A Post-Adoption Guide

Searching for records and birth relatives
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This search guide has been developed by VANISH search and support workers with significant contributions from VANISH members and people working in the field of adoption including past and present staff, service users, Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND) staff and post-adoption services as referenced.

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Language

VANISH wishes to acknowledge that the experience of being adopted and the experience of separation from a child by adoption is for each person a unique experience. VANISH recognises the very sensitive nature of these experiences, and of the language associated with this sensitivity. At no time, is the language used in this search guide intended to cause offence.

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INTRODUCTION

This search guide is intended for

a) individuals who were born and/or adopted in Victoria and who would like to search independently for their mother\(^1\) or father. Its purpose is to assist the adopted person or the adult child of an adopted person who is deceased\(^2\) to conduct the search for a birth parent or other birth family members following the steps outlined.

b) mothers and/or fathers whose daughters and/or sons were born and/or adopted in Victoria and who would like to search independently for their children\(^1\). An amendment\(^3\) to the Adoption Act 1984 was made on 1 July, 2013; since then, parents have been permitted to receive identifying information about their adopted adult daughters and sons in line with other Australian jurisdictions.

The search for birth relatives one has been separated from by adoption is a very personal journey. Some may find the search process exciting, rewarding and quite straightforward while others may find the search process overwhelming, frustrating and possibly disappointing. Some may want to complete only Stage One, which is to obtain their adoption records. Others will continue on to Stage Two, which will involve conducting the search for their mother, father, son or daughter. Whilst others will go on and complete Stage Three which is to make outreach to their birth relative in the anticipation of making contact.

As each search is individual and unique, there are no set rules in the search and contact process and each person will approach the search for a relative separated by adoption in their own way. This guide covers some points of consideration when conducting a search and outlines the basic steps in the search process. The guide also covers some guidelines and points of consideration when the search is complete and the searcher wishes to make contact as well as some discussion around receiving a negative response to an outreach or no response at all.

As you embark on this journey of discovery about yourself and family members you have been separated from by adoption, VANISH search and support workers are available to support you, and to offer assistance and guidance with your search.

This is your search
Go at your own pace
Look after yourself

\(^1\) For the purpose of this guide, the term ‘mother’ includes alternate terms such as first mother, original mother, natural mother, birth mother, biological mother, relinquishing mother.

\(^2\) The adult child of an adopted person is entitled to apply for identifying information regarding their parent’s adoption, regardless of whether the parent (the adoptee) is alive or deceased. The requirement of the Adoption Act (1984) is that the Adoption Information Service (AIS) notifies the adoptee in writing of the application. If the adoptee is deceased the applicant is asked to provide documentation to confirm this.

\(^3\) Media release by Hon Ted Baillieu MP and Hon Mary Wooldridge MP, 25 October 2012
PREPARATION for SEARCHING

For most individuals, deciding to apply for their adoption records can be a major life decision and the search process can involve unexpected emotional highs and lows. This can be particularly so when upon receipt of records, a mother or father learns for the first time the identity of their adult daughter and/or son and some information about the adoptive family. Alternately, an adopted person learns for the first time the name of their mother, possibly their father, sometimes the circumstances around their adoption and most importantly, their given name if recorded on the copy of their original (pre-adoption) birth certificate\(^4\).

Taking the next step to search for a birth relative may also present many challenges. As each search is unique and search results vary greatly, it can be helpful to consider some of the possible outcomes in preparation. It may be that the person sought is

- found quickly and easily,
- found but after many months, even years of searching,
- found but doesn’t want contact,
- found deceased,
- not found.

\(^4\) Also referred to as original birth certificate and/or first birth certificate

VANISH search and support staff can assist you with practical suggestions during the search process and are available to offer ongoing support when needed via support groups, telephone, email or in person; access to reading material is also available.
THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEARCHING

ADOPTED PERSON

The motivations for an adopted person to apply for their adoption records and search for their mother and/or father will vary from person to person. Not all feel the need to seek information or make contact however for many there is a deep desire to learn more about their origins and to gain a better understanding of who they are. The decision to search sometimes coincides with a major event in the life of an adopted person such as marriage, the birth of the first child, serious illness or the death of an adoptive parent.

Many adopted people have a natural curiosity to know more after receiving their adoption records and so begin the search process immediately; but for others it may be some time, even years before they decide to start searching. Some common reasons adopted people give for searching include the need to

- answer the question “where have I come from?”; the innate need to know one’s origins and roots,
- feel connected and to have a sense of belonging,
- know family medical information/history,
- gain a sense of identity,
- learn why they look like they do and why they are like they are,
- learn about the social, cultural and ethnic background of their family of origin,
- learn why they were adopted,
- ‘fill in the gaps’ or the missing pieces.

Some of the reasons why people who are adopted do not apply for their adoption records or, once they receive their records do not search are that they

- may not feel the immediate need to seek information about their origins or to make contact with their family of origin,
- may have a sense of loyalty to their adoptive parents and do not want to affect their current relationship,
- may fear rejection by their mother and/or father and/or family,
- are apprehensive about the unknown and what they will discover about their family of origin and how new relationships will impact their current lives.

Searching can provide an individual who was adopted with the opportunity to learn about the circumstances that led to their adoption, to have current information about their family of origin and to know about the parent(s) from whom they were separated.

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5 Liz Trinder, Julia Feast & David Howe, The Adoption Reunion Handbook John Wiley & Sons Ltd England 2004
LATE DISCOVERY

Some people have never known or even suspected they were adopted and so discovery late in life can be a devastating shock.

An adopted person
- who did not know he/she was adopted and has been contacted by their mother or father, or another birth relative may feel angry that they did not know they were adopted.
- may feel confused by their feelings about both their adoptive parents who have deceived them and/or the relative who has contacted them
- may be unable to overcome feelings and/or be unwilling to respond to an outreach and may need time to work through these feelings.
- may need time to work through feelings.

Most often, the late discovery of adoption occurs inadvertently, for example
- when applying for a passport or a birth certificate,
- discovering adoption records after the death of an adoptive parent,
- being told by a friend or relative,
- being contacted by an unknown birth relative,
- being omitted from a family tree.

For the adult person who has recently learned he or she was adopted, attending a support group can be beneficial. Learning later in life is often described as “turning my life upside down” and “I am not who I thought I was”. Sharing these new feelings and emotions with others in a supportive group environment can help validate and ‘normalise’ these new and perhaps overwhelming feelings, as well as reassure the person that they are not alone.

MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Many mothers and fathers whose daughters and/or sons were adopted find it very difficult to deal with the loss and to live without knowledge of what happened to their children.

In the past, it was believed that mothers wished to remain anonymous and would not want their identity revealed as they ‘got on with their life’. Research\(^6\) and experience have shown this assumption to be untrue for most mothers; they do not forget their child who was adopted and continue to think about their child for the rest of their lives.

Many mothers feel an intense yearning to know something about their daughters and/or sons and have a strong desire to meet them but believed that they did not have ‘the right’ to know about their daughter and/or son and that the records would never be available. Many mothers have not told anyone else and have lived with the secret since the adoption so it is important for adopted people searching for their mothers to remember that their birth and adoption may still be a secret from members of the birth family and to approach with sensitivity and respect.

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Fathers have also reported a keen sense of loss following the adoption of their daughter and/or son and feel a strong desire to know something about the adopted person and to possibly meet.

Fathers who were not married to the mother were usually not named on the birth certificate and so adopted persons are dependent on their birth mother for information about the identity of their birth father; this may be difficult to obtain if the birth mother felt hurt or betrayed by the birth father.

Further, fathers do not always know that a child was conceived or born as a result of their relationship with the mother, or that a child was placed for adoption. Nevertheless, experience indicates that many fathers respond positively to contact from their daughter or son and if they do know about the adoption, many fathers attempt to trace their daughter or son.

Some of the reasons why a mother or father may not apply for their adoption records or, once the adoption records are received a mother or father may not search are that they

- fear that their daughter or son does not know she or he is adopted and that the contact will disrupt their life.
- believe that they have no right to search and make contact with their now adult child
- fear that their daughter or son might reject them.
- fear that their daughter or son will not understand why they were adopted
- fear that their daughter or son will be angry and resentful with them about their adoption

BIRTH RELATIVES
Adoption involves separation from not just birth parents, but also from the two extended birth families. If it is known that a child has been adopted out of the birth family, birth relatives can have a deep-seated need for information about the adopted person, and after contact is made, many adopted persons enjoy positive on-going relationships with grandparents, aunts and uncles.

