

VANISH VOICE

Autumn 2019



SPECIAL ARTICLE: DNA TESTING

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From the Manager's Desk

Dear VANISH members and friends,

Welcome to the Autumn edition of VOICE. I hope you are enjoying the cooler weather after all those hot, dry days we experienced across the state.

In this edition we are covering DNA genealogical testing which we have been receiving an increasing number of enquiries about since our joint workshop with the Genealogical Society Victoria 18 months ago. DNA testing has also been getting increasing attention in the media, including a story published last month featuring our Patron Pauline Ley. The link to this story is at the bottom of our article on page 7.

I am pleased to introduce our two new volunteers. Andrea Phillips, who has a legal background joined us in October last year and has been assisting us with research on legislation and regulations among other things. Lea Squadrito joined last month as Librarian and we look forward to her applying her training and experience to our library and other resources. We are grateful to both Andrea and Lea for volunteering their time and energy to the work of VANISH.

Since the last edition of VOICE we have sadly

farewelled Penny Mackieson who served as Chair of VANISH for 4 years (see below) and Hana Crisp who worked with us for the past year, firstly as Administrator and then in a short-term role as Communications, Policy and Research Officer. Hana brought her considerable skills and experience to a broad range of tasks and her involvement was much appreciated by everyone at VANISH. We wish her all the best for her future.

This edition of VOICE includes updates about what we have been doing and news items from around the world. I do hope you find it interesting. Please

remember we always appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you would like to contact me please email me at manager@vanish.org.au

Warm regards,

**Charlotte Smith,
Manager**



Farewell and Thank You Penny Mackieson

It was with enormous sadness that we farewelled Penny Mackieson last month. Penny had served on the Committee of Management (COM) since 2014 and as Chair of the COM since 2015. Penny has been a dynamic force for good in her time with VANISH, providing sound leadership and commitment to our service users and members as well as our core values and goals. Penny has been instrumental in writing submissions to government including to the recent Review of the Adoption Act. Her solid understanding of adoption through her personal and professional experience, together with the fact that she is highly respected in the sector have meant that her advocacy and liaison work has been highly effective.



VANISH has been extremely fortunate to have Penny as Chair and we are very thankful for the time and energy she devoted to our work. Penny has now completed her PhD and has re-joined the workforce so hopefully we will get the opportunity to see her once in a while! Penny's book *Adoption Deception* (Spinifex Press) is available in the VANISH Library.

The VANISH Team:

Charlotte Smith
Manager

Elizabeth Tomlinson
*Counsellor and Search & Support
Coordinator*

Mary Rawson, Gail Holstock
and Patricia Navaretti
Search & Support Workers

Lorna Sleightholm
Receptionist/Administrator

Adam D'Arcy
Quality & Compliance Officer

Barbara Burns
Accountant (Volunteer)

Andrea Phillips
Legal (Volunteer)

Lea Squadrito
Librarian (Volunteer)

6th Anniversary of the National Apology

Afternoon Tea at VANISH

Thursday 21st March marked the sixth Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. VANISH commemorated the occasion with afternoon tea in North Melbourne. VANISH Committee of Management members, the Manager and staff members hosted guests including VANISH members and service users and representatives from ARMS and FIND. It was a lovely informal get together with a short speech by Charlotte Smith, who read excerpts from the Apology and paid respect to those who continue to experience the affects of forced adoptions. She expressed the importance of coming together and supporting each other. Later in the afternoon some of us joined the gathering hosted by ARMS next to the recently unveiled statue by Anne Ross, 'Taken not Given' which is located behind Parliament House in St Andrew's Reserve.



"Empty Arms-Broken Lives" – A new statue in Western Australia

In Western Australia to commemorate the 6th Anniversary of the National Apology a new memorial entitled "Empty Arms-Broken Lives" was unveiled by ARMS WA. There was an excellent turnout with poignant speeches and shared recognition of the damage of forced adoption policies that separated mothers, fathers and children. It has been a big job to create a memorial (largely funded by the Federal Government), and we congratulate Lyn Devine, chairperson of ARMS and all who have worked on the project. The memorial can be seen at Read Park, corner of Salford St and Albany Hwy in Victoria Park, WA.

(Information and photos from Jigsaw WA with permission.)



News & Events



David Cross, Sandra Pankhurst and Charlotte Smith

Podcast with Sandra Pankhurst

We had a lovely chat about all things adoption with Sandra Pankhurst on her podcast "Sandra and Friends". If you would like to listen to Sandra talking with Charlotte Smith, VANISH Manager and David Cross, VANISH Support Group Facilitator please go to the link below. We had so much to discuss, we decided to do a second podcast soon! Sarah Krasnostein's remarkable book about Sandra, "The Trauma Cleaner" is available from the VANISH library and at all good bookshops.

<http://bit.ly/SandraAndFriendsPodcastEp4>

ABC "The Cult of The Family"

A series about *The Family* was aired on ABC last month. It is a three-part investigation that chronicles the rise and fall of Australia's most notorious cult and its strange but charismatic female leader, Anne Hamilton-Byrne. If you missed it you can still watch it until July on ABC iview at the following link.

