



Victorian Adoption Network for
Information and Self Help



Annual Report

2019 - 2020

Year 32*

OUR VISION

That the human right to genealogical connection and identity is recognised and supported in the broader community and in legislation, policy and practice.

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 VALUES

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

OUR SERVICES

- Specialist search assistance
- Support by phone, email or face to face
- Information and resources
- Facilitated support groups
- In-house counselling
- Referrals to other practitioners and services
- Training for professionals
- Statewide public information sessions
- Advocacy and Policy advice

OUR CLIENTS

- People affected by adoption in Victoria - mothers, fathers, adopted persons and other family members
- People affected by adoption in other states and territories and overseas
- People affected by donor conception - donor conceived persons, donor parents, natural parents and social parents.
- Forgotten Australians - former wards of state, de facto adoptions and/or those who were placed in institutional or foster care in Victoria.

* Due to a past error in the numbering sequence, please note that this Annual Report is for our 32nd year. Previous reports from 2012 onwards will be republished with the corrected number.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



Dear members,

I thank all of our continuing, departing and new staff led by Charlotte Smith, for their *outstanding* contribution to the work of the year as VANISH:

- Built a positive relationship with Attorney

General Jill Hennessy, and the DJCS; and

- Lived and thrived through the COVID-19 pandemic.

VANISH's membership survey yielded very positive feedback and offered clear guidance for ways of making connections with members even stronger in the future. Membership now stands at 924, up from 871 this time in 2019.

In 2019/2020 VANISH advocacy has meant:

- Preparation of a comprehensive submission to the current Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions;
- Providing encouragement and support to members who wanted to prepare their own Inquiry submissions;
- Urging the Victoria Government to find ways of addressing discrimination against the LGBTQIA community in the ART Act 2008 (Vic) that endeavours to protect from the negative impacts of large numbers of children and siblings being created through ART; and
- Continuing work to promote replacement of the outdated 1984 Adoption Act and in particular to make provisions for integrated birth certificates.

2020/2021 sees VANISH face fresh challenges:

- New strategic thinking in response to the forthcoming COVID-19 normal world;
- Ensuring VANISH and our members' voices are heard during the Historical Forced Adoptions Inquiry; and
- Negotiating long term funding arrangements for the work VANISH will undertake for DJCS and their partners.

I thank all CoM members for their work, in particular noting the lasting, significant contribution retiring member Lyn Moore has made.

Simon Pryor, Chair

MANAGER'S REPORT



Dear members,

It gives me great pleasure to report on what has been an extraordinary year. Victoria has faced unprecedented challenges with COVID-19 and we are now relieved and hopeful as the state opens up again.

The lockdown in Melbourne dramatically changed how we work and the staff team have had to be agile yet steadfast to minimise disruption to our services. Searches have been progressed despite the closure of public records offices, support has continued by phone and through support groups offered online. Feedback from our Service Users indicates we have continued to make a positive impact on their lives and I congratulate the team on their remarkable adaptability and commitment.

We have engaged positively with our existing and new funding partners during a year of considerable movement. The Department of Justice and Community Safety is reshaping adoption services, work that is still ongoing. The donor conceived search service was transferred from the Department of Health and Human Services to VARTA and Open Place has transitioned from Berry Street to Relationships Australia Victoria.

This year we farewelled our two longest serving staff members Mary Rawson and Elizabeth Tomlinson, who have been the backbone of VANISH and made an enormous contribution to our work. We acknowledge them both in this report.

We are now well into financial year 2021. We eagerly await the Victorian Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions, we anticipate work commencing on a new Adoption Act, and we look forward to continuing to provide our unique and important services to people affected by adoption, state wardship and donor conception.

I am very grateful to the Chair Simon Pryor and the rest of the Committee for their leadership and unwavering support this year.

Charlotte Smith, Manager

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT & STAFF

Committee of Management 2019 - 2020

VANISH is governed by a Committee of Management made up of volunteers who, with the exception of the Independent Experts, have a relevant lived experience. Committee Members assist the organisation to achieve its purpose and goals and ensure compliance with VANISH Rules and state and federal legislation. Members of the Committee of Management for 2019 - 2020 are listed below.

Members	Representing	Term Commenced
Simon Pryor (Chair)	Offspring	May 2017
Tricia Lester (Secretary)	Natural Parent	September 2013
François Petitto (Treasurer)	Offspring	July 2019
Todd Dargan	Offspring	September 2018
Sue Green	Offspring	September 2015
Ross Hunter	Offspring	September 2019
Maureen Long	Independent Expert	May 2018
Lyn Moore	Offspring	October 2017
Charlotte Smith	Manager (Ex-Officio)	May 2016

Staff Team

VANISH is staffed by qualified professionals with extensive experience in search and support. Some of the VANISH team also have a relevant lived experience. Since our last report we farewelled our two most long serving staff members, Mary Rawson and Elizabeth Tomlinson (see details on page 4). We also farewelled Gail Holstock who we then welcomed back again after ten months away. We also welcomed Flavia Leser to the team. Members of the VANISH staff team are listed below. Our volunteers are listed on the opposite page.

Name	Title	Commenced / Departed
Charlotte Smith	Manager	July 2013
Elizabeth Tomlinson	Search and Support Coordinator/ Counsellor	November 2007 - November 2020
Mary Rawson	Search and Support Worker	February 2004 - June 2020
Gail Holstock	Community Outreach & Training Coordinator	August 2013 - January 2020
Patricia Navaretti	Search and Support Worker	June 2018
Tracey Hudson	Search and Support Worker	August 2019
Adam D'Arcy	Quality and Compliance Officer	February 2017
Lorna Sleightholm	Administrator/Receptionist	September 2018
Flavia Leser	Accountant	January 2020
Gail Holstock	Search and Support Worker	November 2020
Kerri Licheni	Bookkeeper (Contractor)	April 2011

We are also grateful for assistance from former staff members Hana Crisp and Julie Gomez.



Andrea Phillips, Legal Volunteer

Andrea joined VANISH in 2018 after hearing about our work on ABC radio. Her qualifications and experience as a solicitor, psychologist and teacher are highly valued at VANISH where every Thursday she enthusiastically turns her hand to whichever tasks await her. Andrea has researched the legal side of DNA testing, reviewed our legal status and reporting requirements, researched redress schemes to inform our submission to the Victorian Inquiry, written policies, advised us of legislative changes, reviewed Zoom for privacy concerns and assisted with contracts. We are extremely grateful to her for volunteering her valuable time and expertise.

Support Groups Facilitators

Without our wonderful Support Group Facilitators we would not be able to provide this valued service. It never ceases to amaze us how these dedicated individuals show up each month to create a safe space for our members and service users. This year involved them becoming proficient in running the groups online so that participants could still connect which was even more important to some during the pandemic.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Our Melbourne groups are facilitated by: Liz Tomlinson and Diane Jacobson (Mixed Group) and Gail Holstock, Caroline Spiers, Tania Curlis and David Cross (Adoptee Only Groups).

