



NEWS BULLETIN

July 2015

Feedback to VANISH

Thank you, it is very exciting times. I would not have been able to make contact with (name deleted) without your kind support and the assistance of Vanish. Can you please thank everyone in the office at Vanish for me and tell them they are all wonderful! (2015)

You have made my lifelong dream come true and I can't even thank you enough for this; your time, patience, (as I was quite a time consuming person) guidance and being such a caring lady...it feels like I have had amnesia for 50 years and have come home. I feel like I fit in and belonged with them instantly; it was very easy to be with my family. I thank you forever for this, as does my family for your help in our reunion. (2015)

Separation from a child by adoption

Contact Statements: time for them to go!

Dear Members

We would like to bring your attention to a Bill which is due to be debated in the upper house of the Victorian Parliament so that you can provide your support if you so wish. The Bill has now passed the Legislative Assembly (the lower house) and will go to the Legislative Council (the upper house) in the first week of August, after Parliament's winter recess.

Following the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices in October 2012, the Adoption Amendment Act 2013 put in place long awaited legal provision for natural parents to be able to apply for identifying information regarding their sons or daughters who were adopted. While the purpose of this legislation was to provide natural parents with the same rights as adopted persons, the previous government included clauses for the use of 'contact statements', making it a criminal offence for natural parents to breach these, involving 60 penalty points which at 30 June 2015 equates to approximately \$8,856.60.

VANISH has actively sought a repeal of these 'contact statements' for the following reasons:-

- 1) Mothers and fathers who were separated from their children by adoption (including forced adoptions) regard this amendment to be iniquitous, cruel, punitive and based upon the assumption that they would behave inappropriately, which directly contradicts and undermines the intent of the Apology.
- 2) It might deter mothers and fathers from seeking information about their sons or daughters for fear that this might provoke a 'contact statement'.
- 3) In some cases, adopted persons have been misinformed regarding their natural parents' circumstances, and thus have been deterred from making outreach or from receiving contact.
- 4) The Adoption Act 1984 legislated the rights of adopted children and natural parents to information

about and contact with each other. This right should apply equally to both parties without discrimination or contact orders.

5) Through 26 years of experience of providing post-adoption support, VANISH has found that when individuals are advised that contact is not desired by the other party, they generally respect those wishes.

6) If an individual were to disrespect the wishes of the relative they have been separated from, and made unwelcome contact, there are adequate effective legal procedures in place to deal with them without having to impose additional penalties.

It is important that the Victorian Government legislates for equal treatment for adopted persons and parents and that contact between individuals separated by past adoptions is not discouraged by punitive legal measures.

VANISH supports The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP, Minister for Families and Children, Minister for Youth Affairs in her bid to repeal the parts of the Act that relate to ‘contact statements’ and penalties. Please show your support to Minister Mikakos, by writing to her at jenny.mikakos@parliament.vic.gov.au

Please urge Members of the Legislative Council, who will be debating this repeal, by telephoning, emailing or writing to them. You can find their contact details here: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members/house/mlc> or email them all please, cut and paste the following recipients into your email message.

jenny.mikakos@parliament.vic.gov.au;

