

Welcome to the Spring edition of Branching Out.

I hope you are all enjoying the warmer weather. The last couple of months have been very busy at PARC so there has been no time to even notice that Spring is here. However, it has also been a very exciting time. Queensland's adoption laws have changed and the Adoption Act 2009 was passed in Parliament on 18 August 2009. The changes bring Queensland's practices in line with other states and will take effect early next year.

The Queensland government has also committed to establishing a post adoption support service and The Benevolent Society has been selected to run this service which will be up and running in the next few months.

This is wonderful news for our Queensland clients and we look forward to a great relationship with our Queensland office.

Continued on page 2



Pictured right:

On 1st August 2009 at the launch of the Queensland Post Adoption Resource Centre, Michael Tizard (left), Benevolent Society State Manager QLD, accepts a cheque from Phil Reeves, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport Qld.

Contents

PAGE 1 — EDITORIAL
PAGE 3 — APOLOGY ALLIANCE OF AUSTRALIA: A BRIEF HISTORY
PAGE 6 — GAVIN MY SON— A POEM
PAGE 7 — ANNETTE'S STORY

Editorial continued

The second exciting event has been that the Apology Alliance of Australia has received an apology to mothers and their families from the Royal Brisbane and Women's hospital for their past practice which has led to further apologies. Please see the article by Barbara Mason to learn more about the Apology Alliance and their achievements. Please also see a link to tell your story to Linda Burney.

We have also included a poem by Lyn Wilkinson and a personal story by Annette as we focus on birth mothers in this issue of the newsletter. As with all newsletters, contributors may have a differing opinion to that of the Post Adoption Resource Centre.

Finally, Lareena Brown and I attended a national post adoption meeting in Adelaide from 15-17 September. Fifty post adoption workers from all over Australia met for the first time to talk about current practice issues and the best way to address the sensitive nature of our work and the ethics involved. There was recognition that each adoption that took place had an impact on many people and on many different layers which we need to take into account. We also discussed adoption issues that have been in the media lately. We have noticed a trend in viewing reunion of family members as a destination to be achieved and not the beginning of a new relationship which needs time and effort to develop. We agreed that this portrayal leads to unrealistic expectations for our clients as well as a sense of shame if they did not achieve the same success.

Sadly, Jackie Mullins, our admin officer is leaving our office to work full time in another position in The Benevolent Society. We will really miss her but wish her well in her new career.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Branching Out

Guest editor

Janet Henegan

Apology Alliance of Australia: a brief history

How the Alliance was born

The loss of a baby to adoption is an horrendous pain, and in the past a cruel, hidden agony, as it was rarely acknowledged or recognised that these mothers suffered. Her loss was hidden behind a veil of deceit and secrecy that was 'closed adoption'. The propaganda promulgated by state welfare and child adoption agencies was the lie that these children were 'unwanted'. Mothers were made to feel that having their child forcibly taken was punishment meted out because they gave birth outside marriage. These mothers were not informed of the available financial benefits that would have assisted them to keep their children, nor any of the alternatives to adoption, such as foster care or access to long day-care centres for their children if they had to work. Being young and naive the legality of what was being done was never questioned, it was only years later mothers as a group uncovered the truth. At the time they were told, by unfeeling adoption workers, to forget about their babies, go home and get on with their lives.

From some ground-breaking efforts by a few courageous mothers and adoptees in the '70s and '80s came both a validation of their claims of pain and grief by the efforts of innovative researchers, who uncovered the deceit and immoral practices of those who purported to be assisting the mothers in their time of need, as well as slow changes in various state laws to allow separated families to access information about one another.

Many support groups formed, which, besides supporting the emotional needs of members, lobbied for recognition of their pain and trauma of the loss of family, asking the governments – State and Federal – for inquiries into the past immoral and unlawful practices of the adoption industry.

Two states – NSW and Tasmania - have had inquiries but apart from those involved, little or no public recognition has developed and although the NSW Inquiry recommended that an apology be given by those persons responsible for causing harm to mothers, no apology has been forthcoming up until now.

It was apparent as separate entities the support groups were not achieving recognition and realisation by the general public, and more importantly the family members who were separated by adoption, of the crimes perpetrated against them.

