

BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2016

Christmas Open Group

Christmas can be a complicated time for people affected by adoption. Losses are often on our mind and negotiating festive gatherings can be challenging. The final Open Support Group (for anyone affected by adoption) of 2016, to be held on Saturday, 10 December (1.30 to 3.30pm) is an opportunity to talk through these feelings and decisions. It is also a time to reflect on how far we've come. December's meeting will also double as Jigsaw's Christmas breakup, so bring a plate to share and join with us.

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).

Adoptee Support Group - 12 Nov

Mother's Support Group - 19 Nov For mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption.

Open Support Group - 10 Dec

"The Open Group helped me gain more insight into the experiences of others in the adoption triad."
Open Support Group Attendee

Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

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



Adoption in the Spotlight

Owing to an increase in adoption related issues in the media, Jigsaw Queensland has experienced an increase in demand for our post-adoption services from those seeking to reunite with original family members.

SBS' Insight Program worked closely with Jigsaw to produce two shows about adoption issues. The first of these explored the issue of identity for people who were affected by family secrets. Jigsaw members Lois Buch and Lan Hopwood and staff member Andrea Lynch featured in the program which went to air on 17 May and is currently available for viewing on SBS On Demand. The second featured birth fathers, a demographic often neglected in research, but one in which there is growing interest from those affected by





The Threads That Connect Us

Seven adopted people attended a special art workshop with Pat Zuber in June.

Pat is an experienced art practitioner and workshop facilitator and is also an adopted person.

She has used art to explore and process her own adoption experience and wanted to give others the chance to do the same.

The theme of the workshop was *The Threads That Connect Us*. Over two days participants learnt the basics of printmaking and with help from Pat were able to create powerful artworks that reflected their experience.

The workshop also provided a relaxed and supportive environment for connecting and sharing with other adopted people.

Following the workshops, Pat generously donated two of her own artworks; *Angela's Birthday* and *Dressing Up* to Jigsaw. The prints have been hung in the hallway of SANDS House so that anyone visiting Jigsaw can see them.

These programs were supported by grants from Forced Adoption Support Services.



Forced Adoption Support Services

Funded by the Australian Government
Department of Social Services



adoption. This program aired on 29 June is also available online.

The Australian version of *Long Lost Family* aired its first season on the Ten Network from March until May and featured many stories of adoption and reunion. Jigsaw responded to many people who were affected by the show in both negative and positive ways. While the show facilitated reunions in different ways than those endorsed by Jigsaw, it did prompt many people, mothers and fathers to contact our service to find out how to access their adoption information and make contact with their original family.

Jigsaw Queensland President, Dr Trevor Jordan, was also recently interviewed on ABC Radio Conversations program by Richard Fidler (you can listen to a podcast on www.jigsawqueensland.com). This program prompted many listeners to contact Jigsaw about their adoption issues and seek support and information.

Mothers Healing Retreat 2016

Nineteen mothers who had lost children to adoption went to a three-day retreat at North Stradbroke Island in March. The retreat was an initiative of Origins Qld Inc with some grant funding from Forced Adoption Support Services, Department of Social Services. Feedback from the retreat was very positive:

"We met and shared and empathised and laughed and cried - all very therapeutic...in a gorgeous location."

"It was a reminder to take time out to rejuvenate, mediate and exercise."

"Talking to other women helps gain perspective on what was an horrendous episode. We still need the comfort of others who understand the same experience."





40th Anniversary Story Bridge Light Up

Close to 50 people gathered at Kangaroo Point on Sunday (17 July) to watch the Story Bridge light up in celebration of Jigsaw's 40th Anniversary and to enjoy a late afternoon barbecue and socialising on the banks of the Brisbane River. Further upstream, Victoria Bridge also lit up in Jigsaw's logo colours and shone across South Bank Parklands, raising awareness of the organisations support services for anyone affected by adoption.

Adding an adventurous element to the event, thirteen climbers scaled the bridge as partygoers watched on. All agreed that it was an exhilarating way to reflect on their own experiences. Jigsaw's role in their adoption story and to celebrate the organisation's anniversary.

