



Introduction

At the conclusion of my three year term 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 2012, the Committee has met five times, in June, August, October, December of 2012 and February 2013. 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

The Committee continues to allow professionals in the adoption and permanent care fields the opportunity to develop strong working relationships and enables us to keep abreast of the current changes and developments in adoption and permanent care. The Committee is unique in the sense that it draws its membership from a variety of sources including professionals working in government and non-government agencies as well as individuals interested in, involved in, or affected by adoption and permanent care or related aspects of Out of Home Care. This could be a recipe for disaster due to the melee of diverse and differing views and experiences of adoption and permanent care represented by the Committee. However, due to the conduct and respect shown by members of the committee, personal and professional views are able to be shared and considered by all members and this enriches everyone in their practice, especially affording them the opportunity to hear first-hand experiences from individuals affected by adoption and permanent care.

It is with sadness that I end my three year term as Chairperson but appreciate the opportunity and the experience I have gained. I have always felt extremely supported by the experienced Management Committee and value the strong working relationships we have formed. I would like to acknowledge all the time members take out of their own busy schedules from within their employed positions to conduct their tasks within the Committee. Without this commitment and energy the Committee would undoubtedly struggle to function.

Three of the office bearer's positions within the Management Committee will be vacated today. The first is the Chairperson's position which is required to be vacated due to the completion of my 3 year maximum term. The second is the Minutes Secretary position; this is due to Lizzie Gray's resignation from PARC and the Committee. The third is the Librarian position which was also held by Lizzie Gray and due to vacated for the reasons as mentioned above.

I wish to proclaim for three new volunteers to fill these departing positions so the Committee can continue to function professionally and productively. Therefore, I am requesting nominations for elections for the following office bearer positions within the Management Committee:

- Chairperson;
- Minutes Secretary
- Librarian

The Management Committee over the past 12 months has consisted of Lisa Vihtonen – Vice Chair, Domenic Filardo – Treasurer, Sonali Abeynaike – Secretary, Barbara Waterman and Lizzie Gray – Minutes Secretary, Erika Berzins – Public Officer and Lizzie Gray – Library Officer.

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

As of December 2012 the membership of the Committee consisted of:

ACT Adoptions Unit- Dept of Disability, Housing and Community Services
Adopted and Permanent Care Association of NSW
Anglicare Adoption Services
Anglicare Out-of-Home Care Services
ASIAC
Barnardos Find-A-Family Australia
Catholic Care Adoption Services
CatholicCare Hunter-Manning
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 adoptees, 1 mother & 1 adoptive parent)

Achievements throughout the Year

The Training and Development Subcommittee - led by Georgina Hawcroft

This Subcommittee only held one training during the past 12 months due to many professionals attending the Australian Adoption Conference in Melbourne held once every four years.

In August 2012 Associate Professor Cathy McMahon from Macquarie University facilitated *Maternal Mood and Prenatal Development*. Cathy's research has focused on psychological adjustment during pregnancy and early parenthood in the context of various reproductive risk factors – in particular peri natal mood disorders and infertility/assisted conception.

25 participants attended the session which was very well received. The training provoked a lot of discussion around how an adoption decision and the mothers stress around the decision would impact on the fetus. We were glad to hear that quality care after birth can assist to address any of this harm caused during the pregnancy.

I would like to thank Georgina and everyone else involved in the Subcommittee for continuing to organise relevant training workshops. Organising these trainings requires substantial behind the scenes work which ultimately enable 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 remainder of 2012 in which the Subcommittee only responded to the Review of the NSW Birth Certificate, we were then hit with a succession of responses to address.

Within the space of two months the Legislative Review Subcommittee completed four responses. The first was a brief response on the draft Code of Conduct for authorised foster, relative and kinship carers. The second was a response to the Department's Statutory Review of the Adoption Regulation 2003. This was delivered in two parts; the first was a general response to the questions raised in the Discussion Paper and the second was an extremely detailed response with recommendations for changes of most sections throughout Chapter 8 (Adoption Information) of the Regulations.

The third response was to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into managing information related to donor conception. If you are wondering why the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care is responding to donor conception issues, it is because as stated in our Constitution we believe that children born through assisted reproductive technology have the same right to know their origins as children who have been adopted or are in permanent care.

