

Parramatta Girls' Home Memorial

Tenderer Consultation Feedback Summary

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Family and Community Services

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1 Executive Summary

This Report summarises the feedback from former residents in response to the five shortlisted artist's initial ideas for the memorial.

Former residents had two opportunities to comment, through:

- a workshop on Friday 17 June 2016. Around 40 women and their loved ones/support people attended. Artists were also invited to join former residents in a visit to the site
- a questionnaire via post, email or telephone. Fifteen responses were received.

Importantly the consultation allowed former residents to describe what life was like in the home, what is important and meaningful to them and what they think should be reflected in the memorial.

Ideas from participants were generated in response to the five different concepts presented.

This report groups individual comments/viewpoints into some emerging themes.

It should be noted that thousands of girls resided in Parramatta Girls' Home, each with their own experience and story. The feedback captures comments made during the workshop and subsequent questionnaire but the comment may not be agreed by all consultation participants, and the comments do not represent the views of all former residents.

Not all ideas will be relevant or have to be incorporated by artists. Artists should be able to draw on the key themes to strengthen their designs. Some comments may also be directly applicable to an artist's style or concept.

2 What we heard

2.1 Themes

» **Acknowledge wrongs /apologies / never again / not forgotten**

- > Should send a strong message of the wrongs and mistakes made by those in authority in the past
- > Acknowledgement of what happened, admit it should not have happened and will not happen again
- > New light has been shed on what happened, no more hiding what happened, make the invisible visible
- > Say sorry and it won't happen again
- > Make sure that the purpose of the memorial is very clear, people should easily be able to understand what is being remembered
- > The apology should be obvious to future generations
- > Clearly show what occurred – young females/confinement/trauma
- > People should know it was like a prison, bars on window, rolled barbed wire, dungeon, segregation, isolation, trapped and tortured, very dark – struggle to see the light even now
- > Important that anyone who didn't go through the Home or know anyone who did can get an understanding of what happened and how wrong it was
- > Good to know we haven't been forgotten
- > Good to have hope now
- > Needs to be a permanent memorial

» **Connection**

- > Must connect with the former residents and reflect their experiences as well as hope and freedom
- > Should depict and capture what happened to the young girls and their environment
- > Must tell a story
- > Capture the essence of a different space and time – capture the era and culture of those living in the home at the time

- > Experiences in the home affected everyone who went to the place and these experiences linger on in the lives of their families as well
 - > A feeling of isolation both by being physically alone and being taken away from what we knew
 - > The experiences in Parramatta Girls should be remembered in their own right
 - > Don't replicate other memorials or compare experiences to other human rights violations
 - > What we did
 - Scrubbing and cleaning
 - Sewing
 - Laundry
 - Dancing
 - Marching
 - Standing to attention hands behind back
 - > Loved the cover way where there was music and contact with each other
 - > Further consultation with former residents and a better understanding of the site and what happened
- » **Disrespect / powerless / voiceless / non person**
- > Reflect that the girls had no rights
 - > No recognition that you were a person
 - > Lived as a number not by name
 - > Didn't have a voice – powerless and voiceless
 - > Emotionally frozen – punished for showing emotion
 - > Void of love and acceptance
 - > Institutionalised
 - > Loss of opportunity
- » **Dark and light / journey**
- > Include light and dark to show good and bad aspects
 - > Reflect both negative and hopeful times
 - > Lighting for hopeful aspects and shadows for darker imagery
 - > Beauty and harshness
 - > Take us on a journey

- > Journey showing fragments of what occurred
- > Walking through a cemetery of life – broken hearts, broken souls
- > Bred resilience in some and destroyed others – acknowledge this
- > Survivors as well as victims
- > Some of the former Parramatta Girls are very strong and some are not at all

» **Friendship**

- > Stood up for each other
- > Emotionally and physically
- > There for each other
- > Loved the cover way where there was contact with each other
- > Include something that reflects the friendships and support. For example, two females walking together into the light – out of Parramatta Girls' Home
- > Show the kindness of friendships
- > Figure of two girls dancing or holding hands and looking at each other
- > Could include two girls on either side of a door painting their path
- > It was the girls who got each other through this place

» **After leaving**

- > Most girls didn't walk out of Parramatta Girls' Home into a positive, supportive environment
- > Careful not to reflect that everything was good when they left
- > Many went into other bad environments and the hardship and mistreatment often continued
- > Often no assistance after leaving
- > Like to show dark in Parramatta Girls' Home and light/colour after leaving

