

VANISH news bulletin

APRIL 2013

Dear members, friends and colleagues

National Apology

It has been an amazing first quarter of 2013 as we have each experienced in different ways the challenges and the healing flowing from the National Apology on 21 March 2013, the viewings held in Melbourne and Tasmania and the numerous small group, family and solitary occasions across the nation. I trust that each of you has found in this acknowledgement some small solace as the public community's understanding of the pain and trauma of adoption deepens. VANISH has endeavoured to keep our website full of information related to the Apology and we trust you are able to read it and have perhaps obtained a copy of the commemorative DVD.

State Apology

- This year VANISH will be working on the Victorian State Government commitments announced by Minister Wooldridge after the Apology on 26 October 2013
 - “ The Government also announced a number of measures to better respond to the needs of those affected by past adoption practices. These include:
- an amendment to the *Adoption Act 1984* which will allow birth parents to receive identifying information about their adopted adult sons and daughters. In line with other Australian jurisdictions, this will be accompanied by the introduction of a contact statement which will allow adopted persons to regulate contact if desired;
- enhanced support for access to specialised counselling and support, including in both rural and metropolitan areas of Victoria. This will include a new professional development program for qualified counsellors to build specialist competencies in post-adoption psychotherapy;
- removal of fees, effective immediately, to enable free access to personal and family information through the Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND) service for people affected by past adoptions; and
- support for the development of an integrated birth certificate in conjunction with national reforms relating to documentation and provision of birth and adoption records.”

Advocacy on Adoption Bill amendments

UPDATE 18 APRIL 2013:

Many thanks to the small group of people who were able to attend Parliament. We had representation from VANISH, ARMS, Origins, Independent Country Women and adopted people and were able to talk with several very supportive Labor MPs including Danielle Green, Christine Campbell and Jacinta Allen as well as Premier Napthine and Minister Wooldridge and advisers.

Unfortunately the Adoption Amendment Bill went through unamended by virtue of the Speaker's casting vote. Geoff Shaw voted for the amendments. Several Liberal members privately expressed their support for the amendments but voted on party lines.

We will continue to keep pressure on during the Bill's progress through the Legislative Assembly and continue with media.

Minister Wooldridge is adamant in her stand but has agreed to consult with the above groups on Guidelines related to "Contact Orders."

MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT – 'Improved counselling for Victorians affected by forced adoption' (see Media release below).

Minister Wooldridge has announced that VANISH will receive \$500,000 funding over two years to deliver access to enhanced services for persons affected by past adoption practices. This is very exciting news for VANISH as we have long advocated for funding to raise community awareness and develop professional skills related to the impact of the loss to adoption (including forced, abducted and relinquished) on the life journeys of mothers, fathers, adopted people and their families affected by adoption.

- The Project is described in the Government Brief as follows:

The Forced Adoption Practices Workforce Development and Capacity Building Initiative

Purpose

To provide a proposal for the establishment and delivery of a package of initiatives that will increase responsiveness to forced adoption issues in Victoria over the next two years.

To develop and implement a package of inter-related initiatives to increase service capacity and capability to identify and respond to forced adoption issues in Victoria.

Project Objectives

- 1. To build and sustain specialist competencies in adoption related issues in an identified and qualified counselling workforce to provide professional one-to-one and group support/counselling/therapeutic interventions to mothers, fathers, families and adopted people affected by past forced adoption policies and practices.*
- 2. To build and sustain the capacity and capability of a range of relevant professionals across sectors and settings to be able to identify where forced adoption underpins a presenting concern and facilitate a referral to a specialist service*
- 3. To increase the availability of adoption specific support services, including both professional and peer support service types*

VANISH will shortly be convening a Reference Group to guide the new Project and an expert panel of our colleagues and professionals to inform this Project. We will consult with mothers, fathers, adopted people, colleagues, friends and members throughout the 2 year life of the Project.

VANISH - ongoing work

Searching

VANISH has just completed a search guide and we are in the process of sending it out to those people who are currently on our database; it is also available on our website.

Support Groups

Our Support Groups are continuing as usual this year and under the new Project we look forward to extending our reach into regional and rural areas. If you have an interest in being part of regional support groups do not hesitate to contact us: manager@vanish.org.au

New VANISH address

Remember we are now at 50 Howard Street, North Melbourne and if you are able to call and visit we would welcome that – give Diane a ring first on 9328 8611 to ensure we have the time to show you around and listen to your feedback on our work.