<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/cult-of-the-family>

Late last year, Ben Shenton offered a glimpse at life inside and outside *The Family* in the SBS program Insight.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/the-family-breaking-free-from-a-sinister-cult>

SBS Insight "DNA Surprises"

In case you missed the screening of SBS Insight "DNA Surprises" last October (Season 2018 Episode 35), you can still view it on SBS On Demand. This episode covers the stories of individuals who discovered the true identity of their biological father, found their siblings through donor conception and one woman who discovered through DNA testing that she is adopted. Follow this link to view this episode. <https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/1340143171818/insight-dna-surprises>

Position Vacant: ACCOUNTANT (VOLUNTEER)

Reporting to the Manager

Liaising with the Treasurer, Bookkeeper and Administrator/Receptionist.

Using MYOB AccountingRight Package – Home and Office access.

Responsibilities:

- ◆ Prepare bi-monthly financial reports for the Manager and Committee of Management (Profit and Loss and Balance Sheet)
- ◆ Prepare annual reports at the end of the financial year (July and August)
- ◆ Prepare for the independent financial audit, ensuring accurate documentation (August)
- ◆ Develop the annual budget with the Manager for COM approval (May) and review mid-year.
- ◆ Ongoing tasks include maintaining a functioning chart of accounts, assisting with and monitoring the coding of expenditure, calculating depreciation, suggesting accounting treatments for unusual items and responding to questions from the Manager, Bookkeeper and Reception/Administrator.

Time commitment has been approximately 8 hours every second month for bi-monthly accounts, 30 hours for annual accounts and audit, 20 hours for the budget and 20 hours for ongoing advice and support, totalling approximately 120 hours.

Criteria:

- ◆ A Bachelor's degree in Accounting or Finance is required, as is professional certification with: Certified Practising Accountants (CPA Australia), Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (CA Australia) or Institute of Public Accountants.
- ◆ At least five years related experience is required. Experience in the not-for-profit sector is desirable.
- ◆ Applicants must also demonstrate attention to detail, good record-keeping skills, understanding of how to meet state and federal tax and non-profit regulations and excellent communication skills for working with front-line staff, management and board members, plus the independent auditor.

Employees and volunteers are required to undergo a police and referee check prior to appointment.

For more details or to express interest contact The Manager, Charlotte Smith, manager@vanish.org.au, 03 9328 8611.



NEWSFLASH! After much lobbying by organisations and individuals in Victoria, *Without Consent: Australia's Past Adoption Practices Exhibition* by the National Archives of Australia will be at the National Wool Museum in Geelong from 1st November 2019 to 26th January 2020. For more details go to <http://www.naa.gov.au/.../exhibitions/without-consent/index.aspx>

VANISH is planning a day trip to take a group to the exhibition in November. If you would like to participate please indicate your interest to info@vanish.org.au or phone (03)9328 8611.

44th Anniversary of "Operation Babylift" C-5 plane crash in Saigon

The 4th April this year marked the 44th anniversary of the "Operation Babylift" C-5 plane crash in Saigon, Vietnam. Out of 314 people on board, 78 children died along with 46 U.S. personnel; there were 176 survivors. Infants and children who survived the crash were flown to the U.S and adopted there. We remember those who perished and their families in Vietnam who never saw them again.

Adoptee Vietnamese International assists Vietnamese adoptees to search for their families, including providing links to organisations supporting DNA Testing <http://www.adoptedvietnamese.org/searching/roots-tracing-guide/>



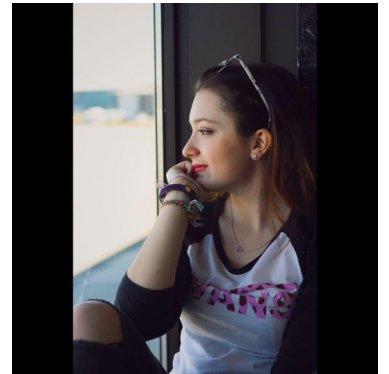
"Hey" - song by Robyn Slade

Robyn Slade's song is about someone meeting their father as an adult. You can listen to it here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u8URdgyFiU>

The 16 year old Canadian singer-songwriter sings this touching heartfelt song with Clint Curtis. Written by her friend Rob Hickman, the song conveys the power of the single word "Hey" upon meeting.

The song came out in September and has now had 73k views.

On Facebook Robyn says: "There are some beautiful stories that people have shared with me in the comment section that everyone should read from people who have found or are looking for their fathers! I'm am beyond thrilled that my song has touched so many people! I'm very honoured that it's being shared by some Adoptees' and Fathers' rights groups!"



(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths

Alison Lowry's new exhibition "(A) Dressing Our Hidden Truths" in the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Dublin, is described as an artistic response to the violence and sexual violence against women in the Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes and Industrial Schools of Ireland's recent past.

Alison Lowry is a glass artist living and working from her studio, 'Schoolhouse Glass' in Saintfield, Northern Ireland.

