



Victorian Adoption Network for
Information and Self Help



Annual Report
2017 – 2018
Year 29
Year 30*

ABOUT US

OUR PURPOSE

To empower and assist those who have experienced adoption, donor-assisted reproduction or other separation from family, by providing a formal structure through which to deliver efficient and effective advice, search and support services and advocacy.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Self help
- Respect
- Empowerment
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Inclusiveness

OUR VISION

VANISH will support those affected by adoption and donor conception to understand the process of separation from family and, where appropriate, rediscover families and rebuild connections.

VANISH will foster debate on the importance of the connection between mother and child and share learning related to identity formation that has been derived from working with adopted people.

OUR SERVICES

VANISH offers the following services:

- Confidential specialist search assistance
- Information about the rights of individuals
- Assistance with applications for records
- Support – by phone, email or face to face
- Facilitated peer support groups
- In-house counselling service
- Counselling and other referrals
- Secondary consultations for professionals
- Counsellor training
- Community education
- Regional information sessions
- Advocating for our service users

OUR CLIENTS

Our services are for:

- People affected by adoption in Victoria - mothers, fathers, adopted persons, natural relatives and adoptive parents
- People affected by adoption in other states and territories, overseas as well as intercountry adoption
- People affected by donor conception - donors, offspring and parents
- Forgotten Australians - former wards of state, de facto adoptions and/or those who were placed in institutional or foster care in Victoria

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**VANISH acknowledges
the Department of Health and Human Services for
the funding and support of the work of VANISH.**

* Due to a past error in the numbering sequence, please note that this Annual Report is for our 30th year. Previous reports from 2012 onwards will be republished with the corrected number.

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT & STAFF

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT 2017 - 2018

Members	Representing	Term Commenced
Penny Mackieson (Chair)	Offspring	October 2014
Tricia Lester (Secretary)	Natural Parent	September 2013
Simon Pryor (Treasurer)	Offspring	May 2017
Cathy Burnett	Independent Expert	September 2013
Sue Green	Offspring	September 2015
Maureen Long	Independent Expert	May 2018
Lyn Moore	Offspring	October 2017
Romana Rossi	Natural Parent	October 2017
Paul Ruff	Natural Parent	September 2015
Charlotte Smith	Manager	May 2016
	Ex-Officio	

STAFF TEAM

Name	Title	Joined VANISH
Charlotte Smith	Manager	July 2013
Elizabeth Tomlinson	Search and Support Coordinator/ Counselling Coordinator	November 2007
Jenny Conrick	Associate Counsellor	February 2017
Mary Rawson	Search and Support Worker	February 2004
Maire Peckett	Search and Support Worker	July 2008 (retired March 2018)
Gail Holstock	Search and Support Worker	August 2013
SallyRose Carbines	Search and Support Worker	November 2016
Julie Gomez	Search and Support Worker	August 2017
Patricia Navaretti	Search and Support Worker	June 2018
Adam D'Arcy	Quality and Compliance Officer	February 2017
Lorna Sleightholm	Administrator/Receptionist	September 2018
Hana Crisp	Administrator/Receptionist	March 2018
Barbara Burns	Accountant (Volunteer)	July 2010
Kerri Licheni	Bookkeeper (Contractor)	April 2011
Myra Krafft	Communications Assistant (Volunteer)	March 2016 - December 2017

HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2017/18

SEARCH

329

new searches registered:
279 searches related to Adoption and
Forgotten Australians
50 searches related to donor conception

SUPPORT, INFORMATION & REFERRALS

1169

telephone, email and face-to-face contacts
regarding search, contact, reunion,
relationships, accessing records and
providing resources.

COUNSELLING

271

telephone and face-to-face counselling
sessions delivered from Melbourne,
Warnambool and Geelong plus Art Therapy
attendances.

SUPPORT GROUPS

318

attendances at support groups in
Albury-Wodonga, Ballarat, Bendigo,
Melbourne and Mildura.

PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

269

secondary consultations, advice,
information and resources to professionals
assisting clients.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

84

contacts in relation to Counsellor Training
and other professional training

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

505

attendances at presentations to historical
societies, allied health workers, medical
practitioners and public forums

For information about our services visit vanish.org.au

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Dear Members,

On behalf of the VANISH Committee of Management, I am pleased to report on 2017-18.

At the last AGM, we welcomed Romana Rossi and Lyn Moore, elected into the categories of 'natural parent' and 'adopted person', respectively. More recently, Maureen Long was appointed as an 'expert' in family and child welfare.

I sincerely thank all our Committee members – Tricia Lester, Simon Pryor, Cathy Burnett, Sue Green, Paul Ruff, Romana, Lyn and Maureen – who have willingly made themselves available for sessions during work times in addition to regular evening meetings, even when challenges have arisen in their personal lives. Indeed, it can be difficult to juggle the time and commitments involved in the governance of an organisation with family and work responsibilities, especially as our Committee work is all performed on a voluntary basis.

A major focus involving both our Committee members and our staff during the last year has been our strategic planning. We are fortunate to have been guided through this process by Christine Gillies, an external expert providing her services pro bono. VANISH is determined to continue being responsive to the needs of our service users impacted by adoption, statutory care and donor conception while also looking to assist new, similarly impacted groups.

VANISH's membership continues to grow, reinforcing the ongoing relevance of our organisation. At the end of June 2018, we had 817 members, compared with 787 at the same time last year. Our membership has also been changing, with the metropolitan base having grown to almost 60%, compared to 40% for our regional base; and adopted persons are now the fastest growing category, comprising almost 70% of our membership. There has also been significant growth in the membership of natural children and other relatives of adopted persons, and so we anticipate creating new membership categories to facilitate better capture of their needs.

