

# BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | 2018 WINTER EDITION

## 2018 Events

To keep an eye on Jigsaw's events for 2018 and beyond, visit [www.jigsawqueensland.com/events](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/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 July, 8 Sept, 10 Nov

### Mother's Support Group - 21 July,

15 Sept, 17 Nov

*(For mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption).*

### Open Support Group - 11 Aug, 13

Oct, 8 Dec.

### Interracial & Inter-country

Group - 18 Aug, 20 Oct, 15 Dec.

### Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group -

18 Aug, 20 Oct, 15 Dec at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Ave, Cotton Tree.



**Forced Adoption Support Services**  
Funded by the Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

## Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

Understanding, Support & Information for all those with adoption in their lives.



## Forced Adoption Plaque at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

**A plaque has been placed on the ground floor of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital near the volunteers desk and is now available to see.**

This Forced Adoption Memorial Plaque Project, funded under the small grants program (Department of Social Services) started in 2017. The aim was to identify sites of significance in the history of forced adoption in Queensland and to design a plaque for sites that would educate the public about the history of forced adoption.

A project worker, Dee Martin consulted widely with stakeholders and service providers. She then worked with a committee of representatives from ALAS, Association of Adoptees, Jigsaw Qld and Origins Qld to develop the criteria for site selection and plaque design / text. Inkahoots design worked with the committee's criteria to design an eye catching and informative plaque.

A number of sites were approached. The first one to agree to install a plaque was the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. In 2009 the hospital had issued apologies to mothers from ALAS and also to adoptees from the Association of Adoptees (previously called WASH). It was the first hospital in Australia to apologise for practices of forced

adoption. The placement of the plaque in the hospital's ground foyer means that a lot of visitors will learn about forced adoption and its lifelong impacts from seeing the plaque. There will be a launch of the plaque in late July. If you are keen to attend, please send an email to [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or phone 07 3356 8888 or 1800 210 313 (Qld only)

**RBWH Apologies in 2009**



ALAS Committee members Trish Large, Marg Hamilton, Jan Kashin and Lorraine Cochrane and received an apology from Professor Ian Jones at RBWH on 19th May, 2009.

*To Members of the Adoption Loss Adult Support Group*

*Dear Friends,*

*Thank you for meeting with senior members of Women's and Newborn Services at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on 10 February 2009 and sharing your stories with us about the care you received at the Royal Women's Hospital some time ago. It was very moving and indeed saddening to hear how your experiences have adversely affected your lives, and many other lives that are near and dear to you.*

*From our frank discussions, we understand that each of you was*

*denied the right to experience the natural relationship between mother and child to care for and to raise your children yourselves, but because of hospital practices were not permitted to do so.*

*In summary you have described to us how you much wanted babies were taken from you by the practices of the hospital operating*



*at the time and that you feel you were coerced by hospital staff to sign over your babies for adoption. In this regard we acknowledge the hurt and suffering you have described and sincerely apologise for any ill treatment experienced by you as single women during your pregnancy and confinement at the Royal Women's Hospital.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Professor Ian Jones  
Obstetrician and Executive  
Director Women's and Newborn  
Services Royal Brisbane and  
Women's Hospital  
19/05/09"*

*To the White Australian Stolen Heritage (WASH) Group and all Adoptees seeking an apology*



Members of WASH (now known as the Association for Adoptees) Therese Hawken, Victoria Fitzpatrick and Kerri Saint received an apology from Professor Ian Jones at RBWH on 12th November, 2009.

