

Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Summit

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Over two decades worldwide inquiries have highlighted the failure of past and present recordkeeping regimes and archival access frameworks to provide answers to fundamental questions – Who took me from my family and why? How were decisions made about where I ended up? How were decisions made to keep me in care? What about my family? What was I like as a child? – and of their propensity to heal rather than harm. A mountain of testimonies and submissions have described how those who have grown up in orphanages, children’s Homes, foster and/or other forms of statutory care have found government, organisational and institutional archives wanting when they have turned to them to make sense of the dislocation, disconnection, neglect, trauma and abuse suffered during their childhoods.

While current standards for out-of-home care emphasise the need to put the physical, emotional, spiritual and social health and wellbeing of children and young people at the centre of service provision, they are being implemented on recordkeeping infrastructure built for previous eras of child protection and welfare. Current frameworks, processes and systems put the rights of the organisations, institutions and governments providing and responsible for out of home care ahead of those of children and their adult selves. They exclude children and young people from participation in decision-making about their records and continue that exclusion throughout adulthood. The recordkeeping needs of a child-centred model of out of home care cannot just be incrementally added onto existing infrastructure designed for a different age, different values, different principles, and a different technological paradigm.



Fig 1 One of the most popular illustrations from the graphic notetaking at the Summit by Matthew Magain from Sketch Group

The archival and recordkeeping needs for childhood out-of-home care are part of one of society's *wicked problems*, namely how to ensure that the systems set-up to protect children from abuse and neglect do not themselves cause harm? Wicked problems are pressing social policy challenges, resistant to easy resolution due to complex interdependencies, and requiring new kinds of collaborative and innovative responses that transcend organisational and jurisdictional boundaries.¹ Envisioning, designing and building an integrated archival and recordkeeping infrastructure for child centred out-of-home care is such a major social design challenge. The scale, depth, breadth and complexities involved require 'smarter and more agile responses to how problems and opportunities are identified and framed, and how new solutions are generated, explored, prototyped resourced and realized'.²

On 8 and 9 May 2017, 180 participants gathered for the Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Summit at the Deakin Edge Federation Square, Melbourne to address this challenge.³ Representing a range of community, organisational, government and professional perspectives we came together with a common concern that recordkeeping and archiving, despite improvements flowing from the inquiries and apologies over the past two decades, continues to let down children caught up in child welfare and protection systems. With a shared recognition of the systemic nature of the problem, we met to discuss how to transform the way records for childhood out of home care are created, captured, managed, archived and accessed to meet lifelong identity, memory and accountability needs.

The Summit program had been designed around two key interconnected principles. The first was that it needed to be centred on giving voice to people whose lives have been affected by failings of recordkeeping and archiving systems – not just to hear directly of those experiences but to also recognise the important role that lived expertise can play in devising and designing innovative solutions. The Summit therefore also needed to be future focused – years of tireless advocacy and a host of inquiries have repeatedly described the recordkeeping and archiving problems. It is now about developing transformative solutions.

Community Voices and Experiences			Transforming Practice		
Monday 8th May			Tuesday 9th May		
9-9.30	Welcome Welcome to Country and welcome to the Summit	1.45-3.15 What good recordkeeping ought to be Hearing from those who create, manage, use and provide access to records about what they need from recordkeeping and archiving systems to provide quality services and support for lifelong identity, memory and accountability needs.	9-9.45	Calls to action Update from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on records and recordkeeping findings and potential recommendations.	12.30-1.15 Lunch Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition
9.30-11.00	Why don't we do better, when we know better? The recordkeeping and archiving needs for childhood out-of-home care are part of one of society's wicked problems, namely how to ensure that the systems set up to protect children from abuse and neglect do not themselves cause harm?	3.15-3.45 Afternoon tea Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition	9.45-10.45	Making change happen Hearing from those who have been part of advocating, developing and implementing strategic transformation agendas on how to bring together diverse interests and commit to working towards a shared vision.	1.15-2.45 Planning the future part 1 A discussion to develop a shared vision of transformed recordkeeping and archiving frameworks, processes and systems.
11-11.30	Morning tea Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition	3.45-4.45 Having input into a story that's going to be written about me Hearing from young care leavers and advocates for better out-of-home care experiences about their aspirations for recordkeeping and archiving systems.	10.45-11.15	Morning tea Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition	2.45-3.15 Afternoon tea Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition
11.30-1.00	Got my file, but that's not me Hearing from community representatives about their expectations of recordkeeping and archiving systems to support lifelong identity, memory and accountability needs.	4.45-5.00 Issues for tomorrow A chance to reflect on the issues raised across the day's discussions and to highlight the matters to address tomorrow.	11.15-12.30	Recordkeeping and archiving reimagined Presenting ideas around re-imagined recordkeeping and archiving systems to explore the potential in digital and networking technologies to move beyond automating paper practices so that multiple rights in records can be represented and enabled.	3.15-4.30 Planning the future part 2 A discussion to develop the action plan for transformed recordkeeping and archiving frameworks, processes and systems.
1.00-1.45	Lunch Interaction with Imagined Archive Exhibition	5.00 Smoking ceremony			4.35-5.00 Outcomes, reflections and close Reflections, closing remarks and next steps from Summit partners and Planning Group.

