



Council for
Intellectual Disability



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Saying sorry for disability institutions

ASID presentation – 22/11/23



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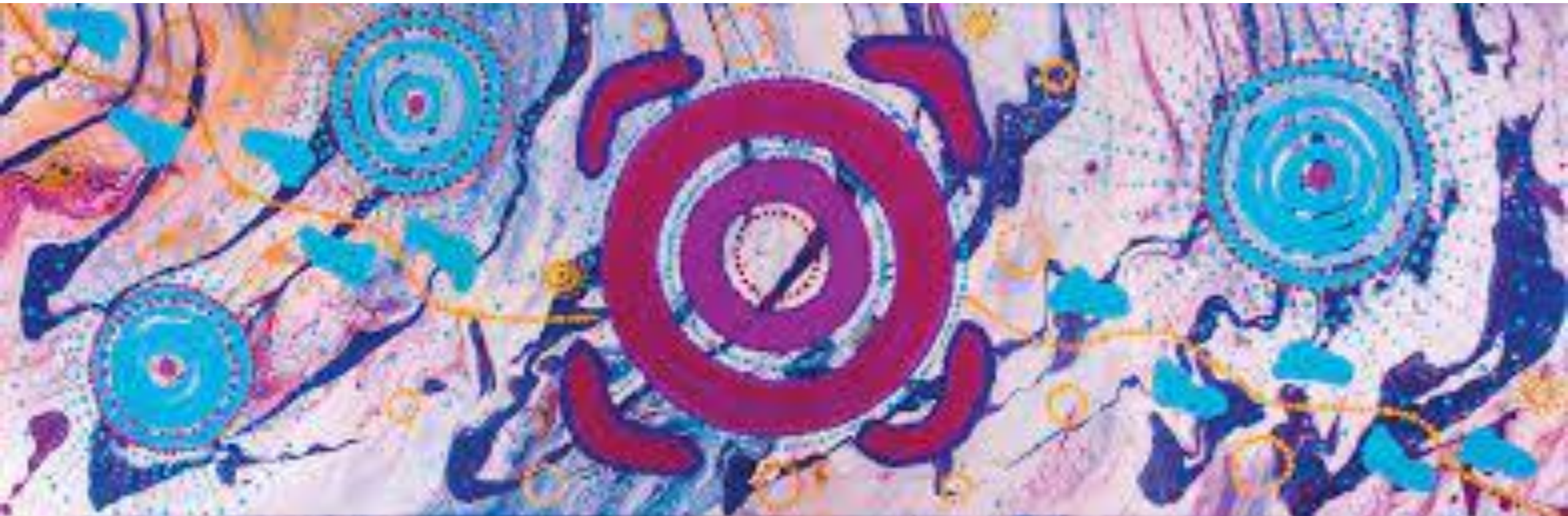


ASID Presenters and Contributors:

- Dr Gina Andrews Zucker, Research Affiliate, Centre for Disability Research and Policy, Sydney University & Council for Intellectual Disability Board Member.
- Associate Professor Linda Steele, Law Health Justice, UTS
- Leigh Creighton, public speaker and disability advocate promoting mental health for ppl with downs syndrome
- Associate Professor Phillippa Carnemolla, UTS
- Jack Kelly, Project Officer, CID and Honorary Research Fellow, UTS
- Ruth Richter, Research Affiliate, Centre for Disability Research and Policy, Faculty of Medicine, Sydney University

Acknowledgement of Country

I am presenting from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.



‘Saying sorry for disability institutions’ Presentation Outline:

1. Background – what is the story of people with intellectual disability who have lived in institutions in Australia? (Gina)
2. What does an apology mean? (Linda and Leigh)
3. Academic and practical reflections on an apology and redress (Ruth Richter and Gina Andrews Zucker)
4. What does research tell us about what people with an intellectual disability think about this issue? (Jack and Phillippa)
5. Panel discussion (MC by Gina, Jack and Phillippa)

1. Context – people with intellectual disability and institutions

Gina discusses the history of people with intellectual disability in institutions (3 minutes)

- Institutions – what is an institution?
 - Goffman's definition
 - Contemporary definition – 'Transinstitutionalisation'
- People with intellectual disability and institutions – history and experience?
 - Australia
 - International
- Have Australians with an intellectual disability who have lived in institutions been given an apology?
 - What did Forgotten Australians say? Senate Committee Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (2003-2004). National Apology by PM Rudd in 2009 to Forgotten Australians.
 - What did the Disability Royal Commission say?
- Lessons from sites of conscience movement
 - International examples
 - Example of Parramatta Girls Home