(A)Dressing Our Hidden Truths opened at the National Museum of Ireland on 27th March and runs until May 2020. For more information read the article in the Irish Times, go to <http://bit.ly/DressingOurHiddenTruthsExhibition>



DNA Testing to Search for Relatives

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the use of DNA testing. There are three reasons people do a DNA test - one is a legal DNA test which involves two individuals being tested for proof of a relationship, commonly used to prove paternity. This test is carried out by specialist companies and the results are accepted as legal evidence of a relationship. Another form of testing is genetic health testing which is used to establish if a person carries genes that involve health risks such as genetic disorders, cancer or heart disease. The third type of test, which this article focusses on is genealogical DNA testing - a relatively new technology where customers send their sample (saliva or cheek swab) to one of the testing companies to have their DNA extracted and analysed. This analysis can provide an estimate of ethnicity and be uploaded to a database and compared with other users, generating DNA matches. These matches can assist a person to establish their ancestry and/or to find relatives. There are now millions of people across the world using genealogical DNA tests, known as Direct To Consumer (DTC) tests.

There are some important points about DNA testing worth bearing in mind:

- ◆ DNA testing is potentially useful for people searching for their parent(s) and previous generations because it traces up the line of ancestors, it is less useful for a person searching for their descendants unless that descendant has taken a DNA test with the same company.
- ◆ A person can be found through DNA testing even if they have not tested themselves because it is possible to identify and research familial connections through the DNA matches of other family members, particularly if those matches have a family tree they are willing to share.
- ◆ When DNA matches show up in your results it means that you also show up as a match in their results, unless you change your settings to avoid being visible.
- ◆ It is possible to send messages to matches through the testing sites to ask them questions about their family in a bid to work out how they are related.
- ◆ Interpreting the results of a DNA test requires skill and understanding of how the matches work and how to use the various tools available. It can be complex and time consuming and it is common for people who are not across this technology to need expert advice.
- ◆ DNA testing is less likely to generate matches for intercountry adoptees because testing is not popular or affordable in their countries of origin. There are some DNA companies which are building country-specific databases which have had some success.



Benefits of DNA Testing

The uptake of DTC testing has grown so rapidly because it has revolutionised genealogical searching, with users combining their DNA results with traditional genealogical research and documentary evidence to infer relationships and find long lost relatives. It is relatively affordable and has been widely promoted by the testing companies and the media.

Many adopted people, donor conceived people and former wards of state welcome this new technology. It has an obvious appeal for people who do not know the identity of one or both of their parents, including people who are not aware they are entitled to apply for their records or whose records are not available to them, have been lost or destroyed, are incomplete or have been falsified. It is also being used by people who are searching for relatives not identified in their records, most commonly fathers and siblings.

Furthermore, DNA testing is seen as reliable. The potential to find out the truth about identity and family is the biggest benefit of DNA testing and can be life changing when successful.

Risks of DNA Testing

Like any new technology, DTC testing comes with unknown risks. It is as yet an unregulated industry and the testing companies are based outside Australia so not necessarily subject to our laws. One of the most commonly cited risks is the potential misuse of data by the testing companies for example selling DNA data to interested parties without consent. There are conflicting views about who owns your DNA once you have tested - testing companies state that you always own your DNA while some commentators say that given this has not been tested in a court in Australia it is impossible to know with any certainty. Other risks include the testing companies going bust, being sold, or being hacked.

Legal and privacy risks might not only apply to those who take a test, but also to the people who share their DNA i.e. their relatives. The best way to manage these risks is to understand them and to carefully read the terms and conditions and set your permissions accordingly.

There are also social and emotional risks, some of which can be reduced by being informed and supported. One important issue is that while with records searches the searcher usually makes contact directly with the person sought, DNA testing puts the searcher in contact with anyone with shared DNA, who might be a close or distant relative. Depending on who is contacted, how they are contacted and what they do with the information, their involvement can be problematic for both the searcher and the person sought and so disrupt the potential for contact or reunion. This factor can make DTC testing precarious for the searcher because it puts their information into the hands of unknown family members who might not handle this news with sensitivity. They might be over-zealous in their attempts to help, or they might seek to block the searcher from finding out more. This type of contact with other relatives can also put the person being sought in a precarious position depending on their situation and their relationship with the person contacted.

Another aspect to bear in mind is that just like accessing adoption records, DNA testing can sometimes reveal upsetting information. The difference is that with DNA testing the searcher might not receive that information in the most appropriate way or be supported in dealing with what they find.

Preparation is Key

Most organisations supporting people with family tracing will tell you that preparation is key. This can include talking through possible scenarios with a trusted support person, reading articles or watching videos by people who have been through search and contact, or participating in support groups either online or in person. If you have considered the various possible outcomes and how you might respond, you are better placed to make decisions along the way. This is important when undertaking a DNA test because unlike traditional searches which involve taking one step at a time at your own pace, with DNA testing, once your results are uploaded there is the potential for immediate connections.

Questions to Ask Before Testing

Below are some useful questions to consider before testing, or even if you have already done your test.

Q What are you hoping to achieve out of taking a DNA test?

Q Have you applied for all the records you are eligible to apply for i.e. records of adoption, 'out of home care', or donor conception?

Q Are you aware of some of the possible outcomes and have you thought through how you might respond in these situations?

