

Accessing records

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

Many organisations that look after children are non-government organisations, like religious or community organisations. These organisations record information for administrative purposes and to comply with laws and regulations. You might want access to records held by these organisations.

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

The government might also hold records about your childhood, like ward files, court records, school records and police reports. If you need access to these, read knowmore's fact sheet *How do I access documents held by government?*

If you need help getting your records, ask the staff at knowmore.

What to expect

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 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, like a friend or support person.

What are my rights to access my records?

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

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.

How do I access my records?

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

Support agencies

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

You can contact knowmore to find out about these agencies.

Who should I make a request to?

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

If you're having trouble finding out, Find & Connect Australia can help you with this.

Using Find & Connect Australia

Find & Connect Australia is a free historical information service. It brings together historical resources about institutional 'care' in Australia.

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.

www.findandconnect.gov.au
1800 16 11 09 (freecall)

I don't know what organisation I'm looking for

If you're having trouble finding the organisation, you can contact knowmore for help.

If you were a ward of the state, you could also consider getting your ward file from the government first (see knowmore's fact sheet *How do I access documents held by government?*).

Your ward file should say what organisations you spent time in.

Making your records request

When you make your request, make sure you clearly describe what records you would like.

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.

How to contact knowmore

Visit: www.knowmore.org.au

Free call: 1800 605 762

Email: info@knowmore.org.au

Brisbane

Level 20, 144 Edward Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
t 07 3218 4500

Melbourne

Level 15, 607 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
t 03 8663 7400

Sydney

Level 7, 26 College Street
Sydney NSW 2000
t 02 8267 7400

Perth

Level 5, 5 Mill Street
Perth WA 6000
t: 08 6117 7244