*Dear Friends,*

*Thank you for meeting with me at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and sharing your experiences of being an adopted one. I was saddened to hear how half-truths, lies, feelings of abandonment, lack of knowledge of your origins and the missed opportunities to grow up and be with your siblings, have and continue to adversely affect your lives, and many other lives of those who are near and dear to you.*

*Our open, honest and obviously painful discussion have helped me to understand how you have been denied the right to experience the natural relationship between you and your mother, your siblings and extended family because of the practices in place at the time of your birth. Some of you were subjected to many different types*

*of abuse; from being denied contact with your mother and by the family in which you were placed.*

*In this regard on behalf of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, I acknowledge the hurt and suffering you have described and sincerely apologise for any ill treatment you experienced while in hospital by being taken and denied contact with your mother at the time of your birth.*

*For similar reasons I also apologise to those families who have experienced hurt and suffering through the tragic and harmful effects caused by adoption.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Professor Ian Jones  
Obstetrician and Executive  
Direction  
Women's and Newborn Services  
Royal Brisbane and Women's  
Hospital  
12/11/09*

## Family Constellations

by Jane Sliwka

I had heard positive reports about Family Constellations a while ago, but finally decided to give it a go this year. As an adoptee myself, I have a complex family background and also felt that developing a greater understanding of this modality



would assist me in my work at Jigsaw.

I attended a two-day workshop in March, where I registered as a 'representative'. This meant that I was able to observe the group process and act as a representative as other people worked through their own personal and family dynamics. Through this experience, I could see that this modality could have a positive influence on people's lives and their ability to move into the future with a greater sense of personal power and acceptance.

I decided to return in May where I worked through my own family constellation with the assistance of



other group members. This was a powerful and emotional experience, but ultimately a positive one that has helped me to

clarify my position in both of my families and current life situation. I feel that Family Constellations could benefit most people, as we are all affected in positive and negative ways by our experiences in our family. In many cases we are also impacted by what has occurred in previous generations of our family.

I feel that this modality is particularly relevant to those affected by adoption where loss and dislocation occur within families. The following information may help you to determine whether participating in this process might be right for you:

### What is it?

Family Constellations is a therapy modality that was established in the mid 1990's by a man named Bert Hellinger. Hellinger is a German Psychotherapist and Family Therapist who is now in his 80's. This modality is popular throughout Europe and America, but is relatively new within Australia.

Family Constellations can be used as an alternative to or in conjunction with traditional counselling.

It is a brief but deep experiential process that can help us to develop:

- New perspectives about our lives

- Acceptance around where we come from so that we can accept ourselves
- Acceptance around what we can't change
- Appreciation for what we do have, including our current and future life
- Love for self and others.
- Resolution around unfinished business from earlier experiences.

**How does it work?**

These outcomes are achieved by quickly getting to the core of underlying dynamics in our family. This most commonly occurs through a group process where individuals 'set up' their issue or family dynamic by placing other group members ('representatives') in a particular location in the room. Information about underlying family dynamics becomes available as representatives move and interact with one another. The constellation can evolve to show new possibilities or to resolve past issues. As well as experiencing an internal shift, some clients find that the next time they meet with a relative, there are tangible changes in that connection.

**Who is it appropriate for?**

Family Constellations is most appropriate when you feel ready for change. You may have tried other counselling or therapy modalities but are seeking a deeper approach. Even if significant family members have passed away, these relationships can still be addressed and resolution achieved through a Family Constellations group

process.

For those who prefer an individual counselling setting, some practitioners also use a Family Constellation approach within individual counselling using figurines.

**How do I access it?**

There are several Family Constellations practitioners in Queensland, which you may search for in your area using google. If you would like further information about how to access this modality, you are welcome to contact Jigsaw on 07 3358 6666.

**Mother's Retreat 2018**

**by Andrea Lynch**

yoga, ate delicious food, enjoyed the magnificent views, and most importantly had a chance to experience the healing power of sharing stories with other mothers.

