

Post Adoption News

Autumn Edition
2023

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Welcome to Post Adoption News

With the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology on 21st March, the Autumn Edition of Post Adoption News shares perspectives and considers the effects of this significant event.

In this edition we also explore the theme of DNA testing and how this has impacted experiences of searching and reunion. The key article discusses how technology now provides more opportunities for people to access their own family and history but also highlights the continuing need for emotional support and guidance when navigating this journey. We hear from our readers about their thoughts on this area and thank them for generously contributing their words.

Within this newsletter you will also find a selection of stories from the media that focus on adoption and as always, you will see our PARC and PASQ Updates. In these updates we share what both teams have been up to and what groups, events or special occasions we have coming up.

- PARC and PASQ Teams

National Apology for Forced Adoption Practices

This March 21st will mark 10 years since the Government formally apologised for forced adoption and acknowledged the lifelong pain and suffering these practices have caused thousands of families. The National Apology is one of the ways the Commonwealth Government has responded to the Senate Inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices. The apology provided many with much needed acknowledgement of these past wrongs and their devastating effects. You can watch the Apology here: bit.ly/3J2jgZp

Events marking this historic apology will be hosted across the country. In Queensland, the Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS Jigsaw QLD) will be hosting the commemoration at Events on Oxlade in New Farm, to register your interest please call 07 3358 6666 or email support@jigsawqld.org.au

In New South Wales, The Forced Adoption Support Service will be hosting a lunch at the Marina Café on Cockatoo Island to commemorate the 10-year anniversary. There will be a chartered ferry to take people across and back to Circular Quay. Unfortunately, this event has reached capacity. However, if you are interested in asking about waitlist spots in case of cancellations, please contact FASS on 1800 210 313 or 02 9687 3636.

Also in NSW, Within These Walls / Australia DNA Hub is holding a special event to Commemorate the 10th Anniversary. As part of the ceremony there will be an unveiling of a monument called 'Apart'. The event will be held in Gilgai, which is ten minutes from Inverell town. To be included in the official invite letter which will be sent when final details are ready please send an email with your contact information, subject heading 'Apart' to the secretarywithinthesewalls@gmail.com.

To commemorate the 10th Anniversary in Canberra, the Australian Government will host commemorative activities on the 21st and 22nd of March. This will include a commemorative dinner on 21st March, and a statement on significant matters in the House of Representatives on the morning of 22nd March.

Parliament House has also curated an audio-visual display of speeches given on 21st March 2013. The display includes the full Apology delivered by former Prime Minister the Hon Julia Gillard AC. To read more about the display click here: bit.ly/3mEwp3d

The National Archives of Australia in Canberra are also hosting a panel discussion on Tuesday 21st March titled, 'Saying sorry: do national apologies change the world?'. John Barclay from ABC's Big Ideas will moderate the discussion between former minister the Hon Jenny Macklin, the Hon Nahum Mushin AM, Professor Michelle Arrow and Ms Rosemary Baird.

The panel will consider whether national apologies make change? Does anything change for those who are receiving it? Can national apologies prevent future crises? For further information and to book a ticket click the link here: bit.ly/41YmrJZ

We are pleased to share stories by our readers in this edition that reflect on the anniversary of the apology. They can be found on pages 13 and 16.

Need Support?

PARC and PASQ both offer counselling and intermediary services for people separated by adoption. If this article has raised anything for you, or you would like support around the impacts of adoption, then please contact your local service:

PARC: 02 9504 6788 (NSW)

DNA

In the last decade genealogical DNA testing has transformed rapidly. The testing is now widely accessible, affordable and a viable option for finding family.

This advancement in technology has empowered many to take their family history into their own hands. DNA kits have also become popular gifts and go on sale to mark almost every occasion. Testament to this rapidly growing inclusion into mainstream culture are the millions of reported samples by large sites including 22 million on Ancestry, and 6.7 million on MyHeritage. This has had a huge effect on the adoption community.

Many people are not able to find relatives through mainstream methods of searching, some spend years picking up pieces here and there, and struggle to make sense of the little information they have. There are a multitude of reasons as to why there can be difficulties with tracing family. As most people in Australia impacted by adoption rely heavily on paperwork that was gathered and captured at the time of their birth, it's not uncommon to be left with more questions and unknowns after receiving your adoption information. Birth fathers' names are rarely included and when they are its provided with a caveat, stating that "your birth fathers name cannot be confirmed" and that there is no evidence to support that he claimed paternity or that he knew of your existence or adoption. Sometimes false names were used, people move overseas and other times a paper trail through the usual channels just disappears. These issues among a plethora of others can make it extremely difficult to distinguish if you are tracking down the correct person. With DNA testing becoming more common it provides exciting possibilities for those who feel they have exhausted every other search avenue of finding birth relatives and knowing more of their heritage. DNA testing can be a breakthrough for many.

In a short amount of time, commercial DNA testing has become more financially affordable and there

is an increasing number of genealogical sites that can take it a step further for you and interpret the information. These developments continue to occur and are providing a new way to lift the lid on complex family histories. The secrecy that shrouds the adoption landscape has left many feeling disconnected and anonymous. DNA testing for some of these people has provided an opportunity to understand themselves and connect with family in a way that wasn't possible without it. For others, it remains an ongoing possibility that is yet to bear fruit. It has also been to some, another source of rejection. Still, as increasing numbers of people provide their DNA to these family history sites so do the chances of connection to relatives, and the opportunity to make sense of who we are within the context of family lineage and history.

A genealogical DNA test looks at a person's DNA and compares it to a whole database of others DNA. Some people will choose to upload their DNA to multiple sites to increase their chances of finding a match. For many who have been stumbling around in the dark with their search, suddenly DNA can link them to family they didn't know existed. After a 6 week wait for DNA to be processed a person could go from having no answers and feeling very isolated, to being thrust into family, connections, and ancestral lineage. For adopted people who frequently spend big chunks of their lives having no knowledge of their history this overnight change can be both miraculous and overwhelming.

