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**Royal Commission**

Consultation Paper

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**Consultation Paper Records and Recordkeeping Practices**

**Purpose.**

Finding evidence of Childhoods spent in care was never going to be easy. Anybody that doesn't respect the complexity of the situation and the true funding needed are playing around the edges.... again!

'Recent research has identified trends; if left in the same state or subjected to another inadequate, poorly scoped, underfunded technical solution; will result in the future looking worse than the past'; hindered by technology itself.

**Or is there another motive.** Why fix the mess? If you keep changing the content and moving the information around; putting it in different locations, media and systems. And employing, IT contractors who believe they just have to put a name in a database or spreadsheet, guarantees the information will remain obscure. This approach is similar to getting all the books in a library removing the pages and throwing them in the air. You don't even have to destroy it!

Impacts will continue;

- eroding victims' and survivors' sense of self, their capacity to establish that they had been abused and their confidence in disclosing abuse
- preventing identification of risks and incidents of child sexual abuse
- delaying or obstructing responses to risks, allegations and instances of child sexual abuse
- obscuring the extent of institutional knowledge of abuse
- hindering disciplinary action, redress efforts, and civil and criminal proceedings.

## **Background**

This submission has come about, due to insights and research into 'Evidence Management' issues found in publicly available sources, including transcripts downloaded from the Royal Commission Website. I have spent much of this year researching key elements from publicly available reports, legislation and investigations; as well as different institutions, states and time periods. My incentive was initially curiosity and putting the picture together for myself and CLAN. However, this journey has revealed some long term impacts from the constant changes in 'Evidence Management' which will continue to impact on children in care, in the future.

A legal childhood is from the age of 16-18, depending on state. A child in care from early childhood could have over 6000+ days of their childhood needing to be captured somewhere. By breaking the day into 3 care segments of 8 hour shifts, adds further complexity to the equation. During this same 6000+ days how many systems and case management changes have occurred?

Other details, have been gained from my experience working in records management in all levels of government. Initially starting in the Registry of the Commonwealth, Department of Supply, in February 1966; before the wide spread introduction of photocopiers, before the invention of facsimile machines and mainframe computers. When file numbering patterns were dictated from the governing body; when urgent messages were sent by Telegraph and; when incoming correspondence books were cross referenced with index cards. And finally, file numbers never changed!

And more recently, my employment with the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) now the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS). During this period, I witnessed the impacts of several case management systems becoming obsolete and the introduction of the current Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) and (CRISSP= includes access by Service Providers), in 2005.

The CRIS system marketing and cost justification was linked directly to the new technology benefits CRIS would introduce. It would be fair to say that the system, is yet to reach its full potential and is still a work in progress.

The following insights are directly related to Victoria, yet the same time period had the same technical limitations and will be mirrored across all systems, government departments and States.

## **Machinery of Government (MOG) changes**

In the case of the 1996 amalgamations forming the first Victorian DHS; the concept was rational but the obstacles were prohibitive. The changes failed to consider major aspects, some still impacting on the department today; different ways of dealing with the problems are many and varied. MOG changes always fail to consider, the practical challenges that are easy in principal and hard in practice.

Yet the biggest impact, failed to be considered and was totally overlooked; the amalgamated physical holdings at the time thought to be around twenty plus linear kilometres; but in reality was over eighty linear kilometres = thousands of boxes coming

from everywhere dating back to the late 1800's being sent to commercial storage providers, local storage and basements not something easy boxed, tracked or changed. Most of it was already boxed from previous changes and subject to the manual processes available at the time of boxing. To meet the immediate impact of dealing with the physical holdings, thousands of boxes were sent to the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV) for temporary storage; with the intention that when the time came they would be sent back for proper progressing. New technology had yet to reach this far. The origins and background to the information history, was buried deep in the volume.

Then you have the physical amalgamation of staff into new Program areas, locations or buildings. It would be easy to state the impacts from the initial amalgamation is still impacting on the ability to find records today. Yet this was before another initiative which will further complicate an already impossible situation; the closing of children homes and institutions.