The Donor Conceived Adults Network was facilitated by Chloe Allworthy, now replaced by Ross Hunter, with VARTA Counsellor Kate Bourne.

Our regional groups are facilitated by: SallyRose Carbines (Ballarat and previously Bendigo), Rosie Saxton (Albury/Wodonga) and supported by Helen Nicholson (Albury/Wodonga)

Special thanks to the individuals who have previously facilitated our groups and finished up this year, Debbie Garratt and Lin Davidson (Albury/Wodonga). We are very grateful to you for sharing your valuable skills and time and wish you the very best in your next adventures and endeavours.

Thanks also go to Lindy Cochrane for assisting with organising and cataloguing our library. We look forward to finalising this work in the new year.

Sandra Pankhurst, Fundraising

Sandra came to her first VANISH AGM last year and immediately put her hand up to assist the organisation with fundraising. Sandra has a history of raising substantial amounts of money for the causes she supports so we were thrilled when she offered to chair a new fundraising sub-committee. VANISH members Pauline Ley, Mandy Candlish and Sue Scholz also volunteered to join and since then the sub-committee has met three times and planned events and other ways to raise funds for our important work. Were it not for COVID-19 and the restrictions, we have no doubt that with Sandra and Mandy's drive and enthusiasm, we would have been announcing our new initiatives by now. Watch this space in 2021!



SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This year saw the departure of VANISH's two longest serving staff members to whom we are extremely grateful for their dedication, skill and commitment. We are very fortunate to have had Mary and Liz on the VANISH team and wish to express our appreciation and gratitude here and to wish them well in their next adventures.

Mary Rawson

This June we bade farewell to longstanding Search and Support Worker Mary Rawson. Mary joined VANISH 16½ years ago and we calculated that she had worked 15,000 hours in that time. What a remarkable contribution!

Mary is well known for her sterling work with Forgotten Australians as well as the adoption community. On her retirement, the VANISH Committee of Management wrote to Mary: "On behalf of the adoption community we appreciate the invaluable care, compassion and dedication you have given to anyone who has come to VANISH seeking personal information and possible contact with family members and the assistance you have given to those on this journey of discovery whether it is successful or not. In the provision of search and support services, particularly with complex cases and more recently with the DNA project, you have shown tenacity and exceptional expertise and skill in solving the jigsaw for so many that otherwise would have been left without the information they sought."

We also had some lovely feedback about Mary in the recent satisfaction survey:
"Well done to Mary who has just retired and a big thank you to her" Anna, Forgotten Australian/Adopted Person

"Happy with VANISH. My search Angel was Mary R, she was truly amazing :)" Susanne, Adopted Person

On leaving, Mary said "I was indeed fortunate to have found my way to VANISH all those years ago; to have worked with such highly committed and very professional colleagues, and to have assisted hundreds of service users who have shared their life stories and who have entrusted me to assist them in searches for birth relatives has not only been a privilege and enlightening but also enjoyable. I never cease to be amazed at and inspired by the resilience, strength and perseverance that so many have demonstrated in their life changing journeys."



Liz Tomlinson

This November we also said farewell Liz Tomlinson after 13 years with VANISH. Thanks to her professionalism, dedication and being so well-organised, Liz has successfully juggled three roles for the last seven years: Search & Support Worker, Search & Support Coordinator and Counsellor.

In their letter to Liz, the Committee of Management said "we express our sincere thanks to you, Liz for the amazing contribution you have made to VANISH by undertaking a variety of roles over the years. On behalf of the adoption community, we have valued your high level of competency and professionalism in your search work and the empathy, sensitivity and respect you have shown not only to individuals using VANISH's services but to the other members of the staff team and Committee of Management on various working groups. You have been an exemplary role model to us all."

Liz provided an invaluable counselling service that made a difference in people's lives, as reflected in the wonderful feedback about Liz received through the satisfaction survey, letters, emails and cards.

"Liz made me feel that I was the only client she was dealing with. Very special and understanding" (Gail, Adopted Person)

A big thank you once again to Liz Tomlinson, looking forward to meeting her one day. Liz was very supportive in my early years of searches" (David, Adopted Person)

Liz's response on leaving was "I would like to thank VANISH for my employment and the many opportunities made available to me as a VANISH representative. I would also like to acknowledge and thank our service users who place their trust in our service, often when most vulnerable. Their strength, resilience and humour shown as we work together is indeed humbling. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to all of my colleagues who every day display immense professionalism and compassion while working for and with our service users."

SEARCH AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Overview

During the 2019-2020 financial year, VANISH registered fewer searches than last year and responded to more requests for information and support. Due to COVID-19 new searches dropped dramatically in March (6) and April (7) but increased again in May (23) and June (19). The following section provides details about new registrants, new searches, closed and completed searches and the number of instances of support, information and referrals.

New Registrations

In 2019-2020, there were 184 new registrants (compared to 215 in 2019).

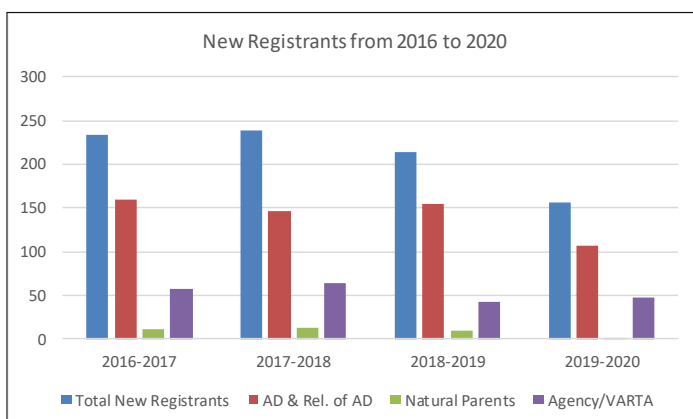
- 157 registered for search assistance to search for relatives (187 in 2019).
- 27 registered for the VANISH counselling service (28 in 2019).

Status of New Registrants

The breakdown of new registrants by status below shows that the majority were Adopted Persons:

- 101 Adopted Persons
- 2 Natural Parents
- 6 Child of Adopted Person
- 24 Agency searches on behalf of Natural Parents (2), Adopted Persons (19) and Forgotten Australians (3).
- 24 VARTA requests on behalf of Donor Conceived Persons, Donors and Parents of Donor Conceived Persons.

The age range of new and existing registrants is from 25 to 81 years. The chart below shows the number of new registrants over the past four years.

