



New South Wales  
Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care Inc

## Chairperson's Annual Report 2011

Presented at AGM on 13 April 2012

### Introduction

At the conclusion of my second 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 2011, the Committee has met five times, namely in June, August, October, December and February 2012. The average attendance of each meeting remained on par to previous years, with an average of 16 people attending each meeting.

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

### Membership and Roles

It is evident that the Committee enables members to develop strong working relationships and provides a unique opportunity for members to network and engage. As Chairperson, I relish being surrounded and supported by an extremely experienced Management Committee. It should be acknowledged that they all take time out of their own busy schedules from within their employed positions to conduct their tasks within the Committee.

Three of the office bearer's positions within the Management Committee will be vacated today. The first is the Secretary position which is required to be vacated due to Lisa Vihtonen's completion of her maximum 3 year term. The second is the Vice-Chairperson position; this is due to Janet Henegan's resignation from this position due to other work commitments. The third is the Minutes Secretary which was filled temporarily by Barbara Waterman – in place of Mary Griffin who is on secondment. I wish to proclaim for three 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:

- Secretary;
- Vice-Chair; and
- Minutes Secretary.

The Management Committee over the past year has consisted of Janet Henegan – Vice Chair, Domenic Filardo – Treasurer, Lisa Vihtonen – Secretary, Barbara Waterman – 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 2011 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  
Barnardos Find-A-Family Australia

Catholic Care Adoption Services  
Centacare Newcastle  
Department of Family and Community Services: Adoption Information Unit  
Department of Family and Community Services: Adoption and Permanent Care Services  
Department of Family and Community Services: Out of Home Care Adoption  
Fostering Young Lives (FYL)  
International Social Service (ISS) Australia  
NSW Office for Children, Children's Guardian  
Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)  
Salvation Army Special Search Service  
Individual members (2 x adoptees, 1 x birth parent and 1 x adoptive parent)

### **Achievements throughout the Year**

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

Another great year occurred in regards to training provided by the Committee during 2011. This included:

- April 2011 – *The Journey From Fostering to Adoption*. Chris and Rob Leong have had a lengthy involvement with Barnardo's since the placement of Marc in 1986. Marc was finally adopted by the Leongs just prior to this talk in his early thirties. Participants found his journey enlightening to hear how much an adoption order can mean for older children or adults and how vital their input and participation in decision making is in their future happiness.
- July 2011 – *Self Care for Workers in Adoption and Permanent Care* facilitated by Judith Krahe Edwards. This was a very interesting session which workers reported feeling reinforced and acknowledged in their roles. Judith was able to share some positive ways of dealing with stress that promote their health and well being.
- March 2012 – *Seeking Safety: Support for Young People with Self Harming Behaviours* facilitated by Gail Johnson. The feedback was very positive in relation to this training and it was great to see a range of participants, from parents to carers to professionals all attend. Gail was particularly skilled at putting participants at ease in dealing with a sensitive and emotional topic. It was enlightening to see these behaviours on a continuum of familiar coping strategies. The training was well subscribed with more than 40 people wishing to attend. Unfortunately a number of people had to cancel at the last minute which was disappointing.

I would like to thank Georgina and everyone else involved within her Subcommittee for organising such stimulating and relevant training workshops. A lot of behind the scenes work occurs in organising these training and it enables both professionals and carers the opportunity to access training relevant to adoption and permanent care at a very affordable price.

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 Moggach - Barnardos

After a quiet period throughout the 2011, the New Year became very busy as the Legislative Review Subcommittee was required to respond to back to back lengthy Discussion Paper's released by the Department.

In January 2012 the Committee received the Discussion Paper on the Statutory Review of the Adoption Regulation 2003. Lynne was able to coordinate very quickly a meeting with six other Committee members during January (which is not easy due to many professionals taking their summer holidays leave) and our response to this Discussion Paper was sent to the Department on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012.

