

Jigsaw  
Queensland  
Inc.

2016

Support Connect Inform Advocate

Annual  
Report



# Annual Report 2015-2016

## Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

### President's report

Jigsaw Queensland has been assisting Queenslanders affected by adoption now for over 40 years. In April 1975 a group of like-minded individuals from the various Australian states and New Zealand met in Sydney to inaugurate 'Jigsaw International'. The negative effects of the closed system of adoption, particularly its legacy of grief and loss, loss of identity, and the disruptive consequences of family secrets were becoming more widely known. For some time, mothers, adoptees and adoptive parents had identified the need for changes to adoption laws so that the members of original families could contact each other. Jigsaw International was short-lived. Jigsaw groups in each state went their own way, partly because adoption was a state-based practice and policies varied from state to state. Each Jigsaw group relied on the volunteer efforts of a committed few, and it was hard to maintain each group even as recognition and support for the concept of family reunions was slowly growing from the community.

How times have changed! We now have had both state and federal apologies for past forced adoption practices and there is a greater recognition in the community of the emotional impacts of adoption on all those involved. Most of the Jigsaw groups have gone by the way, except in WA and Queensland, and even we are not formally related any more. Nevertheless, here in Queensland Jigsaw still has high brand recognition with respect to adoption, and in particular with helping people with their search and reunion.

In the early days the focus was on establishing and maintaining voluntary contact registers. The governments of the day eventually offered the same, but there were limitations

to this approach. Jigsaw continued to lobby for open records and the rights of individuals affected by adoption to access them. This long process of engagement culminated in the Adoption Act 2009, and this year the government consulted with the community to appropriately that Act. It is gratifying to report that that legislation has been amended and penalties provisions have been removed with respect to breaches of contact statements. The Act itself is also more forthright in facilitating the provision of information about birth fathers.

As ever, Jigsaw relies heavily on a core of committed volunteers, but thanks to recent federal funding for the Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS), we now also employ professional staff to assist our clients and members from 9-5 Monday to Friday.

Thanks to this increased availability, our support groups are thriving and our reach via social media is increasing. This year Jo Sparrow has also helped with PR for FASS and Jigsaw. An interview Jo arranged for Trevor on Drive Time on ABC Radio on the Sunshine Coast, led to invitation to be on the Conversation Hour with Richard Fidler. This gained us significant national exposure just prior to the commencement of Long Lost Family on Channel Ten. Committee member Lois Buch also appeared on SBS's Insight Program. Many viewers and listeners called us on the toll free FASS number for information and support.

Our website is a valuable resource which is used national-wide and overseas. In 2015 it was revamped, allowing us to do more in-house updates and integration with our PR and other social media, including a mobile version. Again, Jo Sparrow's wordsmith skills were much appreciated.

We held a Post Adoption Helping Skills training course in August, which was attended by eight trainee volunteers and two new FASS

team members. Susan Kelly facilitated the session this year. Lois, Jan and Jo H. have already come on board as co-facilitators of support groups. We'd love to see some more mothers apply to attend the next course! It is a great help to the existing groups facilitators.

Following an inspired idea by Lois Buch, the Brisbane City Council granted us a Story Bridge light up for a night in July—for free! (This involved clarifying our status as a charity here in Queensland (we are already recognised as such at the national level and the ATO). Jo Sparrow followed up by organising a bridge walk/climb for intrepid individuals and families to coincide and the crew set off at dusk for a wonderful experience of Brisbane in the winter twilight. Many thanks to Heather and the team for organising food for the day, including birthday cake, and to Susan and volunteers for helping with the barbecue and salads, and Collette and Heather for expressing our appreciation to all our members and supporters on the day..

Jigsaw Queensland continued to work closely other Queensland stakeholders. We meet regularly in a post-adoption services providers' quarterly roundtable (with Post-Adoption Support Queensland, Salvation Army, Link-UP, Lotus Place and Adoption Services Queensland). We also work with other stakeholder groups, such as ALAS, Origins and the Association for Adoptees to provide feedback to government on adoption policy and practice and to commemorate state and federal Apology events. At the national level Susan and I attended the Australian Post Adoption Service Providers meeting, which was held in Auckland in January, coinciding with and international adopt conference. Trevor also gave a presentation at the Redefining Families conference about learning the lessons of the past in adoption, donor insemination and surrogacy.

### **Forced Adoption Support Service**

Without boring you with lots of statistics, you might be interested to know around 200 clients access the FASS service every six

months. There are: twice as many adoptees as mothers; twice as many females as males; twice as many phone calls to emails. Most FASS clients are between 45 and 65 years of age. Helping with search inquiries has always been a part of our service agreement with the Department of Social Services, but we have expanding this to include intermediary services for those clients who want it.

