

Post Adoption News

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02 9504 6788 / parc@benevolent.org.au

Welcome to Post Adoption News

Since our last edition we have been counting down to the PARC 30th anniversary event which was to be held at the Australian Museum, late June. Sadly, the event was cancelled at short notice due to the Sydney COVID outbreak. We plan to reschedule to September.

In this edition we revisit adoption as trauma and our feature article explores the links between adoption and addiction. In our first reader story, the writer explores the link between her adoption experience and her addiction "to a legal substance" – food!

Our second reader story is about reunion and the third story is written by Karen Ingram whose book "Lifting the Lid" is reviewed in this edition. The review provides an overview of Karen's book and will spike your interest to pick up a copy.

Thank you to our readers who have generously shared their words and stories in this edition, we take heart in providing a place for you to share your experiences with others.

We also bring you further results from our recent client satisfaction survey, service updates from both the PASQ and PARC teams, including on the recent Speaker's Forum on Adoption and Mental Health. Lastly, enjoy working your way through our regular Adoption in the News updates.

We hope you are keeping well this winter and wish you well in the months to come.

PARC and PASQ Teams

Words to share

"Be gentle with yourself.

You are meeting parts of you that you have long been at war with.

Take all the time you need."

- *Janny Juddly, The Therapist in my Pocket*

"One does not walk into the forest and accuse the trees of being off-center,

Nor do they visit the shore and call the waves imperfect.

So why do we look at ourselves this way?"

- *Tao Te Ching*

"When you meet someone deep in grief...

Slip off your needs
and set them by the door.

Enter barefoot
this darkened chapel
Hollowed by loss
Hallowed by sorrow
Its gray stone walls
and floor.

You, the congregation
of one
Are here to listen
not to sing.

Kneel in the back pew.
make no sounds,
Let the candles
speak."

- *Patricia McKernon Runkle*



Adoption and Addiction

Adoption and addiction may seem like complex and unrelated ideas to some, however for many parties to adoption, when exploring the nature of some behaviours, there are clear indicators that adoption and addiction are intrinsically connected.

To recognise the link between adoption and addiction we must first recognise Adoption as trauma (please refer to the PARC poster below this article); this trauma can often trigger behaviours that become addictions. Some may be unaware, or not ready to acknowledge their addiction, but as we delve deeper into the heart of trauma and its impact upon anyone affected by adoption, you may find some common themes within your own lives. Let's first consider what an addiction is, how it can impact a person's life, and how it can be closely connected to adoption and finally, how we might address addiction as people affected by adoption.

"[All addictions are] attempts to regulate our internal emotional states because we're not comfortable, and the discomfort originates in childhood". – Dr Gabor Maté

Addiction can be any source of temporary (or ongoing) relief or pleasure; it may drive cravings when you're without it. Consider this: does a particular behaviour you have, create negative consequences and, despite these consequences, you struggle to stop that behaviour? If this is the case, it could be an addiction. The sad reality is that while addiction does not discriminate, adults who have endured trauma at a young age are at greater risk for developing an addiction.

"No one's saying that every traumatized person becomes addicted, rather every addicted person was traumatized. There are other outcomes of trauma addiction is only one of them." – Dr Gabor Maté

Underlying adoption, there can be many diverse connections to addiction. One way of understanding it, is a response to trauma, but also to avoid feelings of rejection and shame, maintaining a sense of control over one's life, numbing the pain of past and ongoing hurt. It may begin as a coping mechanism that soon spirals into addiction. General life stressors also inevitably contribute to how one responds, often exacerbating addictions.

Perhaps understandable to some, addictions can feel comforting, familiar, a ‘crutch’ upon which to support oneself; something that is within one’s control. The ‘self-talk’ may convince oneself that they’re deserving of that extra drink, that tub of ice cream or extra time on social media. But the reality is, addictions often control the person, by being an avoidance of facing grief, shame, and past trauma.

People who have been adopted, and/or exposed to traumatic events, as many are aware, can experience lifelong pain and suffering. Struggling to cope with adverse childhood experiences often cause adults to abuse substances, potentially resulting in a limited emotional capacity and decreased ability to manage daily stressors.

Furthermore, people grappling with addictions can often feel shunned by society, enhancing any shame and guilt they already feel and potentially fuelling their addiction. It may then come as little surprise that adoptees are over-represented in the treatment and recovery of addictions. (Sunderland) We cannot minimise the significance that trauma has upon the parties to adoption and the subsequent impact of addiction experienced by so many who continue to live their lives feeling a sense of unworthiness and shame – a prevalent catalyst perpetuating addictive habits. It can be like falling into a vicious cycle of feeling shame/rejection/grief etc, then turning to addictive behaviours to shut it out, ignore or numb it, only to return to feeling shame for having fed the addiction. Those of you who can identify with this cycle in their lives are not alone. In fact, it’s probably more common than you think. So how might we begin to address this relationship between adoption and addiction?

There is hope. Addressing the childhood trauma of adoption, and the vulnerability that accompanies this, is often very confronting, highly emotional, and seemingly too difficult to process. Addictions are one way of responding to the emotional turmoil. But if there can be a sense of self-awareness and a willingness to face the shame that often accompanies addiction, there is hope in overcoming the addiction. Obviously, this is no

easy feat; it inevitably involves exploring difficult memories and experiencing pain. Addictions can be overcome with self-compassion and meaningful support, empowering guidance and understanding. Human nature often chooses to avoid pain; but to face it head on often amounts to bravery and liberating oneself from challenges related to adoption, including addictions.

