

Bits & Pieces

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Welcome to Bits & Pieces Summer Edition

Bits & Pieces is a quarterly newsletter produced by Jigsaw Qld. In each edition we aim for a mix of stories and information encompassing various perspectives relating to adoption. It also includes stories & information about our Forced Adoption Support Services (FASS). If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email us at support@jigsawqld.org.au.

In this edition we talk about discharging your adoption, Christmas for people affected by adoption, a Forced Adoption Support Service update and more.

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A Story of Discharge

Name withheld on request

Here is one adopted person’s account of their experience of seeking a discharge of their adoption in Queensland. Each person undertaking this process experiences it differently. If you are considering pursuing a discharge of your adoption, we at Jigsaw recommend that you have as many supports in place as possible. We cannot provide legal advice, but we can provide information and emotional support before, during and after the journey. For more information go to www.jigsawqueensland.com/discharge

I am adopted. I was adopted.

The tense doesn’t sound much different, but to me, it is a revelation. A recovery of identity.

I recently took my case for a discharge of my adoption order to the Supreme Court of Brisbane- which is what they make you do. The Government that facilitated the policies and systems of forced adoption is the same Government that makes the laws you must follow to reverse the injustice.

I’m not sure why they make an adoptee go through further mental anguish to apply to be their real identity. Perhaps the Government doesn’t want precedents set. Perhaps they are resisting the possibility of compensation. Perhaps an apology is all they could bring themselves to do. Nevertheless, there’s no ‘form’ that an adult adoptee can fill in to bring back his identity. No, you must take your case to the highest Court of the State.

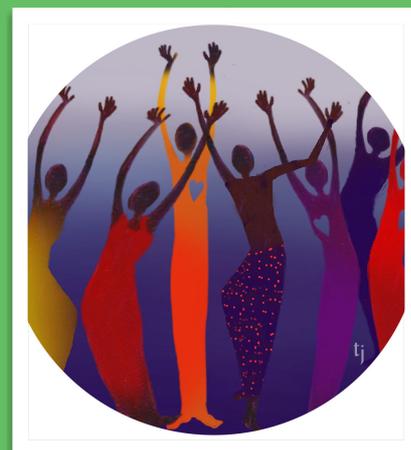


A baby doesn’t consent to its adoption. It is a contract made between the Government and the adoptive parents where the baby is the commodity. This contract doesn’t just last for

COVID SUPPORT GROUP UPDATE

Jigsaw Qld are following all Queensland Health restrictions and directives with regards to our support groups and face-to-face services. To get the latest information, keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.

We have successfully run some support groups as a Zoom sessions and will keep you posted about further online sessions in 2021. For further information email support@jigsawqld.org.au or phone (07) 3358 6666.



life, but it changes the identity and heritage of an adoptee forever, past their lifetime, on their tombstone, and for future generations to come. We can never be free of the false identity created “in our best interests”.

I didn't want that. I just wanted to be who I am.

To achieve the truth of my identity, I had to embark on a journey that has lasted 40 years. I found out I was adopted at 15 years old. Uncovering initial details of my birth family only once laws changed, when I was 30. Secrets and lies in my birth family. Hidden paperwork held by the Government.



My birth mother gave a false name for who my father was. She was under pressure from her mother to give me away and this was the easiest route.

The Government didn't bother to investigate – although giving false information was an offense under law, and so too was the pressure illegal, it wasn't of interest to their process. This untruth set off a chain of events that classified me as “unfit” for adoption, so I was “deferred”, and

fostered for 2 years. During that time, she married my birth father, her long-time boyfriend, legitimising me. They then had a baby who died at birth. In that turmoil she confessed to my birth father she had given away their first-born son to adoption.

I was still fostered at that time, and my biological family could have had me back, but they didn't know this because the Government didn't inform them that this could be an option, nor of their legal rights to visitation whilst I was in care.

The Government did not even seek my father's consent to my adoption, because they relied on my mother's false story, and never investigated it or kept in contact with my mother. The affect was that the Government saw it was in my “best interests” to place me away from my birth family, even though the then medical opinion said otherwise.

I was adopted soon after. My identity was changed, as if I was born to my adoptive parents. Some of this paperwork I was only able to retrieve in the last 18 months. Some critical paperwork has been “lost” by the Government and the Salvation Army, so I will never know. Under the Government's laws, I still need this to ‘prove’ my case.

I am not ungrateful. I am not bitter. I know it could've been worse, much worse. It also could've been better. I don't blame anyone – yet I know where the faults lie. But I lost the chance to grow up with my two full brothers and half-sister, my real mother and father. And they lost that chance too. (I was unable to meet my birth mother – she died of a brain haemorrhage at 30).

I decided I would no longer be a “victim”. I wanted to be in charge of who I am. That's why I brought the case to court. I couldn't afford lawyers and barristers with no experience that

quoted \$40,000 to run my case. So I did it myself. It took me 18 months of work to build a case that took 20 minutes to hear.

I had to split into three; a lawyer, a detective, and my emotional self. Sometimes the emotions interfered.