Feedback

..... to 'John' who sent us a big bunch of glorious flowers - thank you – a lovely thought and a warm welcome to the next year. We love to know when our work is helpful and also when we can do better so do stay in touch.

Many thanks to all members who donated most generously to our 2012 Xmas Appeal

VANISH has received a constant stream of emails, cards and phone calls from those who attended the National Apology and Melbourne and Tasmanian viewings expressing their 'thanks'. We had close to 100 people at the Melbourne venue, 20 at the Hobart venue and we provided financial assistance to almost 70 people through the Attorney-General's funding to attend in Canberra. Thanks to the staff, members, volunteers and colleagues for all their work.

2013 Staff

Coleen Clare

Manager

Diane Jacobson

Administrative Officer

Liz Tomlinson, Mary Rawson

Mary Peckett Andrea Parascandalo

Search and Support Workers

NEW STAFFING OPPORTUNITIES

VANISH is currently advertising for a training co-ordinator to develop and deliver our new professional training, a part time counsellor, a part time support group coordinator and a part time administrative officer for the Project .

Please contact VANISH ASAP if you are interested in any of these positions which ARE NOW advertised on 'SEEK'.

The future is bright as we move towards providing new and improved services for the adoption community. I look forward to your visits and your feedback at any time.

Warm regards

Coleen Clare

Manager, VANISH

0411 696 602

11 April 2013 - MEDIA release from The Hon Mary Wooldridge MP

Improved counselling for Victorians affected by forced adoption

Persons affected by past adoption practices will have access to enhanced services as a result of \$500,000 in funding from the Victorian Government, announced today by Community Services Minister Mary Wooldridge.

On 25 October 2012, the Victorian Parliament formally apologised for past adoption practices. In conjunction with the Apology the Government announced a number of measures to better respond to the needs of those affected by forced adoption. One of these measures was enhanced support for access to specialised counselling and support, including in both rural and metropolitan areas of Victoria.

"We know that for many affected individuals, treatment and support from specifically trained counsellors can help them understand and better manage the complex trauma, symptoms, and reactions they feel," Ms Wooldridge said.

The counselling initiative announced today includes delivery of the following over the next two years:

- The development and delivery of a competency-based training package to build specialist skills for existing (metropolitan and rural/regional) counsellors to better respond to forced adoption issues.
- Management of a panel of qualified counsellors that are appropriately trained and willing to accept referrals to provide forced adoption counselling.
- Development of a website for counsellors (and other professionals) to access related support materials.
- A dedicated full-time specialist counsellor to deliver both counselling services and a secondary consultation service for other counsellors.
- Facilitation of support groups for the adoption community across Victoria

VANISH, a community-based organisation that provides support services for people affected by adoption, has been selected to deliver this workforce development and capacity building package, across Victoria. VANISH will use a combination of in-house and external resources.

“The Victorian Government acknowledged last October, the ongoing trauma and pain many people affected by forced adoptions deal with on a daily basis. While what was done cannot now be undone, practical measures such as this counselling package are intended to improve the support available in the community.

The Government has also removed fees for persons seeking access to personal and family information through the Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND) service and introduced into Parliament legislation which will allow mothers affected by forced adoption the right access to identifying information about their sons and daughters.

Media contact: Michael Moore 0400 719 355 michael.moore@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Lightly Centered Nurture Retreats presents a Unique Weekend

“Your Voice” Retreat for **WOMEN ADOPTEES**

****Please note Date Change
Due to Mothers Day oversight.....****

Fri May 31st – Sun June 2nd
at Mackaloucoo Retreat..... Cowes, Vic

≈

- ≈ Connect, share & grow with other adoptee women
 - ≈ Enhance Self-Nurturing Skills
 - ≈ BYO A Special Journal for writing and drawing
- ≈ Free time to Relax with indulgent facilities including.....swim spa, gym, fishing, walks priv. spa and **optional Indian Head Massage \$40**
- ≈ \$495 per person with \$100 deposit to secure place.

