

Lotus Times

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Lotus Times is published in collaboration with **The Historical Abuse Network** which works collaboratively with people who experienced abuse and neglect in institutions, foster care and detention centres. We acknowledge their courage as they move from adversity to hope in seeking public recognition, justice and redress.

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Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce.

In 2015, the Historical Abuse Network (HAN) published *Unfinished Business*, calling on the Queensland Government to establish a Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce.

Two years later, at the annual Remembrance Day event, the Premier and then Minister for the Arts, the Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk announced the Queensland Government would establish a Taskforce.

After the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released its final report on 15 December 2017, the Queensland Government consulted on what the Taskforce would look like. This happened through a number of roundtables with people with lived experience, support services and organisations across Queensland. The roundtables were chaired by Queensland Government Ministers.

In September 2018, the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce was established and Mr Robert (Bob) Atkinson was appointed as its Chair. As readers of Lotus Times may know, Bob (as he likes to be known) was the Queensland Police Commissioner before being appointed as one of six Commissioners of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

We spoke with Bob about the Taskforce. “We think the Taskforce is one of a kind in Australia and it is a real privilege to be the Chair. Our vision is for a Queensland where children are protected, safe and supported to reach their full potential. Our purpose is to raise awareness of institutional child sexual abuse and its impacts, to drive changes that will protect children, and provide a holistic response to support, justice and healing for people with a lived experience across Queensland.

“One of the concerns from the Commissioners at the Royal Commission was that its work would lose

momentum over time. The Queensland Taskforce is committed to bringing the books of the Royal Commission to the people.

“The priorities for the Taskforce for this year are to talk with people about the Royal Commission and the Taskforce, legislative reforms that will improve access

We want to remember the legacy of past injustices and acknowledge the importance of truth telling in the role of healing.

to justice, redress, support services for people with lived experience and their families, protect children and access to records.

“While we are not able to advocate for people on an individual basis, it is important that we hear from people with lived experience about what they think about the Royal Commission’s recommendations and how they are being implemented in Queensland.

“Our role is to provide our best advice to the Honourable Di Farmer MP, the Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence about Royal Commission reforms,” Bob said.



Bob Atkinson, Chair
Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce

The Taskforce also provides advice on the establishment of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Grants Program which provides funding to eligible organisations for activities that contribute to truth, healing and reconciliation in Queensland.

While the first round of grants closed on 2 August 2019, there will be a number of other rounds in the coming years. The aim is to assist as many organisations as possible to work with and support people with lived experience to recognise the harm caused by institutional child sexual abuse and assist with healing and reconciliation.

“I am grateful for the early work of HAN and Micah Projects in recommending a Taskforce. The establishment of the Taskforce is testament to their efforts and dedication,” Bob Atkinson said.

The Taskforce members participated in a workshop and decided collectively on the image of a tapestry to represent its work. The individual threads of people with lived experience, their supporters, Queensland Government agencies and the community are weaved together.

Taskforce members include four people with lived experience, plus people with professional experience: Karyn Walsh from Micah Projects, Julie-Lin Pemberton from Link-Up Queensland, Helena Holdaway from Life Without Barriers and David Baker from the Uniting Church of Australia (Queensland Synod).

The Taskforce will operate until 2022 and can be contacted through its Secretariat – Pieta Sephton on 3097 7251 or Kelly Lotz on 3097 5793.



Archbishop Phillip Aspinall and the Dean of Brisbane Dr Peter Catt with Margaret Hamilton and Dorelle Downes at the service.



St Mary's Home, Toowong, 1961

Remembrance garden established for St Marys mothers and their children Toowong, Brisbane



Mothers who spent time at St Mary's Home, Toowong who were forced to give up their babies for adoption in the 1960s and 1970s (L to R) Dorelle Downes, Rosemary Harbison, Margaret Hamilton and Diane.

There were tears and hugs aplenty at a very emotional service held at the former St Mary's Home at Toowong – a home previously run by the Brisbane Anglican Diocese – in honour of those affected by forced adoption practices from the 1950s to the early 1980s.

