



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 2013 the Committee has met five times: During 2013 we met in June, August, October and December; and then in February of 2014. The average attendance of each meeting remained on par to previous years, with an average of 15 people attending each meeting. Meeting attendance has varied with a range of 11 to 19 attendees over the past 12 months.

Meetings continue to be held at the Anglicare premises at Parkes St, Parramatta. On behalf of the Committee, I delivered a small gift to the Anglicare office in December, which consisted of a selection of gourmet teas from T2. This was a small gesture of thanks to Anglicare for their continued generosity which enables our Committee to meet at a regular central venue, free of charge and with a comfortable room that accommodates all our needs.

Membership and Roles

The Committee is unique in Australia as very few states have such a strong interconnected group of both professionals and individual members who contribute to regular and worthwhile discussion and actions. The Committee has membership from a variety of professional sources within government and non-government agencies as well as individuals members. The committee enables professionals in the adoption and permanent care fields the opportunity to develop strong working relationships with one another, which supports close collaborative work across agencies. It also ensures professionals keep abreast of the current changes and developments in adoption and permanent care, including aspects of adoption and permanent care that may be outside of our own day to day expertise.

Pleasingly, our individual members have increased in numbers over recent years and equally contribute to the Committee. Each individual member has their own personal experience, and these experiences are not only of interest to the wider Committee, but are incredibly valuable and offer greater insight into the varied personal experiences involved in adoption and Out of Home Care. I personally always feel it is such a privilege for professionals to be able to hear the stories of those individuals, and I have deep respect and admiration for those who have bravely shared their stories. To all of our individual members, I send a heartfelt thankyou.

I also wish to acknowledge the continued efforts of our professional members and their commitment in attending our meetings, contributing to discussion and those who are involved in our various sub committees. Amongst the melee of diverse and differing views and experiences across both pre and post adoption sectors and out of home care we manage to maintain an atmosphere of professional respect and support within the Committee. This enables us all to share, listen, contemplate and learn from our colleagues and respectfully agree to disagree when necessary. I hope our wide membership will continue to encourage the sharing of thoughts, ideas and practices which can only improve on practice and service provision to our client groups.

As Chairperson at the end of my first year, I have felt secure in knowing that I have been surrounded and supported by an extremely experienced Management Committee and I value each and every member's input from the wider committee into our sharing of knowledge, discussion, and thought provoking topics of conversation. I thank everyone for the dedication and commitment to the Committee, and appreciate your regular attendance in this era of being frantically busy and time poor.

Only one of the office bearer's positions within the Management Committee will be vacated today. That is the Treasurer position which is required to be vacated due to Domenic Filardo's completion of his maximum 3 year term. I wish to proclaim for one new volunteer to fill the void of this departing position and am requesting nominations for election for the treasurer position:

The Management Committee over the past 12 months has consisted of myself as Chairperson and closely supported by the following:

Janet Henegan – Vice Chair & Librarian
Domenic Filardo – Treasurer;
Damon Martin – Secretary;
Sonali Abeynaike & Jackie Palmer – Minutes Secretary,
Erika Berzins – Public 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 2013 the membership of the Committee consisted of:
ACT Adoptions Unit- Dept of Disability, Housing and Community Services
Adoption and Permanent Care Association of NSW
Anglicare Adoption Services
Anglicare Out-of-Home Care Services
ASIAC
Australian Families for Children
Barnardos Find-A-Family (adoption and permanent care programs)
CatholicCare Adoption Services
CatholicCare Hunter-Manning
CatholicCare Out of Home Care
Jane Eales (Individual)
Department of Family and Community Services: Adoption and Permanent Care Services
Department of Family and Community Services: Out of Home Care
Erika Berzins (Individual)

Fostering Young Lives (FYL)
International Social Service (ISS) Australia
Jenny Pickles (individual)
National Adoption Awareness Week
NSW Office for Children, Children's Guardian
Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)
Salvation Army Special Search Service

SUB COMMITTEE WORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Training and Development Subcommittee - led by Georgina Hawcroft until September 2013 and then jointly led by Phoebe Lewis from ISS and Brooke Bengston from PARC.