The complexity of bringing together departments, some still using manual systems; others at different technical maturity levels using the same or different types of computer technology; different software platforms with varying fields and design specifications. Some using mainframe systems and others had progressed to PC server based technology.

Note; the annual growth rate of physical records for the combined departments was estimated to be approximately two linear kilometres a year.

### **Technical Solutions**

Large projects were derived and grossly underfunded to reduce the reliance on finding hardcopy records in a sea of boxes. Software systems were introduced, most too primitive to last the distance; ending up on Cassette tapes, VCR tapes and Floppy Disks, large spooled backup tapes. Microfiche & Microfilm is the only technology that has lasted the distance but is at the mercy of a very old microfiche reader. Looking at the technology at that point in time and in hindsight knowing the challenges that this era was yet to bridge, such as Y2K or system generated mistakes misrepresenting time periods and creation history of old legacy collections unfortunate enough, to be considered important enough, to be captured by technology at the time.

It is easily to underestimate the complications this type of system upgrades bring both electronically and physically. There were rules, regulations, policy, standards and guidelines but in hindsight they could not keep up with the technology advances and its associated shortcomings.

As a consequence the decision-makers have been carving up DHS ever since, into smaller chunks. With still no control of the records firmly in place. This usually causes a flow on affect; large volumes of records boxed and electronically migrated offline and sent offsite, under the control of another government department or storage provider, where the content will be unfamiliar and the control system unavailable. PROV guidelines for the MOG changes is the records are moved across to the new department.

## **Electronic Systems**

Decisions made during Case Management system crossover periods are also critical to the information sort today by the Royal Commission. In Victoria, as CRIS was rolled out across the state only active clients, still in care and under the protection of the Secretary were migrated across to the CRIS system. The full rollout took close to two years and was suspended for a period, to fix faults along the way. CRIS gradually expanded through the different DHS regions; until the point of total rollover, until then the regions kept using the existing case management systems and the associated hardcopy client records which were tracked using the corporate records management system RecFind.

The usual approach when introducing new systems is don't migrate over rubbish, let's start with a clean system! This is definitely an IT approach. It is driven from availability, performance, speed and more importantly data mapping, field restrictions and critical metadata elements. The principle in the hardcopy world is, keep the file number because it is on a physical file somewhere. In the electronic world a number must be unique within the system. The duplication of file numbers from different departments was at cross purposes with the technical restrictions and the hurry to get the systems up and working.

One popular file numbering pattern used for many decades in all of the amalgamated departments was annual single numbering pattern. It is only when you combine departments, boxes, index cards and registers into one or more databases that the identifier must be unique. Technology and software available at the time was limited in field availability and with such a large influx of electronic data there were many imports and exports to address the different issues; before the information found its home and user base. This did not change the fact that the associated physical files, registers and index cards could only be found using the number issued on creation; located somewhere in a filing cabinet, in a box, in a storage area.

## **Legacy Systems**

In the early 1990's, the then Community Services Department invested in the RecFind records management system that would later interface with the different case management systems to cater for the tracking of hardcopy client records. RecFind would allow system administrators to add additional databases to cater to a specific user base and reduce the impact of access to sensitive record types such as Child Protection clients being easily assessable, to users that were not involved in the program.

The DHS amalgamations in 1996 bought together different systems at different maturity levels, with staff understanding also limited by their previous exposure to electronic systems. As a result of the amalgamation, 81 separate RecFind databases were used across the state. Each holding different files, documents and box registrations. Some being exclusively used for client data types including records for the Child Death Investigation Unit (CDIU). By the time this system was replaced in 2001, 600-700 different numbering patterns were migrated to the new system. It is only when you consider the information in these systems and what technology was available, to backup this information that you can appreciate the issues and ongoing complications.

Before CRIS was implemented into the first pilot Region in 2005 and slowly moved around the state, the prior case management systems kept the case notes of all clients to the point of crossover. All of the previous case management system expertise was broken up by the different amalgamated departments. All had been introduced well before the move to the new DHS. CRIS was the only system that combined different case management functions and program types.