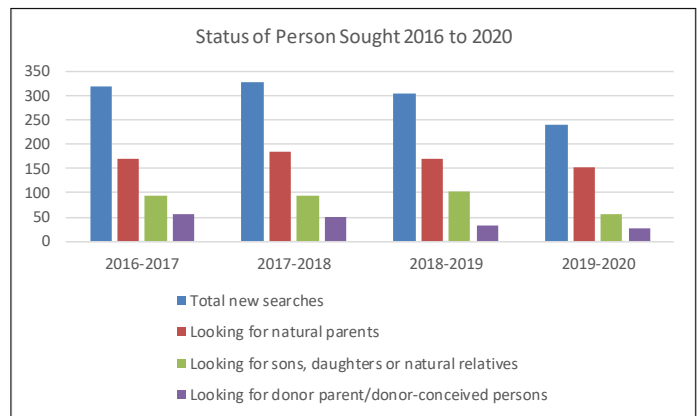


New Searches

There were 241 new searches registered this year compared to 305 in 2019. 156 were on behalf of new registrants (187 in 2019) and 85 on behalf of returning service users (118 in 2019). The status of the person sought was as follows:

- 153 Natural Parents of Adopted Persons and Forgotten Australians
- 55 Natural Relatives of Adopted Persons and Forgotten Australians
- 6 Adopted Persons
- 27 Donors or Donor Conceived Persons

The Chart below shows the Status of Persons Sought for the past four years.



The difference between the number of registrants and the number of searches is that some registrants request more than one search, for example where a person searches for their natural mother and their natural father or if a relative is found deceased then a new search for a living relative may commence.

***They found my mother after 50 years!
I could not have done this without
Vanish (Tracy, Adopted Person)***

***The staff were professional, caring and
compassionate. (Anon)***

***Thank you Vanish for helping and
supporting me with my search for my
Natural Father. (Wayne, Adopted
Person)***

SEARCH AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Completed Searches

220 searches were completed this year:

- 105 Found living (125 in 2019)
- 41 Found deceased (50 in 2019)
- 12 Found records (9 in 2019)
- 62 Not Found (31 in 2019)

Closed Searches

117 searches were closed this year. Searches might be closed after discussion with the searcher due to e.g. not having enough information, the Service User deciding not to proceed for a range of reasons, or the Service User having completed the search themselves.

- 41 were closed after discussion with the Service User (20 in 2019)
- 76 closed due to not no paperwork being received from the Service User after registration, or due to no further contact with the Service User (50 in 2019)

NB Completed and closed searches relate to previous active searches as well as those registered this year.

Very happy with the service provided to find my birth mother. Excellent outcome, very pleased with VANISH.
(Robert, Adopted Person)

I really found Patricia (my 'case manager') to be amazing and feel lucky to have had her on my journey.
(Fiona, Adopted Person)

Agency Searches

VANISH continued to have contractual arrangements to conduct searches on behalf of clients of several Agencies: Open Place, VARTA, Adoption Information Services (formerly FIND) and Anglicare. In addition, VANISH has continued to conduct searches on a reciprocal basis for post-adoption agencies in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia New Zealand, England.

These arrangements are of many years standing and are invaluable as they have enabled many long and difficult searches to be completed. The search team are particularly grateful for the generous assistance our interstate colleagues provided during the lockdown and sincerely thank Jigsaw WA, PASS SA and Jigsaw QLD for their support.

Support, Information and Referrals

Requests for support, information and referrals via telephone, email, letter and face to face, continued to be a significant aspect of the work of the VANISH search and support team during the course of the year. VANISH received 1598 requests for information, support and referrals from service users this year which is an increase from 1389 last year. The following figures provide a breakdown:

- 1423 instances of information and support provided (1277 in 2019).
- 166 referrals made to other agencies and services and to counsellors (112 in 2019).
- 329 professionals assisting clients affected by adoption and state wardship (257 in 2019).

*Thank you. Thank you so much.
Gratitude for all your work and skills.
(Annette, Adopted Person)*

VANISH helps people deal with a very hurtful pain that doesn't go away, the pain has to be managed! VANISH PROVIDE THE SUPPORT NEEDED. (Lee, Adopted Person)

Education and training

There were 232 contacts relating to community education and professional training this year, significantly fewer than 582 last year.

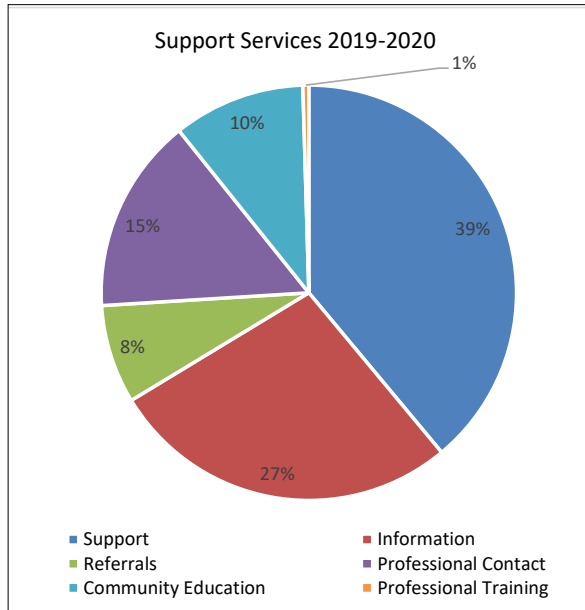
- 222 community education contacts, including health and mental health practitioners and historical societies (511 in 2019)
- 10 attendees at Professional Training (71 in 2019)

Enquiries

VANISH registers on the database enquiries which require detailed responses and/or on-going support. Enquiries this year were predominantly requests for information concerning how to find a relative who was adopted or how to get adoption records so as to search for mothers, fathers and other family members. There were also a several requests for information about the Victoria Inquiry into Forced Adoption. Requests for support most frequently included dealing with relationship difficulties concerning reunion or managing relationships between all family members.

SEARCH AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The chart below shows VANISH support, information and education services delivered and the proportion for each type of service. Not all services are directly comparable so this chart is indicative only.



Counselling

Over the year we responded to a steady stream of requests and provided counselling to 42 Service Users from metropolitan Melbourne, rural/regional Victoria and interstate as well as making referrals to the therapists on our list of counsellors experienced in supporting individuals affected by adoption.

The details of counselling registrants and sessions are shown in the breakdown and chart below:

- 27 new individuals registered for the counselling service.
- 15 existing service users received counselling
- 153 counselling sessions were conducted in person and by telephone to individuals dealing with a range of issues concerning their adoption or the adoption of their now adult child.

