



OUTLINE OF EXPECTED EVIDENCE OF IAN HAMM (CONNECTING HOME)

DECEMBER HEARINGS 2022 (CHILD PROTECTION)

7 DECEMBER 2022

I BACKGROUND

1. I am a Yorta Yorta man from Yarrawonga. I have been actively involved in the Victorian Aboriginal community for many years, including with government (both Federal and Victorian) and in the community sector. I am passionate about supporting the Stolen Generations on their healing journey.
2. I also hold a number of governance positions relevant to the Aboriginal community, including:
 - (a) Chair of Connecting Home (discussed further below);
 - (b) a Board member of the Healing Foundation (and Chair of its Stolen Generations Reference Group and Chair of its Historical Records Taskforce) (discussed further below);
 - (c) Chair of First Nations Foundation (focused on financial prosperity for Indigenous Australians); and
 - (d) Chair of the Board of Directors of the Koorie Heritage Trust.
3. I was previously Deputy Chair of the Board of Directors at Aboriginal Housing Victoria, and also acted as the Chair of the Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee (discussed further below).

II ABOUT CONNECTING HOME

4. Connecting Home provides individual support services to survivors of the Stolen Generations. I don't like the term "members" of the Stolen Generations – it makes it sound like it's some sort of club. Connecting Home also provides information and education to the wider community regarding Stolen Generations history and current issues. Connecting Home defines a survivor of the Stolen Generations as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who was removed or separated from family, hand, language and culture as a result of past policies – including adoption, foster care and institutionalisation. A fundamental principal of Connecting Home is around inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness.
5. Connecting Home aims to respond to the needs not only of those people directly affected by past removal policies, being those Aboriginal people that were removed before 31 December 1976. The services provided by Connecting Home are aimed at people suffering the consequences of decades of alienation and dislocation – that is what we are funded for, and what we were established to do. Connecting Home generally has somewhere between 40 to 60 active clients at any one time.
6. However, evidence has demonstrated that intergenerational trauma takes a number of generations to resolve. In my evidence to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria (**Forced Adoptions Inquiry**) last year, I referred to the Stolen

Generations people living in Victoria today (approximately 2,500 people). This means that the families and descendants of these people may also be experiencing intergenerational trauma – which makes it a significant number of affected people. We also assist the families of our clients.

7. The services Connecting Home provide include broad based case management services to members of the Stolen Generations, which includes connecting people with other services that may be better equipped to meet their specific needs. We provide a wraparound service, recognising that people do not have a 'single' issue, there are lots of issues, and counselling and support is critically important. The loss of culture that survivors of Stolen Generations experience often leads to a loss of personal and social identity. Many adults spend their lives not only trying to re-connect with their families, but also with their culture. Connecting Home aims to help people rebuild connections and find a place of peace. We see people use our services and step away, but then return to us when they need to reconnect or need support (e.g. if they feel they have 'drifted' from a good place that they were in).
8. In addition, Connecting Home also provide information, support and assistance with regard to:
 - (a) Victorian Stolen Generations Reparations (discussed further below);
 - (b) National redress support services (in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse), providing culturally safe support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are thinking about applying for redress; and
 - (c) The Stolen Generations Funeral Fund.
9. Connecting Home is also registered to provide National Disability Insurance Scheme services to the Stolen Generations and their families (and offers support coordination, plan management, and direct support services).
10. In my role as Chair, I have oversight on the strategic direction of Connecting Home.

III ABOUT THE HEALING FOUNDATION

11. In my work with the Healing Foundation, I am involved at the State and Commonwealth level on Stolen Generations issues. The Healing Foundation refers to Stolen Generations as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed as children from their families and communities through race-based policies set up by both State and Federal governments from 1910 to the 1970s.
12. The Healing Foundation provides a national platform to amplify the voices and lived experience of Stolen Generations survivors and their families. The Healing Foundation promotes trauma-aware, healing informed practice to help government, policymakers and workforces understand their role in intergenerational healing. The Healing Foundation is involved in and supports projects around Australia focused on Stolen Generations and intergenerational trauma. The Healing Foundation also collects data and evidence around the Stolen Generations to use for policy development, government responses and to support survivors. Up until around 2018, there was not a lot of data on Stolen Generations people.