In the ten years since, are the systems still supported or are they in a box in storage without anyone knowing the content? How is the old technology accessed for FOI, litigation and the Royal Commission? Case notes were not printed out and put on the hardcopy file; there was insufficient resources and storage space available for this type of initiative. Regional storage space was also an issue and once a client was inactive for a couple of months, the physical file was sent off to central storage and requested when/if the client re-entered the system.

Before and after the implementation of the CRIS system, there were still physical client files kept that mirrored the electronic case management system identifier. The rule at the time and possibly still in place; was case notes and related in care information would be kept electronically (If it was generated electronically it was kept electronically), all other information would be contained in the hardcopy file. Initially access to the old systems was occurring regularly but as clients and time moved on the old systems become obsolete and forgotten.

During the early period of electronic case management systems the use of hardcopy files was still needed and seen as a temporary workaround; used to house hardcopy records received in relation to the person or topic. As case management systems matured it was believed that the electronic system would eventually replace the need for hardcopy records; reducing the need for physical storage space and the associated environmental factors. From my experience it is still a work in progress and the goal posts seem to be further away!

### **Reports & Investigations.**

For many years reports have been written from a number of sources identifying various issues related to 'In Care' treatment of children; 'Wards of State' and the management of related records and information 'Evidence'. Many of these reports have appropriately identified various issues and made substantial recommendations to force change. Some recommendations have fallen out of reports by the Auditor General, Ombudsman; State Inquiries and other investigations and complaints.

### **Key Findings & Recommendations**

Many of the recommendations documented after significant investigations and audits, are either supported by government agencies fully; partially; in principle or totally rejected. However, regardless of the importance of the recommendations and the pressing need for change, very few are monitored to completion. This can be due to the lack of adequate funding, staff turnover, lack of understanding by the agency to the issues or approach to reach the desired outcome; and in some instances the funding removed mid-stream from long term projects that will address the issue eventually, but a change of priorities and direction is taken.

This type of situation is typical and not unique. Not only are the issues that have taken close to a hundred years to create, still there but they are compounded by the technology available at the time of the project and the need by researchers, to understand whether the collection of records was completed, or left in mid-stream; this type of failure will always ensure the records remain obscure. Multiply that by various collections stored from various institutions sent between various government agencies; and where do you start? This type of expertise is not found in the market place and takes years to develop. The rotation or overturn of staff in key information research and retrieval areas will ensure the cost of discovery remains prohibitive and to put a full history of abuse together requires a complete understanding of the care services and the requirements as well as.....the technology available at the time!

Childhoods spent in care was never going to be a quick fix. Anybody that doesn't respect the complexity of the situation and the true funding needed are playing around the edges again! Unfortunately, this is often evident in relation to care leavers information and the provision of evidence to support claims of abuse. If the information is not there or is costly to find, the delays and cost as a result, is substantial to the litigant.

#### **Evidence & Freedom of Information (FOI).**

Paper records' lifespan can (and has) been easily destroyed and lost forever, left to the discretion of those in a position of power, lacking storage space, throwing out the old to make way for the new, or striking a match. If you substitute the word record, recordkeeping, records management, file or document with the word evidence you will see a different reaction. Using the word evidence instead of the word record in the following sentence may convey a different response. If someone is accused of destroying evidence; most people will sit up and listen, believing a crime has been committed. If the word evidence is substituted with the word records it doesn't have the same clout.

In the past litigants were lucky to receive 250 pages from various sources of up to a decade in care; easily processed in the one FOI request. Today for the same length of time you could receive close to 10,000 pages. Broken up into costly 500 page batches at the discretion of the record holder, the relevance of the batches released will not be known until the whole story is pieced together, possibly taking years, to gain a full history. Then how relevant will the released documents be? Has the request included other types of records such as Incident reports, Inspection reports, Health records, Immunisation records, Health centre records, Placement records and copies of all notes relevant to the child in Communication books? Does it include drugs 'experimental' or other, administered on Children under the 'Protection of the State'; these record types are usually housed in management files or in batches or date range rather than by client. Very costly and time consuming to retrieve.