In regard to VANISH's advocacy work, at the state level we have continued to advocate for the implementation of key findings from both reviews relating to adoption recently commissioned by the Andrews Government. Regarding the Victorian Law Reform Commission's review of the *Adoption Act 1984*, the Government has not indicated when or, indeed, whether it intends to commence work on redrafting the *Adoption Act*, which was the major recommendation from the review.

Regarding the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People's Inquiry into the early outcomes from implementation of the 2014 permanency amendments, the Government has indicated it does not intend to change the legislation, which currently ranks adoption higher in the permanency hierarchy for children subject to child protection intervention than Permanent Care Orders.

Nationally, in relation to the current Inquiry into Local Adoption, VANISH made a written submission in May 2018 and participated in a public hearing in Canberra in June 2018.

Internationally, VANISH was well-represented at the Sixth International Conference on Adoption Research (ICAR6) held in Montreal in July 2018. Charlotte Smith, our Manager, presented a poster prepared with Sue Green on VANISH's two-day post-adoption training program for welfare professionals. In addition, VANISH had two self-funded delegates: Jenny Conrick, one of our counsellors, gave two presentations on her PhD research regarding the support needs of adopted women as mothers; and I presented on my current PhD research regarding Victoria's longstanding preference for Permanent Care Orders, instead of adoption, from out-of-home care.

At every level, there is a need to continue engagement in forums and activities for the purposes of reminding policy makers, politicians, practitioners and researchers of the complexities associated with practices that separate children from their natural families, and the lifelong service and support needs of people impacted by such practices.

In closing, I sincerely thank all of VANISH's dedicated staff, contractors, volunteers, members and supporters. I especially acknowledge Charlotte, the conduit between the Committee and the staff, who is pivotal to VANISH's success as an organisation. The Manager's role is large and varied, and it has been my pleasure working with Charlotte as she develops and applies her expertise in the many facets of her leadership role.

I look forward to another busy and productive year for VANISH.

Penny Mackieson

Chair, VANISH Inc.



MANAGER'S REPORT

Dear Members,

I am very pleased to present to you VANISH's report for 2017-18.

As you may remember, last year VANISH went through accreditation and established a new search service on behalf of people affected by donor conception. This year we have focussed on consolidating new systems and processes, as well as responding to increased demand for support, information, counselling and community education.

There have been a number of changes to our team this year. First of all we bade farewell to Search and Support Worker, Maire Peckett, who retired just short of ten years' service. I would like to acknowledge Maire's remarkable search skills, her perseverance and determination for completing difficult and complex searches and her compassionate way of providing support. We wish Maire a healthy and happy retirement. We also said goodbye to Karen Francis who very capably fulfilled the role of VANISH Administrator for two years, and to Myra Krafft who volunteered with VANISH as Communications Assistant, who travelled from Traralgon each fortnight to share with us her skills and expertise.

We have also been delighted to welcome three new staff members. Patricia Navaretti is our new Search and Support Worker, Hana Crisp joined us on a short-term contract in the Administrator role, which she is now handing over to Lorna Sleightholm who joined us very recently. Fortunately, Hana will stay with us a little longer to assist with a range of research and communication tasks.

So once again we have a strong team of professionals providing search, support and counselling services. The team are - Liz Tomlinson, Jenny Conrick, Mary Rawson, Gail Holstock, SallyRose Carbines, Julie Gomez, Patricia Navaretti, Adam D'Arcy, Hana Crisp and Lorna Sleightholm. I would like to recognise and acknowledge their exemplary work in delivering services and congratulate them on their achievements this year.

As you will read in the section on services, we have responded to a notable increase in demand for support, information and counselling this year as well as undertaking slightly more searches than last year. We also ran another art therapy course thanks to the skill, dedication and enthusiasm of Art Therapist Michele Hutchins. These courses have continued to

be very well received and I would like to thank Relationships Australia Victoria for the small grants that have made them possible.

We have provided an increased number of presentations in 2017-18, in particular at forums organised by the Home and Community Care (HACC) Diversity Advisers. These forums have involved presentations by representatives from Open Place, Connecting Home and the British Child Migrants Trust as well as VANISH. Our role has been to assist health professionals to better understand the challenges and needs of people affected by past and forced adoptions. You can read more about these forums on page 11. VANISH has also continued to provide presentations to family history groups and genealogical societies around Victoria.

We have been delighted to work with our colleagues at Family Information Network and Discovery (FIND), Association of Relinquishing Mothers (ARMS), Open Place, and the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) and all the other organisations we have had the pleasure of interacting with during this year. We are very grateful to the Department of Health and Human Services for the ongoing support provided to VANISH and therefore our service users and community.

I would like to finish off by expressing my gratitude to the Chair, Penny Mackieson, the Executive and the Committee Members for being so generous with their time and expertise in leading and guiding VANISH. It is a pleasure to work with such a committed and forward-thinking group of people. I look forward to working with the staff and Committee in 2018-19 to deliver the very much needed services we provide and to advocate on behalf of the people with whom we work.

Charlotte Smith

Manager, VANISH Inc.



SEARCH & SUPPORT SERVICES

In 2017-18 VANISH has seen a significant increase in demand for search and support services, counselling, and community education while the number of new registrants and number of searches has slightly increased compared to last year. The number of support group attendances has remained the same.

