

# 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](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au).*

In this edition, we slide into Christmas with a special interview with an adopted person about navigating the festive season. We also introduce our new FASS Team Leader, review an adoption documentary, commemorate the Qld adoption apology and highlight recent AdoptTEA events.

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## First in-person, Australian screening of Primal Wound documentary a hit with viewers

*On 20 November people affected by adoption gathered at the Springfield Central Library to view filmmaker and adoptee, Rebecca Autumn Sansom's feature-length documentary, 'Reckoning with the Primal Wound'. It was the first of our Open Information Event Series. We asked Hilary Beck - a mother who lost a daughter to adoption - for a review of the film. Here's what she had to say...*



*Film screening in Springfield*

Filmmaker and adoptee, Rebecca Autumn Sansom, teams with Nancy Verrier to make a documentary about the experience of being an adopted person.

The mother of an adopted daughter herself, Psychotherapist, Nancy Verrier takes the observer on a voyage of revelation about the impacts of separation at birth (or soon after) on an adopted person. This separation creates what she terms, a 'Primal Wound', that severs the mystical bond between mother and child and creates a sense of lifelong deprivation. She corrects the general view that adoption has no real impact on adoptees and, therefore, the past understanding that these children's feelings and behaviours don't need to be addressed.

The film captures the experiences of several adoptees who've experienced a pervasive sense of incompleteness that separation causes. In their search for 'completeness', they experience deep emotional examination resulting in a kind of acquiescence to a situation that may never be truly accepted. To use a metaphor, it is like half a pair of scissors; one is not complete without the other half.

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) in partnership with Relationship Matters InterCountry Adoption Family Support Services (RM ICAFSS) have released a series of short, educational video resources for professional teachers, doctors and counsellors.

Featuring Australian intercountry adoptees, they aim through the video to share thoughts and experiences with these professionals so they, in turn can better support intercountry adoptees through the challenges they face. You'll find the videos on the ICAV website: [www.intercountryadopteevoices.com](http://www.intercountryadopteevoices.com) - please share!





*Filmmaker, Rebecca Autumn Sansom*

The search for ‘the other half’ was a recurring theme of the film and while there were positive reunions for some, others were thwarted in their search. It was evident that even for those whose reunion had a happy ending, there remained a palpable hesitation to trust and feel comfortable and this affected both adoptees and mothers.



*Author of The Primal Wound, Nancy Verrier*

However healing the reunions may have been, there were still lingering fears of abandonment for many adoptees who were unable to trust that they would not be ‘rejected’ again. Coupled with the reality of not being in control, adoptees grapple to explain emotions that have left an indelible scar on the psyche. While there are many examples of deep and enduring pain of loss and separation for those who were adopted, there is also much hope for people who have felt

abandoned by their experiences. One adoptee made it clear that “we are not abandoned now - we are adults who have been loved”. Much of the film discusses the effects of separation on the child - the gnawing sense of never belonging being the prominent one - but we are reminded that our focus on the child should move to the adult view.

*If you weren’t able to watch the documentary, you can listen to the Adopt Perspective Podcast episode interviewing Rebecca Autumn Sansom released on 6 October, 2021. And Adopt Perspective is thrilled to announce they are interviewing Nancy Verrier for the first two episodes of 2022 - so standby!*

## **Jigsaw Qld’s Forced Adoption Support Service welcomes new Team Leader**



*FASS Team Leader, Caroline Slade*

In November, Jigsaw Qld’s Forced Adoption Support Service welcomed new Team Leader, Caroline Slade. Caroline takes on the role

vacated by Andrea Lynch who retired earlier in the year.

Caroline is a proud Yuggera woman who has worked in the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice Leader for the South West Region of Child Safety for the past six years.

She has worked for Child Safety for more than a decade, with a robust child protection background with experience in frontline and executive roles. She holds a number undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications including a Bachelor of Social Work. Caroline has lived experience of adoption and a solid understanding of past and current adoption practices and the needs of those affected by them. And her work in the child protection space has given her an advanced knowledge of trauma-informed practice, attachment theory and family support.

## **AdopTEA events aim to increase awareness**

**Event write-up provided by Judy Glover**

A series of morning teas were held around Queensland in October during Queensland Mental Health Week to highlight adoptee mental health. Eight groups / events registered across Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, and regional Queensland. (Jigsaw Qld's Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS) provided funds for the Brisbane and Sunshine Coast events from the Forced Adoption Support Service Small Grants Program).

The aim of the AdopTEA was to increase awareness and understanding of the impacts of adoption on adopted people and reduce the stigma associated with reaching out and seeking support.

### Peer-supported gatherings

There were four informal, peer-supported gatherings of adopted people offering an

opportunity to connect with one another and share stories of adoption journeys.

The first AdopTEA event was held at the Brisbane Broncos Leagues club with 15 participants, who enjoyed coffee, a fabulous cake and connection with other adoptees. Hosts of the event, Judy and Colleen, shared that the feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive with many staying on after the morning tea to have lunch in the bistro.