The Archbishop of Brisbane, the Most Rev'd Dr Phillip Aspinall blessed a new Remembrance Garden which was an initiative of former St Mary's mothers – a place where they could return and sit peacefully and reflect on an extraordinary time in their lives where they bonded with their unborn child, before the baby was later removed upon birth and adopted out in a scheme run by governments around Australia for several decades.

Around 10 mothers and children attended the special blessing of the Remembrance Gardens –supported by several other dozen family, friends and supporters, along with Diocese and Anglicare workers.

Three mothers spoke about their experiences – Margaret Hamilton, Dorelle Downes and

Rosemary Harbison, as well as Sandra McGregor, a daughter of one of the other mothers who has since passed away. Most mothers spent time at St Mary's before the birth, then delivered their baby at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

Between 1951 and the early 1980s, it is estimated up to 150,000 unmarried women across Australia were forced to give up their babies, after spending time in homes mainly run by churches, including Anglican, Catholic and Lutheran churches.

The former Prime Minister Julia Gillard read a national apology in Federal Parliament in 2012, where she outlined the fact that mothers were given false assurances by authorities and were "forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal."

Ms Downs suffered an incredible trauma – having been gang-raped in 1970 when she was aged 19, while working as a governess on a remote property in western Queensland.

"When I wrote to my mother and told her I was pack raped, she said I couldn't come home," Ms Downs said. "She just didn't want to know, as I guess there was a social stigma attached to it at

the time. It was a case of 'what would the neighbours say?'"

Ms Downs travelled from Longreach back to Brisbane while she was heavily pregnant and stayed at St Mary's Home, Toowong, where she and other mothers-to-be did household chores in the final months before their baby was born.

Her son was born in hospital but he was taken away from her immediately. She only knew that she had given birth to a son because one of the staff later told her: 'you had a son, a long skinny streak like yourself with a crop of black hair and the same crooked little fingers.'

"So from then until the time when we eventually met in 1993, I was always looking for a baby with crooked little fingers," Ms Down said.

"But in the hospital, I kept asking to see my son and I refused to sign the adoption consent form. They told me the only way to get out of there was to sign the consent form, so I eventually did after nine or ten days. They told me 'don't bother looking for him because you'll never find him'."

Ms Downs and her son Michael were eventually reunited in 1993 and have maintained a close and loving relationship ever since. Others weren't so fortunate.



Margaret Hamilton pregnant in February 1966

Margaret Hamilton was also 19 and was engaged to be married when she fell pregnant.

"I lost a baby and I was given back a grown man when we eventually found each other years later. We did see each other but he was kept at arm's length from me by his foster mother and sadly he died of a congenital heart problem in 2014," Ms Hamilton said.

She worked for the advocacy group Adoption Loss, Adult Support Australia for over 10 years



Margaret Hamilton and her son Michael aged 24, in 1990.

and has been instrumental in working with the Brisbane Anglican Diocese in encouraging them to provide an apology in 2012, as well as redress payments and the Remembrance Gardens initiative.

"I am grateful and appreciate for what the Anglican Church in Brisbane has done, especially the Archbishop, Dean Peter Catt and Carol Birrell of Anglicare," Ms Hamilton said.

Archbishop Aspinall repeated the Church's apology at the blessing ceremony and said it had been a tragedy that mothers had babies

removed from them without their proper consent.

"We know of some really tragic stories about whole lives really that were ruined by those forced adoption practices – very deep pain and lasting grief and impacts that lasted a lifetime for those families so this is a very important occasion to honour them, to acknowledge their experience and to offer our support to them," the Archbishop said.

"The grief runs so deep that nothing can completely heal that. But I think reaching out a hand in friendship and support and acknowledging what they went through and its deep impact means a lot to these women.

"The Anglican Church has been making redress payments and they go some of the way to helping some of the mothers to reconnect and stay connected with the children they've been separated from. It assists to provide professional counselling where that's required but we don't pretend that it compensates in any respect. How do you compensate someone for the loss of a child effectively, but hopefully it helps.

"This place is very significant to them. They wanted some place tangible which acknowledged the experiences they went through but it also provides them with a lovely, quiet space to come and sit and to reflect as they put their own lives back together again."