There is help; the hardest part might first be admitting you have an addiction, then seeking support.

If you find yourself struggling with adoption and addiction and want to seek support, contact PASQ QLD on 07 3170 4600, at pasq@benevolent.org.au, or PARC NSW on 02 9504 6788, at parc@benevolent.org.au. If you are in crisis, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

For further information on the information presented above, please visit the following sites:

www.drgabormate.com

“How dealing with past trauma may be the key to breaking addiction”

www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/nov/24/joanna-moorhead-gabriel-mate-trauma-addiction-treat?fbclid=IwAR0BoELfZvJirHohh04CMBeUi30W8s-Kt4i-mvPQsOP5IXPGezKqQJwzUr4

“Can Adverse Childhood Experiences Cause Addiction?”

www.vertavahealth.com/blog/childhood-experiences-cause-addiction/

“Adoption & Addiction” – Paul Sunderland

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e0-SsmOUJI

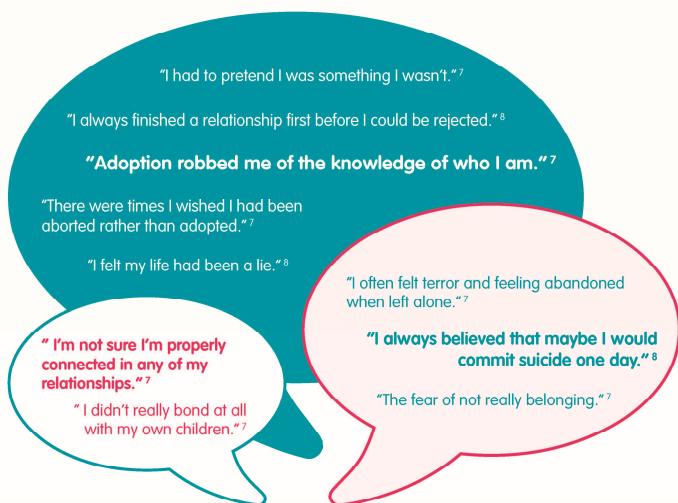
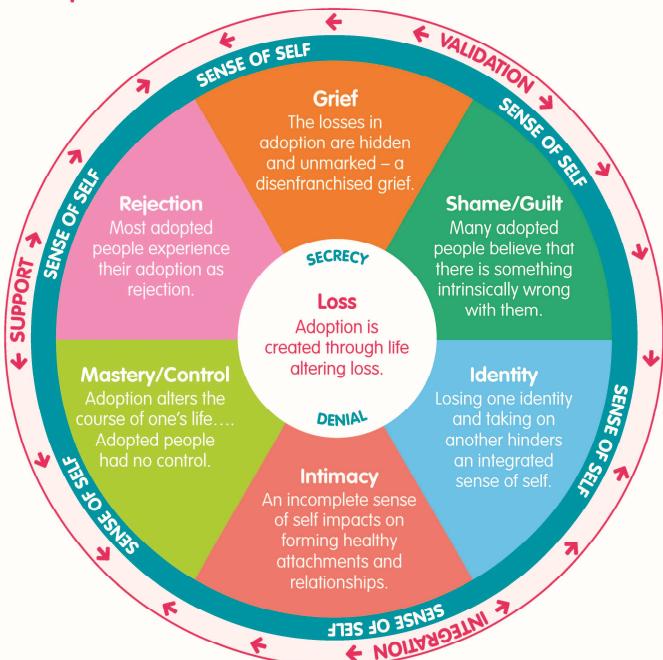
“How Childhood Trauma leads to Addiction” – Gabor Maté

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVg2bfqbIGI

ADOPTION IS TRAUMA – The Ripple Effect

1 in 15 people are affected by adoption in Australia.¹

Adoption Wheel²



What can you do?

Ask and Listen

- Are you adopted?
- What does your adoption mean for you?

Validate and connect

- Acknowledge lifelong impacts of adoption.
- Connect with peers and specialist services.

Support and respond

- Trauma informed.
- Holistic versus symptom management.

The First 1000 Days³

"Children exposed to adverse environments and experiences early are likely to continue to be exposed to such experiences, which has a cumulative effect. In this way, a poor start to life in the first 1000 days may be the start of a cascade of events that reinforce earlier neurological and biological adaptations."

- Adoption:**
- In-utero maternal stress
 - Preverbal loss of mother and father

Adverse Childhood Experiences⁴

Adoption is an Adverse Childhood Experience:

1. Maternal/paternal separation at birth
2. Abandonment
3. Unrecognised and unaddressed emotional needs



10/100 people with 3 ACEs attempt suicide

Adoption Specific Research

Past Adoption Experiences 2012 – 823 adopted people in Australia⁵

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

- Adopted people showed much higher levels of psychological distress than the general population in 2001 National Health Survey.
- Close to one in five respondents (adopted persons) was likely to have had a severe mental disorder at the time of survey completion.

