



Marc Leong grew up in foster care. Photo: Sahlan Hayes/Getty Images

## Foster kids to get digital 'memory box' to store their precious keepsakes

Rachel Browne, Social Affairs Reporter

All that remains of Marc Leong's childhood memorabilia is an old photo and a drawing he did when he was about six or seven, depicting him in front of a house with his mum and his dog.

Mr Leong, now 37, was raised in a series of foster homes after being removed from his mother while still in primary school.

Every time he moved home, precious keepsakes such as photos, drawings, toys and school reports would go missing along with more practical documents such as his medical records.

"I have very little from my childhood – no medical records, no information about my family history," the Summer Hill disability care worker said.

"There is a lack of identity. With any family, they have their rituals and their memories and the precious things they hand down between generations. I never had that."

To help store the keepsakes of the state's 18,000 children in foster care, leading child welfare agency Barnardos Australia has developed a digital "memory box", launched at the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies conference on Monday.

Barnardos chief executive Louise Voigt said the new software, called MyStory, would help provide a sense of stability to children in care, who can move house 10 times or more before their 18th birthdays.

"Children who have been through six, eight, 10 placements, they lose everything, they lose their history, they lose who they are in a sense," she said. "This is incredibly damaging."

"Nobody keeps that first school photo or that important document – all those things which are so important in terms of construction of identity later, you have lost along the way."

"This will help to ensure permanency and permanency is the most critical thing in a foster care system."

Initially, it will be the responsibility of the child's caseworker to add information to the password-protected file but Ms Voigt expects older children will be able to add to it themselves.

MyStory will store everything from legal and medical documents to the more sentimental such as letters, photos, drawings and school reports.

Mr Leong such a permanent record of a child's life would be "incredibly helpful".

"It would answer a lot of questions when they are older," he said. "They have something solid to refer to."

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/foster-kids-to-get-digital-memory-box-to-store-their-precious-keepsakes-20140818-1058sk.html#ixzz3An7GI0uZ>