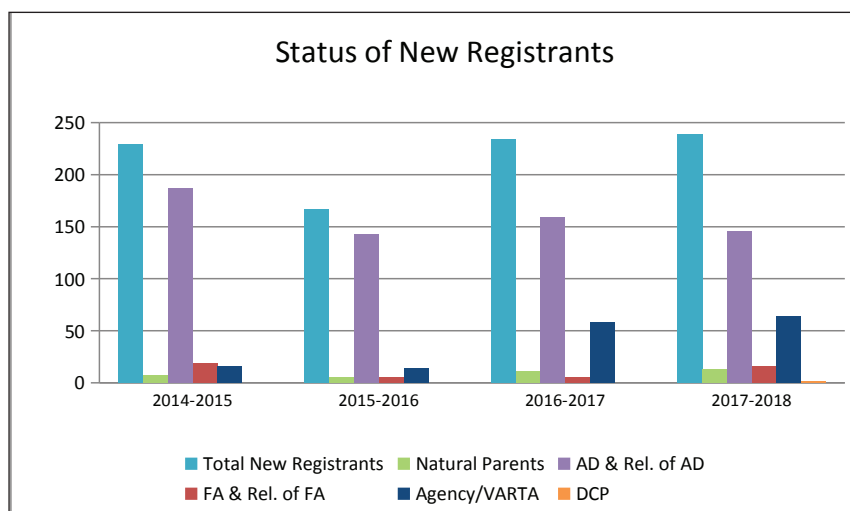
This section provides a breakdown of service users newly registered with VANISH, of new searches registered, and of support services delivered, including information, referrals and community education. Information for counselling services and support groups is provided on page 7.

New Registrations

In 2017-18 VANISH registered 240 new service users of which 175 were direct service users and 65 were through agencies. The average age of direct service users is 56 years, four years older than last year.

Status of New Registrants

New registrants include Natural Parents (NPs), Adopted Persons (ADs), relatives of ADs, Forgotten Australians (FAs) and relatives of FAs. All but one of the Donor Conceived People (DCPs) and Donor Parents (DPs) were referred through VARTA this year.



The 240 new registrants comprised

- 146 ADs or relatives of ADs
- 13 Natural Parents
- 16 FAs or relatives of FAs
- 1 DCP
- 15 Agency searches on behalf of ADs and/or FAs
- 49 VARTA searches on behalf of DCPs and DPs

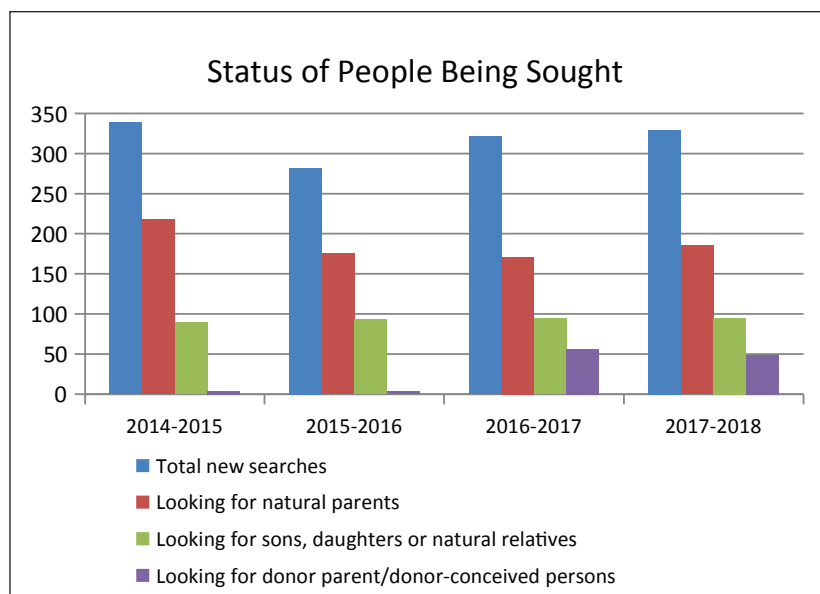
The total number of new registrants and the breakdown by categories is shown in the adjacent chart providing a comparison for the past four years. In this chart VARTA and Agency searches are combined.

New Searches

There were 329 new searches registered for 2017-2018. Of these:

- 185 persons sought were Natural Parents
- 20 persons sought were Adopted Persons
- 54 persons sought were natural relatives of Adopted Persons, e.g. siblings and grandparents
- 20 persons sought were FAs and/or natural relatives of FAs
- 50 persons sought were Donors or Donor Conceived Persons

This data is shown in the adjacent chart providing a comparison for the past four years.



SEARCH & SUPPORT SERVICES

VANISH continues to have contractual arrangements with Open Place, VARTA, Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND) and Anglicare to conduct searches on behalf of some of their clients. In addition, VANISH has conducted searches on a reciprocal basis for post-adoption agencies in England, South Australia, Western Australia and New Zealand; these arrangements are of many years standing. All of these arrangements whether at the request of VANISH or at the request of other agencies/services, are invaluable as they have enabled many long and difficult searches to be completed.

Support, Information and Referrals

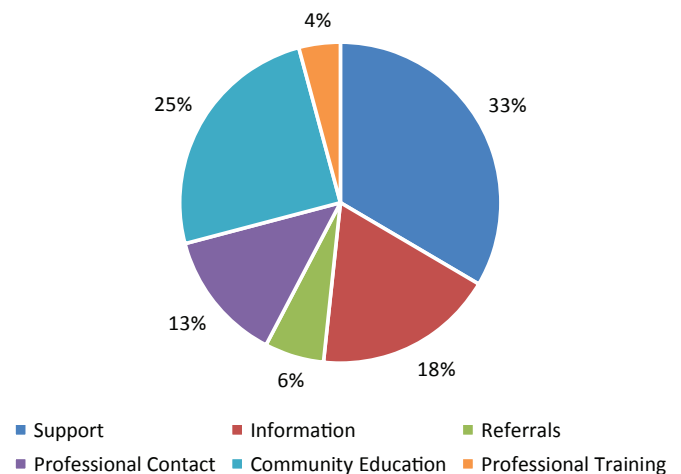
This year VANISH saw an overall increase of 54% in demand for support information and referrals this year compared to last year.