Fig 2: Overview of the Summit Program

On day one we learned from representatives from Stolen Generations, Former Child Migrants, Forgotten Australians, Older and Younger Care Leaver communities about the impacts recordkeeping and archiving systems have had on people's lives. Their stories reinforced the role that good recordkeeping and archiving could play in developing and nurturing a sense of self, maintaining connections to family, community and culture, and in supporting quality decision making. They also highlighted the pressing problems. The urgent action needed now around records access for aging populations and in support of redress, along with ensuring that recordkeeping and archiving for children and young people in statutory care today contributes to enabling them to aspire and live up to their potential.

Day Two began with a keynote from Justice Jennifer Coate, highlighting the ways in which the importance of recordkeeping was brought to the attention of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA) during public and private hearings, and other research activities. From this rousing start we then learnt of ways in which to work as a community to make change happen, and of how to harness the potential in digital and networking technologies to move beyond automating paper practices and enable multiple rights in records to be represented and enacted. This included imagining a future vision of a distributed, participatory, child-centred recordkeeping and archiving regime that could meet the lifelong identity, memory and accountability needs identified and described the previous day. The discussion then turned to how under existing discretionary powers that vision could start to be turned into a reality.

The day ended with a resolution to advocate for and develop a unified, collaborative and strategic approach in order to address the systemic recordkeeping and archiving challenges.

