



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

Chairperson's Annual Report 2009

Presented at AGM on 9 April 2010

Introduction

At the conclusion of my second year as Chairperson I am pleased to report on the initiatives and actions taken during 2009, and to highlight some of the key themes looming on the horizon of adoption and foster care practices in NSW.

As a Committee we are fortunate to have a breadth of membership that 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.

A unique contribution of this Committee is to be a voice of all parties involved in adoption and permanent care. In any issues debated or in actions planned, the Committee endeavours to provide a balanced view of complex issues. This is achieved through the mix of representatives on the Committee: from adoption agencies, to adoptive parent groups to adoptees and support services such as PARC. Membership from a birth parent representative, and other accredited fostering agencies providing permanent care should be further encouraged.

The Constitution identifies 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.

Overlaps continue to emerge between permanent foster care and adoption issues. I consider that this has been shaped in part by the following factors:

- There are increasing numbers of children entering care and staying in care for longer. [Figures from The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report (2007-08) and the Boston Consulting Group suggest that on current trends there will be 24 000 children in care in NSW by 2014].
- CS has implemented permanency planning guidelines and practices. A key area of OOHC case management reform identified by Annette Gallard recently is adoption – *“Increase the number of OOHC adoptions. Strategy and procedures exist and have been shown to be effective”*.¹

¹ A Gallard: [NSW Out-of-Home Care Reform Forum 22 February 2010](#)

- There is an earlier entry age of children into care [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report (2007-08)]
- There are fewer children being relinquished by parents for local or intercountry adoption programs. According to the current Community Services website, the number of intercountry adoptions is declining. Each year DOCS local adoptions program has between 15-25 adoptions of under 2 year olds.²
- Potential adoptive parents are being considered for placements of children referred through CS OOHC referral units of children with long term court orders
- CS provides ongoing financial support for those who adopt children from care.

This merging of some aspects of foster care and adoption practices may extend in the future to sharing resources such as training and assessment approaches, dual authorisation of carers and revised referral pathways between OOHC and adoption.

Functions of the Committee that remain central 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.

Meetings

Since the last AGM 6 meetings have been held on the second Friday of each alternate month, with an average of 17 people attending each meeting.

Meetings have been convened at the Anglicare premises at Parkes St Parramatta as a central, accessible and free venue. I would like to acknowledge Anglicare and thank them for providing this free meeting space for the Committee.

Membership and Roles

As Chairperson I have been well supported by an executive team comprising minutes secretary (Mary Griffin), secretary (Lisa Vihtonen), treasurer (Janet Henegan), and vice chairperson (Jane West). Their contributions, along with those on sub committees, have been invaluable in working towards our goals during 2009. What a

An Overview of the Approach to Implementing the Review

²

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/parents_carers_and_families/fostering_and_adoption/adoption/want_to_adopt/intercountry_adoption/adoption_statistics.html

gap we all felt when Jodie Mollison and Jenny Ames resigned after their years of dynamic involvement! However there were new representatives to welcome. We are excited to meet as part of a forum where diverse professional and personal experience is valued.

During 2009 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 Out-of-Home Care Services
Barnardos Find-A-Family Australia
Catholic Care Adoption Services
Centacare Newcastle
Community Services: Adoption and Permanent Care Services
Community Services: Post Adoption Information Services
International Social Services Australian (NSW)
ICASN
NSW Office for Children, Children's Guardian
Post Adoption Resource Centre
Salvation Army Special Search
Individual members (2 x adoptees)

Achievements

The Training and Development Subcommittee - led by Georgina Hawcroft- Anglicare
The educative role of the Committee has been achieved through continuing professional development training, the revision of resource booklets such as *Exploring Adoption: Other Options* and access to publications such as *Releasing the Past*.

The training sessions held in 2009 were

- March 09 facilitated by Debra Hogan, Community Services, on permanency planning
- July 09 on facilitated by Gail Johnston on adolescent attachment:
'Transforming relationships- balancing safety and exploration for the hurt adolescent'
- October 09- facilitated by Hari Candlin on birth family contact issues.