%	NHS male	NHS Female	Adopted persons
Likely to be well	85.6	79.6	54.1
Likely to have a moderate/severe mental disorder	5.8	9.9	28.2

Suicidal Behaviour in National and International adoptees – A Swedish Cohort Study⁶

- Large scale study (approx. 1.28 million people) using registers of people born 1963-1973 and followed up until 2002.
- Shows higher rates of suicide for adopted people but cannot predict who will attempt suicide.

CONTACT US

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Winkler, R., Brown, D. W., van Kessel, M., & Blanchard, A. (1988). Clinical practice in adoption. *Psychology Practitioner Guideline Booklet*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Vanessa, J. & A. Kaplan, S. (1993). Using values in adoption. in L. Coleman, A. Tiber, H. Honney, & C. Doggs (Eds.), *Working with older adoptees: A source book of innovative models* (pp.45-53). Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine.

Adopted from <https://igiswqueenstdn.com/filtering-issues-in-adoption>

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Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Sofield, C., & Swell, R. (2012). Post adoption experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Post Adoption Practices Research Report No. 2(1). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Chapter 7.

*Post Adoption Resource Centre clients

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SOCIETY
Post Adoption Services



From our readers

"I can't remember being told that I was adopted, I just always knew. Although it was something rarely ever discussed..."

Sadly, the lack of communication about my adoption caused me to suppress so many emotions and feelings.

I imagine that most of us that are adopted have been fighting our thoughts and our feelings for our entire lives.

Growing up I was always fearful of addiction. I don't know why but I was. Although my thoughts of addition only ever related to alcohol and illegal substances and nothing else.

I feared that my biological parents may have been addicts of some sort and it may well be genetic. I mean, why else would I have been taken away from them.

How naive I was; I now know that addictions come in so many shapes and sizes. I never thought that my addiction would be a substance that was legal.

For me my addiction was food.

For me my association with food being a comforter comes from the very beginning of my life. I spent months in the nursery and the only association I had to comfort was when I was bottle fed. To this day I do not know how old I was when I was adopted. I still struggle with the things that I don't know about my

own birth and the first few months of my life. It seems nobody ever thought that perhaps it would be important for me to one day know what time I was born what I weighed and most importantly how long was my stay in that nursery. How long was I there before my adoptive parents came and took me home. There is a photo of me with my adoptive parents and my adoptive brothers that was taken at the hospital on the day they came to collect me and take me home. I look to be maybe 4-6 months old. Who comforted me through out those months? Who cared for when I cried? I guess I will never know.

Most of my life I have had a weight issue. I blamed it on genetics. I thought that perhaps I came from parents that also had a weight issue. You know, a family of big boned people. That's the thing when you are adopted you can make up your own story to fit in with all the reasons things don't go the way they should. I always had an excuse in my head. If I got upset, I would comfort myself with food, bad food. I never could understand why I used food as a comforter. I was never an over eater, I was an emotional eater, there's a difference. I would only binge when I felt emotional and stressed. For me that began to be more and more often. The older I got the worse this became. When I was married if I had an upset with my husband I would say in my head, "I'll show you" and I would go and eat something that was bad for me, I always did this in secret. The temporary pleasure I would get from this made the pain ease and the stress disappear. Even if it was only momentary. I felt like I was punishing him for upsetting me but the only person I was hurting was

me. I knew this but I couldn't stop it. The more I did it the more I needed it. My weight skyrocketed and I didn't know how to stop it. I was spiralling out of control. I couldn't beat the addiction, no matter how hard I tried. I wanted someone to save me, to help me, to stop me. I knew that there was nobody that could do that for me, I was alone.

Eventually my marriage broke down. It was now time for me to step back and look at myself. I needed to stop blaming others for my addiction. I needed to be accountable. How do I do this when I don't understand my addiction?

Then I met my new partner and together we started to explore ways to better our lives. We grew up in a time when communication wasn't commonplace. You didn't speak about your feelings and you certainly didn't show them. We had a journey ahead of us but together we knew we could break through and find the answers we needed. We went to retreats, seminars and workshops and we kept learning as much as we could. It opened so many emotions and for the first time we were learning why we do the things we do. It's strange how things just start to fall into place. Finally, I started to talk about being adopted. Talking about my emotions and my feelings.

This then led me to finding out who my birth parents were, and I met my birth mother and my siblings in 2019, I was 49yrs old. Sadly, my birth father had died in 2014.

Do you know that I never even knew that I was entitled to find out information about my adoption? I never knew I could access help for what had happened to me as a newborn baby. I never knew that I had rights. This is what living "the secret of adoption" keeps from you. All these years of struggling through life and right around the corner there was help.

After applying for my personal information, which I never knew I was able to access I was advised that I could also access assistance from The Benevolent Society. I made contact and was assigned my counsellor. We worked closely together and after a couple of sessions we decided to give EMDR: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing a go. I was naturally a little hesitant to give this a go as I had no idea what I was in for, but what did I have to lose right? This treatment doesn't work for everyone, but I was hopeful. I was pleasantly surprised by the success I had from this session. I left feeling exhausted and drained, it was an emotional experience, but I felt relieved. Since getting a better understanding of my

addiction and the above therapy I have managed to stay focused on my goals and not let my addiction win. I have started to take back control of my life and I am losing all those extra kilos slowly but surely. I still have a long way to go but I am healing. I feel for the first time in my life I am in control, not my addiction.

