

Bits & Pieces

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Welcome to Bits & Pieces Autumn 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. Enjoy!

In this edition we discuss seeking DNA testing, Gold Coast mother's group, a client's reunion story, writing your adoption story and more.

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Meredith's story of reuniting with her son.

One of our clients, Meredith, shares some of her story and experience of adoption and reuniting with her son in an interview with us.

Meredith was aged eighteen at the time she was pregnant with her son and had been in a long-term relationship with her partner, Robert. Meredith said she came from a 'strict Catholic family' who pressured and coerced her and Robert to have the baby adopted. At the time, neither of them felt they had any other option, so they agreed to the adoption.

Meredith's first contact with Jigsaw Qld was in 2019 when she received a letter from us asking her to make contact. She didn't immediately make the adoption connection, but soon realised the contact must be about her son who she lost to adoption in the early 70s. When Meredith contacted Jigsaw, we were able to confirm that her son (now named Terry) was looking for her and wanted to have contact. Meredith was still with Terry's father and they had another son who was now thirty-three years old.

In 2004, Meredith and Robert had contacted the Salvation Army Tracing Service to see if they



could find Terry. Their youngest son was eighteen years old at the time and they felt he may be old enough to understand. The Salvation Army did find Terry, however, he declined to have contact with them at that time. Below are Meredith's responses to our questions.

What was it like hearing from Jigsaw?

I opened the letter and, once I realised what it was about, I was in shock...an excited shock. I called out for Robert to come and have a look at the letter. After all those years our son wanted to find us and I said to Robert, 'Oh my God, it's actually going to happen!'. Robert told me at the time that he had only been thinking about Terry a few days before. It was a good surprise and then we started wondering how are we were going to react to getting to know him and see him. Back in 2004 when we tried to make

GOLD COAST MOTHER'S SUPPORT GROUP

Are you a mother who lost a child through forced adoption? You're invited to join a support and social group for morning tea and a chat with others with similar experiences.

The meeting will be held on the 3rd Saturday of every month at Women's Space at 57 Billington St, Labrador (near Gold Coast Hwy & buses) parking is available. Please phone Vivienne or Joyce for further information. Vivienne: 0421 403 105 or Joyce: 0410 319 877.

YOU GAVE ME A VOICE...



contact with Terry, we knew it could go either way. We had seen people affected by adoption in reunions on TV. When he didn't want to meet us it was disappointing; however, I also thought, it's his choice and we totally understood that.

Before 2004 did you ever think about looking for your son?

Over the years we talked about it occasionally if there was a show on TV or other conversations that led to it, but, there were times we didn't want to talk about it because it was upsetting. Sometimes I would wonder where he was and what he was doing. I always thought about him on his birthday and other special occasions. I always wondered if he was married or not. I always knew I wanted to find him, I had to.

What stopped you from looking?

We wanted to wait until our other son was old enough because then, if Terry did want to meet us, he would be able to get his head around it and understand. When Terry declined we thought that there is no point in telling our younger son because he might never get to meet his brother. There seemed to be no point in telling him about something that he might never explore. We didn't do anything about looking before then because we didn't think our younger son would be ready. I always wanted to start the ball rolling, it was just a matter of timing.

What was it like meeting Terry for the first time?

We went to Jigsaw for our first meeting with Terry. I thought I would burst into tears; however, when I hugged Terry it was like I already knew him. I looked at him and thought 'you are Welsh you are, you are so my side'. And him being the way he is, it was just like I know this guy. That's how I felt. It was just natural. Robert and I talked about Terry all the way

home and we were both just so excited to have finally met him.

How was the relationship developed since your first meeting?

It's been wonderful, it's like we're old mates. It was like on the day we met I looked at him and thought 'that's just me'. We talk on the phone once a week or every couple of weeks for about an hour. We talk about just about anything and everything. Terry's got a good sense of humour. We're having dinner tonight and catching up. We share a love of music and sport and we're both left handed. I noticed that the first time we met him when I saw how he was holding his fork. I feel like we have grown closer. I'm not his mother, but I gave birth to him and I have heard him talking to people and he's told them, 'I'm talking to my mother' and I think that's gorgeous, I love it. I look at him and think of him as a kid. I still can't picture him as a 46 year old man, he's like my boy, but he's not, he's a man. We just get on so well and I think it can only get better.