- Information and support was provided to **1,046** individuals via telephone, email and face to face compared to 760 last year.
- **123** referrals were made to government and non-government agencies and to counsellors compared to 70 last year.
- Professionals contacting VANISH while assisting clients with search, records, adoption and wardship related issues totalled **269** compared to 306 last year.

- 505 contacts were made in relation to community education, including health and mental health practitioners and historical societies, compared to 87 last year. This increase largely relates to the HACC forums held this year.
- 84 contacts were recorded for Professional training such as VANISH Counsellor Training.

As can be seen in the chart below, support, information and referrals still make up the majority (58%) of VANISH support services. This chart does not include counselling and support groups which are covered separately on the next page.

Support Services 2017-2018



A Letter from a VANISH Service User

Dear Charlotte,

Just wanted to write a personal letter to your amazing organisation.

I first rang another agency here in the state where I am located – the first contact was very judgmental and very clinical – and as a result I abandoned my search for quite a few years.

As my situation arose in Victoria I contacted the Community Services in VIC and they gave me a list of agencies. I chose VANISH at random and immediately I spoke to someone. I felt great courage to tell my story and proceed with my search for my daughter. All the people I spoke to were so caring

and helpful – giving me tips and advice to help me all the way. With time differences – early business hours etc. because of my location – the staff supported me – nothing was too much trouble for them!

I found my daughter after one year of searching and we have a wonderful relationship thanks to VANISH. (Would love to help anyone else who needs the courage to look for their child!)

Tell them – don't give up – whatever the outcome it's meant to be. Courage is the key!

THANKS SO MUCH.

— Sylvie

COUNSELLING & COUNSELLOR TRAINING

This year VANISH has seen a significant increase (64%) in demand for counselling services compared to last year. Face-to-face and telephone counselling services have been delivered by Counsellor Elizabeth Tomlinson at the North Melbourne office and by Dr Jenny Conrick, Counselling Associate, from Warrnambool and Geelong.

The VANISH counselling model is strengths-based and recovery-focused. It recognises the lifelong impacts of

- separation, loss, shame and secrecy;
- trauma;
- grief (disenfranchised); and
- infant and adult attachment styles and patterns of intimacy.

This service has been accessed by individuals requiring assistance to deal with a range of ways in which their lives are being affected, including anxiety, depression, grief and loss, complex family relationships and other relationship issues.

In 2017-18 a total of 60 clients were provided counselling, of which 37 were new clients. A total number of 244 counselling appointments were provided of which 151 were in or from Melbourne and 93 were in or from Warrnambool and Geelong. These figures are presented in the table below. There were also five attendees at the therapeutic creativity group which ran for six weeks (please see page 9).

Counselling Services	No. Clients	No. Sessions
Clients - Melbourne	44	151
Clients - Western Victoria	16	93
Therapeutic Group	5	27
Totals	65	271

Given the demand and the positive feedback we have received from clients regarding this service, VANISH intends to continue to provide counselling for as long as funds are available to do so.

Counsellor Training

This year VANISH provided Counsellor Training delivered by Dr Sue Green to 26 participants. Participants were private counsellors and workers from community welfare services including post-adoption support, who travelled from as far as Queensland, Mildura and Wodonga to attend.



The training covered the impacts of past and forced adoption practices on mothers, fathers, adopted persons and family members, and different approaches to support them. It utilised a combination of case studies, video interviews with individuals affected and professionals, and current research and literature.

As with previous training programs, the feedback was extremely positive with 22 of the 23 participants stating the content of the course was excellent and 1 stating it was very good. Here are some comments from the evaluation forms:

"So useful, thank you "

"Fantastic - presenter/facilitator and group"

"Thank you very much for a well organised, informative training program"

"I learnt so much, thank you"

"Thank you Sue and VANISH. This course has been invaluable to me. Excellent."

SUPPORT GROUPS

Throughout 2017-18 VANISH continued to run support groups in Melbourne and regional locations around Victoria. The total number of attendances was 318 (as per the table on the right) which is the same as last year, but the breakdown of numbers attending each group was quite different.

In Melbourne both the Mixed Group and the Adoptee Only Group have increased in terms of numbers attending indicating that there is ongoing demand for this type of facilitated peer support.

Some of the regional groups have had consistent numbers of participants attending, while others have had lower numbers than we had anticipated, and in the case of Traralgon we reluctantly decided to discontinue the group due the facilitator no longer being available and low participation.

VANISH has received very positive feedback from support group participants including from those attending the groups that have been smaller in size. Furthermore VANISH receives regular requests from people in other locations in Victoria to establish new groups, including from individuals qualified to run groups. In the coming year we will undertake a review of the regional groups to better understand why the expressed interest and demand is not translating into attendances in some locations.

Support groups are being held in Melbourne, Bendigo, Ballarat, Albury-Wodonga and Mildura. In some locations these groups are operated in partnership

with the Association of Relinquishing Mothers (ARMS) where the mothers group is convened by ARMS and the Adoptee Only and Mixed Groups are facilitated by VANISH. ARMS is run by mothers separated from their sons and daughters through adoption who provide support on a voluntary basis including travelling on weekends to run these groups. Their commitment and determination is admirable.