Whilst the technology provides an opportunity for people to access their own family and history in ways the paper trail has never allowed, it lacks the emotional support and guidance of an intermediary service. Given this, it can be helpful to access support in the lead up and throughout your journey using DNA sites. Accessing a counsellor, close friends, DNA specific service or a supportive group can provide you with a place to process your emotions and share the thoughts and feelings that emerge from the process. In providing intermediary and searching to clients over many years, post adoption services are keenly aware of the two journeys that take place for a person searching for family. The external journey of jumping through the bureaucratic

hoops and managing the paperwork, and the internal one that regularly triggers our most primal fears and hopes. After all, family is written into our very being, into our cells, our DNA, and naturally wants to be understood and made sense of. The complexities of adoption can leave a person with a lot to process and move through as they receive information and contact from relatives for the first time. For most people who have not been displaced from genetic family they have been interpreting and processing their place in the human family in bite size pieces their whole lives. Considering this, its normal to have all kinds of emotions and thoughts explode into your experience upon finding family and ancestral lineage.

In addition to readying yourself emotionally it can also be important to have a clear understanding of the sites you are using, and how they work. With all the opportunities that DNA testing creates, it can be a confusing space to navigate by yourself, and one that comes with its own challenges. We advise that before jumping on the sites, do your research and find support when needed. As the need for specialised support grows in this area so do the ways you can access help. Both PASQ and PARC can provide emotional support and a safe place to debrief the ups and down of search and reunion. However, when it comes to the detailed interpretation of your DNA, building accurate family trees and figuring out how the DNA pieces together with the records there are some important services in this space you can go to for help.

Below is a list of services and organisations that we are aware of who are providing support to people looking to access DNA as part of their searching journey. We would also love to hear from you, please write to us and let us know if you have used a searching support whether it be your local librarian or a neighbour we want to hear from you.

Adoption Search Australia

Run by a passionate volunteer Diane, this group provides hands on support for people who are trying to make sense of their past using DNA. She has gathered a team of 'search angels' and

research assistants who are allocated cases that they work on until solved, helping people to make sense of their matches and the searching process. You can request to join Di's group here:

bit.ly/3J1h7Nq

Australian DNA Hub

The Australian DNA Hub is a support network for peers by peers who have been affected by adoption, fostering and other historical Government child removal practices including those conceived by donor conception, who wish to connect with their biological family. They also help mothers, fathers and other family members of loss. Once in the DNA databases, the hub will continue to support you through the forest of information in your search for your family roots. Visit their website here bit.ly/3JqkFKz or call 0418 412 956

Society of Australian Genealogists

This charity has been supporting family historians and enthusiasts to uncover and piece together their history since 1932. The service is focused on education, training and supporting people with the right information to get the best results. With extensive experience they bring a wealth of knowledge to their work. They have a plethora of resources and materials and offer regular DNA workshops, for complete beginners and for those who have some knowledge. The next workshop they are running online will be the 18th of March. If you'd like to find out more you can check them out by going to their website bit.ly/3SY6UWN, telephone on 02 9247 3953 or visit them in person at their Library 2/379 Kent St, Sydney NSW 2000.

Genie1

Louise Coakley has been using DNA as a research tool for over a decade and offers DNA consultations to guide and coach clients on understanding their DNA results. More information about Louise, including her contact details can be found on her website Genie 1 & Genetic Genealogy bit.ly/3FdiEij

Carmen's Story

I would like to share with you my experience as an adoptee using the Ancestry platform with the optional DNA testing. I found this to be such an enormous benefit to help work out how I am connected to my DNA matches and to delve into my biological roots. I was hesitant at first, for privacy issues and the storage of my DNA, but after reading the privacy statement I felt rest assured. I was also hesitant about using the messaging system as I wanted to protect my privacy and others along the way. Your profile and its contents including family trees, records etc. can be made public or private which gives you peace of mind and messaging can be kept anonymous too. Once my DNA kit was processed, my DNA matches unfolded before my eyes, and it gave me a whole new outlook and perspective on where I may have come from, which was absolutely priceless! Before too long I was researching my DNA matches, family trees and records etc. Ancestry now sorts the matches into paternal and maternal which makes it so much easier. It does not really take that long to get an idea of who matches with who with the 'shared match function', which I found to be quite accurate. In the beginning, I had very little birth relative information to go on, not even surnames. However, with the help of Ancestry and social media I was well on my way, and it was an amazing feeling to start to piece it all together. Personally, I found learning a little about genealogy, DNA and the centimorgans you and your matches share to be very insightful. Word of warning though, ensure you cross reference family trees and records of other members family trees etc. with your own and don't take it as 100% correct as there are inaccuracies out there and before you know it you are barking up someone else's tree, so to speak! With a little patience, determination and knowledge so much can be gained and where other methods have failed then it is worth the consideration.

Watch out... it is addictive.

Carmen



DNA– Myths and Possibilities

(Clarification regarding language - I use mum and dad when talking about my adoptive parents and use mother and father when referring to my biological/first parents.)

So, you are thinking about DNA testing?

I would like to share with you some of my experience and reflections I have regarding commercial DNA testing. I hope this may illustrate some of the complexity as well as some of the benefits found in doing a commercial DNA test.

Firstly, a little background. I first contacted PARC in 1997 and then again in 1999, both being a simple phone call. Needless to say, I was in a distressed and questioning state of mind, looking for some answers and a more effective way to make sense of my adoption experience. Counselling as yet, was not freely available as it is currently. I neither had the finances to enter into counselling or the time to do so with work and family responsibilities. This was further impacted by living on the NSW Central Coast, far from any face-to-face support or someone that may normalise my experience of being adopted. Then venturing online, I ultimately found others affected in the same way and sharing similar history. I started to 'come out of the fog' hard and fast with a new awareness and understanding that I had a lot more to learn. This was not only regarding my

own experience of adoption but also the history of adoption throughout the world. I had organised to attend the Federal apology with other members of a support group I was in, but at the last moment decided to not go. I chose to view it online, in the safety of my home. I recognised how raw and vulnerable I was and did not believe it would have been fair on others to have to attend to my acute distress.

