



**ARMS (Vic)**  
Association Representing Mothers Separated by adoption

**AUTUMN NEWSLETTER**

**APRIL 2023**



**PO Box 645 Deepdene Vic 3103**

**Telephone: 0400 701 621**

**Email: [arms@armsvic.org.au](mailto:arms@armsvic.org.au)**

**Website: [armsvic.org.au](http://armsvic.org.au)**



SAVE THE DATE.....

ARMS MOTHERS DAY  
EVENT  
6 MAY 2023  
INVITATION ENCLOSED

Welcome to our Autumn 2023 Newsletter. We have had some exciting events recently and you will read more later in this Newsletter.

Some ARMS members accepted the invitation from Canberra in March to travel to Canberra and stay one night to attend a dinner at the National Portrait Gallery followed by morning tea in Parliament House the next day. This was to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's Apology to all those affected by Forced Adoption. (The term Forced refers to illegality, manipulation, coercion, lack of support.)

ARMS and Vanish also held a Commemoration at St Andrew's Reserve in Melbourne on March 25<sup>th</sup> at our Taken Not Given memorial.



Coming up in May is our annual Mothers' Day Meeting to recognise us as mothers to the babies we gave birth to but were not allowed to raise. Giving birth changed us forever and many women had no other children. We like to acknowledge that we are all mothers. As part of the Mothers' Day meeting we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of ARMS. We would like to see as many members there as possible. This is an amazing milestone and we have all been a part of it. The invitation is further on in this Newsletter.

ARMS is currently looking at the Government's commitment to a redress scheme. The Exceptional Circumstances Fund is currently available until the Redress Scheme comes into effect. Payments from the Exceptional Circumstances Fund will not affect any future payments from the Redress Scheme. They are requesting feedback to see our priorities.

Please remember to pay your membership to ARMS as we have no other funding to pay the running costs such as telephone and webpage costs. We do get some grants for specific projects but that is where that money must go. Just a reminder for you.

Thank you for reading my report. Remember this is your Newsletter and we would love your contribution and ideas to share here.

*Faye Burnham, Convenor*



## VANISH CREATIVE EXPRESSION WORKSHOPS FOR MOTHERS

There's still time to sign up for the Writing as Therapy or the Art Therapy workshop. Places are still available. Registrations for the writing workshop can be made until the 19th April 2023. Go to [www.vanish.org.au/news-events](http://www.vanish.org.au/news-events) or phone 03 9328 8611.



As well as the ARMS telephone number 0400 701 621 the following committee members are happy to be contacted (between 9am and 9pm) on their personal phone numbers:

Faye Burnham	0411 865 836
Jo Fraser	0409 442 701
Dorothy Kowalski	0411 098 773 03 9889 3583

## Tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

The 21st March marked the tenth anniversary of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's historic Apology for Forced Adoptions in Parliament House in Canberra in 2013. To mark this important milestone the Government hosted commemorative activities in Canberra on 21st and 22nd March. The commemoration brought together people directly affected by adoption along with those who tirelessly worked, and continue to work, as supporters of the forced adoptions community.



On Tuesday evening many of us attended a panel organised by the National Archives of Australia - Saying sorry: do national apologies change the world? The panel was moderated by Paul Barclay from the ABC and the very interesting speakers were the Honourable Nahum Mushin AM (Forced Adoption Apology), the Honourable Jenny Macklin (Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians Apologies), Professor Michelle Arrow (Vice President of the Australian Historical Society) and Rosemary Baird (from the National Sorry Day Committee). A dinner was then held at The National Portrait Gallery with Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services, the Honourable Nahum Mushin AM and the Honourable Nicola Roxon, former Minister, as guest speakers. The evening provided a great opportunity to liaise with friends from other states and make new contacts that will be valuable for us in our advocacy work.

On Wednesday morning Amanda Rishworth read a Statement of Significance in the House of Representatives (see below), with those of us who had travelled to Canberra in the public gallery. We were expecting an announcement of some significance from the Minister and were bitterly disappointed that all she announced was \$700,000 in funding for training for aged care, allied health and Forced Adoption Support Service providers. A morning tea followed the Statement of Significance and Minister Rishworth was approached by many guests to express their disappointment. We need to assume that she is unaware of our experiences with agencies and the lack of high quality counselling, and that her public servants are not themselves adequately informed about what proper redress should look like. In so many cases, it is ignorance, not conspiracy that has well intentioned leaders making poor decisions. We have contacted the Minister outlining our thoughts and asking for a meeting to discuss how funding can be made available directly to those affected by adoption rather than once again to agencies.

