

Let's talk...

Sorry Day



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this factsheet may contain images or names of people who have passed away

Sorry Day (26 May) is a time to remember the past policies of forced child removal, and reflect on the sad and painful stories of the Stolen Generations.

It is a time to recognise the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the power of saying Sorry.

Did you know?

- The first Sorry Day was held on 26 May 1998—exactly one year after the [Bringing Them Home Report](#) was presented to the Parliament.
- The *Bringing Them Home* Report was the result of an inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, and recommends both an apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reparations.
- The term “Stolen Generations” refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were forcibly removed as children from their families by government, welfare, or church authorities, and placed into institutional care or with non-Indigenous foster families.
- The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children began as early as the mid-1800s and continued until the 1970s.

Key timeline

“We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians... For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.”¹



Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, 13 February 2008

¹<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F2008-02-13%2F0003%22>

1909: the Aborigines Protection Act gave the Aborigines Protection Board legal sanction to take Aboriginal children from their families in New South Wales.²

1937: All Australian States adopt policies to 'assimilate' Aboriginal children of mixed descent.³

1950s: During the 1950s and 1960s, great numbers of Aboriginal children were removed from their families in the name of assimilation. They became known as the Stolen Generation.⁴

1970s: Aboriginal children continue to be removed from their families into the 1970s. Aboriginal groups begin to receive funding to challenge these very high rates of removal.⁵

26 May 1997: The *Bringing Them Home* Report is tabled in Federal Parliament. This report talked about the painful history of the Stolen Generations, and made 54 recommendations for moving forward including holding a national Sorry Day every year.

26 May 1998: The first official Sorry Day is held to acknowledge the impact of forcible removal policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

28 May 2000: The Corroboree 2000 Bridge Walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge shut down traffic and made national headlines as hundreds of thousands of people walked in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.⁶

13 February 2008: Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for the policies which 'inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these, our fellow Australians'. This is why each year on 13 February, we now celebrate the anniversary of the Apology.

Some statistics...

- The Corroboree Bridge Walk in 2000 saw over **250,000 people** walking across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of reconciliation, and saying sorry to the Stolen Generations.
- **24,763** personal apologies were made to Aboriginal and



² http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/apa1909n25262.pdf

³ <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>

⁴ <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>

⁵ *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.* Commonwealth of Australia 1997

⁶ <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>

Torres Strait Islander people at the first Sorry Day in 1998.⁷

- The *Bringing Them Home* Report found that between **one in three and one in ten** Aboriginal children were removed from their families as a result of government policy.
- The Inquiry which culminated in the *Bringing Them Home Report* received over **777 submissions**, including **535** from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations.

The Healing Foundation

“It never goes away. Just ‘cause we’re not walking around on crutches or with bandages or plasters on our arms and legs, doesn’t mean we’re not hurting. Just ‘cause you can’t see it...I’ll carry these sorts of wounds ‘till the day I die.”

Confidential Evidence 580, Queensland. Bringing Them Home Report

For many members of the Stolen Generations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Sorry Day is official recognition of a dark history of forced removal that was, for a long time, denied. To assist with the healing process for the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected, the Healing Foundation was established one year after the Apology. For many members of the Stolen Generations, as well as their children and families, healing is a complex process. The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on building culturally strong, community-led healing solutions.

Colonisation, forced removals, and other past Australian government policies have resulted in trauma and grief for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, across generations. Many people have spoken of the ongoing pain they feel as a result of past government practices. The Healing Foundation sees a future in which those affected by the legacy of past forced removal policies have broken the cycle of abuse, and have enhanced their capacity as communities, families, and individuals, to sustain their wellbeing and that of future generations. To achieve this future, the Healing Foundation supports and promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing initiatives across Australia.

The Healing Foundation works with members of the Stolen Generations to create their own healing responses, supports children and young people to improve their own social and emotional wellbeing, provides trauma related workforce education and training, assists communities to access information on trauma and healing, and develops evidence for best-practice Indigenous healing.

We encourage everyone to learn more about [the story of the Healing Foundation](#), and we hope that by helping to recognise the wrongs of the past, we are moving forward towards a reconciled, just and equitable Australia.

⁷ <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>

Take action

“In true reconciliation, through the remembering, the grieving and the healing we can come to terms with our conscience and become as one in the dreaming of this land.”⁸

Evelyn Scott Chairperson, Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 27 May 2000.



- Deepen your understanding of our shared histories and cultures via Reconciliation Australia’s online learning resource [Share Our Pride](#).
- Read the harrowing [testimonies](#) of members of the Stolen Generations via the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Watch [this animation](#) from the Healing Foundation about intergenerational trauma.
- Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and achievements by hosting an [event](#) for [National Reconciliation Week](#).
- Watch the short documentary [The Apology](#) to better understand why this moment was so important to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Watch [Rabbit Proof Fence](#) or [Radiance](#) which both share stories of family, connection to land, and the impacts of removal.
- Listen to Archie Roach’s iconic song [They Took the Children Away](#), or the amazing reinterpretation by Gurrumul and Briggs [The Children Came Back](#)
- Share this factsheet.

Reconciliation Australia would like to thank the [Healing Foundation](#) for their help in the production of this factsheet.

Photo credits:

Take Action photo: The Apology to the Stolen Generations, [Indigenous Film Services](#).

⁸ http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/14/speeches/Evelyn_Scott.htm