

Evidence, memory and justice. Archival responses to recent Australian reports about the treatment of children in care. Dr Joanna Sassoon, National Library of Australia

NOTE: Part of proposed panel session with papers by MacKenzie and Olsen.

This paper will discuss archival responses to recent Australian reports about the treatment of children in care. National reports in the past 15 years relating to the lifelong impact of the treatment of three different groups of children in care in Australia have raised many issues relating to personal identity which have archives and archival practices at their core. Issues raised through these national reports which relate to archives include the importance of knowing ones identity, the search for family members, calls for compensation, the right to tell ones story and improved access to and management of records.

While the three groups of children – Indigenous Australians (Stolen Generations), British and Maltese child migrants, and children placed in care through Australian welfare laws (Forgotten Australians) – have had different experiences and now have different personal needs, the outcomes relating to archival strategies identified through the reports have many similarities. This paper will point to differences in the archival policy responses to these groups who have a common experience of being in care as children, and some of the challenges that the different groups face in order to achieve equitable responses to the search for identity and finding families.

These reports have resulted in a range of policy initiatives, and this paper will provide an overview of some of the responses where archives are important and some of the challenges that need to be overcome to implement them to effect. This paper will include discussion of some of the archival issues relating to compensation schemes and government policy responses including indexing projects, national oral histories and improving access to records. Some

of the challenges relating to these responses will also be discussed.

Dr Joanna Sassoon has worked in social policy development, as an archivist in archives and libraries and as an archival educator. Most recently she has worked with the Commonwealth government on formulating archival policy responses to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants reports, project managing the National Library of Australia's oral history project with this group, and on the Western Australian Aboriginal Stolen Wages Taskforce. She has published internationally on photographic theory, Australian and environmental history and archival practice.