Support Groups	No. Groups	No. Attendees
Regional	47	109
Metro	29	209
Totals	76	318

During the year VANISH arranged a training for Support Group Facilitators from the VANISH and ARMS metro and regional support groups. This training covered the past and forced adoption practices, how individuals are affected, what they might bring up in a support group setting, specific facilitation skills and how to ensure groups are safe and effective. At the end of the training the facilitators expressed interest in establishing a facilitator network so they might be able to support one another and share ideas.

This training was supported by small grant funding from the Federal Government's Forced Adoption Support Services through Relationships Australia Victoria.

SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATORS

A big thank you to all of our Support Group Facilitators and Co-Facilitators!

Without you we would be unable to provide this valuable service.

Metropolitan Groups

Adopted Persons Only Group:

Gail Holstock, Caroline Spiers

Mixed Group:

Liz Tomlinson, Diane Jacobson

Donor Conceived Adults Support Group:

Louise Watkins (resigned), Chloe Allworthy and Kate Bourne (VARTA)

Regional Groups

Facilitators:

SallyRose Carbines, Lin Davidson, Bonney Dietrich, Debbie Garratt, Liz Joynson (resigned), Sue Kemsley (resigned) and Anne Mangan.

Co-Facilitators & Support People:

Helen Nicholson, Bobby (Neil Richards) and Myra Krafft (resigned).

EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Creative Expression (Art Therapy) Course #2

Following excellent feedback from our pilot program earlier in 2017, VANISH offered a second art therapy course uniquely designed for adopted persons during October and November, facilitated by qualified art therapist and adoptee Michele Hutchins. Again, each session incorporated a different artistic medium, as well as movement, music and mindfulness practices, in order to explore the adoption experience and strengthen the connection with one's authentic self. Five people participated in the six-week course and the program was very well-received.

VANISH received some great feedback including the following:

"I would like to express my gratitude to VANISH and Michele for enabling me to take part in such a wonderful and insightful program. I find it hard to put into words how much I have learned out of it. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

— Cheryl

This course was supported by small grant funding from the Federal Government's Forced Adoption Support Services through Relationships Australia Victoria.

BIG HEART Q&A Panel

In September 2017, VANISH was invited to participate in a Q&A panel following a performance of the theatrical play *BIG HEART*. Penny Mackieson (Chair of VANISH and author of *Adoption Deception*) and former VANISH Committee member Dominic Hong Duc Golding (Vietnamese adoptee, writer and performer) joined *BIG HEART* writer Patricia Cornelius and director Susie Dee. The play told the story of a woman who adopts a child from each of the continents in order to offer the children "a better life", and explored themes of adoption, multiculturalism and racism.

BIG HEART + Q&A

Saturday 23rd at 2pm



Commemorative Event for the Fifth Anniversary of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology

In October 2017, ARMS and VANISH co-hosted a commemorative event for the Fifth Anniversary of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology in Parliament Gardens.



Enjoying the talents of The Thornberries.

It was acknowledged that the Apology resulted from many years of advocacy by hard-working individuals and groups for recognition of the wrongs brought about by past adoption policies and practices. It was also recognised that since the apology, different groups have come together and learned about the reality of each others' experiences.

The speakers on the day reminded us that the Senate Inquiry and Victorian Parliament Apology were necessary for the Victorian Government to acknowledge and accept responsibility for past adoption practices. We were also reminded that continued lobbying is needed to ensure that current policies and practices do not support the legal severing of the relationship between children and their family of origin.

Premier Daniel Andrews could not attend the event, however he sent a letter to read out, in which he acknowledged the Apology and 'pledged to always remember this dark part of our history'.

The finale of the event involved the delightful trio of ukulele-playing women, The Thornberries, with moving and uplifting music and song.

This event was supported by small grant funding from the Federal Government's Forced Adoption Support Services through Relationships Australia Victoria.

Commemorative Event for the Fifth Anniversary of the National Apology

On the 22nd March 2018 VANISH and ARMS held an event to commemorate the Fifth Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at the Vibe Savoy Hotel in Melbourne. The event involved an afternoon tea followed by speeches and the screening of a video message from Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard AM, especially recorded for people attending anniversary events around Australia. Jo Fraser (ARMS) introduced the three speakers: Charlotte Smith (VANISH) Marie Meggitt (ARMS) and keynote speaker Adjunct Professor Hon. Nahum Mushin.

The event was attended by 70 people, most of whom were individuals affected by past and forced adoption practices as well as friends and colleagues from partner organisations.

It was a pleasure to see Julia's address in which she conveyed how the day of the National Apology was a highlight of her Prime Ministership and how she is still frequently approached by people affected who want to share their experiences with her. She congratulated all those who had advocated for the Apology and encouraged them to continue with their advocacy work.



Speakers Jo Fraser, Marie Meggitt and Charlotte Smith

Professor Nahum Mushin spoke passionately and described seeing so many VANISH, ARMS and Origins members as "like a homecoming" after all the discussions leading up to the Apology. He stressed that five years later so much work still needs to be done and raised the issue of compensation for those affected. He ended by discussing the future of adoption and the importance of integrated birth certificates and nationally-consistent legislation, but also questioned whether adoption is still necessary.

Marie Meggitt talked about how she converted her personal experience into political action. By speaking out about the impact of her experience, she was joined by other mothers over time, and their collective voices created the political impetus for the Apology. Marie also spoke about the rise of surrogacy, which threatens to create a new generation of grieving women.