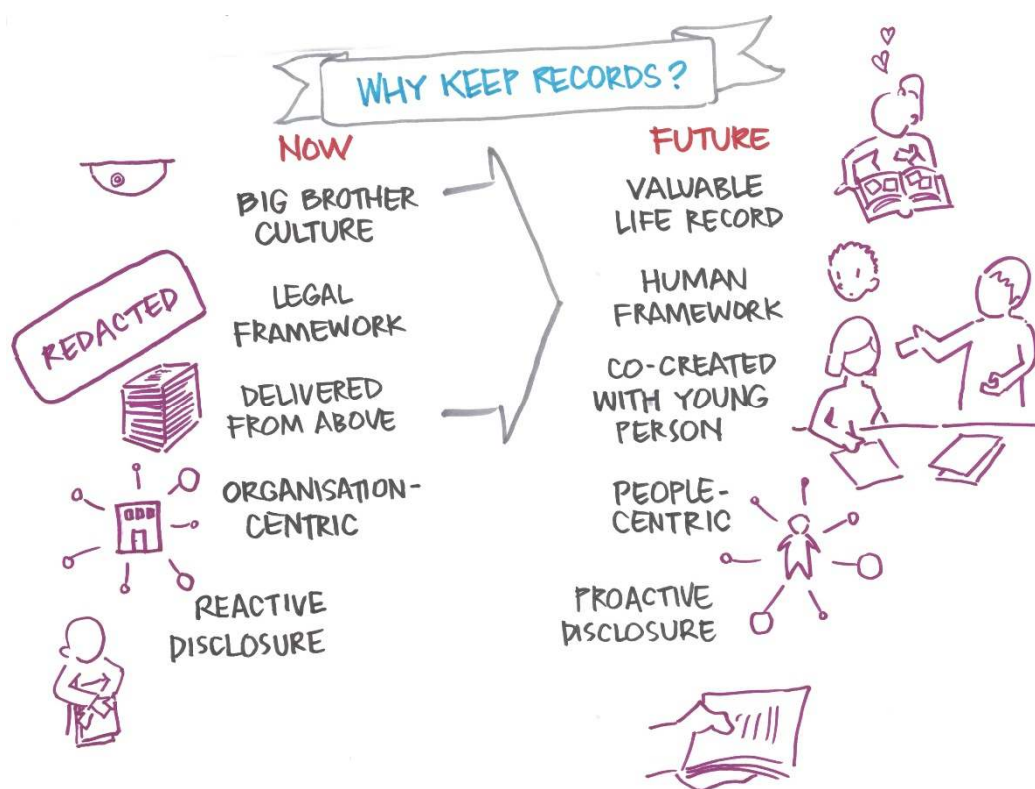


Fig 3: The future vision of recordkeeping and archiving captured by the Summit's graphic note taker

Since the Summit we have worked on an initial draft of a strategic plan.⁴ It centres on working towards a **National Framework for Recordkeeping for Childhood Out of Home Care** by 2020, and to pursue its implementation, monitoring and evaluation over the following decade, i.e. 2020-2030. It incorporates:

- Adopting the expected recommendations from the RCIRCSA on **Recordkeeping Principles for Child Safe Organisations**
- Establishing a **rights based charter for childhood recordkeeping** which
 - recognises the agency of children in relation to recordkeeping, in alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990, and the emphasis on the active participation of children in the decision making that impacts on their lives in the *National Standards for Out-of-Home Care 2011*; and

- governs ongoing records access needs of Care Leavers, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations to more consistently, effectively and compassionately deal with the historical legacy of fragmented and distributed archives.
- Advocating for an **independent Recordkeeping and Rights of the Child body** with development, auditing and oversight responsibilities, and to oversee the design and implementation of a national cross-jurisdictional, cross-sectoral legislative and policy framework to promote efficient and accountable recordkeeping and archiving by all agencies involved in child care services.
- Designing and implementing the infrastructure to support an **independent Lifelong Living Archive** for every child who experiences out-of-home care. A secure, distributed, networked, digital archive populated by children themselves and by their care givers, case workers, teachers, and health professionals. It would support a child's identity, memory and time in out-of-home care and be accessible throughout his or her life.
- Committing to a **Network Governance Model** that defines the ways in which the different components integrate to form an interoperable infrastructure that works across jurisdictions.
- Developing a **transdisciplinary research and development agenda** to identify, progress, support, evaluate and monitor transformations, and an interconnected **action and advocacy agenda** around themes of historical justice, transitioning and young adult needs, child centred recordkeeping, and education and training.

