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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### VICTORIA'S POST ADOPTION SERVICE TURNS 25– WHERE TO FOR ADOPTION NOW?

**Those people who have suffered separation from a child and the loss of a child to adoption are very challenged by current moves by Prime Minister Tony Abbott to make adoption ‘much easier and faster’ as they know from personal experience the lifelong pain of separation from their child or the family they were born to.**

Nearly 100 members of VANISH, Victoria’s post adoption service, will gather in the Ample Café, Howard Street, North Melbourne this Saturday to remember the second anniversary of the state apology for past adoption practices and to celebrate 25 years of providing post adoption services in Victoria.

The program will include speeches by Jenny Mikakos MP, Opposition Shadow Minister for Children, Madeleine Chow a member of VANISH and Wayne Hope and Robyn Butler, writers and directors of *Upper Middle Bogan* who will speak about how they managed to tell a story of forced adoption with both humour and sensitivity. Members appreciate hope and humour but will also feel sorrow and grief as they remember the pain of being separated from their children and parents.

Penny Mackieson, member of VANISH, adopted person and social worker states: *“I feel extremely disappointed. I also feel dismay, disbelief, disgust, disillusionment, hurt and a lot of anger. The healing I experienced from the Victorian Government’s apology in October 2012, and then from the Australian Government’s apology in March 2013, to the many thousands of people affected by the pre-1980s practices of forced adoption has been completely undone. It’s as if those apologies never actually happened; as if all the personal testimonies and research and effort involved has all been unheard, unravelled and undermined. I’m really struggling with how quickly it’s all occurred, as well. It’s all so very wrong and retrograde.”*

Leigh Hubbard, Chairperson of VANISH states: *“It is very short sighted of governments not to be drawing on the learning from those who have experienced adoption in making new policies. Adoption must be the last option as a placement choice with transparency and when it occurs the child must be given full support to maintain an appropriate connection to her or his parents and family of birth. This connection will not be easy but we know it is essential for the formation of sound identity and wellbeing and requires specialist support for children and birth parents in the early years when adoption occurs and later in adolescence when identity becomes crucial and then often for adults at significant milestones throughout life such as births and deaths.”*

Jo Fraser on behalf of ARMS states: *“On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012 the Victorian Government apologised for past forced adoption practices, recognising and acknowledging previous State Governments’ active role in the injustice and unethical practices of forced adoptions. This Apology was deeply meaningful to many of the women who had their babies taken from them for adoption, and made public the negative effects and consequences of adoption on mothers. For some women it helped lift the cover of shame and self-doubt and enabled them to step into the light. Speaking about our loss has shown us that we are not alone – many women are walking on the same path.”*

We now commemorate the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of this apology. As time goes on the pain does not diminish, but it is heartening to know that our pain and loss continues to be acknowledged, which hopefully helps in the healing process. However, a

bitter pill for us to swallow is the implementation in the Adoption Legislation Amendment 2013 of Contact Statements: in effect a veto. We continue to hope that this will be changed and we will at last be given absolute equal rights to other Victorians.

VANISH members feel the Apologies are hollow if past mistakes are not avoided in forming new policy and we call upon the Prime Minister to ensure that government only uses adoption as a placement choice of last resort after every attempt is made to keep children with their mothers, fathers, siblings and extended families and to maintain connections with cultures and countries.

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