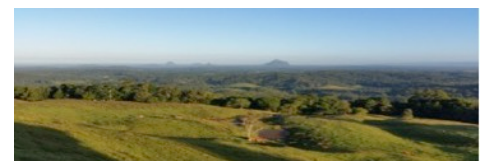
The feedback was extremely positive and included:

**"Far exceeded my expectations. Fabulous venue, brilliant staff (both professional support and venue staff), glorious views, and glorious weather. Very affirming - this is how to achieve fifteen years of healing in 3 days."**

**"Supporting caring environment was provided to enable us to share stories, express our pain and anger in a confidential safe situation. Able to share ideas, tears and cuddles."**



From the 15th to 17th May, seventeen mothers attended a retreat at Tranquil Park, Maleny. The retreat program was developed and facilitated by staff from the Jigsaw Qld's Forced Adoption Support Service and the Post Adoption Support Qld. Mothers attended workshops about identifying and managing triggers, went walking, practiced



## The Media and Adoption Minority Stress

By Chris Mundy

When I saw that the Australian Government was embarking on another Parliamentary Inquiry to explore the “barriers to adoption” I felt exasperated. The idea had already been flagged by the Federal Children’s Minister in previous weeks, commenting about the adoption of children from aboriginal families. Media discussion about the issue ensued on the Seven Network’s Sunrise program rightfully creating a community backlash. As the written submissions to the parliamentary inquiry were slowly released over several weeks, I was confronted with views I found radical and jarring. While I had thought I had come to terms with my feelings about adoption, they were certainly surfacing again as the public and the politicians again began to debate and propagate the idea of adoption as an answer to Australia’s children in out-of-home care.

“Minority Stress” has been a cause for concern for community groups in recent public and political debates. Some state that minority groups, such as racial and sexual minorities experience higher levels of stress especially during public discourse about legislation and social changes. As individuals in these groups can experience feelings of rejection and isolation due to prejudice and discrimination, it is particularly important for these groups to be supported through times of specific media attention.

Whilst largely an unexplored area, those who have been affected by adoption can also experience “minority stress” during public debates, such as that occurring in the current parliamentary inquiry. Those affected by adoption often wrestle with feelings of isolation, stigma and rejection as the result of having different experiences to the general population or being treated unfairly. Negative comments, being misunderstood and being discriminated against have

been experiences for adoptees, mothers and fathers affected by past adoption practices.

Managing triggers is important at this time. Morning breakfast TV, politicians, radio talk back and social media are places where adoption will be debated as a policy option at a national level. Submissions to the inquiry which range from those of a deeply personal nature to positions by state departments and child welfare organisations can be quite confronting.

Here’s a list of things we can do when adoption discussions move to the forefront of public debate:

**\* Switch Off** - It takes a special kind of self-awareness to know when things are becoming too much for us.

Repeated exposure to triggers can lead to re-traumatising ourselves over and over again. We need to have the strength to change the TV channel, switch off from social media, remove ourselves from an online group or take a course of action to protect ourselves emotionally. We can remain informed but also pace our exposure to triggering material.

**\* Take action** - Think about what action you can take e.g. write a submission, contact politicians,

or write letters to the editor. It is best to take action when you are feeling calmer so that your rational brain can help you to respond in a considered and effective manner. The latter is very important if you are wanting your views to be considered and to influence others.

**\* Attend a Support Group** - Jigsaw Queensland holds support groups for Mothers, Adopted people, an Open Group for all people affected by adoption and an Interracial Intercountry Support group. Sharing your feelings with others in a support group can help you feel understood, validated and accepted.

**\* Call Jigsaw Queensland** - Jigsaw Queensland workers are specialised in adoption related issues and many are affected by adoption themselves. We monitor adoption related issues in the media and in public discussions and can support individuals



affected by adoption. At times we may also need to seek out the support of a mental health professional who is specialised in adoption or trauma that can help us manage negative adoption experiences.

**\* Practice Self Care** - Taking time out to de-stress is important to reduce our anxiety levels. Mindfulness, meditation, prayer, bushwalking, hobbies, massage and exercise can all be great ways to reduce stress. Eating and sleeping well is also essential.