Has it impacted on you and your husband differently?

I don't think so. Robert never really comes out and says anything to me, he just goes with the flow. I'm just excited about the whole thing because all of my life, I felt like something was missing. Now I feel like I've got all my family together except for that disjointed bit with our younger son now.

What have been the challenges?

Telling my youngest son was the most nerve-racking thing I've ever had to do. My stomach was in knots, even more so than meeting Terry for the first time, because I just felt so comfortable meeting him. When I told my younger son, I just burst into tears, I was scared of being judged by him. We told him that he had

a brother and that we were telling him now because Terry wanted to meet us. Then we both cried and he asked me how we'd coped with that all of those years. When we told his wife, she was so excited. I was hoping that was how he would react.

When I asked him if he wanted to talk more about it he told me no, because 'that's between you and Dad'. However, when he got home later that night he rang and told me that he is not sure how to take it. He said for years he wanted a brother and now that he had found out that he had one, he just didn't know how to handle it. He said he was looking at it as though Terry was a long lost cousin. I told him that was fine if that was how he wanted to look at it, but that he should at least meet Terry. If he were a cousin then you'd meet your cousin.

I was hoping by Boxing Day that our younger son would have come around so Terry could have spent that time with us. But that didn't happen and I felt mean and disappointed. I didn't want to make an awkward situation for Terry and I feel for him because he always asks about our other son. He never asks when he can meet him, but I'm sure he wants to meet his flesh and blood.

Maybe because my youngest son has had thirty-three years thinking that he is the only son, an only child, maybe he feels threatened but I don't know why he would. We've all got to get to know Terry. Anyway, he knows now so everyone else should meet Terry. If our younger son doesn't want to join in, he'll just have to stay in the corner because Terry is always going to be there, he's not going away. It would be better for me if the whole family could be together - one, big, happy unit. I want to have one big event, so that I can introduce Terry to everyone. I don't want him to think that we are just going to let him dwindle away, because we've disappointed him once and I don't want to do that again.

How has your other family members reacted to finding your son?

Over New Year, Terry met all of my side of the family at our place. We were all telling stories about what we used to get up to. All the skeletons came out of the closet that day! The way he holds his head...that's my brother, David. The way he talks and the mannerisms... Terry just fits in. He's just like one of us. He hasn't met Robert's family yet. Robert and Terry haven't spent any more time together just yet. Once Robert's business wraps up and I've cut down to three days a week, Terry will be able to come to our place for dinner or we'll head off to the tavern together and he can spend the night.

What would you say to others who are thinking about looking for their lost son or daughter?

Do it. Simple, just do it. It is so rewarding, especially if you've been thinking about it. If it's been on your mind and you're a normal person, then it is impossible to go through life and not think about it. You don't just have a baby and then give it away and not think about it anymore. It isn't normal to do that. If you're thinking they want to look, just do it. I mean, it may not work out, but look at the rewards if it does. You've met that other part of you that you lost long ago.



DNA Testing to Search for Relatives

The following article has been shared with permission from the Vanish Voice (Autumn 2019 edition). <https://vanish.org.au>. The FASS service has also produced an information sheet on using genealogical DNA tests to search for relatives separated by adoption - <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/information-sheets>.

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

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

- DNA testing is potentially useful for people searching for their parent(s) and previous generations because it traces up the line of ancestors, it is less useful for a person searching for their descendants unless that descendant has taken a DNA test with the same company.