Reunion: Leisa and Allen.

Names used in this article have been changed to protect the identity of the writers.

Leisa: I had known I was adopted from the age of about 12 years old. When my adoptive parents had both passed away. I decided to get more information about my adoption. When this happened my life story was changed in a moment. I had been adopted twice. Neither of the two women I had thought to be my birth mother and my adoptive mother were now something different. I had a third Mum, my actual birthmother.

Confused, lost and wanting to know more I contacted PASQ. The staff were so helpful and caring and so we commenced a journey of discovery. PASQ found three half-siblings – one brother had passed but two brothers were still alive. My birth mother had passed away some years ago. I was overjoyed to know that I did belong to a family.

One brother lived on the North Coast NSW while the other was in Queensland. After some telephone contact with the brother in NSW it was arranged to have a face-to-face meeting where he was living with his wife. Our first meeting was very special. We met in a local Café for afternoon tea. My husband had travelled up with me but we decided that I would meet my new brother by myself. I was waiting inside and when he arrived, he gave me a wonderful smile and hug. We both felt very at ease with each other. My husband joined us after a while and was welcomed just as warmly. After much chatting and laughing it was agreed to go on to my brother's home just a short drive away. Another cuppa and then I meet my new sister-in-law. Such a warm greeting – "welcome home".

I then learned the story of the two contact letters they received from PASQ and my sister-in-law's persistence in getting it followed up. I am so grateful to her, for her keen interest in family history and her getting my brother to complete the circle. My other brother had travelled down from Queensland and we had a great dinner and plenty sharing of our stories. I knew I was in

a family that cared about me, my family. We had some days together and then it was time for home. I have been in regular contact with my brother in NSW and have met one of my nieces. There are plans afoot to meet other family member in 2021 depending on circumstances. Once again a big “thank you” to PASQ without whom this story would not have been written.

Allen: What a massive surprise and also an unbelievable shock to find out that I had a sister after 60 years of thinking there was only myself and two other brothers—little did we realise that we had a sister.

It has been such a wonderful journey for us all as it scripted so well, after all those years of not knowing and being complete strangers we are finally a complete family unit. What an extremely wonderful feeling as we have previously said we are greatly indebted to PASQ for their wonderful help in making our family complete.

FOUND by Karen Ingram

An intoxicating mix of nerves and excitement came over me as the doors opened. I walked up to the reception desk and said her name. The words sounded foreign coming out of my mouth and although I hadn't known her for long, I only knew her as Nana. “Do you know where to find her?” asked the receptionist. I froze. After three years of not knowing where she was, I had only just found her, but I didn't know which room she was in.

Beeping sounds overlapped each other as they came from the left, from the right, behind me and ahead. There was no mistaking this environment. This is the final home for many and those beeping sounds were calls for assistance. Tentatively I paced the corridor, watching for the room number, wondering what I would find and how I would react. Turning into the doorway of room 107 I saw her in the corner bathed in sunlight. Her figure was framed by the plants in the courtyard as she reclined in her chair, reading.

“Hello” I called cheerily. She looked up and squinted in my direction. “Hello Nana, it's me, Karen”. She beamed back at me. “Karen, how wonderful to see you!” Those words were just the encouragement I needed. My visit would be good for both of us.

Smiling, I sidled alongside her, took her frail hand in mine, leant in and gently kissed her soft cheek. “Hello Nana.” We sat quietly for a moment, smiling and

looking at each other. I was desperate to take everything in, to not miss a thing. We had already missed out on so much. I'm not sure what she saw in me, or what her 95 year old mind must have been thinking. I'd been assured her mind and wit remained sharp although her short term memory was deteriorating. Nana spent most of the hours in her day reading novels or listening to Radio National. Her long tender fingers looked like they belonged to an artist or a writer and I was impressed they managed to cradle weighty hard-backs. Her beautiful smile nourished me instantly and at once I felt selfish to seek comfort from a woman who had already given so much of herself to others. I was hopeful my visit would bring her some gladness.

Nana didn't find out that I existed until I was thirty years old. I was the family secret. My birth-mother told one person in her family that she was pregnant, her father. ‘Old Jim’ made all of the arrangements for his daughter's internment, the relinquishing of her baby and he sent her on a south pacific cruise to get over the event. He also chose to never mention it to his wife, and took the secret to his grave. The shock, sadness and betrayal felt by Nana when my presence was unleashed on the family three decades later added further pain to this unfolding series of stories.

Twenty years ago I arrived on a doorstep of a house in Port Melbourne to meet my first blood relative. The front gate was flung wide open. The front door was flung wide open. Awash with an intoxicating mix of nerves and excitement I made a few steps towards the entrance and was welcomed by a smiling woman running towards me, her arms outreaching. It is still to this day one of the best hugs of my life. Our bodies melded into one and we held on to each other for the longest time. This was my aunty. She was my people. After a while I lifted my head high enough to look over her shoulder and down the hall I saw someone standing there. “Who is this?” I asked. “This is your Nana” was the reply. Nana, at the time a small but spritely 75 year old, reached out for me and we embraced. As soon as she heard about my planned visit, she booked a flight from Newcastle to Melbourne. She couldn't wait to meet me.