*..it did happen just as we recall it, that we are deserving of this acknowledgement, that we have done as best we can with the cards we have been dealt and that we are entitled to grieve and have that grief acknowledged.*

*..we give these losses the respect of time*



*Marie Meggitt  
an excerpt from her candle  
lighting ceremony speech in our  
Summer 2023 newsletter*



**10 Year Anniversary of National Apology for Forced Adoptions**  
**Excerpts of a Statement of Significance in Parliament**  
by Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services



"It was a historic moment. A moment where a mass of voices, once silenced, was brought to the national stage.

Ten years ago, all sides of politics came together in agreement with the Apology.

We know that the passing of time has not healed your wounds. But we thank you.

By being here, you are ensuring the nation does not forget.

I must also acknowledge the former members of the Senate, Ms Sue Boyce and Ms Rachael Siewert, who championed this cause through the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, as well as former Ministers, Ms Nicola Roxon and Ms Jenny Macklin.

I acknowledge also the Chair of the Reference Committee for the Forced Adoptions Apology, Professor Nahum Mushin, who with his committee members, including the member for Moreton, worked with mothers, adopted people and fathers to ensure the Apology reflected their deep pain and hurt, as well as their bravery.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday when he spoke in the Parliament: "This is not ancient history. Not some distant tale from the banished past. The Australians affected are with us still".

Forced adoptions are a startlingly recent chapter in Australia's history.

They were commonplace across the country, growing in frequency through the 1940s to reach a peak between 1950 and 1975.

Though difficult to confirm with unreliable records, it is estimated that the total number of forced adoptions could be as high as 250,000.

That's a quarter of a million newborn babies that were taken from their mothers and families by means of shame, coercion, institutional abuse, drugging, physical restraint, forgery and fraud.

These practices were driven by the social judgement that children must, at all costs,

be raised by married parents - always a mother, and a father.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday: "We reflect on a culture that enabled and facilitated the practice of denying mothers even a single moment with the baby they had brought into the world". It's unimaginable.

And the aftershocks are still reverberating through communities, as the consequences of forced adoption are still coming to light.

... A deep veil of silence was drawn across this shameful period in history.

... Importantly, The Australian Parliament denounced the forced adoption practices as reprehensible, inexcusable, immoral, and above all - illegal.

However, the Apology was also an acknowledgement that we had to do better. Do better in our recognition and support for the people affected.

Do better by the people who were let down by people and institutions they should have been able to trust to protect and care for them.

Today I acknowledge that there is still more to be done.

On this tenth anniversary, we restate that we have not forgotten the mothers, adopted people, some fathers, families, and communities torn apart by forced adoptions.

We recognise that the pain has not gone away, and will never go away.

We recognise that the search for identities continues and more support is needed.

We need to look at what we can do to better support people impacted.

To do better for everyone who was let down by society and the institutions they should have been able to trust to protect and care for them.

And to make sure Australia never forgets this shameful chapter - and never makes the same mistakes again.



## Tenth Anniversary National Apology - Melbourne event



ARMS and VANISH held an event commemorating the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at the Taken Not Given memorial. The weather was very kind to us and we had a pleasing turnout of members of ARMS, VANISH and Origins as well as family and friends. The guest speaker was Nahum Mushin who "had a chat with us" outlining his thoughts on what has gone before and what should happen in the future. He expressed his disappointment at the lack of any meaningful announcement at the event in Canberra and encouraged us to keep up the fight. Jo Fraser and Charlotte Smith also spoke about Julia Gillard's Apology and what it meant and means to those affected by adoption. It's hard to believe it was ten years ago - and so little has been implemented by the Government. As Nahum said, ten years have been wasted, but we are hopeful that this will now change.



### WA INQUIRY 2023

Western Australia will follow Victoria in holding an inquiry into forced adoption, following two years of campaigning by people who were adopted out as children and mothers who were forced to give up their babies.