The fourth and final response was in regards to the NSW Government's Discussion Paper titled 'Child Protection: Legislative Reform Legislative Proposals'. This was undoubtedly one of the most time consuming and in-depth responses this Subcommittee has made. It involved Subcommittee members meeting for three full days to address the questions raised in this lengthy Discussion Paper (75 pages). Our response to the Child Protection Legislative Reforms was extremely thorough at 15 pages long.

The secession of these four responses placed an enormous strain on the Subcommittee and its leader Lynne Moggach. I would like to thank Lynne and everyone else who volunteered their time to these responses which involved a tremendous amount of work and effort. I would also like to acknowledge Lynne's tireless commitment in drafting and documenting our discussions. For those not privileged to attend these Subcommittee meetings, it is amazing to see Lynne's ability to document the Subcommittee's consensus view as discussion occurs and then construct such articulate responses.

Lynne has been a member of the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care for 21 years and is now leaving the Committee. We are now faced with finding a new leader of the Legislative Review Subcommittee, and I add that this is a very important role to fill so please consider volunteering to lead this Subcommittee.

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 in the adoption and permanent care field. However shortly after the subcommittee's construction we were made aware that DHS (VIC) FIND Service had commissioned ANZOG (Australia New Zealand School of Government) to conduct research on this topic. Therefore this Subcommittee decided to reconvene once the ANZSOG report was released.

The ANZOG report titled 'When Government uses social media to find and contact its citizens: navigating the issues' was only released at the end of 2012, the report in brief recommends that Government should utilise social media to find and contact citizens if appropriate guidance and processes are in place. This would include agencies developing a specific policy and procedures for the use of social media.

The Subcommittee now aims to produce a generic policy and procedures that agencies could adapt for their use. Additionally the subcommittee is currently developing an information booklet for adoptive parents about Social Media and Adoption including identifying the safety measures and risks associated with social media. Work is underway on the production of these tools and we envisage that they will be completed by mid 2013.

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

This Subcommittee was formed in April 2012 and has worked hard on developing a set of Frequently Asked Questions and a Matrix to help with the community's perception of Out-of-Home Care and adoption. These FAQs and Matrix will be accessible to the public via our new website which is expected to go live in the next month.

A lot of hard work went into developing the FAQs and Matrix which is going to be extremely valuable for the new Committee website, and I would like to thank Sue for coordinating the development of this content.

Themes and Highlights Throughout the Year

- The Committee meetings continue to use the new format of information sharing introduced in August 2010 and I believe it is still working well as it enables the Committee members to receive in-depth presentations on the specific services from its different members. In the past 12 months we have received presentations from Adoption Information Unit, CatholicCare Adoption Services, Post Adoption Resource Centre and ISS Australia – specifically Damon Martin's paper 'The Right to Information for Donor Conceived Persons; Lessons Learnt from Adoption'. We have also been privileged to hear some members personal accounts of their adoption experience, in particular Jenny Pickles, Georgina Hawcroft and Erika Berzins.
- Undoubtedly two monumental adoption milestones occurred in the past 12 months, and these were the formal apologies from the Commonwealth and NSW Governments in relation to the former forced adoption practices.

On 21 March 2013 the Prime Minister, The Honorable Julia Gillard MP delivered a formal national apology in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra. Prime Minister Gillard apologised on behalf of the Australian Government to people affected by forced adoption or removal policies and practices. The Australian Government has invested \$11.5 million over the next four years to assist those affected by forced adoption practices as part of its response to the recommendations in the Senate inquiry report on the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

See the following Attorney Generals website for information about the apology, including copies of the apology text, the speeches in the House of Representatives and the Senate and information on how to watch the apology on ABC's iView.

<http://www.ag.gov.au/About/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Pages/default.aspx>

On 20 September 2012 NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell said sorry for the "years of pain and grief" caused to mothers and to their children who were removed in past forced adoptions. He stated 'Today in this, Australia's first parliament, we acknowledge the terrible wrongs that were done and with profound sadness and remorse say to those living with ongoing grief and

pain, we are sorry." He also announced that funding for the Post Adoption Resource Centre will be increased by up to \$900,000 over 3 years.