This Subcommittee held four training workshops during the past 12 months, which was a significant increase from the previous year. Those workshops were:

1) MARY IWANEK, ADOPTION PRACTICES: 11 JUNE 2013

Mary Iwanek is a former National Manager of the New Zealand Government's Adoption Team. She has had approximately 40 years of experience working within New Zealand and has significant experience within adoption practice. Mary presented a training aimed at professionals which explored the many complexities underpinning pre and post-adoption and Out-Of-Home-Care practices. The training highlighted Mary's insights into the pre and post adoption field, including exploring the evolution of adoption in New Zealand with a specific focus on how the spirit of openness was embraced. She also offered her thoughts from a personal perspective based on practice experience regarding the emerging issues pertaining to children being adopted through the Out-Of-Home Care system and the role of Guardianship vs Adoption Orders. Mary also discussed a post-adoption resource tool developed to assist professionals in understanding when and what motivates clients to search and begin the reunion process.

This training was well received with approximately 60 attendees and offered the opportunity for open discussion amongst professionals. Profits made from the event went directly into the training and development budget. Mary's talk was thought provoking and addressed the value of empowerment of individuals in reunion and the value of openness all within the New Zealand practice context.

2) ANGIE DE CASANOVE, ART THERAPY: 23 AUGUST 2013

Angie de Casanove is a Senior Social Worker and Psychotherapist from the Children's Hospital at Westmead. Angie has a Masters in Mental Health specialising in psychodynamic therapy and art therapy for children and adolescents. She also has a background in family counselling, lecturing, group work and research. The training was aimed at professionals and provided learning opportunities for increased knowledge of how art is an effective and a non-invasive tool for unpacking trauma; different techniques to use art in individual therapy and groups; and how the unconscious can be revealed through art and sand play therapy.

This was a small training group with a maximum capacity of 25 attendees, so it was pleasing to achieve almost capacity with 24 attendees. The training was very well

received and many participants commented they would like to have a more extensive version held over a longer 1 day format. This is something the Training and Development Subcommittee is looking into further for a future workshop opportunity which will include sand tray therapy.

3) DR KARYN PURVIS, TRUST BASED RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTION PROGRAM: 11 NOVEMBER 2013

Dr Karyn Purvis is an awarded American Child Psychologist and Training and Development Subcommittee played a role in endorsing on behalf of National Adoption Awareness Week a training event for both families and professionals with Dr Purvis. Dr Purvis presented her Trust Based Relationship Intervention model to parents, adoptive parents, foster carers and professionals working with children at risk. Dr Purvis' training comprised of video case histories, interactive exercises and practical strategies, with Dr Purvis explaining how the Trust Based Relationship Intervention program integrates a variety of intervention principles including Empowering, Connecting and Correcting. Approximately 80 attendees came to this event and it was very well received and an exciting opportunity to hear from an international speaker.

4) MARK SHORTUS, TRACING TOOLS WORKSHOP: 14 MARCH 2014

Mark Shortus has worked for 8 years as a skip tracer and investigator for many financial institutions, along with 3 years of adoption search work for the Benevolent Society. This workshop was an excellent opportunity for professionals to share information and learn more about the various tracing tools and resources agencies utilise in their day to day work. Each agency also provided a summary of the tracing methods that they each use as a way of enhancing our practices in this area. It also provided opportunities to brainstorm how agencies can work collaboratively to overcome issues like the recent electoral roll restrictions.

This was a free training workshop with approximately 40 attendees and was well received. The Training and Development Subcommittee has since collated and circulated a summary of all the resources shared by various agencies which will be a valuable resource for us all.

I would like to thank Georgina, Phoebe and Brooke for leading this very important and valuable Subcommittee and extend my thanks to everyone else involved in the Subcommittee for continuing to organise relevant training workshops at a minimal cost. It is essential that professionals in the field to remain up to date with their skills and be given opportunity to question, evaluate and improve on their practice. In order to achieve this, professionals must receive appropriate training and learning opportunities within the adoption and out of home care sector. I feel that this Subcommittee is a crucial component to meeting the training and development needs of staff, given that adoption and permanent care is a niche field and there are not always a lot of relevant training opportunities available for workers. I also understand the importance of tailoring training to be inclusive and meet the needs of our wonderful foster carers and adoptive parents, as they negotiate the specific challenges and delights that children in the sector bring.

