

# Bits & Pieces

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## Welcome to Bits & Pieces Spring 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](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au). Enjoy!*

In this edition we talk about recent and upcoming episodes of the Adopt Perspective podcast, what is possible in the world of adoption advocacy, COVID-19 and Jigsaw Qld, Ten Doors Down book review and more.

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Children's and Community Safety  
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## Adopt Perspective podcast shines a light on adoption.

by Jo Sparrow

Jigsaw Qld's 2020 podcast project was originally envisioned as a tool to reach anyone unable to attend support groups, workshops and events in person. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, those numbers rose exponentially, making the podcast more important than originally conceived.

When the pandemic hit, we accelerated production and released our first episodes in April and have to-date released thirteen episodes - averaging one release every two weeks.

The push to move ahead quickly hasn't been without its challenges. Visions of face-to-face recordings transformed into Skype interviews recorded from different suburbs, states and even countries. But the challenge has proven that anything is possible.

So far, we have featured the stories of two mothers (Heather and Hilary) who were separated from their babies during the forced adoption era - one in North Queensland and one in Christchurch, New Zealand. Both have since reunited with their children.

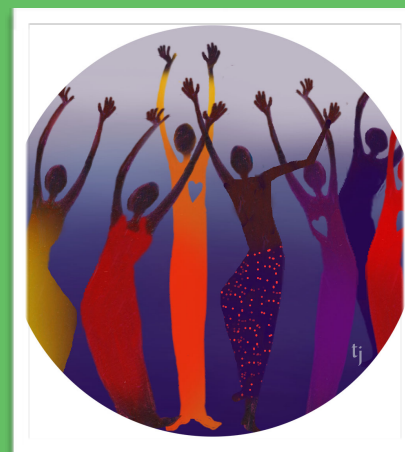


Jane and I discussed the Forced Adoption era and Rachel and Richard shared their story of father and daughter reunion using Jigsaw's intermediary service (which was further explained in a follow up episode).

## COVID SUPPORT GROUP UPDATE

Jigsaw Qld are following all Queensland Health restrictions and directives with regards to our support groups and face-to-face services. To get the latest information, keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.

We are planning to trial our Open Support Group as a Zoom session. You can register your interest for either a Thursday or Saturday group by emailing [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or phoning (07) 3358 6666.



Lois and I spoke about the impact of the recent deaths of our adoptive parents (again followed up with an episode on grief and loss).

Dr Sue Bond shared the story of her late discovery adoption and how writing has helped her understand it and Jane talked to Dr Helen Riley about her research findings on the late discovery experience. *(Dr Riley pictured below)*



I recently spoke to former family court Judge, Professor Nahum Mushin (picture below) who chaired the Forced Adoption Apology Reference Group. He talked about this experience and his thoughts on the future of adoption in Australia.



Jigsaw Qld's President, Dr Trevor Jordan discussed permanency versus adoption in response to the recent calls in the media to make adoption easier in Queensland.

On the eve of Father's Day, Jane interviewed Gary Coles about the experience of fathers who were separated from their babies by adoption.

Coming up, I talk to Barton Williams, an Australian author / actor now living in London, who was airlifted from war ravaged Saigon, Vietnam aged three, as part of Operation Baby Lift. He was then adopted by an Adelaide couple. Barton talks to us about his childhood and his efforts to connect with Vietnam and find his family.

We have a few more episodes up our sleeves to round out the year, including a Christmas special.

The feedback we have received has been wonderful and helps us in planning our 2021 season. Latest stats show that the majority of listeners are located across Australia, with a large number in regional Australia, where access to services can be more challenging. We also have listeners in the USA, UK, France, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Israel, Denmark, Finland, India, Vietnam, Spain and Singapore to name a few. It confirms what we already knew - that the impacts of adoption resonate around the globe and that we are all connected by the experience.

**Adopt Perspective** is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts and Deezer or can be listened to at [www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective). A new episode drops (approx) every fortnight.

## What is, is possible! by Dr Trevor Jordan

**Trevor is the President of Jigsaw Qld and a retired academic in the field of applied ethics.**

One of the things that can inspire activists in their long march through our social institutions is to know that the way things are now has not always been and that alternative social realities are possible. Sociologists would tell us that it is a tendency of ideology to claim that present

conditions are natural and the way they should be. At the other extreme are the revolutionary romantics who believe their fantasy world lies just around the corner. Somewhere between the despair of nothing ever changing and an ever-frustrated optimism lies a middle path of realistic and hopeful engagement with the powers that be.