IV MY WORK ON THE STOLEN GENERATIONS REPARATIONS STEERING COMMITTEE

13. As noted above, I acted as Chair of the Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee, which was established in December 2020 to begin the reparations design process. The Steering Committee issued its report in June 2021. A copy of that report is at **Annexure 1**.
14. Relevantly, the report discussed the “guarantees against repetition” of policies and practices that resulted in separation from family, community, Culture, Country, and subsequent loss of identity and sense of belonging, and provided a list of ‘outstanding matters’, namely:
 - *“Overarching strategy and objectives relating to intergenerational trauma and the child protection system.*
 - *The removal rate for Aboriginal children in Victoria is 90 per 1,000 and has been increasing every year.*
 - *In 2019 the second highest over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care was in Victoria.¹¹³ The Bringing Them Home Report states that Victoria had the first highest over-representation in 1993 indicating that little has changed statistically since this time.*
 - *Admissions to out-of-home care were at the highest rate in Victoria (38.4 per 1,000 children);*
 - *Between 2018 and 2019, there were 12 adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Victoria, all to non-Indigenous adoptive parents. VACCA has reported that it was not consulted in relation to these adoptions.*
 - *The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on long-term child protection orders was highest in Victoria (75.6 per 1,000).”*
15. Following the recommendations set out in the report, on 31 March 2022 the Victorian Government opened the Stolen Generations Reparations Package, pursuant to which eligible recipients may receive reparations and support, including a \$100,000 payment, a personal apology from Government, access to programs and healing services, and an opportunity to share their story. While the Victorian Government is ahead of other states in terms of financial compensation, there is no amount of financial compensation that can make up for another life that you simply did not have. That being said, this amount is substantial enough that people feel like their experience has been recognised.
16. The report also recommended extending the Stolen Generations Interim Funeral Fund to an ongoing fund, providing \$10,000 payments to eligible applicants. The fund would cover various costs of funerals for Stolen Generations survivors such as plaques for unmarked graves, and exhumation and repatriation of remains to allow burial on Country.

V EVIDENCE PROVIDED TO PREVIOUS INQUIRIES

17. I have personally given evidence and Connecting Home and the Healing Foundation have made submissions to Royal Commissions and Inquiries, as set out below.

Forced Adoptions Inquiry

18. I gave evidence to the Legal and Social Issues Committee’s Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria (**Forced Adoptions Inquiry**) in June 2021. In my evidence, I noted:
 - (a) in relation to the approximately 2,500 Stolen Generations people in Victoria, we think around 1,000 of those are people who were removed here in Victoria (a lot of people were removed from interstate and taken to Victoria);
 - (b) the State redress package was focused on the act of removal (not what happened as a result of removal) – given the risks of making judgments about other people’s trauma;

- (c) the risks of retraumatising people engaging with the redress system;
- (d) the intergenerational effect of the Stolen Generation, it is not only those who were taken “but their children and their children’s children and their great-grandchildren” – with any forced separation there is an intergenerational effect – for the Aboriginal community this has not so much “rippled” down the generations, but has been a “tsunami effect”;
- (e) the rate of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care today has “a distinct, real and actual connection with a lot of those children to a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent being removed”; and
- (f) the ‘lottery’ of child removal and subsequent outcomes.

19. A transcript of my evidence is available at **Annexure 2**.

Joint Select Committee on Implementation of National Redress Scheme

20. In June 2020, the Healing Foundation made a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of a National Redress Scheme. This submission noted that the breakdown of family and social structures caused by removal and abuse decimated communities, and has led to ongoing health and social effects for the Stolen Generations and their families.
21. The submission called out unaddressed intergenerational trauma as a driver of some of the most serious social and wellbeing issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today. It noted that trauma can be passed down to others, and the children of Stolen Generations survivors may experience difficulties with attachment, disconnection from their extended families and culture and high levels of stress from family and community members who are dealing with the impacts of trauma. It creates a cycle of trauma – the impact is passed from one generation to the next. A copy of this submission, which I support, is at **Annexure 3**.