Counselling Service FY2020		
Clients Status	No clients	No sessions
Natural Parents	6	34
Adopted Persons	36	119
Total	42	153

The counsellor was very respectful and seemed non-judgemental. Liz was very nice and made me feel comfortable in our sessions. The sessions have also helped me work on my issues. (Anon)

The counselling I received was so helpful in that it gave me confidence and skills to deal with my feelings and the outcome of my search. (Sylvie, Natural Mother)

Support Groups

This year the Melbourne Mixed Group and two Adoptee Only groups, one funded by VANISH supporters through a Chuffed campaign, continued to operate up until the restrictions. From then on the Adoptee Only Groups continued online. In Ballarat meetings occurred when possible while the Albury-Wodonga group also went online. These groups proved an important source of support and connection during lockdown. A total of 325 attendances were recorded as follows:

FY2020 Support Group attendance		
Location	No. of groups	No. of attendees
Regional	22	64
Metro	57	261
Total	79	325

Being around other people who understand your experience and can voice their own is just so incredibly powerful. I feel so very grateful to the Vanish adoption support group. Without a doubt a massively positive impact on my life, particularly to have a safe space where I can voice how adoption has impacted me and I will be believed! (Anon)

YOUR COMMUNITY

Without Consent

Last November, VANISH and ARMS (Vic) arranged an excursion for members and guests to view the *Without Consent* exhibition at the National Wool Museum in Geelong where we were joined by a group from Tasmania. This special event was made possible with the generous support of National Archives Australia (NAA) and the National Wool Museum. This was the only showing of the exhibition in Victoria so it was an important opportunity for the community.

Jo Fraser, Secretary of ARMS was our MC for the event. Padraic Fisher, CEO of the National Wool Museum gave us a warm welcome then Caroline Webber, Director of Public Programs at NAA provided an overview of how the exhibition was designed, curated and displayed. Hon Nahum Mushin AM shared an overview of forced adoptions, summing up by saying, 'This exhibition is a record of events which occurred in Australia which we must never forget. I'm constantly reminded of the phrase 'Lest we forget', which is used in another context, it is very relevant here. ...This exhibition would not have existed without all the things that are in it and they are there as a result of people who have actually experienced it. That this exhibition is here is because of those who keep going, keep going in a most extraordinary way.'



After lunch Charlotte Smith, VANISH Manager, invited community representatives to respond. Marie Meggit, Chair of ARMS (Vic) and Tricia Lester, Secretary of VANISH led the responses then others shared their feedback. Their comments were a strong testament to how powerfully validating the exhibition is for people with a lived experience. It is also highly educational for people not familiar with Australia's past adoption practices.

VANISH has advocated to the NAA that *Without Consent* not be archived yet, especially given its potential for education and advocacy during the current Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions.

Anniversary Event

On 25th October 2019, VANISH members and representatives attended a gathering organised by ARMS (Vic) at the statue "Taken Not Given" in St Andrews Place, Melbourne, to commemorate the 1st Anniversary of its unveiling and the 7th Anniversary of the Victorian Apology for Past Adoption Practices. Marie Meggitt made a powerful speech reminding us all of the dark journey of adoption and the profound loss and grief that is the lived experience of those affected. After the ceremony all gathered at the nearby café and shared their stories.

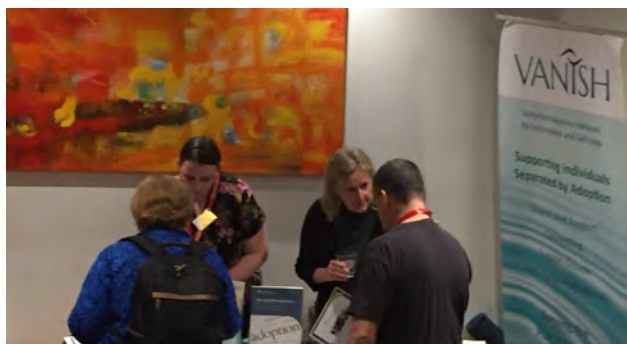


DNA Presentations

DNA Downunder, Melbourne & Sydney

In August 2019 DNA Downunder events were held across Australia, with international experts in DNA testing presenting on a range of topics.

At the Melbourne event VANISH had a table which received a constant stream of visitors with questions about our services and other adoption matters.



VANISH staff Patricia and Gail respond to enquiries by visitors at Melbourne DNA Downunder

At the Sydney event which was the largest DNA Downunder gathering, VANISH Manager Charlotte Smith presented on “Making and managing contact in

the context of adoption and NPE” which was well received by the audience of DNA users and genealogists alike. Making contact with the correct person and sensitively, is one of the most pressing challenges with DNA testing and participants were keen to hear more about ways to go about this and about VANISH search and support services.

Albury-Wodonga

In response to a request by participants of the Albury-Wodonga support group and to increasing demand to understand the complex topic of DNA testing for finding unknown family, VANISH organised a presentation and questions and answers session in September, facilitated by Rose Overberg. Rose is a Victorian based Donor Conceived Person who has assisted numerous adopted people and donor conceived people to identify their relatives or ancestry through analysing their DNA results.

The event was well attended and the session stimulated lots of questions and discussion. Topics covered were: what is DNA and how is it used for finding unknown family; using DNA and family trees to be a DNA detective and finally, how to manage expectations and contact with genetic relatives.

Writing As Therapy Course



Over the past six months VANISH has offered Writing As Therapy courses run by Dr Sian Prior, a Melbourne based writer with a PhD in creative writing who teaches creative writing at RMIT.

Originally the course was to be in Melbourne, however due to COVID we asked Sian to adapt to online. This resulted in smaller groups but savings on the venue and catering meant we could offer four courses, two each for Mothers and Adopted Persons. A total of 32 participants attended, some of whom would have faced barriers in physically attending a Melbourne event.

We are very grateful to Sian, for her adaptability and sensitive approach as she shared her story, insights and expertise with participants. We are also grateful

to the COMPASS program (Relationships Australia) for the small grant for this course.

Here is some participant feedback. All comments are published with permission, anonymously.

I thought she (Sian) did a great job creating a safe space for people to think about their writing and provided the opportunity for people to share but only if they felt comfortable. It was good to hear about her experiences with writing and the different ways to think about and approach writing. Thank you!

Writing a journal - not as challenging as I thought.

It was great to share stories with others and to be given some basic structures and writing exercises to work on. I liked the resources Sian gave us - I have checked out a few of the books already. Overall it was inspiring and useful.

An inspiring opportunity to engage with a very practical resource for self care and reflective practice.

YOUR VOICE

Advocacy by VANISH

This year VANISH has undertaken a significant amount of advocacy on behalf of our members and community. Our advocacy positions are drawn from long experience of working with people with a lived experience, whose voices are front and centre in our submissions and media work. Letters and submissions to policy makers are the result of a team effort by VANISH Committee members with Manager and staff input.

Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions

In May last year, Victoria's Attorney General the Hon. Jill Hennessy, announced a new parliamentary Inquiry into support services and responses to the issue of historical forced adoptions in Victoria.

The Inquiry Committee Chair, Natalie Suleyman said the Inquiry was "an important opportunity for community members to provide information that will enable the Committee to assess what support has been provided and to make recommendations going forward".



Parliament of Victoria

VANISH made a substantial submission into the Inquiry, seeing it as an important opportunity to put on record past practices, their impacts, community action, legislative reform, the apologies, services provided and the gaps. VANISH made 30 recommendations, including the following:

- * There be a sensitive redress scheme which includes the removal of the statute of limitations so that the responsible institutions can be taken to court.
- * Natural parents be afforded the same rights with regard to Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages as adopted persons, so that they are able obtain their adult child's marriage, change of name and/or death certificates, if they exist.

