

March 2023

VANISH

NEWS BULLETIN

Victorian Adoption Network for
Information and Self Help

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Dear members, friends and colleagues,

I hope you are keeping well and enjoying the last of the summer warmth as we ease towards autumn.

We are sending you this bulletin to let you know about some upcoming events and workshops, in particular the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions later this month. There are two evening events in Canberra on the 21st March and then a speech in Parliament on the morning of the 22nd March which you can watch online. There will probably be a fair bit of media coverage so if it is a challenging time for you, please do reach out and contact us for support.

Meanwhile here in Victoria, we are inviting you to a commemorative afternoon tea on Saturday 25th March arranged by VANISH and ARMS. See inside for more details. Everyone is welcome and we would love you to join us if you can.

In this bulletin we have provided an update about changes at Births, Deaths & Marriages as well as a few news articles. We hope to be able to provide some information about the implementation of the inquiry recommendations in our next VOICE newsletter, along with contributions from members and new books.

Kind regards,
Charlotte Smith
VANISH CEO

Important Dates

10TH ANNIVERSARY FOR THE NATIONAL APOLOGY

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13-26 March | [Online] <i>You Should Be Grateful</i> documentary, available for online viewing |
| 21 March | [Canberra] <i>Saying sorry: Do national apologies change the world?</i> A panel discussion from 6-7.30pm at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) |
| 21 March | [Canberra] Dinner event by invitation, hosted by Minister for Social Services, 7.30pm |
| 22 March | [Canberra/Online] Parliamentary statement, 9am, House of Representatives, Parliament House |
| 22-23 March | [Castlemaine] <i>Don't Wait/Carol from Clunes</i> double bill at Castlemaine Fringe Festival, 8pm |
| 25 March | [Melbourne] Commemorative ceremony, 2pm at <i>Taken Not Given</i> statue followed by afternoon tea |

UPCOMING VANISH WORKSHOPS

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 April | VANISH 'Common Threads' Textile Workshop for Adoptees with Nicole Kemp and SallyRose |
| 19 Apr-10 May | Writing as Therapy for Mothers with Sian Prior |
| 8 June -13 July | Art Therapy for Adoptees with Michele Hutchins |

10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

CANBERRA

The Commonwealth Government has arranged **three events in Canberra** to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions.



On **21 March from 6pm-7.30pm** the National Archives of Australia (NAA) will host **Saying sorry: Do national apologies change the world?**, a panel discussion moderated by Paul

Barclay from ABC's Big Ideas with guests former minister the Hon Jenny Macklin, the Hon Nahum Mushin AM, Professor Michelle Arrow and Ms Rosemary Baird. The discussion will be uploaded to the NAA's website and aired on Radio National at a later date. For more information go to <https://www.naa.gov.au/visit-us/events-and-exhibitions/saying-sorry-do-national-apologies-change-world>

On **21 March from 7.30pm** there will be a dinner event for representatives nominated by support and advocacy organisations and Forced Adoption Support Services operating across all states and territories. The dinner, hosted by the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, aims to bring together people from around Australia including individuals directly affected by forced adoption practices, support and advocacy organisation representatives, and those who worked to bring about the National Apology in 2013.

On **22 March at 9am** there will be a statement on significant matters in the House of Representatives which can be watched online. Attendees will then be welcomed to a morning tea in Parliament House with Parliamentarians. To watch the statement go to [https://www.aph.gov.au/News and Events/ Watch Parliament](https://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament) and select the House of Representatives.

MELBOURNE

Here in **Melbourne**, we will commemorate the anniversary on **Saturday 25th March**, starting with a ceremony at the statue **Taken Not Given** at 2pm followed by afternoon tea organised by VANISH and ARMS.

We will be joined by some wonderful guest speakers including the Hon Nahum Mushin AM who will share his reflections on the Canberra events. Everyone is welcome and we would love you to join us if you can.

The statue is located near the Treasury building at St Andrews Place, on the corner of St Andrews Place and Lansdowne Street (opposite the Eye and Ear on the Park Hospital, Melbourne). Please contact us if you would like directions or further information.

Please RSVP by 21st March
by phone 03 9328 8611 or
email info@vanish.org.au

VANISH



10th Anniversary of the

National Apology for Forced Adoptions

Commemorative Event

**Saturday 25th March
2pm**

St Andrews Place, Melbourne



10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

OTHER EVENTS - VICTORIA AND ONLINE

***Don't Wait!* Castlemaine Fringe Festival show explores the ripple effect of adoption**

How do you deal with family secrets? Writer and performer Sally Guildford explores the impact of adoption, secrecy, and broken attachments in her one-woman theatre show *Don't Wait!*, which premieres at the upcoming Castlemaine Fringe Festival during the week of the anniversary of the National Apology. VANISH support worker and Castlemaine local SallyRose Carbines will be attending both performances and available to chat after the show.