Two events were catalysts for the formation of the Apology Alliance. One was the apology given to the Stolen Indigenous Generations the other was the upcoming launch of an anthology of mothers' stories funded by the Department of Community Service: 'Releasing the Past: Mothers' Stories of their Stolen Babies', edited by Christine Cole, researcher and author. Cole was aware that the Indigenous community had worked tirelessly and effectively as a cohesive group, as had the Forgotten Australians and the British Migrant group. Cole's intention therefore was to unite the groups in a common quest: to elicit acknowledgement of past human and civil rights abuse and gain a Federal apology.

Consequently, the Alliance was formed so 'Natural Parents could have a National Voice'. Broadly the Alliance serves all the groups – both support groups and professional organisations - by keeping them connected and informed of relevant issues. When there is an important issue that all groups wish to support, the Alliance co-ordinates it and writes letters, or puts together a submission on behalf of the members. For instance, the Alliance co-ordinated with all support groups and post adoption centres to send a submission to the Queensland government to overturn the veto system in Queensland so adoptees could gain access to information about their families – thankfully the Bligh Labour government has acknowledged the need for adoptees to know their biological ancestry and adoptees can now access that information.

In October 2008 an email was sent to more than 100 politicians and a letter posted to the Prime Minister with a copy of the Mothers' book stating the reasons why we needed an apology and its importance in assisting us in our healing process. It was endorsed by all member groups of the Alliance.

The Alliance was further galvanised by the promotion of intercountry adoption and the stated intention of a media personality, Debora-lee Furness, to overhaul adoption laws both domestically and intercountry. A panel was formed to advise the government on matters pertaining to overseas adoption. It consisted of adoptive parents and two intercountry adoptees. The Alliance lobbied to have a natural family representative but though not successful it still informs the government on relevant issues concerning intercountry adoptions from the natural families' perspective.

Apology Alliance of Australia: a brief history

During November 2008 there was strong media coverage during “National Adoption Awareness Week” given to the Deborra-lee Furness campaign to promote overseas adoption and make Australia - which she accused of being anti-adoption, - pro-adoption.

Members of the Alliance believed that a realistic picture of the pain and loss inherent in adoption was not getting any media attention. Consequently, Janice Kashin, an Alliance member, decided she would place a ‘Declaration of Profound Loss’ in *The Australian*. The Apology Alliance contacted all its member groups and post adoption resource centres and all agreed to support Janice’s initiative.

The following appeared in *The Australian* November 21, 2008, with a list of all the Alliance member groups:

DECLARATION OF PROFOUND LOSS

We the undersigned:

**MOURN the loss of our children
TAKEN FOR ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our families of origin
DENIED US BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our brothers and sisters
CAUSED BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of grandparents
DENIED US BY ADOPTION**

**MOURN the loss of our rightful position in life
DECREED BY ADOPTION**

APOLOGY ALLIANCE ACHIEVEMENTS to date:

- Verbal (broadcast on Channel 7) and written apology delivered to ALAS by Professor Ian Jones in June 2009 on behalf of the Royal Brisbane Women’s Hospital for the suffering caused to unmarried mothers by past practices.
- To capitalise on our media attention because of RBWH’s apology, the Alliance connected members with media, leading to mothers speaking out twice publicly, on Channel 7 News in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.
- This led to the Hornsby Hospital, in June, 2009 issuing a public apology on Channel 7 news, to all mothers mistreated and forcibly separated from their children at their institution.
- Subsequently the West Australian Deputy Premier, Dr Kim Haines, stated publicly that his government intended to apologise to all mothers and children forcibly separated in his state. He has personally apologised to the author of this article and to another Alliance member in September, on behalf of the State Government of Western Australia.
- Representatives of a W.A. Catholic institution are formally meeting with members of the Apology Alliance to negotiate an apology from their institution
- Three representatives of the Apology Alliance met with the NSW Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney formally requesting an apology from the NSW Premier.
- Co-ordinated teleconference on 10 September 2009 between representatives of various member groups and representatives of the Hon Jenny Macklin’s office (Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) “to discuss how the Commonwealth can assist with the healing process ... so we can chart a path forward with the dialogue we are so keen to have”
- As a result of the input from the teleconference, the apology is ‘on the table’ but it was stated that more input from all members of the Apology Alliance members is needed. The Federal government wants to hear from all family members impacted by past practices on how an apology would assist them in their healing process.