Q Do you have a trusted support person who will listen and provide information without trying to influence your decisions?

Q Do you know where to go for professional support if you need it?

Q Have you read the terms, conditions and privacy settings and decided what you are willing to give permission for?

Q How will you respond to unexpected contact from a relative?

Q Are you prepared to put the time and effort into learning how to interpret your results, or do you have access to someone who can assist with this?

Interpreting Results

Once you have received your DNA results:

- ◆ Your results are matched with results of relatives who have also had their DNA tested with that same company and your estimated relationship is provided. Initially you might have no close relatives, however, over time you may find more matches are generated.
- ◆ In order to access family trees and/or ethnicity of your DNA matches, some testing companies require you to pay a subscription fee.
- ◆ DNA results alone do not always provide immediate answers: communication with your DNA matches, access to their family trees plus use of historic genealogical records and other clues such as shared locations and timeframes will help determine a relationship.
- ◆ A person's ethnicity is determined by taking their DNA result and comparing it to other DNA samples. People who test with more than one company often get different results. As more people test, ethnicity results change. Generally, ethnicity results are not considered especially reliable and are indicative only.
- ◆ Some testing companies allow users to upload their autosomal DNA results from other companies in order to compare matches.

Interpreting DNA test results may require assistance from someone with specialist expertise. Some testing companies provide this service for a fee. Some post-adoption support organisations have expertise within their search team. There are also volunteer 'search angels' who can provide technical assistance. Whoever you ask to provide you with technical support will require access to your results so it is important to be discerning when deciding who to ask. You might like to ask them about their expertise, success rates, how they operate and whether they adhere to the codes of conduct, guidelines and standards for genetic genealogists (see link below). It is also important to agree with them up front about their role in your search to ensure that they do not correspond with your matches without your permission and involvement.

The [International Society of Genetic Genealogy Wiki](#) states that "ISOGG highly recommends that adoptees, orphans, donor conceived individuals and others with sensitive matters work with experienced search organizations prior to making contact with biological families." If you find a DNA match which shows a close relationship, for example half sibling, aunt/uncle or first cousin you would like to make contact with, VANISH support staff are available to discuss issues of concern and how to make outreach.

If you are interested in knowing more about DNA testing there are many books, articles and sources of information available. There are also plenty of media stories about people who have found their relatives and what they experienced. We provide a few links and references for further reading on the following page. If you are not sure whether you have accessed all the records that might be available to you then please contact VANISH to discuss this further.

Useful DNA Links and References

Which test to do <https://www.genie1.com.au/blog/58-which-dna-testing-company>
Or <https://thednageek.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-main-dna-testing-companies-2018-version/>
The DNA Detectives <https://thednadetectives.com/about-the-company/>
DNA Adoption <http://dnaadoption.org/>
DNA Testing Adviser <https://www.dna-testing-adviser.com/Tracing-Birth-Parents.html>

Media stories

<https://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/dna-detectives-and-the-end-of-family-secrets-20190306-p5124t.html>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/discovering-my-half-sister-through-dna/10547774>

<https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/west-weekend-magazine/heart-of-the-matter-ng-b881054723z>
<https://cbs4indy.com/2019/04/08/bloomington-woman-reunites-with-birth-parents-in-south-korea-after-50-years/>

More stories can be found at <https://www.genie1.com.au/blog/80-dna-success-stories>

Personal Story



Stories of transracial adoptees must be heard – even uncomfortable ones

Article by Nicole Cheug, author of *All You Can Ever Know*, published in The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/04/transracial-adoption-listen-understand?fbclid=IwAR1y8sGdfo-7YBe-MvbLHOez9iKADUaYcMtmaNWUeIAg-JXTU0-QUclE2YQ>

What Searches Used to Look Like

Given we are discussing DNA testing and what it means for people searching for family, we thought it might be interesting to give a bit of a comparison and share what a search used to be like back in the 1980's when the law changed to allow adopted persons to apply for their records. In Mark Granland's story "*Chain of Events*" he described the application process and the long wait.

"...In 1984 (I would have been 28 years old then) I was working in the channel 10 newsroom in Melbourne as a Sound recordist. On one particular day, we were sent to cover a press conference with the then Minister for Social Services, Pauline Toner. At this press conference Pauline announced the changes in the adoption act to allow the release of identifying information to adoptees in Victoria. Adoptees were now able to apply for their "original" birth certificates which would have their birth parents names on them.

I thought about this for a while and so after three weeks I put my name down and registered on the list. What's to lose. Jeez, talk about open the flood gates, I was number 2744, and that was just in Victoria.

It took five loooong years for my number to come up. God knows why it took so long. Believe me when I say just how frustrating it is waiting for "the system" to slowly grind along. There are 1200 working days in five years so that meant DSV (Community Services Victoria) handled 2.3 cases a day. It's a bit like going to a department store and putting something on a five year lay-by. Once you embark on a search it can't happen soon enough...

...In 1989, I received a letter from CSV telling me my number had come up and I could come in and get my papers. After the long five year wait I thought I would have to go through a counselling session or something of a process, but instead I was handed a piece of paper, rubber stamped and basically said see you later. A bit of a disappointment really but at least I had my piece of paper. This piece of paper allowed me to go to Births, Deaths and Marriages in the city to get my "original" birth certificate..."