Owing to a fuse blowing on the Story Bridge, the light-up didn't happen quite as expected and Council delivered a 2nd light up on 6 August. Thank you to all who came to share in the celebrations, to Lois Buch for organising the light up and Brisbane City Council for giving Jigsaw the opportunity to raise awareness of Jigsaw's services. Also, many thanks to everyone who helped pull the event together and a special thank you to Brisbane photographer, Marcus Bell from Studio Impressions who donated his time and resources to take some incredible photos of the bridge for Jigsaw.

To see more photos from the bridge climb/barbeque, go to www.jigsawqueensland.com.





Being kind to yourself (self compassion) is good for your health

By Andrea Lynch

Many people have learnt to be very self-critical and sometimes they think that this is the best path to self-improvement. The 'inner critic' can take over and people 'beat themselves up' constantly. The adoption experience can amplify this habit of being harshly self-critical and feelings of unworthiness. Rather than helping and motivating us, the self-critical voice can be very destructive to our wellbeing.

On the other hand self-compassion has been shown to be good for our health, wellbeing and relationships. Research shows that people who are compassionate towards themselves are less likely to be depressed, anxious and stressed. When we soothe our own pain it increases oxycontin (hormone) which increases feelings of trust, calm, safety, generosity and connectedness.

Many of us are much better at showing compassion towards others than ourselves.

What is self-compassion and how do we develop it?

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards ourselves as we would to a good friend.

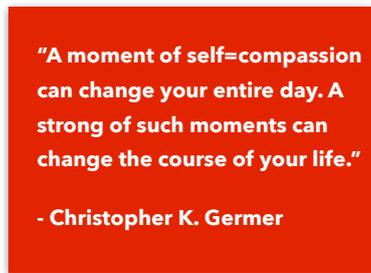
When we are having a difficult time or noticing something we don't like about ourselves, instead of trying to suppress our pain and being harshly self-critical, we can give ourselves comfort and kindness.

"It (self-compassion) recognises that the human condition is

imperfect so that we feel connected to others when we fail or suffer rather than feeling separate or isolated. It also involves mindfulness - the recognition and non-judgemental acceptance of painful emotions as they arise in the present moment. "(Neff, K, 2016)

Self-compassion takes practice and there are lots of books and websites that can give ideas for how to go about this. A couple of websites and books are listed below.

Christopher Germer: <http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org/>



Christopher K Germer (2009) *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*

Dr Kristin Neff: <http://self-compassion.org/>

Dr Kristin Neff (2011) *Self Compassion: stop beating yourself up and leave insecurity*

If you would like more information on this topic or some help with developing more self-compassion contact the FASS team on 07) 33586666 or 1800 210 313 (Qld only).

.....

Fathers Survey

The University of NSW is conducting research into fathers of adopted children. Little research has been conducted in this important area. Those wanting to participate should follow the instructions on their website at <http://www.birthfathers.unsw.edu.au/>

Membership / Donations / Bequests

Jigsaw is a non-profit organisation, relying on a mix of trained volunteer helpers and professional support to provide a range of services to all those affected by adoption. We rely on membership and donations from individuals, business and government to achieve our objectives and to help us provide ongoing services to our members and the community at large.

We are grateful for one-off or regular tax-deductible donations and can assist you to make a bequest in your Will. A bequest is a very real way to make a positive difference. A donation or bequest to Jigsaw Qld can help us in all areas including to influence government policies for better legislation and to educate future leaders about adoption-related issues. Find out more at the membership and bequests tabs at www.jigsawqueensland.com or call us on 07) 3358 6666.



ADOPTION NEWS

Inter-country Adoption and Passports.

A recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald highlights recent changes to Department of Immigration protocols, denying some adopted people access to an Australian passport.

It explains the plight of Teresa Mullan, who could not get her Australian passport renewed despite being adopted in Queensland. Teresa was born during the period of forced adoption in Australia when numerous single mothers were forced to reside in unwed mother's homes interstate or across the Tasman.

Teresa's mother was born in Australia, but lived in an unwed mother's home in New Zealand at the time of Teresa's birth in 1963. When Teresa's mother returned to Queensland, she was forcibly adopted to Queensland parents.