10 * Cost-free Integrated Birth Certificates be made available to adopted persons who want them.

- * Adoption discharges be a simple, no fault procedure and this be publicised.

- * Government provide adequate funding for the delivery of a full suite of services for people affected including counselling and support groups.

- * Regional outreach programs be funded and implemented to improve access for regional and rural Victorians.

- * Government funds research into various aspects of past adoption practices, particularly impacts across the lifespan, and contact and reunion outcomes.

Public hearings are due to commence as soon as restrictions allow. The report is due in December but likely to be delayed into 2021 due to COVID.

Donor Conception Advocacy

In July, VANISH made a submission in relation to a proposed amendment to the ART Act (2008) to change the limit from 10 women per donor, to 10 families. This amendment aims to address discrimination against the LGBTQIA community e.g. where same sex female couples both wish to conceive children and want them to be biologically related.

In our submission we expressed support for removing discrimination. The concerns we raised relate to undermining the original purpose of the 10 women limit which is to reduce the possibility of consanguinity between donor conceived people and to limit the number of children born as a result of each donor's donation, as this is an important factor for the emotional wellbeing of donor conceived individuals. VANISH recommended reverting to the original proposal of replacing the 10 women limit with a 5 family limit as this would address discrimination and go some way to limit the number of children born of the same donor parent. The current limit of 10 women is likely to result in 20 to 30 siblings for a donor conceived person. Changing it to a 10 family limit could result in doubling or trebling that given the dynamic nature of families and the high rate of separation and repartnering in Australia.

VANISH noted the parallel with adoption whereby even though the Act states that the rights of the children to be born are paramount, policy and practice were and are developed largely in response to the needs and demands of people wanting children and the industry that supports them. There seems to be little concern for, or listening to, the children affected by these policies who are now adults.

Integrated Birth Certificates

In 2012 the Senate Inquiry into Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices recommended Integrated Birth Certificates be implemented. The Victorian Government responded with 'support for the development of an integrated birth certificate in conjunction with national reforms relating to documentation and provisions of birth and adoption records'. Since then, the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) undertook a review of the Adoption Act 1984. The Commission heard a range of views and in its final report (2017), recommended Integrated Birth Certificates be implemented.

One important principle is that adult adoptees can choose whether or not to apply for one. This choice is an important factor for individuals who had no agency in their adoption. Some might not choose to apply for these certificates, but making them available for those who do is about righting the wrongs of the past. "For many people affected by past closed and forced adoptions, the amended birth certificate symbolises the serious problems they see with adoption. Their birth certificates represent erasure of their past and fabrication of their birth; a re-writing of their identity; and dishonesty and injustice which must be corrected. The Commission was told 'adult adoptees have to live with [this] on a day to day basis'" (VLRC p96).

Following an article in VOICE newsletter about NSW introducing Integrated Birth Certificates, VANISH members sent in their views. Some are below:

"My thoughts are I would like the option. I hated the fact that my original birth certificate got cancelled, I hate the fact that my birth certificate has adopted stamped all over it. My original certificate that had Schedule 5 at the top (which no one knew what that meant) had to be cancelled - but it meant a lot to me, if I want to apply for a full birth certificate to go overseas this was not good enough and it was cancelled - just like my birth really - cancelled out."

Kelli, adopted in 1972

"As an adult, I would love to have the option to see my entire history on the one page and feel that my birth family (both of whom I've met) is included. I think it provides a visual representation of the kind of chaotic mess of information that adoption leads to. I really like the terms 'before adoption' and 'after adoption' which clearly acknowledges all parties. It would also provide future generations with information of their true biological heritage."

I sincerely hope that integrated birth certificates soon

become reality in Victoria for all adoptees and donor conceived people." Adoptee, adopted in 1965.

"It would be so meaningful to me to be able to use an integrated birth certificate. An integrated birth certificate, with both sets of parents on my birth certificate, would allow me to feel that who I am is legitimate, that I am not a dirty secret to literally be erased with a new and false birth certificate. It would allow me to be more confident and more truthful about who I am. There is no shame in having more than one set of parents, or any of the new family set ups we see emerging today. What is shameful is living in a society that can only see parents in one form, where parents only feel legitimate if a child's biology is erased, all to ensure we conform to this western notion of a nuclear family. I'm so happy to see NSW lead the way with integrated birth certificates, it's well past time for Victoria to get on board too!" Cheyne, adopted in 1980.

NEW SOUTH WALES BIRTH, DEATH AND MARRIAGE REGISTRATION ACT 2016 INTEGRATED BIRTH CERTIFICATE		
	This column represents the person's Legal Name and Legal Parent/s	
1. Child	Child's Name At Adoption SHARP Michael James Jones Male 02 October 2019 Campbelltown, NSW	Child's Name At Birth JONES Michael James Male 02 October 2019 Campbelltown, NSW
2. Mother/Parent	Mother/Parent After Adoption SHARP DANDY Janet Teacher 34 Orange, NSW	Mother/Parent At Birth JONES Unknown Sally Shop Assistant 30 Lithgow, NSW
3. Father/Parent	Father/Parent After Adoption SHARP Stuart Electrician 31 Randwick, NSW	Father/Parent At Birth JACKSON Nick Builder 24 Katoomba, NSW
4. Marriage of Parents	Date of Marriage 28 July 2011 Place of Marriage Campbelltown, NSW	-
5. Previous Children of relationship	Samantha J	Not any
6. Informants	Name J. SHARP Address 25 Regent Street Chippendale, NSW, 2008 MOTHER Name S. SHARP Address 25 Regent Street Chippendale, NSW, 2008 FATHER	S. JONES 321 Smith Lane Sydney, NSW, 2000 MOTHER
7. Registering Authority	Name Registrar Date 01 December 2019	
8. Enrolment(s)	This person was adopted pursuant to the Adoption Act 2000 (NSW) Date of Adoption: 1 January 2018	Not any

NSW Proposed Integrated Birth Certificate

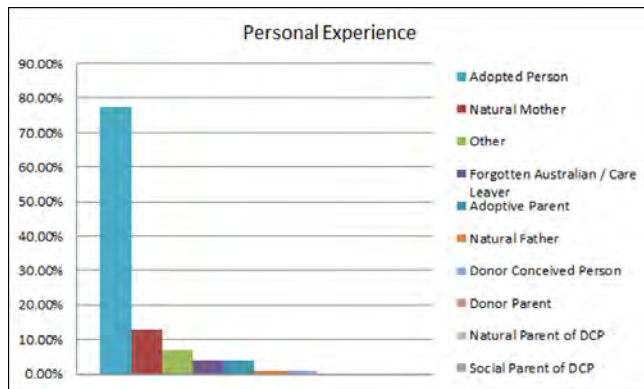
VANISH wrote to the Victorian Attorney General Jill Hennessy pointing out that it is eight years since the Senate Inquiry recommended Integrated Birth Certificates and the community should not have to wait any longer for them to be implemented. In our letter we also raised the issue of the New Adoption Act, explaining that some people affected, particularly Natural Parents, are concerned they will not live to see the discrimination removed. We urged the AG to direct this important work recommended by the VLRC be commenced without further delay.