Don't Wait! is playing as part of a double bill with *Carol from Clunes*, another one-woman show, at 8pm on Wednesday 22nd and Thursday 23rd

March at the Bridge Hotel in Castlemaine.

Tickets are available here: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing?eid=1004710>

“You should be grateful”: A new online documentary about adoptee experiences

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of the National Apology, a new documentary called “You should be grateful” will be presented by the Monash Public Library Service for online viewing.



The film features the personal experiences of five adopted people as they reveal how adoption has affected their lives, dispelling many myths which have kept adoptees silent for decades.

You can register for free at:

<https://www.monlib.vic.gov.au/Whats-On/Events/You-Should-Be-Grateful> to receive a link to access the film online between Monday 13th and Sunday 26th March.

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

3-Part Online Workshop Exploring Racism for Intercountry Adoptees

Adult intercountry and/or transracial adoptees are invited to participate in a free, online workshop series exploring race, racism, and white privilege, tailored specifically for intercountry adoptees. The event is hosted by [InterCountry Adoptee Voices \(ICAV\)](#), facilitated by [Hue](#), and funded by the [Relationships Australia ICAFSS Small Grants](#).

The workshops will take place on three fortnightly Sundays: May 21, June 4, and June 18, from 1-4.30pm. Places are limited and preference will be given to those who commit to attending all three workshop dates.

For more information or to sign up, go to:

<https://tinyurl.com/ICAVworkshop>



Births, Deaths & Marriages

Over the past year, access to Births, Deaths & Marriages (BDM) for the purposes of searching has undergone some changes and further changes are expected through the upcoming review of its Access Policy. Where previously, adopted people would apply to BDM for the birth, death, marriage, or change of name certificates relating to their natural parents, applications for information are now submitted to Adoption Information Services (AIS). We are currently trialling this new pathway and are grateful to the AIS team for their assistance as we navigate the new procedures.

The change enables information to be obtained without individuals having to apply and pay for certificates which is a positive outcome, especially for people whose searches have been hampered due to financial constraints. However, the fact that the actual certificate is not provided means that other potentially valuable information is not available which could limit the likelihood of finding the person sought. We have been advised that if a certificate from BDM is still needed for searching purposes, or wanted for sentimental or other reasons, a request can be made to BDM and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis until the Access Policy is changed.

For mothers and fathers (natural parents) this is not so different to current practice because unfortunately, they were never given the right to apply to BDMs for certificates pertaining to their adopted daughters and sons. Equal rights for mothers and fathers in terms of access to information is something VANISH has long advocated for, particularly since the legislation changed to give them the right to identifying information in 2013.

We had expected the review of BDM's Access Policy to be undertaken at the end of last year, however the post-election Machinery of Government changes, which saw BDM moving to the newly formed Department of Government Services, are likely to have delayed this. We have also been assured that the review will involve an opportunity for consultation.

VANISH will continue to represent our members and service users in terms of rights to privacy and rights to information.

Birth Certificates

Another area we have been advocating on relates to adding the father to an adopted person's birth register and certificate. This is important because it will not be possible to have the father stated on the new Integrated Birth Certificate being introduced in October, if he is not on the birth register.

According to the advice we received, for adoptions prior to 1985 the evidentiary threshold is lower and there is no need for a DNA report, but this has not been the experience for some of our service users. We are currently seeking clarification and advocating for clear and equitable procedures for adding fathers. We will keep you informed of any news as we are aware some individuals may want to do this in readiness for applying for their Integrated Birth Certificate.

Exceptional Circumstances Fund

The Victorian Government's Exceptional Circumstances Fund has continued to provide one-off payments to mothers facing exceptional circumstances. VANISH has assisted mothers to successfully apply for up to \$10,000 which in some cases has been life-changing for them. Exceptional circumstances can include:

- terminal illness
- critical illness
- diagnosed mental illness
- requiring surgery for mobility issues, chronic health conditions or other elective surgery
- having one or more chronic conditions
- having experienced an injury or other debilitating event that has materially impacted on your physical or psychological wellbeing
- other exceptional circumstances that are likely to significantly impact you in the next 12 months.

If you are not sure if you qualify and would like to discuss this with us, please call VANISH and speak with one of our team. If you would like support in completing or submitting your application form we would be happy to assist you. In some locations we can arrange face-to-face meetings or home visits. VANISH has also produced a supporting letter you can hand to your medical professional which describes the scheme and how they can support you.