St. Mary's Home circa 1896

A special message of support was also sent by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard and was read out at the service by the Archbishop:

"The National Apology was an incredibly significant day for survivors, and I was deeply privileged to share it with them. I hope it continues to stand as an important milestone on the journey of healing and reflects our acknowledgement as a country of the lifelong legacy of pain and suffering created by forced adoption.

"I was very moved to learn of this Remembrance Garden, as a recognition both of that legacy, and of our commitment as a nation to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated.

"My thoughts will be with all those affected by the practice of forced adoption at your opening ceremony."

"I was very moved to learn of this Remembrance Garden, as a recognition both of that legacy, and of our commitment as a nation to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated."

The Toowong site has since been redeveloped and is now an Anglicare facility providing Homelessness Services for Women and Families with programs for young women aged 16-25, with eight units on site for women and their children and 23 units for adult women.

Facility manager Carol Birrell was instrumental in working with the St Mary's mothers over several years in bringing the Garden of Remembrance to reality.

"Dorelle and Margaret came to me some time ago with the idea of a garden and I thought it was a great concept and I took the idea to Karen Crouch [Anglicare SQ Executive Director]," Ms Birrell said.

"I kept going back to the mothers to consult and said I would like to support them to make it possible. I also made a commitment to them that I would continue to follow up until it happened so it's great to see it officially opened and blessed today."





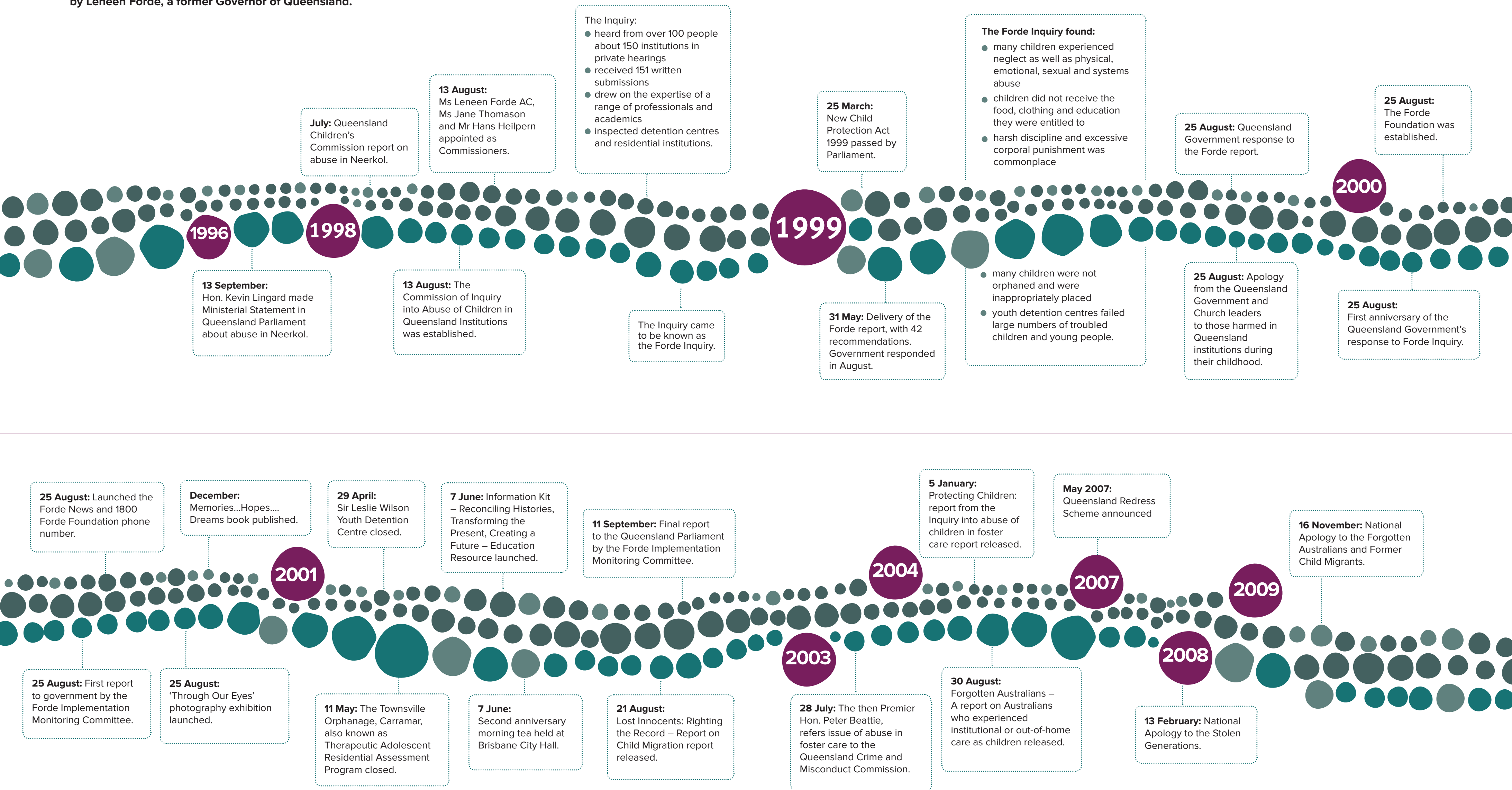
The Forde Inquiry 20th Anniversary (1999 – 2019)