2.2 Physical

» Statues /sculptures

- > Lifelike statues
- > Strong connection to figurative style of memorial
- > Visualisation brings strong emotion and connection
- > Expressiveness of lifelike figures – embody experience and emotion
- > Consider the age of girls in the home – generally young teens to 18 years A group of girls ranging across different age groups
- > Bowl haircuts symbolise this place
- > Tell a clear story of the experiences
- > Girls doing activities like scrubbing, dancing, sewing, laundry, hands behind their backs, marching
- > Young girl with a bucket and scrubbing brush on a concrete plinth encased in marble with stories around the base
- > Young girl under the bell or on cover way – standing or scrubbing
- > Figures showing powerless and voiceless for example no mouth, mouth covered, no face
- > Figure with carvings on legs/arms to show grief, lonely and perhaps a needle in hand
- > Pregnant girls
- > To show some of the activities include a sculpture of an object on its own rather than a girl using the object for example a scrubbing or bucket
- > One girl on a monstrous wall
- > Tall monument concrete and marble – shows ancestors and convict women
- > Need to be made of durable low maintenance materials
- > Avoid sentimentality

» Objects / artefacts

- > Words and objects within the seating
- > Signs and symbols representing lived experience
- > Embed artefacts in pathways
- > Place the objects off the ground – set in the ground can reflect 'downtrodden'
- > Sunken area with artefacts
- > Open gate to show no one is locked in anymore

- > Bricks throughout the garden engraved with short stories
- > Words showing the emotions felt by the young girls inside at the time
- > Hand prints
- > No bars
- > A broken heart with hands reaching to one another inside the heart
- > Carvings done by the girls and graffiti - IWLA
- > Use Parra Girls artwork
- > A high window in a cell – a single star visible symbolising hope
- > Perhaps a sculpture utilising the sun to light up a star within the window and floodlit at night
- > Group picture of the girls and underneath their names and years in the home
- > Need to be made of durable low maintenance materials

» **Collage**

- > Of experiences and what happened
- > Depict daily life
- > Large wall with all displayed. For example, one figure of a girl, graffiti section, names and years in the home, display case with uniforms

» **Gardens /plantings**

- > Sense of peace and hope, soft shapes, flowers and colour
- > Invite birds and insects into the space to bring life
- > Wildflowers and a living tapestry
- > Acknowledge the history, include heritage and historic flora
- > Native plants to acknowledge Indigenous girls
- > Gardens are lovely but don't reflect the history unless something is added
- > Include a remembrance wall or friendship wall
- > Remember the isolation for example use foliage to create enclosed spaces like the isolation cells reflecting the emotions around confinement
- > Include a stone monument representing a cell somewhere in the garden
- > Need to include a visual presence showing that young women were in the home
- > Many women would like to see the messages and stories in writing or depicted figuratively rather than interpreting
- > Include stone benches with inscriptions

- > Topiary would be a good way to reflect who was there and the things they had to do (For example, cleaning, laundry etc.) but ongoing maintenance could be an issue as the messages may not be conveyed if not maintained
- > For example add structures that mirror the isolation cells, shapes of young girls
- > Waterfall / water features
- > Water falling over a wall – perhaps with names or etching in it
- > Sound of water
- > Cleansing
- > Any garden proposal needs to consider ease of maintenance now and into the future
- > Look at Wendy’s Garden in Lavender Bay

» **Pathways /stairs**

- > Create a walkway of hope
- > A healing pathway
- > Etchings and carvings in the pathway
- > Scarred cover way/pathway with scrub marks
- > Stepping stones to an open heart no more darkness or isolation
- > Open gate or door to show leaving
- > Staircase with landings to reflect the past
- > Journey through a girl’s life in the Home – arrival, chores, caring for one another, games played etc., coming out

» **Seating**

- > Seating linked through a pathway
- > Each could tell an individual story – engraving /etching
- > Circular seating – private and reflective

2.3 Other

- » If your work is chosen, any consultation to develop it should be done safely with support and counselling available for the women. This work will release a lot of emotion and trauma
- » None of the work should use the words 'Identity Unknown'. There is an artist who has a government commission with a painting in progress of girls with no faces titled 'Identity Unknown'
- » Don't fence it off people need to see it and recognise what happened here
- » The location of the memorial should be permanent. It would be very hurtful for former residents to have the memorial moved around or even worse removed at some time in the future
- » The memorial is critical to bringing closure on this period of former residents' lives
- » It needs to have substance to be a permanent reminder to the abuse of power that those entrusted to our care so negligently ignored
- » People need to know the girls were not bad - the keepers were bad
- » Besides having the memorial there needs to be full interpretation of the history of different parts of Parra Girls through having plaques and signs around the place so that people know what went on
- » Security and potential for vandalism in a public location
- » Reinstate the covered way as a place of celebration rather than tears - write "form the past into the future" on it.



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