That was the first of about six meetings over the following twenty years. There was a lot to learn about each but how do you catch up on a life-time of missed opportunities? I longed to connect with my heritage and the stories that had started to unfold about Nana were amazing. One of my prized possessions is a tiny jade Buddha which she gave me at our first meeting.

What an awesome woman! A Buddha! We wrote to each other each Christmas although more recently her letters stopped arriving. I wasn't sure if she had died, or if she had moved or if she had joined other members of her family in cutting communication with me.

After a series of heart-numbing events over the past few years I surprised myself in mustering the courage I needed to ask some more questions and three weeks ago I found that Nana had been relocated to a nursing home in a small coastal town in New South Wales. I managed to get a message to her about wanting to find out about my family history and I heard back that she was happy to help me where she could. After the longest time, it was these little nibbles that brought me to her bed-side one week ago and I was given a chance, possibly the last chance, to talk to my maternal grandmother.

Seeing her beautiful smile and hearing her say how wonderful it was to see me filled my heart in more ways than I can describe. I'd hurriedly written down some questions for her the night before but it's hard to cram a lifetime of questions into one visit. I wanted to know the names of her siblings, of her parents, what did her father do, what did she like at school, what did she do when she left school, who were her pets, how did she meet 'old Jim', who was 'old Jim'. On the surface the questions are quite banal, but when faced with the only source of the answers, it meant the world. How was I going to capture all of the answers and be present in the moment, and notice her expressions and mentally record and retain her voice, her tone, her laughter. As we sat together I felt the sands of that damn hourglass slipping away faster than ever.

We had quality time and enjoyed a conversation. We talked about the jobs that her great grand-children may have in the future, about storytelling and technology. We talked about cruelty of animals and the dreadful treatment of Indigenous Australians. It's an issue so close to my heart and to know my grandmother unequivocally felt the same as me was wonderfully reassuring. She understood at a level I didn't know existed for a woman of her generation. She felt that nursing homes are no place for children and we talked about the lack of exposure so many children have with people who are nearing the end of their life. She was excited to hear about my children and careful not to overwhelm her, I asked her if she would like to see them. They were marking time at the nearby beach with their dad. When Nana gave the all clear, I sent out the signal and they were there in a

flash. Her face lit up, her eyes sparkled and her smile was beaming. I'm not sure what she saw in them, or what her 95 year old mind must have been thinking.

We had driven a long way to see Nana and it was time to say good-bye. I have so many more questions and I'm sure that was my last chance to ask them of her. I wanted our good-bye to be beautiful, but it in the end it was just sad. It's unlikely I'll ever see her again, but I took her frail hand in mine, leant in and gently kissed her soft cheek, "I'm so glad I came to visit Nana, we'll see you soon".

Tell us your PARC or PASQ story...

In the lead up to PARC's 30th anniversary and with 40 years of combined experience, we'd love to hear your experience of PARC or PASQ. [Click here or visit](#) www.surveymonkey.com/r/G2FWQ9X to share your story.

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)
PASQ: **07 3170 4600** (QLD)

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?



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



When I hear the words "Adoption" and "Addiction"

Last edition we asked you to tell us in your words what you think of when you hear the words "adoption" and "addiction". We thank all of those who shared these very personal reflections with us.

"When I hear the words adoption and addiction, I think of comfort, being controlled and wanting to escape. I think of the substance that soothes yet also creates feelings of self loathing. This to me is part of the adoption experience as adoptees have an incomplete knowledge of their identity, of their feelings, birth family and neurological wiring. From this an addictive substance continues this incompleteness by numbing feelings and heightening the sense of being a bad baby that ruined their birth mothers life. So we punish ourselves by harming ourselves with addictive substances."

"Adoption and addiction go hand in hand. Every person in the adoption triangle has a hole in their heart and their lives. With time the hole grows and addictions, with its highs and lows, tries to fill the void. They

never, never succeeded! "

"It makes me sad"

"I lived with my adopted mum who was addicted to sleeping tablets. When her husband died I was only 12 years of age at the time she stayed on the tablets for years. I left home at 18 years of age. I didn't see her for a while but confronted her on a visit once that she took tablets. She told me not anymore but took up drinking alcohol instead (not when I lived with her). To this day, I won't take sleeping tablets at all. I do meditation instead."

"I feel as though I know both of these words intimately. they both represent unrelenting pain and discomfort, both physically and psychologically. I live my life daily as an adopted person with scars on the inside, I live daily as an addictive personality. I want to be drunk, stoned or just smoking a cigarette but I know now these things are going to kill me so now I sooth myself through food, it too will kill me as I have diabetes but just not as quickly as my other vices. I fight my addictive

behaviour the same way I fight my adoption pain and that is to go in hard, scratch at it until it bleeds is my go to saying. Adoption hurts, addiction hurts too, they go hand in hand. My addictions replaced my anger, abandonment and isolation. As an adopted person to disappear even just for a few hours from your own head is a blessing."

"I can admit that I was addicted to people pleasing (codependency) to manipulate people; and sex - as a substitute for love (that I didn't deserve) and avoidance of intimacy (into me see). Because of the guilt and shame I had about relinquishing my baby for adoption."