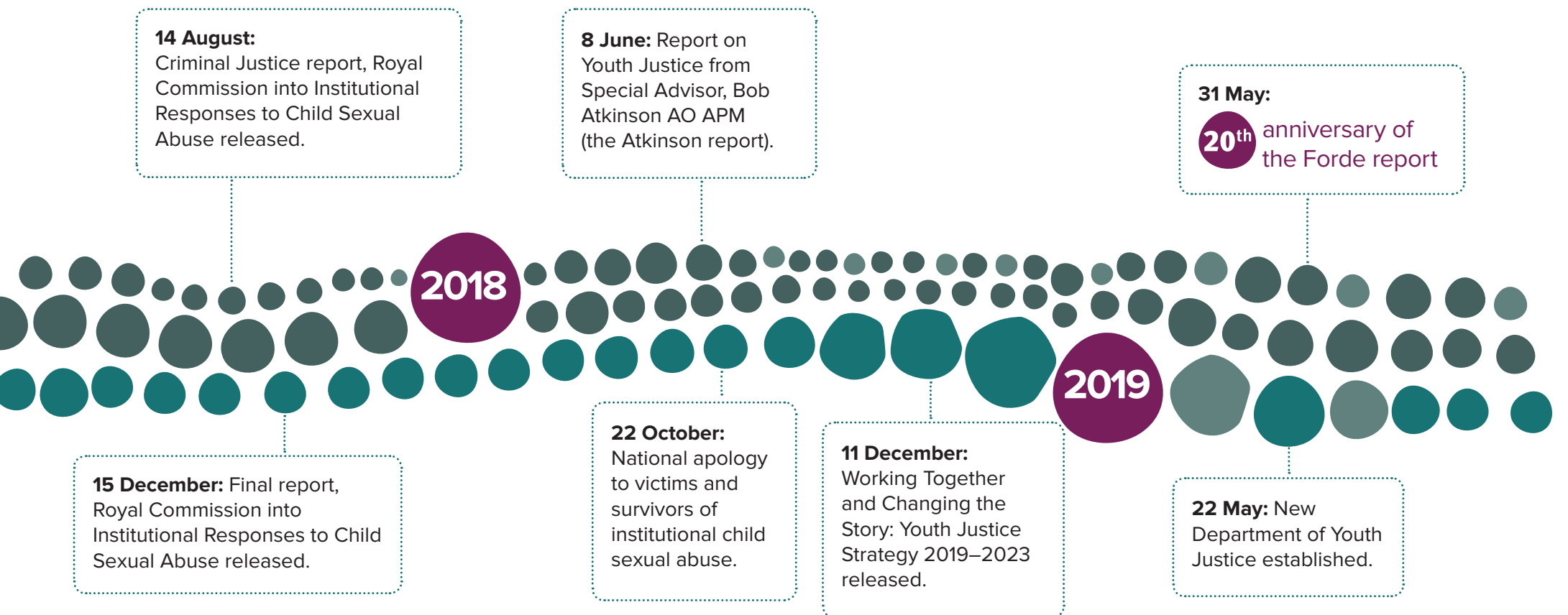
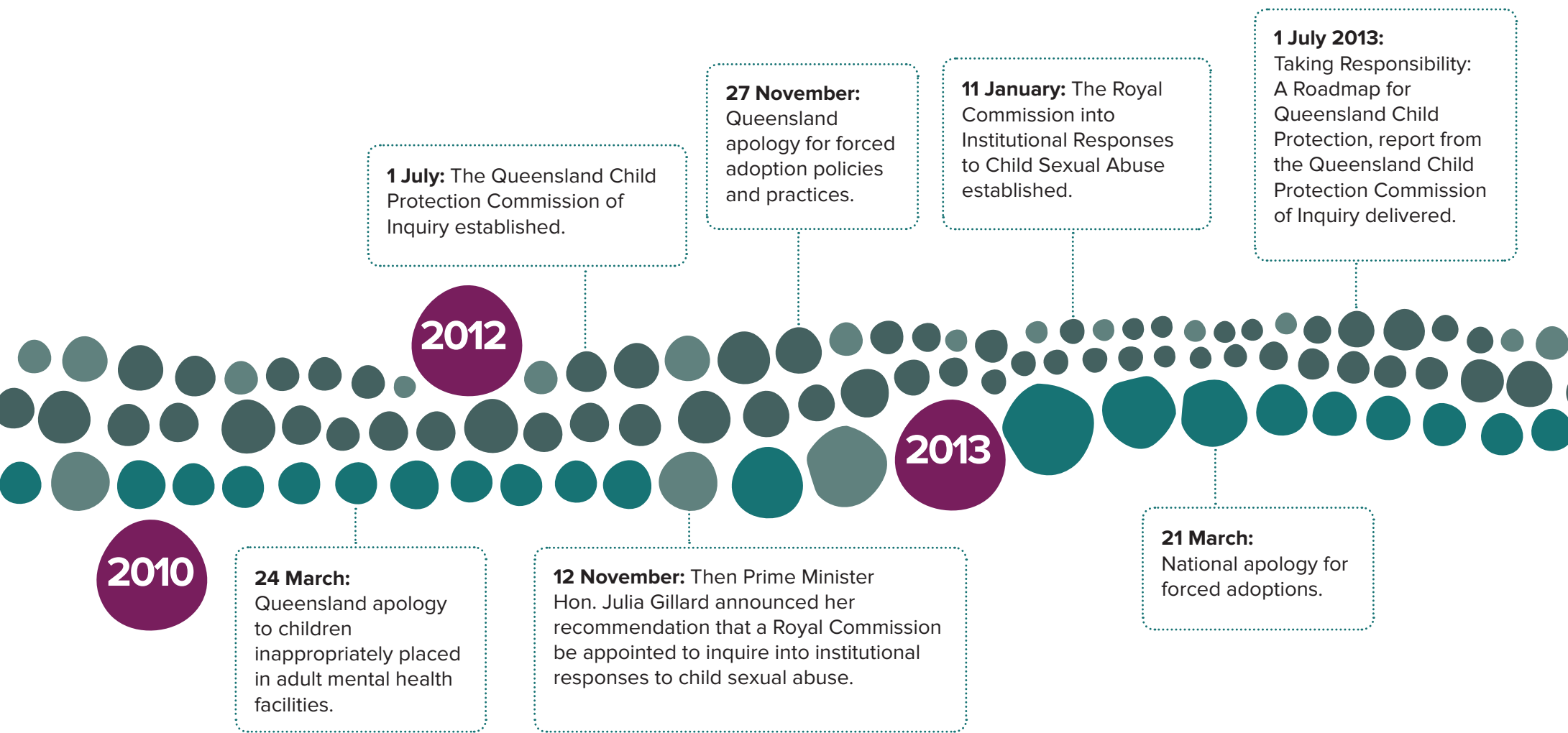
The Forde Inquiry (1998–1999), or formally the **Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions**, was a special inquiry into child abuse in Queensland, presided over by Leneen Forde, a former Governor of Queensland.

