

Bits & Pieces

Jigsaw Qld: (07) 3358 6666 – FASS: 1800 21 03 13 – www.jigsawqueensland.com



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. Enjoy!

In this edition we discuss seeking long-term therapeutic counselling, our recent fathers and trauma sensitive yoga workshops, adoption & wills, writing your adoption story and a book review.

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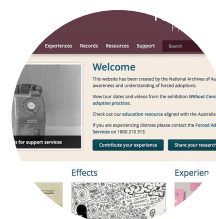
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Seeking long-term therapeutic counselling when you're affected by adoption by Jane Sliwka

November is now known as adoption awareness month. In recognition of this, the American Psychological Association published an article in November 2018 to acknowledge the fact that adoption has lifelong implications for all affected.

With a particular focus on adoptees, the article highlights that adoptees seek therapy at a much higher rate than non-adopted people (almost double). Specifically, it is highlighted that adoptees are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, personality and behavioural disorders, lower self-esteem and issues in interpersonal relationships (Melero & Sanchez-Sandoval, 2017). Importantly, the article highlights that when seeking support from a therapist adoptees rate 'adoption competence' as the most important factor in choosing a professional (Baden et al., 2017).

Sadly, the issues identified in this American article supports the results of the 2012 study by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which surveyed 823 adoptees, and 505 mothers who lost a child to adoption. This research found that



adoptees were up to 10 times more likely and mothers up to 16 times more likely to experience serious mental health issues when compared with the general population.

The American Psychological Association provides the following tips for therapists:

1. When initiating a relationship with a client, ask a question about adoption status and don't assume biological relationships amongst family members.
2. Regardless of the initial reasons for seeking therapy, explore an individual's feelings about the adoption and the current condition of their relationship with relevant family members, including those lost to adoption.

TRAUMA SENSITIVE YOGA WORKSHOP

Following the success of the information session in June, the Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS) at Jigsaw Qld organised four free Trauma Sensitive Yoga classes in Oct/Nov. Mothers and adopted people attended and feedback was positive. There are no further workshops planned by FASS at this stage, however if you would like to go on the wait list for future workshops, please contact us on support@jigsawqld.org.au or phone (07) 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13. Edwina Kemp and Kathie Overeem who ran the workshops are trained in trauma sensitive yoga and are also mental health professionals.



3. Professional development should focus on understanding adoption as a lifelong issue, understanding the grief and loss involved in adoption, and understanding the way that early trauma affects ongoing wellbeing, including an individual's attachment style.

Unfortunately, here at the Forced Adoption Support Service (Jigsaw Qld) we often hear from our clients that they have struggled to find a therapist who is responsive to the unique issues that have arisen out of their adoption experience.

Read the full article here: <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/expert/adults-adopted>

We make the following recommendations to those who are looking for support from an adoption competent therapist:

- If a therapist has been recommended to you or you have located somebody through your own research, ask the therapist if they have completed the Australian Psychological Society (APS) training. This is titled 'Working With People Affected By Forced Adoption: Training for Mental Health Professionals' and is available at <https://psychology.org.au/Event/16082>

- Contact FASS (Jigsaw Qld) who have a list of professionals who have completed the APS training. Phone: 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13 (if you are phoning from QLD). FASS also provides short-term counselling and emotional support (up to 6 sessions) for those affected by forced adoption (face to face or via. telephone).

- In Queensland, Post Adoption Support Queensland (The Benevolent Society) are funded to provide ongoing counselling support to those affected by any type of adoption. This includes telephone or Skype

counselling for those in regional areas.
Phone: (07) 3170 4600.

You are welcome to show this article to your existing therapist if you have one.

Fathers open up about their experiences

The Forced Adoption Support Service at Jigsaw Qld recently invited Gary Coles to run a workshop for fathers. The workshop, held on Saturday 19th October at Jigsaw, was attended by four fathers. The small group size gave the fathers a safe space and time to tell their stories and be heard. Gary reported that "there was lots of nodding, smiling, laughter and tears".



Gary has researched and written extensively about the experience of fathers who were separated from their sons and daughters by adoption during the era of forced adoptions. Gary also has lived experience of being a father whose son was adopted in 1967.

"The sharing of our stories and the similarities and differences helped me on my continuing journey. Just knowing others stories and being able to listen to them is a great thing." (workshop participant)

At the workshop Gary shared information with the fathers about the national apology for forced

adoption which included fathers and research that has been done with fathers. Gary reported that workshop participants seemed “pleased to know they were recognised”.

