

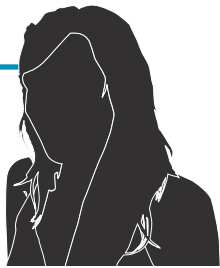


MUM 1

21-year-old mother of two – aged 3 and 4 – living with her mother in the southern suburbs.

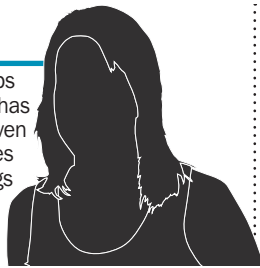
MUM 2

Southern suburbs mother-of-six. She is 26 and pregnant.



MUM 3

Northern suburbs mum, 36. She has 11 children, seven of which FamiliesSA have dealings with.



MUM 4

The 32-year-old Frewville mother of seven, aged 22 months to 13 years, had her children removed from their home on Christmas Eve.



We asked for help – but they took our kids

Four mothers share their tragic tales

TRIGGER-HAPPY social workers are taking children from their homes and creating a new “stolen generation”, a group of distraught mothers claim.

The four women, with 26 children between them, say what started as cries for help became the catalyst that destroyed their families.

They say care workers bullied and threatened them and coerced them to put their children into care.

In some cases, the children were ripped from the arms of their parents outside court houses and schools without any warning.

The mums also say their children are now living in situations worse than the conditions they had at home.

Some have unsupervised visits with fathers convicted of child neglect and other crimes, others are separated from siblings and children as young as three have run away from foster homes.

Recent FamiliesSA figures show that at the end of June last year, there were 2111 children under care and protection orders, an 8.6 per cent increase on the previous year's 1943.

There are now about 1780 children in state care, the office of Families and Communities Minister Jennifer Rankine confirmed yesterday.

The minister's office provided reasons for FamiliesSA intervention in each of the cases of the four mothers, and emphasised it was the Youth Court that assesses the department's applications and makes the protection orders. But the mums argue they face no charges of neglect and believe they are good and capable mothers who were “tricked” into handing over their children to the state when they asked for help.

SPECIAL REPORT

BRYAN LITTLELY



The mothers say FamiliesSA social workers have been “jumpy” and “trigger-happy” since June, 2008 when 21 children were found living in squalid conditions at Parafield Gardens. Six people face child-neglect charges over that case.

All four mothers who approached *The Advertiser* to tell their stories say they have never been charged with any child neglect crimes.

I was pregnant. The order got extended to 14 months and throughout my pregnancy they threatened to take my baby away when he was born.”

Her daughter was returned to her care and she looked after both children until December, 2008, when her son, now aged three, was admitted to hospital with head injuries sustained while he was in the care of a babysitter. The mother claims her son was in the babysitter's care for just 15 minutes.

No charges were laid over the incident but both children were taken from the mother and are now in the care of their father's parents.

The father lives in the home with the children but an order states he is

MUM 2 is a 26-year-old mother of six who was herself under the care of the state as a child.

“I was under the guardianship of the state from 11 to 18 and I learnt what I know about being a mum from FamiliesSA,” said the southern suburbs mum, who is pregnant.

“When I needed help with my five-week-old twins, I had to turn to them for help... that's all I knew to do.

“They said I would get my boys back, but I can't see that I will get my boys back and now they have taken my other four children.

“I am pregnant and I am scared they will take my baby away, too.”

The young mum said her infant twins were taken from her more than a year ago and her other four children – whom her current partner had helped care for – were placed under a protection order in November.

She said she now only has supervised visits with her children, for a few hours twice a week, while the father of the four eldest children has unsupervised access despite having been jailed for child neglect of her eldest son.

“The three eldest kids were taken from school... We didn't even know it was happening,” the woman's partner said.

“We had our three-year-old daughter with us and they were forcibly removing our girl from my arms. I was distressed and they handcuffed me when they did it.”

The mother said: “They are creating the new stolen generation.

“I just want to be a mother. I want for my children to not have to go through what I went through as a child in the care of the state.”

“We had our three-year-old daughter with us and they were forcibly removing our girl from my arms. I was distressed and they handcuffed me when they did it. They are creating the new stolen generation.”

MUM 1, a 21-year-old from the southern suburbs, has lost the neat, comfortable rental property she had secured to raise her two young children. She says FamiliesSA has not only “stolen” her children, but also her joy of being a mother. She first came to the attention of the service when she and her mother asked for help to deal with her six-week-old daughter.

