

## Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care NSW Inc

### Annual General Meeting – 5 April 2019

Thank you COAPC for a successful year. Thanks to Kay Berry, Barnardos and Damon Martin, ISS for your work; and to Carole Lane, Family Spirit and Catherine Lynch, an individual member for your interest in supporting the management committee – we are sorry you could not stay longer! We have welcomed several new members and farewelled others. We have meet each quarter since our last AGM and have benefited from the information provided by FACS on specific projects – including the much anticipated NSW Birth certificate review. Our commitment to update and modernise our website is active but very much a work in progress! Thank you to Jenny Pickles for her insight and lead on this initiative

2018 was an enormous year by anyone's standards. The implications of the very significant changes resulting from the implementation of new NSW Government policy required each member to navigate and respond as they saw fit, while bringing that position to these meetings for robust and informed discussion.

For context, and in summary, in 2014 the **Permanent Placement Principles** were enshrined in NSW legislation, guiding the placement of at risk children safely in a permanent home. These principles place adoption ahead of long term care for children in need of long term care and protection.

In 2017 the **Permanency Support Program** Reforms commenced. These reforms resulted in clear contract funding for the case work required to achieve preservation of children in their family, restoration after short term foster care or foster care, adoption and guardianship orders for children in the child protection system. The Productivity Commission report from January 2019 shows entries to care in NSW have dropped from 2.3 per 1,000 children in 2015-16 to 1.2 per 1,000 in 2017-18. We know there is no significant change to funding for post adoption services.

In late 2017 the NSW Government sought feedback from on proposed legislative amendments resulting in the *Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act Amendment* being enacted in February 2019.

In 2015 the NSW Government also provided funding for the creation of the **Institute of Open Adoption Studies** at University of Sydney in collaboration with Barnados. They focus on researching the impact of adoption on children in OOHC in Australia providing contemporary data on local experiences, a valuable contribution given much research is from studies undertaken in USA, UK or elsewhere. There are still many gaps in our knowledge.

The COAPC commitment to disseminating research was evident in the training organised by the training subcommittee. Thank you to Brooke Bengtson from PARC for her leadership. It was a packed house to hear Loretta Pederson's Narrative Therapy approach to grief and trauma.

For COAPC, 2018 commenced with a discussion that acknowledged the diversity of the members of the committee. Although our opinions on the best way to achieve stability and security for children differed we agreed unanimously on the need for support for children, their birth and adoptive families to be available at the time of their choosing and need. As I've said already, this support takes many forms and is informed by many and diverse experiences and ongoing research.

The Committee has represented these diverse and broad experiences well over the last twelve months. Financial contributions have been made to the establishment of a new Adoptee Rights organisation and towards the Australasian Post Adoption Meeting held in 2018. The professional members of the committee have also agreed to host this professional forum in 2019. This will require a significant investment of time and resources from across the Government and Non Government sector.

With thanks to our members, the Institute of Open Adoption Studies and Adopt Change, we have been able to hear firsthand the research being undertaken in the current Australian context. At the suggestion of the committee, the executive has agreed to contribute to the 'Meanings of Permanency' Study being undertaken by IOAS in 2019. In the event we IOAS are successful in securing the host rights for the ICAR Conference in 2022 COAPC have been invited to participate in the advisory committee.

Our commitment to contributing to broader policy context was evident in the exceptional work of COAPC's legislative subcommittee, led ably and willingly by Jodie Mollison from The Benevolent Society. COAPC contributed to the Federal House of Representatives Inquiry into a Nationally consistent framework for adoption and to the ACT Government's discussion paper on dispensing with consent in that jurisdiction.

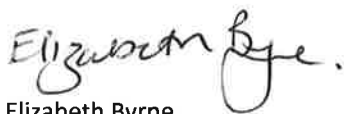
The Inquiry into a Nationally Consistent Framework for Adoption report released in November 2018 recommended that adoption be considered as a viable stable and permanent option for children who have experienced significant abuse and neglect and for whom restoration is not viable. The implementation of these recommendations is likely dependent on the winner of the next federal election!

The Federal Government also impacted the work of our members and the sector through cuts to funding for ISS's Intercountry Adoption Tracing Service. The withdrawal of this funding has resulted in the sector losing a valuable and significant way of supporting people post adoption.

The media has been used extensively by all interest groups. We have seen pieces advocating for practice that is informed by attachment and the need for children to remain in stable and permanent homes; we have seen personal experiences of adults reversing adoption and intercountry adoptees searching for family; we have seen the protests from Aboriginal and other groups against NSW legislative amendments that were enacted in February. This is the public context within which each of us provides support to our client groups – we are all passionate about our work and about making positive change.

This means different things for each of us, the value of this committee is the opportunity to share research, professional learning and personal experience to ensure current practice is always informed by the past, particularly through Forced Adoption, the Stolen Generations and the Forgotten Australians - as children and now as adults - to ensure the best possible outcome for EACH INDIVIDUAL in what is a profound personal experience.

I am passionate about the impotence of this committee. This is a unique forum for many stakeholders to engage in meaningful discussion and information sharing about policy and research. I encourage everyone to prioritise and these quarterly opportunities to shape practice. Along with other issues that will emerge, such as the proposed review of the Adoption Act and advocating for the rights of donor conceived people, work towards our shared commitment to advocate for improved post adoption support must be ongoing.



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