There are also brothers and sisters, some of whom may have always known of the existence of the adopted person and hoped for contact, while others may be shocked to learn they have a brother or sister who was adopted and need time to work through their own feelings and emotions about this significant information. A more challenging situation for the adopted person is learning of other siblings who were also adopted and/or remained in ‘out of home care’.

Similar to mothers and fathers, birth relatives are often reluctant to interfere, yet wish to know about the welfare of the adopted person while some prefer not to get involved.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS
It is common for adoptive parents to experience a range of emotions when an adopted person begins to search for information about their adoption or has contact with birth relatives. Adoptive parents often feel threatened and neglected in the reunion process and in some cases fear losing the adult child to the birth parents; they may question whether their own relationship
with the adopted person will be impacted when contact is made with birth parents and/or birth relatives are often at the centre of their concerns.

However, fear of being replaced by the mother and/or father are generally unfounded and resolved once contact has been made as mothers and fathers are likely to be sensitive to the adoptive parents' feelings and not want the relationship between their daughter or son and the adoptive parents to be damaged in any way. Many adoptive parents encourage their adopted sons/daughters to learn about their adoption, and are very supportive of them making contact with their birth relatives and learning about their origins.

THE DECISION TO SEARCH

Embarking on a search can be a life changing and emotional experience so you may want to consider some of the following points:

- your reasons for searching,
- acknowledge your feelings and if needed, seek professional support,
- accept support from someone you trust,
- recognise the impact this very personal journey may have on your immediate family such as your spouse/partner and/or children, your parents and/or siblings.
- acknowledge your feelings around the possibility that the person you are searching for may have died or may not want contact with you,
- become familiar with ‘adoption issues’ from all perspectives by reading and talking with others who have had a similar experience.

Expectations

Some questions that may be useful to ask yourself before starting a search.

- What are my expectations or more specifically, my needs?
- What has prompted me to start searching now?
- How may my current relationships change?
- Who have I told about searching?
- Am I aware of how challenging this may be for me and for those close to me?
- How have I prepared myself for this very important life changing process?
- What have I read to prepare me for this life changing event?

Am I looking after myself?

Do I have suitable support mechanisms in place?

RESPONSIBLE SEARCHING

Responsible searching involves respect for both the searcher and the person sought and protects both from unexpected or ill-prepared contact.

Some individuals who search, will successfully locate the person they are seeking by following the steps outlined in this guide without breaching the privacy of that person. In some cases, in particular where the search is more difficult and complex, it may become tempting to make direct enquiries to other people in order to gain a current address of the person sought. Taking
these steps may provide quick answers, however it may breach the privacy of the person sought and also jeopardise the desired outcome.

It is advised that the use of social networking sites be conducted with caution and respect for the privacy and confidentiality of the person sought as social networking sites are ‘open forums’ and the searcher has no knowledge of the privacy settings of that site. Searching for someone on websites such as ‘Friends Reunited’, ‘Facebook’, ‘Genes Reunited’, ‘Ancestry.com’ and ‘LinkedIn’ may result in finding very useful clues as to the whereabouts of someone, however making a direct approach to that person via social networking is not recommended as there can be no guarantee of confidentiality once contact is established.

VANISH strongly advises that there be primary documentary evidence to support the results of your search and to bear in mind that you cannot be certain the person found is your mother/father or son/daughter until confirmed by that person.

For your information The Adoption Act 1984 (Victoria) S.121 (2) reads
At any time other than the prohibited period, a person must not publish, or cause to be published, in a newspaper or periodical, or by means of broadcasting or television, any matter that identifies a person as, or is reasonably likely to enable any person to be identified as, a party to an adoption unless the last-mentioned person has given consent to the publication. Penalty: in the case of a body corporate, 1000 penalty units; in any other case, 100 penalty units or imprisonment for 2 years.

This principle applies to broadcasting via social media.

VANISH suggests that the privacy of yourself and the person you are seeking be respected at all times. It is therefore advisable to avoid trying to short cut the search process, for example knocking on doors or ringing up neighbours or relatives. It may be difficult for you to answer questions without breaking the confidentiality of the person sought.
THE SEARCH PROCESS

Having decided to go ahead with a search, it is suggested that throughout the process, you set your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings.

Being well-organised is also very important and it is suggested you

- keep a diary where phone calls/emails/letters, birth death marriage (BDM) applications can be recorded,
- date all entries so that when you return to your searching you know where you are up to, you are able to reflect and re-visit your process. It may even be useful to make a note of how you were feeling at the time you undertook this part of your process,
- file copies of all correspondence, certificates and other records in a folder,
- record important contacts with their telephone numbers and/or email addresses,

Worksheets are included at the end of this guide to help you record information found during the search.

STAGE ONE - Applying for Adoption Records

The first step is to obtain your adoption records7. For an adopted person, these records are released under the Adoption Act 1984. The adoption information application forms are available on the FIND website http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/forms-and-templates/family-information-networks-application-form or you can request a form be sent from FIND (03) 8608 5700 or from VANISH (03) 9328 8611.

Section 87 of the Adoption Act 1984 requires the applicant attend a mandatory interview in person with a counsellor. The purpose of this interview is to

- prepare you for the information contained in your file,
- discuss any expectations and the potential implication of search and outreach to any birth relatives,
- provide you with the opportunity to ask questions,
- give you information about the support services available to you.

As an adopted person, you will receive a copy of the adoption file which may include your original (pre-adoption) birth certificate, the Adoption Court order, and if available, adoption agency records as well as the Certificate of Interview (Section 87)

All applicants’ details are entered into the Adoption Information Register held at the Department of Health and Human Services. During the mandatory interview, this will be discussed with you including the opportunity for you to record your wishes about contact with a birth relative. You will also be told if your mother/father daughter/son or another birth relative has made an enquiry about you.

7 The fee for making this ‘application for adoption information’ was abolished as a result of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology on 25 October 2012
For a mother and/or father, these records are released under the Adoption Amendment Act 2013. The adoption information application forms are available on the FIND website http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/forms-and-templates/family-information-networks-application-form or you can request a form be sent from FIND (03) 8608 5700 or from VANISH (03) 9328 8611.

During this interview a mother and/or father will receive –
- Original (Pre-adoption) birth certificate
- The Adoption Order
- Notice of Identification
- Consent to Adoption
- Affidavit
- Revocation
- Summary of the Court Records
- Full name of adoptive parents, their ages, occupations and address at the time of the adoption
- Adoption Agency Records and
- If there is a time gap between the consent to adoption and the actual adoption an explanation will be given as to the delay in the finalisation of the adoption.
- PLUS
- If the child is a female, there will be an indication of whether there has been a marriage search done in Victoria and what the result is. If she has married in Victoria her most recent married name will be given but not a copy of the marriage certificate.
STAGE TWO - The Search Process

Searching for your mother
It is important to read carefully and note the details about your mother recorded on your pre-adoption birth certificate and in any adoption agency and/or court records as the information you have about your mother will determine your next step; keep in mind that many mothers travelled interstate or overseas for the birth of their child.

1. You may have been able to confirm your mother’s identity and her parents’ names from searching records such as past Australia wide electoral rolls, postal directories, nominal rolls. The next step is to apply to the Victorian Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages or if your mother was born interstate or overseas to the relevant state/territory/overseas registry, for her most recent marriage and/or change of name certificate or death certificate.

   All Australian Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages require the following items to accompany an application –
   • current application fee\(^8\)
   • three forms of police certified identification e.g. passport or driver licence, Medicare card, utility or rent account
   • a copy of your pre-adoption birth certificate
   • copy of your Certificate of Interview (Section 87)

2. If you receive your mother’s most recent marriage certificate or change of name certificate then you hopefully have her current name. Using this name, matched with that of her husband if applicable, you can search the Australia wide electoral rolls from the year she was married to the current day. Past Australia wide electoral rolls up to 2008 are to be found at the State Library of Victoria or interstate equivalents, and selected electoral years up to 1980 are to be found on Ancestry.com.au.

   The current Australia wide Electoral Roll (AER) can be accessed at any Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) office.

   If you believe you have found your mother’s current address, it is important to discuss this with another trusted person or a search/support worker at VANISH to ensure you have found the correct person. When confident you have the correct person and have the relevant document(s) to support this then proceed to Stage Three.

3. If you are unable to confirm your mother’s identity, or that of her parents, it is suggested you apply for her birth certificate. This will confirm you have your mother’s correct date and place of birth, her legal name and that of each of her parents.

