shepherd Homes and, in doing so, the report offers multiple perspectives of institutional life. Responding to these contested histories forms part of the suggested responses to former residents by GSA NZ.

The research was overseen by a reference group and involved a literature review, site visits and in-depth oral history interviews with 12 women who spent time as children and women in Good Shepherd Homes. The research participants were restricted to a group who came to the Homes as girls and young women entering care. Consequently, the research was unable to comprehensively draw out the possible range of experiences and forms of recognition for the wider population, including boys and other women who resided at Good Shepherd Homes. These limitations were due to the recruitment methods and the age and health status of this population of former residents. While the research was commissioned by GSA NZ most of the participants were not recruited through GSA NZ

services and two thirds (eight participants) were recruited through government funded care-leaver support services independent of GSA NZ.

At the time of interview, the majority of the women were aged in their sixties with an age range of late fifties to early nineties. The length of time receiving care and support from Good Shepherd varied from two to 74 years, with the average length of time of five years (excluding the longest period). Their age during care ranged from 3 to 90 years, with the most common ages in care among the group of 13 to 16 years of age. The women lived in four institutional sites in Melbourne (Abbotsford), Bendigo (St Aidan's), Perth (Leederville) and Sydney (Ashfield). Three women spent some time in Good Shepherd hostels, with the youngest woman interviewed only living at a Good Shepherd hostel.

#### WHAT WERE THE EXPERIENCES OF FORMER RESIDENTS IN GOOD SHEPHERD INSTITUTIONS?

The report presents an analysis of the accounts of life in Good Shepherd Homes from the perspectives of the girls and women who lived there. It is the first time that Good Shepherd has sought detailed accounts of the experiences of those who lived in their Homes. As it is only a small group, it is difficult to know if this range of experiences begins to reflect those of the larger population of thousands of women who lived in these Homes. It is important to acknowledge

then that this is a small sample of the lived - and living - experiences of former residents and many voices have not been heard. No Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women participated in the research. As well, it must be noted that this may be a particular group of women who shared some common characteristics that lent themselves to particular life outcomes and reflected high levels of resilience – all knew why they came into care, most had ongoing family contact while in care, and many developed a caring relationship with a Sister or other religious, for some continuing over many years after leaving the Home. Such outcomes as that of this group of women are not always apparent among care-leavers who have participated in other research.

The literature review sought evidence of experiences of time in the care of Good Shepherd Homes and while there has been a small number of submissions to public inquiries, online publications and some engagement in social media, there is yet much that is undocumented. There is much scope for further work to be done documenting the lives of those who experienced the care of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and reshaping the official histories of the Homes to better reflect the accounts of the girls, boys and women who lived there.

The interviews were informed by a literature review that highlighted the impact of welfare policies and practice on the experiences of girls and young women who entered Good Shepherd care during the 1940s to 1970s, as well as noting the social changes that were occurring in the wider community and Catholic Church at this time. Girls and young women could be voluntarily placed in care by their family, as about half of the women interviewed were. While accommodated in the same 'class' in Good Shepherd Homes, others were sentenced by the courts as wards of the state. For both groups, poverty, parental ill health, violence and family break-down were among the reasons why these girls were institutionalised, characteristic

of all children who entered care in this period, as identified in Chapter 2. In addition, and highlighting the gendered nature of welfare responses, there was some evidence that concerns about 'moral danger' also influenced decisions about their institutionalisation. Unusually, and largely due to the age most of the women came into Good Shepherd care and the level of family contact, the women knew why they were in care as children.

Among the group of 12 women, there were diverse experiences during and after care. Three key themes are evident in the research. First, the research identified a severe institutional setting and cruel punishments that some women recalled experiencing. The women were surrounded by high walls, but some felt unprotected and imprisoned. The resulting emotional harms have had long term impacts. They undertook the work of adults which may have assisted them later to gain employment, but came at the cost of a poor education, access to more highly skilled occupations across their life time, and physical ill health as they aged. These elements reflect aspects of the gendered nature of welfare. On the one hand, as young women, the prospect (or reality) of 'moral danger' appeared to influence some decisions about their need for protection within the confines of the Home. On the other, while Good Shepherd supported their capacity for financial independence, their gender (and class) meant that the work they would undertake would be unskilled and low paid. This means that for many their time in Good Shepherd care has continued to shape their lives powerfully over time as this lost potential has played out.

Second, without negating the significance of the severity of the institutional setting, the engagement in adult work and the punishment and fear of punishment some endured, there is a range of ways in which the women reported that they were supported, in particular in relation to gaining employment and by the long term emotional connections with individual Sisters that some of the women maintained. This capacity to acknowledge the support that they received may in part be because of the time of life at which the women were interviewed. Their interviews were highly reflective, drawing out their memories and their analysis of these memories from the perspective of their lives at late middle to older age.

Third, despite adverse experiences that all the women experienced before and/or during care, the women's accounts of their lives demonstrate resilience and, for most, levels of satisfaction with what they have achieved. It is worth noting that despite this level of life satisfaction it may well have been much greater if their childhood experiences had been less harsh and not characterised by deprivation as they were in the Homes. Nonetheless, their achievements include advances in their work and career, loving relationships with their children and foster children, and pride in their children's successes. Today, some of the women are content with their lives; others are struggling. At least half of the women interviewed now experience financial hardship, and with this insecurity heightened for some by serious ill health.

## HOW CAN THESE EXPERIENCES INFORM HOW FORMER CARE PROVIDERS ACKNOWLEDGE AND RESPOND TO FORMER RESIDENTS?

Before turning to the findings of the research, it is worth referring to the principles that guide the work of GSANZ, as these are relevant and can be applied in considering responses to the women who grew up in their care.