March 21st, 2013, was a turning point for me as it was for many in our community. I felt I could now point to something outside of myself regarding adoption. It was no longer a matter of a negative attitude or poor psychology as I was often told. In my mind (and body) the apology made what happened to me, to be a real and tangible phenomenon for the first time in my life.

After viewing the apology delivered by Julia Gillard, and later attending the first PARC adoptee retreat; I committed to some serious unpacking emotionally and otherwise. I was now able to get some support through counselling with PARC, which was now freely available as a result of recent funding, one positive outcome that came because of the apology. Adjacent to the counselling, I also then attempted to communicate firstly with my mother and then also my father. I had made multiple attempts with my mother over 3 decades, communicating first by

phone (which I would advise against) and then via email, without a change in outcome. I now requested PARC to mediate on my behalf.

My hope was that my mother may make use of the support services now readily available, or engage with similar services within the state she is living in. My thinking was that since some time had passed, things may be different, and she may wish to have some communication with me. This was not to be.

So where to next?

I had learnt, as my previous experience had shown me, that a direct approach may not lead to a positive outcome. I decided to turn my focus now on searching for my father. The legislation had recently changed, allowing adoptees to apply for their putative father's information, or more specifically; releasing the family name of the person named as my father. For many years I had my father's first and middle name, along with other 'non-identifying' information. This was issued to me when first contacting the department. His surname/family name was a mystery to me, with it being redacted from all the documentation I had, as is the case for most adoptees. In many cases the painful and fanciful 'father unknown' exists within the adoptee's records.

I had lost count of the times I had read through what information I had, trying to make some sense of it all. I would imagine that I would find a clue that I had missed somehow on a previous reading. Such was my hopeless wanting. Not only (non-identifying) information about my mother and father but their siblings and parents too. This always seemed to me to be at odds with the response I received from my mother, only adding to my frustration and confusion. What I do know now, was that I had quite a considerable amount of information when I compare it to what others have told me that appears on their file.

My heart breaks for them, the ruthless unfairness of this is beyond me.

I finally received notification from the AIU (Adoption Information Unit), of my putative father's name as stated in my adoption records. I don't recall anything specific, but I do know I felt angry, sad, and indignant, while at the same time feeling relief, expectation, and humiliation.

I feel that living in an adoption construct we seem to carry opposing thoughts and live in a constant state of cognitive dissonance. It is the most painful expectation and waiting; not unlike a plane never landing or ship never mooring. This creates a perpetual holding pattern of hypervigilance; where some of us are wanting the call that others are fearfully dreading. It is a burdensome existence for all parties.

With this new information I decided to reach out to my mother again. I had no expectations of a different response, but I thought at the very least she should be informed that I was reaching out to my father. I was concerned that he might attempt to contact her and trigger her even more. I knew I was flying blind and in very real terms had no true knowledge of the reality of their relationship or the nature of its demise. What I did know was that there was little I could do but let it flow its course. I had wrestled with the idea of what a father is and what they need to be throughout the entirety of my life. As I was now a father myself this was of primary importance to me. This allowed me to reflect on the parenting I too had received (or not) from my mum and dad growing up.

Conversations between the AIU and PARC then led the AIU to attempt to contact all men on the electoral roll in NSW who shared the same name. Ultimately this was to also end in a negative result.

So where to now?

Ultimately, the decision to do DNA came as a result of an ongoing failure over 30 years in attempting to communicate with my mother and a negative result with the department's attempt to contact my father. The decision to do DNA was in many ways the only option left. I felt I had nothing left to lose. I thought at the very least I would be

able to find out my ethnic background and had zero expectation of any matches and furthermore any contact from anyone on either side. This belief was ultimately proven to be false.

DNA may answer all your questions in the moment, but it may also add an additional complexity to your life that you could not comprehend.

The sudden knowledge that my father was one of 9 siblings (with another one believed to be lost to adoption) and that I have 40+ first cousins may be on the extreme end of possible outcomes. Words fail me in attempting to describe the sudden realisation that I am the eldest of many siblings, and I believe they felt the same way. It may also add complexity to others lives that they have no capacity to understand, comprehend and at the very least have the emotional space available to process this new information. This was largely to be the case. Unfortunately, the adoptee is in a position of absolute disadvantage here. You appear suddenly, within a family structure with no coordinates to orient yourself. You do not have the assumed knowledge and understanding regarding the history and dynamics that all other members intrinsically have.

Current and historical (often unresolved and unspoken) issues may be further exacerbated when an additional stressor is applied. It is important to understand that this same result may happen to any 'surprise' person that were to show up at the same point in time. This is not a reflection on the adoptee and is regardless of what history/herstory they bring with them.

Communication is essential throughout, and even the most benign or best intended attempts may produce a negative outcome. This can be the case in any family; even without difficult situations.

I believe the term 'reunion' to be woefully inadequate in clearly describing what is actually happening to all parties within the adoption

construct. This is a pattern throughout the lexicon of infant removal; both historically and currently as it is principally a product of the adoption industry as a whole. Reunion and the way it is portrayed sensationally in the media and as a form of entertainment, fails to address that in majority it is adults meeting adults for the first time.

It is further complicated with the residue of decades old unresolved needs and trauma that has not been appropriately addressed. Others may feel differently regarding reunion, the apology, and how they as individuals make sense of any of this. And that is more than perfectly ok, it is to be appreciated.

Reflections

Like many others from the Forced Adoption era, I came to DNA very late in my journey in 2017.

Even when all this is said and done, I would still advise to do DNA.

It is ONE way of finding out a truth regarding what makes you the person you are.

It may not be the whole truth, but it can provide some explanation as to who you are; and also who you are not.