**\* Keep Perspective** - Anxiety can often cause us to catastrophise situations to unmanageable levels. It can be helpful when we are feeling overwhelmed to stop, take a step back and try to be objective about the situation. This may mean researching and seeking to understand why some people may have a different view whilst analysing our own position.

## Canada Follows Suit: Senate Inquiry into Post-War Adoption Practices

(article courtesy Vanish Voice)



Australian Senator Rachel Siewert speaking to the Canadian Senate Committee (photo from cpac.com)

From the 1940s to 1970s in Canada, over 300,000 unwed women were forced to relinquish their children for adoption, in accordance with Canada's post-war adoption mandate. Rejected by their families, many mothers were hidden in government-funded homes managed by church groups and were often subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

For three days in March, the Canadian Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology listened to emotional testimonies from mothers and adult adoptees that were affected. Australian Senator Rachel Siewert and Professor Daryl Higgins also spoke

to the committee about Australia's similar adoption history, national inquiry and apology.

Origins Canada, sister organisation of Origins VIC, NSW and QLD, has been advocating for acknowledgement of these practices for years. Executive Director Valerie Andrews recommended following the example of the Australian government, in terms of taking input from mothers for the specific wording of the apology, the recognition of certain practices as illegal, and the allocation of funding for mental health issues.

The committee is expected to release a report on this study later this year. Video recordings of the meetings are available on the Senate of Canada YouTube page.

Valerie Andrews has also written a book about these practices entitled *White Unwed Mother: The Adoption Mandate in Postwar Canada*, currently available for pre-order through Demeter Press.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Steve Mascord's "Touchstones"**

**by Mark Young**

**Making a younger self proud (while still growing up).**

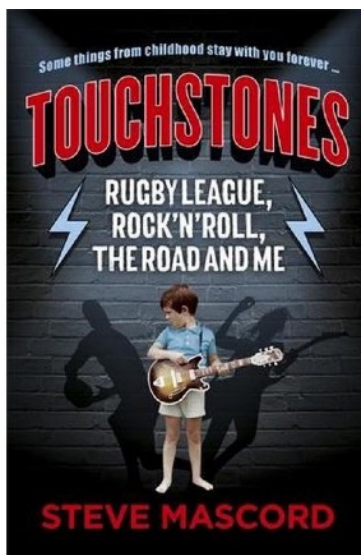
Steve Mascord's book, "Touchstones" (Stoke Hill Press, 2017) is a quirky reflection of an obsession with rugby league, rock'n'roll and a vital need to belong. Mascord's clever observations and decent local values deliver timely results over a gruelling year of journalistic and personal endeavour. Mascord talks about making his younger self proud - partly because he is trying to look after a lost and wounded inner child finding comfort in the boyhood myths and legends of rugby league and rock'n'roll.

By half time, Steve shares his core message with the reader. He writes of his experience with 'adoptoxia', a personal daze of re-orientation after learning accidentally of his family identity: "Concepts taken for granted, such as family similarities and inherited traits, suddenly apply. You have a bloodline after resigning yourself to living your entire life without one.

It seems that several adoption stories have these elements of amazing coincidence and powerful serendipity, whereby relatives and histories are found

out of lovely social connection and hidden homing devices.

In my own story, I remember telling my parish priest after my mother's funeral, in a slightly offhand remark, that we were now looking for our long lost sister who our mother had given up for adoption 57 years earlier. My priest was able to then tell me, the encryption of confidentiality having been decoded by my admission, that our half-sister had in fact been in touch with the church, prompted by reading about our mother's death in the newspaper. The reunions followed, which have helped answer lingering family questions and made us all a little bit freer and truthful in the way we live our lives.



But this is Steve and (his alter ego) Andrew's story. Steve is able to survive the turmoil beneath his manic forays into the recurring distractions of rugby league and rock'n'roll, ensuring his 'touchstones didn't become headstones'.

