



New South Wales
Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care Inc

Chairperson's Annual Report 2010

Presented at AGM on 1 April 2011

Introduction

At the conclusion of my first year as Chairperson I am pleased to report on the actions of the Committee and highlight some of the key themes pertaining to adoption and permanent care over the past year.

Meetings

Since the last AGM in April 2010, the Committee has met four times, namely in June, August, December and February. It was decided that our October meeting would be cancelled in view of the Committee attending the Tammy Chu documentary *Resilience*. The average attendance of each meeting remained on par to previous years, with an average of 17 people attending each meeting.

Meetings continue to be held at the Anglicare premises at Parkes St, Parramatta. On behalf of the Committee would like to thank Anglicare for their generosity which enables our Committee to meet at a regular central venue free of charge with a room that accommodates all our needs. I hope this arrangement can continue.

Membership and Roles

In my inaugural year as Chairperson, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by an extremely experienced Management Committee. I would like to acknowledge the support they have provided to a novice like me, notwithstanding their own busy schedules from within their employed positions.

As two of the office bearer's positions within the Management Committee are required to be vacated due to the completion of their maximum 3 year term, I wish to proclaim for new volunteers to fill the void of these departing positions so the Committee can continue to function as professionally and productively as before. Therefore I am requesting nominations for elections for the following office bearer positions:

- Vice-Chair
- Treasurer

The Management Committee over the past year has consisted of Jane West – Vice Chair, Janet Henegan – Treasurer, Lisa Vihtonen – Secretary, Mary Griffin – Minutes Secretary, Erika Berzins – Public Officer and Lizzie Gray – Library Officer.

Also I wish to acknowledge the Sub Committee's within this Committee, their contributions and dedication is invaluable – I will discuss their achievements in more detail soon.

As of December 2010 the membership of the Committee consisted of:

ACT Adoptions Unit- Dept of Disability, Housing and Community Services
Adoptive Parents Association of NSW
Anglicare Adoption Services
Anglicare Out-of-Home Care Services
Australian Families for Children (AFC)
Barnardos Find-A-Family Australia
Catholic Care Adoption Services
Centacare Newcastle
Department of Human Services - Community Services: Adoption Information Unit
Department of Human Services - Community Services: Adoption and Permanent Care Services
Department of Human Services - Community Services: Out of Home Care
Intercountry Adoptee Support Network (ICASN)
International Social Service Australia
Mercy Ministries
NSW Office for Children, Children's Guardian
Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)
Salvation Army Special Search Service
Wesley Mission Dalmar Out of Home Care
Individual members (2 x adoptees and 1 adoptive parent)

Achievements throughout the Year

As part of our Constitution's objectives, the Committee continues to promote community and professionals awareness of issues and needs of all parties involved in adoption, permanent care and related issues. A most notable achievement in relation to this was the revision of the booklet *Exploring Adoption: Other Options*, this was published and printed in May 2010 and distributed widely to relevant adoption service providers and hospitals. Lisa Vihtonen – Barnardos assisted in coordinating and publishing this revised booklet.

The Training and Development Subcommittee - led by Georgina Hawcroft- Anglicare

Another great year occurred in regards to training provided by the Committee during 2010. This included:

- April 2010 – *Difficult Conversations* facilitated by Paula Hayden. We received mixed feedback in regards to this training, and the attendees were a mixture of professionals and carers which made the presentation more challenging for the speaker.
- July 2010 – *Too Many Losses Too Soon* facilitated by Madeleine Krebs, which was about loss and grief among foster and adopted children.
- October 2010- *Resilience* facilitated by Tammy Chu. Resilience is documentary film produced by intercountry adoptee Tammy Chu – this powerful film was about a Korean intercountry adoptee, raised in America and his reunification with his birth mother in Korea. Tammy also responded eloquently to questions raised by the participants after the film.

I would like to thank Georgina and everyone else involved within her Subcommittee for organising such stimulating and relevant training workshops.

Resource library and marketing – led by Lizzie Gray- PARC

On behalf of the Committee, Lizzie has continued to distribute the Mothers' Book launched in 2008, *Releasing the Past*, which describes the practices that formerly put many mothers under pressure to give up their children for adoption. As well as the book published in 1990 *Further Down The Track*, which is an account of personal adoption reunion stories.

The Legislative Review Subcommittee – led by Lynne Moggagh - Barnardos

Unlike previous years, this Subcommittee has been kept busy over the past year responding to the following:

- May 2010 the Subcommittee had the opportunity to write to Annette Gallard – Chief Executive, Community Services in response to the proposed National Minimum Principles in Adoption 2010 (“the National Principles”).
- January 2011 the Subcommittee had the opportunity to write to Danielle Wooley – Director Out of Home Care Policy, Community Services in response to the Issues Paper regarding Sole Parental Responsibility Orders (“Sole PR orders”).
- January 2011 the Subcommittee reviewed the Committee’s Constitution, which was prepared in 2002 and not been amended since 2004. It has now been amended and legally checked. The amended version has now been distributed throughout the Committee, furthermore I wish for us to vote on this amended Constitution via a special resolution, then we will be able to submit the new Constitution to the Department of Fair Trading.

I would like to thank Lynne and everyone else who volunteered their time to this Subcommittee. Having the opportunity to respond to such important pieces of legislation proves the value of our Committee and all its members.

