

BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD, INC.

Jigsaw Newsletter Spring 2015

Jigsaw
Queensland
Inc.

Understanding,
Support & Edu-
cation for all
those with
adoption in
their lives



New FASS service takes off

Jigsaw Queensland's new Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS), funded by the Australian Government, has taken off since our last issue. Two more staff members have joined the team. Peta Jamson and Chris Mundy are our two new Information, Support and Referral Workers for the new 5 day per week service to support those affected by adoption around the state.

Client interest in the new service has been encouraging. 68 people sought support from the new service during the first months of operation, comprising of 54 females and 14 males. 41 were adopted people, predominately looking for assistance with accessing information and searching for relatives. Enquiries occurred from a wide number of age groups, from mid 20's to mid 90's. Some clients have specialized needs and Jigsaw

Queensland go out of their way to make sure all people affected by adoption are fully supported. Referrals have been made to not only to local providers, but also International Social Services to trace international family members and Local Community Centres to give local practical support.

"It's also fantastic to see Jigsaw clients from 20 years ago re-connecting with our service", says Team Leader Susan Kelly. "We know from our experience how much people's circumstances change over time".

FASS has quickly developed a reputation for supporting our clients with search for relatives. FASS is also increasingly providing assistance with outreach to birth relatives. We do this by supporting people who choose to manage their

own approach or by outreaching on their behalf. The FASS team have helped facilitate a number of reunions and feel privileged to share this journey with our clients.

Jigsaw was also recently invited to deliver training to the other FASS services around Australia at a forced adoption "round table" meeting in Sydney. Jigsaw's FASS team played a key role in helping other FASS services explore the key issues of forced adoption for clients.

**Forced Adoption Support
Service: 1800 21 03 13 or
admin@jigsawqld.org.au**



Forced Adoption
Support Services

A core lifelong issue: Mastery and Control

By Chris Mundy

We all like to have a say in how we live our lives. But sometimes being the master and controller of our own destiny is a challenge, especially for those affected by adoption. This affects how we develop as human beings and how we interact with the world around us. It changes how we approach self-control and 'self-actualisation'.

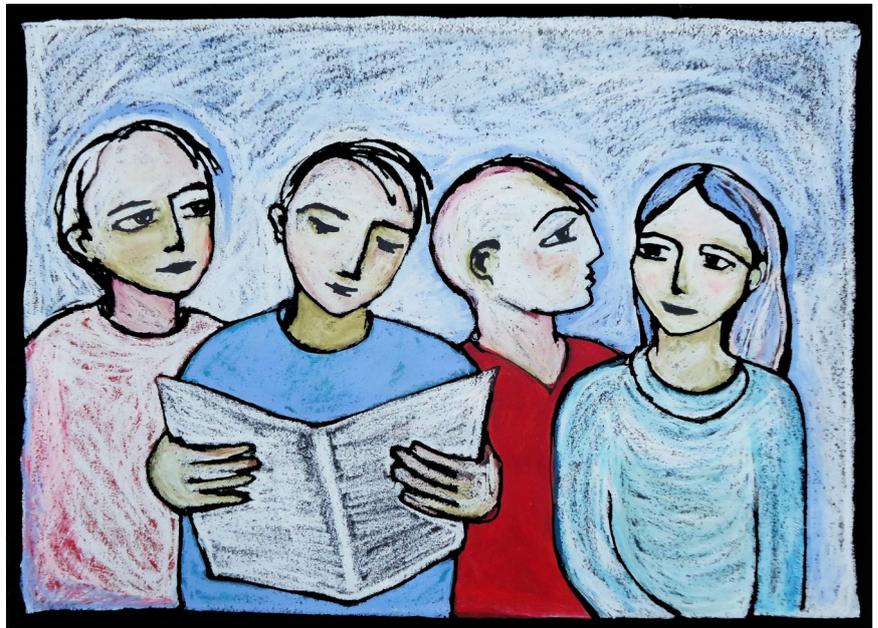
'Self-Actualisation' was a theory first proposed by American psychologist Abraham Maslow. The theory proposed that each person had an ideal self they could become if they used all of their talents, skills and determination. Losing a sense of mastery and control in your life can disrupt people on their path to full self-actualisation.

Parent's ideal for their life wasn't to lose a baby to adoption. Becoming accidentally pregnant and losing their child isn't high on people's list of dreams and aspirations. Additionally, losing control over what happens to the baby is a huge disruption to a mother's control over her life leading to feelings of powerlessness that can become a theme for life. Fathers who had little input into the adoption may also experience issues of mastery over their own lives.