On 22 February 2023, the Standing Committee on the Environment and Public Affairs in the Western Australia government resolved to commence an inquiry into the matters raised in the petition presented to the Hon Lorna Harper MLC. The terms of reference for that inquiry, and the Committee's details, may be found on the Parliament's website at [www.parliament.wa.gov.au/env](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/env).

It is intended that this inquiry will give any person affected by forced adoptions an opportunity, either publicly

or privately, to share their lived experiences.

That will include (but not be limited to) mothers who had children forcibly removed from them at birth, or those who were wrongfully coerced or persuaded into giving up their baby for adoption.

Please contact us on 08 9222 7231 or [env@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:env@parliament.wa.gov.au) if you have any questions. **Submissions must be made by the 16th June.**

You can lodge your submission online here:

<https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/WebOpenSubmissions>

or post it to: Environment and Public Affairs Committee Parliament House 4 Harvest Terrace West Perth WA 6005.



## Scottish Apology for Forced Adoptions

Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has issued an apology to the thousands of women who had their babies taken from them for adoption. She said the apology was 'long overdue'.

In one of her final acts as First Minister, Ms Sturgeon fought back tears as she condemned a practice she said was "relatively common" until the 1970s. It saw "many thousands of children" taken from their mothers - most of whom were young and unmarried - without consent. "The horrors of what happened to these women is almost impossible to comprehend. It is the stuff of nightmares.

"Today, as First Minister, and on behalf of the Scottish Government, I say directly to the mothers who had their babies taken away from them, to the sons and daughters who were separated from their parents, to the fathers who were denied their rights, and to families who have lived with this legacy: for the decades of pain that you have suffered, I offer today a sincere, heartfelt and unreserved apology."

It affected an estimated 60,000 women between the 1950s and late 70s. The Scottish Government committed to around £145,000 of funding to provide those impacted with specialist support and counselling.

This has been a long and hard fought battle by women in Scotland and they are to be congratulated on this significant Apology.



As part of the apology, the Scottish government has already committed to a scoping study to address the improvements that are required to be made to the services available to victims. If you have any connection to an adoption that took place in Scotland, or if you are a Scot living in Scotland or abroad, then your experience is invaluable to this study.

Any information that you can provide, whether it is positive or not, will be helpful. This might include your experiences of searching and connecting, accessing counselling or therapy, accessing peer support, seeking mental health support through your doctor (GP), or why you have been unable to benefit from any of these. Please email [jofraser3124@gmail.com](mailto:jofraser3124@gmail.com) for contact details.

You.....  
You were a part of my body  
Born healthy but I was unable to watch you grow  
Taken from me and given to strangers  
Not offered the help that was out there  
Not given the information to apply for assistance  
Time went by.....  
Days, weeks, months, years  
Your milestones, Birthdays, kindergarten , school,  
boyfriends, girlfriends I missed too  
Wedding, births to name another few  
Finally getting the courage with encouragement to look for you  
Delighted to find you  
Excited to meet you  
Ecstatic to stay in touch with you  
Slowly reconnecting  
All so sad  
It is not the fairytale we are led to believe by the media and some  
other people  
You, I loved and will always love.

Gail   



### DISCLAIMER:

All contributions are presented with the aim of sharing ideas. Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by ARMS

## ARMS sincerely apologises for an error in the ARMS Summer 2023 newsletter

On page 6, a photo of the memorial in Marley Street, Victoria Park, Sale was incorrectly labelled "Adoption Memorial, Sale". We unreservedly apologise for any distress the incorrect labelling of the photo may have caused IRM or anyone else. Here is another photo of the beautiful memorial with its correct name:



### **CHERISHED Mother and Child**

Officially Unveiled by  
Hon Darren Chester MP  
Federal Member for Gippsland

On Behalf Of Independent Regional  
Mothers On 17 March 2017

To Commemorate Prime Minister  
Julia Gillard`s National  
Parliamentary Apology on 21 March  
2013

## ARMS (Vic) SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

ARMS has been holding support group meetings on the first Saturday of every month, except January, since 1982. A safe place to be yourself, share your emotions and know that you are not judged.

The meetings are now held at St Augustine's Church, 631 Bourke St, Melbourne (near Spencer St) from 2 - 4pm.