I believe the finding out of who you are not is much more relevant and meaningful to the adoptee.

I believe that this form of attrition is what underpins the felt experience of 'coming out of the fog'.

In many ways we are shedding our skin, or like the butterfly emerging from the cocoon.

I hope you enjoy your new wings.

Michael



Getting a DNA Detective on the Case

Finding out at the age of 60 that I was actually adopted as a baby initially left me feeling unmoored, drifting into an unknown future from a now unreliable past. Fortunately, I had the support and understanding of family and friends to help with the journey. I also had the benefit that my Mum, my now adoptive mother, did somehow remember the very distinctive name of my birth mother despite not having seen the adoption papers for six decades.

After the initial shock of the news, I was perhaps panicked by the elapsed decades and launched into an immediate search without any documentation. I had been told it would take months to obtain it anyway, especially due to the backlog of applications during the COVID pandemic. Sadly, within a day or so, I was able to use that very distinctive name to find my birth mother's obituary online. She had died just four years prior. That discovery was shattering to me, a regret that will stay with me always. I could also see from the obituary that she had subsequently married and had five children – four daughters and then some years later, a son. Her husband was still alive, but he was quite elderly and was reported as being ill even at the time of his wife's passing.

The next day I spoke by phone to my putative maternal half-brother, who I had located based

on my own research online and with advice from my adult daughter, who was trying to help me cope with this extraordinary development in our lives. The man I phoned, who was fifteen years younger than me, was shocked to receive such a call. He generously agreed, however, that if the official documentation confirmed the identity of his mother as my birth mother, then we could do a sibling DNA test to put it beyond doubt.

This was where DNA testing first started to become an essential part of my search story. It was also the point at which I found out about PARC and its support services for late notification adoptees like me and was able to get advice on how to proceed. The adoption information was expedited, and this verification gave me the basis for a sibling DNA test to eventually confirm the high probability, though not the certainty, that my putative half-brother and I had the same birth mother.

The social work documentation I eventually received told me my birth mother was a 21-year-old Catholic-trained nurse who had graduated just prior to travelling from Melbourne to Sydney and then working as a nanny and housekeeper in the six months leading up to my birth at the Mater Hospital North Sydney. In searching for a possible birth father, I had figured possible suspects were doctors or male staff working at the same hospital

she trained at in Melbourne. In the absence of anything better to go on, I spent quite a bit of time looking at the group photographs in the hospital's annual reports vainly seeking a male doctor with some physical resemblance to me.

When I received my original birth and adoption documentation it unsurprisingly did not name a birth father, but only included a brief physical description and some anonymous family background. A critical clue though was the occupation recorded in the notes: he was a professional golfer.

I had by this time submitted an Ancestry DNA test but it was going to take time to get the results analysed. In the interim, I compiled a list of professional golfers living in Melbourne based on searching the electoral rolls around 1960 using the occupational terms "professional golfer" and "golf professional". It was quite a long list but at least I figured I now had some surnames to check against the DNA matches. Family and friends whom I had confided in had also started looking at photographs of Australian golfers from that period that they thought looked the most like me. Of course, we almost exclusively focused on the famous ones. The least helpful suggestion sent to me, but certainly both the funniest and the scariest, was an unflattering image of Donald Trump taken with a prominent rear-view perspective of him while swinging a club.

When I finally got the Ancestry results, they largely bamboozled me. The only close matches seemed to be on my maternal side. The other pressure point that came up when those matches went live on the Ancestry database was from my new-found maternal family, who feared that they somehow might be communicated to my birth mother's husband. I had agreed to try to keep my existence a secret as it was reasonably assumed that he did not know of his wife's first baby. So, I switched off the Ancestry matching.

Fortunately, I had already made moves to expedite my search through getting expert help, by consulting Louise Coakley from Genetic Genealogy. I had obtained her contact details (see below) from VANISH in Victoria. On a video

conference call one Sunday evening, Louise systematically pulled apart and sorted the Ancestry DNA results and began identifying possibilities. The following morning, I had an email from Louise with a highly probable result. It was written to me at 2am in the morning but, as she explained, when she is hot on the trail, she finds it hard to switch off. Moreover, she had used her broader genealogical skills to place my putative birth father as working in near proximity to where my birth mother lived at that time in Melbourne. Louise had almost certainly found the professional golfer who was my likely birth father. I'll end that part of the story there with a degree of suspense as I'm looking to write more in the future about my journey. However, I will say that when I checked my list of golfers compiled from the Melbourne electoral roll, that specific name was not there. Upon checking the electoral roll again, I found he had instead listed his occupation as "golf pro" – the only one to depart from the official format with that casual descriptor – which in itself became a clue to his character. Without Louise's expertise I probably would still be searching uselessly through a list of names that my actual birth father wasn't included on.

A subsequent DNA test done to check the paternal line did overwhelmingly verify Louise's genealogical techniques. Louise's qualifications, and expertise were a key factor in persuading others that these were not just some amateurish assumptions on my part and that a paternal DNA test was warranted. Louise also records the video conference session and it can be downloaded and viewed again, which is invaluable when dealing with such a complex process that most people have never encountered. Perhaps I could have learnt how to do it myself but time was of the essence and it was not the kind of conclusion where you wanted to make a rookie error.

While I understand that there are very good DNA search angels out there – bless them – I have referred others to Louise and they have had successful outcomes also. Once the adoption sleuthing is done, the process soon turns into researching the new genetic family tree so someone like Louise with a broad skillset and

family history experience is well-placed to help there too.

Louise Coakley can be contacted via her website bit.ly/3L9x9HD or read her blog at bit.ly/3FdiEij

Paul

I'm working on a book and related blog/podcast project currently and would be interested in hearing from others who are adopted and were born at the Mater Hospital in North Sydney during the period from the 1950s until 1982, when the maternity hospital closed.

