

**Annual Report**

**Introduction**

I would like to start by welcoming you all to the Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care’s Annual General Meeting, and thanking you for your active participation in the work of the committee over the past year. I am pleased to present the Chairperson’s report for 2017, which is my first report as Chairperson of the Committee.

**Membership and Roles**

I want to start my report by acknowledging the valuable work of the Management Committee. Their support and guidance has been very reassuring as I found my feet in the role of Chairperson. I had big shoes to fill, when Lisa Vihtonen stepped down after steering the Committee so well in her three year term as Chairperson. Last year’s AGM saw a few new faces elected to the Management Committee, including Kay Berry as Vice Chair, Jackie Atkinson as Minutes Secretary, and Anjanette Humphries as Public Officer, and the continuation of Jane Eales as Secretary and Damon Martin as Treasurer.

This year Damon Martin’s three year term as treasurer comes to an end, and I want to thank Damon for all the time he has put into this role, in addition to all the other ways he has served the Committee. Damon has a long history with the Committee, and has served on the executive as Chairperson, vice chairperson and treasurer. Damon has been a key player in much of the committee’s work, and was the driving force in organising the National Post Adoption Meeting to be held in conjunction with the ICAR5 conference in New Zealand.

The position of Treasurer is now vacant, as is one additional position on the management committee, and nominations were invited for and received for both these positions prior to this AGM, in accordance with the Constitution.

Sadly in the past year a decision was made by FACS management that the department should resign from the Committee, despite having been active members of the Committee since its inception.The resignation was explained as being due to a possible conflict of interest for FACS, in holding paid membership of a Committee. However FACS has indicated a willingness to attend meetings by invitation in order to provide presentations, in addition to FACS workers attending training events organised by the Committee. So at this time there are 13 agencies with membership, and four individual members.

**Meetings**

The Committee has continued with its new schedule of meeting four times a year, on the first Friday of the month, at the new venue of Barnardos’ offices in Ashfield. We are very grateful to Barnardos for providing a venue for our meetings free of charge, and for providing the morning tea. Meetings have been well attended, with numbers ranging from 18 - 25 attendees.

**Achievements of the Committee**

One of the objectives of this Committee has always been to bring together those with a professional or personal connection to adoption, providing a forum for sharing views, and for influencing adoption practice and knowledge in the wider community. I have appreciated the diversity of views expressed in our meetings, and I believe the sharing of our personal and professional stories and experiences keeps our work as a Committee very grounded and focused, as well as providing direction for further advocacy in the adoption space.

The majority of the committee’s work happens through the sub-committees, and 2016 saw plenty of activity. I wish to acknowledge the three Subcommittees for their contributions and thank each subcommittee for their valuable work and achievements.

The Training and Development Subcommittee was led by Brooke Bengsten and Kay Hardfeldt and organised two training workshops of particular relevance to the adoption sector.

* The Dark Matter of Love, a movie presentation with a focus on intercountry adoption, followed by a discussion facilitated by Amanda Whitbread from FACS, was held at FACS Ashfield office on 11th May 2016.
* *Contact and Connection: Exploring Birth Family Contact*was aimed at both carers and practitioners. It was presented by Gail McCabe-Johnston, a Counselling Psychologist (private practice) on 15 August 2016. This followed on from Gail’s training in 2015.

Both these training sessions were well attended, and the feedback was very positive.

The Legislative subcommittee was facilitated by Jodi Mollison.

The Legislative subcommittee did not meet in 2016, however did collaborate via phone and email. A submission was prepared on 11th March in response to the Queensland review of the Adoption Act 2009 and Regulation. The submission focused on a number of matters, relating to the consent process, openness and information sharing, adoption plans and contact statements. This was based on the perceived benefit of the provisions of NSW legislation which allows for a greater degree of openness, and the importance of access to information for the parties affected by an adoption.

The subcommittee was unable to respond to the Victorian review of the Adoption Act 1984 and the NSW inquiry into child protection for OOHC due to tight time frames and the availability of subcommittee members.

The Social Media and Community Education Subcommittee

This subcommittee has been without a leader for most of 2016, however there were a few pieces of work previously agreed to which remained unfinished. We are grateful to Jenny Pickles and Jane Eales who have agreed to review the Committee’s website and action the Committee’s decision from 2015 to release information and stories of persons with adoption experience. These stories need to be reviewed and organised prior to being uploaded onto the website.

I would like to thank Erin Bower for agreeing to help with updating the Committee website, as needed.

**Meeting presentations and discussions**

Our meetings have benefitted from presentations by:-

* FACS - Phillippa Wellman, Acting Director, Safe Home For Life Child Safety and Permanency  presented at our June meeting about Guardianship Orders, which are now part of the permanency planning options available for children in long term care.
* Link up - Shaun Middlebrook, Team Leader – Family Link/Community Builders/Hidden Carers spoke at our December meeting about the challenges for permanency options for Aboriginal children, and the importance of searching for kin for the placement of Aboriginal children. It was suggested that COAPC contact Shaun in 2017 to arrange sector training on this issue.
* ISS, Damon provided information about his trip to Cambodia, and the issues faced by a developing country where traditionally the care of children is provided through institutions, to a foster care model.
* Jenny Pickles who described the work she is doing with the post adoptive support group she facilitates.

**Adoption developments and news**

In 2016 there were a number of areas of ongoing development, following initiatives which began in 2015.

* The Adoption Regulation 2015 was proclaimed in Oct of 2015, and in NSW 2016 has been a year of putting changes into practice as the adoption sector has grappled with the new permanency principals and OOHC to adoption. Agencies have been developing processes to work within this new legislation, which enables children who cannot be returned to the care of their families to be adopted by their foster carers.
* In 2015 the NSW state government announced funding for an Institute of Open Adoption. 2016 saw this promise realised, in the Institute of Open Adoption Studies, an independent research centre funded by the NSW Government and the University of Sydney. The Institute is a joint venture between the University of Sydney and Barnardos Australia, hosted by the Faculty of Education and Social Work. The institute is the first publically funded independent research centre of this kind in Australia and will provide a framework for research, advocacy and practice development in open adoption with the focus on children and their best interests
* The Adoptions Working Party has been meeting throughout 2015 and 2016 at the Supreme Court, with the Hon Justice Brereton and the Hon Justice Kunc to review and provide comment on the Adoptions Practice Note which guides adoption applications to the Supreme Court. Representatives of some of COAPC member agencies have been a part of this working group.

In the community and media space the movie “Lion”, has drawn attention to adoption, and in particular the issues around inter country adoption, identity and post adoption reunion and contact.

**Conclusion**

Looking back over the year as I prepared this report, it has been satisfying to see that the work of Committee continues to support the objectives of our constitution. Primarily in the areas of reviewing, monitoring and providing comment on legislation, policy and practice relating to adoption; providing training opportunities specific to adoption practice and issues; and providing a forum for raising awareness through presentation of current adoption information and practice issues.

I would encourage everyone who attends our meetings to consider what they may bring, or how they may contribute to the work of the Committee going forward into 2017.

Finally I would like to conclude by once again thanking those who give their time to supporting the work of the Committee, including those on the Management Committee and sub-committees. It has been great working alongside you over the past year.

Angela Thomas

Chairperson

NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care

March 2017