Zoom support group meetings will be trialled on the third Wednesday of each month from 6 - 8pm. Please email [jofraser3124@gmail.com](mailto:jofraser3124@gmail.com) to register to have the link sent to you. We look forward to seeing you there.

mothers must mother  
each other, too.

we must hold each other up &  
surround each other strong &  
in the ear  
of every new mother  
we must whisper,  
you belong  
you belong.

by Vicki Rivard

### **Redress Scheme Survey**

Members will have received, by email or post, the survey questionnaire on the proposed Redress Scheme to be established by the Victorian Government. We hope you were able to respond to the survey by the due date of 12th April, as input from those who will be directly affected by the scheme is very important. Even if you are late responding to the survey, it's entirely possible that your response could be considered.



# WHITE GOODS

(An edited version of the transcript for the short film White Goods by Pollyannafilms.)



I've just read about two women who were recently released from an asylum for the criminally insane. They'd been there for 74 years for having illegitimate children. That's what they did to people who broke the "laws of normality".

My child was taken from me in 1970 when I was pregnant and not married. I was supposed to get married but I tried to kill myself the day before the wedding and after that I was given no option but to "give the child up".

I was allowed to stay at home and was forever grateful that I hadn't been sent to a home to scrub floors and pray for forgiveness. But I was still the "bad girl", and I was from that moment, shunned. The adoption was coerced and they were quite brutal. There were many cruel things that happened at the hospital.

I did sign the papers. People did explain things to me. But the whole system worked to stop me from keeping that child. I now know that it was part of the social workers' policy to say to you, 'How can you bring up this child? How can you be the mother and the father? Where are you going to get the money? Don't be selfish. Think of your baby. There's a nice couple waiting for your child.'

If they were married and they had white goods that was enough.

I had the baby and was very physically damaged from what they did to me. I went home and sat on a rubber ring and from that moment, no one mentioned it ever again. It's over and done with, we've got rid of the bad things you've done.

Then the silence begins. Absolute silence. I felt jealous of people who were allowed to have funerals for their babies because everyone is feeling sorry for them, they have a ceremony, and it's all out in the open. I had to go on, with the mask, in the silence. You learn to put the mask on.

Finally, about twenty years ago (I'm 72 now), I went into therapy about a relationship break-up and I said 'I feel like a balloon full of water, full of tears', because it was all inside and could never be let out. In that safe place, the therapy, I cried. It must have been for eleven years. My mother came to the hospital with me. She drove me there and she came in. And I said to my therapist 'that was nice of her.' And the therapist said, 'well, she's your mother'. That shocked me. I had learned to expect very little.

Then they told me that the baby's head measurement was too big and they couldn't adopt her because she wasn't perfect.

These people with the white goods couldn't have an imperfect baby. So I signed some papers saying that if she wasn't adopted within a year, I'd have her back. I have the hospital documents and the word "retard" was actually used. It's not in my imagination. Either she was going to be adopted, or I was going to get a "retard" in twelve months.

Then I was told the perfect solution had come up. The foster parents had fallen in love with her. Would I sign papers for that?

I was being called back and having to make these huge decisions for a girl who had really just left school. I was very naïve. I don't think I've been able to make quite the life I should have been able to and I'm grieving for that. I'm also grieving for family connection, because it disconnected me. The cruelty of it is incredible. I wish I'd fought more for her, but I didn't have a chance. I never had an inkling of power.

After the baby was born, they put me in a broken leg ward, supposedly for my benefit. They said it was so I wouldn't have to look at the babies but I think it was so the mothers wouldn't have to look at the "bad girl".





I'm in the broken leg ward and everyone's saying 'there's that poor girl who's given up her child.' Even now, everyone says you've "given up" your child. They never say they took your child.

Stole your child.

I think of this poor little girl. I was in a pink quilted dressing gown and when my waters broke it was all over my pink fluffy slippers.

I walked to the end of the corridor and stared out towards the maternity wing, which was a separate building down the road. That's where I knew the baby was. Someone reported my distress to the social worker and the next day she took me down to see the baby.

You weren't usually allowed to see the baby. (I now know that was illegal.) The social worker stood on the other side of the cot and looked at me. I wasn't allowed to touch and I could only look for a couple of seconds, but that look was just amazing.

There were her eyes looking at me. My eyes. There was no doubt this was my baby. I think all my hormones jumped at once. It was just incredible.

