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PRESS RELEASE

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World first for Victoria – increased opportunity for donor conceived people to find their ‘donor’ fathers.

VANISH a network for information and self-help has provided services in Victoria for 25 years on behalf of people separated from family, mothers, fathers and adopted people. As well VANISH undertakes searches for family for people who have been in institutional care (Forgotten Australians) and supports those who have experienced intercountry adoption and people affected by donor conception, donors, donor conceived people and parents.

Legislation passed recently by the Victorian Parliament and which will come into effect in June 2015, will enable people born from procedures using sperm or eggs donated before the end of 1997 to find out identifying information about the donor with the donor's consent. Previously, the only means for people born from sperm or eggs donated before 1989 was potential access to information about their donors via a voluntary registry.

Victoria was the first jurisdiction in Australia to recognise the importance of access to donor information by donor conceived people. The latest amendment to the Assisted Reproductive Bill 2013 moves one step closer to allowing all donor conceived people equal rights to access to information about their genetic heritage.

An important measure contained in the legislation is the protection and preservation of records of donor IVF programs. Coleen Clare, Manager of VANISH said the “Protection of these records will be critical to the ability of donor conceived people to obtain information in the future, about their genetic heritage. In practice this will be similar to the changes that occurred in 1984 when adopted people were able to search for their mothers and fathers.

Ross Hunter, a donor conceived person and a member of the VANISH Committee of Management, said “I hope that now pre-88 donors will be aware of the positive role that they played in helping a generation of infertile men in becoming parents - many of them very nurturing and loving parents. For this they should be contented, not apprehensive. I also hope that they will understand the important need of their perhaps unintended and unexpected offspring to have some clues to their biological, ethnic and medical heritage. In many cases, I hope it will lead to more than this cold, transactional, yet highly significant exchange. Donor conceived people are not looking for fathers. They do though seek gradual, careful and authentic contact with someone with whom they are likely to share more than a physical resemblance. It is exciting, uncharted territory which many may be interested to explore.”

Ian Smith, a member of the VANISH Committee of Management and a pre-1988 sperm donor said “I welcome these changes. There has been a difficult balance to be achieved between the human rights of donor conceived people who wish to know of their genetic origins and donors, such as me, who participated in donor programs anonymously. I think the right balance has been achieved here – with strong support measures including counselling services.

VANISH recognises the importance of the work of the Parliamentary Law Reform Committee, and in particular the Chair of that Committee Clem Newton-Brown, for their significant work in achieving this ground-breaking change in legislation..

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Donor conceived person, VANISH Committee

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