



## **Search Guide for ICA**

### **The Purpose of this Document**

This brief guide has been written in response to the VANISH intercountry adopted members' requests for information about the process of 'search and contact'. It is intended to be an introduction only, as each search is unique and there can only be suggestions for each person to consider, about the contact process.

### **Background**

Deciding to apply for your adoption records and then searching for first family members, is a very personal and often challenging journey. For those adopted from another country, it is made even more complex by having to navigate the legislation and adoption systems of two countries, with awareness that records in your country of origin may have been lost, not initially kept or may contain information that is inaccurate- each circumstance adding to the difficulty of locating family members.

Many countries have mixed feelings about their past practices of sending infants for adoption overseas, and some countries still struggle with the moral and cultural sanctions that may have led to the separation of the infant from their mother in the first place. This can lead to hesitation on their part when approached directly for information.

'Search and contact' also occurs in the context of the intercountry adopted adult being connected to a country and culture by birth and still having a physical and racial link with its population, while having grown up in Australia. At times intercountry adopted adults can feel that they stand outside of both countries and cultures, and may struggle with a deep sense of not quite belonging to either.

Concerns may also be experienced regarding the impact of search and contact on their first family and their adoptive family members. These are all issues that VANISH staff are prepared to support and assist you with.

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*This is your search*

*Go at your own pace*

*Look after yourself*

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## **Legislation**

Since 2014 intercountry adoption (ICA) is subject to the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, which is Australia's Central Authority for the establishment and management of intercountry adoption arrangements. "The Australian Central Authority works closely with state and territory central authorities, who are responsible for the delivery of intercountry adoption services", including assistance with searching (Fact Sheet). Like other forms of adoption in Australia, ICA is governed by each state's Adoption Legislation, which includes processes for obtaining information about an adoption.

Part V1 of the Victorian *Adoption Act 1984* outlines how intercountry adopted persons can obtain their Australian adoption records. Locating further information from a country of origin and planning a search process, is not outlined in the Victorian *Adoption Act 1984*, but is subject to protocols developed between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) FIND Service, the Intercountry Adoption Unit Department of Health and Human Services and the overseas countries with whom protocols have been established.

## **Obtaining a Copy of Your Australian Records**

While many intercountry adopted people may already have a copy of documents that were given to their adoptive parents at the time of the legalisation of their adoption in Victoria, some still decide to apply to FIND for their own copies of these documents. This application can provide an opportunity for the adopted person to clarify any issues regarding the records that they receive and to express their wishes about providing information, obtaining information, or meeting other people involved in their adoption. As with domestic adoptions, this information is entered onto the Adoption Information Register. All information is kept strictly confidential and applicants can update or cancel the details on the Register at any time.

This contact also allows the adopted person to have a frank discussion about the search process, the current search protocols that will involve the Intercountry Adoption unit, and to obtain updated information about the current policies and practices of their country of origin, regarding search and contact. Understanding this can assist the searcher when in their birth country.

### **Support for Intercountry Adopted Persons as they Search**

Deciding to search and then undertaking a search, can be life changing and very emotional.

You may wish to consider:

- your reasons for searching and your expectations;
- your feelings about the various possible outcomes of searching;
- the potential impact that your quest may have on those who are close to you and how this might change your relationships with them;
- that you have support for the journey- from friends, family and professionals;
- the ‘separation from family of origin’ issues from all perspectives by reading and talking with others who have had a similar experience.

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*Am I looking after myself?*

*Do I have suitable support?*

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Once you decide to go ahead with a search, it is suggested that set your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the process and your feelings about it, VANISH has professional staff who understand and can offer support and or counselling to assist you. VANISH also has members who are part of the Intercountry adoption community, who are willing to make contact and introduce you to others who have taken this journey.

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*You are not alone*

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## **Adoption Information and/or Support Services**

### **Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND)**

Address: 20/ 570 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

Tel: (03) 8608 5700

### **VANISH Inc.**

1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 50 Howard Street, North Melbourne, 3051

Postal Address: PO Box 112, Carlton South 3053

Tel: (03) 9328 8611 or 1300826474

Fax: (03) 93206527

Email: [Info@vanish.org.au](mailto:Info@vanish.org.au)

Web: [www.vanish.org.au](http://www.vanish.org.au)

### **Relationships Australia (Compass)**

Ph: 1800 21 03 13

Web: [www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au](http://www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au)

### **Permanent Care and Adoptive Families**

Level 5, 50 Market Street, Melbourne (CBD) 3000

Ph: (03) 9020 1833

Email: [info@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:info@pcafamilies.org.au)

Web: <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/about-pca-families>

### **Intercountry Adoption Resource Network**

PO Box 12238 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 8006

Tel: (03) 98989625

Email: [icarn01@gmail.com](mailto:icarn01@gmail.com)

### **KAiAN, Inc. (Korean Adoptees in Australia)**

Network <https://www.facebook.com/groups/167804436626538/>

## **Resources**

### **DHHS**

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/applying-for-documents-and-records/adoption-and-family-records/adoption-and-family-information-networks-and-discovery>

Department Immigration and Boarder Protection, Australian Government, Fact Sheet 36 - Adopting a Child from Outside Australia

<https://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/36adopting.htm>