

Jigsaw
Queensland
Inc.

2020

Support Connect Inform Advocate



Annual Report 2019-2020

Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

President's report 2019-2020

The oddest year

Jigsaw and the Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS) staff always meet early in January to plan the year ahead. We could never have imagined what has happened since, as COVID-19 had forced individuals and organisations worldwide to re-evaluate and re-work their best laid plans.

Thankfully, we managed to squeeze in the 7th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoption as a live event. Although many chose to exercise caution and not attend this time around. Going ahead under the COVID-19 conditions at the time allowed our energetic choir to debut the song, 'Lost and Found' written by Jay Turner and Cath Mundy with the input of the choir members, who were all affected by adoption.

We also quickly adjusted our office practices to maintain our commitment to take calls from people affected by adoption between the hours of 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, with some staff working from home. As our records and accounting are all cloud based the transition was somewhat easy for us, but there were extra costs involved. Thankfully, Jigsaw Qld was also the beneficiary of Jobseekers payments and other initiatives to help sustain nonprofit organisations. This enabled us to fully commit to developing podcasts in lieu of our support meetings as a way of providing peer to peer support to those affected by adoption. Many thanks go to Jo Sparrow and Jane Sliwka for this initiative which has been very successful in terms of the number of the growing number of listeners and the topics covered.

Governance

Once again, we have relied heavily on the dedicated work of all our volunteers and committee members to keep Jigsaw directly relevant to persons affected by past adoption. I would like to offer a heart-felt thank you to our Management Committee team; in particular Robert White's assistance with

finances and bookkeeping, Collette Glazebrook as Secretary and Treasurer, Heather Hermann, who helps us to maintain a sense of history and purpose in what we do. Jo Sparrow joined the committee this year. For some years now, Jo has been providing public relations support, editing the newsletter and, now, producing our 'Adopt Perspectives' podcasts.

Warm and hearty thanks to all the Jigsaw Committee members, group facilitators, office workers and volunteers who keep Jigsaw alive and well.

It is not only our longevity but also our respect for the diversity of adoption experience that has earned Jigsaw Queensland its outstanding reputation as a trustworthy provider of post-adoption support and a valued contributor to state and national discussions on permanency and adoption policy and practice. The different colours in our Jigsaw logo represent the diverse ways in which we are all affected by adoption and the unique contribution each of us can make in transforming lives. They also remind us that our colour is not the whole rainbow and that working together and supporting each other on the journey is important.

Trevor Jordan
President

Support group reports

Mothers' Group

The Mothers support meeting entered its 23rd year in August 2020. This year has been very mixed with COVID and the regulations. Meetings were cancelled and when allowed to resume we then had strict rules to abide to--the 1.5 metre seating arrangements and myself serving the tea and coffee and the clean up before and after the meeting.

I was able to phone and keep in contact with mothers when meetings were cancelled. The numbers are at about 6, but in the last 2 meetings they dropped to 4 as I have 2 mothers that are not well.

I would like to thank Jigsaw for having trust in me to run the meetings for the past 12 years.

Heather

Open Group

Another year of stimulating conversations and discussions has been the theme for our meetings. at least for half of the year. The open group strength is that it opens up different perspectives on adoption and lines of communication between those affected by adoption in divergent ways.

When COVID-19 hit, we found that many of our regular open group attendees were in the potentially vulnerable categories as defined by Qld Health authorities. We cancelled the support groups meeting and resumed with a Zoom meeting in October. This brought in some attendees from Sunshine Coast, Hervey Bay and Sydney. We will look at using both options (online and in person) in the future.

Collette

Adoptee Group

The Adoptee support group has been well attended this last year. We've managed to have a few meetings under the always changing COVID-19 restrictions. It is gratifying that other service providers recognise the value of peer-to peer sharing and support. So, a number of adoptees attend to get peer support who are also getting support through Post Adoption Support Queensland's counselling service. Melissa has done a great job again in facilitating the meetings with style and wit.



Forced Adoption Support Service



Forced Adoption Support Services

This year the FASS team has assisted mothers, fathers, adopted people, and other family members with information, emotional support, family tracing, intermediary services and referrals.