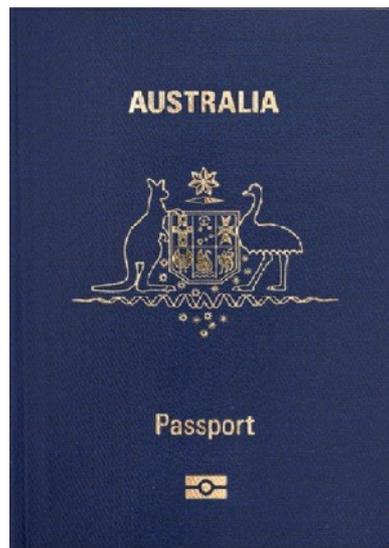
Despite having an adopted person's birth certificate issued by Queensland BDM, Teresa found that she could not renew her Australian passport as her birth certificate was not sufficient proof of Australian citizenship.

Teresa has been residing in Australia since her adoption 52 years ago, has held an Australian passport previously and has worked for at least 3 Australian government departments.

These changes to departmental rules may affect many adopted people who were born overseas. During the period of forced adoption, many Australian and New Zealand women moved between countries to have their children.

It is also an issue for inter-country adoptees from other parts of the world.

If you were born overseas, adopted in Australia and are having difficulties in obtaining or renewing your passport please contact the Inter-country Adoption Australia hotline on 1800 197 760 or International Social Service on 1300 657 843.



Jigsaw Queensland meets with VARTA

Jigsaw Queensland staff members recently met with the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) to discuss recent developments in supporting people conceived through donor conception and surrogacy.

Jigsaw Queensland's research in 2015 indicated many similar issues between donor conceived people and adopted people who struggle with the search for identity, access to information, grief and loss.

Many people are not told they are donor conceived and this can come as a huge shock. Legislation introduced in August 2015 in Victoria gives donor conceived

people increased access to identifying information.

VARTA supports people affected by donor conception. Many donor conceived people don't know about their conception and discover this information as adults. The search for their identity may be significantly hampered by donor records being destroyed, limited records being available and difficulties discussing the matter with their parents.

Donors may have donated to multiple families (legislation in Victoria has recently restricted this to ten). This presents challenges to reunion as sperm donors may produce quite a number of children that may want future contact. VARTA assists with counselling and reunion around these sensitive issues.

Donor conception and reunion can learn a lot from adoption and reunion, however there are some unique differences. The number of family members involved creates some significant complexities.

However the use of reproductive technologies are becoming more common and without appropriate legislation in place in Queensland, a significant number of people will be affected by issues of identity, belonging and loss. Jigsaw Queensland is hoping to host a workshop exploring the needs of donor conceived people.



Jigsaw celebrates 40 years of volunteers

Acknowledging the commitment of volunteers for National Volunteer Week (held 9 to 15 May) was even more significant than ever in Jigsaw Queensland's 40th anniversary year.

President of Jigsaw, Dr Trevor Jordan said volunteers are the backbone of the organisation and are responsible for its very existence.

'Jigsaw was formed by volunteers 40 years ago to host contact registers for members of the adoption triad. At the time people didn't have the same access to identifying information that they do now,' Dr Jordan said.

'Forty years ago contact registers were the only way adoptees and their original families could identify and contact each other. Without Jigsaw volunteers to facilitate that process, there wouldn't have been any hope for these people.'

'Because of the advocacy work of these volunteers and others in the community to change the legislation in Queensland, we now have far greater access to identifying information. Jigsaw has gone on to support more than 50,000 people with their search and reunion and exploring their adoption experience.'

Jigsaw volunteer, Heather H is this year celebrating her 16th year of voluntary service with the organisation and credits her desire to become involved to the benefits she herself derived from Jigsaw.

'I joined Jigsaw in 1999 as a mother who had reconnected with

her first born, who was seeking support,' Heather said.

'Initially, I attended the open support group meetings and then the mother's group, before putting my hand up to volunteer in 2000.'

'I was so scared when I first began, but a friend advised me not to do it for Jigsaw, but for myself. That changed my perspective and I began to see the experience in a different light.'

'I completed a helping skills course and began the process of learning how to support people. It was then that I started to gain as



much from my volunteer experience as I was giving.'

