

Speech by FACS Secretary, Michael Coutts – Trotter

Anniversary of the NSW Apology for Forced Adoption Practices – 20 September, 2017.

It's an honour to participate in the fifth anniversary of the NSW Parliamentary apology for forced adoption practices.

I also acknowledge that we are on the land of the Gadigal People and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

There are many special people here today, but none more special than those of you to whom the apology was addressed - the mothers who had your babies taken, the children who lost families, the brothers and sisters separated, the fathers who weren't recognised as fathers.

Those of us never touched by forced adoption practices will never know and can never understand the grief, loss, pain and anger that you have experienced and with which you live.

Only you can offer each other fellowship. That understanding and respect that comes – and only comes - from shared experience.

Today's event renews that fellowship.

It also reminds our community of the injustice and cruelty that you've had to bear and of your ongoing journey of truth, healing and acceptance.

It is important for people to know this history. And more important still for those of us who can act to help, even in a small way, to do so.

The 2012 apology, and before it the NSW inquiry of 2000, came about because of your courage and tenacity. You have helped to lift some of the silence and unwarranted shame.

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In the past five years nearly three thousand people have come forward to join the NSW reunion and information register or to access records.

We have indexed – and made searchable - more than 150,000 NSW adoption files. This will help protect the rights of people affected by forced adoption to get vital information about what happened to them and their families.

The sheer volume of these records shows just how common forced adoption was in NSW.

Last year NSW endorsed a national redress scheme recommended by the McClelland Royal Commission.

And as a result of a Royal Commission case study, we have greatly improved the way we respond to survivors of abuse who approach us for acknowledgment, apology, support and compensation.

As Premier O'Farrell said in 2012 – 'more babies were taken in NSW than in any other state and the law was used as a mechanism to legitimise theft. For many decades this was not believed.'

Today we acknowledge again that it *is* true. It happened, time and again.

It happened to you. And we must never forget.

Thank you so much for attending today.