Mark's story of search and contact with his mother, father and siblings "*Chain of Events*" is available from the VANISH Library.



Mark Granland, author of "*Chain of Events*"

Search Update

As we move toward the end of another busy financial year, it is a good time to reflect on the work undertaken by the Search and Support team at VANISH. During the last nine months there has been a slight increase in the number of searches registered and a steady number of enquiries for information and support from individuals who have had an experience of adoption or out of home care.

At VANISH we have noticed that it is now very common for our service users to have searched extensively on the internet including social media without success. VANISH assists these service users to access the appropriate public records in Victoria, other states, and sometimes overseas. However, a number of the searches we are asked to assist with are not easy, the information provided in the records (adoption, donor-conceived, ward of state) is often scant, incomplete or incorrect; in addition, the person sought may not be visible on any historic or current public records available to VANISH or our service users, therefore some searches are taking much longer to complete than they were 10 or even 5 years ago.

Adopted persons and people who spent some or all of their childhood in out of home care (Forgotten Australians) continue to be the dominant cohort seeking direct assistance with a search for their mother, father, sibling or grandparent. We have also seen a steady increase in the number of children of an adopted person or Forgotten Australian seeking assistance with a search because their parent has passed away or is elderly and therefore unable to conduct the search themselves.

Unfortunately, we have not seen the uptake of search requests expected from mothers and fathers following the Amendment to the Victorian Adoption Act 1984, which was implemented in July 2013. The Amendment gave mothers and fathers (if the father's name was recorded on the adopted persons birth registration) the right to identifying information about their son or daughter at the time of the adoption. To address this gap in our service, VANISH will be conducting a short survey specifically targeting mothers and fathers to better understand 'what we can do for you?'



Finally, we have noticed an increase in the number of re-activated searches which were registered 5, 10 or 20 years ago but never completed. To the delight of our service users, VANISH has been able to successfully complete several of these re-activated searches. Although we cannot guarantee success, it reminds us that it is always worth having another look because as the years pass, Births Deaths and Marriage (BDM) records become public records and more information is available online.

Many of our service users are unaware of their rights to access BDM records or are finding it increasingly difficult to navigate the BDM website and make applications. If you are unsure of your rights to access BDM records or are having difficulty with an application, please contact VANISH for assistance.

Funding Update

For the past two years the Department of Health and Human Services has provided VANISH with additional funds for regional counselling and regional support groups. This year the Department advised us that additional funding is no longer available so have been required to reduce some of these services. While we will still offer a modest free counselling service, we will no longer be providing a regional counselling service from Warnambool and Geelong. Our telephone counselling service will also be somewhat reduced.

This is a disappointing outcome for VANISH and our service users who require counselling from specialists with a sound understanding of separation and adoption. It is particularly discouraging given the federal apology funding, according to the post implementation review, has not delivered therapeutic counselling as anticipated (see article on page 11).

VANISH has made a start on developing proposals to philanthropic funding bodies in an attempt to continue to provide these much needed services. We will keep you informed of the outcomes of our efforts in future newsletters. We do still have some capacity to provide specialist counselling so if you wish to access this service please contact us.

With regards to the regional support groups we are currently undertaking a review to see how we can continue the regional groups that are well attended and to assess how we can best support regional and remote service users in areas where the groups have not been well attended.

Machinery of Government Changes

At the end of December last year VANISH was advised that the Premier of Victoria has reallocated responsibility for the Adoption Act 1984 to the Attorney General solely. As a result, the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) has become the responsible agency for adoption and related functions.

This means that from 1 January 2019 responsibility for the Adoption Act changed and the functions performed by the Department of Health and Human Services including through permanent care and adoption teams, the intercountry adoption team, FIND and community service organisations such as VANISH will gradually be transferred across to DJCS.

VANISH has been advised that this should not result in any significant change to the services we are funded by the State Government to deliver.

We hope that one of the early outcomes of this transfer will be the development of a new Adoption Act as recommended by the Victorian Law Reform Commission in their review of the Adoption Act in June 2017. This review made recommendations regarding how adoptions should be implemented, access to information, post-adoption support, and integrated birth certificates.

VANISH will continue to advocate for changes to the Act and services which meet the needs of our members, service users and others affected by adoption.

Chuffed Fundraiser for Peer Support Group



We know that peer support groups work and so do our service users! So much so that our monthly adopted persons group was over-subscribed. With up to 20 people coming along. We wanted to set up an additional monthly group to ensure that each person gets the attention they need and deserve but our funding is modest and our budget was already stretched, so we asked for your help through the crowdfunding program Chuffed.

Thanks to your wonderful support we exceeded our goal of \$4,500 so THANK YOU!! We couldn't have done it without you.

We are also extremely grateful to the new Support Group Facilitators David Cross and Tania Curlis. The new support group is 1st Thursday of each month 6.30 - 8.30pm.