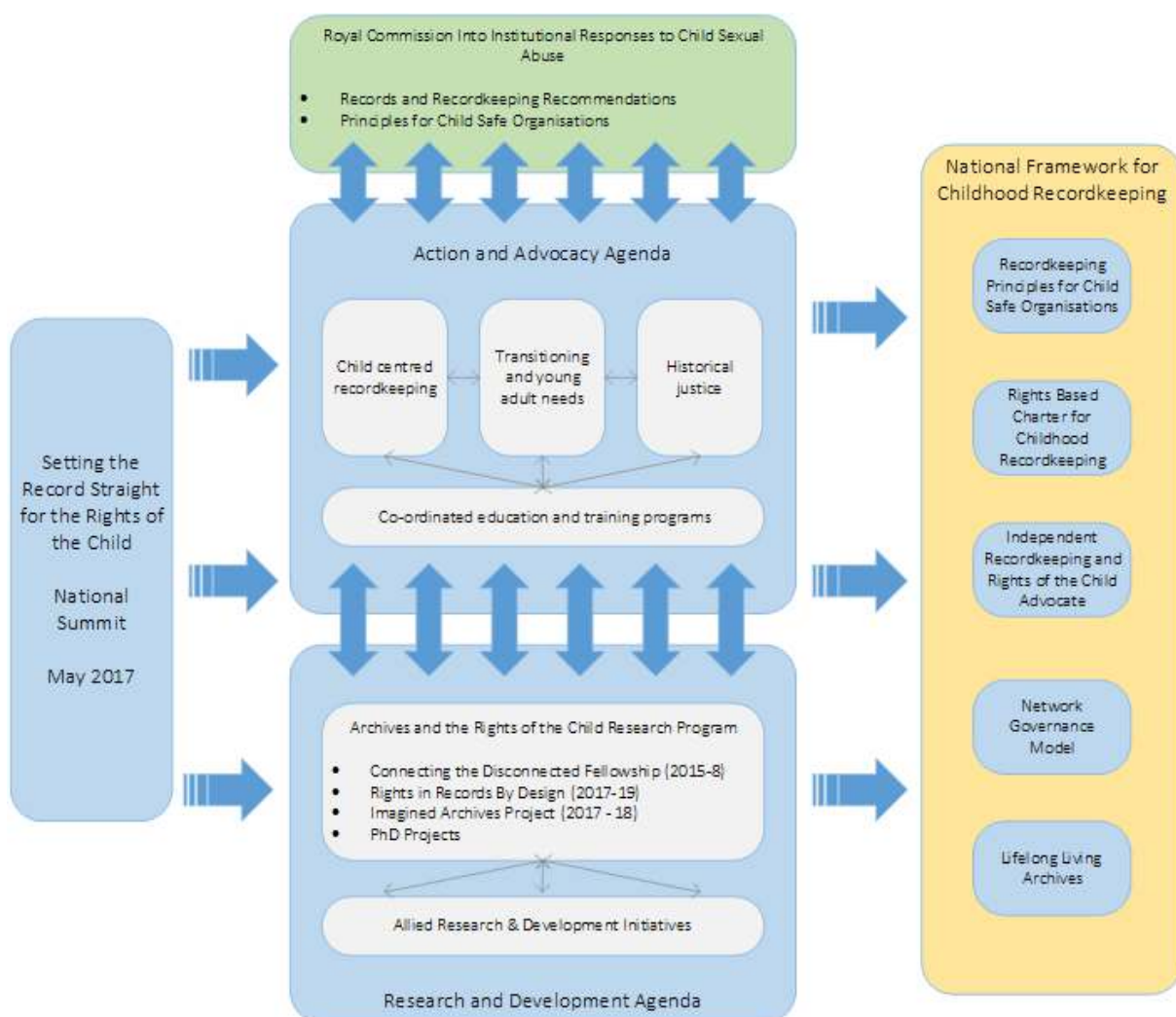


Fig 4: Towards a National Framework for Childhood Recordkeeping⁵

At the end of this year on 15 December 2017, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will be delivering its report and making its recommendations. The Summit and the activities that we hope will follow is about ensuring that when it comes to archives and recordkeeping there is a community in place to proactively respond, and take advantage of the momentum of that moment to make sure that the future tells a different story to the past.

We call on all archivists and other recordkeeping professionals to be part of that community. We need your thinking, your ideas, your drive, your commitment, your determination, as it is only together that we will transform recordkeeping and archiving for childhood out-of-home care.

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Endnotes

¹ Australian Public Service Commission, *Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective*, 2007. <http://www.apsc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/6386/wickedproblems.pdf> accessed 21 June 2017.

² Leah Armstrong, Jocelyn Bailey, Guy Julier, & Lucy Kimbell, *Social Design Futures: HEI Research and the AHRC*. UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. <<https://mappingsocialdesign.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/social-design-report.pdf>> accessed 21 June 2017.

³ See the Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Initiative website at <<https://rights-records.it.monash.edu/summit/>>

⁴ Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Initiative, Submission to the Royal Commission to Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017, <[http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/c893fec1-9366-4a5f-ab4f-adcc0cf08189/Setting-the-Record-Straight-For-the-Rights-of-\(1\)](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/c893fec1-9366-4a5f-ab4f-adcc0cf08189/Setting-the-Record-Straight-For-the-Rights-of-(1))> accessed 16 June 2017.

⁵ Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Initiative, *Setting the Record Straight for the Rights of the Child Strategic Plan August 2017*. <<https://doi.org/10.4225/03/59a23f161bcc6>> accessed 24 September 2017.