**Our vision** is that all women, girls and families are safe, well, strong and connected.

**Our purpose** is to enable fullness of life for women, girls and families experiencing disadvantage.

**Our values** of audacity, zeal, justice, the value of each person and reconciliation guide our work.

**Our impact:** We will focus our impact on:

- Economic participation and wellbeing – Women are enabled to be economically strong.
- Safety - Women, girls and families live free of violence.
- Resilience – Women, girls and families are equipped to overcome the challenges they face.
- System change - Positive change in laws, policies, financial instruments, social norms and behaviours (GSANZ, 2019d).



Three key overarching principles frame the suggested responses to former residents of Good Shepherd Homes. First, all initiatives will require GSANZ to continue to engage with former residents and work closely together. Co-design is now considered a good practice model in developing new programs across a range of client groups and should also guide the work of GSANZ. By working collaboratively with former residents it may become evident that there is a range of initiatives that have yet to be considered that could be explored. Second, all these developmental activities need to be conducted in ways that properly pay attention to the breadth of former residents' experiences and ensuring such engagement is embedded in trauma informed practice. Third, there is urgency to this work due to the ageing population of former residents and the possibility of failing health. To truly reflect the needs and interests of this group they must be directly engaged in these processes and this must be done without any delay.

Most of the women involved in the research had engaged with acknowledgements but only half, and mostly minimally, had been involved with, or received assistance from, Good Shepherd in doing so. Instead, their engagement had been with government and community sector sources of support. While some women may not have wished to engage with GSANZ directly due to harmful past experiences, nor felt the need to seek acknowledgement, the interviews did not indicate that these were the only possible explanations. It may be simply because they do not know what GSANZ has on offer.

While a public apology from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd is presented on the GSANZ website, as well as reference to various forms of practical and financial support offered by GSANZ, greater promotion is needed to ensure former residents are aware of these initiatives. As noted on the GSANZ website (2019a), 'we are continually learning about how to reach out and listen to people who have been affected'. Placing a direct link to 'Services for former residents' and 'Apology to former residents' on the GSANZ website's front page is perhaps a more obvious pathway.

One of the most concerning issues was the level of financial hardship and ill health among this small group of women. Providing support to ensure economic security and access to health services (including dental, psychological, medical and other support) in these circumstances is a major response that could be further explored by GSANZ. While the Sisters of the Good Shepherd are a participating organisation in the National Redress Scheme, it is unclear the extent to which this will provide support to women who lived in Good Shepherd Homes due to its focus on helping those who have experienced institutional sexual abuse. Additional initiatives may be necessary to truly respond to the needs of women who grew up in Good Shepherd Homes. Such programs would resonate strongly with many of the values integral to GSANZ's work such as justice and reconciliation. Moreover, it would aid the achievement of 'fullness of life for women, girls and families experiencing disadvantage'.

While none of the women interviewed revealed that they wished to report abuse experienced in Good Shepherd Homes, that some disclosed that they did experience abuse points to the need for a comprehensive and well supported process by which former residents are able to report such conduct. GSANZ has such a process in place but this research is a prompt to ensure that its processes and mechanisms, including where necessary regarding reporting to external agencies, meets best practice standards.



This research suggests that former residents of Good Shepherd value memorials but only the Abbotsford and Ashfield sites have such an acknowledgement. The Abbotsford memorial is for all former residents of all Good Shepherd Homes, but it is unclear how well known this memorial is and how meaningful and accessible it is for those outside of Melbourne. GSANZ's Memorial Committee is planning memorials at other Good Shepherd sites and having ceremonies that sensitively and respectfully pay accord to those who lived there. GSANZ's support for the work of their Memorial Committee and making this initiative a priority is a way of honouring the lives of former residents.

There are other initiatives, such as an oral history collection, building on a pilot project which explored good practice in such circumstances (Perera & Landvogt, 2019), that could be established for which former residents' accounts would be gathered. Acknowledging the absence of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander accounts in this project, arrangements would be put in place to ensure that special attention was paid to the recruitment of this participant group. Due to the ageing population of former residents and their health status, and their desire to be heard and their life stories recorded and archived, there is urgency about such a project and should be taken up as a priority. A heritage museum curated by former residents is another possible initiative that provides evidence of life in Good Shepherd Homes from the perspective of the residents. Such material should be used to revise the materials that account for Good Shepherd's history. For example, the GSANZ website could be rewritten to better reflect the life histories and perspectives of former residents by acknowledging and including these contested histories.

Because of historical legacies, accessing personal records can be disappointing and hurtful. To minimise harm, records must be released to former residents in ways that are well supported, informative and timely. It is likely that GSANZ's Heritage Engagement program (and state government records services) will require additional resources to enable this to occur. As knowledge of the Heritage Engagement program grows, or events occur that raise the profile of Good Shepherd, requests for personal records are likely to increase, and this demand should be recognised and supported. Consideration should also be given to the need for family reunification support. It would also be useful to seek advice from former residents about their interest in regular reunions facilitated either by GSANZ, or by former residents and supported by GSANZ.

Across GSANZ services, including those targeting former residents of Good Shepherd Homes as well as the range of other GSANZ programs where it can be expected that there will be engagement with those who experienced care in other settings, attention should be paid to ensuring that staff are well equipped to work with these groups. It is suggested that GSANZ review its professional development offerings to ensure they have the capacity to create such a skilled workforce across their specialist and generalist services. In enhancing these professional skills, the specialist expertise of advocates will be vital.

GSANZ has an important role to play in working with other former care providers and organisations that provide services to this group in advocating for best practice responses. As well, beyond excellence in service provision, GSANZ can use its commitment to system change to work with advocates, government and community sectors to highlight and promote improvements in relevant policy and resourcing.

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