Case example: *Michael Mc Fadden*

- Gina's PhD includes a life span case study of 13 of the 86 children who were admitted to Watt Street – Newcastle Mental Hospital, NSW, Australia in 1952.
- Gina's uncle, Ricky Gowlland, moved to Watt Street aged 5 $\frac{3}{4}$. He then was 'transferred' to Peat Island at 13. He lived at Peat Island from the age of 13-64 years. The last two years of his life, Ricky lived at Casuarina Grove – an aged care facility for people with intellectual disability in Wyong, Central Coast, NSW.
- Today's focus is on the story of one of Ricky's peers – Michael Mc Fadden - who in my eyes is clearly owed an apology by the State.
- Michael Mc Fadden was born in 1946 with cerebral palsy. At the age of 11 Michael was admitted to Watt Street Mental Hospital. Accounts in letters and nurses file notes reflect that Michael was a much loved resident at Watt Street.

Case example: *Michael Mc Fadden (continued)*

- At the age of 11, just after Christmas in 1958, Michael moves to Milson Island. Milson and Peat Island is a much larger institution, with adult males and teenage boys. Michael lives at Milson Island – Ward 5 – an ambulant ward for boys and men with physical disability.
- In 1960 Michael has an severe epileptic fit nine months after his arrival at the Island. Michael's health declines, he finds eating difficult, he loses weight. Michael's parents are concerned, they make a complaint to the Medical Superintendent of the Islands.
- Mr and Mrs McFadden seek their local MP's support to facilitate Michael's transfer to Parramatta Mental Hospital, NSW (so he can be closer to the family home in Lidcombe). Michael is transferred in and out of Parramatta Mental Hospital twice. Sadly, Michael dies soon after his second admission. Michael's death certificate says that he died because of '*epilepsy*' and '*cerebral degeneration*'. The death certificate notes that the last illness experienced by Michael was '*malnutrition*'. Experienced over the course of '*months*'.

Case example: *Michael Mc Fadden (continued)*

Redress owed to the McFadden family?

- What recompense has there been for Michael? For his family?
- The emotional scars are still apparent 60 years later. At PhD interview with all three of Michael's siblings, some 60 years later, the vivid memories of how Michael was institutionalised, its impact on the family unit, and his premature death is real. At interview, Michael's eldest brother, John McFadden, who later became a public lawyer, wept. The pain is real – six decades later.
- Surely the McFadden family is owed redress? Compensation an apology by the state?


2. What would an apology mean?

Leigh Creighton and Linda Steele explore in conversation what 'an apology' might mean (7 mins).

In the video Leigh and Linda:

- Acknowledge the experiences of people with intellectual disability who have lived in institutions.
 - These include stories of suffering.
- Acknowledge that people with intellectual disability have lives of value, experience meaningful relationships, most want family connection, stories of strength love, and survival.
- Discuss what an apology means?
- What is redress – who is responsible? What's the government's role in redress?





Leigh Creighton on the need for an apology:
*“People with a disability have a voice ...
people are story tellers ... and these stories
should be told widely.”*

3. How can redress help?

Content from Ruth Richter – practice expert in redress

- What is redress?
- What does redress offer people?
- Ways to think about redress
- What avenues are there for redress for people with intellectual disability who have lived in state institutions?
 - Redress for the ‘Stolen Generation’
 - Redress for victim survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.
 - Redress recommendations as per the Disability Royal Commission?
- Barriers to redress for people with intellectual disability?

4. What research tells us about what ppl with intellectual disability think about this issue?

Phillippa Carnemolla and Jack Kelly discuss:

- What research has been done by UTS on this issue?
 - What has the research found?
- What advocacy is needed for an apology?
 - Current collaboration?
 - Future collaboration?
 - Important role and promotion of people with intellectual disability in advocating for acknowledgment/ remembrance/ an apology?

6. Discussion and questions

- Is an apology owed?
 - Contemporary example analogous to historical institutions? Eg. Segregation in group homes? Use of restrictive practices on people with disability?
- Should there be redress?
 - Views on the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations on redress?
- What are the next steps?
 - Challenges because the Royal Commission was largely silent on this issue
 - Lobby state government?
 - Lobby Federal Government?
 - Role of sites of conscience international movement.
 - Role of advocacy



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