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Stolen Generations)

22. The Healing Foundation made a Joint Submission (with the Australian Association of Gerontology (**AAG**) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group (**ATSIAAG**)) to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Stolen Generations) in September 2019.
23. In our submission, the Healing Foundation noted the need for urgent action to provide for the complex and specific needs of ageing Stolen Generations, and highlighted that by 2023, all Stolen Generations survivors will be aged 50 and over, and eligible for government aged care support. Our submission highlighted the challenges in providing aged care for Stolen Generations (including disconnection from families and intergenerational trauma, aged care workers are not trauma-informed, and the limitations on Aboriginal community-controlled services).
24. The submission also set out the principles for improving aged care for Stolen Generations – such as self-determination, co-design, choice, trauma-informed, and the need for holistic wrap-around services. A copy of this submission, which I support, is at **Annexure 4**.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Peoples with Disability

25. Connecting Home, together with the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate, made a submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Peoples with Disability in April 2021.
26. This submission raised the compounding disadvantage and isolation, fear or mistrust of Government and other services, including the risk of igniting past trauma, and dearth of available services, as well as discussing the role of culture – which can serve as a source of strength if it can be recognised accordingly.
27. We also emphasised the importance of a truly person-centred approach, adopting a holistic practice model and the *Yana Djerring* principles (i.e. grow cultural knowledge, build community connections, create cultural safety, build respectful relationships, communicate for independence, choice and control, and apply technical knowledge). A copy of this submission, which I support, is at **Annexure 5**.

VI CONNECTING THE PAST & PRESENT: THE STOLEN GENERATIONS & TODAY

28. I was separated from my family in 1964 when I was three weeks old. I grew up 50 kilometres away from my family, unaware of their existence. I have direct experience of the uncertainty of identity, and challenges of removal. Loss of access to cultural means you have a complete absence of personal and social identity. When you are Aboriginal, that really matters and shines through. Absence of culture is a never-ending disruption to a person's life. As noted above, I have worked extensively with organisations advocating for the Stolen Generations.
29. Further, there are challenges for Stolen Generations in re-establishing relationships with their families. If a person is removed at a young age and separated for 20 years – when reuniting with family it is an adult relationship. Trying to build that is difficult. But the next generation benefits – effectively 'closing the loop' – as they are brought back into the family, and born back into the community and clan.
30. For a stolen child, they are aggrieved and grieving – it is a continual grieving process. With that grief, there is an anger that goes with it. It is a sense that "this was done to me" – in my formative years as a person – and leaves the person feeling detached for the rest of their life. It is a strong thing you feel.
31. In my evidence to the Forced Adoptions Inquiry, as noted above, I referred to the approximately 2,500 Stolen Generations people in Victoria. My evidence discussed the intergenerational effect of removal and the connection with the current record rate of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care. There is a distinct, real and actual connection with a lot of those children to an ancestor being removed (some of whom are still alive). The effects of the Stolen Generations are ongoing.
32. However, I think it is necessary to distinguish between the Stolen Generations and the current crisis regarding high rates of removal of Aboriginal children. The causes for removal are different. In the Stolen Generations, children were taken simply because they were Aboriginal – that is no longer the case. Children today are removed for a variety of reasons, which although it is now not simply because of what they are born, it still disproportionately affects Aboriginal people. While their Aboriginality is still a factor in the reasons for removal, it is one of many factors.
33. While the causes are different, the consequences for the individual can be the same (due to the loss of connection to family, community and culture). They will be spat out of the system and disconnected

from where they left off – and struggle to find their place. The longer the disconnection ‘gap’ – the harder it is to reconnect. The consequence is the same as for the Stolen Generations.

34. However, to label today's crisis as the “Stolen Generations” effectively ends the conversation – and isn't the best way to deal with this issue. It causes people to shut off from it. The high rate of removal of Aboriginal children today is a contemporary problem, not a continuation of the historical Stolen Generations policies.
35. There are a few key questions to ask on this issue:
 - (a) Do we understand the circumstances today in which Aboriginal families or children find themselves that give rise to State attention? I do not believe that we do. There are a range of reasons Aboriginal families are in distress. There is an economic wellbeing element here. This has a direct line to your social circumstances – which is what catches the attention of the State.
 - (b) How does the State respond, and is it equipped to respond, to those circumstances, and is it keeping up with best practice (including international best practice) around intervention? Does the State view its role to lift people up, or just stop it getting worse? There is a need to support economic circumstances – not just social circumstances.
 - (c) Are Aboriginal community organisations involved in the child protection system brought in early enough – and before intervention? I don't believe they are. But I also don't believe they are given the scope they might need to respond. They have limited resources – therefore they focus in on where the State is involved. But by then it is too late. It is a conundrum for service providers – if we push funds to early intervention, that will draw funds away from those that are desperate. But things need to change.
 - (d) To what degree is there ‘black cladding’ in the policies of government around the child protection system? There are a lot of initiatives that appear to be embedded with Aboriginality (artwork, name etc.), but fundamentally, at their core, it does not change what these services or programs are about. This is an uncomfortable conversation – but there is a lack of progress – how far have we really got?
36. My impression is that the connection between children that are removed and family and community is way off where it should be. While in part this is related to the system and the bureaucracy, it is also due to the dearth of Aboriginal people acting as foster parents or involved in kinship care.