Email me at:

lonelymanupontheshore@gmail.com

Rose's Story

My name is Rose Brady, I have always known I was adopted as my parents did not keep that a secret. So, I meet my biological mother through the paperwork that the adoption department had sent through to me. It was a lovely reunion, plus I found out that I have four brothers. I am still in contact with my biological mother and my siblings.

To find out whom my biological father was, I had to do a DNA test. When the results came in, I had a close relation on the tree. My sister-in-law is pretty good at the DNA tree and how the lines go. So, with my DNA results and the close relation she had put it down to two brothers.

I could not believe I was that close to finding my biological father. But I had to wait for someone in that family to do their DNA test. So, the waiting game began, and I felt at least it's down to two brothers, I have met some family members, plus have contact with some others, which is a better outcome than nothing. The adoption agency kept

in contact with me regularly, helping out when they could.

My sister-in-law said everyone is doing their DNA so someone in that family is bound to get one done.

Two years of wondering later, I get a message from Kathy, wondering why our DNA matches are saying we could be 1st cousins or half-sisters. I rang her and her parents were there as well, and I told her it could be your father, Walter or could be his brother Henry. So, Walter and his wife agree that Walter will do a DNA test.

Just talking on the phone to each other for the first two weeks, they made me feel like part of the family, I felt very welcomed.

In the meantime, I had met Walter and his lovely wife, Kathy, plus some more family members which I felt very welcomed by.

Just after we met the results were in, Walter rang me and said 100% you are mine. Wow I felt so relieved that it was over. I had felt part of the family already. When I sat down and was talking to Walter, I had so many of his traits, we thought there was a huge possibility that we were father and daughter. I have met my siblings from that side, they have accepted that I am part of the family, and we have contact with each other regularly.

I never gave up finding whom my biological family was. I knew it was going to take time, and a lot of patience.

I now know that DNA is the way to go. I feel very happy that both my biological parents want me in their lives, plus all up I have 7 brothers (including my brother that I grew up with) and 3 sisters.

Rose

DNA Tips and Tricks

Here are some of the tips and tricks that were shared with us by Diane and Peter during PARC's Speakers Forum on DNA last year.

- **Use multiple DNA websites.**

Why? DNA is only really useful when compared to other people's DNA – It is a good idea to try and have it compared to other sets of DNA to generate as many DNA matches as you can get.

Once you have your DNA results you should try and get your DNA on as many sites as possible, such as: AncestryDNA, Family Tree DNA, MyHeritage, 23AndMe, Living DNA.

Ancestry has the largest database, so it is a great place to start. Make the first DNA test you do with them. From Ancestry, you can then download your raw DNA and upload it to another DNA site.

- **Keep your eye out for sales on DNA kits**

Most sites typically have sales around Black Friday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Mothers & Father's Day, ANZAC Day, most public holidays.

- **Peter suggested attaching a tree to your DNA** – Ancestry then compares your tree to others and looks to find connections, common ancestors, and relationships. This can help because they offer hints that may help you find others.

- On the contrary, Di believes that you shouldn't attach a tree to your DNA. Her concern being that members of the family may see where you sit on the tree and could discover who you are before you are able to do a sensitive and discreet outreach.

- However, you can also have a private, unsearchable tree with guesses and theories that no one can see. Here you can privately try and work out your tree.

- **Big numbers = close relatives.**

Try not to get bogged down in the scientific, just remember that the bigger the number the closer the relative probably is. The largest number you will get is about 3,500, the closer to that number, the closer the relative.

- **Use the screenshot feature on your computer to capture information when you come across it.**

People may change the privacy of their information; screenshotting can ensure you remember what you found in case it is removed.



- **Check your DNA matches regularly**, Di believes "every case is solvable with time"

- **Try and manage your expectations.**

Unfortunately, finding a close relative does not mean you will get a relationship or the relationship you want. However, finding out more about your genealogical history alone can be a huge benefit for many people.

- **Consider using an intermediary service.**

Once you have found a close match, rather than contacting them yourself you may like to consider using PARC or PASQ's intermediary service. To know more about how we can act as an intermediary please contact your relevant service.

The PARC Speakers Forum on DNA can be viewed here: bit.ly/3ZWYfLf



Australia's Dirty Laundry

The Stain of Forced Adoption in Australia's History

Forced adoption in Australia was a government policy that aimed to remove children from single mothers, unwed mothers, and Indigenous families, among others. This policy had a significant impact on the lives of those who were taken from their mothers, and it has left many with long-lasting psychological trauma. The Australian government's practice of Forced Adoption in the 20th century was a national tragedy that continues to impact many families today.

The practice of Forced Adoption is a stain on Australia's history, and the fact that it was allowed to happen for so long is a reflection of the inadequacies and failures of the Australian government at the time. The experiences of those who were forcibly removed from their families, and the trauma that they have had to endure as a result, are a reminder of the need to ensure that such practices are never repeated.

While it may seem like a humorous analogy, the question of whether the Australian Government is capable of doing its own "laundry" in addressing the stain of Forced Adoption is a serious one. Given the profound harm caused by this policy, it is essential that the government takes

responsibility for its past actions and works to provide support and resources to those affected. This requires not only acknowledging the past wrongs, but also actively working towards healing and reconciliation through ongoing efforts to provide mental health support, facilitate legal reunions for those separated from their families, and ensure that such policies are never repeated in the future, through critically needed reform.

Whether or not the government is capable of taking on this task remains to be seen, and will likely depend on a range of factors including political will, public pressure, and the dedication and expertise of those involved in the process. However, it is clear that the need to address the legacy of Forced Adoption is urgent and pressing, and failure to do so risks perpetuating the harm caused by this policy for generations to come.

Sorting the Stains:

The Impact of Forced Adoption

My recent open letter to The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP brings attention to the fact that the current Prime Minister was almost a victim of this practice, which highlights how widespread and devastating the impact of Forced Adoption was. Although his mother was not forced to give him up for adoption, it was noted that she stated she

was a widow and had no father recorded on his birth certificate. This, combined with the fact that his father was Italian, could have potentially made him vulnerable to being taken away by the government. The policy of the time was to place children born to single mothers in care, and it is fortunate that this was not the outcome in his case.