Note: to process 500 pages of a FOI request takes 45 days. For 10,000 pages at 500 pages per release equals 20 requests. Some solicitors have pressured DHHS to increase pages released to 800 pages per batch. During a recent discussion with the DHHS FOI Unit, it was confirmed that only 500 pages would be released at the one time. I told the person I expected thousands of pages and I was told, I only had to pay once (payment can be

waivered depending on my circumstances), but I would have to put in a new request after I received the first 500 pages. I also asked, if the information released would be filtered to the important content and I was told I would receive the first 500 pages and then the next 500 pages, and so on. Also, who is minding the special keep sakes that are not records such as school drawings? Where are the school class photos and who holds any other snapshots taken during out of home care? Some care leavers are too young to remember the street address of carers/ foster families and may vaguely remember another child or adult they interacted with. They may also remember a family pet they became attached too.

The first 500 pages could be duplicated throughout the file and the wait may be fruitless. Then the game of 'spot the truth and the authoritative record' begins. Wading through the ever-increasing number of copies, duplicate case notes, events attended and placed on each attendees file; family case notes placed on each sibling's file and so on; this could be in both hardcopy and from the electronic system. The electronic case notes will include any quick updates to the CRIS system which may not be reflected in the hardcopy file, worse still if the child's records are split across several government agencies.

### **CRIS & CRISSP Challenges.**

Unfortunately, some child protection workers lack confidence in the CRIS system and print out everything and place it on the physical file adding to the duplication of information during the FOI process. Resources are not available to confirm duplication or version changes; and are left to the FOI requestor to put the picture together.

There are instances in the CRIS system where one child is recorded under several variations of their name which often means several files floating around, with the same or different content. Sometimes it takes months or years for a reconciliation of content of the CRIS system and the records system; sent by an overnight interface. Workers may never realise that the child is in the system more than once. The other way round is also a problem. Children with similar names can have the content wrongly updated on their file to reflect the history of another child. In the past the oldest sibling will often have the details of the other family siblings placed on their file and the ability to produce multiple copies was dependent on a typewriter and carbon copies. Copy paste did not exist!

In Victoria, the CRISSP system has limitations on providing access to the child's case notes once the child has been moved between services. Within 24 hours the service provider no longer has access to the case management system and it is opened up for the new placement provider. However, the child's records to this point are written by the current care provider and becomes their responsibility to keep evidence about the placement and their involvement. Yet they no longer have access to the system even though they have provided case notes of their care and will be responsible for any actions taken by them, during their service period. This forces Service Providers to keep their own records of the care they have provided and case notes they have compiled. But who has time to valid the content and ensure the case notes remain the same as those put directly into the CRISSP system.

### **Service Provider Records**

Working with children checks. Staff rosters, payroll records, changeovers and communication books will stay with the agency as they denote the care provided during the placement and will not be kept in CRISSP. The burden of where the money is; the strict monitoring of funding provides a trail of where the child is and who is being paid for caring for the child at any given point, yet these records are legally destroyed long before litigation begins. With the current removal of the statute of litigations changes to the finance provisions, the retention of finance records must be reviewed. Note; invoices are very short term and rarely survive beyond seven years and if they do it is considered poor recordkeeping practices.

### **Photographs & Film.**

If by chance photos do end up on the case management file in the past two decades; it would be more by accident than intentional and is the child alone or are there other people in the photo; and who are they?

These same adults do not have the same restrictions and take photos of any child under their supervision anytime. More so now, with most people walking around with a mobile phone capable of taking photos and film. Carers do not ask permission to take/keep photos of a child they cared for? There was no formal policy ensuring photos are kept as part of the child's case history and in some cases the inability to properly record the photos into a logical sequence would be time consuming and prohibitive. The face of an abuser could be printed on the child's memory forever but do they have the correct name to go with the face? When the child becomes a care leaver they have no legal avenue to obtain a visual snippet of people they possibly remember as being part of their childhood. Should Care leavers be able to ask for photos of adults or any worker involved in their care, should it form part of their record? Are photos mandated under the working with children check? Will their retention match the longevity of children in care record retention?