philip.dalidakis@parliament.vic.gov.au; khalil.eideh@parliament.vic.gov.au;
nazih.elasmr@parliament.vic.gov.au; steven.herbert@parliament.vic.gov.au;
gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au; shaun.leanne@parliament.vic.gov.au;
cesar.melhem@parliament.vic.gov.au; daniel.mulino@parliament.vic.gov.au;
jaala.pulford@parliament.vic.gov.au; harriet.shing@parliament.vic.gov.au;
adem.somyurek@parliament.vic.gov.au; jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au;
gayle.tierney@parliament.vic.gov.au; fiona.patten@parliament.vic.gov.au;
rachel.carling-jenkins@parliament.vic.gov.au; bruce.atkinson@parliament.vic.gov.au;
georgie.crozier@parliament.vic.gov.au; richard.dalla-riva@parliament.vic.gov.au;
david.davis@parliament.vic.gov.au; bernie.finn@parliament.vic.gov.au;
margaret.fitzherbert@parliament.vic.gov.au; wendy.lovell@parliament.vic.gov.au;
joshua.morris@parliament.vic.gov.au; edward.o'donohue@parliament.vic.gov.au;
craig.ondarchie@parliament.vic.gov.au; inga.peulich@parliament.vic.gov.au;
simon.ramsay@parliament.vic.gov.au; gordon.rich-phillips@parliament.vic.gov.au;
mary.wooldridge@parliament.vic.gov.au; jeff.bourman@parliament.vic.gov.au;
daniel.young@parliament.vic.gov.au; melina.bath@parliament.vic.gov.au;
damian.drum@parliament.vic.gov.au; greg.barber@parliament.vic.gov.au;
samantha.dunn@parliament.vic.gov.au; colleen.hartland@parliament.vic.gov.au;
sue.pennicuik@parliament.vic.gov.au; nina.springle@parliament.vic.gov.au;
james.purcell@parliament.vic.gov.au;

If you can provide your personal reasons for why you believe S 5; Division 1A—90A & 90B ‘Contact statements by adult adopted persons’ of the Adoption Amendment Act (2013) should be repealed; it is important to include these in your message.

You can read the Victorian Parliamentary Apology here <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/documents/assembly/Apology.pdf>

Donor Conception

VANISH advocates for all donor-conceived people, using the learning drawn from the confusion, loss, grief and trauma we have seen played out in the lives of those who have suffered separation from a child and adoption.

We believe that all donor conceived people, regardless of when they were conceived, should have the right to knowledge about their donors and, if mutually agreed, the opportunity to meet. To this end we have been actively engaged with the proposed new Victorian legislation giving donor-conceived people the right to access information identifying their donors and acknowledging that all Victorians should have the right to know their genetic heritage no matter when they were born.

Background

This information is drawn from *A right to know your identity*, VARTA website:

<https://www.varta.org.au/resources/news/right-know-your-identity-victorian-governments-commitment>

For decades, the rights of donor-conceived people to obtain identifying information about their donors has been inconsistent and confusing – it has arbitrarily depended on when gametes (reproductive cells) were donated.

Prior to 29 June 2015;

- those whose gametes were donated prior to 1988 cannot access any information identifying their donor;
- those whose gametes were donated between 1988 and 1998 can only receive identifying information with the consent of their donor;
- and those whose gametes were donated after 1998 have unconditional access to information identifying their donor.

Amendments to the *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* were passed in 2014 and came into effect on 29 June 2015. These amendments allow persons conceived as a result of donations made prior to 1988 to find out identifying information about their donors with the donor's consent.

While these changes are significant; they do not address the inequality between donor-conceived Victorians. They still limit some donor-conceived people's access to information about their identity depending on when their gametes were donated.

Under the proposed legislation donor-conceived people will have the same rights to access donor information regardless of when their gametes were donated.

In enabling donor-conceived people to find out identifying information about their donor; the Government recognises that it is imperative to support donors through the process of being identified.

A key component of the Government's proposal is to include 'contact preferences' for donors to enable them to choose and manage what contact they have with their offspring. This recognises that donors who donated prior to 1998 did so with the expectation that they would remain anonymous.

This Discussion Paper outlines a range of proposed measures to support donors through these proposed changes – such as contact preferences, as well as the proposed process for how information requests will be managed – and the Government welcomes feedback on these proposals.

Under the new legislation there will be the opportunity for donor-conceived people to know more about their heritage, to learn their medical history, or so that they can try to connect with the individuals who donated to give them life; all donor-conceived Victorians should have the same rights to access information about where they came from.

The Government's proposed amendments will remove these random time constraints, and give all donor-conceived people the same rights to access identifying information about their donors.

Discussion Paper

The Government has released a Discussion Paper, 'The Right to Know', which outlines how the proposed changes will work in practice. It details how donor-conceived people will be able to apply for information, how contact preferences will apply, and how donors and donor-conceived people will be supported through this process.