In my experience, we are all capable of making a difference. Whether that difference will be helpful or harmful depends on whether we give due attention to means as well as ends, we focus on principles rather than positions and personalities, and we learn to live as well as we can even as we wait for changes to happen.

Many struggling around the world for their rights as people affected by adoption might look upon the current Australian scene with envy. For example, in Queensland, we have a right to access our identifying information, we can access an original birth certificate. Original parents and their sons and daughters can state a contact preference, which should be acknowledged by the other party, but no penalties are in place for breaching that request. The names of putative fathers held on adoption files are also given to adoptees, and if the relevant parties are deceased information can be requested by their children and grandchildren.

Naturally, all this can generate a lot of anxiety, so the state government funds post-adoption support services to help those affected by past and current adoption practices find their relatives and negotiate their new relationships; that is, if they want such help; it is not compulsory.

As a nation, Australians have confronted the realities of past adoption practices, acknowledging that those practices were in many cases done illegally and unethically, usually without the kind of fully informed consent that we expect today. Each Australian state

government and the Commonwealth parliament issued a formal apology for past forced adoption practices and the federal government allocated funds for professional education, direct service support and assistance to peer support groups.

Of course, this didn't all happen overnight and a lot of people have contributed over the years to achieving these changes. Our politicians are no more enlightened than those in other countries, and our bureaucrats are required to be just as bureaucratic as others. Of course, the journey is not yet complete. There are still to be addressed issues around discharging adoptions, providing redress for past wrongs and the future of adoption practice in providing permanency for children.

All these changes have been the work of many hands and, with some sense of satisfaction, I am glad to have played my small part. I was a product of the closed system of adoption, where official records were sealed forever. My adoptive mother took full advantage of that by not revealing my adoptive status. My adoptive father thought differently, and when my mother died, he gladly disclosed the secret. I have lived through successive adoption information regimes that have provided non-identifying and identifying information. I had a deeply personal desire for changes in policy that I combined with my professional interest in applied ethics in public and professional life. I was also able to make personal connections with activists in the USA and Europe.

What are some of the things I have learned over the years that may have helped contribute positively to these changes in adoption policy and practice here in Australia? I offer these as a personal reflection and in no particular order.

Offer solutions not just problems. Everyone has a gripe and those gripes don't always line up. Those who oppose your point of view have their gripes. Let policy makers know what you would

like to see happen and why. Provide them with simple talking points, backed up with information and evidence. If you sell the idea to them they can sell it to others.

Listen carefully for the problem as the policy-maker sees it. If you think their viewpoint is wrong, then counter it or neutralise it if you can. Show respect for the person when doing so. Being respectful towards others is particularly helpful in influencing the undecided middle.

It is important to let policy-makers know the emotional impact of their policy and practice, but don't overdo it. Your opponents can get teary too. Passion is important but it only gets you so far.

Support principles rather than positions. You can negotiate on the basis of agreed principles or shared values, but with positions you can only take sides.

Adoption affects a lot of people, but it is a minority issue, so sheer numbers will never carry the day and will not force a policy-maker's hand. Lasting adoption law reform will require bipartisan support.

Politicians can change their minds when they have personal encounters with someone affected by an issue who is similar to them. Diversity within the activist ranks can be used to build bipartisan support.

So, let a thousand flowers bloom. Work together, seek agreement, but don't disrupt the energy and commitment of existing groups by creating an artificial and co-optable single voice.

Try to be the reasonable person in the room. Listen with respect. Offer constructive ideas. Affirm the contributions of others, but also set clear boundaries.

Try to find out who has 'their fingers on the keyboard'; that is, who is actually doing the work on the policy issues, researching it and presenting it for discussion or approval. Give them as much information as possible, preferably in the form of evidence and reasoning.

Be wary of over-personalising the problem. Don't focus on one politician or political party. We all need our champions, so it is worthwhile cultivating positive relationships with decision-makers, but try to avoid putting all your eggs (expectations, etc.) in one basket. In my experience, sometimes positive policy outcomes can be delivered by politicians you otherwise despise--and vica versa. Sometimes your political hero on other issues can drag the chain on adoption reform. Try to get bi-lateral support.