The open letter to The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP (full letter here: bit.ly/40aT6uy) is an emotional plea to the Australian government to acknowledge the harm that was done to those who were forcibly removed from their families.

Double Standards and Marginalization

The fact that Peter Dutton, a former Minister for Immigration, did not attend the first apology to the Stolen Generations and 15 years later he apologises for not attending the first apology. This shows how the government has failed to take responsibility for its actions. The apology was an important step in acknowledging the harm that had been done to Indigenous Australians, but the fact that a senior government official did not attend shows that there is still a long way to go.

The failure of Dutton to attend the apology highlights how the government has been reluctant to acknowledge the harm that was done and has been slow to take action to address the situation.

Neglecting to Wash:

Government Failure to Take Responsibility

The quote from former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in his recent speech for the 15th Anniversary of the Stolen Generation is another example of how Forced Adoption has impacted Australian society. In his statement, Mr Rudd asks:

“What would have happened IF white Australian children had been taken away from their parents without cause or evidence of maltreatment, but simply as a matter of general policy? Our reaction would have been outrage, anger and the deepest

sense of injustice” – Kevin Rudd

He notes that the reaction to such a policy would have been one of outrage, anger, and a deep sense of injustice. This statement highlights the double standard that exists when it comes to Forced Adoption and how it is viewed or in most cases, unacknowledged by the wider Australian public.

What Mr Rudd failed to realize was that the forced adoption practices actually occurred in Australia during the 20th century and affected not only Indigenous Australians but also white Australians. An estimated 250,000 white Australian children were taken away from them without any specific case evidence of maltreatment as a matter of general policy.

Airing the Dirty Laundry:

Urgent Need for Support and Acknowledgement

All these issues are connected and show how the government has been inadequate and failed to take responsibility for its actions. These examples highlight how the government has failed to provide adequate support to those who were affected by Forced Adoption. Forced Adoption in Australia was a policy that was aimed at removing children from vulnerable families, including single mothers, unwed mothers, and Indigenous families, among others. In many cases, the adoptions were carried out without the mother's informed consent often by extreme psychological abuse and coercion, and there was little support provided to those who were affected. This lack of support has had a significant impact on the lives of those who were taken from their mothers, and it has left many with long-lasting psychological trauma.

Within the current political landscape, we observe a fascinating interplay of personal histories and official apologies. The present Prime Minister, for instance, narrowly dodged the fate of Forced

Adoption as an infant, an experience that undoubtedly shapes his worldview today. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition Incumbent, who has only recently expressed remorse for failing to attend the first Apology to the Stolen Generations some 15 years ago, confronts the weight of history and its enduring effects. And let us not forget the former Prime Minister who issued the inaugural apology to the Stolen Generations and commemorated the 15th anniversary of the apology, yet appears unaware of the First National Apology for Forced Adoptions a decade prior. The 21st of March 2023 is the 10th anniversary of the First National Apology for Forced Adoptions, one cannot help but wonder what further complexities and contradictions will emerge from this tapestry of narratives around #truth, #culture, #diversity & #inclusion.

Will Australia address the need to do its laundry, or will it continue to sit in its own filth?

Here are two simple things that would ease the burden on adoptees and their mental health:

1. The issuance of Birth Certificates that state the correct relationship between guardians and birth parents. Past and current process remove any mention of biological family and implies that the adoptive family gave birth to the adoptee. This is how adoptive parents get away with not telling adoptive children that they're adopted. Many people do not know that this is still a standard policy in today's adoptions.
2. Ease of access, to no fault no fee discharges, so those of failed adoptions like myself are able to return to their family of origin. This would avoid going through extreme, unnecessary trauma, time and time again through lengthy excessively expensive court proceedings.

Adoptees nationally have been advocating for these changes to legislation state by state for decades to no avail.

Shane Bouel

The ebb and flow of connection

In the lead up to the Winter edition of Post Adoption News we are asking if readers would like to share **100 words** on the theme 'the ebb and flow of connection'.

To submit your response to this theme you can click the link here: <https://forms.office.com/r/zH01zHmqQj>

If you would like to write a longer piece of writing for the theme please email parc@benevolent.org.au and we can provide you with some guidelines for your submission.

As always, thank you to our readers for generously sharing their thoughts and writing with us.

Forced Adoption Casualties

In the article To and for (see the Spring 2022 edition of Post Adoption News) I concluded one reason the Australian Adoption Apologies achieved limited traction in the public arena was that many of their titles were process rather than people oriented. I suggested the alternative *Apology to Forced Adoption Casualties* could address this weakness. The more benign *Apology to People Affected by Forced Adoptions* is also a possibility.

Acceptance is, of course, not restricted to a single issue. For example, the National Apology, the last Australian parliamentary adoption apology to be delivered and the one with greatest geographical potential to make a difference had its effectiveness severely compromised by a concurrent abortive leadership spill within the Commonwealth government. Predictably the media headlines that day and the over next few news cycles were dedicated to the shenanigans within the federal Labor Party, instead of the healing opportunities offered by the Apology. The National Apology for Forced Adoptions never recovered from this setback and failed to achieve the traction it surely deserved, a point highlighted in articles appearing in the Spring 2022 editions of Jigsaw Pieces and Post Adoption News.