Intimate Group size with places going quickly

Email to abjen@ozemail.com.au

Phone Jen (adoptee) on 0413423145



VALE ROSE COOPER (originally Lawson) 14/07/1952 - 4/04/2013

In loving tribute and honour of Rosemary Rae Cooper, who was born Rae Lawson on 14 July 1952 and passed on 4 April 2013.

An adoptee herself, Rose Cooper was instrumental in the battle to give rights to adoptees and relinquishing parents. She was an active member of Jigsaw (Victoria) in the seventies and eighties leading to the change in the Victorian legislation and then became a member of VANISH. She was also a qualified grief counsellor specialising in adoption related grief.



In 2011 she completed a Master of Health Sciences at La Trobe University, her thesis was titled "EMBODYING ADOPTION How Adopted Midlife Adults Grieve Biological and Social Parents". She then established and ran the blog <http://EmbodyingAdoption.com/> which is a valuable read, but no longer accepts further entries since her passing.

Rose was an extraordinary woman and a resolute networker. Throughout her life, she acquired and retained friends from primary school, secondary school, the church, every place she ever worked, every institution in which she studied and, every organisation in which she volunteered. To each she was that loyal friend who was always available with wise counsel in times of trouble or distress. She was strong, independent, clever and forthright.

All who knew Rose are feeling a deep sense of loss and grief; but at the same time we are grateful for having been recipients of Rose's exceptional friendship.

A Facebook page called "In Memoriam - Rose Cooper" has been established at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/In-Memoriam-Rose-Cooper/511692018891454?fref=ts> and I urge those who benefitted from knowing her to post comments on how they valued her friendship and commitment to others.

Lesley-Anne Sleep

Jan Owen AM – new Patron for VANISH

The VANISH Committee of Management is proud to announce that Jan Owen, the CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians has agreed to be a Patron of VANISH. Jan understands the adoption experience and is deeply committed to the wellbeing of members of the adoption and post donor-conception communities. Jan is a pioneer of the youth sector in Australia. She is a highly regarded social entrepreneur, innovator and child and youth advocate. From 2002 – 2010, Jan was Executive Director of Social Ventures Australia, a leader in social investment in Australia. Prior to this Jan founded the CREATE Foundation and was inaugural CEO for nine years.

Jan is the only non-US citizen to receive a fellowship for leadership and innovation from the Peter Drucker Foundation, USA. In 2000 she was awarded membership of the Order of Australia for services to children and young people. Jan serves on the Boards of NAB Schools First, the School for Social Entrepreneurs, Inspire Foundation, Enterprise Melbourne, and the International Women's Development Agency.

In future News Bulletins, we look forward to hearing from Jan and welcoming her at some of our events.

Vale NARELLE GRACE GRECH

Our beautiful friend Narelle (Rel) Grech's life ended peacefully on Tuesday March 26, 2013, at Royal Melbourne Hospital. She was 30 years old.

Rel was an inspiration.

When she was 15, Rel learned that she was donor conceived at Prince Henry's Hospital in Melbourne. For the rest of life she fought to establish the identity of her donor father and for the rights of others in a similar position to her.

Rel obtained a social work degree at RMIT; graduating in 2007. Her first position was in foster care with MacKillop Family Services, Melbourne. She then she worked in London as a social worker in foster care agencies.

Rel loved the arts; she sang, wrote music and poetry from an early age. She certainly loved life! Rel had a magnetic personality; a beautiful open face, a gorgeous smile, twinkling eyes and the most infectious laugh imaginable.

Rel was a passionate member of Tangledwebs Inc. a voice of advocacy for donor conceived persons. Standing on the steps of Parliament House, with other members of Tangledwebs, Rel held a sign that read: "My history? It's a mystery!" She designed badges reading: "Donor Conception; Genetic Deception". Her emails contained the footer: "If we don't stand up for children; we don't stand for much".

She returned home to Melbourne in 2011, somewhat reluctantly, but it was time to reconnect with her Aussie family and friends. Within a few months she became unwell. Stage 4 cancer was diagnosed; a devastating revelation for Rel and those who loved her. Although deeply shaken, she embarked on challenging medical treatments with characteristic dignity and courage. Rel was a great believer in alternative forms of healing; she had always embraced eastern philosophies and beliefs and was able to incorporate these into her treatment regime.