Advocacy in Canberra



Leigh Hubbard, Simon Pryor, Thomas Graham, Sue Green, Charlotte Smith and Catherine Lynch in Canberra

In February representatives from VANISH Simon Pryor, Sue Green and Charlotte Smith joined Leigh Hubbard, former Chair of VANISH, Catherine Lynch, President of Adoptee Rights Australia and Thomas Graham, Editor of Ipsify in Canberra to lobby federal parliamentarians regarding two key areas of concern.

The first was the report *Breaking barriers: a national adoption framework for Australian children* following the National Inquiry into Local Adoption which recommends a national framework for adoption including adoption from out of home care. VANISH strongly supports the Dissenting Report and holds that adoption, violates the child's rights to preservation of name, heritage, identity, and often also family relationships, in childhood and adulthood.

VANISH strongly believes that adoption should only occur with informed consent. Adoption from out-of-home care is non-consensual or occurs in the context of state intervention; it is more accurately described as forced adoption. VANISH views adoption as too drastic an option for providing a child with safety and stability within the range of existing permanent placement options. We contend that adoption should be the last resort, following more suitable permanent placement options including kinship care, guardianship, and permanent care orders.

Adoption is often mistakenly seen as a government budget-saving measure, compared with maintaining children in long-term foster care arrangements however, this is short-sighted given the ongoing necessity for specialist support services to address the needs of all parties affected by adoption, as VANISH knows from 30 years working in the sector.

The other matter raised with the 22 parliamentarians we met with was the findings of the Post Implementation Review Report of the Forced Adoption Support Services (FASS) published at the beginning of this year. This report provides details on how funding from the National Apology for Forced Adoptions has been used.

The report conveyed that funding has not been spent on therapeutic counselling as recommended in the Senate Report and as promised by then Prime Minister Julia Gillard. It seems that FASS providers did not see therapeutic counselling as a requirement of their funding agreements which is hard to understand given how essential this service is for our community.

Furthermore the number of people accessing FASS services was very disappointing, particularly for some states. The FASS program in Victoria delivered by Relationships Australia had the second lowest total client figures nationwide (60 clients over two-and-a-half years), despite being the second most populous state. Even more concerning is the reported cost per client which represents extremely poor value for money. The figures were most exorbitant for Victoria with an average cost of \$16,282 per client.

The review also reported disappointing satisfaction rates. In the October 2017 FASS survey, 25.7% of respondents reported that they were either neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with overall services, with even lower levels of satisfaction for access to peer support and referrals. One of the main reasons for dissatisfaction was "a lack of understanding of forced adoption and adoption issues".

These unsatisfactory outcomes from the \$5 million delivered through the Department of Social Services add insult to injury after the \$3.5 million allocated to the Department of Health to increase the capacity of the Access to Allied Psychological Services program until the end of the 2014 financial year went unaccounted for and, we assume, back into central funds.

We had very positive discussions with all of the MPs we met with and achieved some very positive outcomes regarding commitment to follow-up actions on their part. VANISH will continue to lobby federal government to deliver much needed services to people affected by Forced Adoptions. VANISH thanks Ged Kearney for generously allowing us to use her office as a base whilst in Parliament.

New Strategic Plan for VANISH

At the end of last year the Committee of Management and staff team finalised the VANISH Strategic Plan for 2019 – 2021. This involved considering how the context we work in has changed over the past five years, and revisiting our vision and goals. We are very grateful to consultant Chris Gillies who expertly guided us in this process. Here is a snapshot of our vision, mission, goals and some initiatives.

Vision (what we hope for): That the human right to genealogical connection and identity is recognised and supported in the broader community and in legislations, policy and practice.

Mission (what we do): To assist people who have experienced separation from family members through adoption, out-of-home-care and donor conception and advocate on behalf of these groups

Values/Principles (how we behave): * Respect *Empowerment *Integrity *Professionalism *Inclusiveness *Self-Help

GOALS for 2019 to 2021

Client Outcomes	VANISH provides high quality, accessible services to our members and service users who will be supported through the application of our specialist skills and expertise.
Brand and Positioning	VANISH is known as the 'go to' specialists for search, support, counselling and training in relation to the needs of our members and service users.
Advocacy	VANISH influences decision makers and stakeholders to improve policy and practice to address the rights and needs of current and potential members and service users.
Organisational Sustainability	VANISH is a stable, sustainable, contemporary organisation with diverse funding streams.

Some of the initiatives we will be undertaking in the coming year, alongside core services are:

- ◆ Engage existing members and service users to better understand barriers and unmet needs
- ◆ Design and implement DNA project to support service users using or wishing to use DNA testing
- ◆ Undertake review of Regional Support Groups re: viability and alternative outreach to meet the needs of regional and rural Victorians
- ◆ Ensure best practice eg timely search service with regular communication and support.

Committee of Management Vacancy

Treasurer (Voluntary role with monthly meetings in Melbourne)

VANISH is seeking a volunteer **Treasurer**, responsible for the financial oversight of VANISH operations, including ensuring that financial policies and procedures, budgeting, record-keeping and accounts comply with statutory and funding body requirements. The Treasurer will work with the Accountant and Manager in preparing the budget and preparing accounts for audit, and will report regularly to the COM and to the AGM.