\(^8\) Fees set by Registries of Births Deaths and Marriages Australia wide are reviewed annually, usually at the start of a new financial year. The current fee (as of July 2015) for a birth, death, marriage or change of name certificate in Victoria is $32.00.
4. With the above information from your mother’s birth certificate, you can then apply to the Victorian Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages or if your mother was born interstate or overseas to the relevant state/territory/overseas Registry, for her most recent marriage and/or change of name certificate or death certificate for your mother.

5. Repeat Steps two and three.

6. If there is ‘No Record’ of a marriage, death or change of name for your mother in the relevant State/Territory/Country, it is suggested you go back in time to records of the year of your birth to establish where your mother’s parents and siblings were living and then follow through their names on Australia wide electoral rolls.

One possible reason there may not be a marriage record for your mother, is that there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that between 30% and 50% of mothers who lost a daughter and/or son to adoption have never married. For this reason it is important to search past and current Australia wide electoral rolls under your mother’s maiden name.

7. If there is evidence your mother and/or her parents moved interstate, then you could make an application for a marriage, change of name and/or death search in that state/territory. See Steps one, two and three.

OR

8. Once you have established the whereabouts of your mother’s parents and/or siblings you could check relevant Resources (further on in this guide). If you find the death of a parent/sibling of your mother, record the date(s) of death and/or burial/cremation then search the relevant newspaper(s) for death notices and/or Probate Indexes for a will/probate. Often vital information about the person sought is contained in these notices. If you find a new name for your mother then repeat Steps one, two and three.

9. Discovering your mother has passed away may come as a shock and you may find unexpected emotions surface together with a feeling of loss and grief. It is important to acknowledge this loss even though it may not be acknowledged in society; sometimes people who have not experienced the loss of a mother or father by adoption may not realise that your grief and loss is very real and may feel like a ‘second loss’ to you. It is helpful at this time to have family and friends to support you. VANISH support workers are available to provide support at this time, either by telephone, face to face or through our regular support groups.
It is possible that after many months even years of searching in Australia, your mother still cannot be found. Some of the possible reasons could be that your mother –

- changed her name or she had a non anglo-celtic name which was anglicised but in neither case was this done legally,
- is married to a man who changed his surname and thus hers,
- has a de facto partner and has assumed his surname,
- has never enrolled to vote or is not eligible to enrol to vote,
- was unaware of incorrect information recorded on your pre-adoption birth certificate such as her place of birth, her age, her residential address or even her name. This may not have been a deliberate action as a mother may not have registered the birth of her daughter or son so she may not have been the one who provided the incorrect information,
- may have been encouraged to provide false information at the time of your birth to protect her privacy,
- had her original surname changed when she was a baby/child and she was given that of her step-father,
- was a former ward of state whose name was changed and may not have been aware of her true or legal status nor of her original name,
- was herself adopted and may or may have not been aware of this,
- is living in another Australian state/territory or even overseas.

If your search has reached this stage, please do not hesitate to contact VANISH for assistance and support
EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL SEARCH
for a Birth Mother

1. Obtain your adoption records

2. Apply to BDMs for marriage certificate/change of name/death certificate of person sought

   ‘No Result’

   3. Apply to BDMs for birth certificate of person sought

   ‘No Result’

   Death certificate received

   4. Search obituaries, cemeteries, wills and probate

   Search electoral rolls from year of your birth for mother’s parents and siblings. Also search for mother under maiden name

   If found, follow 5.

   Apply for death certificate of mother’s parent/s

   Search obituaries, wills and probate records for mother’s name

   Search current electoral roll for person sought

   Confirm correct person has been located and prepare outreach letter

   5. Trace person sought through electoral rolls from last known address to current address

At any time during this process VANISH staff are available to assist.
**Searching for your father**
The search for a father may differ from that for a mother as he is not always named on the pre-adoption birth certificate which means the adopted person does not know his identity and is unable to apply for his birth, death, marriage or change of name certificate.

In some circumstances the father was named on the pre-adoption certificate such as when
- the mother and father of the child were legally married,
- the mother and father of the child were in a de facto relationship,
- the father acknowledged paternity.

In the case where a mother was married, her husband was usually presumed to be the biological father of her child. If this was not so, there may be an affidavit in the Adoption Court record from the mother and/or her husband to that effect.

It is rare for a father’s name to be included on the pre-adoption birth certificate when a child was to be adopted; in most cases it was actively discouraged, however his name may be recorded in the adoption records.

**Note:** Since 1996, a mother has been required by law to name the father of her child or to make a statutory declaration if she was unable or unwilling to do so.

If a father is named in the Adoption Agency record, particularly in the Adoption Court Order but not on the pre-adoption birth certificate then an application can be made to the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages requesting the right to apply for his birth, most recent marriage, death and/or change of certificate; the decision is left to the discretion of the Registrar.

> In most cases, the father of an adopted person is not named on either the pre-adoption birth certificate or in the adoption records and his identity can only be learned from the adopted person’s mother or possibly other birth family members.

**Searching for other birth relatives**
In the situation where your mother and/or father has been found deceased, you may wish to search for another relative, as making contact with a birth relative can be an avenue for you to learn more about your parent/s and his or her family. Generally VANISH advises that the search be first for a sibling of your parent. The reason for this is that a sibling of your mother in particular is more likely to know about you and of your mother’s circumstances at the time of your adoption.

Conducting a search for a birth relative may be more difficult as you are only able to access public and historic records. The first step would be to apply for the death certificates of your maternal/paternal grandparents and to read their death notices, and if available their wills/probate applications.

If your parent has no siblings then an alternative relative could be sought such as a maternal aunt/uncle or a child of your parent.
STAGE THREE - Outreach and Contact

When preparing to make contact you may wish to consider some of the following points:

- Why do you want to make contact? What are your needs and expectations about making contact? Have you considered these may change after contact has been made?
- Are you able to approach outreach with an open mind and a willingness to accept differences between you and the person you are seeking.
- Who knows about your decision to make contact and who will support you through the process? What might the implications be for you and family members such as your partner, children and parents as you prepare for contact and then possibly, as you establish a new relationship with your relative you have been separated from by adoption?
- Have you considered the other person’s experience of the adoption process?
- Have you considered the person you have found may also have needs and expectations once contact is made? How might you deal with these and what can you offer this person?
- How do you feel about on-going contact and the time and energy required to build a positive relationship?
- As you have had some time to consider contact and the person you are seeking has not, are you able to be sensitive to their feelings and respect their wishes to proceed at a pace they are comfortable with?
- How will contact be made?

It can be helpful at this stage to take time to reflect on the adoption experience from the perspective of the person you have found.

MAKING CONTACT

Now that you have completed your search and have a possible address for the person you are searching for, we strongly advise that you carefully consider your approach.

Respect the person you are contacting and allow them time to respond. While you may have been thinking about this stage for quite some time, the person you are contacting has not had the same time to prepare and while your contact may be very welcome it may also be a shock or surprise, so contact should proceed at their pace.

Contact for both parties can be confronting and overwhelming so to take your time and be considerate, to the person you are contacting and also to yourself.

Be mindful of the person’s privacy and confidentiality when making first contact. Contact should be discreet, tactful and as confidential as possible and made directly to the person you are trying to contact; involving others can be a breach of the person’s privacy.
It is suggested that the initial contact be made in writing with the aim to confirm that this is indeed the person you are seeking. A letter is preferable because it allows the recipient time to think about a response and if this is indeed the person you are seeking, a letter allows time to work through feelings that surface as a result of your contact.

Further it is suggested you write your letter sensitively as it may be opened by someone else in the household. VANISH staff can assist you with this and can provide examples of outreach letters.

Although contact by telephone offers an immediate response for the ‘searcher’ it might be intrusive to the person being contacted and does not allow them the opportunity to prepare themselves and if the person is in shock, the call may end abruptly without any information exchanged.

It can be helpful to consider that the current circumstances of the person you are seeking may make it difficult to engage in communication at the time of contact and hence determine the nature and timing of their response. There is no way of knowing what is happening in the ‘found’ person’s life when contact is made. The person could just need some time to consider thoughts and feelings around the contact or circumstances such as holidays, illness or a recent death may make it difficult to respond immediately.

To promote the best possible outcome maintain your own integrity and respect the person you are contacting. VANISH suggests that you do not just turn up at someone’s door, as this does not allow time for the other person to prepare for your contact.