VII CHANGE IN DEMAND FOR HOUSING, IDENTITY & ATTITUDES TO COMMUNITY & IMPACT ON KINSHIP CARE

37. There has been a marked shift in the demand for housing in the Aboriginal community in Victoria. In my role as Deputy Chair of the Board of Directors at Aboriginal Housing Victoria, I saw this change first-hand – previously Aboriginal people typically looked for 4 or 5 bedroom houses, whereas more recently, Aboriginal people were mostly looking for 1 or 2 bedroom units. While there are a range of economic and structural reasons for this change (including housing affordability, change in family size and changing aspirations), the consequence is that Aboriginal families don't have the capacity to take other children in and care for them in the same way we used to.

38. There are also other factors impacting on our community's ability to engage in kinship care, including how Aboriginal people view their obligations to their family. Aboriginal people are becoming more affluent and aspirational. While this is a good thing, there is also a cost, being the collective strength as a community and our ability to rely on one another. For example, if a family has their kids in school and are managing okay, they may be unwilling to bring other kids into the home as they are worried it will traumatise their own kids. That's different to our attitude 50 years ago – where we hid each other's kids from welfare, or looked after family without even thinking about it. It is different from what it was.
39. Our collective strength as a community has been enormous. We had to rely on each other – we set up community organisations and health services – but how do we keep that fundamental connection to community alive as we move up the social and economic ladder? Related to this, what does it mean to be Aboriginal in the third decade of the 21st century – in an urban environment? How do people feel about being Aboriginal in 2022 – what are their rights and responsibilities? These questions are real and feed into how kinship care operates.
40. We need to talk more about what is good about being Aboriginal to strengthen our community as it evolves and changes. We do great things for Australia as a whole – and we need to talk about that. I don't want to be referred to as an "Aboriginal Public Servant". I was a Public Servant who was Aboriginal. It is like they are putting a limiter on me. My Aboriginal identity is my personal identity. It does not put me in a sub-category of a profession.

VIII BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

41. A key concern I have with the system is ensuring that appointments to senior roles are 'ready' for those positions and adequately supported, and that they have real capacity to reform the Aboriginal agenda and get things done. It is important that Aboriginal people have time to learn their craft, and learn it well, before being given senior roles. I heard this described by a Minister once as the "dark arts of the public service" – effectively, how to make the magic work and make change.
42. This is what Aboriginal people need to learn to succeed in senior roles – and it has been a relatively short period of time in which we've been able to have positions of responsibility in government systems (15 years or so). The government is withdrawing from Aboriginal life – which is a good thing – but this brings with it real responsibilities and an enormous acceleration for our community in a short period of time.
43. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (**ACCOs**) could benefit from training in this regard. While being Aboriginal gives you an enormous head start in terms of understanding the complexities of these issues, it doesn't mean you are fully qualified. Training is required to deal with people with emotional distress and trauma.
44. More generally, beyond ACCOs, the Government would also benefit from a more structured approach to ensure a more informed public sector (rather than framing the issues in silos of negative portfolio thinking), as the complexities of being Aboriginal are not understood. There is some training available – but it is 'micro' in scale, compared to the 'macro' need.

Annexures:

Annexure 1: Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee Final Report (20 July 2021)

Annexure 2: Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria (Transcript, 4 June 2021)

Annexure 3: Healing Foundation Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of a National Redress Scheme (22 June 2020)

Annexure 4: Healing Foundation and AAG ATSIAAG submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Stolen Generations) (10 September 2019)

Annexure 5: Connecting Home and Office of the Public Advocate Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability