Records about adoption, fostering and institutions

Governments, churches and welfare bodies removed Indigenous children from their families from the first days of British colonisation. These children may have been adopted, fostered out to white families or brought up in institutions.

The institutions included both ‘mainstream’ and those exclusively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Some were dormitory schools within missions (run by religious groups) or stations (run by governments).

**Why were Indigenous children sent to both types of institutions?**

At different times in some states and territories until the 1960s governments followed ‘assimilation’ policies to remove children from their Indigenous families and raise them to become white Australians.

- Some Indigenous children were administered under Aboriginal protection and welfare laws and sent to segregated Indigenous institutions.
- If Indigenous children were quite ‘fair’ and looked non-Indigenous they were adopted, fostered or institutionalised under mainstream child welfare legislation and sent to mainstream institutions.

By the 1970s Aboriginal protection and welfare legislation was repealed, segregated institutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were closed, and Indigenous children were adopted, fostered or institutionalised under mainstream child welfare law.

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

**Access to records is limited to protect privacy**

Records about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care are very personal and subject to strict access conditions to protect their privacy. This includes access to historical records and access to name indexes.

Generally you can access records about yourself or very close relatives depending on the age of the records and your relationship to the person.

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

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

Stolen Generations

Since the Bringing Them Home report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children removed from their families (1995), Australian governments have created special teams to assist people to get access to their records and special indexes that make these records easier to find.

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

Contact information

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

Forgotten Australians

In 2004 a Senate inquiry was completed on Australians who experienced institutional or out of home care as children – now known as the ‘Forgotten Australians’. The Find & Connect web resource was developed to provide information about children’s homes – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The site has short histories of each institution and information about where to find the records of children who lived there. Find & Connect was set up to help people who were in out-of-home ‘care’ as children learn more about their histories and to locate and access their personal records. You can:

- find non-government institutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- trace the history of institutions that started as missions and were taken over by governments
- trace the name changes of institutions over time.
- read information about and view images of children’s homes
- get help to find records about your childhood in ‘care’
- connect with support groups and services in your state/territory.
No personal information or private records are shown on the Find & Connect website.

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

For more information about the records and accessing them, see Find & Connect – Information about records.