- The 10th Australian Adoption Conference was held in Melbourne in October 2012. This event that occurs once every four years is an invaluable opportunity for researchers, practitioners and stakeholders to discuss existing and proposed policies and practices across the adoption and permanent care sector. The conference attracts overseas experts in the field to present; Jeanne Kaniuk – Head of Coram Adoption Service and Dr Gary Clapton – University of Edinburgh being two of the Keynote Speakers.
- Following the two day Australian Adoption Conference was the fourth National Post Adoption Meeting held in Melbourne in October 2012. This one day event provides an opportunity for post adoption professionals throughout Australia to share knowledge and discuss the issues within post adoption practice. This year's meeting focused on two specific emerging trends, social media and adoption, and donor conception. Eric Harper presented the ANZOG (Australia New Zealand School of Government) report titled 'When Government uses social media to find and contact its citizens: navigating the issues' and Damon Martin presented his paper 'The right to information for donor conceived people; lessons learnt from adoption'.
- Australia's Intercountry Adoption was dealt a huge blow following the announcement on 28 June 2012 that the Australian Government had decided to close the Ethiopia-Australia Intercountry Adoption Program. This decision was made in response to the specific circumstances of the Ethiopian adoption environment, which was increasingly unpredictable, challenging and complex, as well as the program's unique operational structure. Ethiopia was Australia's third largest Intercountry Adoption Program in terms of numbers of adoptions over the past 10 years, behind China and South Korea respectively.
- In November 2012 National Adoption Awareness Week (NAAW) occurred and their Founding Patron Deborra-lee Furness announced the appointment of a new CEO, Sheri Shenker. This position was possible through generous support from the Pratt Foundation. Barnardos Australia also joined NAAW to campaign state governments for a change in legislation and child welfare services.
- After over 50 years of contributing to NSW adoption policy and practice, the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care has never had a presence on the World Wide Web. This is all about to change with the development of a first NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care website which is expected to go live in April 2013.

The information contained in the website will provide the public with a better understanding of the Committee and some of the issues pertaining to adoption and permanent care in NSW. This website is being made possible by the generous offer from Elastic Digital to build the website free of charge.

- In November 2012 the NSW Government released a Discussion Paper titled 'Child Protection: Legislative Reform Legislative Proposals'. Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward launched a comprehensive program of legislative reform focusing on improvements in promoting good parenting, providing a safe and stable home for children and young people in care and creating a child focused system.

The official consultation period closed on 22 March 2013 and Community Services received close to 230 submissions from service providers, carers, parents, Community Services staff, government and non-government agencies, children and young people and the public. The Community Services' project team, which is developing the reforms, is now reviewing and analysing all the submissions received. It is anticipated that legislation will be tabled in Parliament later this year.

- In November 2012 the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of NSW announced an inquiry by the Law and Safety Committee into the management of information relating to donor conception in NSW.

Under current legislation only those people conceived after 2010 have the right to access information about their donor, as donations made before this date did not have to be recorded on a central register. The Inquiry will explore a range of questions including whether retrospective access to information should be granted; what issues this would likely raise with individuals and donors; what support should be provided; and how donor information should be managed and by whom.

Goals and directions for 2013-14

1. As mentioned earlier in the report, the Committee is now embarking on having an internet presence with the implementation of our very first website. The focus for 2013 will be to publicise this website and continually update the necessary content.
2. The Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee is to produce a generic policy and procedures that agencies could adapt and use as well as producing an information booklet for adoptive parents about Social Media and Adoption including identifying the safety measures and risks associated with social media.
3. I suggest the Committee makes a concerted effort to attract more members from the Out-of-Home Care field, especially in light of the sweeping reforms proposed to the landscape of child protection and adoption in NSW.

Conclusion

Finally I would like to formally thank all Committee members for their valuable contribution, especially to those who participated in our Subcommittee's. All of our members volunteer their time and expertise as we strive as a collective to keep abreast of adoption and permanent care issues while providing sound and informed advice to ensure best practice is maintained.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my three year term as Chairperson and value the strong working relationships I have formed with the members. 2013-14 will be another busy and productive year for the Committee and I would like to thank all members in advance for continuing to contribute to this Committee and making a difference within the adoption and permanent care fields.

Damon Martin
Chairperson
NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care
April 2013