YOUR FEEDBACK

This year we carried out our Service User Satisfaction Survey for people who had received a service in the last three years. We received 101 responses with wonderful feedback and very helpful insights for which we thank everyone who participated. Below is a snapshot of the results.

Respondents

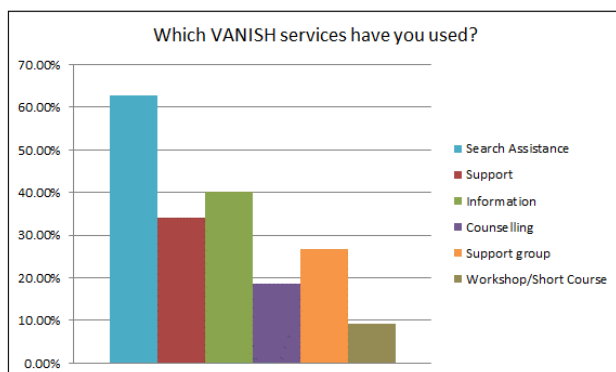
86% of respondents came from two main age brackets, 47% from the 46-60 age bracket and 39% from the 61-75 age bracket.



The majority of respondents (77%), were an adopted person, 13% were a natural mother, 4% a Forgotten Australian, 4% an adoptive parent, 1% a natural father and 1% a donor conceived person. Those who responded "other" (7%) included a sibling of an adopted person, a child of an adopted person and an adopted person adopted by a step-parent.

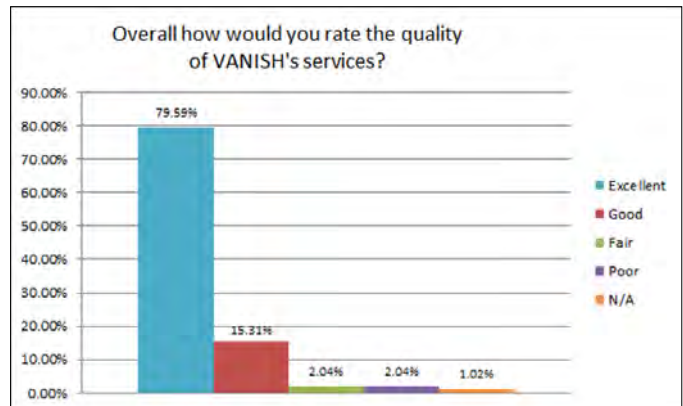
54% of respondents live in Greater Melbourne, 12% in regional centres, 12% in rural Victoria, 16% interstate and 2% overseas.

The most common engagement with VANISH by those surveyed was for search assistance (63%) followed by information (40%), support (34%), support groups (27%), counselling (19%) and workshops/short courses (9%).

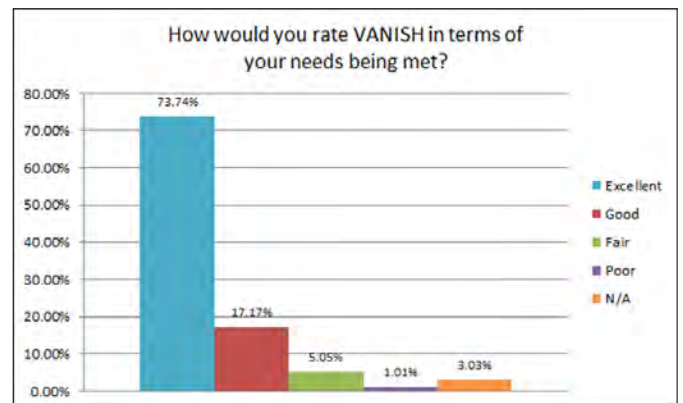


Service Performance

Overwhelmingly (95%) respondents rated the quality of VANISH's services as either excellent or good.

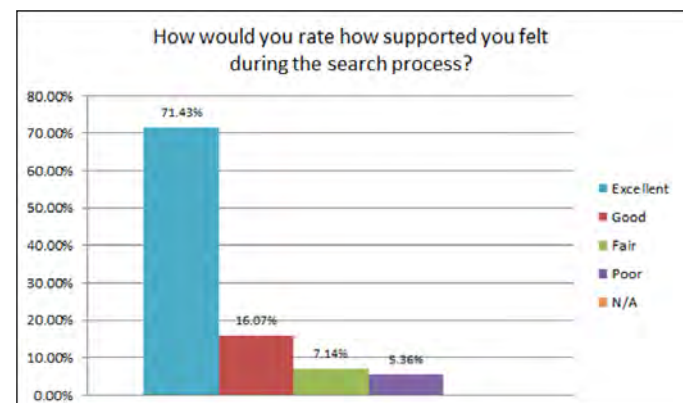


Respondents also rated the extent to which their needs were met highly with 91% as excellent or good.

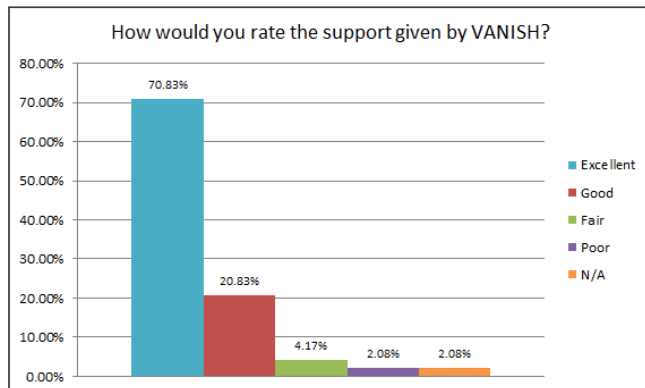


Search & Support

The feedback regarding the search service highlighted the high quality of work the team does, rating them consistently as either excellent or good in categories such as being respectful to individual circumstances (93%), being able to 'hear' or understand the feelings of the service user (92%) and how they would rate the workers explanation of the search process (93%). Suggested improvements to the search service were to have a more national approach, a service for people using DNA testing, and to have more staff.

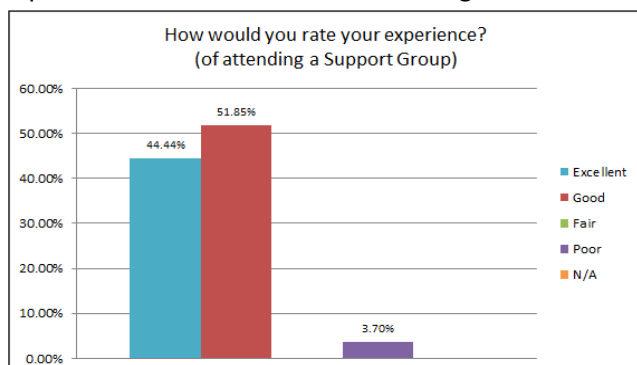


92% of respondents who said they accessed support through VANISH rated this support as either excellent or good. This is shown in the chart below.