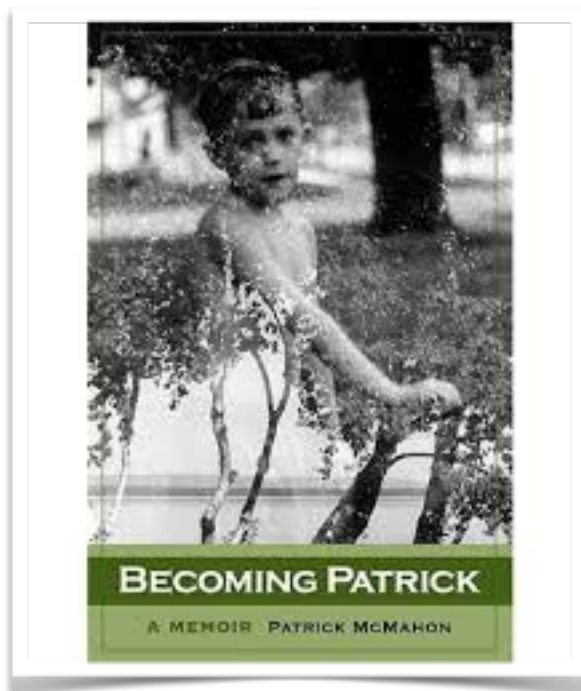
Gary has written a number of books including *Ever After: Fathers and the Impact of Adoption* (2004); *Transparent: Seeing Through the Legacy of Adoption* (2008); *The Invisible Men of Adoption* (2010); *Made in Australia – The Adoption Apologies* (2014); *Disturbing Adoption – The Collected Pieces* (2015). Jigsaw members can borrow Gary’s books from the library.

Fathers: an update from the Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS)

- Since the amendments to the Qld Adoption Act in November 2016 there has been an increase in the number of adopted people receiving the name of their father when they apply for their adoption information. This is because the change to the Act meant that if the father’s name was in the record (even if not on the birth certificate) it will now be released.
- Fathers can also apply for adoption information about a son/daughter who was adopted- we recommend fathers contact Adoption Services on 1800 647 983 and ask for the post adoption. Or, contact Jigsaw Qld (phone 1800 21 03 13 or 07 3358 6666) for advice on applying
- Some adopted people and fathers are finding each other using genealogical testing e.g. ancestry DNA testing when information is not available through official channels or the search has been unproductive. Jigsaw Qld has produced an information sheet on this topic.
- When outreaching to a potential father, FASS recommends doing a paternity test as soon as possible after making contact as this gives peace of mind to both parties and prevents the severe impact of a negative result in paternity testing after a relationship has been formed.

- The experience of FASS staff in outreaching to fathers on behalf of adoptees has confirmed that the stereotype of fathers not wanting to know about their child who was adopted is certainly not the case for many fathers.

***Becoming Patrick* written by Patrick McMahon**



This is a memoir about an adopted person’s journey growing up in an adoptive family and the emotionally charged process of search and reunion. Importantly, it also addresses some of the added complexities that exist if you identify as anything other than heterosexual.

Born in 1958, in Chicago Illinois, McMahon's adoption was privately arranged through a doctor and two neighbours, one a lawyer and the other acting as an unofficial facilitator with the birth parents. At just a few days old he was taken to live 500 miles away in Kansas City with his adoptive family. McMahon’s adoptive father's substance abuse features significantly in his story and how his adoptive mother had to hold the family together and at times act as Patrick’s protector.

The book does not document Patrick’s struggle of growing up being gay or his coming out story. However, interestingly, the first page of the book

clearly tells the reader that he has had a conversation with his adoptive mother about being gay. They never discussed his adoption however, as Patrick was growing up.

Early on in the book we are introduced to Safia, a fellow adoptee also in a same sex relationship. McMahon had never spoken to another adopted person at this point and their meeting seems perfectly timed. They have a shared experience; being adopted is something that happened to them both and being gay is just who they are. They both understand the fear of coming out and what it's like to ask, what if other people can't handle it? What if they walk away? The meeting leaves McMahon wondering what is safe to reveal and to whom? How and when to tell new and precious family members in reunion is complex and you can feel how overwhelming it is for him and the courage it takes to tell his birth mother.

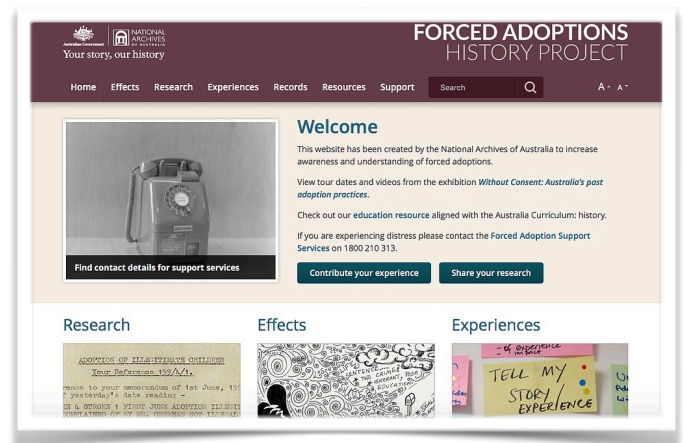


Patrick didn't start searching until he was thirty-two. His detailed account of the search gives the reader a good understanding of how infuriating it is to be denied your own information and I couldn't help but cheer each time he overcame a state imposed barrier. At times it reads like a suspense novel, McMahon playing detective following one clue to the next, finally leading to a long lost relative. As he is empowered with information his transformation begins. I was swept up in his journey from Patrick the unhappy and unfulfilled engineer into his more authentic creative self. Rather than a coming out