Then as soon as this response was completed another Discussion Paper from the Department was received, the Review of the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulations 2000. Again Lynne coordinated six Committee members to meet on two occasions and formulated a response, which was sent to the Department on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

I would like to thank Lynne and everyone else you who volunteered their time to these two specific responses, both involved a tremendous amount of work and effort. A special thanks also to Lynne's tireless commitment in drafting and documenting our discussions. To give others an idea of the amount of work undertaken in this Subcommittee, one of these Discussion Paper's was 73 pages long; it needs to be thoroughly read and discussed as a group in order for a consensus view to be obtained and a constructed response.

#### National Post Adoption Meeting Steering Group – led by Damon Martin – ISS Australia

The idea of developing an annual National Post Adoption Meeting was formed when a group of post adoption professionals from across Australia decided to meet on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2008 – before the start of the Adoption Conference in Sydney. Following this meeting South Australia offered to hold the first National Post Adoption Meeting in 2009 which was collaboratively run by the State Adoption Team, PASS and Link-Up. In 2010 Queensland hosted the meeting and then NSW volunteered to host the 2011 Meeting. The post adoption professionals from NSW believed that the Committee should organise this meeting with involvement from all the post adoption providers in NSW. It was also an opportunity to highlight the strong multi-agency collaboration in NSW and within the Committee.

The Steering Group consisted of representatives from Community Services, Anglicare, Barnardos, CatholicCare, PARC, Salvation Army, ISS Australia, NSW Link-Up and two individuals (adoptees). Our first planning meeting was in December 2010 and the Steering Group met a total of 12 times in preparation of the 26-28 October 2011 Meeting.

Overall the 3 day meeting was a huge success, wonderfully thought provoking and stimulating, with over 80 professionals from all over Australia and New Zealand in attendance. The theme of the meeting was '*Past, Present and Future Post Adoption Practice*'.

Some highlights of the meeting were Marion Quartly – Monash University presentation on '*The History of Adoption in Australia Project*', Mary Iwanek – former National Manager of Adoption in NZ presentation on the 'Spirit of Openness', CatholicCare Adoption Services new DVD '*Honoring Connections*' as well as the numerous first hand accounts from clients, this included a panel of adoptive and foster parents, adoptees and a foster child; a personal story of a grave side reunion facilitated by NSW Link-Up regarding an Aboriginal man and his deceased grandmother, and lastly a personal story of an intercountry adoptee from Cambodia and her moving and inspiring journey recognizing that post adoption support can be life long.

I would like to thank all the professionals who dedicated their time in organizing and presenting at this meeting – it was truly a great accomplishment especially since it was done without any assistance from a specialist 'conference' organizer.

#### National Adoption Awareness Week Subcommittee – led by Janet Henegan – PARC and Damon Martin – ISS Australia

In lieu of last's year's brief statement by the Committee during National Adoption Awareness Week, the Subcommittee decided to release a media statement to acknowledge that families are formed and reformed in different ways and that awareness and sensitivity regarding this fact is necessary. The statement also attempted to divert the attention from intercountry adoption and discussed the equally important needs of the over 17,000 children in out-of-home care in NSW that need stability and permanency.

Several members of the Committee were also able to attend National Adoption Awareness Week Breakfast Summit on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2011 hosted by Deborra-Lee Furness and promote the views and philosophy of the Committee.

#### Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee – led by Damon Martin – ISS Australia

The Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee was set up in June 2011 to address the issues this new phenomenon posed within the adoption and permanent care field. Only two meetings have occurred and initial guidelines of how Facebook can be used as a search tool within a professional context have been developed.

The Subcommittee now aims to produce an information booklet for adoptive parents about Social Media and Adoption – identifying the safety measures and risks associated with social media. The completion of this booklet has been put on hold until the release of the ANZOG (Australia New Zealand School of Government) Research Project Report which has addressed issues of social media used within the context of adoption professionals. The Subcommittee will reconvene once the ANZOG report has been released.