I had to contend with a Government Department that was willing to defend the case by hiding behind old laws. Laws that successive Governments realised were wrong, they changed, and even apologised for. I obtained first-person affidavits but they were classified as hearsay by the legal system. I felt the legal system was prejudiced against laypeople. The law doesn't even allow discharge case details to be published. For lawyers yes, for those representing themselves, no.

In Queensland, there are several grounds where an adoptee may have a case to dismiss their original adoption order and reinstate their true self legally. Including:

- "If the order was made because of false representation or a person acting in an improper way". I think the false name given for who my father was qualifies.

- "if the adoption consent wasn't given freely". The pressure from my birth grandmother I think applies here, as does the forced adoption system in itself, when you read up on the practices used.

- "exceptional circumstances". Which conveniently aren't defined in law, and are up to the discretion of each Judge. Looking at some other historical cases I could find, this ground tends to rely on evidence of poor mental health of an adoptee linked to their adoptive life, sexual assault within the adoptive family, or an irreconcilable breakdown of that family relationship.

These 'exceptional circumstances' tend to be the grounds most cases are brought under, so I'm told.

Only one ground needs to satisfy a judge to meet the legal requirement of a discharge.

Happily, I did prove my case to the satisfaction of the Judge on the day. But the law restricts me from telling you how.

My real name is rightfully mine again. I can now legally call my brothers my brothers, my sister my sister, and my father my father. I have regained my truthful heritage. I can start to heal some of the injustices done to me in my "best interests".



Fortunately, I had the support of my birth family, eventually my adoptive mother, and key people I sought advice from. I thank them all for that. But I was generally alone in this, and it broke my relationship with my girlfriend. For those that think the risk is worth it, have the fortitude, and can manage the mental damage done in the process, I recommend seeking a discharge of adoption.

Perhaps in the future the discharge application process will be easier, and court case mightn't be required. Perhaps the Government will create an 'integrated' birth certificate for adoptees that includes both their adoptive and biological family details – that may be enough for some adoptees. Perhaps in the future, the Government will share information unconditionally to an adoptee about their own selves, even if their

adoptive status has been hidden from them by their adoptive family.

I couldn't wait for perhaps... the injustice of the truth being inaccessible to me, compounded by lies being in my records, drove me to action.

I am still me. But now growing inside me is the pride of my true self. I was adopted.

Adopt Perspective Podcast

Have you had a chance to listen to Adopt Perspective podcast yet? The podcast features a mix of personal stories and informational episodes and is available to listen to on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts and Deezer or can be listened to at www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective.

With twenty episodes under their belts in Season One, Jo and Jane are taking a break over Christmas and have an exciting line up planned for the new year.

The first episode for 2021 will feature psychotherapist, adoptee and author, Pam Cordano. All the way from the USA, Pam will help us set course for a year of building the foundations for a meaningful life. Pam's episode will air in the final week of January.



Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS) News

Client Services - In 2020, our small team were very busy working with clients who call or email our service for help with emotional issues relating to adoption, accessing adoption records, searching and contacting relatives and referrals for support that is beyond the scope of our service.

In the past financial year our team assisted 491 individual clients throughout Queensland.

Our intermediary services (searching and outreach) connected 24 people to their relatives. We also supported many others where the searching is ongoing. Most of our services are delivered by phone and email so were able to continue throughout COVID. In December we will again conduct our annual client satisfaction survey and we hope this year's result will be as good as last year.

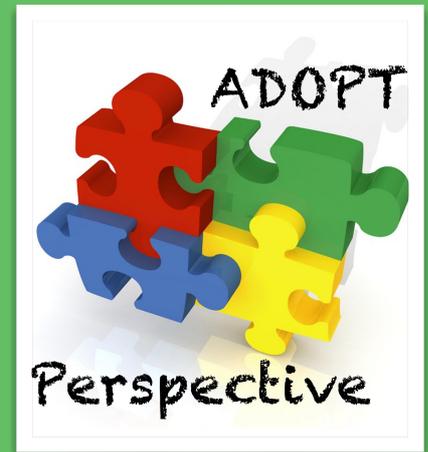
Dec 2019 Survey: 98 per cent of survey respondents said FASS staff understood adoption issues and were supportive and 96% said they provided helpful information and suggestions.

Events / projects - In addition to our work with individual clients, the FASS team organised events such as the anniversary song writing and choir workshops and worked with stakeholder groups to coordinate the anniversary event for the national apology which went ahead on 20th March (as events of less than 100 were within the Qld Government COVID 19 directives at that stage). Following government health advice, we encouraged those who were vulnerable due to age or health conditions to not attend but still about half of the 70 who had registered were able to be at the event. The performance of the original song "Lost and Found" which was developed with and performed by the choir of adopted people and mothers was particularly moving.

ADOPT PERSPECTIVE PODCAST

With twenty episodes produced over just eight months, it has been a huge learning curve and busy year for the podcast team. On behalf of your hosts, Jo and Jane, we wish you a merry festive season and a happy new year. Be sure to listen in to our 2020 year in review and Christmas special released this month and stay safe.