PASQ/PARC Client Experience Survey

We would like to thank all our clients who took part in our Client Satisfaction survey last year. The survey aimed to capture information about clients' experiences with the services and their impact. This feedback is invaluable because it helps us understand what we do well and where we need to improve.

We received 247 responses, with 87% of responses reporting satisfaction with the services and 77% reporting being extremely satisfied. 3 in 4 respondents reported a better understanding of their adoption experience and the statements relating to a stronger sense of self, improved emotional well-being, and feeling less isolated as a result of involvement with the services each saw 2 in 3 respondents agreeing.

The services were considered to be easy to access, quality services provided by experienced teams that understand adoption experiences and who are trusted, respectful and genuinely care. Also appearing as strong themes were the value of choice and connection to other people with similar expectations, particularly through peer

support and the newsletter. Opportunities identified by respondents for the improvement of how the services support this included support relating to particular types of adoption experiences, such as inter-country adoption, and providing support in accessible ways throughout metro and regional to remote areas of NSW and QLD. Both face-to-face and virtual services' value was reflected in responses, and the teams will be further exploring ways to make the most of virtual opportunities.

The loss of trusted key workers and staff changes was the strongest negative experience seen in the responses. Understanding that trust is fundamental to providing quality services and that trust takes time to earn, PASQ and PARC work hard to foster stable teams and to provide clients with access to their key worker as well as the broader teams in order to both create teams that can pool a wealth of knowledge and experience and connect clients with more than one staff member, and to ease the transition as much as possible when staff changes are unavoidable. If you have further ideas for how we can improve staff change-over processes, we'd love to hear from you.

PARC and PASQ regularly seek feedback after services are provided. As well, PARC and PASQ will be working on communicating The Benevolent Society's feedback and complaint processes as this was identified as an area in which we could improve.

This report is based on a summary provided by The Benevolent Society's Risk, Quality and Compliance team.

Sarah Jane Davis, PASQ Team Leader and Fiona Cameron, PARC Team Leader



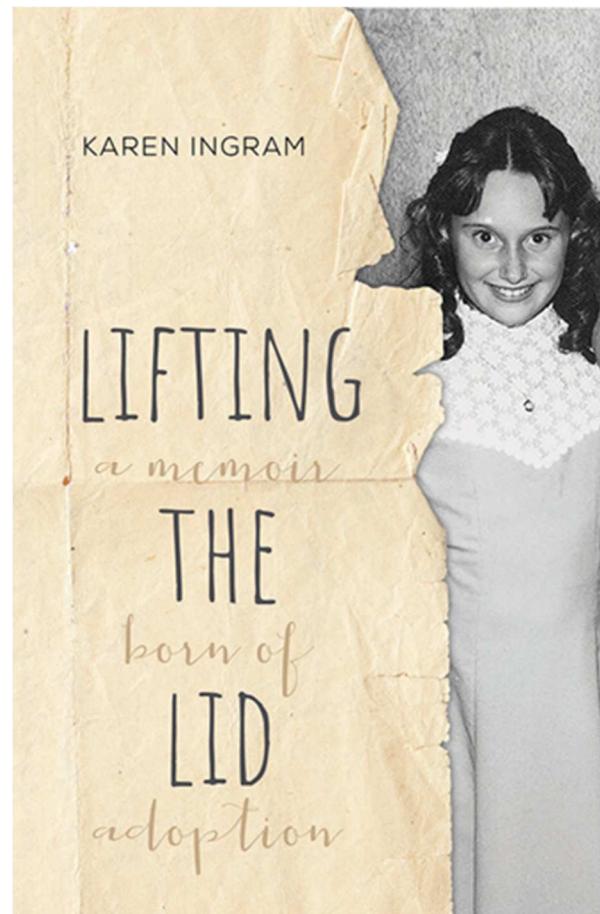
Book Review: Lifting the lid

Lifting the Lid is Karen Ingram's story of growing up in Newcastle and her journey into adulthood as she tries to piece together her family history. Written as a creative memoir Karen weaves the many complicated aspects of her story together in a compelling way.

Karen's story takes twists and turns and as she begins on her reunion journey, she details the sometimes-contradictory emotions felt when initial contact is made, describing both exhaustion, immense relief, and often divided loyalties. One of the most unique aspects of Karen's book is her decision to not just use prose to tell her story but to draw on photos and small sections of poetry scattered throughout to add textual depth and help the story come to life.

Lifting the Lid is written with great positivity, at times humour and generosity to all who have played a part in her story - taking a serious and more sensitive approach when needed. However, the central thread throughout this book is Karen's genuine and deep interest in her family history, as she writes, "I was fascinated by the people who went before me." This curiosity guides every part of this carefully built story, and as a reader you slowly become invested in finding out the truth alongside Karen.

It was a privilege to get to read Lifting the Lid, Karen's compassion shone through the book, and her strong writing skills helped tell an engaging and complex story.



Lifting the Lid can be purchased online through Karen Ingram's website: karenigram.com.au

PARC Update

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

PARC Staffing News... PARC 30th Anniversary

Welcome Sarah!

Sarah Burn joined PARC in April as a Counsellor, taking over the role from Tricia Dearden who recently retired.

What attracted you to this role?

Sarah: I have worked in the adoptions arena for close to 20 years in NSW; PARC has always been a highly regarded and well-established team in the sector, and it was a great opportunity for me to join the team and work with such experienced practitioners.