Themes and Highlights Throughout the Year

- June 2010 – During a Committee Meeting we had a discussion on the use of Facebook in adoption and ethics of using such social media websites for searching. As this new phenomenon is here to stay, I believe more awareness and research needs to be obtained into the pro’s and con’s of social media used within adoption and permanent care.
- June 2010 – I suggested a new format of Information Sharing during our Committee meetings, and it was agreed that more in-depth presentations by two agencies would occur each meeting plus anyone with specific or relevant information they wish to share. This new Information Sharing format commenced at the August 2010 Committee meeting and will continue throughout 2011.
- August 2010 – Adoption Information Unit – Community Services provided the Committee with an in-depth presentation on how open access is applied to adoption information for adoptions that occurred in NSW after 1 January 2010, as per the Adoption Act 2000 and the new detailed information available on the Department’s website.
- August 2010 – Adoptive Parent’s Association (APA) was able to use the August Committee meeting to launch their new website, which was partly funded by the Committee.
- September 2010 – The Adoption Amendment (Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2010 was passed which enables couples of the same sex to adopt in NSW - however in regards to the NSW Intercountry Adoption Program, they have no programs with overseas countries willing to accept adoption applications from same-sex couples. See the following link for the Media Release from the Minister:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/lib100039/same_sex_adoption.pdf

plus the SMH report on this Bill:

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/could-this-be-the-year-of-the-modern-family-20100913-15826.html>

- October 2010 – Tammy Chu launched her documentary film *Resilience*, this was very well received and highlighted the issues for intercountry adoptees in regards to their language and culture.
- October 2010 – The 2nd National Post Adoption Meeting was held in Brisbane, this provided post adoption professionals from throughout Australia to network and discuss post and past adoption issues, ethics and practises in the various states and territories.
- November 2010 – Our Committee formed a National Adoption Awareness Week Subcommittee and produced the following statement:
Families are formed and reformed in different ways; Birth, Fostering, Adoption, Permanent Care and Kin Care. Be aware of what you assume and show sensitivity.
- December 2010 – The Supreme Court granted an adoption order for the first same-sex adoption in NSW, this application was processed by Barnardos Find A Family Adoption Program. The following link is the Judgment decision <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/scjudgments/2010nswsc.nsf/aef73009028d6777ca25673900081e8d/4b83b423d4d1687aca2577f500090fba?OpenDocument>
Plus a SMH article:
<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/body-language-said-it-all--first-samesex-couple-to-adopt-in-nsw-are-great-dads-20101215-18yaa.html>
- March 2011 – NSW Surrogacy Legislation came into force on 1 March 2011, this Act assists heterosexual and same-sex couples with surrogate children to gain full legal recognition as parents and to ensure it is a crime for NSW residents who enter into a commercial surrogacy agreement – even if the surrogate mother is overseas. Although surrogacy does not relate to our Committee per se, it is evident that children born through some surrogacy arrangements are going to have face similar issues in regards to adoptees, such as loss of identity, family and medical history and so on, therefore it is likely that professionals involved in post adoption services will need to support such clientele in the future. This controversial topic of surrogacy has been in the media a lot recently, you can access the following links to learn more:
<http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/>
<http://www.lifestyleyou.com.au/other/qanda-with-sami-lukis.aspx>
<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/lifematters/is-this-baby-really-a-crime-20110122-1a0jj.html>
- 2010 also saw a new trend of mainstream movies about adoption; most notable were *Mother and Child*, an American movie about the lives of a birth mother and her adopted daughter, plus some prospective adoptive parents. Also the Australian movie *The Waiting City* was released, which follows the journey of an Australian couple travelling to India to collect their adoptive baby.
- The Committee also responded to a Daily Telegraph Article following the Kelli Lane murder trial. Journalist Miranda Divine made some outlandish comments about adoption practise and the Committee decided to respond in the hope to educate the community of the reality of current adoption practise. The following link is the article mentioned:
http://blogs.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/mirandadevine/index.php/dailytelegraph/comments/adopt_a_kinder_attitude_to_jailed_mother/

- The Committee wrote formally to invite the Aftercare Resource Centre Support Services – Relationships Australia and NSW Link-Up to join the Committee.
- The Committee also wrote to Debra-Lee Furness in the hope we can meet with her in order to provide her with information on the current practises of NSW adoption which in turn could enhance community awareness.

Goals and directions for 2011

1. As mentioned earlier in the report, Facebook and Social Media are a new phenomenon here to stay. Adoption and permanent care need to learn how to deal with Facebook and other social media, especially in relation to contact issues with birth families. At the Committee's meeting in June 2010 we formed a Subcommittee to explore and address the issues pertaining to social media within the adoption and permanent care field – however I don't think this went any further. I recommend that this Subcommittee meets in order to develop some practise guidelines in relation to social media and adoption/permanent care.
2. The National Post Adoption Meeting will be held in Sydney in October 2011, and the Committee has agreed to steer this meeting in order to maintain an interagency flavour. I recommend that the Subcommittee formed for this meeting continues to meet more regularly so the National Post Adoption Meeting in Sydney can be productive, informative and showcase the interagency collaboration practised in NSW.

Conclusion

Finally in my inaugural year as Chairperson, I would like to formally thank all members of the Committee for their valuable contribution, especially to those who participated within our Subcommittee's.

As I have mentioned above, it has been yet again another busy year for the Committee. During 2010 we have achieved many of our objectives we always strive towards. These include promoting community and professional awareness of issues and needs of all parties involved in adoption and permanent care, reviewing legislation relevant to adoption and permanent care and making recommendations to the relevant Ministers and Senior Government Officials and conducting training programs in relation to adoption and permanent care practice, just to name a few.

I have enjoyed forming strong working relationships with my colleagues within the Committee over the past year, and I look forward to being apart of another productive year with such a diverse group of committed members, all strivings towards a common goal.

Damon Martin
 Chairperson
 NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care
 April 2011