Thanks to the subcommittee for organising these stimulating training workshops for members, parties to adoption and permanent care, and professionals.

Training in 2010 is planned for April June and October. Paula Hayden will present a workshop on Difficult Conversations on 30 April.

We anticipate an exciting training opportunity and film day in Oct/Nov 2010. COAPC has agreed to offer financial assistance to ICASN to bring Tammy Chu to Sydney.

Tammy Chu is the producer of 'Resilience'-a movie about an adoptee and their birth mother (adoptee is from Korea. (Thanks Lynelle).

For other training proposals for 2010 include a discussion panel on adoption or a session on the psychological impact of separation. Clearly the Training and Professional Development subcommittee aims to provide input and discussion on relevant practice perspectives.

Resource library and marketing – led by Lizzy Gray- PARC

Revision of Alternatives to Adoption Booklet is being finalised.

Launched in September 2008, The Mothers' Book *Releasing the Past* vividly describes the practices that formerly put many mothers under pressure to give up their children for adoption. It is available through PARC with a marketing objective of this Committee to increase distribution, particularly to birth mothers affected by these past practices.

The Legislative Review Subcommittee – led by Lynne Moggagh - Barnardos

2009 has been a quieter year for this subcommittee which met to respond to the proposed amendments (Access to Information) to the Adoption Act. The Committee participated in consultation held in October 2009 on the *Guidelines for the release of adoption information*.

Changes to the regulation and the guidelines came into effect on 1 Jan 2010 and relate to the supply of information to parties to adoption, and a risk assessment process to be undertaken to determine what level of information is disclosed.

The Committee also made a response to the producers of some television shows featuring family searches and reunions. Some reported impacts of these TV media shows, such as *Can We Help* and *Find My Family* have been an increase in enquiries. The Committee was concerned about the lack of clear ethical and practice guidelines when dealing with people's personal stories. Issues raised were the lack of support if a search outcome was not successful, the aftermath of a reunion and access to services that can provide relationship guidance for the future

Be My Family – led by Jane West/Sue Madden- Anglicare

The Be My Family project was suspended in November 2008 and a review was undertaken to address areas such as the placement of the service within new CS 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 and in consultation with Community Services, the decision was made by the Committee to conclude this program. Administrative matters were finalised in early 2010. Referrals for hard to place children in need of adoption or permanent care are being directed to the Adoptions Unit or the Child and Family Referral Units in each metro region.

Goals and directions for 2010

Some directions for the Committee to consider for 2010 may require new subcommittees or working groups.

The working group led by Lisa Vihtonen on **Exploring Adoption- other options** has revised and updated this resource booklet, to be available in the coming months.

A working party or shared workshop on **useful resources for parents** to assist them when doing lifestory with an adopted or fostered child could cover areas that are often sensitive and hard to approach in a child-centred way.

Dual authorisation issues could be discussed to identify the overlaps between permanent foster care and adoption in recruitment, training, assessment and authorisation of applicants.

A sub committee on **contact issues and social networking technologies** could explore the range of communication now available and its implications for sharing information between parties to adoption or foster care. Clearly, options for contact have been accelerated by the internet, mobile phones, social networking sites which have allowed birth mothers and adoptees, and sometimes adoptive parents, to find and directly communicate with each other. The Committee could develop some practice guidelines in response to this changing aspect of contact between parties.

Adoption Awareness Week- a subcommittee could aim to provide information about the needs of children in adoption and heighten community awareness.

Conclusion

The efforts and varied endeavours of the Committee during 2009, 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'.

I have experienced an increased burden of work in my role at an agency level, so I sincerely acknowledge and thank all those who have willingly assisted this work of the Committee despite their other work loads and busy schedules. It is with regret that I can not continue in my role as Chair of this Committee. I thank you for the opportunity that I have had to contribute to the work of the Committee over the last two years.

Sue Madden
Chairperson
NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care
April 2010