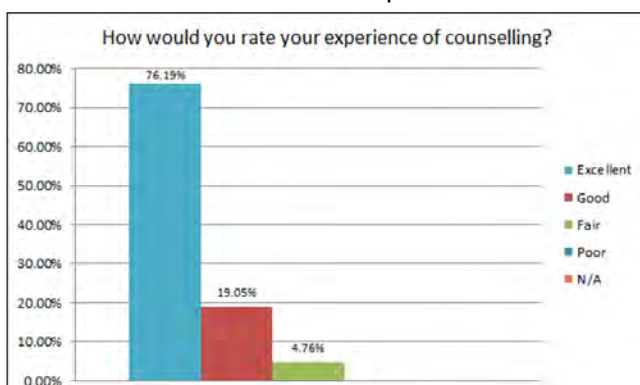
Support Groups

Of the people who attended support groups, 96% rated their experience as excellent or good. Common positive experiences were that the people attending felt validated, able to find people with a shared experience to their own and not feeling so alone.



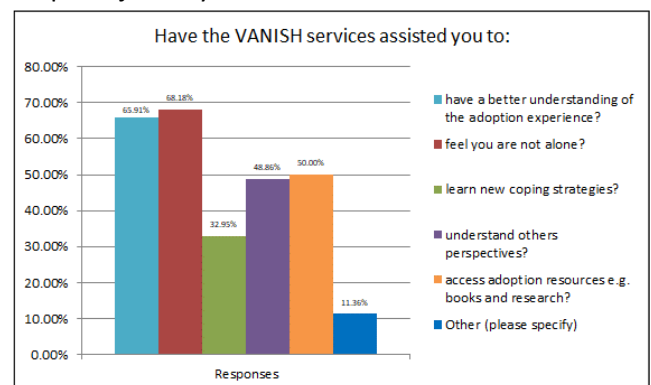
Counselling

Of the people who utilised the counselling services 95% of respondents rated the experience as excellent or good. A significant number of people felt being supported and heard by a caring and understanding professional was the most positive outcome. Others referred to the positive impact in terms of outcomes in their reunions and relationships.

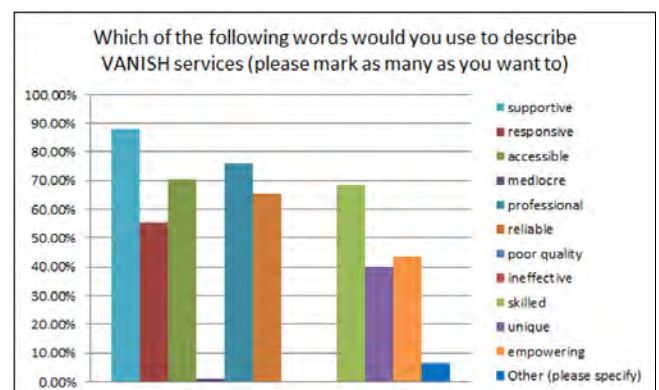


Describing the service

Respondents were provided with a list of phrases and were asked to identify those which best described VANISH. They were able to identify as many from the list as they felt appropriate. The responses are provided in the chart below. The most frequently chosen phrase was “feel you are not alone” closely followed by “have a better understanding of the adoption experience”. The “other” responses included developing a better understanding of the sibling experience, being assisted to know and understand how to balance their identity between the adopted and biological selves, and supporting others on their adoption journey.



When invited to pick words to describe the VANISH service, respondents overwhelmingly picked the positive descriptors, as shown in the chart below.



Research

This year the survey included a new question “Are you interested in doing more detailed surveys from time to time about different aspects of your lived experience, for example contact, reunion, relationships etc? Of the 87 respondents who answered this question, 60% said yes. This is very positive given the dearth of research and we will follow up on this next year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VANISH Acknowledges and Thanks.....

Department of Justice & Community Service Victoria

For the financial support for the post-adoption services VANISH delivers. Our special thanks go to the Adoption Services team for managing the transition to DJCS in a way that ensured continuity of services.

Department of Health & Human Services Victoria

We wish to thank DHHS (previously DHS) for the financial support for the past 30 years since VANISH was established and for the positive engagement regarding our services.

Forced Adoption Support Services (Relationships Australia Victoria)

VANISH thanks FASS via the Commonwealth Department of Social Services for funding through the small grants program.

Ryerson Index

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to Judith Thorn and Bernadette Harris who have each contributed over many years to The Ryerson Index. On a weekly basis since at least 2007, Judith and Bernadette have, along with hundreds of other volunteers across Australia, given of their time to index newspaper death and funeral notices. This Index is a very valuable and free resource used by family historians worldwide, and by VANISH search workers when conducting searches on behalf of service users. Thank you Judith and Bernadette.

Herbert Smith Freehills for the valuable legal advice regarding Adoption and Assisted Reproductive Treatment legislation and our contracts with partner organisations.

Hank Romyn for his generous donation of 15 of his watercolours for VANISH to sell to raise funds.

Webres Solutions VANISH is extremely grateful to Webres for the exceptional IT support provided this year putting in place technology for our staff to work from home.

Jigsaw Western Australia, PASS South Australia and Jigsaw Queensland for their support with AEC searches while Melbourne was in lockdown.

Rose Wells for her assistance with photos.

Oliver Tsorbaris for technical support for our AGM.

Members and Friends who have made financial donations to VANISH over the year and who donated to the Chuffed Campaign for our additional support group.

Committee's Report for the year ended 30 June 2020

Your committee members submit the financial accounts of the VANISH Inc. for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.

Committee Members

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

Simon Pryor (Chair)

Tricia Lester (Secretary)

François Pettito (Treasurer)

Todd Dargan

Ross Hunter

Maureen Long

Lyn Moore

Sue Green

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 affected by adoption, state wardship, donor assisted reproduction or other separation from family, as outlined in the Rules of VANISH Inc.

