



**NSW COMMITTEE ON ADOPTION &  
PERMANENT CARE INC.**

**Chairperson's Annual Report 2008**

Presented at AGM on 17 April 09

## **Introduction**

At the conclusion of my first year as Chairperson, it is evident that this Committee is a unique forum in the field of adoption and permanent care, placed at the intersection of historical and current practices, with the opportunity to influence current and future practice.

The Committee is comprised of a mix of representatives engaged at the interface of adoption and permanent care issues. Membership draws on the diversity of experience in this field, from professionals in government and non government agencies, to others from organisations whose lives have been affected by adoption and permanent care.

As a peak body the Committee's role is to

- advocate for the needs of children affected by adoption or out of home care
- comment on community attitudes relevant to these issues
- maintain discussion with governments and authorities about the needs of those children who cannot be raised in their families of origin.

I have observed some new overlaps emerging between permanent foster care placements and adoptions. These overlaps are tied to the implementation of DOCS' Out of Home Care Reforms, the development of DOCS' permanency planning guidelines and the guarantee of financial support for those who adopt children from care. This merging of some aspects of foster care and adoption practices may open into further areas of extending resources such as training and assessment approaches, dual authorisation of carers and revised referral pathways between OOHC and adoption.

Functions of the Committee that continue to be paramount are

- to continue to discuss and to advocate to keep family members connected to each other, through ways and means that are sensitive, empowering and to the mutual advantage of all concerned.
- to educate both practitioners and community members about the impact and ramifications of being raised outside their family of origin. The educative role of the Committee was demonstrated at the 9<sup>th</sup> Adoptions Conference held in 2008, and with continuing professional development training.

## Meetings

There were 6 meetings held throughout 2008 on the second Friday of each alternate month (beginning with 16th February 2008) with an average of 15 people attending each meeting.

Meetings were moved to Anglicare premises at Parkes St Parramatta in August 08 to make use of this as a central, accessible and free venue. I would like to acknowledge Anglicare and thank them for providing this meeting space for the Committee.

## Membership and Roles

The last AGM saw several new committee members accepting roles on the Committee- eg as minutes secretary, treasurer, librarian and chairperson. With so much change, the experience and involvement of others who have continued to serve on the Committee has been invaluable.

As chair I found myself in a whirlpool of activity and decision making about the mothers' book, the Australian Adoption Conference, the financial records and management of the committee, and later the review of the Be My Family program, auspiced by the Committee. It has been an intense but very productive year for this Committee - perhaps one of the busiest in many years?

During 2008 the membership of the Committee was as follows:

ACT Adoptions Unit- Dept of Disability, Housing and Community Services  
Adoptive Parents Association of NSW  
Australian Families for Children (AFC)  
Anglicare Adoption Services  
Anglicare Child, Youth and Family Services  
Barnardos Find-A-Family Australia  
Catholic Care Adoption Services  
Centacare Newcastle  
Department of Community Services: Adoption and Permanent Care Services  
Department of Community Services : Post Adoption Information Services  
International Social Services Australian (NSW)  
Office for Children, Children's Guardian  
Post Adoption Resource Centre  
Salvation Army Special Search  
Individual members (2 x adoptees)

Jodie Mollison is soon to leave her position with Catholic Care Adoptions and sadly will no longer hold the office of Secretary, COAPC. She has done an excellent job, and we all appreciate Jodie's commitment over several years to the work of the Committee, her valuable experience in adoption practice issues, and the initiatives she has taken on behalf of the committee while in office.

## Achievements

### 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Adoption Conference

It was back in 2006 when Angharad Candlin suggested that NSW take on the organisation of the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Adoption Conference. A Conference subcommittee was established and plans to host the conference saw this project come to fruition in a successful conference held from 3-5 September 2008 at the Stamford Plaza Hotel, Double Bay.

The conference theme of *Connecting Past, Securing Future* attracted speakers and delegates from overseas, interstate and Sydney-wide. The conference program was designed to capture the diversity of experiences and viewpoints, and to view adoption practices, past and present.

At the opening ceremony, the then Minister Kevin Greene, on behalf of the Office for Children, Children's Guardian, presented the accreditation certificates to Barnardos, Centacare and Anglicare as non government adoption providers.

Keynote speakers were Julie Selwyn (UK) who addressed issues of permanency, and Dr. Ruth McRoy (USA) on Openness in adoption. Roger West, Judy Durey and Janice Kashin unpacked powerful personal stories. Judy Durey held a forum for young adoptees.