Adoptees have no control over their removal from their family of origin,



*The courage to be who we are
We are not helpless and powerless.
We can take control of our lives and
steer them towards a great destiny.*



nor placement in their family of destination. This can be disruptive to development as adoptees learn from early in life that they have little control over themselves or their destiny. As teenagers there may be conflict with their adoptive parents over control issues and they may participate in high risk taking behaviour (showing a lack of self control)

Adopted parents also lose a lot of mastery and control in adoption. Couples don't dream of becoming infertile and they feel helpless when they are unable to have children. This can lead to difficulty in controlling their own parenting, by becoming permissive or over protective.

Losing mastery and control can lead all in the adoption triad to feel helpless, powerless and unmotivated.

There is another way! We can develop control over our lives

As with all of the core issues in adoption, being aware of the issue is the first step in making progress. Identifying our feelings of helplessness and the reasons why they exist can help us to analyse the thoughts we have about who we are. Once we are aware we can start to act. Becoming self actualized requires

At Jigsaw we draw on Deborah Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan's '7 Core Issues in Adoption' in all our work. (See our website for details)

We examine one issue more closely in each newsletter

In this newsletter we look at the tough core issue of Mastery and Control

courage to be ourselves and explore new things. It means leaving our comfort zones and going beyond our limitations to discover a brand new world. It also means being realistic about ourselves, others and the world around us.

Having a goal and developing a sense of meaning in life is also an important step for gaining mastery and control over our lives. Some may find the exploration of spirituality helpful in this regard. Creativity is a useful tool for obtaining this objective—whether it be creative thought or creative action through art and music.

What does an apology mean?

By Trevor Jordan

On the occasion of the launch of the National Archives exhibition, 'Without Consent: Past Forced Adoption, I was invited to be on a panel to discuss the question 'What does an apology mean?'

The term 'forced adoption' covers a range of policies and practices from direct physical and psychological coercion to unrelenting social and familial pressures that undermined the ability of mothers to give truly informed consent by any acceptable meaning of the term today. That is why the National Apology delivered by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard was a significant recognition that such policies and practices are no longer acceptable and those who suffered them deserved not only an apology but further practical steps towards righting these past wrongs.

In her writings on reparative justice, the ethicist Margaret Urban Walker argues that, 'A genuinely offered apology accepts the indignation, hostility or alienation of the wronged party and their demands for satisfaction for injury and suffering. This includes a rightful claim for redress, that is, for reparative action meaningful in the eyes of the offended and the community.'

In the context of the National Apology this has meant further validation of those impacted by past forced adoption practices through the incorporation of the history of forced adoption into the national memory through the Forced Adoption History Project and its website public exhibitions, which record permanently for the nation the experiences of those impacted by past forced adoption. These are also valuable educational resources, useful to schools and universities to help highlight the past and modify future practice.

The National Apology was further backed up by a commitment to provide direct services to those impacted by past forced adoption, both through an immediate injection of additional funds in the health care system to provide accessibility to psychological services and also a commitment to the national networks of Forced Adoption Support Services in each state and territory to further assist those impacted by past forced adoption.

These are well-intentioned and proportionate



responses to an apology. Nevertheless, these actions can only go so far to address the very particular and often diverse impacts that past adoption has had on individual lives – one size does not fit all.

There remains the vexed issue of whether restitution to victims should only be indirect, through the provision of services and benefits, or also direct, through monetary compensation to individuals. Such direct compensation has the benefit of encouraging self-determination, as individuals are given the means to address their own needs.

The problem is past adoption practice shattered relationships and diminished persons through experiences of loss, shame and guilt. Without a focus on helping individuals create and sustain mutually satisfying relationships, it is doubtful that money alone can be an effective mechanism of restitution. Currently, there is also no consistent national approach to addressing this issue for those who see it as important to them.



National
Apology for
Forced Adoptions



Adoptees overwhelmingly make up the majority of applications for past adoption history information, with over 2000 being lodged since the new legislation was implemented in 2010.