Operating Result

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

Year ended	Year ended
30 June 2020	30 June 2019
\$92,384	(\$74)

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



François Pettito (Treasurer)



Simon Pryor (Chairperson)

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Profit and Loss Statement for the year ended 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Revenue		
Victorian Government Grants	652,391	627,744
Partner Memorandums of Understanding		
Open Place	43,966	43,103
RAV Small Grants	1,250	12,479
Interest Received	4,426	5,811
Donations	2,788	5,499
Other Income	71,745	11,055
Total Revenue	776,566	705,691
Expenses		
Communications	4,658	5,214
Finance	7,855	7,801
Administration	18,382	15,783
Depreciation	6,827	12,280
Information Technology	12,862	7,531
Governance and Compliance	4,233	4,278
Small Grants	1,250	12,479
Service Expenses	12,310	38,894
Support Groups	3,081	4,610
Employment	530,028	518,676
Property	60,007	56,886
Utilities	6,741	7,748
Stakeholder Engagement	2,879	3,366
Professional Development, Training and Supervision	13,071	10,219
Total Expenses	684,184	705,765
Net (Loss)/Profit	92,384	(74)

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	464,837	311,498
Income Owing	-217.83	21,333
Prepaid Expenses	<u>2,315</u>	<u>1,917</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>466,934</u>	<u>334,748</u>
Non-current Assets		
Security Deposit Howard Street	10,000	10,000
Property, Plant and Equipment	<u>12,848</u>	<u>17,992</u>
Total Non-Current Assets	<u>22,848</u>	<u>27,992</u>
Total Assets	489,782	362,740
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Trade Creditors and Accruals	674	8,441
GST Liability	13,370	11,846
Payroll Liabilities	12,821	10,085
Grants Carried Forward	6,950	1,206
Provisions	<u>64,725</u>	<u>23,413</u>
Total Current Liabilities	<u>98,540</u>	<u>54,991</u>
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provision for Long Service leave	<u>19,812</u>	<u>28,705</u>
Total Non-Current Liabilities	<u>19,812</u>	<u>28,705</u>
Total Liabilities	118,353	83,696
Net Assets	371,429	279,044
VANISH Funds		
Current Earnings	92,384	-
Retained Earnings	279,044	279,044
Total VANISH Funds	371,429	\$279,044

FINANCIAL REPORT

Summary Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 30 June 2019

	Inflows, (outflows)	
	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Cash Flows Operating Activities		
DHHS Funding	584,341	592,744
RAV Small Grants	1250	0
Partner Memorandums of Understanding	44,184	64,027
Interest Received	4,426	5,811
Donations	2,788	5,499
Sundry Income	5,765	11,055
Cashflow Boost Subsidy	29,980	-
Jobkeeper Subsidy	36,000	-
Payments to Suppliers and Employees	(552,189)	(662,171)
GST (net)	(1,524)	(5,589)
Net Cash Inflow from Operating Activities	155,021	11,376
Cash Flows Investing Activities		
Plant and Equipment and Leasehold Improvements	(1,683)	(1,922)
Net Cash Outflow from Investing Activities	(1,683)	(1,922)
Cash Flows Financing Activities	0	0
Net Cash Inflow from Financing Activities	0	0
Total Net Cash Inflow for the Year	153,339	9,454
Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash Held for the Year	153,339	9,454
Cash at the Beginning of the Year	321,498	312,044
Cash at End of the Year	474,837	321,498

Summary Statement of Change in Equity for the year ended 30 June 2020

Balance at 1 July 2019	279,044	279,118
Net Gain/(Loss) for the Year	92,384	(74)
Balance at 30 June 2020	371,428	279,044

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 2020

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 2020 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:

François Petitto (Treasurer)



Simon Pryor (Chairperson)



Notes to the Financial Statements for the Year ended 30th June 2020

1. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Basis of Preparation

In the opinion of the Committee of Management, the Association is not a reporting entity since there are unlikely to exist users of the financial report who are not able to command the preparation of reports tailored so as to satisfy specifically all of their information needs. These special purpose financial statements have been prepared to meet the reporting requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the recognition and measurement requirements of the Australian Accounting Standards and Accounting Interpretations, and the disclosure requirements of AASB 101 Presentation of Financial Statements, AASB 107 Statement of Cash Flows, AASB 108 Accounting Policies, Changes. The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis and are based in Accounting Estimates and Errors and AASB 1054 Australian Additional Disclosures.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis and are based on historical costs modified, where applicable, by the measurement at fair value of selected non-current assets, financial assets and financial liabilities.

Significant accounting policies adopted in the preparation of these financial statements are presented below and are consistent with prior reporting periods unless otherwise stated.

2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents comprises cash on hand, demand deposits and short term investments which are readily convertible to known amounts of cash and which are subject to an insignificant risk of change in value.

Provisions

Provisions are recognised when the association has a legal or constructive obligation, as a result of past events, for which it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will result and that outflow can be reliably measured.

Employee Benefits

Provision is made for the association's liability for employee benefits arising from services rendered by employees to the end of the reporting period. Employee benefits that are expected to be wholly settled within one year have been measured at the amounts expected to be paid when the liability is settled. Employee benefits expected to be settled more than one year after the end of the reporting period have been measured at the present value of the estimated future cash outflows to be made for those benefits. In determining the liability, consideration is given to employee wage increases and the probability that the employee may satisfy vesting requirements. Changes in the measurement of the liability are recognised in profit or loss.

Property, Plant and Equipment

Property, plant and equipment are carried at cost, independent or association's valuation. All assets excluding freehold land, are depreciated over their useful lives to the business. Leasehold improvements and office equipment are carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation.

Revenue and Other Income

Revenue is recognised when the amount of the revenue can be measured reliably, it is probable that economic benefits associated with the transaction will flow to the entity and specific criteria relating to the type of revenue as noted below, has been satisfied. Revenue is measured at the fair value of the consideration received or receivable and is presented net of returns, discounts and rebates. All revenue is stated net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST).

Interest Revenue

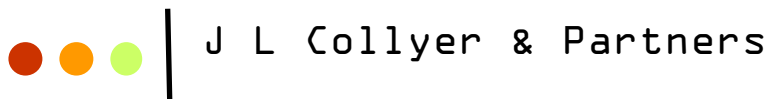
Interest is recognised using the effective interest method.

Other Revenue

Other revenue is recognised when the entity is entitled to the funds.

*The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.
These financial statements have been subject to audit or review and should be read in
conjunction with the attached Audit Review Report.*

AUDITOR'S REPORT



Unit 7 603 Boronia Road
WANTIRNA VIC 3152
Phone: 03 97206666
E-mail: lionel@jlcollyerpartners.com.au

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 2020, 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 2020, and its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 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 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 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

A blue ink signature of Lionel R. Arnold, written in a cursive style.

Partner

Dated in Wantirna on 4th September 2020

Liability limited by a scheme
approved under Professional
Standards Legislation.



J L Collyer & Partners
Is a CPA Practice



I cannot thank Vanish and Liz enough for all they have done for me. (Tracy)

The written material was so important for myself to understand the varied perspectives of the adoption story. I am so pleased I read it all before forging ahead. (Cate)

Sharing like-minded stories together. Stops the feelings of being alone with your adoption experiences (Mandy)

I cannot imagine what my difficult search and challenging reunion would have been like without Charlotte and the team from Vanish. (Trish)

I've really enjoyed the workshops that I have done with VANISH as they have a healing theme to them. Thank you. (Kerry)

Meeting other people who are adopted and hearing their stories, I now do not feel so different. (Kerina)

Thank you for your ongoing high standard of service provision and advocacy on behalf of the adoption community - especially the adoptee community. (Anon)

Thanks for the incredible work you do! (Anon)

I only scratched the surface of what I know VANISH can do and provide. I'm encouraged that when I do contact them again I will get the help I need. (Chris)

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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