As an Office Bearer, the Treasurer will be a member of the Executive, which is comprised of the Treasurer, Chair, Secretary and Manager (ex-officio). Board members are expected to attend eleven COM meetings (preceded by an Executive meeting) each year, on the fourth Wednesday evening of every month (except December), and the AGM. The time commitment in regard to scheduled meetings over the course of year is estimated to be about 40 hours.

Selection Criteria

We are seeking expressions of interest for the position of Treasurer from individuals who

- are qualified and experienced in accounting and/or finance
- possess relevant Board/Committee skills and experience
- are aligned with VANISH values and policy positions

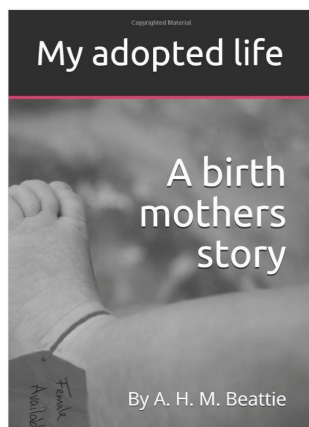
Employees and volunteers are required to undergo a police and referee check prior to appointment.

For further information or to apply please contact **The Chair, Simon Pryor**, info@vanish.org.au, 03 9328 8611.

New Books in the Library

MY ADOPTED LIFE

A birth mothers story by AHM Beattie



Divorce in the eyes of the catholic church in the 1960's was forbidden and when Lizzie found herself pregnant after being legally separated from a violent husband for years, she only had one choice. Adoption.

Lizzy had to give this baby away in order to bring up her legitimate

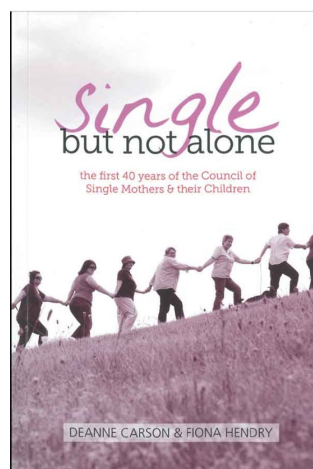
daughter and keep them both safe.

From Lancashire to Ireland and finally to Liverpool, follow the harrowing story of a birth mother's ordeal and the ultimate sacrifice made to give both her children the best that life could offer.

(from Amazon)

SINGLE BUT NOT ALONE

Deanne Carson and Fiona Hendry



In 1969 a group of 'unmarried mothers' banded together to challenge the systems and social attitudes preventing single women from raising their own children. These women fought for legitimacy and their right to be mothers and won, forever changing the political and social landscape for single mothers in Australia.

Single but not alone tracks the journey of CSMC from grassroots movement to powerful political lobby group and an organisation that has never wavered in its commitment to provide compassionate support for single mothers and their children.

(from CSMC Website)

NEW FILM

The Chaperone - review by Tricia Lester

I enjoyed this film and this is my personal view of one of the topics that it raised.

I am sure you will have read the reviews and know that this film is not about the 1920's silent film star Louise Brooks rather, it is about Norma, an ordinary woman who went with Louise on her first trip to New York as her Chaperone. For me the film is less about the dynamic between these two women and more about the underlying theme of secrets.



This film provided me with an insight into the practices that took place in parts of the United States which I was totally unaware of. Apparently, between 1880's and 1930's in parts of the USA hundreds of thousands children were sent away to be fostered. To say there was no consideration as to the suitability of the adopting family or the placement is an understatement. The more generous view appeared to be that these children needed homes and families while the less generous was that these children were a nuisance and best out of sight, out of mind.

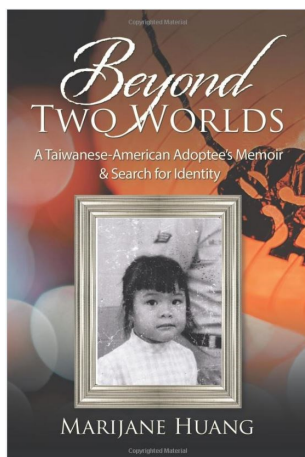
In the film Norma had memories of her original family and where she came from and she longed to seek them out. She remembered being held and loved. She asked "how can I know who I am if I don't know where I came from?" and Why - what happened that her mother and family could not keep me any longer?" The answers were not what she expected as they rarely are – however, she managed to accept these answers and whilst in New York she found a way to return to Kansas and live well.

I have avoided spoiling the film by giving away too much and I hope you have an opportunity to see this film.

New Books in the Library

BEYOND TWO WORLDS

A Taiwanese-American Adoptee's Memoir & Search for Identity By Marijane Huang



Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Marijane was adopted by an American military family at four months old. She grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in the deep South where hers was the only Asian face among a majority of white.