story, 'Becoming Patrick' is a story of Patrick coming into his own.

As a final thought, McMahon writes 'gay people deal with alienation, shame, secrets, lies, separation from the mainstream, coming out and forming an identity'. Although he highlights how similar these experiences are to people affected by adoption 'being gay adds a significant layer to the picture'.

Do you have a story to tell?



The National Archives of Australia Forced Adoptions History Project website will close for new submissions in the first half of 2020. There is still an opportunity to share your important story on the website before then, with submissions closing in April 2020.

Jigsaw Queensland's Forced Adoption Support Service is calling for expressions of interest in a writing workshop(s) to be held in April to finalise any stories you have been working on to submit to the History Project or to the Jigsaw Queensland website. If you are interested, please email us at support@jigsawqld.org.au or phone (07) 3358 666 or 1800 21 03 13 (Qld only).

SONG GIVES THOSE AFFECTED BY FORCED ADOPTION A VOICE - CHOIR OPPORTUNITY

In November, a song writing workshop facilitated by professional singer-songwriters, Jay Turner and Cath Mundy was held to create a song about forced adoption to be performed at the March 2020 Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. Both Jay and Cath have a wealth of experience and are passionate about working with groups to create songs that give people a voice. People who are affected by forced adoption, including mothers/fathers/adopted adults and their families are now invited to join the choir in this performance. No previous singing experience is needed! Joining the choir is an opportunity to meet others affected by adoption. Rehearsals will be on six Saturdays (11am to 1pm) between 8th February and 14 March at Jigsaw Qld, New Farm. To register, email support@jigsawqld.org.au or phone (07) 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13 (in Qld) by 24th Dec.

Death and Wills by Isabel Andrews

As we all know two things are inevitable - death and taxes. Despite this, some people try and avoid all thought of death and put off making a Will to 'one day'. The problem of course is that death can be unexpected, and it is the living who have to cope with the decisions made, or not made. I am writing this in relation to the birth mothers' death, though many of the issues apply equally to an adopted person, indeed to any person.

The issue of 'Wills and Estates' occasionally arises at our Mothers' Support Group. The legal issues are clear: an adopted child has full inheritance rights from their adoptive parents and no call on the estate of birth parents. Where families are re-united, however, the emotional issues are more complex. For many it is clear cut, their estate will go to the children they raised, after all the adopted child will inherit from their adoptive parents. For some it is also clear cut but with a different decision - their estate will be divided evenly between all their children, those raised and not raised. Of course, there are positions in between with bequests made to various people. For some, the complications are even greater, such as step-children who may also be inheriting from another parent. It can become so complex that

the path of least resistance is taken - not doing anything.

Doing nothing, however, can cause great angst, hurt and damage after your death. Similarly, some think, I have almost nothing to leave so why worry about it. My answer remains the same - it can leave great angst, hurt and damage for those left behind because many of the issues are not about money but about being recognised and thought about. Some mothers ask - what is the right thing to do? There is of course no 'right' answer. Where you are in the reunion process will impact on the decisions made. A decision made pre-reunion or a year later may change ten, twenty or thirty years down the track. The good thing is that Wills can be changed as circumstances, wishes, or beliefs change.

Your decisions will be based on your broader beliefs. Some people believe all children in a family should be treated the same (when it comes to finances at least). One of my friends has three children, one of whom became wealthy through marriage; nevertheless, she tries to give all the kids the same amount. If she gives one child a helping hand she will also give her wealthy child a similar amount, whether in money or goods. It's very important to her to be equal and fair. In an adoptive situation, depending on the quality of the relationships, a person with these beliefs may want to recognise their relinquished child equally.

Other people see it differently and help their kids according to each child's needs. One child may have a good job or a wealthier spouse and get much less assistance than an unmarried child in a lower paid job. In an adoption situation, again depending on the quality of the relationship, a person with these beliefs may give greater thought and weight to the life circumstances of each person, such as how much will they inherit from their adoptive parents. There is no right answer, it is a question of your own values and beliefs, and the circumstances of each child. I do however give you the following to reflect on.