The Adoption Act 2009

Jigsaw is excited about the current review around the Queensland Adoption Legislation: The Adoption Act 2009. Since 2010 when the legislation was first implemented, thousands of people have applied for their information from Adoption Services at the Department of Communities:

Applicant	Number of applicants
Adopted person	2152
Adoptive father	11
Adoptive mother	20
Birth father	67
Birth mother	363
Other birth relative(s)	294
Other adoptive relative(s)	10
Child of adopted person	16
Unknown (not recorded in system)	30
Total	2963

Most of our readers would have already obtained your information and you may think your input into this review is not relevant. It is. We need to hear your feedback around your experiences with accessing information under the existing legislation and any concerns you may have had. By sharing your experiences you will be supporting mothers, fathers and adopted people in the future to have improved access to their own information. Jigsaw is going to approach this in a number of ways.

Have your say

We will be holding **two forums** on **Saturday 7th of November** to discuss relevant sections in the act.

The forum at 10:30pm will be discussing **contact statements** (previously known as vetoes). Under the present legislation, if a party to adoption has lodged a contact statement no other party is permitted to make contact if they informed of this statement. In some cases however, contact vetoes may have been lodged over 20 years ago during unique circumstances pertinent to that time only. Some parties may chose to revoke contact statements if given the opportunity and in other states vetoes are time limited.

The 1:30pm forum will be discussing the relevant sections in the act pertaining to the release of **identifying information around fathers**. Historically the access to information about fathers has been problematic due to legislation restrictions however new interpretations of these procedures have recently opened the doors to accessing names where available. Changes to the legislation will ensure that current interpretation will become concrete for accessing information in the future.

Jigsaw has been around for 38 years and we appreciate that many of our former members may not be able to attend our forums. In view of this we will be creating an online survey where people can give their feedback and contribute to discussions around this legislation.

For those of you who are wanting to write your own submissions, please don't hesitate to contact the Jigsaw team if you have any questions or require assistance with this process. Details about how to lodge a submission or give direct feedback can be found on the Department of Communities website.

Call Jigsaw on 07 3358 6666 for any further information.

Motivations for searching

Dr Nola Passmore, a leading expert on post adoption from the University of Southern Queensland, has found that adoptees who search to resolve personal issues are likely to face the most challenges in personal wellbeing. Motivations for searching could be grouped into 3 categories: Searching for background information, searching to reconnect with birth relatives and searching to resolve personal issues (e.g., to resolve problems, find a sense of belonging, gain peace, or find who they resemble). Searching to resolve personal issues was associated with higher depression and emotional issues and negative views of adoptive parents. Often these issues are not resolved after the reunion process.

Support is available from Jigsaw Queensland for people affected by adoption experiencing personal issues. Adoption can have lifelong effects on individuals that are often not resolved during the course of reunion.

Donor Offspring

by Jessica Watson

Hi! My name is Jessica, and I am a fourth year social work student from Griffith University. I am currently undertaking my final placement with Jigsaw QLD, which consists of 18 weeks of hands on experience before I go out into the working world. My role at Jigsaw for those 18 weeks is to complete a research project on the issue of donor conception.

What does donor conception have to do with an adoption? **Donor-conceived adults are advocating for the right to their genetic identity, with current arguments for secrecy similar to those used by closed adoption supporters in the 90's.**

Donor-conception refers to the use of donated gametes (sperm and/or eggs) for the purpose of having a child. In the majority of cases the child will be genetically related to one parent, although in the use of donated embryos the child will have no genetic connection to either parent. In all cases, the mother will physically carry and give birth to the child.

Historically there has been a strong element of secrecy surrounding donor conception, with the use of anonymous donors being not just preferred, but required. Current estimates suggest that there are at least 60,000 donor conceived people living in Australia, with the vast majority unaware of the truth of their conception. The practice of utilising anonymous gamete donors was banned in IVF clinics Australia wide in 2005 through the NHMRC guidelines. The majority of this research focuses on donor-conceived adults whom were conceived anonymously prior to 2005.

One of the most prominent issues that has been raised by donor-conceived people is the lack of access to their genetic identity. Before regulation, many older IVF clinics had deliberately destroyed medical records to ensure that the donors identi-

ty remains anonymous. This means that a large number of people now have no viable avenue for seeking their genetic identity.

Up until quite recently there was a significant lack of information regarding donor-conception and in its absence many donor-conceived people turned to adoption literature. In fact, prior to the now recognised term 'donor-conceived', many referred to themselves as 'donor-inseminated adoptees' or as 'half-adopted'. A quote from one donor-conceived individual states "I started reading a lot of adoption literature and meeting a lot of adoptees and they really understood and validated my concerns and they validated my feelings about donor conception". This is not to suggest that the experiences of adoptees and donor-conceived people are the same, just that there are recognised similarities.

