To the Department of Community Affairs,

My name is Colleen Ewen, i am now 58 years of age and i would like to tell you my side of the story regarding the treatment of young Pregnant women in the 1960's and how appalling the conditions were. I would also like to try and get across to you what it was like to be 15, pregnant and living in one of these so called "homes".

In 1968 i was fifteen and pregnant. I didn't no i was, I lived with my father at Windang on the South Coast. My sister lived in Sydney with her husband they had come down for a visit. One night she walked into the bathroom and saw me in the shower, she told me i was having a baby, by this time i would have been about seven and a half months pregnant. I was terrified of my father but she kept ringing to find out if i had told him. His reaction was to demand who the father was i refused to tell him. He took me to Windang police station and told them what was going on, i think he was hoping i would tell them who the father was. In those days carnal knowledge was a crime. My father got angrier & angrier he punched me in the face in front off the police who did nothing, about an hour later a lady came to the police station and took me home and told me to pack a bag. She then told me i was going to a place in Sydney but she did not tell me why or what the place was. I don't remember the name of the street but it was at Leichhardt in a back street off Parramatta Rd. It was a big double story old house, I don't know who run it. There was a "house mother" i think maybe 12-15 young women not really sure of exact numbers. The rooms were divided by partitions 3 to a room. Nobody said much to one another. We all did chores and a roster for cooking. Not long after i got there i was called to a small office and a lady was in there i don't remember her telling me who she was but she new my name. She started asking me questions "What was i going to do?" I replied "I don't know". "How are you going to support your baby?""I don't know", "How are you going to support yourself and your baby" "I don't know", "Have you thought about how you going to take care of your baby?" "I don't know."I was nearly due and had not seen a doctor, i had no idea what all this meant, nothing was explained to me and no offers of help were made as to what i could do. Every other day i went to the office, the same lady was there she asked me the same questions each time. One day she said she had some papers for me to sign, she told me they were adoption papers and that i needed to sign them. There was no explanation of what they meant or were for, i had no idea that i had any rights especially the 30 day cool off period just that it was best for the baby. I can't even remember if i ever did sign them.
In the unmarried mothers home i didn't talk much to the other girls or the house mother, i had been in and out of children's homes most of my life, i was fifteen months old the first time and the last time was from 1965-1968. Being brought up by nuns you did what you were told, i had no social or people skills and you didn't buck authority. It was the same to me just another home where you did not question what you were told to do for fear of sevear punishment. I had no idea nobody told me i had any rights or responsibility to myself or my baby no information was offered, Just those constant same questions which left me believing that i couldn't keep my baby. We all went to what i now know was a clinic at the hospital. It was a little place i think it was called South Sydney hospital you could see it from the train on the left hand side going into Central Station. It was a small two story white building i don't remember the name of the street, there was an unmarried mothers home across the street from the hospital. I think i may have been in the home six or seven weeks i'm not really sure. One afternoon i had a lot of pain i could hardly walk and one of the girls told me i was in labour i didn't know what that meant. I went to the hospital in a taxi with another girl, was dropped off and she went back to the home. I was taken up stairs by a nurse into a room with three beds divided by curtains, I was told to get undressed and hop up on the bed. The pain was so bad but still nothing was explained to me. I don't know how long i layed there in pain i just wanted it to go away but it was getting worse. I was crying and a nurse came in looked at me and just walked out. It got worse, two nurses came in one was older, i was rolling around a lot hoping the pain would go away by this

time i was panicking and very distraught the nurses were trying to hold me down, one was trying to wrap something around my head covering my eyes she said to me is so you don't see, this just made me worse and i was told to stop the nonsense. I don't know how long it took, it seemed like a long time. I know now i had a lot of stiches and at no time did they tell me what they were doing to me. I was taken to a room where there was another girl there, i slept a lot i think it was mainly due to sedation. I'd had my baby but i didn't no what i'd had. When a nurse came in i'd ask where my baby was i was told my baby was ok and nothing more. As i said i slept a lot i think i was there for about ten days, i had not seen my baby or new what sex it was. My father had told me my aunty had come to the hospital to visit me and my newborn child (my mother had died when i was twelve) my aunty was shocked that i had had a baby she asked me what i was going to do, by this time i was convinced that i was not allowed to keep the baby, I still feel it was all mind games they played with me. I told my aunt that i had to adopt my baby out and that i had not seen it and i didn't know what i had. She asked "What do you mean you have to adopt your baby out? "That's what the lady at the home said, at the time i didn't realise this woman was a social worker. If truth be known she didn't actually say those words to me, it was all the questions that i couldn't answer before my baby was born that led me to believe that i was not allowed to keep my baby. My aunt then said to me "your baby is yours, they can't force you to adopt!"I new then i wanted to keep my baby. My father & aunt went to see whoever was in charge. There was alot of loud voices and argument as to how i was going to look after the baby, my aunt came back and i still had not seen my baby.

I left the hospital that day with my baby, a little boy i named (…).

I believe that the hospital staff cooperated with Australian government social workers to coerce and try to force teen mums to adopt their babies out. There were alot of girls like me who had no support and who were even more vulnerable to the social workers and their mind games. We were all led to believe that what we had done was wrong and shameful, They tried to convince us adopting out our new born babies was the better choice for the babies future..... The government in that era was wrong. The social workers and hospital staff that carried out these policies had total disregard for young mum's and the situation they were in.

Still to this day there are women out there who have to live everyday with the choices they were not given. The trauma and guilt due to the lies and forced adoptions of their new born babies.

I feel for all these now women who gave up their new born babies due to the pressure and lies of the government policies. We all live with the trauma and guilt of our so called "shameful" actions.....

I hope this helps to bring out into the light the impact and total disregard for human rights the government policies had on women and their so called "shameful" acts.

Regards
Mrs Colleen Ewen