I personally hope that those who believe that an apology will assist them with their healing process will contact Jenny Macklin’s office and let her representatives know how important it is to you.

Extract of an article by:

Barbara Maison
September 23rd 2009

Apology Alliance of Australia: a brief history continued

To contact **The Hon Jenny Macklin, Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs:**

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/member.asp?id=PG6>

To contact **Linda Burney, NSW Minister for Community Services:**

linda.burney@parliament.nsw.gov.au

To contact the **Apology Alliance:**

c.cole@uws.edu.au



Members of the ALAS group: (far left) resident ALAS artist: Jan Kashin; (2nd from left) President of ALAS, Trish Large; Margaret Hamilton (next to the Professor) and (far right) Professor Ian Jones presenting the apology on behalf of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

Gavin — My son

a poem by Lyn Wilkinson

It was 21 years ago today
When you were a tiny ray
Born of love, joy and sunshine
"Gavin" was this son of mine

My heart did break
As I lay awake
The only choice I had, was of adoption
For your grandmother gives me no option!!

You see, your father deserted me
'Tis one thing he never wanted to be!
He now has a lot to answer for
From the day HE chose to ignore
Knowledge of his first born son
Which is one thing I could never have done

There was no shelter, no one to care
So a 'Home for Girls' I had to share
I felt the pain and rejection
My OWN family gave me no direction!
I knew the guilt but there was no shame
Except for the son I could not claim!

YOU were the love – of my life
I could protect YOU from the strife!
Through my love for you

I KNEW what I had to do
The only choice which I had to voice
Was to pray to God above
Your "new" parents could have the same love!

As I held your tiny hand in mine
I HAD to believe you would be fine
I guess until the day you die
You will always wonder why!!
But it wasn't easy to give you away
What a terrible price I had to pay
So be assured, I shall always remember
Tuesday, the second of November

And today, when you become of age
I had hoped to find you at some stage
But if God decides, that time isn't right
I must believe with all my might
That sometime there will come the day
When I can stand before you and say

"Son of mine – heart of my heart"
"I never wanted us to part"
"I hope one day, you can forgive"
For you will never know
The nightmare I live
Always looking, always despairing
Forever wondering, FOREVER caring!!
Because it's MY life
You are not SHARING!!!

ANNETTE'S STORY

My story starts 47 years ago when I gave birth to a little boy. Unfortunately I had to adopt him out without ever having the chance to see him or even hold him. For all those years he was never out of my thoughts. I had three other children but I never had the nerve to tell them about John until just over two years ago. They were very surprised to say the least but also very supportive when I said I needed to find him.

I went through all the channels and after a few months, "BINGO" , I knew where he was living .Unsure of what to do next I contacted the Benevolent Society to use as an intermediary. Lizzie was my contact there. Thank you Lizzie for all your help and understanding.

Within a week of receiving Lizzie's letter , John responded and a meeting was organised for him to meet Lizzie. During that meeting he asked if he could call me. They rang and for the first time in his life I heard his voice .We spoke for 3/4 hour , then he called again the next night .He wanted to come up to meet me .WOW!!!! I arranged for his brother and sister and her daughter to come for the day too. What a wonderful day that was . We were all very nervous and excited . My granddaughter thought it was great having another uncle. He spent a few days here and had quality time with each of us individually.

I will be seeing him again in a fortnight when I am down staying with my brotherhe lives about 10 minutes away from John. We will be having a get - to -gether giving him the opportunity to meet his extended family. Early December we have a family Christmas party involving about 40 relatives and John will be coming to that to met the rest of the crew.

It has been a very successful reunion. At last I am a complete person.

Thank you to Lyn and Annette for telling their stories.

If you would like to contribute to Branching Out, please send your article, poem, book review or story to:

parc@bensoc.org.au

or

contact us on:

02 9365 3444