

Accessing Records

How do I access records held by a non-government organisation?

**know
more**

Free legal help to navigate
the Royal Commission

Free advice line 1800 605 762 | Website knowmore.org.au

Many organisations that look after children are non-government organisations, like religious or community organisations. You might want access to records held by these organisations. This factsheet will give you some help with doing this.

People seek out their personal records for many different reasons. For example, you might want information about:

- the time you spent in out-of-home 'care', like at an orphanage or home, or
- a complaint you made to an organisation.

(If the government might also hold records about your childhood, like ward files, court records, school records and police reports, you should read **knowmore's** factsheet *How do I access documents held by government?*)

It is important that you get advice about the best option, so contact **knowmore** for legal help.

Why would a non-government organisation hold records about me?

Children's homes and other organisations record information for administrative purposes and to comply with laws and regulations.

What should I expect when accessing my records?

The records you uncover may not answer all the questions you want answered. Many records might relate to you but will have been created for other purposes. This means they may contain minimal information, be inaccurate or not record important events in your life.

Trauma and emotion

Everyone has their own story. Sometimes accessing records about your childhood, especially if you were a ward of the state, can have a significant emotional impact on you.

The records may bring up traumatic memories or feelings of anger, hurt, fear and loss, but also feelings of nostalgia or relief.

It is a good idea to view your records with someone you trust or feel supported by, like a friend or support person.

What are my rights to access records held by organisations about me?

If your records are about the time you spent in out-of-home 'care', then you might have a legal right to access the records.

Many organisations might also be covered by privacy and information laws that give you the right to access their records.

If an organisation refuses you access, you can contact **knowmore** for legal help.

Getting started

You can access your records on your own. If you were a ward of the state, you might also be able to get support from an agency.

Support agencies

There are support agencies available to assist people who are wards of the state and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

You can contact **knowmore** to find out about these agencies.

Accessing Records

How do I access records held by a non-government organisation?

Doing it yourself

Your first step is to find out who ran the place you are interested in. It might be a church, school, sporting club, etc.

Using Find & Connect Australia

You can start by contacting a free historical information service called Find & Connect Australia. Their website is www.findandconnect.gov.au and their phone number is 1800 16 11 09 (freecall). This service brings together historical resources about institutional 'care' in Australia.

Running an online search

You can search Find & Connect Australia's online database for the institution's name, location or date. Once you find the institution, look for the section 'Information about records'.

The database should tell you how you can make your records request and what records might be available.

Making your request

When you make your request, make sure you clearly describe what records you would like and make sure you include the name you were known as when you were a child.

You may also need to include a copy of some photo identification so that the organisation can respect your privacy by only giving your records to you.

I don't know what organisation I'm looking for. What should I do?

You can contact **knowmore** for some help. If you were a ward of the state, you could also consider getting your ward file from the government first (see **knowmore's** factsheet *How do I access documents held by government?*). Your file should say what organisations you spent time in.

Contact knowmore

Free advice line 1800 605 762

www.knowmore.org.au

Email info@knowmore.org.au

www.facebook.com/knowmorecomms

@knowmorecomms

Brisbane

Suite 1, Level 16, 141 Queen St,
Brisbane QLD 4000
PO Box 2151, Brisbane QLD 4001
t 07 3218 4500

Sydney

Suite G02, Ground Floor,
233 Castlereagh St, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box 20319, World Square NSW 2002
t 02 8267 7400

Melbourne

Level 1, 180 Flinders St,
Melbourne 3000
PO Box 84, Flinders Lane VIC 8009
t 03 8663 7400

knowmore has been established by the National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc. with funding from the Australian Government represented by the Attorney-General's Department.

The information provided in this factsheet is for information only. It must not be relied on as legal advice. You should seek legal advice about your own particular circumstances. | Last updated: July 2014 © **knowmore**