The Legislative Review Subcommittee – led by Janet Henegan – PARC

The start of 2013 was an extremely busy period for the Legislative Review Subcommittee as they completed several pieces of work. The first was a response to the NSW Government release of a Discussion Paper titled 'Child Protection: Legislative Reform Legislative Proposals'. This was a large piece of work in early 2013 where the

Subcommittee met on 3 separate occasions for whole day sessions to complete the response. Within the same period the Subcommittee also formulated a response to the 'Issues Paper Managing Information Related to Donor Conception' and to the 'Statutory Review of the NSW Adoption Regulations 2003.

Later in 2013 the Legislative Review Subcommittee suggested and instigated several letters, including a letter to Prime Minister Tony Abbott advocating for search and mediation services to be able to access the electoral roll in response to recently enforced restrictions regarding public access. Furthermore the Subcommittee met and formulated a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters and was successful in being asked to attend and give evidence at the Inquiry in March 2014. Janet Henegan and I both attended the Inquiry and received a warm welcome, with the parliamentary members supporting our claims as to the importance of access to the electoral role in order for us to ensure best practice in our work. They wanted to thank the wider Committee for the work we do and for bringing these concerns to the attention of the Standing Committee. We were assured that they would look further into the issue with the aim of resolving what seems to be an unnecessary restriction. Hopefully we will receive further feedback shortly.

I would like to thank Janet for taking the lead of this subcommittee after the departure of Lynne Moggach in early 2013 after many years in the role. Janet has proved to be a valuable and competent leader and taken to this (at times) onerous task with ease.

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

The Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee was initially set up in June 2011 to address the complexities of managing and navigating the use of social media within the adoption and permanent care field. At the end of 2012 ANZOG (Australia New Zealand School of Government) released a report entitled 'When Government uses social media to find and contact its citizens: navigating the issues'. In brief the report, recommended that Government should utilise social media to find and contact citizens providing appropriate guidance and processes are in place. It also recommended agencies develop a specific policy and procedures for the use of social media.

In response to this report, during 2013 the Social Media and Adoption Subcommittee produced some generic policy and procedures regarding social media use that agencies could adapt for their individual use. The guidelines covered four main topics: "developing an account", "using social media", "tracing" and "maintaining a professional social media presence". These guidelines were distributed to the Committee members for comment and have since been placed on the Committee website. The next phase of the subcommittee will be to develop an information booklet for adoptive parents about Social Media and Adoption including identifying the safety measures and risks associated with social media.

Thankyou to Damon and his team for this much needed work; especially for those among us who are not necessarily technically savvy or who are struggling with the complexities of navigating social media.

Community Education on Adoption Subcommittee – led by Melissa Bell, Barnardos

This Subcommittee was formed in April 2012 and successfully developed a set of Frequently Asked Questions and a Matrix to help with the community's enquiries

regarding Out-of-Home Care and adoption. These FAQs and Matrix is now accessible to the public via our website.

During 2013 and into 2014, the Community Education Subcommittee has been moving into the next phase of actively working on raising community awareness regarding present adoption practice and experience as well as the history and impact of past adoptions. The aim is to provide factual information and dispel some of the common myths. The subcommittee has been meeting regularly and when considering "The Changing Face of Adoption", have identified 4 key messages for community education: "openness in adoption"; "the needs of New South Wales children"; "lifelong impact of adoption" and "post adoption support".

Several options are currently being considered regarding this work including raising the profile of the CoA&PC website and having more information available on the website and possibly contacting a journalist to produce a story involving an individual and/or family that highlights some/all of the key messages.

Thankyou to all participants for you work in identifying the 4 key messages, which are all very relevant topics for consideration. I appreciation that in order to move to the next stage there will need to be further discussion and consensus from the committee regarding the most pressing issue/s that need attention and the most appropriate means of delivering the message.