Other studied similarities between the experiences of donor-conceived individuals and adoptees include experiencing a sense of loss resulting from disconnection to their biological family, genealogical bewilderment, incomplete/absent medical history and the impacts of late discovery. Further is the question of unknown siblings, which in some rare cases of donor-conception could be as high as 50. Another potential similarity is the expectation to 'be grateful that your parents went through so much effort to have you', which can add guilt to the very real feelings of loss. There are of course recognised differences. Adoptees may feel a sense of abandonment that is not present in the donor experience. Donor-conceived people may focus on the 'deliberately created to fulfil adult needs' aspect of their experience, which is still medically sanctioned as a way to overcome infertility today.

The NT, ACT, QLD and TAS still have no legislation regarding access to donor information, and purely rely on the NHMRC guidelines. The



NHMRC guidelines are complicated in that they are not legally enforced, but clinics are still required to adhere to them. These jurisdictions also have no central registers for matching donors and donor-conceived people. In VIC, NSW, WA and SA legislation exists but varies greatly by state. The right to information is based on factors such as the year of birth, the year of donation, donor consent and the nature of information collected. Generally, there is no retrospective access to donor information. This leaves the vast majority of donor-conceived adults with no right to access their own genetic information.

Support and information for people affected by donor conception can be obtained from Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) or Jigsaw Queensland.

“How do I know if I’m a forced adoption?”

By Chris Mundy

When I applied for my adoption information in 2011, I’d never heard of the term ‘forced adoption’. As my application progressed over a 6 month period I waited patiently for my information to arrive. The letter I received from my mother detailed what life was like for her in an unwed mother’s home and her unwillingness to give me up for adoption in the hospital. As time went on I heard further stories from her about the many levels of society that coerced her into finally signing the adoption papers.

“Consents obtained from unmarried mothers who were not fully informed of alternatives to adoption, were unaware of the consequences of adoption, or were influenced and manipulated by authority figures including their parents, doctors, social workers and church figures, cannot be said to be informed consent”

National Forced Adoption Exhibition, 2012

Adoptees applying for information and instigating a search for their original parents may not know about forced adoption, just as I had not known. Adoption was so prevalent up to the 1980’s, the common narrative was that it was a fairly ‘normal’ process and that we were lovingly ‘given’ away. The truth was a different story and this can be confronting for adopted people.

Since the findings of the senate inquiry, what we do know about adoptions until the 1980’s is that many were forced. Women had very few options. Welfare systems for single parents weren’t introduced until the late 1970’s and the inquiry confirms that past adoption practices and policies were unethical, immoral and dehumanizing. While many mothers and fathers that lost their children are aware of forced adoption, adoptees are much less aware.

Adoptees may contact numerous adoption support agencies and Adoption Services Queensland purely looking for medical or identifying information with no idea they were part of a forced adoption until contact is made with their parents and the circumstances of their birth are revealed.

This makes it challenging when an adoptee approaches a forced adoption service, unsure of whether they fit the category of a ‘forced adoption’. Jigsaw Queensland’s position is that because of the prevalence of forced adoption until the early 1980’s, it is safe to assume that most adoptions that occurred during this period were forced until proven otherwise. Making this assumption prepares the adoptee for contact with their parent and some of the complex issues that may arise during initial contact due to forced adoption. It also allows the adoptee to challenge some of their conceptions about their adoption and consider the societal, legislative and practice issues prevalent at the time of their birth so they may have a more fuller understanding of the context of separation from their parents. It also assists in the understanding and interpretation of adoption information and documents from the department.

Those affected by adoption can contact our new Forced Adoption Support Service on 1800 21 03 13.

Commemorative plaque and tea rose—St John’s Cathedral Brisbane. Accompanied the Anglican church’s Diocesan apology for forced adoption.

A Morning Tea to mark the anniversary of the Queensland State Apology will be held by Jigsaw Qld on Friday 27th November 2015.



New Jigsaw Qld Staff Our new Intake, Support and Referral Workers

Peta Jamson has been part of the team at Jigsaw since July this year. She has a background in counselling and spent time at Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) before taking on the role at Jigsaw. She has an emphasis on empathy and has good understanding towards people who are affected by adoption. It has been her long term goal to work in this area. She is a mother who has lost a child to adoption and draws on her personal adoption experience. She can relate to how complex negotiating the adoption journey and managing the post contact relationship can be.—It can be a rollercoaster of feelings and emotions which we here at Jigsaw can support you through.