*Judy Glover & Colleen Bernard at the Brisbane AdopTEA event*

The Sunshine Coast event, hosted by Kerri, Therese and Lesley, had 30 attendees who made helpful connections with other adoptees and mothers, along with their supportive family members and carers, etc, and had access to books, flyers, leaflets, and other related resources.

Toogoolawah was the venue for a drop-in morning tea. Vivienne took an awareness approach setting up an information table with

brochures, books and flyers with support options on them. Ray White Esk/Toogoolawah sponsored the day by supplying morning tea for everyone. She chatted to people passing by about Mental Health Awareness for Adoptees. Being a small town, she wanted locals to know that she is there to offer support. Vivienne is starting a support group in the CWA Hall in Esk February 2022. It was a successful morning and she is hoping to take a more formal approach next year.

A private gathering of adoptees also took place at the Gold Coast.



*Brisbane AdoptTEA event*

### Professional events

The Post Adoption Support Queensland team from the Benevolent Society held two AdoptTEA events (online and in person) with TBS staff from other services within the organisation. They shared practice knowledge and experience in adoption in a bid to increase understanding of why adoption is trauma and build their knowledge about the impacts of adoption on mental health. Attendees commented they'd never considered this link before but after attending could clearly identify the lasting impacts adoption would have on the mental health of adopted people. They left feeling more aware of the impacts of adoption and the support available through gaining access to

helpful resources and support services to use in their practice.

Manager at TBS, Alana Laundry commented, "The Benevolent Society recognises that the impacts of adoption are far reaching and long lasting. We were honoured to be involved in bringing the AdoptTEA to fruition and hope to see its message become a part of our wider community's understanding of adoption."

Link-Up (Qld) held an event, as did the team at Adoption and Permanent Care Services (Queensland Government). The APCS team discussed the gaps in mental health services around adoption matters and the intricate ways that people impacted by adoption can be affected and that the impacts can be severe yet very different depending on the individual experiences. Also discussed was the need to raise awareness within the health sector and the risks associated with higher rates of suicide among adoptees and that mental health services need to be more informed.

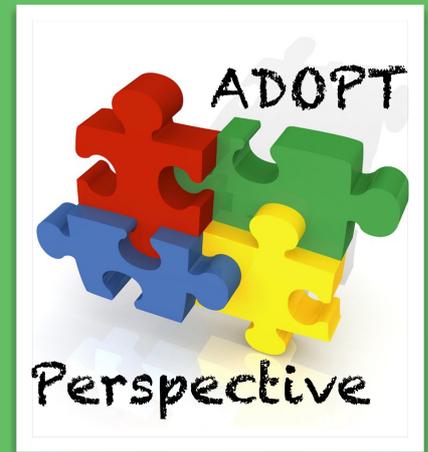
### Why an AdoptTEA?

Judy Glover has been an adoptee advocate and providing peer-support to adoptees since 2015. During that time she heard over and over again from adoptees that "being adopted" became harder and more complicated the older they were. They became more aware of the "losses" they experienced, not only of their mother at birth, also their father, siblings and extended family. And the losses that continued on year after year – lost time with natural family, loss of relationships or the opportunity to grow relationships with natural family, loss of their name and identity, loss of connection to their ancestry and culture, and so much more.

These compounding losses often seemed to lead to a deep sense of sadness, grief, regret, and shame within adoptees, regardless of whether they had a good relationship with their adoptive parents or they did not. Adoptees reporting major depression, addictions, and suicidal thoughts or behaviours were becoming more commonplace.

## DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

Do you have a story to tell? If so, we'd love to hear from you. We regularly feature personal stories, poems and articles in our newsletter and on the website, or you can submit a form to be interviewed on the podcast. Email us at [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or go to [www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective) to fill in the podcast prospective guest form.



While this is acknowledged and accepted within the adoptee community, there is a lack of awareness amongst the general community who are not directly impacted by adoption. With many adoptees expressing an underlying fear of reaching out for support, Judy saw the need to increase the public awareness of the trauma of adoption to reduce the anxiety, stigma and shame of reaching out for help.

As a way of taking the issue mainstream, Judy reached out to the Post Adoption Support Queensland team at The Benevolent Society with the idea of holding a morning tea during Queensland Mental Health Week. PASQ were excited to come on board with the concept and together they created "The AdopTEA".