Is there anything that has surprised you?

I am in awe of how such a small team continues to provide and produce so many varied and invaluable, high quality events, resources and services to the adoption community and has been doing so for 30 years.

What would you like people to know about you?

I'm interested in meeting people where they are at on their journey and am always honoured to walk alongside someone who is sharing such a personal part of themselves with me. It is a privilege to work in this space and support people who are exploring their personal experiences.



PARC has been busy organizing:

- An Anniversary Morning Tea at the Australian Museum 22nd June—rescheduled to September
- The production of a new 10 minute video about the experience of adoption – our voices, our stories.
- Republishing our book, The Colour of Difference, now 20 years old
- Jointly reprinting the follow up book The Colour of Time with International Social Services.

We will cover these events in our next Newsletter.

Groups and Events

March

8th Anniversary of the Federal Apology for Forced Adoption.

PARC attended the Forced Adoption Support Service luncheon cruise 22 March to mark this occasion.

May

PARC Mother's Morning Tea was held at Hurstville with some mothers attending on-line as well. The mothers each commented on the special warmth, kindness and understanding that they experienced.

June

Speaker's Forum 8th June – Adoption and Mental Health. This was well-attended at Glebe and on-line. Please read the following article for more information.

Suicide and Adoption: Continuing conversations beyond the forum



The Speaker's Forum was held on the 8th of June 2021 in honour of David Cunningham, an adopted person. The night brought together 60 different people at our Glebe office, and online, including adopted people, mothers, fathers, family members, and professionals.

The night opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and Brooke Bengston, PARC Counsellor, introduced Courtney Cunningham to speak about her experiences as an adopted person. Courtney tragically lost her brother, David, to suicide. She was adopted from Columbia, and David was adopted from Korea when they were 4 months old. When describing the lifelong impact of adoption, she said,

"Adoption doesn't end when papers are signed, and you're given to a family. It's an ongoing battle."

Courtney spoke of the importance of understanding the impact of the age that a child is adopted and their family background. Courtney shared that her experiences with depression and thoughts of suicide began at an early age. She asked parents to remember that children are not always going to be forthcoming. While acknowledging the positives of adoption, Courtney reflected on the challenges of attachment and the racial

expectations of being a black, Columbian woman in a white society.

Marg Watson, PARC Counsellor, shared a written statement from The Hon. Julia Gillard in response to the event. Ms Gillard expressed her gratitude to the PARC team and acknowledged the impact adoption has had on the community. She offered her condolences to the Cunningham family and stated,

"Remembering [David] and his passing as a way to connect with your community – both clients and professionals – and encourage more learning and conversations about suicide is so important."

Given the impact of trauma on people affected by adoption and the prevalence of suicide among men in Australia, it made sense to invite Dr. Zac Seidler to the event. Dr. Seidler is a Clinical Psychologist, the Director of Mental Health Training at Movember and a Research Fellow with Orygen at The University of Melbourne. He began by paying his respects to David's family, describing the impact of suicide as a "tsunami." He hoped to take David's memory and use it to shine a spotlight on the issue. He spoke about the "gender paradox" in which women attempt suicide 5-6 times more than men, but men die by suicide 3-4 times more than women. He said, **"We end up actually, if you look at the world statistics, losing a man a minute to suicide which is staggering, and that's 7 men a day within Australia."**

Dr Seidler spoke about the importance of informal support in the community as a solution stating, **"Community fundamentally saves lives, and it's extremely important and it's something we take for granted."** He linked his own work with people affected by adoption and how men

are expected to suppress their emotion and avoid being vulnerable. He described the representation of masculinity and how it used to be about oppression, and then repression and is now moving towards the age of depression. He addressed the concepts of belonging and burdensomeness, two prevalent issues when it comes to mental health. Zac connected this back to adoption and trying to find out where you have come from, who you are and how to make sense of the world through what he describes as an "unattainable fog." He emphasised that men suffer in silence and will present differently with anger, irritability, and substance use. This can often be misunderstood or interpreted as bad behaviour, when it is really a cry for help. Zac says it's about being curious and giving men the space to speak to understand what is going on for them, in all its complexity.

Zac acknowledged that it takes committed effort to collect data and have decision makers attend to issues such as the relationship between the impact of adoption and suicide. As he headed off to Canberra to liaise with federal parliamentarians about mental health issues he said, "**Adoption is front of mind.**"

Naomi Blair, Program Manager of Mood Active, was then invited to speak by David's family. The Cunningham family have found the service to be a great benefit for their mental health after losing David. Mood Active are a charity association that helps people with depression and anxiety get back on their feet using exercise. For more information, go to www.moodactive.com.au.

Thankyou to all those who attended. We all agreed that this contributed to an important continuing conversation which impacts us all.

"Adoption and Addiction" Podcast from Jigsaw QLD

In their most recent episodes of "Adopt Perspective", Jigsaw QLD share a two part series on "Adoption and Addiction".