For the two years that followed the diagnosis she was unable to work but fought to continue to live independently. Her family (and close friend Danielle), gave her unconditional support and strength to continue to live her life in the best way possible. Rel was deeply appreciative of their love and support.

Rel had come to believe, but not to accept, that she would never know the identity of her donor father. It was a source of grief that she bore with stoicism. However, she never ceased to lobby and seek justice for herself and other donor conceived persons who live with this loss.

Five weeks prior to her death, she was informed that Victoria's then Premier Ted Baillieu, hearing of her plight, had instructed the Public Records Office to unseal the document which recorded the name of her donor father. It transpired that he was still alive and lived in rural Victoria. He, Ray, was delighted to meet his unknown daughter for the first time, without initially being aware of her perilous state of health.

Their meeting and the short time which followed were euphoric, shining hours for both Rel and Ray, who miraculously found they were soul mates. They shared similar attitudes and interests. For each of them it was a precious, life-changing few weeks in their lifetimes. Rel was able to confirm that she had a "whole" Maltese birth heritage; a significant and enriching aspect of her identity.

Throughout her life and illness, Rel was given the utmost love and support from her family. Her Mum (Grace), Dad (Joe), sister (Michelle) and brother in law (Roberto) cherished her dearly and all of them shared her joy in meeting her "other" father.

Rel was delighted to meet her paternal brother Zac. They shared some special moments together in the short time available. Rel has three unknown paternal siblings (also donor conceived) who will never meet their sister. Perhaps one day in the future her family and friends might meet them and be able to share with them treasured memories of this wonderful young woman.

Rel will NEVER be forgotten by all those who loved her.

"THE CANDLE THAT BURNS TWICE AS BRIGHT BURNS HALF AS LONG"

From members of Tangledwebs Inc.

Day of reflection on your experiences of adoption



Sunday May 26th 2013

9:30 for 10: 00 am start and finish at 5:00 pm

Come and spend the day on the Mornington Peninsula and reflect on your experience with adoption:

- consider the patterns within your family that have been impacted by this experience
- reflect on the triggers that result in discomfort
- recognize your coping mechanisms, share and develop new ones

Morning and afternoon teas provided. Please bring lunch to share.

Cost: \$150

Your day will be facilitated by Kim Isaacs, who was a past worker at VANISH Inc. Kim shares an experience of adoption herself and has been working with her story across her life cycle, recognizing and reflecting on when the challenges of adoption reappear and how to meet them with grace and mindfulness. You will be invited to work with a variety of materials to aid your reflective process. Some of these may be clay, sand, paint, music...

Feel free to call Kim on **0431 989 048** to chat further about this workshop

**Commemorative DVDs and badges from the Victorian
Forced Adoptions Apology are available at VANISH.**

**If you would like both or either, please let us know when you can
come in to pick them up.**

Change of details – changes to your membership details can be emailed to info@vanish.org.au with subject as Membership

EMAILS: if you are receiving your news bulletins and VOICE by post and would like to change to email please let us know through info@vanish.org.au

*I wrote this on the National
Apology day from the perspective
of a birth mother, it is dedicated to
all mothers.*

Ripped Away

A teenage girl pregnant and alone
Different times different people
Different Opinions and attitudes
We're very much skewed

The shame of a pregnancy
At such a tender age
Societies projection
Biased rejection

So much pressure
Having to bear
A young teenage girl
In complete despair

With no support
From family or friends
A corrupt system
Oh let's not pretend

Her baby was taken
Her love her family
Ripped away without
any humanity

(Chorus)
I want my baby
I need my baby
I love my baby
PLEASE Don't take my baby away
PLEASE Don't take my baby away

A life then lived out
with an emptiness and pain
A tragic injustice
that will never be regained

Not knowing where
their life & blood may be
Growing up amongst others
For her never to see

No birthdays no smiles
No caresses no hugs
A bond of mother and child
Taken away by thugs

(Chorus)
I want my baby
I need my baby
I love my baby
PLEASE Don't take my baby away
PLEASE Don't take my baby away

Years having passed the pain still
remains And never to be forgotten
As the bond still remains

Some have united
and healed the pain
Some never found
their loved one again

Here's to the mothers
The children been taken
Never again must we allow them
forsaken

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