Some annual reports do include photos of workers employed during that year perhaps that should be made mandatory. Annual reports are usually publicly available documents and regardless of the time a person is employed, casually or permanently their photo must form part of the annual report; providing care leavers with an option to put a name to a face; school class photos include the teacher in them. Are foster carers photographed as part of their record or included in the organisation's annual report?

Children in care today; during this age of constant advances in technology will continue to have blank spots in their recorded history; if those driving the constant changes do not stop and take a breath and address the issues holistically. The loss of being able to upgrade all devices and ensure content is readable across a lifetime has not been properly addressed. I'm sure at the beginning of recorded history similar challenges existed such as how to stop paper from degrading. It is unknown how long it took to get paper to last a hundred years yet today it is impossible to avoid our devices from becoming old technology by the end of the year.

### **PROV & VERS**

The Victorian Public Records Office (PROV) has developed the Victorian Electronic Records

Strategy (VERS) and every Victorian Government Agency are mandated to become VERS compliant. However, when government agencies outsource services and the outsourced agency is already complaining about the cost of compliance. Do the Agencies have to be VERS compliant? No!

If you asked PROV they will reiterate it is for permanent records (only) being transferred into PROV custody. Yet children placed in out of home care records are permanent; any court orders related the child, makes them so. Are agencies aware of this and how is the information gathered and while agencies are encouraged to print out their own records once the child moves on, what happens if the records are added to; information failed to be included in the CRIS system and now the CRIS system is unavailable? What records are subpoenaed? This could easily happen when information is considered as belonging to the agency like staff rosters and communication books.

VERS is a back office function that happens at end of the life of a record; in this case the records could be stored in contracted Agencies for years and could quickly become obsolete and forgotten as new technology is introduced. End of life for child protection records could mean active for close to twenty years and then stored or sent to DHHS for transfer to PROV after remaining inactive and readable for a, further ten years. Where are these records? When are they linked into the child's history?

PROV standard requires Government to keep records in a readable format for the life of the retention. How does that work, if no one asks contracted Agencies; especially after the contract or child has moved on and hasn't used those services for years? IT people do not consider the content of systems as evidence; also different combinations of tables linked together in a system can form the evidence but without the system the evidence falls apart. PROV also govern policy in regard to the transfer of records between departments after MOG changes; further impeding the process and understanding of holdings. This is like trying to find a needle in a haystack; with no idea of the information origins and what format the information was created in, or later captured electronically and at what point in time, in the technology evolution. E.g.; Is it in a hardcopy register or it is available online is it identified at the document item level; subject level; file level; box level, or consignment level, function level or all?.

Governments are regulated to the extreme; monitored; audited and inspected. To the public a lifetime is a long time and a childhood will have a minimum of 6540 days of different calendar events. Until these issues are resolved; we are forced to stay with the current system; where children in care today will continue to have the added burden of duplicate copies and multiple versions stored across different Care providers, physical storage locations and electronic systems, impacting on the outcome and increasing the stress and cost to the Care leavers trying to piece their lives and history together after government and agencies have spent years and millions of dollars to ensure the puzzle stays in pieces.

### **Mandatory Reporting**

Mandatory reporting (MR) is one significant change that has consequently increased the statutory records and the number of pages being kept per child.

MR may support today's children in care from being subjected to the degree of abuse suffered by children in the past. MR, typically varies across Australian Jurisdictions by those legally required to report abuse. This one change has addressed many of the issues reviewed in various transcripts and evidence made available by the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

The Royal Commission's evidence and transcripts has highlighted the difference this one piece of **enforced** legislation could have made to many lives destroyed by past abuse and neglect. It also avoids the embarrassing questioning of those in a position of power at the time and now subjected to giving testimony on their failure to report abuse to police, and the subsequent harm their lack of action has caused to the life of those entrusted to their care. If we cannot stop the abuse in the first instance, it must be stopped from destroying a lifetime!