Do you have a story to tell? If so, we'd love to hear from you. Go to www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective to fill in the prospective guest form or email support@jigsawqld.org.au.



Jane Sliwka worked very hard with Jo Sparrow to produce the Adopt Perspective podcast series which has produced 20 episodes since April and has reached a large number of people and received good feedback. This project will continue next year.

In November 2020, FASS arranged online courses in “Writing as Therapy” for adopted people and mothers. These courses had been run previously for Vanish in Victoria and received excellent feedback.

Needs Survey - To assist with planning, FASS surveyed adopted people and mothers to ask about what topics they wanted to know more about and the modes of delivery they preferred (online / written materials / face-to-face workshops). There was strong support for online delivery which is particularly helpful for our regional clients. Thank you to those people who participated in the survey. We will continue to use this survey information in our planning going forward.

Good news for next year - The budget announcements in October confirmed that FASS services will be funded for another three years from June 2021 is most welcome.

Another welcome announcement was the increase in psychological services under the Medicare Better Access Program from 10 to 20

sessions per year which will be helpful to some of our clients.

There will also be further funding for training delivered by the APS (Australian Psychological Society) to enhance the knowledge of mental health professionals in working with people affected by forced adoption. We very much enjoy working collaboratively with our clients and stakeholders and look forward to continuing our services in 2021.



Andrea Lynch, FASS Team Leader.



Christmas - when you are affected by adoption.

Special occasions, such as Christmas, birthdays, weddings, funerals and other family events can bring with them complexities for any individual impacted by adoption. Because of this, we often receive phone calls from mothers, fathers, adopted people and other family members in anticipation of or following such an event.

For adoptees, they may have two sets of families with different expectations. For mothers and fathers, they may not know exactly how they 'fit' in their adult child's life following a reunion. For all parties affected by adoption, such events can raise questions around 'belonging' as well as feelings of loss even on what would otherwise be considered the happiest of days. We decided to interview an adopted person about her experience of Christmas over the years to shed some light on this topic.

How has being adopted impacted your experience of Christmas?

My strongest memory surrounding Christmas growing up was the desire I felt for a big family Christmas. As an only child in my adoptive family, who didn't have any cousins my age, I was often surrounded by older people at Christmas time which led to feelings of loneliness and boredom. Christmas never quite

lived up to the 'Christmas dream' that you hear about and see in movies.

What does Christmas bring up for you now?

I get stressed months before thinking about what to do for Christmas. As my adoptive parents have passed away and I don't have any close family to spend the day with, I feel anxious not knowing who I will spend the day with.

What has been your favourite Christmas?

The Christmas when my sister (from my biological family) spent the day with my adoptive family and I. Then, later in the day we spent Christmas dinner with my extended birth family and it was a wonderful occasion where I felt very much included.

What has been your most difficult Christmas?

Probably the Christmas during my first year in reunion. I had hoped to be included and see my birth family on the day. Earlier that year when we reunited, I had wanted to focus on getting to know my immediate birth family before meeting extended family as I had read about the benefits of taking things slowly.

I was also aware of complex family dynamics as my birth mother had been estranged from her family for a few years. However, after we reunited, she got back in touch with her sister to tell her about me. So, they decided to spend Christmas together that year and did not invite me. I was devastated not to be included. I felt rejected.

How has the lead up to Christmas been for you this year?

This year has been extremely difficult. Due to the mental health and addiction issues in my biological family, I have decided to spend this

Christmas with some of my extended adoptive family who have invited me to be with them.

However, I had hoped to see my birth family in the lead up to Christmas Day. They have reacted negatively to me not seeing them on the actual day and I am unsure at this point whether they will choose to see me at all.

What would you say to another adopted person who is struggling in the lead up to Christmas?

Seek support if you need it. Reach out to a support service or attend a support group where you can talk things through with other people affected by adoption.

Allow yourself time and space to reflect on how you feel and what you need. However, be realistic about your expectations of other people.

You don't have to spend the day with family at all if you don't want to. I have wanted to feel embraced and included by my birth family, but the reality has been very different and made me examine my expectations in the relationships.

Consider other people and possibilities, choose people who you trust and feel safe with to spend that time. Think of the activities and interests that bring you joy and engage in those.



2020 / 21 Events

Support groups are adhering to current government recommendations and directives. To get the latest information, please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page. The below dates are our scheduled meeting dates - restrictions allowing.

During the pandemic please register by calling (07) 3358 6666 or email support@jigsawqld.org.au if you wish to attend a support group as there are number limitations and we may need to cancel groups at late notice owing to restrictions or illness. Meetings are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 - 3.30pm.

Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

Open Support Group - (2020) 12 December. This episode doubles as a Christmas break up.

(2021) 13 Feb, 10 April, 12 June, 14 Aug, 9 Oct, 11 Dec.

Adoptee Support Group - (2021) 9 Jan, 13 March, 8 May, 10 July, 11 Sept, 13 Nov.

Mothers' Morning Tea - (2021) 20 Jan, 17 March, 19 May, 21 July, 15 Sept, 17 Nov.