

Please tell us about your activities in assisting former child migrants to bring a class action against the Fairbridge Society, the Australian Federal government and the New South Wales State government

68. Shortly after the publication of my book titled 'The Forgotten Children' one of the former Fairbridge children rang to say he had discussed his claim of being sexually abused with the law firm Slater and Gordon. He said that a senior partner Bill Madden would like to talk to me.
69. Bill Madden confirmed Slater and Gordon was prepared to represent former Fairbridge children on a 'no win – no fee' basis. I made it clear that I didn't think many (if any) of the former Fairbridge children could afford to proceed on any other basis.
70. I subsequently helped organise meetings in Sydney and Orange, which I attended, where Slater and Gordon outlined to some of the former Fairbridge children how they intended to proceed.
71. When asked by individual former Fairbridge children I suggested that if they felt they had a case they should join the Slater and Gordon action. Initially around 70 joined; ultimately more than 215 were part of the action.
72. At all times Slater and Gordon kept me apprised of developments in the case (while observing individual client confidentiality) because they were aware that many of the former Fairbridge children were regularly contacting me to ask me what they should do. Many of the former Fairbridge children have limited literacy ability and could not fully understand the lawyers' letters.
73. At a very early stage I decided against being one of the plaintiffs because I felt I could be far more effective as a supporter and an advocate if I was not a potential beneficiary in any legal proceedings.
74. Slater and Gordon first approached the Fairbridge Foundation of New South Wales in late 2007 to discuss an out of court settlement scheme for the former Fairbridge children who had been sexually or physically abused at Fairbridge. The NSW Fairbridge Foundation requested some information about the claimants before making any decisions, and so Slater and Gordon obtained and provided statutory declarations from over 35 claimants as to the sexual and physical abuse they suffered. In response, the NSW Fairbridge Foundation declined to establish a settlement scheme and refused to extend even the courtesy of a face to face meeting about the claims. Slater and Gordon also contacted the New South Wales State Government, who at least agreed to a meeting. However, the State Government also declined to establish a settlement scheme.