### **Threats by Technology Advances.**

The lifespan of software and systems is only now coming to terms with the longevity and relationship of the content it stores. Technology can be a hindrance where paper records required rigorous rules of original order, unique identifiers, handwriting verification, indexing, signed originals and initialled file copies which could be easily verified with experts in the field giving evidence to the authenticity of the evidence. Today's technology must replicate a similar process, similar to the use of DNA, where there is no dispute about the authenticity of the evidence. The technology is available but major hurdles prevent the necessary changes and anyone claiming to be an expert in our current environment are quickly overwhelmed by the constant changes.

Many unique ways of ensuring information is accurate is at cross purposes with the restrict requirement of maintaining privacy. Note: anyone finding my dog can obtain the basic dog details and will be able to call him by name. But it may be harder to find out where/who the owner is. The dog is microchipped and the dog has no avenue of recall as it is not subject to privacy legislation, but the owner is.

The numbers issued through life should become a testimony to that life. Staying within the current approach will continue to inhibit systems that will allow the following information to be managed and assigned to one individual and remaining unique across a lifetime such as the birth registration/Medicare number the first unique identifiers issued to an individual to be used throughout their life. This number would then become the following numbers: Tax file number, Student number, Ward –Child Protection number, Passport number, Driving licence number, and so on.

How many times are we asked to provide one of the above for proof of identity? Yet children are not part of this unique system until later in life. It is time to rethink our approach to protect children from the mistakes of the past.

Today's technology leaves a footprint where ever we go but the problem is there are too many footprints to follow and no one has the access to all footprints along the way. We must identify our 'identifiers'. Unique identifiers should never change example none of us have our Taxation File number, Medicare number; Drivers Licence number; Birth registration numbers changed; as the related system or registration only happens once.

Children in and out of care could happen many, many times with daily activities captured under different registrations (around 6000 different entries).

So why should anyone change the number of child placed in care? It is really simple yet complex to fix. Depending on when a child enters care will depend on what system was used to identify them which is also dependant on the age or special needs of the child e.g. does the child have a disability or mental health needs? Are the programs using the one system registration that will also interface with other agencies including the police? Do the police use the same registration number allocated by the child protection or welfare agencies? If the child is in and out of care they could be at the discretion, diligence and more importantly time available to the intake worker. How can anyone review multiple systems to find past registrations; this is not the highest priority at the time of intake.

It is easy to criticise the lack of proper information management but the following example is not unique and forms part of a normal process. A child is taken out of the home by the police in the middle of the night and placed in emergency care. The Police or the Child Protection worker have taken a child away from a serious situation and the last thing on anyone's mind, is the child's middle name or their date of birth. In some cases the child will enter the system, as unknown or with an alias and an unconfirmed date of birth. Ensuring that this information is corrected along the way is critical and usually by the time a court order has been issued, most details are known. Yet, where is the information consolidated and in what system; the court system, the case management system or the police system or all three with some differences?

Then you have the unfortunate high turnover of child protection staff. So the previous child's history is continually updated by someone with limited knowledge of the child's background. Further impacted by technology advances e.g. If the intake happened between technologies or in various systems this could mean possibly wading through large registers, manual index cards, legacy backup systems that few know about and less can access; and hardcopy file boxes not within easy reach. Child protection files are heavy and rarely consist of one file and usually consists of multiple parts of up to a ream of paper is each part.

### **Record Retention**

The life of care leaver client files and the legal retention of related care records rarely align. Examples of these are the staff rosters, funding, timesheets and communications books which are indirectly related to the client record without the indefinite retention period yet they provide, where, when and more importantly who was interacting with the child at different times.

### **Inspection Reports**

Inspection records that identify each child in care on the inspection date and observed during the visit, is kept by the relevant government agency and kept on a file related to the Institution and other high level policy, procedures and proposed changes as a result of the inspection outcomes and recommendations. Depending on the inspector's diligence voluntary placements which were not funded by government and not considered Wards of

the State could be included in the inspection reports. As a result, a child in care and not wards of the state can have their information contained in these reports.

Inspection reports documented during these visits are formal documents, often detailing the personal likes and dislikes of the inspector. In some instances departmental inspectors have criticised the child's appearance as being attractive or unattractive rather than noting the health and care being provided. Historically these records provide clear evidence of the approach of care during different time periods and show a definite change of attitude through time. The records are broken up by the individual management practices that facilitate the ongoing work processes. The retention of records related to care is also subject to the value of the information source.