In July, Chris Mundy and Peta joined the FASS team. Later in the year Andrea Lynch came on board to assist, particularly with our work with stakeholders in the FASS small grant program. Through this program, FASS has been able to fund a National Apology for Forced Adoption 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary event, a Mothers' Retreat on Stradbroke Island, and Printmaking workshops for adoptees with Pat Zuber. Chris also helped to organise a 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary event for the Queensland Apology for Forced Adoptions in Roma St Parklands in November.

In the past year, Susan has provided training in post-adoption work and search skills to the FASS teams around Australia, both in person and by teleconference. Trevor participated in the inaugural Webinar for the Australian Psychological Society's Forced Adoption online training and has collaborated in conference presentations to professionals, including social workers and mental health workers.

It was all in all a very a busy year. Peta Jamson has moved from part-time position to occasional casual work with us. Since the close of the financial year, Susan Kelly has also decided to move on. Susan has been instrumental in setting up the Forced Adoption Support Service within Jigsaw Queensland, bringing her energy, enthusiasm and experience to laying the foundations for our team. Her energy and commitment to starting the service were appreciated. We wish her well. Emma Keune has also moved on. Her enthusiasm was also appreciated. Andrea Lynch is now the Acting Team leader for FASS.

## **Governance**

Once again, we have relied heavily on the dedicated work of our volunteers and committee members to keep us going week in and week out. I would like to offer a heart-felt thank you to our Management Committee team, many of who joined us for the first time this year. Collette and Heather have maintained the sense of history in all we do and Lois, Donna and Jan have brought enthusiasm, wisdom and common sense to our deliberations. Robert's financial skills have been invaluable and during the year he agreed to take on the role of Treasurer. Governance of not-for-profit organisation, even a small one such as Jigsaw Queensland, is a serious matter. We have been assisted greatly in this by the many publications and information provided by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission. But as I write each year, our overall purpose remains to assist people to establish and maintain mutually satisfying family relationships. To our great satisfaction, many of us have also forged new friendships that sustain us in our adoption journeys.

Trevor Jordan  
President

## **Support group reports**

### **Mothers' Group**

The Mothers' support meeting entered its 19<sup>th</sup> year in August 2015 and continues to function along the lines of the previous years. It now has been 3 years since we started the bi-monthly meetings and it still is working very well for all mothers that attend. There is a regular core of mothers up to 7 sometimes 9. This year we have 4 new mums 2 travelling at least 1 ½ hours to attend the meeting. Again I hear them say over and over how great it is to have a safe place where they can talk freely and not be judged.

The Mothers retreat was held in March this year at Stradbroke Island. 7 of the mothers who attend the retreat are the mums from our mothers group. I was so proud of the mums, because I could see how far they had come in their personal journeys.

Also, a big thank you to Jenny C for taking the meeting when I have been away.

Kind regards.  
Heather

### **Open Group**

First, a special thank you to Trevor Jordan, Jan Wood and Lois Buch, who have regularly shared the role of facilitation with me over the past year. The format of bi-monthly meetings on a Saturday afternoon continues to gain support and our numbers have remained stable with an upward trend more recent times.

There is little doubt of the value of offering an open meeting for anyone affected by adoption and consistent feedback confirms the personal benefit of listening to all sides of the adoption triangle. I have observed great generosity in individual sharing of stories and a confidence in asking somewhat difficult questions between group attendees. With respect for each other's perspective, groups have been able to explore the deeper emotional aspects of how adoption has impacted their lives.

The Open Group has had regular numbers of 10 to 15 with signs of staying around the higher end. This past year it has been common to find equal numbers of adoptees and mothers in the room and especially insightful to welcome a birth father who has attended regularly.

From my own experience of facilitating for over a decade, it is almost impossible to adequately thank the participants of this group. They willingly contribute and offer genuine compassion to each other and throughout the past year and I look forward to welcoming our regular and new participants into 2017.

Collette Glazebrook

### **Adoptee Group**

Meetings were held bi-monthly (January, March, May, July, September & November) on the second Saturday, 1.30-3.30pm.

Attendance was very good, with client numbers ranging from 6 to 12. Clients were a constant mix of new and familiar faces, with most folks attending at least 2 meetings, many attending 3 or 4.

Clients are in a variety of stages in their 'paper' and 'emotional' journeys. Some have reunited with members of their birth family, some are still yet to make contact. All have common experiences of the lifelong adoption influence.

Feedback from clients has been overwhelmingly positive – several have introduced new members to the group/Jigsaw. Many clients have attended their first meeting as a direct result of phoning FASS for support.

Meetings have been facilitated in most instances by Trevor & Melissa, with able assistance from Lois and Jo (H) and Jo (S).

Thanks to all involved – clients and facilitators – for their continued support, wisdom and commitment.

Melissa Neilsen

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



**Queensland  
Government**



**Forced Adoption  
Support Services**

Funded by the Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

**Jigsaw**   
Queensland