#### Community Education on Adoption Subcommittee – led by Sue Madden – Anglicare

This Subcommittee is yet to be completely formed and will meet for the first time on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012, however it is envisaged this Subcommittee could address a number of issues relating to the community's perception of Out-of-Home Care and adoption.

#### **Themes and Highlights Throughout the Year**

- The Committee meetings adopted a new format of information sharing in August 2010; I believe this has worked well and enabled the Committee members to receive a more in-depth account of the specific services from its different members. We have received in-depth presentations over the last 12 months from OOHC Adoption, Adoption Information Unit, Adoption and Permanent Care Services – Community Services, CatholicCare Adoption Services, Fostering Young Lives, Barnardos Find-A-Family, Salvation Army Special Search Service and APA NSW (Adoption and Permanent Care Association of NSW)
- On 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee released their report on the *Commonwealth's Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices*. There were twenty recommendations in the 323 page report which proposed formal apologies from Federal and State Governments as well as hospitals, churches and organisations involved in the past practice.  
Other recommendations included funding for services to meet the lifelong needs of all those affected by past forced adoption, better access to records and the implementation of integrated birth certificates that name and identify birth mothers, fathers and children.  
The outcome of the Senate Inquiry was seen by tens of thousands of woman who were forcibly separated from their babies as a landmark victory as it acknowledged the illegal and inhumane nature of former forced adoption practice.  
The Senate Inquiry also found that evidence of consent was not properly taken, there was evidence of coercion and all the pressure, practices and policies have had lifelong impacts on mothers, fathers, adoptees and family members. Many of these birth mothers continue to live with the trauma and grief of being separated from their baby under these circumstances and many adoptees are now learning the true facts of the circumstances that lead to their adoption.  
A copy of the full report is available on the following link:  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/senate\\_committees?url=clac\\_ctte/com\\_m\\_contrib\\_former\\_forced\\_adoption/report/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate_committees?url=clac_ctte/com_m_contrib_former_forced_adoption/report/index.htm)
- A concerted effort to attract more members to the Committee was taken in 2011, especially to attract organisations involved in out-of-home services in order to balance the adoption and permanent care members of the Committee. I am pleased that Fostering Young Lives – a foster care service of the Benevolent Society became members in 2011 and can provide input into the pertinent issues faced within the out-of-home arena, along with the Committee's other OOHC providers.  
I am also pleased that the National Adoption Awareness Week (NAAW) Committee became members in 2012; this will assist NAAW to keep abreast of the wide range of issues relating to adoption and permanent care in NSW as well as build strong working relationships with the key providers within the State. NAAW have the ability to create media attention to adoption issues and held a very successful and well organised Breakfast Summit on National Adoption Awareness Week. NAAW founding member, Deborra-lee Furness was also able to address the National Press Club of Australia on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2011 to speak of orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children worldwide.