### **Voluntary Placements**

Children Voluntary placed within institutions are disadvantaged by the system at the time. Voluntary placed children in care often don't know the circumstances of their placement and often believe they are also Wards of the State. Other than how they ended up in care they lived and suffered the same conditions of all children in care with the marked disadvantage of the often wrong; expectation of Wards of State to be registered and their details centrally recorded somewhere.

### **Incident Reports**

Significant incident reports category one are duplicated over 5 times and one copy must be with the Minister within 24 hours of the incident with a briefing of the events leading to the incident. Yet when this incident involves multiple clients and staff where is the information held? Is the full details of those involved fully recorded against each client and a copy put on the staff file? This is unlikely, and this event can change categories during the life cycle of the workflow process.

A category one or two incident report is rarely decided by the witnesses to the event and is more likely determined by the media exposure this will bring to the services. The eventual filing of the incident will happen at a later time. Understandably incident reports category one are deemed permanent. If the incident involves more than one client as well as a staff member where does the information belong? Future researcher would like the information categorised by the incident type and to be located with other significant events associated with the service and care provider.

Clients seeking litigation want the record linked squarely with other information related to them. Staff members involved in the event, depending on their involvement, will want the information associated with them (unless they are being accused of harm). Depending on the incident and staff involvement in the incident; whether it is yet to be properly investigated and lastly substantiated may prevent the incident being recorded directly on the clients' case records. Due to privacy considerations and the fact that the client records are shared across service providers and with other staff members who will be able to see the incident details of staff involvement.

In Victoria, up until recently sexual assault was a category 2 and another incident category existed, category 3 with the associated reports deems very short term value. Both

categories saw the records able to be legally destroyed between 5-10 years. The three categories all had different retention periods and the categories were used across all program types including child protection, juvenile justice and disability. A review of the incident report processes saw the existing categories reduced from three to two and a review of the category 1 incident types now included sexual assault. Category 2 and the old category 3 incident reports are considered temporary value and like invoices, are processed in batches, due to the large volume. The change of the sexual assault incident category will contribute to the destruction of sexual abuse report Incident reports prior to the review. In the meantime how many have been destroyed? Note; It is only poor records management practices that will see some of these reports surviving legal destruction.

### **Finance Records**

Understandably finance systems do not interface with case management systems and following the money trail has its limitations and government would be reluctant to have their financial records open to scrutiny by care providers. Yet the financial system oversight must be replicated to case management with the same diligence, rigor and strict audit requirements to care for future generations and not to disadvantage children who have left care. By the time former care leavers are in a position to pursue a legal avenue finance records of payment to carers and care provides are usually long gone. Yet the finance systems do use the unique identifiers of each client when allocating funds and linking client funding. Unfortunately, the day to day payment histories are voluminous and impossible to resource at the item level control. Should payments for the care of the child be included in the child case management records? Strict control of the money and constant audits of the payment process and fraud prevention provides the whereabouts of the child at any given point.

The issues associated with the linking and following the information money trail is not easily conveyed. However, if funding for Child Care is managed in a finance system and the contracts with Care providers is managed in another; and payments to care providers is subject to the location of a child at any particular point in time; hopefully recorded in the child's case history; it is obvious straight away the information is split. Then you have the placement of children and transfer between care facilities and the associated record responsibilities. Note; The CRIS system is available to care providers, to update case histories while the child is their placement but the finance system is not.

### **Approach to Change.**

IT people drive technology changes without any concept of the events and duration the technology must stay assessable and the lifetime events the system will hold. E.g. a child could be legally identified as anyone under 16 years or 18 years old depending on which state. So a child going in and out of care, from birth for the 6570 days of their legal childhood will have multiple placements, multiple care providers, and multiple health records across a variety of systems

New case management computer systems that don't consider the above will continue to cause the same issues. The problem with childhoods is it is not a onetime event with each day of our childhood being a separate registration into our histories. Unless we take the

time to take a breath we will continue to forge into unknown territory. The same action will always get the same reaction! Technology is ruling our direction and failing. Today's technology because of its rapid advances across the world has introduced a race to invest in a new gadget and the ever increasing problems of duplication, version control and multiple copies.