**REJECTION OR NO RESPONSE TO OUTREACH**

**Adopted persons**

One of the most feared outcomes for an adoptee searching for a birth mother and/or birth father is that they will say “no” to contact. It is this fear that keeps many adoptees from seeking contact. However, research shows that only a small percentage of birth parents will reject contact, unfortunately some adopted people will experience the pain of a “second rejection”. Usually the rejection will be experienced by no response to a letter of outreach, or a verbal or written statement from the birth parent(s) stating that he/she has no wish for contact.

Either way, rejection can be devastating to many adoptees. It is important to remember that it is not you, the person, they are rejecting, but it is the pain, shame and trauma of the adoption experience that causes a birth parent to shut down and reject contact. The adoption experience, coupled with the fact that some birth parents have not told a soul about the now adult child who was born and adopted out, may be the reason that a birth parent chooses not to have contact with the adoptee. The following article may be helpful if you have not been able to make contact with your birth mother:-.

*Why Won’t My Birth Mother Meet Me? by Carole Anderson*


VANISH suggests that anyone who experiences overwhelming emotions around their adoption experience seeks counselling.
Mothers and fathers
Research indicates that on hearing from their son or daughter who was adopted, a high percentage of parents feel a great sense of relief and joy and respond immediately and positively when they are contacted, however not all are able to respond or sustain contact. Some of the issues a parent may be faced with upon contact and beyond are that they may

- not have told their present partner or their family about the adoption and feel afraid because of perceived consequences,
- have been told that they would never see their child again and are shocked to learn that the adoption law has changed,
- have hoped for information throughout the years but when outreach is made the fears and anxieties about contact are too overwhelming to contemplate,
- not have had the opportunity to work through the painful feelings of deeply buried grief and loss associated with the adoption and therefore are unable to contemplate contact at this stage,
- fear that their son and/or daughter will not understand the circumstances of the adoption and will be angry, resentful or think badly of them.

Meeting your Mother and/or Father, Son and/or Daughter

Once contact has been established, the next step might be meeting in person. It is suggested the first meeting take place in a neutral mutually agreed upon place.

You may want to consider having some private time together initially, rather than a reunion with numerous family members.

If you wish to have a support person with you at the time of the first meeting, it is suggested you discuss with that person what you want from them as a support person and that there are clear boundaries about their role.

It is also suggested that having a support person with you is discussed with the person you are meeting for the first time and that he or she agrees as it is important both parties involved are comfortable and have the freedom to express feelings and emotions without the presence of an unexpected third party.

Making contact and meeting with a mother and/or father, son and/or daughter can be an emotional roller coaster. It can raise a number of intense feelings from the past and the euphoria of finding each other can then be replaced by feelings of sadness and loss. During this phase, it is helpful to consider the feelings of both yourself and the other person, take things slowly as you learn about each other and develop a relationship built on respect, honesty and trust.

Like any relationship, this one may have its ‘ups and downs’ and although there is a biological link between you and the person found, it does not mean that you will have similar expectations or shared interests, lifestyle and values and you may find that expectations prior to making contact are not fulfilled in the short or long term. While some individuals may feel an instant

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bond with the person they have contacted, others may feel like they are meeting a total stranger.

Advice from those who have searched and made contact.

- Be clear about your expectations.
- Respect the privacy of the person sought and allow her/him time and space to recall their experience and the circumstances of the adoption.
- Take time to reflect on the process and how you feel about it.
- Allow time to get to know the person and accept who they are.
- Take time to consider your future expectations and your role within the relationship. How will that fit in with your current life and the role expectations of the other person?
- Mutual respect, mutual agreement and mutual acceptance help to develop and maintain an ongoing relationship

At this phase of your journey, it is also a good time to stop and consider the effects on other family members. Partners can be uncertain about the changes and may feel excluded or unsure how to support their loved one. Similarly, parents may be unsure of their role and at times be surprised by the depth of their own feelings and responses.

Also, it can be helpful at this stage to take time to reflect on your own journey, and inform yourself about reunions by reading and speaking with others who have some experience of this process. Acknowledge and understand the challenges and responsibilities ahead, those that you own and those that are owned by the person you have made contact with.

Finally, acknowledge that by taking the steps to apply for your adoption records, search for and locate a birth relative you have been separated from by adoption, you are not only providing yourself with the opportunity to know the person you have found, you are also offering the person you have found the opportunity to know you.
MAKING REUNIONS WORK

The following suggestions to help make your reunion, if you have one, work as well as it can for you have been taken from the *Adoption Search and Reunion Handbook*\(^{10}\)

- Set out on this journey when you are ready. You will know when it is the right time
- All reunions are unique. Find a balance and pace that suits you and your reunion
- Work out what you want from, or can give to, the reunion. Be realistic about what you can offer each other and the place in each other’s lives.
- You and your relatives are likely to have to deal with some strong emotions. It will take time, patience and probably compromise to sort them all out. Try to work out why people feel or behave the way they do (including you!). Be kind to yourself and others if behaviour is not always perfect
- If you can, try to let your adoptive family know about the search and reunion process
- Keep communicating with all the people involved. If you feel hurt, excluded, angry or swamped then say so, but gently.
- You’ll need a lot of support from people who might share your excitement and disappointments, act as sounding boards, and from time to time suggest a different view on things.
- Be prepared to adjust your expectations as time goes on. The chances are that the reunion will have good times as well as bad like all relationships. Nor are you likely to sail through all challenges in a state of perfect tolerance, compromise and understanding! Get what you can from the search and reunion process. Hang onto the good bits and, when you are ready, discard the bad.
- Above all, the reunion is about you coming to terms with your past, present and future in whatever way you can.

\(^{10}\) Ibid
SUPPORT

VANISH provides professional and confidential practical and emotional support for all people affected by adoption as their needs arise. This includes but is not limited to – mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, spouses, partners, siblings, adoptive parents, relatives and extended family members. Support is available by telephone, email, in person, or by attending one of VANISH support groups.

VANISH SUPPORT GROUPS

VANISH conducts two support groups in Melbourne per month: one for adoptees only and the mixed support group for all parties affected by adoption. Feedback indicates that both groups are very important and beneficial to those who attend. VANISH also provides support groups in regional Victoria – please refer to VANISH website for details.

Support groups provide a space where one can meet others who share a similar experience and where one can explore issues of concern around adoption in a safe, caring and non-judgemental environment. The benefits of meeting in such a group cannot be underestimated, as there is a shared unspoken understanding of what it feels like to lose a child to adoption or what it is feels like to be a person who was adopted.

For those who attend the mixed support group, there is the benefit of hearing about the experiences of adoption from another perspective. This can be of great benefit to those who are embarking on a search, and in particular those considering making an outreach and/or having contact. The grief and issues associated with the loss at the time of adoption and then the complexities of a reunion are difficult, so attending a mixed support group can provide a greater understanding and perhaps allow greater tolerance of each party and therefore a more positive and long-lasting reunion.

The adoptee only support group provides a safe environment for people who were adopted as children to voice their feelings and emotions in a safe and supportive environment without judgement from society, their adoptive parents or mothers and/or fathers. While each person has his/her own unique individual experience, feelings and emotions around their adoption, it is also understood that there are several ‘core issues’ which thread through the life of an adopted person or a mother or father. Attending a group meeting can provide support for a person who is struggling with issues as they arise by sharing their experience and learning from others with individual but similar experiences.
WORKSHEET A

PERSON SOUGHT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of the person sought</th>
<th>Source of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NAME</strong> of person sought: <strong>full name as recorded on any BDM certificate or in Adoption Agency File.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALSO KNOWN AS</strong> Any other name(s) the person sought may have used or be known by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIRTH</strong> of person sought: <strong>date &amp; place person sought was born</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOTHER</strong> of person sought: <strong>full name, maiden name, date and place of birth. if deceased, date and place of death</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FATHER</strong> of person sought: <strong>full name, date and place of birth and occupation. if deceased, date and place of death</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SIBLING(S)</strong> of person sought: <strong>Name(s), date(s) and place(s) of birth of any known siblings. if deceased, date and place of death</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARRIAGE(S)/RELATIONSHIP(S) of person sought:</strong> - <strong>date, place of any marriages/de facto relationships. - spouse/de facto partner details.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHILD/CHILDREN of person sought:</strong> <strong>names, dates and places of birth of any known children of the person sought</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEATH:</strong> - <strong>date &amp; place person died</strong> - <strong>informant details and relationship to deceased</strong> - <strong>cemetery details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WORKSHEET B**

**SEARCH RESULTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Time Frame/Date</th>
<th>Residential address of person sought and other people at address</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example Vic electoral rolls</td>
<td>1968-1972</td>
<td>123 Smith Street, Smithville 3000 - Mary Buchanan, Donald Buchanan, Jean Buchanan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithsville Cemetery</td>
<td>4 April 1984, 29 June 2009</td>
<td>Death Donald Buchanan, Death Mary Buchanan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ADOPTION INFORMATION SERVICES (AIS) VICTORIA
The following four post-adoption agencies hold adoption records (and state ward records) from the past and provide a range of services including support, family searching, counselling and intermediary work.

Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND)
Department of Health and Human Services
Level 20, 570 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000
Postal Address: P O Box 588 Collins Street West, Melbourne 8007
Tel: (03) 8606 5700 OR 1800 130 225 (national free call) OR 1300 769 926 (local free call)
Fax: (03) 8608 5700
Email: findduty@dhs.vic.gov.au

Anglicare Western Victoria
41 Somerville Road, Yarraville 3013
Tel: (03) 9396 7400 or 1800 809 722
Fax (03) 9689 6110
Web: http://www.anglicarevic.org.au

Catholic Care Victoria
3 Wingfield Street, Footscray 3011
Tel: (03) 9689 3888
Fax (03) 9689 4901
Email: adoptions@ccam.org.au

Connections Victoria
274 High Street, Windsor 3181
Tel: (03) 9521 5666
Fax: (03) 9521 5220
Email: foreverfamily@connections.org.au
Web: http://www.connections.org.au/search/site

OTHER ADOPTION INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES -

VICTORIA
VANISH Inc
1ST Floor, 50 Howard Street, North Melbourne 3051
Postal Address: PO Box 112, Carlton South 3053
Tel: (03) 9328 8611 or 1300 826 474
Fax: (03) 9320 6527
Email: info@vanish.org.au
Web: http://vanish.org.au/

Association Relinquishing Mothers (Vic) Inc (ARMS)
P O Box 645, Deepdene 3103
Tel: (03) 9769 0232
Email: arms@armsvic.org.au
Web: www.armsvic.org.au

Intercountry Adoption Resources Network (ICARN)
P O Box 12238 A’Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000
Tel: (03) 9898 9625
Email: ICARN01@gmail.com
Koorie Heritage Trust
Levels 1 and 3, The Yarra Building, Federation Square,
Cnr Flinders & Swanston Streets, Melbourne 3000
Tel: (03) 8622 2600
Fax: (03) 9602 4333
Email: info@koorieheritagetrust.com
Web: http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/

LINK-UP Victoria
34 Wurruk Avenue, Preston 3072
Tel: (03) 9470 3666 Freecall: 1800 687 662
Fax:(03) 9470 3666
Email: linkup@vacca.org
Web: http://www.linkupvictoria.org.au/

MacKillop Family Heritage and Information Service
237 Cecil Street, South Melbourne 3205
Tel: (03) 9699 9177
Email: enquiry@mackillop.org.au
Web: www.mackillop.org.au

Open Place
Suite 1, 8 Bromham Place, Richmond 3121
Tel: (03) 9421 6162 or 1800 779 379
Email: info@openplace.org.au
Web: www.openplace.org.au

Post Placement Support Service (PPSS)
135 Mt. Alexander Rd, Flemington 3031
Tel: (03) 9020 1833
Email: info@ppss.org.au
Web: www.iacaaustralia.org/

ADOPTION INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES - INTERSTATE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
Adoption Information Service
Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, 11 Moore Street, Civic ACT
Postal Address: GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601
Tel: (02) 6207 1069
Fax: (02) 6207 8888
Email: adoptions@acr.gov.au

NEW SOUTH WALES
Adoption Information Unit
Department of Community Services, 4-6 Cavill Avenue, Ashfield NSW 2131
Postal Address: Locked Bag 4028, Ashfield NSW 2131
Tel: 1300 799 023 (local call from within NSW and ACT) OR
(02) 9716 3005 (from other states) OR (+61) 2 9716 3005 (from overseas)
Fax: 02 9716 3400
Email: adoption.information@facs.nsw.gov.au

Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) New South Wales and ACT
Suite 253, Level 5, 7-11 The Avenue, Hurstville NSW 1481
Tel: (02) 9504 6788
Fax: (02) 9570 2699
Email: parc@benevolent.org.au
Web: www.benevolent.org.au/connect/post--adoption--support
NORTHERN TERRITORY
Adoption Unit, Department of Children & Families
1st Floor, CasCom 4, Building 2, 13 Scaturchio Street, Darwin
Postal Address: PO Box 40596, Casuarina NT 0811
Tel: (08) 8922 5519
Fax:(08) 8922 7480
Web: www.childrenandfamilies.nt.gov.au/Adoption/

QUEENSLAND
Adoption Information Service, Department of Communities
111 George Street, Brisbane Qld 4000
Postal Address: GPO Box 806 Brisbane Qld 4001
Tel: (07) 3224 7415
Fax: (07) 3210 0350
Email: ads@communities.qld.gov.au
Web: https://www.qld.gov.au/community/caring-child/contact-adoption-services/

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)
189 Coronation Drive, Milton, Qld 4064
Tel: (07)3170 4600 or 1300 914 819
Fax: 07 3255 2953
Email: pasq@benevolent.org.au
Web: www.benevolent.org.au/connect/post--adoption--support

JIGSAW Queensland Post-Adoption Centre
SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm Qld 4005
Postal Address: PO Box 912, New Farm Qld. 4005
Tel: (07) 3358 6666
Email: jigsawqld@server101.com
Web: http://jigsawqld.com

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Adoption & Family Information Service (AIFS),
Department for Education and Child Development,
108 North Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000
Postal Address: PO Box 1152, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: (08) 8207 2648
Email: adoptions@sa.gov.au
Web: http://www.families.sa.gov.au/pages/adoption/ContactAFIS/?reFlag=1

Post Adoption Support Services (PASS) SA
49A Osmond Street, Hindmarsh SA 5007
Tel: (08) 8245 8100
Fax. (08) 8346 7333
Email: passinfo@rasa.org.au

TASMANIA
Adoption & Permanency Service, Department of Health & Human Services,
34 Davey Street, Hobart Tasmania 7000
Postal Address: GPO Box 538, Hobart 7001
Tel: (03) 6166 0422
Fax (03) 6233 1343
Email: adoption.service@dhhs.tas.gov.au
INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE (ISS) AUSTRALIA

If the search in Australia for a birth parent and/or adult child who was adopted has been unsuccessful and there is evidence that person was born and/or lived overseas and may have returned there or gone elsewhere overseas then one option is to contact International Social Service (ISS) http://www.iss.org.au/our-services/tracing-and-reunification/. The Toll Free number is 1300 657 843 or (+61) 3 9614 8755 for the National Office. There is a fee associated with this service.
NB The ISS does not provide services related to inter-country adoptions.

ADOPTION INFORMATION AND/OR SUPPORT SERVICES - OVERSEAS

NEW ZEALAND
Department of Child Youth and Family
Tel: 64 9 912 3820 (from outside NZ)
Email: webadoption@cyf.govt.nz

UNITED KINGDOM
Adoptions Section, Room C202
General Register Office
Trafalgar Road, Southport  PR8 2HH
Email: adoptions@gro.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.gov.uk/adoption-records

Adoption Services for Adults
P O Box 4621, Marlow, Bucks. SL7 9DG
Tel: 01628 481 954
Web: http://www.adoptionservicesforadults.org.uk
RESOURCES

ARCHIVES/ PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE of STATES/TERRITORIES
The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and interstate State Archives are the
official repositories of historic records of government departments and some private
organisations and institutions. Legislation governing public access to records is
regulated by the relevant state/territory legislation.

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV)
99 Shiel Street, North Melbourne 3053
Postal Address: PO Box 2100, North Melbourne. 3051.
Tel: (03) 9348 5600
Email: enquiries@prov.vic.gov.au

Other State/Territory Archives
- Northern Territory Archives Service http://artsandmuseums.nt.gov.au/ntas

BIRTHS, DEATHS and MARRIAGES REGISTRIES
An important part of most searches (see above) for birth relatives will be
applications to Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDMs) for birth, death,
marriage and/or change of name certificates.

The Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
595 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000
Tel: 1300 369 367
Email: vicbdm@justice.vic.gov.au
Web: www.bdm.vic.gov.au

The link to the website of each Australian State/Territory BDM Registry can be found at http://australia.gov.au/topics/law-and-justice/births-deaths-and-marriages-registries
Each BDM website contains information about the rights of adoptees, access
policies and current fees for certificates.

Some Registries such as NSW, QLD, WA and NZ now have Indexes of BDMs
(historic) available online. NB the cost of historic BDM certificates is cheaper on-
line than one purchased by a postal application.

DEATH NOTICES/INFORMATION
Cemeteries/Crematoriums
Many Australian cemeteries/crematoriums have on-line indexes of deceased
persons; contact details of most can be found at http://www.australiancemeteries.com/

Alternatively contact the shire/council office in which the cemetery is located as
the local government authority is responsible for all cemeteries/crematoriums in its
area.
Death/Funeral Notices
The Ryerson Index is a free on-line database of death and funeral notices in major daily Australian metropolitan and some regional newspapers; apart from the name of the deceased person the index provides the date and place of death (if published) and the name and date of publication of death notice(s).
http://www.ryersonindex.org/

Funeral Directors are also an invaluable source of information. Funeral Directors are listed by suburb/town on http://www.afda.org.au/

ELECTORAL ROLLS AUSTRALIA WIDE
Past and current Australia wide electoral rolls are an essential resource in conducting any search. Past electoral rolls are to be found in the Genealogy Centres of capital city libraries, at Genealogy Society offices and random years to 1980 on www.ancestry.com.au Since 1911, it has been compulsory for all adults with Australian citizenship to vote in Commonwealth elections and referendums. In 1973, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years throughout Australia, in 1964 Aboriginal people were given the right to vote and in 1984 it was made compulsory for all Aboriginal people to enrol and to vote at elections.

The following are entitled to and are required by law to vote:
- people 18 years of age or over.
- Australian citizens or British subjects on Commonwealth electoral rolls on 25 January 1984.\(^{11}\)
- people who have lived at their current address for at least one month prior to an election.

The following people are not entitled to enrol nor to vote:
- people who, by reason of being of unsound mind, are incapable of understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting,
- prisoners serving a sentence of three years or more,
- people who have been convicted of treason and have not been pardoned,
- Australian citizens permanently living overseas,
- any person who renounces their Australian citizenship,
- people who are not Australian citizens,
- people who are not 18 years of age or over.

The current electronic Victorian electoral roll can be accessed by members of the public at the Victorian Electoral Commission office, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne.

The current electronic Australia wide electoral roll can be accessed by members of the public at any Australian Electoral Commission office; the main office is at 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

NB In recent years there has been a trend for people who are eligible to vote who do not register and thus their names do not appear on an electoral roll.

FAMILY HISTORY/GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES
You might like to consider joining your local Family History or State Genealogical Society so as to be able to use their resources. These Societies will generally hold most of the historic records held in State/Territory Libraries, and in addition will generally hold a wealth of information about local people and places. The two such Societies in Victoria are

\(^{11}\) At which time the eligibility requirements were altered.

**IMMIGRATION / NATURALISATION FILES**
including British Selection Migrant Selection Documents

The Immigration files of most non-British immigrants and Immigration files of a few British Immigrants are to be found on the National Archives of Australia (NAA) website [http://www.naa.gov.au/](http://www.naa.gov.au/) If the file you are searching for is not on the NAA website it is always worth putting in an application with as much information as you have. Unless the record has already been digitised there is a fee for obtaining a copy of the record.

Historic Immigration/Passenger Indexes can be found on the State Archive/Public Records websites – see above.

**LIBRARIES – STATE/TERRITORY**

Each State/Territory Library will have a Genealogy/Family History Centre with selections of historic records which will be invaluable in the search for family members:

- Birth Death Marriage Indexes
- Cemetery Indexes
- Electoral rolls
- Immigration Indexes
- Some State Ward Indexes
- Some Children’s Homes Records
- Newspapers
- Postal/Telephone Directories
- Public Service Rolls
- Rate Books
- Photographs

The State Library of Victoria (SLV) is located at 328 Swanston St, Melbourne. 3000
Tel: (03) 8664 7000


**MENTAL HEALTH RECORDS**

With the final closure of all the large mental health/psychiatric institutions in the 1990s the Mental Health Board distributed those files of patients who were receiving treatment to the appropriate community-based psychiatric units. For example Royal Park patients and their medical records were transferred to the John Cade Psychiatric Unit at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Closed files, i.e. where the patients were no longer receiving treatment or were deceased, were transferred to the archives unit of the Depart. of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This archives unit also holds the Admissions Registers for most of the closed psychiatric institutions; others may have been forwarded to the Public Records Office (PROV). Many patient medical records have been destroyed but these Admissions Registers contain quite detailed personal information.
An adopted person has the right under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act to apply for information about a parent who was a patient at a psychiatric institution; this does not mean they will be automatically granted access to a parent's file as different legislation governs who can access records. There is an application fee but this is waived if the applicant is on a pension or has a health care card. An FOI Application Form can be obtained from The FOI Unit, Department of Health and Human Services – Tel: (03) 9096 8449.

MILITARY ROLLS AND DEFENCE SERVICE RECORDS
These nominal rolls, created by the Australian War Memorial in conjunction with the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, contain the full name, date and place of birth, date and place of enlistment and name of next of kin of ex-service men and women who saw military service overseas.


NB The Great War Defence Service Records have been digitised and can be viewed free of charge on the NAA website. Other defence service personnel records can be accessed as long as they are more than 30 years old and they do not contain "sensitive material". They can be ordered through the National Archives of Australia (NAA) [http://www.naa.gov.au/](http://www.naa.gov.au/) A fee applies.

NEWSPAPERS
The National Library of Australia has been responsible for the digitising of many Australian newspapers up to and including 1954. [http://trove.nla.gov.au/](http://trove.nla.gov.au/) The birth, death, marriage, divorce, missing person’s notices, court appearances and general articles can be an invaluable source of information.

POSTAL DIRECTORIES
Sands and McDougall Postal Directories were produced annually in Victoria up to 1974; similar postal directories were produced in other states but were replaced by telephone directories in different years. These directories list residents and their addresses - alphabetically, by suburb and by country town; there are also entries for trades/occupations. As only initials and surname of a householder are listed any entry needs to be cross-referenced with the relevant year on an electoral roll to obtain the full name of the person. These postal directories have been reproduced on micro-fiche and can be found in Genealogy Centres in libraries.

PROBATE/WILLS/LETTERS of ADMINISTRATION
Probate/wills/letters of administration older than three years are held at the PROV in North Melbourne and once ordered through the PROV website can be viewed there without cost. An index of probate applications to the Supreme Court of Victoria from 1841-2009 can be found on the PROV website at [http://prov.vic.gov.au/research/wills-and-probate](http://prov.vic.gov.au/research/wills-and-probate).

An index of probate applications to the Supreme Court of Victoria since 1953¹² can also be found at [http://scvprobate.com.au/probate/](http://scvprobate.com.au/probate/) Probate/wills/letters of administration for the past three years can be viewed at The Probate Office, Supreme Court of Victoria, 436 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. A search fee¹³ applies plus photocopy costs and a file needs to be ordered and paid for before it can be viewed. Since 1997¹⁴ a Victorian probate file has contained the death certificate of the deceased person.

¹² This is an-going project with further years being added regularly to the database. The Probate Index for the years 1841 to 1992 has been put on micro-fiche and can be found in most libraries.

¹³ Currently that fee is $23.10

¹⁴ Wills Act 1997
SUGGESTED READING

A child to call my own – A study of adopted women and their experience of motherhood by Phoebe Masso & Victoria Whitfield, Post Adoption Resource Centre, New South Wales, 2003
Explores the impact of adoption and motherhood.

A birthmother talks of her personal experience of adoption and loss as well as looking at the effects on other members of the triangle.

A companion book to Adoption and Loss.

Adoption Healing, a path to recovery by Joe Soll, Gateway Press, Inc 2000.
Written for all members of the adoption triad.

Adoption Healing for mothers who lost children to adoption by Joe Soll, Gateway Press, Inc 2003. Joe Soll’s new book is intended to help with the healing process of mothers.

A very clear outline of the developmental aspects of being adopted from birth to old age. Recommended for professional and lay people alike.

A comprehensive book about adoption reunion in America. Covers issues for siblings, birth fathers and adoptive parents as well as adoptees and birth mothers. Addresses questions such as ‘Why do reunions happen?’ , ‘What are the patterns of reunion?’ and ‘What are the post reunion issues?’ Poignant stories of adoption and reunion particularly from a birth mother’s perspective.