Charlotte Smith thanked Jigsaw Queensland and Post Adoption Support Services South Australia for their role in arranging the video message by Julia Gillard. She reflected on her own powerful experience of attending the National Apology. But she also questioned the concrete outcomes for people affected, five years later, considering the lack of publicly available information and transparency. She urged the relevant departments to be accountable for the Apology funding and report on how it has been used and the outcomes.

VANISH hopes the event provided everyone there with an opportunity for reflection, healing and connection.



Professor Nahum Mushin and Jo Fraser

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Fifth Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions: Albury Event



Caryn Giblin presenting the wreath to Helen Nicholson

On Saturday 24th March 2018, the Albury LibraryMuseum organised a commemoration of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions to coincide with the showing of the National Archives of Australia exhibition “Without Consent”. The special anniversary video message from former Prime Minister Julia Gillard AM was screened and short speeches were given by the LibraryMuseum Learning and Outreach Coordinator Caryn Giblin and VANISH Manager Charlotte Smith.

As part of the exhibition a table had been set up with materials for visitors who were connected to or moved by the exhibition to make a tissue paper flower. The flowers were then woven into a beautiful wreath by local artist Bronwyn Cossor and gifted to the VANISH Albury Wodonga support group. Helen Nicholson, who has been our valued support person for the group ever since its inception, received the wreath on behalf of the group. Helen said that it was very powerful to see that so many visitors had been touched by the Without Consent exhibition and compelled to make the flowers, and that it was an honour to receive this gift from the community. The wreath was accompanied by a plaque with the following message:

On behalf of the Albury-Wodonga community this wreath is presented to the VANISH Albury-Wodonga support group in acknowledgment of people affected by forced adoption.

Home and Community Care Presentations

During 2017-18, VANISH staff have presented at five forums called “Understanding Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants, Stolen Generations and People Affected by Past and Forced Adoption Practices.” These events were for Home And Community Care (HACC) workers. VANISH presented alongside colleagues from Open Place, Connecting Home and the British Child Migrants Trust, with sessions followed by panel discussions.

The forums were attended by a range of HACC health and allied health professionals including home care providers and team leaders.

Feedback from the forums have indicated that this training is incredibly beneficial for people working in the sector and VANISH has received further requests for educational presentations. In the follow-up surveys, participants provided very positive feedback about the forums:

“Well done - really important information which every agency needs to have.” (Morwell)

“Fantastic day, eye opening, moving, confronting. Thank you for sharing.” (Kerang)

“I’m an adoptee and found VANISH’s presentation to be extremely beneficial.” (Kerang)



VANISH Manager Charlotte Smith and VANISH Search & Support Worker Gail Holstock on the panel at the Frankston HACC forum.

The forums were held in Frankston (77 participants), Morwell (47 participants), Kerang (53 participants), Yea (70 participants) and Preston (55 participants). VANISH commends the HACC Diversity Advisers for their role in organising these excellent forums.

DNA Testing Community Workshop

DNA testing is a relatively recent technology that is proving to be very popular and successful within the adoption and donor conception community. It involves an individual's DNA being submitted and compared to the DNA of other people who have tested. The DNA data is entered into a secure database for comparison and these databases now have millions of users. Through this technology and researching family trees, some people have been able to find their relatives, regardless of whether those relatives have tested.

On 23rd September 2017, VANISH organised a workshop/information session to promote greater understanding of DNA testing and how to get support if needed.

The event was held at the Genealogical Society of Victoria (GSV) in Melbourne with over 40 attendees. Our two excellent presenters - Louise Coakley, genetic genealogist and the convenor of the DNA Drop-In Clinic at Cairns Family History Society, and Damian Adams, medical research scientist and PhD candidate at Flinders University, South Australia - provided valuable and engaging overviews of the various uses of DNA testing, how to interpret the results, and the risks and benefits of this new technology.

Presentations were followed with a Q&A session and some excellent contributions from attendees.



Louise Coakley assisting a VANISH member

Representatives from FIND, Open Place and VARTA joined us in order to respond to any questions regarding applying for records.



The event attracted VANISH members and service users as well as others who heard about the event through the GSV or social media. The survey of participants showed how much they valued the event. Feedback included:

"Many thanks to VANISH and its partners for this wonderful workshop. It was really worthwhile and everyone involved must be commended!"

"I would like to sincerely thank VANISH for running the workshop and allowing myself and my husband to attend. It was very enjoyable and all attendees were very friendly. I would also like to commend the speakers on their knowledge and I picked up a few pointers from them. Thank you."

"All of my expectations were met. This was a fantastic workshop" - LS

Following the workshop VANISH is now planning how best to support service users who wish to engage in DNA testing, bearing in mind the opportunities and risks of doing so.

VANISH would like to thank Penny Wolf and the other wonderful volunteers at GSV for making their space available and for their generous assistance on the day.



Damian Adams presenting

PAULINE LEY AWARDED OAM

In June 2018, VANISH founding member Pauline Ley was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for service to people affected by adoption and reproductive technology.

Beginnings

Pauline was born in Perth in 1945 to a 22-year-old single mother and soon adopted by a Melbourne couple, who did not tell Pauline that she was adopted until she was 16. At the age of 25 after a difficult search, Pauline finally met her mother, followed by her two half-sisters and her grandmother. During the search, the Western Australian legal system denied her access to her birth records, and there was nowhere to go for support or information, and very little understanding of the complexity of adoption amongst professionals and the general community.

Building the adoption community

From the late 1960s, Pauline developed a network of people in the Geelong area who would meet informally and support each other. In 1982, the "Geelong Adoption Program" (GAP)

was formally established with a mission to provide adoption education and a safe, supportive meeting place for those with an adoption experience. People came from all over Victoria for advice and counselling. Referrals came from community centres, doctors, hospitals, schools, prisons and drug dependency services.