Many approaches to address the problem have been partially funded over the past two decades. At the same time technology advances have gone beyond our wildest dreams. Everyone looking at the problems of childhoods spent in care have rightly looked at what technology can do to improve the situation. Unfortunately this has added to the burden because the solution keeps getting better and the original path ends or twists and turns and never goes anywhere. No one knew when they first developed computer printouts and stored them in boxes as permanent hardcopy files that the paper would fade in ten years. How many of us used the technology without understanding the limitations.

Wasting millions on an unknown end result. Taxpayers should rightly ask how much money has been spent to date on records management projects. Rumours of another project boasting a fix to the Victorian Government's large volume of expensive record holdings is again being whispered around the industry with the intention of outsourcing the problem once and for all. Or are we moving the problem elsewhere and further complicating the problem. 'Looking to technology to fix the problem; is the problem'. Something that has been tried before with mixed results but this time we have a royal commission keeping the pressure on which keeps the money flowing but who is watching where the stream is headed?

Using technology such as indexing or scanning everything and keeping it electronically; is like getting the pages of all the books of a library and throwing them in the air and asking someone to put a picture together without knowing what story the page belongs to. How is the source of the following information grouped for future reference?

Scanned images or metadata indexing must have the history of the source be included?

1. Incident reports -category, investigation, outcome or follow-up; has the briefing to the minister been included?
2. Inspection reports - by child, institution, Inspector, location or date of inspection, recommendations;
3. Audits and reviews are they associated directly or indirectly to a service provider, incident or client? How will the scanned image show who what where and when?
4. Placement records -by date; child, Foster carer, street address, funded agency, Institution files – by date; child, carer.
5. Who created these records? The source will often answer this question. Incident reports are usually created by the witness to the event. Inspection records are usually created by the Inspector. Placement records and institution file content is made up of staff working for the institutions and the date of the document will show who was roster on at the time.

Most systems can build flags and triggers that take a user to the uncompleted details. However, if the information is not easily available to the person entering or updating the system it must be passed as part of the exit process. The system can also stop the user from processing to the next stage of care. There must be another way and other public offices faced with the similar information needs will face the same issues. Modern communication methods cycle the one point but fail to validate and timestamp the source and importance of the information. Adding to the 10,000 plus pages with no guarantee that information has also been stored in an unknown device outside of the official system.

### **Privacy Act**

Finally the Privacy Act impact on care leavers. Information provided to me about my history is discussed with my family and there are no restrictions on Privacy. My knowledge about my history is constantly updated by conversations with my siblings, who adjust misconceptions and clarify obscure memories; we clarify our histories whenever we are together allowing us to store and pass on our histories for generations to come. In most cases, children in care have been removed from the family home and often removed from the family circle, where their history is stored.

### **Information Systems Limitations and Impacts**

How can text messages, emails and case management content; held by many care providers involved in the life of children put a condensed and complete history together without gaps and without volume? This was one of the key recommendations coming out of the Forgotten Australians report. And as the child goes through the care process the information and the gaps get filled in along the way.

**Finally** 'How can the content of the internet be authenticated. The paper world has survived thousands of years where the storage of the evidence is known by a few; yet today's evidence belongs to on one and shared by everybody; but is it real; has it been manipulated or paint shopped.....is it the truth!' Who is quality checking the concepts and auditing the outcomes? Is the concepts of the last two thousand years being considered as a framework or is it in the hands of technology only. I still have a drawer full of floppy disks and VCR tapes that I can't use.

Kind Regards

Sandra Papashalis

### **Information Source**

The content source is derived from the following information sources.

Published Reports by State Territory & Federal Government

Acts & Legislation

State Records Offices published Disposal and Retention guides

State & Federal Inquiries

State & Federal Ombudsman's Reports

State & Federal Auditor General's Reports  
Royal Commission's past and present and related findings and publications.