Then I was whisked away. And I felt, just as I did with my mother: "that was nice of them".

Every birthday my mother would ring me - my daughter's birthday. Never said a thing about why, but the phone always rang. I'd always be in a terrible state, but I'd pretend to be normal and neither of us would

mention it.

On her sixteenth birthday, I rang the adoption office in Canberra and this person was just about to retire and she told me things she shouldn't. She said, 'I remember the case. The head measurement...' She told me all these stories of abuse and how "the child" had been removed at the age of 11 and was a ward of the state.

I fainted.

**Moss**



## The Six Types of Courage

**Physical Courage:** To keep going with resiliency, balance & awareness.

**Social Courage:** To be yourself unapologetically.

**Moral Courage:** Doing the right thing even when it's uncomfortable or unpopular

**Emotional Courage:** Feeling all your emotions (positive & negative) without guilt or attachment.

**Intellectual Courage:** to learn, unlearn and relearn with an open & flexible mind.

**Spiritual Courage:** Living with purpose & meaning through a heart centered approach towards all life and oneself.



### Message from Gail.....

Please can an article go in the newsletter that I still love sending cards. Unreliable service becoming a big frustration. Mail just gone up and to increase again because of less letters. I would like to post sms or emails if possible. If there are girls that don't have either I will happily continue sending them a card via post

Let Dorothy [dosh68@gmail.com](mailto:dosh68@gmail.com) know what you would like

Take care all. Me xxx



Hi Gail

You excelled again with birthday cards etc

You really are one clever person

Thanks again to you and sisters at arms

I do appreciate them and keep most as I love all your beautiful words

I find them all very uplifting

Love Sheryl x o

# ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2023



## SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of every month (except January)

*Shame dies when stories are told in safe places* Ann Voskamp

January 2023

4<sup>th</sup> February

4<sup>th</sup> March

25<sup>th</sup> March

1<sup>st</sup> April

NO SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS IN JANUARY

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 21/3/2013 National Apology  
at Taken Not Given memorial, St Andrews Reserve,

Cnr St Andrews Pl & Lansdowne St East Melbourne

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

**6th May**

**Special Mothers Day event at Queen Vic  
Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne**

3<sup>rd</sup> June

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

1<sup>st</sup> July

at St Augustine's Church 1pm - 3pm

5<sup>th</sup> August

at St Augustine's Church 1pm - 3pm

2<sup>nd</sup> September

at St Augustine's Church 1pm - 3pm

7<sup>th</sup> October

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

28<sup>th</sup> October

15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 25/10/2018 Apology

at Taken Not Given memorial, St Andrews Reserve,  
Cnr St Andrews Place & Lansdowne St East Melbourne

4<sup>th</sup> November

at St Augustine's Church 2pm - 4pm

2<sup>nd</sup> December

AGM - venue to be advised 2pm - 4pm



ZOOM SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

ARE ON THE THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH FROM 6 - 8 pm.

Email [jofraser3124@gmail.com](mailto:jofraser3124@gmail.com) for the link.

**St Augustine's Church 631 Bourke St Melbourne**

Bourke Street is in the free tram zone and trams 86 and 96 both stop at Stop 1 (Southern Cross Station). St Augustine's is a two or three minute walk from the Southern Cross Station.



YOU ARE WARMLY INVITED TO THE  
**ARMS (Vic)**  
**MOTHERS' DAY CELEBRATION**  
2-4pm on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> MAY 2023



Venue:

**QUEEN VICTORIA WOMEN'S CENTRE**

**210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne 3000**

Please enter via the rear door and take elevator  
to the Wayi Djerring - Us Together room on Level 4

**Our guest speaker is Marie Meggitt, founder of ARMS**

As part of this special day, we will be celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of ARMS (Vic) and the new backing on the ARMS (Vic) banner will be unveiled.

There will also be a performance by the Willin Wimmin choir.

**RSVP 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

ARMS (Vic) phone: 0400 701 621

Email: [arms@armsvic.org.au](mailto:arms@armsvic.org.au)

Jo Fraser ph: 0409 442 701

Faye Burnham ph: 0411 865 836

Dorothy Kowalski ph: 0411 098 773



ARMS is very grateful to the Queen Victoria Women's Centre Trust for generously providing the use of the Wayi Djerring - Us Together room for our meeting.