

APOLOGY BY THE GENERAL OF THE SALVATION ARMY GENERAL SHAW CLIFTON, TO CARE LEAVERS OF SALVATION ARMY HOMES

7TH DECEMBER 2010

I am very pleased that this gathering is taking place today. It is a gathering I have long anticipated and I was looking forward keenly to being with you all in person for this highly significant and deeply sensitive occasion. Imagine therefore my profound disappointment on being required to undergo a few weeks ago open heart surgery for a double bypass and a replacement aortic valve. All this has denied to me and to my wife, Commissioner Helen Clifton, the privilege of being present with you in person today. I am deeply grateful to Commissioner Barry Swanson and Commissioner Sue Swanson for agreeing to travel from London, England, to be with you all as our personal representatives. I have asked Commissioner Barry Swanson, as second in command of the Army world, to speak for me as you meet. I send you warmest personal greetings. I record also my personal sense of deep sorrow and regret at the events of the past which are being remembered today. I know that these events are constant memories for you all and in many cases also for your loved ones.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on behalf of The Salvation Army to men and women who were children in the care of The Salvation Army in years past. I want to thank Jim Luthy for the courage to write to me and initiate the idea that has culminated in this gathering. I acknowledge the support of CLAN (Care Leavers Australia Network) in working toward this day. The territorial leaders of The Salvation Army in Australia: Commissioner Linda Bond and Commissioner Raymond Finger are also here to show their support on this significant occasion.

Between 1894 and the early 1990's, The Salvation Army operated children's homes throughout Australia. During those years, over 30 thousand children were cared for in over 55 Salvation Army homes staffed by more than 3,000 Officers and employees. Some children were only infants, many were young teenagers. Some were with us briefly, others for their whole childhood. There were many and varied circumstances that led to these children being placed in our care.

To our great regret, some of these children did not benefit from their experience and were not well cared for by our staff. We acknowledge that at certain times in our history, the atmosphere in some homes was rigid, harsh, and authoritarian. Many children did not experience the gentleness of love that they needed. Some children suffered abuse and deprivation. As a result their stories are full of hurt, rejection, discouragement and a failure to realise potential.

As the International Leader of The Salvation Army, I express to all Australian care leavers, our deepest sorrow for these failures and hurts. The Salvation Army offers you our heartfelt apology. To you all, we say 'Sorry.'

- That greater love was not given when you were so vulnerable - we are sorry.

- For any harsh words, violent actions or abuse - we are sorry. These should never have happened.
- For when you tried to speak out and you were not listened to or believed – we are sorry.
- That the process of being placed in care meant for some that you lost family and extended family – we are sorry.
- For those who did not find the support you needed as you grieved for your losses – we are sorry
- To our Indigenous care leavers, for the loss of culture and connection to your land - we are sorry.
- For those who could not navigate the pain of their life experience and are no longer with us – we are deeply sorry
- To your families, your wives and husbands, your children, your partners, who have also suffered because the deprivations of childhood can impact on adulthood relationships – to you we say sorry.

The Salvation Army acknowledges that you were not to blame for what you experienced. We are now listening to your life stories.

I want to thank those Salvation Army Officers who did give compassionate care. Some of you objected to the harsh treatment given – I pay tribute to your courage and we thank you for the kindness you brought and the positive difference you were able to make to some of these precious children.

As General of The Salvation Army, I am glad that our two Australian Territories now have firm policies in place to protect children. I am grateful that both territories have previously issued apologies. In some cases, reunions have been held at the home sites, and apologies have been given there. I am also glad that both territories are able to assist former “children in care”, who contact The Salvation Army. Where care leavers make direct contact themselves with the Army, caring and just procedures are followed. Many care leavers have been helped, for example, by assistance with counselling costs, or by receiving a personal apology. We desire to support all our care leavers to find healing and hope for their future. I invite all care leavers who feel pain from their time in a *Salvation Army* home who have not yet contacted us, to do so.

Finally, as leader of this global Christian movement, I want to affirm the true values which underpin The Salvation Army and the Christian Church. We follow the one who said, 'Let the children come to me.' He has called everyone to a pathway of love, respect, and compassion. While at times we failed him in the past, we do not want to now. We want all to know and experience his gracious love and healing. With that desire in our hearts, we say, God bless you.