

## Chair Report – COAPC AGM 5 March 2021

It is lovely to be meeting with you all today for the 2021 AGM of the NSW Committee of Adoption and Permanent Care Inc. There have been many changes, challenges and opportunities over the last twelve months.

The last twelve months are best described by one word – Covid – a global pandemic that has required agile responses from each of us and the organisations we represent. As practitioners in the field of adoption and foster care and people who are affected by adoption – we are acutely aware of the social and health impacts of governments many Covid responses. At best it required us to develop ways to connect with our clients in a meaningful way in a virtual environment, at worst it may have exacerbated the stress and suffering of people seeking to connect, or even search for, their families.

The impact of responding to the crisis and remote working distracted COAPC momentarily from our core function of advocating for improvements to the adoption and permanent care experiences of children and their families -but it did not stop us altogether!

The previous twelve months have seen us offer training to committee members on virtual casework. Sincere thanks to Jodie Mollison and the Benevolent Society for agreeing to share your excellent 'virtual casework' resources. We also offered an excellent seminar on the impacts of recent NSW Supreme Court and Court of Appeal judgements relating to the Aboriginal children and the Adoption Act. Our thanks to the NSW Crown Solicitors Office for their thorough summary and helpful family research tips. Sincere thanks to the training sub committee for supporting these sessions and for continuing to extend the learning of the sector – the plans for culturally sensitive Adoption casework practice with Aboriginal communities and increasing sector understanding of the importance of attachment are sound focuses for the coming year.

These two training sessions have been included in a COAPC drop box so the information and resources are available to others in the sector who missed them first time round. The Social Media sub committee has also been focused on improving our online presence and are seeking ways to improve the website and other social media profiles, there is exciting opportunity for the committee to continue this focus in 2022.

The legislative subcommittee respond to DSS scoping for intercountry adoption family support about 12 months ago.

Today is my last meeting as Chair of the COAPC committee. I value the professional relationships I have developed and the opportunities for collaboration.

I am grateful for the dedication of the other executive committee members, special mention to Damon Martin who is passing the ISS representative role over to colleagues. He has been involved in this committee for over 13 years – I think he has held every role! His knowledge, motivation and sense of humour will be keenly missed. Thank you to Betty Luu who keeps us exceptionally well organised as Secretary, to Jacinda Wing for her attention to detail with our finances, Renee Carter for her experience in management and boards has been invaluable and to Kay Berry for hosting and catering our meeting in her role as ‘ordinary member’ – nothing much ordinary about her! I am grateful for the time you have given to these voluntary roles.

This is my final year as Chair, my three years in the role have been ones of profound change in the sector – the rollout of the NSW Government’s Permanency Support Program fundamentally changed the permanency pathways for children in OOHC – we have seen the number of children adopted from care increase and I anticipate this trend will continue for the foreseeable future. The legislative amendments and outcomes such as accreditation of LWB and Key Assets demonstrates there is increasing expectation that children in foster care are to be soundly supported towards adoption to enjoy the psychological, physical and legal permanence of a permanent family. While the numbers of children adopted through the local voluntary programs run by a small number of agencies has remained steady over the last few years, the needs of these children are complex.

Regardless of the adoption pathway of children and adults who have been adopted, both in NSW or intercountry, their needs continue post adoption and an ongoing challenge for all levels of government is to ensure the right therapeutic, trauma informed services are adequately funded and accessible across a person’s life span. This committee has a significant opportunity to be the collective voice of the non-government sector and to strongly advocate for improved search and support services for children, young people, adult adoptees and their parents. I urge you to maintain momentum.

COAPC is a unique forum where professionals from all aspects of adoption work can seek the wisdom of those with lived experience. The adoption practice today is vastly different from the forced adoption, stolen generation or forgotten Australians experiences but their voice is important and informs our professional practice. I am grateful to the individual members of the COAPC committee, the insights you bring to our meetings improves professional practice. Special thanks to Jenny Pickles who continually seeks to improve the diversity of the committee membership.

I am passionate about work with children and their families, I value the voice of the child (and those who have been children) and I respect the diverse opinions of those affected by and working in the adoption space. This committee allows for the respectful exchange of ideas, valuable training and the opportunity to advocate for change – whatever that might be! It has been wonderful to be part of what is possible. I wish the committee every success in 2022.

*Elizabeth Byrne*