On an issue that will not bring in many votes, politicians in power are looking to associate themselves with good news stories; politicians out of power are wanting bad news stories. Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

## A review of *Ten Doors Down* by Robert Tickner

*The following review was written by Mark Young. Mark is a member of Jigsaw Queensland and worked as a policy advisor for the Uniting Church Queensland Synod from 1988 to 2000 where he learnt from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and scholars about the religious roots of reconciliation. He also observed the dramatic reforms in Queensland politics during this period, especially changes in state adoption legislation which prompted his mother to disclose her past experiences to her three sons.*

(*Ten Doors Down* by Scribe Publications)

This is a warm and fascinating memoir from a former Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

## 2020 SUBMISSION TO CHILD PROTECTION & OTHER AMENDMENTS BILL

Jigsaw Qld recently made a submission to the Queensland Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, Child Protection & Other Amendments Bill 2020.

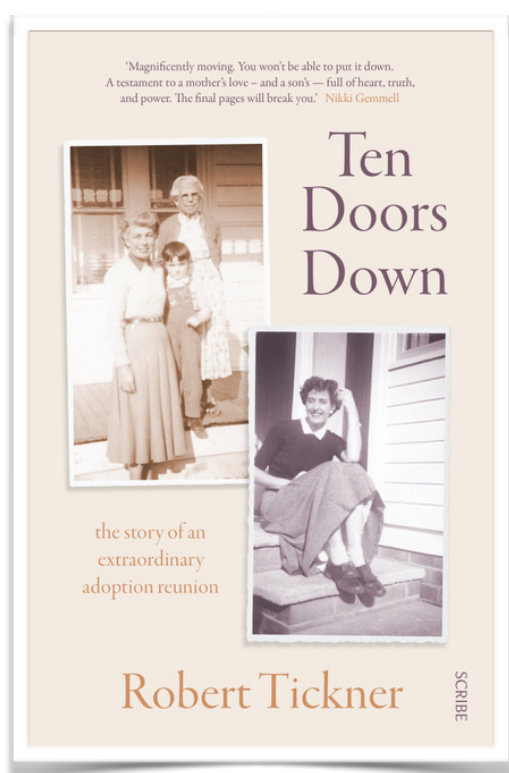
To read the full submission, please visit our website at: <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/2020-submission-to-child-protection>

Submission to

Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
Child Protection and Other Amendments Bill 2020

By

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Islander Affairs (1990 to 1996). Robert had a happy upbringing in regional New South Wales with his adopted parents, but wanted to find his Genesis story (by reconnecting with his mother) after starting a family of his own.

He then traces the whereabouts of his father and extended family, all with the careful assistance of a wise public servant from the adoption services department in NSW.

There is a lot of empathy and compassion and raw emotion in Robert's descriptions of his hopes, struggles and occasional setbacks (both personal and political) in the 1980s and 1990s.

He is clearly an embodiment of heart politics which transcends tribalism; and, following his successful parliamentary career, went on to lead the Red Cross in Australia from 2005 to 2015.

The vivid recollections of meeting his mother, and finding out some heartbreaking coincidences of how close they had unknowingly come in physical proximity to one another will no doubt affect the reader as much as it did me (tears, page-turning, anticipation).

I come as a reviewer of this memoir identifying with Robert's siblings who didn't know they had a missing family member. We met our older sister after the death of our mother seven years ago (sadly they never met, but we enjoy seeing our mother's echo in our 'new' sister's physical and emotional world). So I really appreciated and benefited from hearing Robert's search for identity and reunion from the adopted person's point of view.

There is a lot of love in this book, and Robert clearly wrestles with sincere loyalties to all of his scattered family members as well as his coalescing political allies and heroes. Having the adoption drama play out alongside his significant political achievements make this book a great addition to Australia's biographical tradition.

Robert Tickner's personal experience clearly made him a more sensitive politician - especially

in responding to the Stolen Generations, Native Title, and the pivotal reconciliation milestones of the 1990s. I hope he is a subscriber of the Jigsaw newsletter and can read this reader's appreciation of his story!