First, consider recognising the relinquished child somehow. This can be as simple as leaving them a letter or small token that is of importance to you, or both. The underlying message is, 'You are important, and I have thought of you'. I've heard several adopted people say they had absolutely no expectation of an inheritance but they express their hurt that they were not mentioned at all, not by the deceased and not by the living relatives during the eulogy or in the death notice. Conversely, one of my clients received a ring that had been handed down from her grandmother to her mother. It was left to her in the Will with a lovely letter. Whilst not of great monetary value, it is very precious to her, as it cements the connection to her birth family and confirms that her birth mum was thinking about her. She treasures the letter and her mums' words of love.

Secondly, whatever your decisions, explain your reasoning in writing. You can of course explain and discuss your decisions whilst you are alive and it's often a good idea to do so; however, with the passage of time memories can get distorted or forgotten. If your surviving family and friends understand your reasoning they are more likely to feel at peace. One mum who has a relinquished daughter, a step-son and two biological daughters she raised has written a letter explaining that she loves them all dearly,

but given their individual circumstances and the fact that her step-son and relinquished daughter will inherit from others she has decided to leave her estate to the two biological daughters she has raised. She has left various other mementos to her other kids. The mum's hope is to assure them of all of her love and place in her heart, but also to financially assist the two likely to inherit the least.

On the other hand, I had a client whose adoptive father left all his estate to her brother (also adopted) with no explanation of why. She and her brother have taken very different paths. She has studied, has a good job and is buying a house. Her brother got involved with drugs and although now clean has few resources and was back living with their dad when the father died after a brief illness. She wonders whether her dad left it all to her brother because he is more financially needy, but if that is the case, she feels he was rewarded for making lousy choices whilst she was punished for being responsible. She wonders whether it is some patriarchal issue: the oldest son inherits all, but it doesn't seem to fit with her father's beliefs. It is over ten years since the death of her father, but it still causes her enormous pain. It has damaged the relationship with her brother as he did not offer any of the inheritance to her. She sifts through their history trying to work it out but can only speculate. Unfortunately, there is no one who has the answers. Her dad did not discuss it with anyone.

She feels bereft, confused, unloved and abandoned because her ultimate fear is that her father simply loved her brother more than her. Already insecure in her self-esteem, the Will has been a knife in her heart.

Thirdly, if you are writing your own Will make sure you are specific. I have another client where the birth mum hastily drew up a Will on her death bed, she wrote, 'I leave my estate to all my children'. My client, the adoptee, was in

occasional contact with her and believes this was her way of 'finally' including him as a real part of the family. However, by not naming her children the legal position is that the adoptee is legally not her child, as adoption severs that link. The family have followed the legal position, particularly as the mothers contact with her relinquished son was infrequent and often complex and distressing. My client is bitter, as the exclusion cements his belief that he is not really family. Again, a fragile self-esteem is further undermined. We can't know what the mother meant, the inclusion of the word 'all' is unusual, and she may well have meant it to include her relinquished son, but she was dying and probably not thinking clearly and may simply have meant the kids she raised. What I do believe is that she would be very saddened by the end result.

Finally, for those left behind, think about the funeral and whether or how you include the relinquished child. Again, much will depend on the strength and stage of reunion. It may be that it is very new and your only wish is to let the relinquished child know of the death. However, if it is an established relationship, think carefully about the roles each person has and whether it is right and appropriate to include the relinquished child. This will include making the decisions, including the wording on the funeral notice, the eulogy, photos and who does the readings. It may be that there are differing wishes in the family or that the adopted person does not want to be included. Again, the important thing is to talk, to ask, to explain. Death is usually a time of great loss and sadness but for the adopted person it can also be a time of great confusion. However, it can also be an opportunity to strengthen bonds and reiterate that 'we are family' and 'we are all in this together'.

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Date Claimer

The 7th Anniversary for the Federal Apology for Forced Adoptions is usually held on the 21 March, however in 2020 this date falls on a Saturday. Therefore the date has been moved to the 20th March. Be sure to add this date to your diaries. More info will follow closer to the event.

2019 / 2020 Events

The Open Group meeting to be held on 14 Dec will double as an end of year celebration, so bring along a plate to share!

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 - (2020 Dates)
11 Jan, 14 Mar, 9 May, 11 July, 12 Sept, 14 Nov.

Mother's Morning Tea - (2020 Dates) 10am to 12pm on 15 Jan, 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 - (2019 Dates) 14 Dec (2020 Dates) 8 Feb, 11 April, 13 June, 8 Aug, 10 Oct & 12 Dec.

Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group - (2019 Dates) 21 Dec (2020 Dates) 15 Feb, 18 Apr, 20 June, 15 Aug, 17 Oct & 19 Dec at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Ave, Cotton Tree.