The Inquiry covered 159 institutions from 1911 to 1999 and found abuse had occurred. It made 42 recommendations relating to contemporary child protection practices, youth justice and redress of past abuse. The Inquiry resulted in reconciliation initiatives including apologies, commemorative memorials and events, establishment and delivery of the

Queensland Government Redress Scheme, establishment of the Forde Foundation Trust Fund, and establishment of community-based support services.

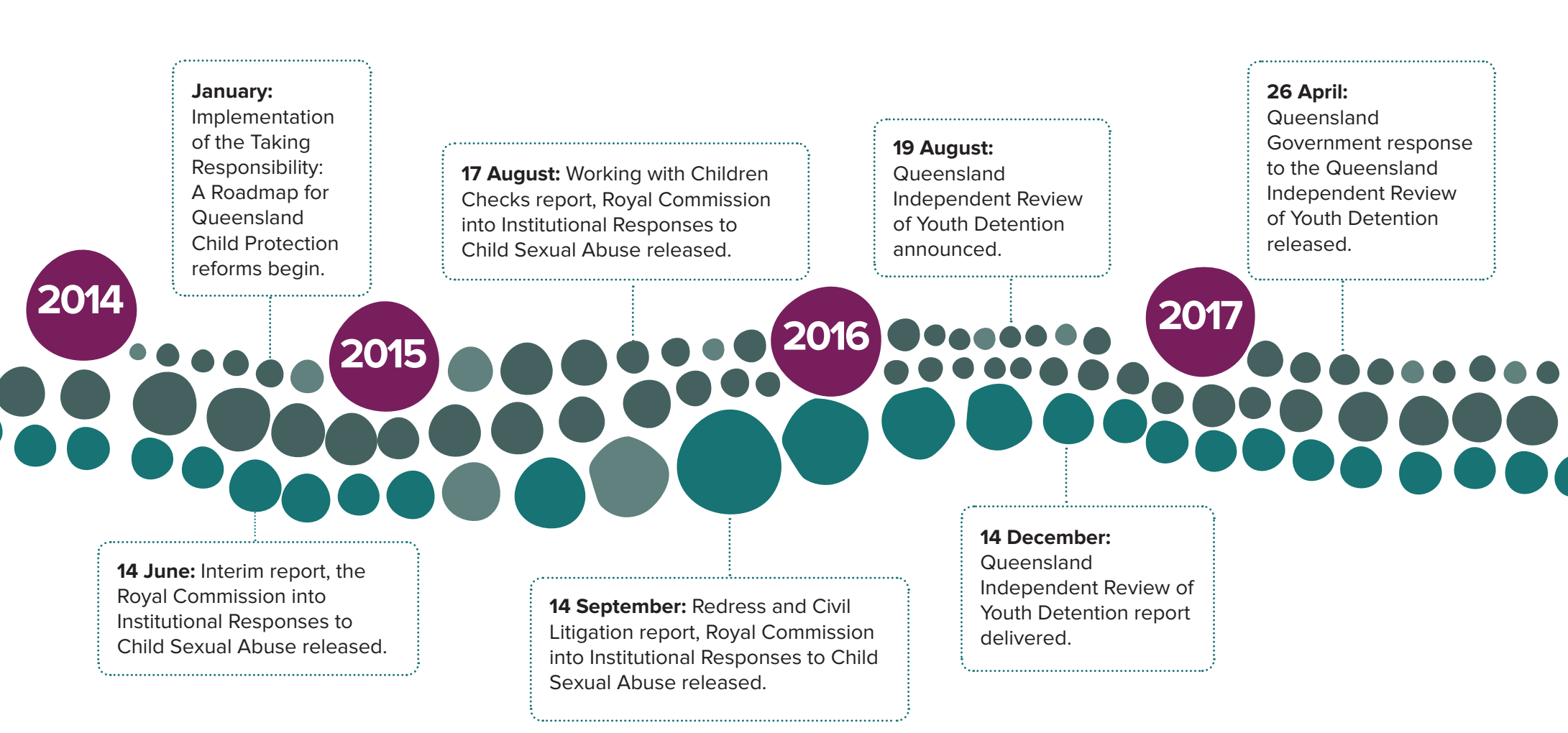
View the film from the 20th Anniversary Forde Inquiry Brisbane event: <http://bit.ly/20thanniversaryfordeinquiry>





"I hope that you keep looking to the future with joy in your hearts and make it better, because you've made it better."

