

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 32a

Intermediary Service

The Benevolent Society's post adoption services offer intermediary services for people who would like assistance in making an approach to birth relatives. The Benevolent Society has been helping people separated from their relatives to make contact with each other since 1991. Below are answers to the most common questions we are asked.

I want to make contact myself – can The Benevolent Society help with that?

Yes, many people ask us for help in writing that first difficult letter. Phone us for a copy of our booklet *First Letters*. We are happy to give you feedback on your draft before you send it. Our advice is that letters are much more likely to lead to a good outcome than telephoning or direct contact. Our experience is that being phoned about a 20 or 30 year secret can be just too sudden. Our counsellor's talk to many people at all stages of contact and are happy to help you in any way possible while you make your contact on your own.

I want to use a "go-between". Can The Benevolent Society help?

Yes - we may act on your behalf in approaching and receiving contact from the person you are seeking. We always make contact by letter, and only resort to the telephone when we have had no response to two or three letters.

What does The Benevolent Society's "go-between" service need from me?

- Copies of your adoption papers - your Adoption Information Certificate (formerly Supply Authority) or your original/amended birth certificate or order of adoption; and copies of any other relevant paperwork such as the marriage certificate extract of the person being sought and your Social and Medical (formerly called Prescribed) Information.
- Copy of your photo ID, such as a driver's licence.
- We will need you to sign an "Intermediary Service Agreement" which sets out your and our responsibilities.
- We require you to have a planning interview with one of our counsellors - if possible face to face, but if not, by phone. In this, we will cover:

- Information that gives us confidence that the person being approached is the right person, and enables us to verify the identity of the person being sought when they respond to us.
- What information about yourself you would like to be shared and what you prefer to be kept confidential.
- What your most important questions are. This is very important in case the person will give information but does not want future contact.
- Preparing a letter explaining your reasons for searching and some details of yourself and your life. It can help to include a few photos of yourself, your life and your present family. These are not sent with the initial letter, but are offered when the person responds to our letter. Many people respond positively to receiving a letter and a photo even when the idea of contact may be very new to them. In our experience, having time to read and re-read a letter, and study photos can be a great help to a person initially very unsure about contact.
- Possible scenarios and outcomes of the mediation, contact and reunion.

What usually happens ?

1. Your counsellor writes a careful letter, consulting with you until you are ready for us to send it.
2. If we hear back, we check that we have the right person, explain who we are, about your request, and offer the letter and photo, giving any support we can e.g. reading material, an appointment for counselling.
3. We continue to act as "go-between" for as long as both parties request this, talking to both until they feel OK about talking or writing to each other directly.

You may like to order from PARC a copy of *At Least Now I Know* which looks at the outcomes of about 160 reunions. We also have lots of books on reunion available for loan or purchase.

What if ...?

1. If we don't get a reply after four – eight weeks, we usually re-send the letter, perhaps sending it by registered post, after consultation with you.
2. If we still don't get a reply after three attempts by letter, we may phone if we have a number, after consulting with you.
3. If the person responds but refuses contact with you, we use the opportunity to ask your important questions and obtain as much information as possible. We explain that we will pass on the "no contact" request but can give no guarantees.

What advice do people give who have been through the process?

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They advise you to:

- be patient
- proceed cautiously at your own pace, not to expect too much too soon
- be clear about your expectations of contact
- prepare yourself for rejection
- respect people's confidentiality, try and put yourself in their position
- never forget that although you may have been searching for a long time, the other person may only just be beginning to think of you as a "real person."

Fees

Our intermediary services receive government funding and are free of charge.

Please phone us if you wish to talk further about any issues raised in this information sheet.

Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)

Mail: Locked Bag 6002,
Hurstville BC NSW 1481
Phone: 02 9504 6788
Email: PARC@benevolent.org.au
Website: www.benevolent.org.au

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)

Location: Ground Floor, 189 Coronation Dr,
Milton QLD 4064
Phone: 07 3170 4600
Email: PASQ@benevolent.org.au
Website: www.benevolent.org.au