

Communities in Crisis: Identity, memory, accountability and the archives

Sue McKemmish: Monash University

Abstract: This presentation will explore archival needs relating to identity, memory and accountability of a range of communities in Australia. A series of government inquiries and reports relating to the Stolen Generations of Indigenous children, British Child Migrants to Australia, Forgotten Australians who were the victims of abuse when they were children in "care", and those affected by Forced Adoptions have made major recommendations relating to the accessibility of archival sources of information relevant to their identity, memory and accountability needs. Many of these recommendations have not been implemented. Archival programs are failing vulnerable communities and in some cases contributing to their trauma. The presentation suggests that the reasons for this failure are systemic and that if the pattern is not to be repeated in the future (e.g. in relation to child asylum seekers now in detention in Australia and its offshore camps), there needs to be fundamental reforms in archival law, policy and practice. It also speculates that similar issues exist in many other countries around the world