Adoption law reform and VANISH

In the 1970s and early 80s, adoption law reform was fiercely resisted, but Pauline advocated tirelessly. In 1984, Victoria became the first Australian state, and one of the first common law jurisdictions in the world, to grant adult adopted persons the right to access their adoption records. In 1992, Pauline presented the keynote address at the American Adoption International Conference in Philadelphia, entitled "Adoption Law in Australia: From Darkness to Light".

To this day, only one third of American States have opened their adoption records.

Thousands of Victorians could finally access their adoption records. The Department of Community Services, where Pauline worked as a counsellor, was deluged with applications for adoption information. In response to this demand, in 1989, Pauline played a pivotal role in the establishment of VANISH.

Donor conception advocacy

Pauline became aware that parallel issues were arising in donor conception, as it increasingly came to replace adoption as a response to infertility. Parents of donor conceived children were advised to hide the truth

from their children, as adoptive parents had often done. Pauline became a leading advocate for donor conception law reform and the co-founder of advocacy group *Tangled Webs*.

After a protracted political process, in 2016, the Victorian Parliament became the first parliament worldwide to grant retrospective rights to those conceived by donor conception to access information about

their biological heritage. This amendment was named 'Narelle's Law' in honour of Narelle Grech, a young donor conceived adult and friend of Pauline, who desperately sought her father before her impending death from a hereditary form of cancer.

Conclusion

Upon receiving this award, Pauline said, "This award is shared with others from the Australian adoption/donor conception community who have made a heroic contribution to our cause." Pauline is a compassionate and courageous leader who has inspired and empowered so many others, both directly and through her involvement in the establishment of a number of highly successful organisations. Almost all of Pauline's work has been done on a voluntary basis and she remains active in the adoption and donor conception communities.



Federal Inquiry into Local Adoption

The Australian Parliament is currently conducting an Inquiry into Local Adoption through its House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. The Inquiry is focused on adoption from out-of-home care as a “viable” permanent placement option for children removed from, and deemed unable to be returned to, their parents’ care for reasons of child protection.

VANISH was invited to make a written submission to the Inquiry. VANISH’s submission argues strongly against the introduction of a national policy promoting non-consensual adoption from out-of-home care because of the deep ethical and moral concerns involved. In reality, such a policy would reintroduce ‘forced adoptions’.

Our submission also argues that “adoption is not necessary to ensure the care of vulnerable children residing in out-of-home care and unable to be returned to their parents’ care in Victoria – indeed, in Australia – as other options are available which have less detrimental impacts on the rights of the child. In Victoria, Permanent Care Orders have been used extensively for this purpose for more than 25 years and VANISH sees no reason for this to change, and furthermore strongly recommends that other states pursue similar models of permanency.”

In addition, VANISH was invited to participate in a public hearing held at Parliament House in Canberra on 19 June 2018 in relation to the Inquiry.

Penny Mackieson, Chair of VANISH, along with Dr Trevor Jordan, President of Jigsaw Queensland, and Nikki Hartmann, Manager of Post Adoption and Forced Adoption Services, Relationships Australia South Australia, responded to questions from members of the Committee raised in response to the written submissions made by the three post-adoption organisations represented. This resulted in a very stimulating, although challenging discussion.

It was encouraging that the Standing Committee was concerned about the permanent legal erasure of an adoptee’s identity through the cancellation of their original birth certificate and replacement with a new birth certificate, and with the permanent legal severing of relationships between the adoptee and their parents and extended family members. However, it was discouraging that some Standing Committee members seemed to have already formed the view that adoption from out-of-home care was the only solution to the increasing numbers of children spending extended periods in out-of-home care. Yet, adoption, with or without parental consent, will do nothing to prevent the dynamics that lead to children being removed from their parents in the first place, nor will it support families to improve their circumstances and enable the return of their children from out-of-home placement.

The transcript of the public hearing and VANISH’s full written submission are available on the Parliament of Australia website.

Thank You To Our Volunteers!

Thank you to the wonderful volunteers who have supported the work of VANISH over the past year. Your time, energy and contributions are very much appreciated.

Accountant: Barbara Burns

Communications Assistant: Myra Krafft

Ryerson Index

Thank you to the following people for their contributions to the Ryerson Index over many years and for their ongoing support of VANISH: Jo Burns, Bernadette Harris, Tara McLaren, Mary Rawson and Judith Thorn.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Committee’s Report for the year ended 30 June 2018

Your committee members submit the financial accounts of the VANISH Inc. for the financial year ended 30 June 2018.

Committee Members

The names of committee members at the date of this report are

- Penny Mackieson (Chairperson)
- Tricia Lester (Secretary)
- Simon Pryor (Treasurer)
- Cathy Burnett
- Sue Green
- Maureen Long
- Lyn Moore
- Romana Rossi
- Paul Ruff
- Ex-officio, Charlotte Smith (Manager)

Principal Activities

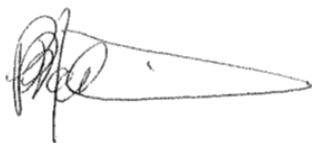
The principal activities of the association during the financial year were search, counselling and support services for people who have experienced being separated from their child or family of origin by adoption, state wardship and donor-assisted reproduction, as outlined in the Constitution of VANISH Inc.