A sequel to Nancy Verrier’s previous book The Primal Wound. A book for all members of the adoption triad.

Development of Responsibility: the experience of birth fathers in adoption by M. Cicchini, Perth, Western Australia, Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc. 1990

Moving book about birth fathers, written by a birth father.

Further Down The Track compiled by The NSW Committee on Adoption & Permanent Care 2001. Contains a collection of personal experiences of adoption reunions in the authors’ own words.

Further explores the inner world of the adopted person, and looks at both the effects of separation and the attachment of adopted people to their adoptive parents.

Lost and Found: the adoption experience, Betty Jean Lifton, USA, 1979

Out of the Shadows: Birthfathers' Stories, Mary Martin Mason, USA, 1995

Late Revelation - the impact of adoption in midlife by Margaret Watson
Australian Journal of Adoption Vol. 6, No. 1  At age forty, Margaret Watson learned she was adopted. Faced with a major identity and life crisis, Margaret embarked on a physical and spiritual journey to find her birth family and discover her true self.

PRC Research
Telling your spouse, children and other family that you have relinquished a child by S. Midford, Perth, Western Australia, Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc.

Based on large scale research, this book draws from life experiences of adopted people to guide people through the emotional and practical issues of reunion.

This book makes use of interviews with adult adoptees, birth and adoptive parents and those professionally involved in adoption issues.


The Effect on the Mother of Relinquishing a Child for Adoption, M van Keppel & R. C. Winkler, 1982

The Experience of Loss in Adoption, M van Keppel, S M Midford and M Cicchini M. 1987


A comprehensive account of the history of adoption in Australia.

To Search for Self; the experience of access to adoption information, P & S Swain (eds), The Federation Press, Sydney, 1992.


REFERENCES

Ever After – fathers and the impact of adoption by Gary Coles, Clova Publications, South Australia, 2004


Post Adoption Support Services (PASS), Relationships Australia, South Australia http://www.rasa.org.au/services/couples-families/post-adoption-support-services-pass/
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - VICTORIAN ADOPTION LEGISLATION

Pre - 1928
Throughout the history of mankind, adoption has been practised in various forms and for a variety of reasons. Adoption is officially the process of taking another person’s child into one’s family through legal means, changing the identity of the child and raising the child as one’s own with all the entailing responsibilities and duties.

However, historically adoption has most frequently occurred outside the legal system; it was a euphemism for various types ‘out of home care’ of a child which may have included ‘foster care’, ‘boarding out’, ‘state wardship’, ‘guardianship’ and ‘de facto adoption’. In Victoria prior to 1928, adoption as mentioned above was widespread but there was no legal requirement for the adoption of a child to be formalised legally although this was occasionally done. However records were created for these various forms of ‘out of home care’ of a child but often they contained sketchy information and if they still exist they are the property of government or non-government welfare organisations which created them.

The Adoption Act 1928
Adoption in Victoria changed with the Adoption Act of 1928; the first legal adoption occurred in July 1929. This legislation provided for the legal transfer of parental rights, duties, obligations and liabilities to the adoptive parents and offered secrecy, and it was believed safety and stability to the child and the adoptive parents. The adopted child had his/her original birth certificate cancelled and was given a new identity with a new birth certificate; all connection with the birth family was severed forever. No further thought was given to the child’s birth parent(s).

The Adoption Act 1984
The Adoption Act 1984 provided the adult adopted person with the right to access ‘identifying information’ about their mother, and their father if he was named on the original birth certificate or in the adoption agency record. Access to adoption records may be provided to an adopted person who is under 18 years of age with the approval of both the parent(s) and the adoptive parents. The adult child of an adopted person who is deceased inherits the right to access ‘identifying information’. In cases where the adopted person does not want to access their adoption records they can give written authority to an adult child to do so.

The adoption records may include the pre-adoption birth certificate, court order, and if any, adoption agency records. Access to ‘identifying information’ about the parent is then interpreted by Registries of Births Deaths and Marriages as giving the adopted person access to the mother’s (and where relevant to the father’s) birth, her most recent marriage, change of name and/or death certificates.

Amendment (2013) to the Victorian Adoption Act (1984)
The Victorian adoption legislation changed on 1st July 2013 as a result of the Past Adoption Practices Apology delivered by the Premier of Victoria on 25th October 2012. With this amendment, mothers (and fathers if named) are now allowed to receive identifying information about their adult adopted children without the consent of their adopted sons and/or daughters.

15 Between 1929 and 2013 there were approximately 64,000 legal adoptions in Victoria (Source – DHS)
APPENDIX B - VERY BRIEF HISTORY of VANISH Inc

The idea of VANISH was conceived by several self-help groups: JIGSAW, Association of Relinquishing Mothers (ARMS) and The Geelong Adoption Program (GAP). These groups had long recognised that people who were involved with self-help could make a special contribution to an adoption information service. These groups had had many years’ experience in providing search assistance and support, and had been consulted when the government’s Adoption Information Service was established following the 1984 Adoption Act.

1984 The Victorian Adoption Act 1984 created the opportunity for adopted adults to obtain their adoption records and thus with identifying information about their parent(s).

1987 A DHS review concluded that the adoption service needed streamlining; it also recognised that an independent search and support service would help facilitate an efficient and speedy Adoption Information Service, thus reducing the long waiting list. It was also accepted that people could conduct their own searches for birth relatives when they felt the time was right, and that the adopted person could do his or her own outreach to the family of origin.

1989 The Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help (VANISH Inc) was established. It was, and still is, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to provide a specialised search service for adopted persons, and to provide a support service to those affected by adoption.

1995 VANISH was asked by the State Government to extend its search and support services to former state wards or careleavers, another group of Victorians who had been separated from their families of origin often in very traumatic circumstances.

2004 Senate Report, ‘The Forgotten Australians’, about the plight of those who had experienced out-of-home or institutional care, stated that services to these people were seriously lacking at many levels.

2006 VANISH Inc altered the composition of its Committee of Management to reflect the change of extending services to donor conceived people.

2006 Victorian Parliamentary Apology to the Forgotten Australians.

2010 Establishment of Open Place a new and separate search and support service for Forgotten Australians but with an on-going relationship with VANISH Inc through the provision of a family tracing service.

2012 Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices.

2013 National Apology for Forced Adoptions

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16 The term ‘careleavers’ has been replace by Forgotten Australians as a result of Senate Report 2004
APPENDIX C

Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices

Apology

Past Adoption Practices

Thursday 25 October 2012

This Parliament expresses our formal and sincere apology to the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who were profoundly harmed by past adoption practices in Victoria.

We acknowledge that many thousands of Victorian babies were taken from their mothers, without informed consent, and that this loss caused immense grief.

We express our sincere sorrow and regret for the health and welfare policies that condoned the practice of forced separations.

These were misguided, unwarranted, and they caused immeasurable pain.

To the mothers and fathers who were denied the opportunity to love and care for your children, and for the pain and trauma you experienced, we are deeply sorry.

To the sons and daughters for whom adoption meant continual anxiety, uncertainty and the deprivation of a natural family connection — we offer our sincere apology.

Today, with all Members of the Parliament of Victoria gathered in this House, we acknowledge the devastating and ongoing impacts of these practices of the past.

To all those harmed we offer our heartfelt sympathy and apologise unreservedly.