## Sometimes it just takes one person

*by David Cullen (David is now a successful businessman and is married with four daughters. This story has been abridged to fit the newsletter. Read the full story here: <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/tester>*

I was adopted at birth in 1971, the biggest year on record for adoptions. As my mother was only 13 when she fell pregnant with me and my Father was 16, I was adopted out...as it was in those days.

I was adopted to a panel beater and his wife. I remember one day walking home from the bus after school and seeing the for-sale sign on the house and removal van in the driveway and I started to cry wondering what was going on. My adoptive father had moved out leaving me and two younger children with my adoptive mum. He was an alcoholic and lived for the drink. We moved around and I went to numerous different schools. When I turned six the courts gave me back to my adoptive father along with the other two children. He had remarried,. I was not part of their plan, but came along with the package deal at the time.

It wasn't long before I was locked in cupboards and shower rooms and beaten, put through walls, sleeping in my own urine. I wet the bed every night until I was nine. I weeded the garden at 5am in the morning and spent weekends working, cleaning and not being allowed to watch TV and constantly hungry.

I was dressed in clothes from rags and handmade school uniforms. I was the last one to have a bath and it was in everyone's else dirty water and it was cold. I did the dishes and was sent to bed early. I was hit with belts and dog chains for not cleaning the dishes properly and I was a kicked around the back yard for not weeding the gardens properly.

A local bus driver raised the possibility with my adoptive parents that I go and live with him and his family as he and a few others had seen issues and raised concerns, but it never went anywhere.

I was caught stealing and eating food from rubbish bins at 10 years old and was taken to the Beenleigh Police Station and a Detective give me a dressing down about how bad I was, and I should be better behaved for my family. I was 10 and never even understood why I was talking to the detective, but I started to believe that I was no good and was wondering my life's value. I tried to overdose but really you must take a lot of Panadol to do that, but lucky for me I wasn't clever enough to work out how to do it. I still remember trying to work out how to finish my own life.

I ended up going to a couple of other families for a few months because I was such a "burden" to my family but I always ended up back there, and when the families I stayed with said they would keep me that was a beating and punishment for telling people lies. I still today sometime wonder if this was all in my mind and not real, I was thinking that I was the problem and I cannot believe that I was so horrible at such a young age. [...]

The Christian Brothers took me in and got me into a kid's home on Warwick Rd Ipswich New Life Centre and later became Quest Care. I was in there with around other 20 kids from various backgrounds with different mental illnesses. It was a warm bed and fresh food and clean. They

helped me get young homeless allowance and I don't think it even covered the costs of living and schooling but the Christian Brothers allowed me to go to St Edmunds and these folks I can never repay for giving me a clean start.

I struggled at school but I loved going and I even started to believe I was okay. [...] I finished school in 1988 and had to move out of the kids home and again had nowhere to go. I was given a part-time job when I was in year 11 and again these folks will never know what they did for me and at the time nor did I. I started driving trucks car carriers to Cairns out of my mind on drugs and once again I had no direction in life and I desperately needed to get direction to keep out of trouble.

The problem is if you had trouble in the past it never really leaves you and folks have no idea how hard I have had to fight to get everything I have today. I was always a fighter but my early years now show me we need to get to the kids before they go down the same road I did. Life doesn't always make sense but everything happens for a reason.

Today I've found my biological parents and my mother, Mary is a nurse up the coast and my father works in a car auction house in Eagle Farm and I see them both regularly and we get on extremely well. My Mother cries because of what I have been through and I inform her that I am happy with my life and my road was the road I travelled to get here.

Folks do not realise how a few people can make a difference. I remember while I was living in the kids home on Warwick road visits from local identities and various Nuns and Christian Brothers, priests, pastors and various other councillors and business owners. Sometimes it only takes one person to say the right thing and it clicks and it can change your whole life.

## 2020 Events

**Support groups are adhering to current government recommendations and directives. To get the latest information, please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page. The below dates are our scheduled meeting dates - restrictions allowing.**

**During the pandemic please register by calling (07) 3358 6666 or email [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) if you wish to attend a support group as there are number limitations and we may need to cancel groups at late notice owing to restrictions or illness. 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** - 12 Sept, 14 Nov.

**Mother's Morning Tea** - 10am to 12pm on 16 Sept & 18 Nov. (An informal gathering for mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption).

**Open Support Group** - 10 Oct & 12 Dec.

**Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group** - 17 Oct & 19 Dec at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Ave, Cotton Tree.