The conference of over 200 delegates ran smoothly due to the hard work of the conference subcommittee and the efforts of Sue Botta from The Conference Specialist, and Grace Howard assisting with finances.<sup>1</sup>

The conference was only possible through the financial support provided by the NSW Department of Community Services, and other key sponsors. The Committee acknowledges this invaluable assistance.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Conference sub-committee - who willingly donated their time, energy and expertise to a multitude of tasks with a sense of joint purpose and good humour - to see a successful conference!

### The Mothers' Book

A highlight of the Adoption Conference was the launch on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2008 of the Mother's Book: *Releasing the Past: Mothers' Stories of their Stolen Babies*.

This launch was the culmination of many years of work and determined effort by Christine Cole. Christine carried the vision for this book for many years, and translated

---

<sup>1</sup> Total delegates were 218

**Australia - 180**

State: NSW 88, ACT 19, QLD 20, VIC 43, SA 11, WA 8, TAS 6, NT 2

**Overseas: 38**

Country basis: USA 5, New Zealand 4, Hong Kong 1, China 1, UK 2, Philippines 1, Ireland 1, no country listed 23

her vision into tasks of collating, editing, liaising with publishers, organising speakers and finally addressing the audience at the book launch! Her words were powerful, and her legacy is this mothers' book - a resource that records the personal accounts of many who suffered under past adoption practices. Through the use of personal accounts and art works, the book illustrates and amplifies the often harrowing experiences that must never be repeated in adoption practices.

The Committee congratulates Christine for this achievement, and also acknowledges all the mothers who have courageously and generously contributed to it. It is satisfying that Recommendation 18 from the *Inquiry into Past Adoption Practice* has been fulfilled.

The quality of the finished product was a result of the skill and generosity of Sasko Veljanov, the technical editor and graphic designer. A grant of \$15,000 from the NSW Department of Community Services was used to meet the costs of producing the book, including its publishing. The book will continue to be available through PARC.

#### The Legislative Review Subcommittee

2008 has been an eventful year for this subcommittee which met regularly in order to respond to a number of different issues.

A response to the proposed amendments to the Adoption Act was submitted in September 08 and a submission to the British High Commissioner regarding passport applications for adoptees was completed in Jan 09.

#### The Training and Development Subcommittee

The training sessions held in 2008 were:

- May 08- Mary Jo McVeigh- on Two Trees and Wrapped in Angels- therapeutic tools for working with children
- September 08 - with Ron Federici on responding to trauma and attachment problems

Thanks to the subcommittee for organising these stimulating and enriching training workshops for members, parties to adoption and permanent care, and professionals. Training in 2009 is planned for March (permanency planning with Debra Hogan) June and October. This program will continue to provide opportunities to learn, to be informed of current research trends, and to broaden practice perspectives.

#### Be My Family

In October 2008 I met with Jane West and Jennifer Ames to consider some issues related to the Be My Family project. The program was suspended in November 2008 and a review was undertaken to address areas such as the placement of the service within new DOCS referral frameworks; the referral processes and protocols including newsletter content guidelines; the support, supervision and accountability, and the problems related to the isolation of the position.

Arising from this review, there is a revised position description and updated protocols for referrals from DOCS, for newsletter content and for document storage.

It was decided to explore accommodation options within agencies and DOCS but this has not been successful. The service is predominantly used by DOCS with over 95% of BMF referrals from DOCS caseworkers for hard to place DOCS children in need of adoption or permanent care.

It was intended that the position could be operational again by April 09, however at this point, some obstacles still remain. In particular, limited time and resources to complete this restructure and supervise/support the position by a member of the COAPC committee. Also no suitable premises are yet available for the project officer to eliminate the isolation of the solo project officer position by housing the worker within an existing service. These matters will be addressed by the Committee in the near future.

### **Conclusion**

The efforts and varied endeavours of the Committee during 2008, highlighted above, are in line with the overarching purpose of the Committee: that 'all effort is directed to improving, and deepening understanding and awareness about impacts of adoption and permanent care, and to refining and developing best practice'.

All effort is voluntary and I would like to acknowledge and thank all those who have willingly added this work of the Committee to their busy schedules.

I would also like to thank the members of the Committee for supporting and guiding me in a busy, and at times daunting, first year as chairperson. I am looking forward to working with the Committee during 2009 to keep adoption and permanent care issues on the public agenda, and wherever possible to influence improvements to practice.

Sue Madden  
Chairperson  
NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care  
April 09