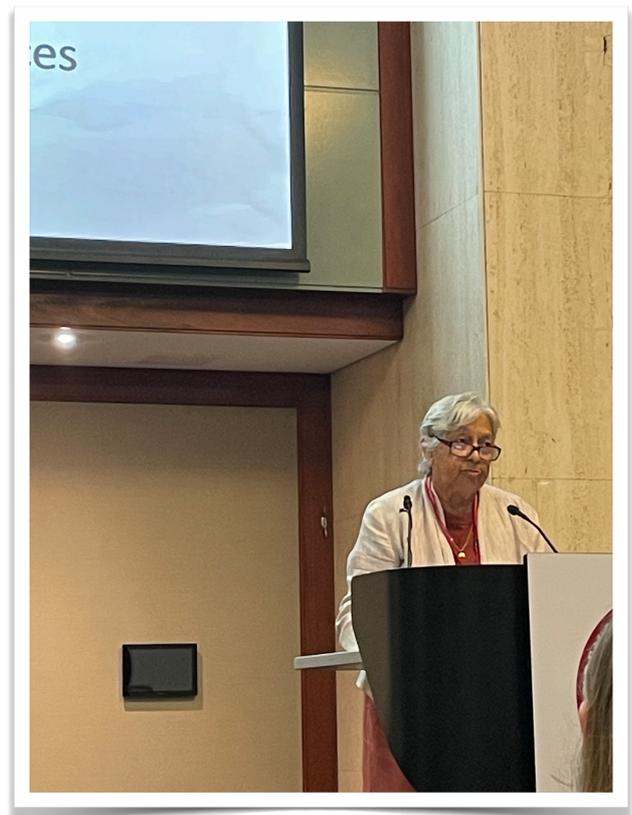
The AdopTEA events will be held again next year during Queensland Mental Health Week to highlight adoptee mental health.

## Queensland Apology Anniversary

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) and the Queensland Post Adoption Working Committee hosted the **9th Anniversary of the Queensland Government's Apology for Forced Adoption Policies and Practices** at Parliament House on Friday, 26th November. It was a moving event featuring speeches from Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Leanne Linard MP and

former Queensland MP, Anne Warner, who championed and sponsored the 1991 amendments to the 1964 Adoption of Children Act while Minister for Family Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Islander Affairs.

Attendees were also the first to hear an original song about forced adoption featuring lyrics written by Kerri Saint from Association for Adoptees - *A Crime Not Known*. The words of the apology, delivered on the 27 November, 2012 can be found [here](#):



*Former MP Anne Warner speaks at the apology anniversary*

# 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 another adopted person about their experience of Christmas over the years to shed some light on this topic.*

## How has being adopted impacted your experience of Christmas?

Growing up I usually spent Christmas with my adoptive mother's extended family (she was one of ten children) and of course my own adoptive siblings who were all biological children. So, I had lots of cousins my age to play with and the celebrations were robust and loud. On one hand

it was loads of fun and on the other it was in moments like these that I felt my differences the most. I looked different, was quiet and didn't see myself reflected in the faces around me. I was sometimes anxious about how loud everyone was and the family disagreements that would bust out. When I was reunited with my biological family, I initially felt pressure to allocate time at Christmas to them as well and when I did spend time with them, I felt equally out of place.

## What does Christmas bring up for you now?

I no longer feel pressure about who to spend Christmas with. We long ago established a pattern in my immediate family (spouse and children) of alternating between our parents and when that doesn't work out for any reason, we just spend it together. It is important to me to have pre-thought out how long I wish to stay at events and I have a shorthand with my partner about when I am ready to leave. I recently experienced a significant birthday and all birthdays are tinged with sadness for me. My biological family (who I am in contact with) never contact me for my birthdays - which may be for a variety of reasons. However, I admit that not hearing from them on birthdays or at Christmas (unless I text first) hurts.

## What has been your most difficult Christmas?

The most difficult Christmas is really several rolled into one. As I grew up, I felt more distanced from my extended adoptive family. The separation felt wider and instead of the longing I had when I was younger to feel more a part of them, I instead began to wish for less contact and eventually a complete severing of those ties. Not only did I not fit in, but I often felt a simmering tension between us and I felt judged in these spaces. This was difficult for my mother to understand and so, for awhile I continued to attend events like Christmas that caused me a great deal of anxiety just to please

her. Thankfully, she and my other close adoptive family members now understand or at least support my decision to not participate in these gatherings and I no longer feel pressure to embrace relationships that are challenging for me.

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

Given that I recently celebrated a milestone birthday, and had some other challenging things happening in tandem, it has been rough. The final slide into Christmas improves every day though. I have managed everyone's expectations around what I will and won't be doing for Christmas. And the boundaries I have put in place over the years and the self-care I have planned for this period are all helping me get into the festive spirit. I have high hopes that it will be great Christmas.

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

You don't have to do this alone. I recently had a day where I felt overwhelmed about an adoption-related issue and I picked up the phone to the Forced Adoption Support Service and talked it through with someone for probably less than five minutes and when I hung up it all seemed manageable and I was in a completely different headspace.



Yes, Christmas is a time when we think of others, but we also have to look after ourselves. Prioritise what you need and what is best for you.

## 2022 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.**

**Adoptee Meetings and Mothers' Morning Teas are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm.**

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

**Open Information Events** - 3 events / year.  
Dates TBA.

**Adoptee Support Group** - (1.30pm - 3.30pm)  
8 Jan, 12 March, 14 May, 9 July, 10 Sept, 12 Nov.

**Mothers' Morning Tea** - a regular morning tea from 10am to 12 noon (address above)  
19 Jan, 16 Mar, 18 May, 20 July, 21 Sept, 16 Nov.