- Following my attendance at the Breakfast Summit hosted by NAAW, I was fortunate to meet the Managing Director of Elastic Digital. Elastic Digital has offered to develop a website and re-brand the Committee on a pro-bono basis. Initial meetings have occurred and the implementation of our website should occur towards the end of 2012. The Committee is very fortunate to receive such a generous offer from Elastic Digital and it will enable our Committee to finally have an internet presence.
- NSW Family and Community Services made a change to the allowance for carers who adopt a child in statutory out-of-home care. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 new adoptive parents who adopt a child in statutory care will be provided with an annual lump sum payment of \$1500 in place of previous fortnightly allowances and contingency payments – these changes do not apply to carers who have already adopted a child.
- In June 2011 the Australian film *Oranges and Sunshine* was released. The film is about the extraordinary true story of the British Child Migrant Scheme. As a way of “boosting Australia’s post-war population, British boys and girls, were sent to the other side of the world by specialist agencies such as the Fairbridge Society, established specifically for the purpose of migrating young children to populate the empire with good, white British stock. Well known national charities such as Barnardos, which provided a wider range of child care services, along with the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church, all played major roles.”<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that over 10,000 children between the ages of 3 & 14 were sent to Australia between the 1912 and the 1970’s. They were mostly placed in institutions or with a foster family, however some were adopted. Many were told they were orphans when in fact only a third were actually orphans, the rest had parents alive back in the UK. A lot of these parents had placed their child into care when they were struggling during hard times, in view that it was a temporary solution however when they returned to collect their children they were often told they had died. These children whether adopted or not, grew up with identity issues, a lack of information about their biological family and knowledge of their medical history. Many remain traumatized through abuse, over-work and lack of education they endured.
- In March 2012 the Minister for Family and Community Services, the Honourable Pru Goward announced the significant progress the NSW Government has made in regards to the expanding the role of the non-government sector in providing out-of-home care (OOHC) services. The OOHC reform implementation will see the transition of services from the government to the non-government sector in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families by delivering a quality sustainable non-government Out-of-Home Care service system for NSW. The Government’s aim is to reduce the number of children entering the statutory care system by increasing restorative practices that support families and retain children within their family and kin network. The focus in this plan is the transition of children and young people who enter statutory care, and those who are currently in placements provided by Community Services, to non-government services. Ms Goward announced that 35 of the 37 NGOs have agreed to reformed arrangements covering 96% of the contracted placements. The Government expects that all children in statutory foster care and kinship care will be supported by OOHC NGOs within five years for non-Aboriginal funded NGOs and within ten years for Aboriginal funded NGOs.  
A copy of the Media Release is available on the following link:  
[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/lib100045/reformed%20out-of-home%20care%20to%20drive%20better%20outcomes.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/lib100045/reformed%20out-of-home%20care%20to%20drive%20better%20outcomes.pdf)
- In March 2012 the Law Reform Committee of the Parliament of Victoria’s released a report following their inquiry into access by donor conceived persons to information about their donors. The Committee has recommended changes to the law to enable all donor-conceived Victorians to apply for information about their genetic identity regardless of when they were born – this is a world first. The inquiry was prompted by concerns raised by donor-conceived people about the impact on their day-to-day lives of the law that denies them basic information about their medical, social and cultural backgrounds as they shared their stories of grief and loss from being denied knowledge of their full identity. The Victorian Government now have 6 months to respond to these recommendations. The State of Victoria has easily been the most progressive State within Australia in regards to enacting legislation for donor conception. The Victorian *Infertility (Medical Procedures) Act 1984* was the “first legislation in the world to regulate IVF and associated human

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.childmigranttrust.com/our-work/child-migration-history>

embryo research.”<sup>2</sup> Since then Victoria has updated their legislation twice, with the *Infertility Treatment Act 1995* and *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* and has set the benchmark for access to information by donors and donor conceived persons alike.

### **Goals and directions for 2012-13**

1. As mentioned earlier in the report, the Committee is now embarking on having an internet presence with the implementation of a website. This is a major development and something long overdue; especially given the fact that Committee has a long history dating back to the 1960's and has had a significant involvement in adoption practice, education and changes in legislation over the years. The focus for 2012 will be to develop the content necessary for the website.
2. 2012 will see the formation of the Community Education on Adoption Subcommittee which could enable the Committee to produce a publication demystifying the community's perception of out-of-home and adoption.
3. Since little progress was made within the Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee due to the decision to wait for the release of the ANZOG Research Report, I recommend that this Subcommittee meets after the release of this report in order to develop some practise guidelines or a published booklet in relation to social media within adoption.
4. I encourage Committee members to attend the 2012 Adoption Conference in Melbourne on 22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> October as well as the National Post Adoption Meeting held the following day (24<sup>th</sup> Oct).

### **Conclusion**

Finally 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 2011 we have achieved many of our objectives, these included 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.

It is no doubt that 2012-13 will be another busy year for the Committee and I look forward to another productive year working 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 2012

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.varta.org.au/history-of-art-regulation-in-victoria/w1/i1004753/>