His story is about learning what we should hold onto from our childhoods and what we need to let go of - before it is too late. This book will appeal to the super intelligent but troubled men in our lives who can't keep still because of the quest that questions them in their journeys across timezones and cultural universes. And to those who like and care about them for who they really are.

## Irish PM Apologises to 126 people illegally adopted decades ago

**Taoiseach Leo Varadkar tells victims disclosures were part of Ireland's 'dark history'.**

(story excerpts courtesy [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com))

The Irish prime minister has apologised in parliament to 126 people who were illegally adopted between 1946 and 1969, saying the disclosures were "another chapter from the very dark history of our country".

As campaigners said the number quoted was likely to be the tip of the iceberg, Leo Varadkar said: "What was done was wrong. What was done robbed children, our fellow citizens, of their identity. It was an historic wrong that we must face up to - and again, on behalf of the government, I'm very sorry for it."

The Taoiseach's apology followed a government statement revealing that 126 births were illegally registered by St Patrick's Guild, a Catholic adoption agency. Those affected, now in their 50s, 60s and 70s, may not know they were adopted.



▲ Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's apology comes just days after Ireland voted to change its laws on abortion. Photograph: Sinan Lawless/PA

The government launched an independent review and said the records of the other adoption societies would be reviewed.

"This is potentially very traumatic for a lot of people and I am so sorry for it," Varadkar told the Dáil.

At a press conference on Wednesday Varadkar said: "People are going to find out that they were adopted in this way having thought for the past 50 or 60 years that they were the natural child of the people who brought them up."

"It's going to be really difficult for those parents who did bring up those people. They are going to have to have a very difficult conversation with the children they brought up."

He added: "We have now very clear evidence that there were illegal registrations at the St Patrick's Guild, and we feel we have to share that information with the people who were affected ... They want to know who they are. They want to know what their birth story is."

One woman who was illegally adopted in 1954 said the 126 people referred to in the statement was "just the tip of the iceberg".

## BOOK REVIEW

### The Choke by Sofie Laguna

by Jo Sparrow

**Time and time again this past year I have randomly picked up books that turn out to have an adoption story at the heart of them. Stella Prize shortlisted book, The Choke by Sofie Laguna is the latest in this unexpected trend.**

Sofie Laguna is a Miles Franklin (2015) winner and she sure knows how to keep you hooked. In the opening scenes of *The Choke*, our protagonist, 10-year-old Justine Lee is about to get chased by her slingshot-wielding half brothers, Kirk and Steve on the banks of the mighty Murray River where the banks narrow almost to the point of meeting (the choke). "This thing is going to hurt, Justine," says Kirk. Don't say you weren't warned.

Justine lives in a hyper masculine and dangerous world with her two half brothers and her grandfather Pop in a shanty house, a few miles from Echuca. Pop is traumatised by his service in the Vietnam War and spends his time half lucid and half in the horrors of his memories. Justine is not well cared for, bathes when she remembers and is fed meals consisting primarily of eggs from Pop's chooks. She is also an undiagnosed dyslexic and is teased at school and left behind by the teachers. One day she is moved in class to sit beside Michael Hooper, who, physically disabled and smart is also an outcast. Their friendship becomes the only

thing Justine can rely on until he too leaves her to move to the city and closer to medical treatment.

Justine and her brothers share a handsome and dangerous father who pops in and out of their lives with no notice. She blames her breach birth for her learning difficulties, her mother's disappearance and for all things wrong in her life.

The *Choke* follows Justine's struggle to leave her circumstances and when revenge is taken on her for one of her father's brutal crimes, she finds herself fourteen and unknowingly pregnant. There follows a forced adoption story that has a different ending to those we know as truth.

While there are triggering scenes of sexual assault and forced adoption trauma in the book, Laguna is not gratuitous in her descriptions. In the end, I was grateful for the "fairy tale" ending. To have had the book finish as forced adoption truly did for most in real life would have been too harrowing.