Chris Mundy is a forced adoption adoptee who has previous experience in a variety of community organisations, including events management for the Wesley Mission, 10 years of state high school Chaplaincy work with at-risk families and 5 years as a Community Development Worker for Encircle Ltd. He has particularly worked on numerous projects that increase volunteering, develop men's capabilities and assist vulnerable families. He holds a Degree in Ministry, a Graduate Diploma in Psychology and is currently working on a Masters in International and Community Development from Deakin University. He is married to wife Amanda and lives with step daughter Ella, daughter Charlotte and son Caleb.



Peta and Chris are part of our 5 day per week FASS service and are available to support people affected by adoption on the FASS hotline 1800 210 313.

Peer Support Volunteers Trained

9 of our new Peer Support volunteers attended the Helping Skills Course in August. The Helping Skills course was specifically designed by Jigsaw Team Leader Susan Kelly for peer support that specializes in adoption issues. The course explored the impacts of adoption over the lifespan and the triggers many people experience. Support group

management techniques were also discussed.

Electoral Roll Searches

The Australia Electoral Commission has confirmed it is now legal for those affected by adoption to access the electoral roll to search for relatives. The current electoral roll is available at any electoral office and can be used to search for names of relatives. No electronic device (such as camera or mobile phone) can be used at the terminals so it is advisable to bring a notebook and pen to write down any information you obtain. Performing your search using a middle name can greatly help narrow down the number of results displayed.



Upcoming workshops and support groups

Jigsaw recognises that there are two components to the adoption journey: the "Inner" Journey (feelings and emotions associated with the adoption journey) and the "Outer" Journey (accessing adoption information). Our support groups and workshops will be addressing both components in a confidential, safe and supportive environment.

Jigsaw's support groups have also experienced an increase in numbers over the past few months. Over 200 participants have attended support groups over the past year and it's exciting to see this number growing. 9 Jigsaw peer support volunteers were also trained in August at our Helping Skills Course.

Participation at the groups is free and the workshop schedule is designed so that if you wish to attend a scheduled JIGSAW support meeting in the afternoon you can do so.

14 November—Adoptee Support Group 1:30 to 3:30pm.

21 November— Birth Mother Group Meeting 1:30 to 3:30pm

12 December—Open Group Meeting 1:30 to 3:30pm.

Jigsaw provides professional and peer support. Information and support changes everything!

Late Discovery Workshop

Discover you are adopted later on in life can be challenging for adoptees, as they deal with shock and the feeling of being overwhelmed. Please join us at Jigsaw Queensland for this FREE workshop. This opportunity will provide you with a chance to meet with other adoptees and explore and discuss the impacts of late discovery.

14 November—Adoptees Late Discovery Workshop 10:30am to 12:30pm.

More details on our workshops will be available on upcoming flyers and our Facebook page. Spaces are limited so we encourage you to register your interest in one or all of the workshops early by emailing admin@jigsaw.org.au or calling (07) 3358 6666. RSVP for these workshops is essential.

Adoption at the Movies

Adoption is prevalent in popular culture and when it features in movies it can be used as a talking point with others, particularly children when explaining family situations. 'Adoption at the Movies' reviews various movies from an adoption perspective and is well worth checking out: <http://www.adoptionlcsw.com/>

Qld Legislation Review Hearing your voice

Don't forget our two forums on the **7th November 2015** as we gather feedback for the Adoption legislation review. **10:30am** will feature a chat about contact statements and the forum at **1:30pm** will focus on fathers and other family members. Please RSVP by 5/11/2015 on 3358 6666 or admin@jigsawqld.org.au.

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/>

Apology Anniversary Morning Tea

Join us on **27th November 2015** for a morning tea to mark the 2nd anniversary of the state apology for forced adoption practices. Further details will be posted on our Facebook page and other media closer to the occasion.

Qld Apology Survey

The 27th of November will mark the three year anniversary of the Queensland apology for past forced adoption policies and practices. As we near this date, many of us will be reflecting on what the apology meant to us at the time and how we feel about it now. Jigsaw would like to hear your reflections as we begin preparations to commemorate the event. Follow this link to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire about what the apology meant to you then and now

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YWV6S8>



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