“They told me that they would help me to get on my feet, that the order would only be for six weeks and I would get her back,” the mum said.

“Three months after she was born,

not to have unsupervised access to the children, the mum says.

The mother says she now lives with her parents and they would like to help her raise her children in that home. But they have only recently been allowed limited unsupervised access to the children.

She said she is required to undergo a psychological assessment before her case can progress and that the current guardians have taunted her, saying she would never get her children back because they are now accredited foster carers.

No children at home but mums keep on

BRYAN LITTLELY

TENS of thousands of dollars in welfare payments are being made weekly to South Australian parents who have had their children removed from their care because FamiliesSA does not alert Centrelink of the intervention. Mums with children

in state care this week told *The Advertiser* their payments, almost \$1000 a week for one mother of seven who had her children removed from her Frewville home on Christmas Eve, have not been cut off.

FamiliesSA does not automatically alert Centrelink that children

have been taken from parents and individual social workers often only advise the parents that it is their responsibility to raise the issue.

FamiliesSA does not receive welfare payments for the now 1780 children in their care.

Another mother, who had five of her seven children removed from

her care in November, said she still received welfare payments for them because “FamiliesSA don't tell Centrelink and I'm not going to”.

Other mums say they are reluctant to alert Centrelink to halt welfare payments because of the state of limbo they are in over whether or

not their children will be returned to their care.

“I don't know if or when I will get my children back,” one mum said.

“So I want to be financially secure to help that to happen and to support them properly if I do get them back.

“While I am fighting to get my children back,

I cannot afford to lose the welfare payments and go and get work... the fact I would be working and have less time for my kids would likely give the social workers more reason to stop me from having my children.”

The Frewville mother revealed she received \$1997 a fortnight in wel-



HEARTBROKEN: One of the mothers places a doll she made in a cot for her daughter who was taken from her along with her son by FamiliesSA.

Picture: CHRIS MANGAN

MUM 3 lives in the northern suburbs, has 11 children, and seven of them were living with her.

In November, five children were taken from her outside the Youth Court under a protection order.

She said the children who were put into care, aged 3-11, had all tried to run away from their foster home.

These included a four year old and a five year old who had both tried to hitch-hike home. After a month in foster care, they were placed in the care of their grandmother.

The mother's lawyers wrote to the mother, saying the magistrate overseeing her case deemed the foster care home had not provided "superior care" to that which she had offered.

In May, the mother admitted in a TV interview to being a neglectful parent when she was evicted from a rental property because of the putrid environment she lived in.

This week, she told *The Advertiser* she had done the best she could and had asked for help in a bid to adequately provide for her children.

"This is the worst experience of my life," the mum said.

"The minister... needs to come out here and talk to people like me to work out what's going on."

MUM 4 is the 32-year-old Frewville mother who had seven children removed from her care on Christmas Eve. She said she handed her children to social workers on the promise they would be kept together.

She first visited the children briefly five days after they were removed and she says they are being cared for in four different homes.

PAGE 16: Editorial

THE MINISTER



Staff put the children first

FAMILIES and Communities Minister Jennifer Rankine, above, yesterday responded to the claims of four mothers who have had children removed from their care.

"It is important to remember that FamiliesSA staff are charged with the responsibility of making sure children are safe in their homes," she said.

"Of these complaints, one instance included a baby boy being hospitalised with head injuries and another was an emergency call from police because they were so worried about a group of children.

"Nobody pretends that every single decision is perfect but when my hard-working staff make an application to the Youth Court for the protection of a child, I believe they are doing so with the best intentions. Ultimately every decision is up to the courts."

claiming thousands

fare payments - \$582 as a parenting payment, \$1353 as a family payment and \$62 for study. She added that her mortgage repayments, due to a series of family financial issues and being stuck with a high interest loan, were \$1152 a week.

She also said her grocery bill exceeded

\$350 a week and about \$7000 she received as part of the Rudd Government stimulus package a year ago went towards mortgage payments, private education fees for four of her children and some renovations to the house FamiliesSA say is not fit for her children.

New mums also have

benefited from the Federal Government's Baby Bonus lump sum payments. A bonus of \$3000 per child was introduced in June 2004 and increased to \$5000 in July, 2008.

Since the beginning of this financial year, the payment has been released as 13 fortnightly payments.

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