Operating Result

The profit from ordinary activities after providing for income tax amounted to:

	Year ended 30 June 2018	Year ended 30 June 2017
	\$34,191	\$32,575

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:



Penny Mackieson
(Chairperson)



Simon Pryor
(Treasurer)

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Profit and Loss Statement for the year ended 30 June 2018

	2018	2017
Revenue		
DHHS Recurrent Funding	\$430,522	\$408,026
DHHS Fixed Funding	38,995	63,731
DHHS Donor Conception Funding	136,835	33,458
Partner Memorandums of Understanding		
Berry Street	42,259	41,299
Relationships Australia		35,879
RAV Small Grants	11,486	8,793
Interest Received	4,847	2,650
Donations	1,681	315
Other income	2,741	
Total Revenue	\$669,366	\$594,151
Expenses		
Communications	5,564	6,113
Finance	6,714	6,157
Administration	21,227	20,537
Depreciation	13,629	10,918
Information Technology	8,100	8,630
Governance and Compliance	4,278	6,131
Small Grants	11,486	11,158
Service Expenses	27,775	15,624
Support Groups	7,094	3,741
Employment	451,740	404,468
Property	53,972	52,439
Utilities	7,839	7,094
Stakeholder Engagement	2,574	4,020
Professional Development, Training and Supervision	13,183	4,546
Total Expenses	\$635,175	\$561,576
Net Profit	\$34,191	\$32,575

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2018

	2018	2017
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$302,044	\$368,096
Income Owing	42,259	
Prepaid Expenses	<u>1,596</u>	<u> </u>
Total Current Assets	<u>\$345,899</u>	<u>\$368,096</u>
Non-current Assets		
Security Deposit Howard Street	10,000	10,000
Property, Plant and Equipment	<u>28,349</u>	<u>35,770</u>
Total Non-Current Assets	<u>38,349</u>	<u>\$45,770</u>
Total Assets	<u>\$384,248</u>	<u>\$413,866</u>
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Trade Creditors and Accruals	5,976	13,024
GST Liability	6,257	13,006
Payroll Liabilities	8,615	16,134
Grants Carried Forward	38,812	80,313
Provisions	<u>15,969</u>	<u>21,089</u>
Total Current Liabilities	<u>\$75,629</u>	<u>\$143,566</u>
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provision for Long Service leave	<u>29,501</u>	<u>25,373</u>
Total Non-Current Liabilities	<u>\$29,501</u>	<u>\$25,373</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>\$105,130</u>	<u>\$168,939</u>
Net Assets	<u>\$279,118</u>	<u>\$244,927</u>
VANISH Funds		
Retained Earnings	<u>\$279,118</u>	<u>\$244,927</u>
Total VANISH Funds	<u>\$279,118</u>	<u>\$244,927</u>

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 30 June 2018

	2018	2017
Cash Flows Operating Activities		
DHHS Recurrent Funding	\$430,522	\$508,027
DHHS Donor Conception Funding	138,378	66,915
RAV Small Grants	4,711	13,180
Partner Memorandums of Understanding	2,725	69,792
Interest received	4,847	2,650
Donations	1,681	315
Sundry Income	2,741	
Payments to Suppliers and Employees	\$(652,198)	\$(517,401)
GST (net)	6,749	(4,951)
Net Cash Outflow from Operating Activities	\$(59,844)	\$138,527
Cash Flows Investing Activities		
Plant and Equipment and Leasehold improvements	(6,208)	(10,681)
Net Cash Outflow from Investing Activities	\$(6,208)	\$(10,681)
Cash Flows Financing Activities		
Net Cash Inflow from Financing Activities	\$0	\$0
Total Net Cash Outflow for the Year	\$(66,052)	\$127,845
Net (Decrease)/Increase in Cash Held for the Year	\$(66,052)	\$127,845
Cash at the beginning of the year	\$378,096	\$250,251
Cash at 30th June 2018	\$312,044	\$378,096

Summary Statement of Change in Equity for the year ended 30 June 2017

Balance at 1 July 2016	\$212,351	\$177,728
Net profit for the year	32,575	\$34,623
Balance at 30 June 2017	\$244,927	\$212,351

A copy of the full financial reports is available to members upon request
by emailing info@vanish.org.au or telephoning (03) 9328 8611.

FINANCIAL REPORT

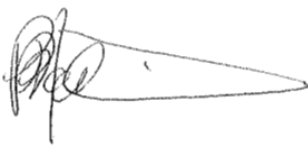
Certificate by Members of the Committee for the year ended 30 June 2018

The Committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose financial report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

In the opinion of the Committee the Income and Expenditure Statement, Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Cash Flows and Notes to the Financial Statements:

1. Presents fairly the financial position of VANISH Inc. as at 30 June 2018 and its performance for the year ended on that date.
2. At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the association will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Penny Mackieson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Penny Mackieson (Chairperson)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Simon Pryor', with a circular flourish at the beginning.

Simon Pryor (Treasurer)



J L Collyer & Partners

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Directors

Lionel R. Arnold CA B.Bus
Raelene Cheng CPA B.Com

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF VANISH INC.

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a special purpose financial report, of VANISH INC., which comprises the financial position as at 30th June 2018, and the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including summary of significant accounting policies and managements assertion statement.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report presents fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of VANISH INC. as at 30th June 2018, and its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditors Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Entity in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Emphasis of Matter-Basis of Accounting

We draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report has been prepared to assist VANISH INC. to meet the requirements of Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Report

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with the financial reporting requirements of the *applicable legislation* and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of a financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, management is responsible for assessing the Entity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Entity or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so. Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Entity's financial reporting process.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

J. L. Collyer & Partners
Accountants

Lionel R. Arnold

Partner

Dated in Glen Waverley on 30th August 2018

VANISH welcomes voluntary donations at any time to enable us to extend our services.

Give now at www.givenow.com.au/vanishinc

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