Further, in the background lurks a community ambivalence about the practice of adoption. The Forced Adoption era in Australia has been well documented in, for example, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Report *Former forced adoption policies and practices* (2012), the Australian Institute of Family Studies' *Past adoption experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices* (2012) and the Legislative Assembly's *Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria* (2021). The history of adoption in this

country is covered in the *The Market in Babies: Stories of Australian Adoption*, by Marian Quartly, Shurlee Swain and Denise Cuthbert (2013). Broadly they identify three periods:

- 1] the 19th century up till the 1920s, a time when adoption was an informal arrangement;
- 2] the regulated period (including the era of Forced Adoptions) when it was legally administered as a service to childless couples, designed to resolve two social problems - the stigma of infertility and the shame of illegitimacy and
- 3] today, when there are far fewer adoptions and permanent care is seen as an alternative. In the book's Introduction, the authors state 'Adoption is a subject that divides public opinion . . . Some agree with celebrity Deborra-Lee Furness that adoption is a legitimate way to form a family . . . Others hold that adoption is a crime against mothers and their children that cannot be justified.' This statement encapsulates the disjunction between perceived benevolence, which has public appeal across the majority who do not have lived adoption experiences and the reactions of people who bear the scars of family separation, notably the casualties of Forced Adoptions. I believe the resulting fault line is another fundamental reason why the Australian Adoption Apologies have not achieved widespread regard.

Clearly, on this the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions, education about the consequences of adoption is far from complete.

However, there is progress. The public memorials to Forced Adoptions, now found in all Australian states and displayed in the Spring 2022 edition of the ARMS (Vic) Newsletter, are a welcome contribution to raising community awareness.

By Gary Coles, author of *The Invisible Men of Adoption* and *Made in Australia: The Adoption Apologies*.

PARC & PASQ Update

Mothers Group

On Tuesday 7th February we hosted our first Mothers Group of 2023. We thought that the theme What brings hope? would be a fitting start to the new year. Our Mothers Group is a small group, hosted online and comprised of regular attendees, with occasional new members joining who are always warmly welcomed.

If you would like to attend a Mothers Group please get in touch with either the PARC (NSW) or PASQ (QLD) team.

PARC: parc@benevolent.org.au or 02 9504 6788

PASQ: pasq@benevolent.org.au or 07 3170 4600

Therapeutic Parenting

PARC and PASQ kicked off their first 6 week Therapeutic Parenting course for the year on Wednesday the 22nd of February. The course focuses on supporting parents to attune to the unique needs of their child and the skills and attributes of parenting therapeutically. As part of the 6 sessions we cover the impact of trauma, attachment, strategies, child development and support parents with the specific challenges they are facing. PARC and PASQ have been running these courses for 10 years and have many parents who return to refresh their knowledge and connect with other parents. If you are interested in accessing this group please don't hesitate to get in touch to register your interest.

PASQ Update

Contact us on 07 3170 4600 or pasq@benevolent.org.au

Groups and Events

Gold Coast Connection Group

The first Gold Coast Connection Group of 2023 was held February 8th. The group dynamics were twelve adoptees and one mother. Several of the group members shared how important being a part of this group was for them. There was a wide range of topics covered, from the impact and issues related to forced adoption, to group members thoughts on using DNA to trace family members when all other avenues have failed. What came across 'loud and clear' from all the members was that adoption left an 'invisible scar' that never went away, even after finding your 'natural family'. This group shows support for each other by not having the answers for everyone's experience of adoption but by 'just being there'.

I hope that our next group will have the same turn out of people and that the new members that will be attending on April 5th will feel a sense of belonging.

Looking forward to seeing you all in April,
Siobhan and Wachu.

Online Group for Adopted People – Expression of Interest

PASQ is planning to facilitate a regular online group for adopted people this year. The intention of this group is to provide an online supportive environment in which adopted people can connect and share ways that have helped them in their experience. If you are interested, contact PASQ at pasq@benevolent.org.au or phone 07 3170 4600

PARC Update

Contact us on 02 9504 6788 or parc@benevolent.org.au

Groups and Events

Art Workshop with Gabby Malpas

On the 17th of January, PARC held an art workshop online and in-person to celebrate the Chinese New Year and provide an opportunity for people impacted by adoption to come together. The artist, Gabby Malpas, is a transracial adoptee raised in New Zealand and a globally collected & licensed artist. This was an all ages activity and we enjoyed being able to connect with some younger adopted people and new faces while making Chinese paper lanterns of Gabby's design. Provided online and face to face, the feedback was very positive, and the children particularly were proud of their completed lanterns.



Healing with the Wim Hof Method

On the evening of Saturday the 21st of January, PARC invited Emma Estrela, an international speaker and intercountry adoptee from Brazil, to share her experience of adoption and discovery of

the Wim Hof (aka "The Ice Man") method of breathing and regulation. Emma's story was absorbing and her journey of integrating her trauma using the Wim Hof method was fascinating and hopeful.

Those in attendance in-person and online were walked through some breathing exercises and there was a short demonstration of using ice to reset and short circuit uncomfortable feelings and thoughts, bringing about a change in body chemistry conducive to relaxation and balance. Feedback indicated that the workshop was very well received and offered a sense of hope to those who have felt unable to find the right tool to support them in emotional regulation. Emma was very generous with her time and provided the following links to learn more about her and the Wim Hof Method.

You can learn more about the Wim Hof method here: bit.ly/3IUxaww

You can read more about Emma here: bit.ly/420X1f5

Morning Tea with the PARC Team

On 8th February PARC hosted a 'Meet the Team' Morning Tea in Hurstville with the option to tune in online for those who couldn't make it in person. With the departure of several longstanding workers at PARC we thought it would be a good time to introduce the new faces and share what professional experience we bring to PARC. For those who missed this occasion you can read about the PARC Team on [page 20](#).