Our small team of part-time staff have provided services to 491 people delivering 3171 client contacts during the 2019-2020 financial year. This represents a slight increase (23) in numbers of clients from the previous year. 48 % of new clients were adoptees, 15% mothers, 15% siblings, 12.5% other relatives and 6% fathers.

The FASS team made contact with 25 biological relatives on behalf of clients this financial year. (Intermediary service)

Most services are delivered by phone and email with a small proportion of face to face services. Skype/zoom services are offered by but rarely taken up. In late March 2020 face to face client services were suspended due to COVID restrictions. In line with Qld Government health directives, some staff continued to work from the office while others worked from home. Closure of the Australian Electoral Commission from March 2020 hindered searches for biological relatives and FASS staff switched to greater use of some paid online search options.

"Thanks to Jigsaw. We (mother and son) are both so grateful for the work you have done to bring us together & we have formed a relationship that shall last for the rest of our lives." (Mother)



TRENDS

There is a **noticeable increase in people using genealogical DNA testing** e.g. ancestry.com to find their birth relatives. This has been very helpful for some people who have been unable to find a relative any other way, especially fathers where the name has not been made available in records or provided by the mother.

However **DNA testing is also creating some challenges**. For example some people are contacting more distant relatives first rather than making direct contact with a mother/father or son/daughter which can hinder relationship building.

FASS staff are gradually **building their knowledge** around the use of genealogical DNA for searching by attending courses, reading books etc.

In some cases FASS are **referring clients** needing 1:1 support to volunteer DNA genealogy experts or the Australian DNA hub.

FASS has developed a **new information sheet** for clients on this topic.

FASS SERVICE FEEDBACK

A survey of clients who had received FASS services during 2019 revealed very high levels of satisfaction. Of the 51 respondents 98 % o agreed that FASS staff understood adoption issues; 98 % agreed that staff were supportive; 96% agreed that staff provided helpful information and that the service overall was helpful. The survey also sought suggestions for service improvement. This information was used in the FASS planning day in January 2020.

NEEDS SURVEY

In May a survey of adopted people was conducted to determine which topics and modes of delivery (face to face workshops/written materials/online delivery) were of most interest. A similar survey went to mothers in August 2020. This information is being used to inform FASS service planning. Both surveys indicated support for online delivery and this has the potential to provide services to regional clients who cannot attend face to face events.

PROJECTS/SMALL GRANTS

Trauma Sensitive Yoga Sessions

Reinhabiting Your Body for Healing: A Trauma Sensitive Yoga (TSY) Information Session for adopted people and mothers who have lost children to adoption

TSY is an evidence based treatment for healing trauma. FASS organised an information session in June 2019 which was facilitated by Edwina Kemp, a social worker and TSY trained facilitator. In response to a request for more sessions a series of 4 practice classes was organised for Oct/Nov 2019.

"It's an amazing experiential learning tool to learn I'm OK just as I am" (a mother)

First workshop for fathers separated from their son/daughter by adoption

FASS organised a workshop for fathers in Oct 2019. The workshop was facilitated by Gary Coles, a father and author of books/articles on the topic of fathers separated from their children by adoption. The workshop was one for fathers impacted by adoption in Australia.

Four fathers attended and gave very positive feedback. An article about the workshop in the senior's magazine resulted in a father contacting FASS requesting assistance in finding his son. Like many other fathers he had not been aware that there are support services available.



“The sharing of stories and the similarities and differences helped me on my continuing journey. Just knowing other’s stories and being able to listen is a great thing.”

Workshops to create a song about forced adoption for the 7th anniversary of the National Apology

Mothers, fathers and adopted people were invited to participate in a songwriting workshop with professional songwriter/singers Jay Turner and Cath Mundy in November 2019. At the workshop the participants shared their experiences of the impact of forced adoption with the songwriters who then wrote an original song (Lost and Found). A second workshop was held in January 2020 for the group to provide feedback on the song.

The workshop participants were very keen to join in the performance of the song at the 7th Anniversary of the National Apology. In response to this, workshops were scheduled in February/ March 2020 so they could rehearse as backing singers.

