

Government-Funded Confinement: The Care Homes That Locked From the Outside

By Sarah Ailish McLoughlin
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They called it "rehabilitation."

What they built was obedience infrastructure.

In twentieth-century Australia and Ireland — and across their settler institutional cousins — girls were removed from families not because they were dangerous, but because they were *difficult to contain*.

Some had been assaulted. Some had resisted school. Some had become pregnant. Others simply disobeyed. The punishment was the same: incarceration in a religious-run institution under the banner of care.

They were labelled **wayward girls** — a term that functioned like a moral charge sheet. And once detained, they were told their **admission was voluntary**, despite state involvement and family coercion.

The institutions — many run by the Good Shepherd Sisters, Sisters of Mercy, or state-aligned Protestant equivalents — described their work as **moral rehabilitation**. They said they offered **spiritual guidance** and the chance to be cleansed through obedience and work.

But the reality was this: - Girls laboured in laundries under threat.

- Prayer was compulsory. Confession was coerced.
- Solitary confinement was used to break resistance.
- Letters were censored or never sent.
- No wages were paid. No records followed them out.

The buildings were described as **care homes**. In reality, they were detention centres.

The doors locked from the outside.

No trial. No charge. No way back.

What happened inside these institutions was neither truly private nor truly public. Police referred. Welfare departments endorsed. Governments funded.

But the legal trail was deliberately sparse. **Paperless custody** made redress nearly impossible.

When questioned decades later, churches described the girls as "volunteers." Governments described the institutions as "legacy organisations."

Legacy organisations. That's the modern phrase for institutions that changed their branding but kept their bones.

They now run charities. Housing services. Domestic violence programs.

They are still funded by governments. Still receive awards. Still carry the shield of trust.

What they have never done — and what this volume demands — is name the language they used as a tool of control.

Strategic Silence Is Not Neutral

These weren't accidents of language. They were policies of perception.

To call forced labor **sanctified** is not poetic. It's a semantic weapon. To call incarceration **care** is not misguided. It's a governance strategy. To call survivors **ungrateful** for exposing these truths is not backlash. It's a continuation of harm.

This edition of *The Advocate* is not a glossary. It's an intervention.

Language Is Infrastructure. Survivors Are Its Architects.

 Governed by the McLoughlin Charter

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