OTHER THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

*The Committee now has a long awaited internet presence with the implementation of our very first website, with much thanks to Damon Martin and Elastic Digital for bringing this to fruition in 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 was made possible by the very generous offer from Elastic Digital to build the website free of charge. Upon completion, a small gift was delivered to Elastic Digital in appreciation of all their selfless work which is of such benefit to us.

*Undoubtedly a monumental OOHC/adoption milestone occurred recently with new legislation passed in parliament in March 2014. The comprehensive program of child protection reforms was led by the Family and Community Services Minister, Pru Goward, and focuses 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. Part of this reform includes ensuring adoption is being considered for young children who cannot remain or return to their family of origin. We wait in anticipation to see how this legislation will impact on practice within the field, as the legislation is to be enforced later this year.

*The Committee meetings continue to use a format of information sharing that enables the Committee members to receive in-depth presentations from either service providers or individual members. Over the past 12 months we have received presentations from Jane Eales on her personal story as an adopted person; Dept of Family and Community Services; Barnardos Find a Family; Benevolent Society (OOHC); Anglicare;

International Social Services; Salvation Army Special Search Services, CatholicCare; Post Adoption Resource Centre and Wattle Place (Relationships Australia)

*The fifth National Post Adoption Meeting was held in Perth in November 2013. This two day event provided 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 the National Apology, which occurred on 21 March 2013, and allowed for reflection on how the apology has been received within the sector. Overall, feedback from the meeting indicated that the National Apology was considered positive, powerful and relevant to practice. It was also considered timely and well worded to be inclusive and meeting the needs of those impacted by past practice.

Other aspects of the meeting included discussion regarding social media and agencies' use of social media and online forums and the problems associated when inappropriate comment or user behavior occurs. There was an interesting presentation by National Archives about the development of a travelling exhibition and website regarding adoption experience. There was also discussion lead by the WA government regarding mandates to notify a party to adoption if BDM are advised of the death of another related party.

It was a very productive and well attended meeting with approximately 50 people attending from all States and Territories across Australia. It was noted that NSW was the only state that did not send a government representative, although several NSW agencies were present. The other notable absence was from Link Up as there was no representative (even from Western Australia).

Goals and directions for 2014-15

1. The focus for 2014 will be to more widely publicise the CoA&PC website and ensure that continual updates occur regarding the necessary content.
2. Continued work on community education and raising public awareness on adoption and permanent care related issues.
3. Continue to offer and promote low cost training opportunities for both professionals and families. It is anticipated that further training will be offered in June 2014 by Gail Johnston on a topic to be confirmed shortly.
4. A further exciting training opportunity is anticipated to be scheduled in October 2014 with CoAPC endorsing on behalf of National Adoption Awareness Week a 5 day intensive workshop lead by Dr Karyn Purvis. It will include a more extensive and interactive training on Trust Based Relationship Intervention (TBRI) and will be aimed at both professionals and families. The details are yet to be finalised, however information will be available on the Committee website once confirmed.
5. 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.
6. I would also like to see representation from an Aboriginal organisation on CoA&PC.

Conclusion

Finally I would like to formally thank all Committee members for their valuable contribution, and for helping me find my feet in my role as Chairperson. I am deeply grateful to the Committee members who volunteer their time and expertise in ensuring we keep abreast of adoption and permanent care issues and contribute to legislative change and best practice within the sector.

I have learnt a lot during my first year term as Chairperson and value the strong working relationships I have formed with both professional and individual members over the past year. I look forward to further develop those bonds as I gain greater understanding and experience during the remainder of my term. I anticipate the remainder of 2014 will be another busy and productive year for the Committee as we see the implementation of new legislation regarding child protection reforms, which undoubtedly will create new practice issues for those in the field. I would like to thank all members in advance for continuing to contribute to this Committee and ensuring we always have best practice with an open, honest and ethical approach to decision making at the forefront of our minds.

Lisa Vihtonen
Chairperson
NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care
April 2014