

The Stolen Generations

Taken Away

Following settlement by the Europeans, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people faced countless tribulations and a lot of adversity. Indigenous families and communities have been affected by many significant events and will continue to be for generations to come. The most traumatic event in the history of Indigenous people was when their children were forcibly removed from them by the government.



The children were placed into missions, homes or other institutions run by white people. The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children first took place in the 1800s and did not cease until the 1970s. Contact between the children and their families and communities was strictly forbidden.

What Was the Reason for Taking Children from Their Families?

During this time, the Australian government thought Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children would live better lives by living in white society. They felt that living with adopted families would provide them with a better education, care and better opportunities in society. However, once the children were removed, they received a poor education (sometimes none at all); were treated poorly and were forced to endure difficult and often unpaid work as labourers and servants.

Another reason for the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was to try to eradicate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bloodline. The removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were expected to marry white people and have children, therefore leading to the gradual removal of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bloodline.

Life in the Missions

In few situations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had a happy upbringing and lived contented lives. Unfortunately, most were despondent and missed their families terribly. The children were forbidden to speak their native language or practise their traditions. Most children were abused and treated poorly. The long-term

effects on the stolen children were that they lost their vital traditions and strong connections to their families and country.

It is customary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to pass on their traditions, culture and history orally through songs and storytelling to future generations. These Dreaming stories convey important information about the land, the laws and the responsibilities of Indigenous people. Most of this information was lost because the adults in the community were unable to tell it to their children.

The Nation Says Sorry

On 13th February 2008, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave a public apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples known as the 'Stolen Generations'. He was the first prime minister to publicly acknowledge the atrocities endured by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the hands of the Australian government. Kevin Rudd apologised for the past laws and policies which have had a long-lasting and damaging effect on so many Indigenous people. This speech was a significant step in moving forward together as a nation because the prime minister was taking responsibility for past actions of the government.

Some of the people from the Stolen Generations have been able to make contact and have been reunited with their families. However, many have not and continue to be 'lost'. Many Indigenous Australians continue to mourn the loss of the life they were taken away from.