We undertake to never forget what happened and to never repeat these practices.
National Apology for Forced Adoptions
21 March 2013

Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering.
We acknowledge the profound effects of these policies and practices on fathers.
And we recognise the hurt these actions caused to brothers and sisters, grandparents, partners and extended family members.
We deplore the shameful practices that denied you, the mothers, your fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for your children. You were not legally or socially acknowledged as their mothers. And you were yourselves deprived of care and support.
To you, the mothers who were betrayed by a system that gave you no choice and subjected you to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice, we apologise.
We say sorry to you, the mothers who were denied knowledge of your rights, which meant you could not provide informed consent. You were given false assurances. You were forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal.
We know you have suffered enduring effects from these practices forced upon you by others. For the loss, the grief, the disempowerment, the stigmatisation and the guilt, we say sorry.
To each of you who were adopted or removed, who were led to believe your mother had rejected you and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with your family and community of origin and to connect with your culture, we say sorry.
We apologise to the sons and daughters who grew up not knowing how much you were wanted and loved.
We acknowledge that many of you still experience a constant struggle with identity, uncertainty and loss, and feel a persistent tension between loyalty to one family and yearning for another.
To you, the fathers, who were excluded from the lives of your children and deprived of the dignity of recognition on your children’s birth records, we say sorry. We acknowledge your loss and grief.
We recognise that the consequences of forced adoption practices continue to resonate through many, many lives. To you, the siblings, grandparents, partners and other family members who have shared in the pain and suffering of your loved ones or who were unable to share their lives, we say sorry.
Many are still grieving. Some families will be lost to one another forever. To those of you who face the difficulties of reconnecting with family and establishing ongoing relationships, we say sorry.
We offer this apology in the hope that it will assist your healing and in order to shine a light on a dark period of our nation’s history.
To those who have fought for the truth to be heard, we hear you now. We acknowledge that many of you have suffered in silence for far too long.
We are saddened that many others are no longer here to share this moment. In particular, we remember those affected by these practices who took their own lives. Our profound sympathies go to their families.
To redress the shameful mistakes of the past, we are committed to ensuring that all those affected get the help they need, including access to specialist counselling services and support, the ability to find the truth in freely available records and assistance in reconnecting with lost family.
We resolve, as a nation, to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated. In facing future challenges, we will remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child’s right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
With profound sadness and remorse, we offer you all our unreserved apology.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister
APPENDIX E –

Service User Files Policy

Policy – VANISH will provide the highest possible degree of personal privacy and confidentiality in communication and in access to service user records.

Rationale – To ensure that all information kept on service users, remains confidential and is secured appropriately and to ensure that all staff, volunteers and service users are made aware of the limits of confidentiality.

Procedure – The Privacy Act has produced a number of Information Privacy Principles, which must be adhered to by all VANISH staff, Volunteers, and Committee of Management members, and are as follows.

Manner and purpose of collection of personal information
Employees of VANISH are only to collect and/or document personal information which is directly relevant to the work undertaken by VANISH. Such information is not to be collected by any unlawful means.

Solicitation of personal information form a service user
Each service user has a right to be aware of what information is required; the purpose for which the information is being collected and who VANISH allows access to such information. Any personal information collected by employees of VANISH must be relevant to the purpose. Additionally, employees are to ensure, to the best of their ability that the information collected is up to date, complete and does not intrude to any unreasonable extent upon the personal affairs of the individual concerned.

Information relating to records
VANISH has and will continue to have possession of records (including those that are kept electronically) which contain personal information on service users, employees and volunteers. It is therefore necessary that

1) secure safeguards are in place to protect the information from loss, unauthorised access, unauthorised use, modification, disclosure or other misuse.
2) details of where a file is located are to be entered on a service user’s record on the computer.
3) the search room or any room holding search data on computers must be secured and/or locked when unattended.

Access to records containing personal information
Any release of information or requests of information or access to personal records must be directed to the Manager, after receiving the permission of the service user. Details of whether a service user is registered with VANISH cannot be released without written permission of the service user which is witnessed (noted with date and time) by the senior worker.

Search room staff, are to be advised if a volunteer or service user is to enter the search room so that service user details are not visible.

No service user files are to be taken from the Search room. In the situation where a staff member is required to obtain information from external resources outside the VANISH building; the search is to be identified by registration number only.

The holding and releasing of records/information by VANISH for the purpose of search will be treated with confidentiality and will comply with the Privacy Act.

Details of where a file is currently being held to be entered on a service user’s record on computer.
Search room or any room holding search data on computers must be secured and/or locked when unattended. No file/record or copy thereof can be taken by person or persons outside the building.

**Personal information to be used for relevant purposes**

Employees of VANISH who are aware of or have access to personal information shall not use the information except for a purpose which is directly relevant to the service user. All VANISH staff and volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement which outlines the agreement for all information relating to service users being confidential.

Any release of information or request of information on behalf of a VANISH service user must be accompanied by a signed authorisation form by the Service User.

**Limits on use and disclosure of personal information**

Employees shall not use or disclose personal information for any purpose, which is not directly relevant to VANISH unless:

- the individual concerned has consented to the use and/or disclosure of the information or an agreed part of the information for that other purpose.

- the employee believes on reasonable grounds that use and/or disclosure of the information for that other purpose is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the life or health of the individual concerned or another person.

- use and/or disclosure of the information for that other purpose is required and authorised under law. The individual concerned is reasonably likely to have been aware, or made aware, that information of that kind is usually passed to that person, body or agency.

- the purpose for which the information is used is directly related to the purpose for which the information was obtained.

- use and/or disclosure of the information for that other purpose are reasonably necessary for enforcement of the criminal law or of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty and is authorised under law.

- if in the above instances, the staff member should divulge the information to the Manager or in her/his absence, to the senior staff member.

- no staff member should discuss any service user with any member of the Committee of Management without first seeking permission of the Manager.

**Record Keeping**

**Policy** - VANISH has a responsibility to record and maintain levels of information pertaining to the particular program and/or the service provided and to relevant Government departmental requirements.

**Rationale** - Effective record-keeping is necessary to ensure the effective operation of the agency and to provide a tool or review when necessary. Record-keeping is also required to secure continued funding.

**Record Keeping Procedure**

Record-keeping should include, but not be limited to, hard copies and electronic copies of the following:

- Official Committee of Management Minutes of VANISH
- Personnel files for all staff, including permanent, casual and part time employees.
- Service user files for all service users.
- Copies of all statistics relating to Government Departments
- Copies of financial statements relating to VANISH and relevant Government Departments.
- Copies of funding agreements
- Copies of all written correspondence relating to VANISH and relevant Government Departments
- Copies of all policy and planning documents relating to VANISH and relevant Government Departments, e.g. Strategic plans, state plans etc.
- Copy of VANISH Policy and Procedure Manual
- Any financial documentation required by relevant legislation
- Records of complaints
- Day notes of any significant calls or other matters

Service User files
All service user files will be locked away and secured at all times (see Service User Files Policy). Documents to be shredded will be handled with care and secured in the Documents Disposal Bin.

Retention periods
All VANISH files will be archived in accordance with current government legislation.

Disposal Policy
All VANISH files will be appropriately destroyed (shredded) at the completion of legislative retention periods.

Statistics Procedures
Policy - VANISH will keep relevant statistics on all service users

Rationale – The production of statistics assists VANISH to account for continued funding and provides a method of determining the number of people assisted.

All staff members will be required to keep accurate statistics on each area of work as directed.

Statistics, which are non-identifying will also be kept in line with that required by the Department of Human and Health Services. All statistics will be collected and kept in such a manner as to ensure the confidentiality of all service users.

All statistics collected will remain the property of VANISH and may only be released on director of the Manager and the Committee of Management.
Application for FULL MEMBERSHIP of VANISH with voting rights

I am eligible for membership in the following category(s)

**Offspring:**
- □ I am an adopted person (Australia)
- □ I am an adopted person (Intercountry)
- □ I am a careleaver (Forgotten Australian)
- □ I am a donor conceived person

**Biological or Natural Family:**
- □ I am the mother or father (birth/natural parent) of an adopted person
- □ I am the natural parent of a donor-conceived person
- □ I am a donor parent
- □ I am the natural parent of a careleaver (Forgotten Australian)
- □ I am the biological sibling of an adopted person or a careleaver (Forgotten Australian) or a donor-conceived person

**Non-biological or Alternative Family:**
- □ I am an adoptive parent
- □ I am the step-parent of an adopted person
- □ I am the non-biological sibling of an adopted person
- □ I am the non-biological parent of a child born of donor assisted reproduction

**Supporter:**
- □ I am an individual who supports the Association but not eligible for membership in any of the above categories

Surname: ____________________________________________
Given names: ____________________________________________
Postal Address: ____________________________________________  Postcode: __________

Email address: ____________________________________________ (please print)
Home telephone No: ___________________ Mobile No. ________ ______

I prefer to receive VOICE, news bulletins or notices via email:  Yes / No

Please note: some documents may be required to be sent by post

Signed: ____________________________  Date: __/__/__

Please return your completed form to: VANISH
P O Box 112, Carlton South . Vic . 3053 or email to info@vanish.org.au

How did you hear about VANISH Inc ?

__________________________________________
VANISH Inc is a not-for-profit organisation and welcomes donations with all monies put towards enhancing existing services.

All donations over $2 are tax deductible. If you would like to make a donation please send cheque or money order to:

VANISH Inc
PO Box 112
Carlton South 3053