In addition to answering phones and performing administrative tasks, Heather also facilitates the mother's support group.

'Volunteering for Jigsaw has helped me enormously with my own personal journey,' she said.

'Listening to the experiences of others and what they have done or how they deal with things—I am able to see what may or may not work for me also.'

'When I come to work, everyone I speak with has been touched by and/or understands the adoption experience and there is a comforting shorthand that comes with that, that doesn't exist outside these doors.'

'I would recommend volunteering with Jigsaw to anyone affected by adoption, but I do recommend they don't do it at the beginning of their own journey.'

'Volunteering after you have already done some exploring yourself, will take you further down the track of your own healing.'

'I've thoroughly enjoyed my 16 years as a volunteer. I don't do it for any form of glory or a title; I do it because it feels wonderful to help someone who is in need and support him or her as they turn a negative into a positive. It is very fulfilling.'

Dr Jordan said it is volunteers like Heather who started Jigsaw and have allowed it to continue to provide the high-level of support and assistance it has become renowned for in the post-adoption community.

In 2017 we will be undertaking a number of events to increase awareness of Jigsaw's services and further support our members. We'd love our members to help us turn these plans into a reality and invite anyone interested in volunteering for Jigsaw in any capacity to contact us on (07) 3358 6666 or support@jigsawqld.org.au.

"Service to a just cause rewards the worker with more real happiness and satisfaction than any other venture of life."
- Carrie Chapman Catt

Adoption Search and Reunion - A ticking clock

President of Jigsaw Queensland is shining a light on the ticking clock for people contemplating adoption reunion.

'Time is no longer on the side of many Australian adoptees, mothers, fathers and siblings who are considering reunions,' Dr Jordan said

'Relinquishing parents of the 1940s and 1950s are now in their 80s and 90s and their adopted children are in their 60s and 70s and every passing moment brings with it the prospective of an opportunity lost.

'At Jigsaw Queensland, we still have people aged in their 60s and 70s phoning us because they've only recently discovered they're adopted after one of their adoptive parents has died.

'In addition to seeing information and support as they navigate the complex emotions that surround late discovery adoption, these adoptees have the added burden of sand slipping through the hourglass at a quickening pace while they consider their options.

'Many of these people were adopted when adoption was at its peak, between the 1950s and 1970s and they and their biological families are now running out of time to reconnect.

Dr Jordan said the message Jigsaw wants to get out to people is that if you want to search and you want to be supported through this process; help is available now.

'We know from recent discussion papers that the number of

enquiries for identifying information is decreasing over recent years and this could be because of the ageing cohort. In 2009-10, 711 adults applied for identifying information in Queensland and this figure decreased to 393 by 2013-14.

'The passing of time isn't always a negative thing as it also brings with it the inevitable life changes that pave the way for people to reconsider past decisions.

'As people age spouses may pass away or people come to the

place—to host voluntary contact registers so that people could be brought together,' he said.

'But now, through our and the advocacy of others in the post-adoption community, that legislation was changed and people have access to more information than ever before.

'The Queensland government now supports people getting their information and this greatly increases the potential for a successful search and/or reunion.

'Another misconception that stops people from seeking identifying information is a fear of the application process itself. We want people to know that you don't have to do it on your own; help is only a 1800 number away.'



realisation that the end of their lives is growing closer and this can lead to a shift in perspective or a strong desire to tidy up loose ends or search for catharsis.'

Dr Jordan said there were many people who are unaware that legislation has changed in Queensland since the last time they explored searching for their families.

"The message Jigsaw wants to get out to people is that if you want to search and you want to be supported through this process; help is available now."

'Initially in Queensland you couldn't get any identifying information, which is why Jigsaw came into existence in the first

"Help is only a 1800 number away."

People often worry about contacting a relative, asking himself or herself if they will like them, but I would say most of the time the people they connect with are very similar as they share genetics. Most of these insecurities slip away very quickly when people allow things to happen naturally and at the pace of the slowest person.

'The only thing certain in this life is that nothing is for certain and as pages on the calendar fall away, this uncertainty only grows.

I urge anyone who would like to talk through their options, explore their adoption story or possibly reunite with relatives to contact us, before it is too late.'