

- My name is Greg Baker, I am 66 years old, I was married to Mary for 43 years. I have four children, ten grandchildren and three great grandchildren. It is no accident I have identified myself this way.,
- **Family was a missing part of my upbringing** , a lifetime desire, and a continuing driving force in my life , maybe no different to other care leavers out there.
- I have been asked to make observations about accessing records and what they mean to, the care leaver.
- My credentials of care are, my parents separated when I was 4 in Broken Hill NSW, and at the age of five I was taken to La Perouse in Sydney,
- Then at 7 and a half to Mt Gibraltar Boys home Bowral, then at 9 years old to Buena Vista Orange,
- I was forced out from Buena Vista at fourteen, then wandered into the King's Cross as a "street kid" for almost two years,
- Picked out by police from a group of thirteen I was sent to Albion St Darlinghurst, charged with possession of stolen goods, assault, vagrancy and put back into a church home landra Farm, Grenfell, having absconded after a month I was held in Young jail , then sent to Minda Sydney , then onto Yarrawarra training school at Maitland, where I walked out on my eighteenth birthday. I was also in Adelaide gaol at nineteen.
- As you may imagine, this journey is still with me, is me, and has profoundly influenced my life and those around me.
- Finding answers and raising questions through records has been for me, an important part of my life journey. These range from incidental facts like my father's time in jail, to learning just eight years ago, I have a younger half brother and sister who I may never know.
- I speak today from my 35 years' experience of seeking records, both as a genealogist and a care leaver, and hearing and reading of similar experiences of care leavers generally.
- Why are records so important to Care Leavers (the seekers) ?
- **Records are not records per se, they are the fabric of people's past and present lives**, their
- **raison d'etre (reason for being)**. Our lives are stitched together by these records..
- Photo's, family stories, school reports, achievement awards and childhood friends are sadly lacking or non-existent for many care leavers. All that is left is "official" records.
- These records are wide ranging, and can be of little importance, or it can be life changing.
- The difficulty is for record holders (the gatekeepers) is **not knowing what is important**, or if a certain phrase or sentence can change a person's understanding to their past, and/or will begin the healing/grieving process.
- Or worse still, record holders do understand, and withhold / destroy records, or make it difficult for the care leaver to view to access. **To share ownership is the only way forward**, and the fundamental rights of the carer.
- Access to records can authenticate and give credence to the care leavers memories and experiences in care.
- Even if the records are lacking in detail, existence , or be counterproductive , they are important and relative to the journey.
- I witnessed the release of Buena Vista Boys Home, Orange NSW, records by the UPA, 6 years ago at a reunion. I watched a
- fifty eight year old man cry uncontrollably as he realised he had two other brothers he never knew. Another found out his father's real name for the first time.
- I too, at this reunion, found the truth of how my brother and I became wards of the state, after forty odd years of carrying the guilt of being responsible for our demise.

- I had been told by “authorities” that my brother and I were placed in care because I was “uncontrollable” and we were taken from our mother. As a consequence we were made “wards of the state”. I carried the blame for our situation from a very young age.
- In fact , our mother volunteered us to the Orphanage, and was paying for our upkeep, then when she couldn’t,, the UPA then applied to make us wards of the state, so they could get the income from the state. This was in the records given to us at the 50th “reunion”.
- Records has, and still able to, change people’s lives, memories and perceptions of their world.
- It can also give rise to resentment , bitterness, depression and animosity. It is not the record holders to judge the veracity or relevance of any record , the consequences of those records should be dealt with after.
- I also accessed my records from DOCS NSW in 2006 and to my surprise there were two letters
- written to me at Yawarra (in 1970). They had been withheld and hidden in a folder for 36 years!
- Pauline my girlfriend, my first love, wrote to ask why I haven’t been writing to her, and if I didn’t want to she would understand, and she would find a new boyfriend, The second letter from My Aunt Susan offered to live in a flat with me in Melbourne (a new start) and said it would be easy to find work there.
- How these letters may have changed my life I will never now know, but I’m certain they should have given these letters to me, even as I left Yawarra.
- ***If destiny is really decided by circumstance, then this throw of the dice should not have been loaded. Tears welled up and my stomach turned as I read them.***
- Unfortunately access to records can also be daunting, challenging and unproductive.
- Lack of details and evidence that validates one’s own story, can lead to disappointment, frustration and resentment for many care leavers.
- It must be also said that records are in the domain of the record holders; both in content and ownership. Yet **it is true that the records are existentially the care leavers persona.**
- It for a care leaver to find truths of circumstance or the affirmation of the story they believe about themselves.
- Find and Connect are to me, the cartographers (the mapmakers), and this role is pivotal to the care leaver when seeking records. A map to show the way forward; through the maze of bureaucracy, and to access other avenues of information, for help and support.
- To me, this role of find and connect, as mapmakers between the care leaver and record holder, will always be difficult and complex, the “Us” and “them” culture still pervades the dialogue,, and it is a role which will never satisfy everyone.
- Having said that I also believe that the stakeholders of this mapmaking have an obligation to provide quality information good and bad, but also **be assiduous in fostering an open and honest dialogue** with all concerned.
- Thank you for listening to my story and thoughts.