7th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

This event held on 20th March, 2020 was still able to go ahead as the numbers allowed for public gatherings in Queensland at that stage was 100. Due to concerns about COVID 19, some people cancelled their booking but there were still approximately 33 people who came to the event. The performance of the anniversary song “Lost and Found” was a very moving highlight for both singers and the audience.



“I think all the group members found the words of the song most meaningful. I thoroughly enjoyed the group experience, and really appreciated the opportunity to be part of the consultation that allowed this song to be written. And singing the chorus has been exhilarating!” (Mother)

Writing Project

A Writing Day facilitated by two professional writers with experience of adoption was scheduled for April 18th. The Writing Day had to be cancelled due to COVID restrictions. So this was quickly replaced by an online resource package. This package was made available for people who wanted to write their story for the National Archives Forced

Adoption History project before it closed for contributions in mid-May. It remains available on the Jigsaw website on an ongoing basis for those who want to write their story.

“Adopt Perspective” podcast project

Due to Jigsaw Qld having to suspend face to face support meetings the planned production of podcasts was moved forward.

FASS staff member Jane Sliwka worked with Jo Sparrow to co-host and produce the podcasts which have included interviews with mothers who lost children to adoption, adopted people, and a father and his daughter who were reunited. The personal stories are being interspersed with interviews with professionals about topics related to the personal stories such as what is forced adoption, intermediary services, grief and loss and late discovery of adoption. By 30th June the podcasts had been listened to 831 times by 230 different listeners across the globe. This audience is growing weekly. This project has been an excellent way to support people during the COVID crisis and also reach people who cannot attend face to face support groups e.g. those living in regional areas and/or those who cannot travel. The podcasts help to promote FASS services and encourage people to seek support.



RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The FASS team have been working closely with Jo Sparrow on updating and improving the information available on the Jigsaw website.

FASS staff contributed articles to the Jigsaw newsletters.

An information pack was developed for aged care facilities and palliative care units but the roll out was suspended once COVID hit because it was not a good time to be approaching aged care organisations. This project may be reconsidered in 2020.

The Professionals Information Pack was revised.

STAKEHOLDER & SERVICE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS

FASS attended the quarterly meetings (via teleconference during COVID) with Qld post adoption service providers.

FASS met with stakeholders to plan the 2020 Anniversary Event.

FASS worked closely with Adoption and Permanency Care Services (Qld Government) to resolve **issues with Births Deaths and Marriages Qld** which were impacting negatively on FASS clients who are searching for biological relatives.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

FASS staff member Jane Sliwka provided a **training session for social work students** at the University of Qld on forced adoption and the lessons to be learnt.

To continue to **build relationships in the indigenous community**, FASS staff attended the launch of a book produced by Link UP Qld which includes stories of people from the stolen generation

On 6th September 2019 FASS staff attended an event for **Remembrance Day for Forgotten Australians** many of whom are also affected by adoption.

In October 2019 Trevor Jordan and Jane Sliwka from the FASS team attended the **Australasian Post Adoption Service Providers Meeting in Sydney**. FASS did a poster presentation of the RBWH Memorial Plaque project. The meeting was attended by participants from throughout Australia from government and non-government agencies.

On 15th October FASS staff attended the launch of a book to celebrate the 10 year anniversary of **Post Adoption Support Qld**.

On 27th November 2019 FASS staff attended the **anniversary of the Qld apology for forced adoptions** to provide support.

STAFFING

FASS staff member Rachel Bell resigned at the end of February 2020 and has been replaced by Anna Crockett.

As well as regular supervision from the team leader, FASS staff attend team professional supervision with an external supervisor and are supported to attend external professional development.

Andrea Lynch
FASS Team Leader

We thank the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women for their continuing support of our peer support services. This contribution is crucial for our volunteer engagement with all those affected by adoption. We also acknowledge the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services for its generous funding of the Forced Adoption Support Service.



Queensland
Government



Forced Adoption
Support Services

Funded by the Australian Government
Department of Social Services