Hon Leneen Forde AC - Chairperson, Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions and Former Governor of Queensland



"For me, the great lesson of the Forde Commission of Inquiry is the immense power of truth when it has been long denied."

Anna Bligh - Former Premier of Queensland



"I stand with you and every single person in this room stands with you. You are absolutely so important."

Hon Di Farmer - Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence



"Your vision has always been that this is a world where we proclaim 'we are fair, we are equal, and we believe in justice'. The legacy of your commitment to make that true and on the records of Queensland has had worldwide implications."

Karyn Walsh - CEO Micah Projects



Reuniting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to family, country and culture.

Link-Up (Qld) aims to bring a sense of peace, identity and belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have been separated from their family and culture.

They provide support to reunite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with their people and country where contact has been lost due to forced removal, fostering, adoption or institutionalisation.

Link-Up (Qld) recently celebrated their 35th anniversary. Since foundation in 1984, Link-Up (Qld) has strived to deliver services to members of the Stolen Generations in a professional and culturally sensitive way.

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PO Box 298, Bungalow Q 4870
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REMEMBRANCE DAY 2019

Come together to acknowledge the experiences of adult survivors of childhood abuse in institutional settings including out-of-home care.

Come together to remember, so we might say “never again!”

Remembrance Day Rockhampton

Tuesday 3 September 2019

11.30am followed by lunch
Rockhampton Leagues Club
Cambridge Street
Rockhampton City Q 4700

Remembrance Day Townsville

Wednesday 4 September 2019

11am followed by lunch
Townsville Yacht Club
1 Plume Street
South Townsville Q 4810

Remembrance Day Mackay

Thursday 5 September 2019

11am followed by lunch
The Shamrock
165 Nebo Road, Mackay Q 4740

Remembrance Day Bundaberg

Thursday 5 September 2019

11.30am followed by lunch
Spotted Dog Tavern
217 Bourbong Street, Bundaberg Q 4670

Remembrance Day Gold Coast

Thursday 5 September 2019

11am followed by lunch
Conference Room, 1st Floor
Southport Community Centre
6 Lawson Street, Southport Q 4215

Remembrance Day Cairns

Friday 6 September 2019

11am followed by lunch
Dunwoody’s Tavern
317 Sheridan Street, Cairns Q 4870

Remembrance Day Brisbane

Friday 6 September 2019

11am followed by light refreshments
Roof Terrace, Level 4
Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA)
South Bank Q 4101

Remembrance Day Gympie

Monday 9 September 2019

11.30am followed by lunch
Royal Hotel
190 Mary Street, Gympie Q 4570

Remembrance Day Brisbane 2019 Guest Speaker



Marie Wilson, C.M., O.N.W.T., M.S.C.
Commissioner TRC of Canada 2009-15

Marie Wilson spent over three decades building an illustrious career in journalism before becoming one of three commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). At the TRC, she worked for six and a half years to reveal the history and impacts of more than a century of forced residential

schooling for Indigenous children. She is now pursuing aspects of reconciliation beyond the TRC as the 2016 Professor of Practice at McGill University’s Institute for the Study of International Development.

Wilson was appointed a TRC commissioner after 35 years as an award-winning journalist, trainer, senior executive manager, independent contractor, and consultant in journalism, program evaluation, and project management. She also worked as a university lecturer in Canada, and a high school teacher in Africa. In all, Wilson has lived, studied, and worked in cross-cultural environments – including in Europe, Africa, South America and various parts of Canada – for almost forty years.

Over the years she has worked with various boards and agencies committed to social justice, journalism and civic engagement, community, spiritual and international development, and the wellbeing of children and youth.



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