Kevin Barhydt - Adoption & Addiction (Part One)

"Kevin Barhydt is an adoptee living in New York who wrote a memoir about his adoption, childhood sexual abuse, addiction and recovery called 'Dear Stephen Michael's Mother'. By the age of 20, Kevin had succumbed to a suicidal lifestyle of drug dealing and prostitution. At age 45, and after many years of recovery, he began a painful journey to uncover his origins and the hopeful search for his mother. In this first episode of a two-part series on adoption and addiction series, Jo talks to Kevin about his personal story and memoir."

Listen [here](#) or visit www.jigsawqueensland.com/podcast/episode/270187c5/kevin-barhydt-adoption-and-addiction-part-one

David Bohl - Adoption & Addiction (Part Two)

"In the second episode of our two-part adoption and addiction series, Jane speaks to David Bohl about the relationship between adoption and addiction. David is an adoptee from the USA who is a Clinical Substance Abuse Counsellor, Master Addiction Counsellor and currently works as an independent addiction and recovery consultant. David is a board member and addiction and recovery consultant to the National Association of Adoptees and Parents. In 2018, David published a book titled 'Parallel Universes' which won an excellence award in the category of addiction recovery."

Listen [here](#) or visit www.jigsawqueensland.com/podcast/episode/1ab95669/david-bohl-adoption-and-addiction-part-two

PASQ Update

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



Therapeutic Parenting Course

PASQ are working towards running another Therapeutic Parenting course in the second half of 2021. If you'd like to register your interest for upcoming groups, please contact us on 07 3170 4600 or pasq@benevolent.org.au.

Toowoomba and Surrounds Adoption, Belonging and Connections group

PASQ are coming to Toowoomba! Meet others affected by adoption and professional working in the field of adoption and reunion. Ask questions and join discussion, or, come along to listen to others.

When: Saturday, 17th July 2021

Time: 10:00 am—12:00 pm

Where: Double Seminar Room, Lvl 3, Toowoomba City Library

RSVP: Spaces are limited. Please RSVP by Friday, 9th July 2021.

Upcoming Groups and Events

April

Gold Coast Connections group

July

Toowoomba and surrounds Adoption, Belonging and Connections group

Later this year...

Therapeutic Parenting Course

Brisbane Mother's Group

Teens Adoption, Belonging and Connections group

Adoption in the news

As a proud autistic, transracial adoptee, Kaleb has spent his entire life trying to prove himself



To read more click [here](#) or visit www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-01/kaleb-asian-parents-australian-adoptee-growing-up-qld-heywire/100014960?fbclid=IwAR0kff9fl9DT1Nv9IQyP5e5fhV0VBuRnpTmICBQmjT6Lj3cGBvu0dBWur_8

This Is What No One Tells You About Adoption



"I was adopted at three weeks of age and grew up in a loving family. My parents told me from the very beginning I was adopted, but I had no access to information about my origins because closed adoption was the norm in the United States well into the 1970s."

To read more click [here](#) or visit www.huffpost.com/entry/adoption-trauma-savior-myth_n_608598b9e4b05af50db72167?ncid=engmodushpmg00000003&fbclid=IwAR0fqmL1RMMgt_gHvq4w_n5yE8OpVDQJUUOr5iOMzAuuJMoYPRjeDkywoow

Forced adoption pain even more raw for Victorian mother 60 years on



"It has been 60 years since Merle Kelly woke from a general anaesthetic to find her newborn had been taken away, but the pain from that day gets rawer as the years go on."

To read more click [here](#) or visit www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-17/adoption-inquiry-wodonga-mum-says-pain-worse-after-60-years/100142692?utm_medium=social&utm_content=sf245948355&utm_campaign=abc_melbourne&utm_source=m.facebook.com&sf245948355=1&fbclid=IwAR0OsuC2plPyCeVaCCdFoWWM1zUdnMa25fucyBnWVnqyGpf7SR-Ujp1eA7Q

Keegan-Michael Key Talks Adoption, Fear of Abandonment and His 'People-Pleasing Issue'



"Keegan-Michael Key is opening up about how his adoption experience has shaped him into the person he is today."

To read more click [here](#) or visit www.people.com/tv/keegan-michael-key-reflects-adoption-experience-running-wild-exclusive/?fbclid=IwAR2CquKQR0VQ-1lENxaBIRZ1cqroWC9KI5tD-6gnaYSYI3Ocdn_Rl9nwzbZE

Adoption in the news

Liz Wilde: 'Here at last was the story behind my mother's torment'



"Two years ago, Liz Wilde wrote a heart-wrenching piece in YOU describing her quest to find out more about her late birth mother. A week later she received an email from a stranger in America."

To read more click [here](#) or visit www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-9326121/Liz-Wilde-story-mothers-torment.html?fbclid=IwAR0sdQBdmvfsVngLhAUT0yVMJrutNTU8tTZJ1BTUtk6VhNLAQRAn3Rs_S8

Origin story: the truth behind an international adoption



"I always thought my parents abandoned me," says Meilan Stuy, who was born in China's Henan Province but raised by adoptive parents half a world away in the US state of Utah. She says her US parents showered her with love, but the older she got, the more she wanted to know where she really came from. As the story of her background emerged, so too did the cruel circumstances that led many Chinese couples to give up their children."

To read more click [here](#), or visit www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/1658/?fbclid=IwAR1pL4WeCb82UFo3LTczIMgEHvKvmfOxs2d5uXVmHeX_SF4loYgHTvIKAY

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