The Government is calling for submissions on this Discussion Paper. Submissions need to be made by Friday; 4 September 2015 and can be done via:

Email to: artsubmission@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Mail: Assisted Reproductive Treatment Policy Manager
50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

alternatively, to request a copy of the discussion paper to be mailed to you call (03) 9096 8750.

Thank you from a service user

Just thought you might like to know that I have had amazing contact with my daughter who lives in Queensland. She is such an incredible young woman who is so balanced and understanding of the situation that she was placed in and wants to see me when we go to Queensland later in the year. She has emailed my son and is thrilled to be part of our family.

How blessed is that story. Just thought you might like to know.

Thank you for all your help in my search I could not have done it without you. You are truly an angel.

Thanks once again. So amazing can't believe it all is happening.

A grateful mother

Many thanks for your support



Coleen Clare
Manager, VANISH

Annual General Meeting Announcement

The 27th VANISH AGM

**Will be held at the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Level 5/50 Market Street Melbourne
Friday 18th September at 5.30 for 6.00pm**

Guest Speaker: Jan Owen AM

Any member interested in joining the VANISH Committee of Management please contact the Manager, Coleen Clare to discuss. Email: manager@vanish.org.au



Please contact VANISH for Nomination forms to serve on the Committee of Management or Proxy forms to vote at the AGM

Melbourne Support Group Dates 2015

Mixed Support Group

(Adoptees, Natural Parents, Adoptive and Alternative Parents)
7.30-9.30pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month

14 July, 11 August, 8 September, 13 October, 10 November, 8 December
For enquiries please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611



Adopted Persons Group

(For Adult Adopted Persons over the age of 18)
7.30-9.30pm on the 4th Tuesday of each month

28 July, 25 August, 22 September, 27, October, 24 November
For enquiries please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611



Donor Conceived Adults

(For Donor-Conceived people over the age of 18)
7.30-9.00pm on the last Thursday of every other month

30 July, 24 September, 26 November

For enquiries or to RSVP please contact
Kate Bourne at VARTA on (03) 8601 5250 or
Coleen Clare, Manager at VANISH Phone (03) 9328 8611 or 1300 VANISH

Regional Support Group Dates 2015

Bendigo

Held at 27 Myrtle Street, Bendigo

2.00-4.00pm on the 2nd Saturday of the month (rotational basis)

Mothers (also called Natural Mothers):

11 July, 12 September, 14 November

Adult Adopted Persons:

8 August, 10 October, 12 December



Traralgon

Held at Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House 11/13 Breed Street

2.00-4.00pm on the 3rd Saturday of the month (rotational basis)

Adult Adopted Persons:

15 August, 21 November

Mothers (also called Natural Mothers):

(Mothers groups are operated in conjunction with ARMS Vic)

19 September, 19 December

Mixed Group:

(Mixed groups are for adopted persons and Natural and Adoptive parents)

18 July, 17 October



Albury-Wodonga

Held at Glen Echo Neighbourhood House

949 Burrows Road, Glenroy Albury

10.30am-12.30pm on the 2nd Saturday of every month (rotational basis)

Adopted Persons

11 July, 10 October

Mixed Group:

(Mixed groups are for adopted persons and Natural and Adoptive parents)

8 August, 14 November

Mothers (also called Natural Mothers):

12 September, 12 December



Ballarat

Held at 119 Lydiard Street, Ballarat (opposite Ballarat railway station)
At 2pm-4pm on the following dates

Adult Adopted Persons Only
(For Adult Adopted Persons over the age of 18)
18 July, 17 October

Mixed Group
(Mixed groups are for adopted persons and Natural and Adoptive parents)
22 August, 21 November

Mothers Only
(also called Natural Mothers):
19 September, 19 December

For enquiries please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611



Forgotten Australians Social and Support Groups

There are 13 Social and Support Groups (S&SGs) throughout Victoria.
These groups meet monthly

Check the website for support groups in your area plus other activities

www.openplace.org.au

Office: *Open Place*, Suite 1, 8 Bromham Place, Richmond
Telephone: 9421 6162 or 1800 779 379