Free DNA Kits from MyHeritage

Applications are now open for *DNA Quest*, MyHeritage's pro bono initiative to help adoptees and their families reunite through genetic testing.

Applications close on 17 March, 2023 and preference will be given to people who are not able to afford genetic testing.

For more information or to apply for a free DNA kit, visit dnaquest.org. Decisions will be made approximately one month after the 17 March deadline and applicants will receive an email informing them of the outcome of their application, with kits mailed out shortly thereafter.

Northern Ireland's investigation into institutional abuse extends to Australia

As Northern Ireland's investigation into physical and sexual abuse at mother and baby homes, Work Houses and Magdalene Laundries continues, the search for survivors has been extended to Australia, assisted by the Australian Federal Police.

Police are appealing for mothers who were taken to one of these institutions to give birth, people who were adopted from, and people who visited, or worked in them between 1922 and 1990, to come forward.

Detective Superintendent Gary Reid, operational lead for the investigation, said: "If you believe you were the victim of abuse or other forms of criminality in any of these Northern Irish institutions, or know somebody who was, or if you witnessed anything suspicious, please contact us, we want to hear from you."

Australian residents can contact the Investigative Team in Northern Ireland directly by email or phone:

MotherBabyHomes.Magdalenelaundries@psni.police.uk

Phone (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm GMT):
0011 4428 9090 1728

For more details: <https://bit.ly/AFPNorthernIreland>

For local support or to be connected to Northern Irish support services, please contact the VANISH office.

Royal Women's Hospital remove fees for accessing medical records

Royal Women's Hospital (RWH) has removed fees for accessing medical records relating to historical adoptions. According to its website, the RWH holds obstetric medical records of women whose babies were adopted post 1960, and for adoptions between 1888 and 1959 it can provide the date, time, weight and length of babies delivered. The application form for Medical Records Relating to Adoption has also been updated. It can be found at this link <https://bit.ly/RWHappform>

If you accessed your records prior to July 2021 and have been charged a fee, you can apply for a refund by contacting the hospital's Freedom of Information team by emailing foi@thewomens.org.au or by calling 03 8345 2610.

Anglicare Victoria apology for historical adoption practices

VANISH was recently advised that Anglicare issued a new apology for historical adoption practices last year (12 May 2022), which you can read here: <https://bit.ly/AnglicareApology>

VANISH is pleased that this apology is more in line with the Senate Inquiry recommendation in that Anglicare "unreservedly" takes responsibility for the lifelong impact of adoption practices. This is unlike former apologies from the Anglican Church and other non-government institutions, which have minimised the extent and impacts of past adoption practices and/or their involvement.

However, we are not aware of how and when this apology was delivered, or how much consultation was undertaken with the individuals and families it is offered to.

In our submission to the Victorian inquiry we emphasised the importance of getting apologies right, the harm that can be caused when this does not happen and the healing that occur when it does. You can read more here (see pages 45-47): <https://vanish.org.au/news-events/vanish-submission-into-historical-forced-adoptions>

VANISH Creative Expression Workshops

There's still plenty of time to sign up for our upcoming creative expression workshops!

- **'Common Threads':** A One-Day Textile Workshop for Adoptees with Nicole Kemp and SallyRose Carbines (Sunday April 2 from 10am-4pm) at Laneway Learning Level 3, Nicholas Building, 15/37 Swanston St, Melbourne
- **Writing as Therapy for Mothers** with Sian Prior (Wednesdays from 2-4pm, 19 April to 10 May) at Ross House 247/251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne
- **Art Therapy for Adoptees** with Michele Hutchins (Thursdays from 10am-2pm, 8 June to 13 July) MacLaren Hall, 45 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn (the site is shared with Erasmus Primary School)
- **Art Therapy for Mothers** with Michele Hutchins (Thursdays from 10am-2pm, 5 Oct to 9 Nov) MacLaren Hall, 45 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn (the site is shared with Erasmus Primary School)



VANISH Support Groups

All groups are for adults 18+

MELBOURNE:

Please register to reserve your place
VANISH Office, 1st Fl, 50 Howard Street,
North Melbourne

**ADOPTED PERSONS 7.30 - 9.30pm,
March 28, April 25**

ZOOM:

ADOPTED PERSONS 6.30 - 8.30pm
Please register to reserve your place
April 12

ALBURY:

Albury Library Museum, 540 Kiewa Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 10.30am - 12.30pm

May 13

MIXED GROUP 10.30am - 12.30pm

(Adopted Persons, Natural and Adoptive Parents)

March 11, June 10

BALLARAT:

ADOPTED PERSONS 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Eastwood Leisure Complex, 20 Eastwood Street

March 18, April 15

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