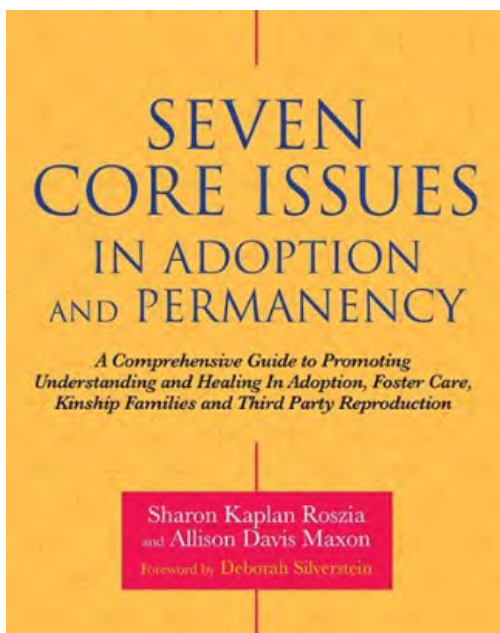
PARC Update

Contact us on 02 9504 6788 or parc@benevolent.org.au

Current Group

ABC Series on the Seven Core Issues

Loss, rejection, guilt and shame, grief, identity, intimacy and mastery/control. These are the main themes that are explored throughout the book "Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency" by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon (2019). Throughout each chapter, the book creates an awareness of the issue in focus to support the reader in better understanding how their experience of adoption has influenced their life and relationships. The lens offered throughout the book aims to allow the reader to better communicate their own challenges and impacts, whilst providing insight and perspective around the impacts on the other constellation members. The book also provides some tools and techniques that the reader may find useful in beginning to process and work through each of these core issues. We recognise that each individual's adoption experience is unique, you may have experienced the impact of some of these core issues, or none at all. You, the reader, are the expert in your own life and lived experience.



PARC will be running our monthly ABC Group (Adoption, Belonging, Connection) for adoptees, in which we will work through each of the seven core issues of adoption. The group will aim to provide information and education around the issue in focus, whilst facilitating a therapeutic space for group participants to share their experiences. If you would like more information about the book or our ABC group, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us!

Each month two different session times will be available.

Our next group is on Chapter Two: Rejection

When:

Wednesday 12th April 2pm—3.30pm

Thursday 13th April 6.30pm—8pm

If you would like to RSVP please email parc@benevolent.org.au and let us know which session you would like to book in for.

Follow us and stay connected

Did you know that both Post Adoption Support Queensland and the Post Adoption Resource Centre have a Facebook Page with adoption related stories, posts, updates and events?



[/postadoptionssupportqld](https://www.facebook.com/postadoptionssupportqld)
[/benevolentsocietyNSW](https://www.facebook.com/benevolentsocietyNSW)

PARC Update

Meet the PARC Team

Over the last 18 months the PARC Team has gone through quite a period of change, with the departure of several significant members of the team. We would like to introduce you to the current members of the PARC Team.

Anita, Counsellor

Hi, my name is Anita. I started at PARC in Jan 2023, so I am the newest member of the team. I'm a social worker. I have previously worked in the adoption space for an NGO as well as in Family Support Service and some youth work. I am looking forward to new learnings not only from my team members but from all the people that I will be working with.

Annaliese, Counsellor

Hi there! My name is Annaliese, and I am a counsellor on the PARC Team. Prior to this, I have worked in roles providing complex case management to children and families in both out of home care and school settings. I am very passionate about providing a safe and therapeutic space for individuals and families to understand, explore and begin to process the trauma they have experienced. I continue to look forward to seeing how my skills and experience can be best utilised in this space.

Brooke, Senior Practitioner

I started my working life as an environmental biologist. Retrained as a psychotherapist and have never looked back! I've worked with individuals, couples and families in former roles and began working with PARC 10 years ago. I have found this position to be such a privilege, incredibly rewarding and I've learned so much about resilience and courage from my clients. I've also been so lucky to

have worked in a supportive and compassionate team, making this role even better!

Clare, Service Support Coordinator

I began working at PARC in January 2021. Prior to working here, I was at university studying Communications and Writing. As the Service Support Coordinator for PARC I enjoy learning from the PARC community and increasing my understanding of the varied experiences of adoption.

Sarah B, Team Leader

Sarah Burn is the Team Leader of PARC having taken over the role from Fiona Cameron in August 2022. Sarah has been with PARC for 2 years and prior to this has worked in both Government and non-Government adoption services over the past 20 years. Sarah's most recent role was with the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service and Intercountry Adoption Tracing Service at International Social Service, Australia.

Sarah K, Counsellor

I joined the PARC team in Nov 2022. I have research experience in adoption and identity, and previously worked as a grief counsellor at Canteen Australia. I am passionate about guiding people to reach a deeper understanding and compassion for their own unique adoption story.



Pictured: left to right, Sarah Burn, Clare Doughty, Sarah King, Erin Arthur (Student), Anita Khoury.

Absent from photo: Brooke Bengston and Annaliese Messenger.

Adoption—reading, listening and viewing

Sandra D Moon is taking back her birth name and reclaiming her lost identity

For ABC Every Day, PARC's Team Leader Sarah Burn spoke to Sandra D Moon, a journalist and adopted person who writes about taking back her birth name and reclaiming her lost identity.

Read the full article here: bit.ly/3mbytiN



Further thoughts on adoption...

Gwen Wilson is the author of *I Belong to No One*, two recent reviews of Gwen's book led her to having further thoughts on adoption which she articulates in this blog post here: bit.ly/3lcMw7R

I Belong to No One was first published by Hachette Australia in June 2015, and is available in paperback, eBook and Audio by ordering through your favourite bookshop or online retailer.

For more information, please see:

www.gwenwilson.com.au

Support grows for an inquiry in Western Australia.

In Western Australia support is growing for an inquiry into forced adoption practices. Advocates argue that WA was the first state to apologise for past practices in 2010, but since then, little has been done to restore rights to survivors. WA Premier, Mark McGowans has voiced his support for an inquiry.

WA Liberal Leader Libby Mettam, pictured below with a group of adoptees and mothers, has also vocalized her support for an inquiry.

Read the full article here: ab.co/3IHhqwO



Forced Adoption in Scotland

The issue of Forced Adoption is continuing to gain momentum and attention in Britain. The Scottish Government has said that they want to open up this conversation and hear from those affected.

Read the full article here: bit.ly/3J4sZ2I

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