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

Benefits of DNA Testing

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

Many adopted people, donor conceived people and former wards of state welcome this new technology. It has an obvious appeal for people who do not know the identity of one or both of their parents, including people who are not aware they are entitled to apply for their records or whose records are not available to them, have

CONSULTATION ON INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

The Government has heard calls from the intercountry adoption sector, particularly adult adoptees, for greater involvement in service design and development. In response to these calls, the Government is holding consultations to ensure that the inter country Adoption Family Support Service (ICAFASS) continues to meet the needs of those who have experienced inter country adoption. https://engage.dss.gov.au/consultation-on-the-intercountry-adoption-family-support-service/?fbclid=IwAR1KZ_E-jKhh6oxTidMKmdmydDGIFclfaXtzvcls-h2icN-_4vds7HGY3U

Please contact Jigsaw Qld (07) 3358 6666 if you are an adult adoptee and would like to meet face to face with the consultants and with other adoptees in Brisbane, or if you would like them to contact you by phone, email: support@jigsawqld.org.au.

been lost or destroyed, are incomplete or have been falsified. It is also being used by people who are searching for relatives not identified in their records, most commonly fathers and siblings.

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

Risks of DNA Testing

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

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

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

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

Preparation is Key

Most organisations supporting people with family tracing will tell you that preparation is key. This can include talking through possible

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

Questions to Ask Before Testing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interpreting Results

Once you have received your DNA results:

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

Interpreting DNA test results may require assistance from someone with specialist expertise. Some testing companies provide this service for a fee. Some post-adoption support organisations have expertise within their search team. There are also volunteer 'search angels' who can provide technical assistance. Whoever you ask to provide you with technical support will require access to your results so it is important to be discerning when deciding who to ask. You might like to ask them about their expertise, success rates, how they operate and whether they adhere to the codes of conduct, guidelines and standards for genetic genealogists (see link below). It is also important to agree with them up front about

their role in your search to ensure that they do not correspond with your matches without your permission and involvement.

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

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

Useful DNA Links and References

Which test to do <https://www.genie1.com.au/blog/58-which-dna-testing-company>
Or <https://thednageek.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-main-dna-testing-companies-2018-version/>

The DNA Detectives <https://thednadetectives.com/about-the-company/>
DNA Adoption <http://dnaadoption.org/>
DNA Testing Adviser <https://www.dna-testing-adviser.com/Tracing-Birth-Parents.html>

Media stories

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

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

<https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/west-weekend-magazine/heart-of-the-matter-ng-b881054723z>

2020 Events

Upcoming Groups

Jigsaw's support groups have experienced an increase in numbers since late 2015. 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).

Adopted Person Support Group - 14 Mar, 9 May, 11 July, 12 Sept, 14 Nov.

Mother's Morning Tea - 10am to 12pm on 18 Mar, 20 May, 15 July, 16 Sept & 18 Nov. (An informal gathering for mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption).

Open Support Group - 11 April, 13 June, 8 Aug, 10 Oct & 12 Dec.

Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group - 18 Apr, 20 June, 15 Aug, 17 Oct & 19 Dec at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Ave, Cotton Tree.

Do you have a story to tell? Writing Day



Voice, Community, Healing

The National Archives of Australia Forced Adoptions History Project website (<http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au>) will close for new submissions at the end of April this year. There is still an opportunity to share your important story on the website before it closes.

Jigsaw Queensland's Forced Adoption Support Service is holding a FREE writing day on 18th April from 9.30am to 4.30pm to complete any stories you've been thinking about or working on to submit to the History Project or the Jigsaw Queensland website.

We invite you to join us in the meeting room at SANDS House, take a seat and write - uninterrupted. The writing day is open to mothers, fathers and adopted people and no previous writing experience is necessary. Experienced writers will be on hand to assist if needed. Your story is important. Join us to ensure it is heard. This

event is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

When: 18 April, 2020

Where: SANDS House, 505 Bowen Tce, New Farm (downstairs meeting room)

Time: 9.30am to 4.30pm

RSVP: Email: support@jigsawqld.org.au or call (07) 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13 (Qld only) by C.O.B. 3 April.

Other: Bring along your laptop or paper and pen. Food will be provided. Please provide dietary restrictions when responding.



Forced Adoption Support Services