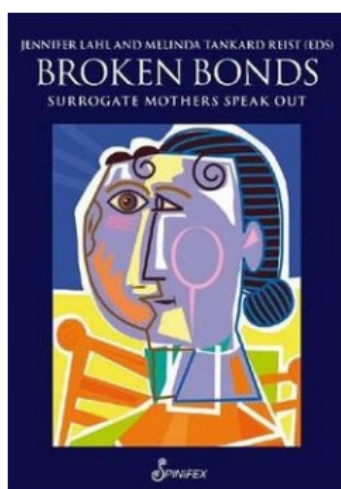
Raised to believe she was Vietnamese and Japanese, she never doubted her ethnicity, until one day,

she found her lost adoption papers. This discovery unloosed secrets that had been buried for decades, causing her to question her identity. With brave determination, Marijane set out on a quest to reconstruct her past and resurrect a birth heritage that had long been forsaken. *Beyond Two Worlds* is a poignant telling of one woman's search for identity and belonging despite insurmountable odds.

(Amazon)

BROKEN BONDS

Surrogate Mothers Speak Out
Edited by Jennifer Lahl, Melinda Tankard Reist, Renate Klein



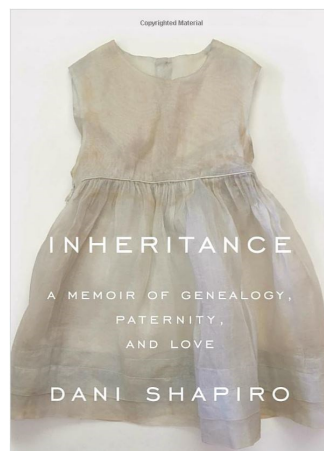
Thousands of people obtain babies through surrogacy arrangements. The general public is compassionate to their plight and supportive of their 'right' to a baby. But who are the nameless women who give birth to these babies?

In this book, strong and courageous women from the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and

Russia share their stories of becoming 'surrogate' mothers only to be deceived by 'baby buyers' and lawyers. This book challenges Big Fertility and its minions: women are not ovens or suitcases, babies are not products. (Taken from Google books)

INHERITANCE

A memoir of genealogy, paternity and love
by Dani Shapiro



What makes us who we are? What combination of memory, history, biology, experience, and that ineffable thing called the soul defines us?

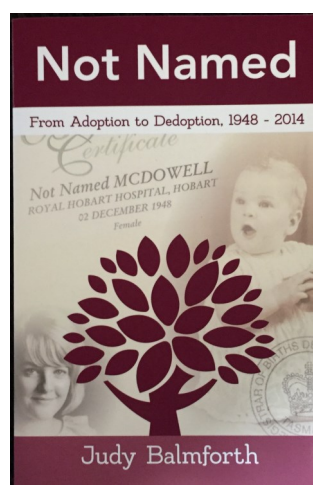
In the spring of 2016, through a genealogy website to which she had whimsically submitted her DNA for analysis, Dani Shapiro received the stunning news that her father was

not her biological father. She woke up one morning and her entire history--the life she had lived--crumbled beneath her.

Inheritance is the story of a woman's urgent quest to unlock the story of her own identity, a story that has been scrupulously hidden from her for more than fifty years, years she had spent writing brilliantly, and compulsively, on themes of identity and family history. (Amazon)

NOT NAMED

From Adoption to Dedoption, 1948-2014
By Judy Balmforth



Adoption. The ideal solution for unwanted babies given to new parents, without question, to ensure happy-ever-after. This is an urban myth.

The myth persists because of the supposed success of adoptions in Tasmania since 1920. There has always been a market for babies to be given to loving white, Christian, married couples to adopt.

Government legislation has always supported this practice for various reasons. So has society supported adoption in the assumption that all 'unmarried mothers; were not fit mothers.

This story is of one individual who has dared to question her own adoption. (From the back cover)

Upcoming VANISH Support Group Dates

Mixed Groups are for Adoptees, Natural Parents, Adoptive and Alternative Parents

Adoptee Groups are for Adult Adopted Persons over the age of eighteen

Mothers Groups are also referred to as Natural Mothers

Melbourne

VANISH office

1st Thursday of each month
Adopted Persons 6.30-8.30pm

6th June
4th July
1st August

2nd Tuesday of each month
Mixed 7.30-9.30pm

11th June
9th July
13th August

4th Tuesday of each month
Adopted Persons 7.30-9.30

28th May
25th June
23rd July
27th August

Albury-Wodonga

2nd Saturday of each month
10.30am-12.30pm

Albury Library, 540 Kiewa St Albury
8th June MIXED
13th July MOTHERS
10th August ADOPTEEES

Bendigo

2nd Saturday of each month
2.00-4.00pm

27 Myrtle St, Bendigo
8th June ADOPTEEES
13th July MOTHERS
10th August ADOPTEEES

Ballarat

3rd Saturday of each month
2.00-4.00pm

20 Eastwood St, Ballarat
18th May ADOPTEEES
15th June MOTHERS
20th July MIXED
17th August ADOPTEEES

Mildura

*To register your interest in
attending a support group in
Mildura, please contact the
VANISH office*

For all enquiries please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611 or 1300 826 474, or email info@vanish.org.au



1st Floor, 50 Howard Street, North Melbourne 3051

Mail: PO Box 112, Carlton South 3053 Ph: (03) 9328 8611 or

Website: www.vanish.org.au 1300 826 474

Email: info@vanish.org.au Fax: (03) 9329 6527

ABN 35 582 901 627