



# **ARMS (Vic)**

**Association Representing Mothers Separated  
by adoption**



**AUTUMN  
NEWSLETTER**

**April 2022**

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Welcome to our newsletter and to my report for Autumn 2022.



Here we are almost back to “normal” although it seems we have many cases of Covid around us at present. I suppose it is called learning to live with Covid. Take care everyone.

March saw us commemorating the Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at St Andrews Reserve. Construction works on the reserve for the erection of the Family Violence Memorial are still taking place at the reserve but the fences were opened up for us so we could meet on this auspicious date at our Taken not Given Memorial. The speeches made on the day will be available on our website if you missed out attending on the day. Those who attended had a memorable afternoon.

The Grants Projects are progressing well:-

- The Digitisation Project has moved along well. There was such a lot of information to be scanned and saved. You can imagine the number of documents that have been kept from when ARMS was first created and in ensuing years. ARMS’ history is a very big story with many changes and challenges along the way. When we began most of us were just grateful to have somewhere to go where we could share our very sad stories and find some comfort. But we also had a political voice and grew as we began to understand more about what we had experienced at the hands of a cruel and judgmental society. Also we gradually became more aware of the injustices of the system that separated us from our babies. The many years of documents belonging to ARMS illustrate this long journey.
- The ARMS Banner project is well on the way to completion and we all look forward to seeing our rejuvenated banner.

On 7th May we will be holding our Mothers’ Day meeting. Our guest for the day is Liz Tomlinson. Liz has many years of experience counselling mothers and adoptees and has a deep knowledge and awareness of our issues. Come along and enjoy the company of our lovely ladies, share some afternoon tea and be enlightened by Liz. Details will be found further along in this newsletter.



Thank you for reading this brief report. May you be well and happily at peace.

*Faye Burnham, Convenor*



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

## National Apology Anniversary Event

On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March ARMS invited members and friends to join us at St Andrew's Reserve to acknowledge the ninth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. A group of around twenty-five spent a very pleasant autumn afternoon at Taken Not Given, in its new position in the reserve. As the reconstruction of the reserve was not quite finished, we thank the contractor for opening the fencing for our event.

Marie Meggitt spoke about Julia Gillard's Apology in 2013 and the affect it has had on those impacted by adoption:



*It is 9 years since Julia stood in front of so many of us in the great hall and named the impact of the government's intervention into our lives – one that fundamentally altered the trajectory of all of our lives. I read the apology again this morning and was struck – again – by the impact of 'naming'. It clarifies, it marks out, it makes known what might be only intuited, it shines a light on what has been hidden, it makes stark an emotion or an impact. Naming makes known what has not been known, except by those who have experienced it. And when the Prime Minister of the country names and makes known, then the 'people' of the country will have heard. They might forget, or ignore, but slowly the knowing seeps into the consciousness of the nation. This is one of the gifts of the Apology offered by Julia Gillard and her government. That act of contrition and recognition from our Federal government inspired (or shamed) state governments around the country to take responsibility for their role in our sorrow and slowly the knowing takes hold in another pocket of our society.*

*And what is it that has been named?*

- *Policies and practices that created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering;*
- *Shameful practices that denied us our fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for our children*
- *We were not legally or socially acknowledged as their mother and were ourselves deprived of care and support*
- *We mothers were betrayed by a system that gave us no choice and subjected us to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice*
- *We were denied knowledge of our rights so that we could not give informed consent.*
- *We were forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal.*
- *The loss, the grief, the disempowerment, the stigmatisation, the guilt – this is what was named and for what the government apologised.*

*And that is before we consider the overwhelming impact on our children. My son's first three weeks of life was in the hospital nursery because I wouldn't sign the papers and the hospital wouldn't discharge me until I had. They finally let me go after 10 days and the Department gave me a week to return to sign. I spent the time arguing with my family to bring him home. What I didn't think of was*

that Michael was just one of a number of babies in a nursery with a parade of nurses and the experience of that loneliness and abandonment would be a lifelong wound.



*There are times when I feel like I am bleeding through my skin when I think about the impact of adoption on my son, myself and so many of us.*

*I think of the apologies we have received as being like a balm. I do believe that those in government who helped develop the apologies walked beside us and at some level, felt our pain. They at least understood, in ways they previously had not, and wanted to tell the nation without stepping back from describing the cruelty of the system that had been created. The symbolism of an apology from a government is significant because it is the seat of power and the arbiter of standards by which we are judged. By naming its role, it acted to restore our good name by recognising and taking on the shame as its own. It acknowledged that it created our shame, when in truth it was their shame for having created the circumstances of our loss and grief. Sadly, they cannot lift from us the lived experience of our shame. There is no 'undoing' possible. But acknowledgement does bring the balm of some healing.*

*The apology also provided leadership to the many who were involved in the system of adoption. By apologising and being so specific in naming the policies and practices, it created an expectation of a change to those practices and it ensured that all the agencies and services that participated in the system are aware that they are culpable. The government's leadership created an implicit expectation that they also will recognise the need for organisational and personal review and an acknowledgement of their role.*

*It has been nine years since this apology was offered to us and it came about through the work of many mothers and our offspring. These things don't occur out of the blue, they happen because people have dug deep to tell what has happened and what is needed to remedy the situation. We are those people. It is because of us, and many more around Australia, that we are here today having achieved a huge cultural shift in the community's understanding of adoption. There is still a long way to go. Adoption is still treated like a fairy tale by many. But we are making progress. We have had help in that we stand on the shoulders of our Aboriginal friends who have fought for many years to have the experiences of the decimation of their families understood.*

*We can be proud of our work, grateful for the sisterhood of the women who walk with us; and deeply acknowledging of the many adopted people who have also worked strenuously for change. They added the voice of their lived experience so that the community can understand the whole dynamic of adoption. Not the 'gift' from a woman whose existence was annihilated, but the deep loss of identity, of family of origin and the life experience of being 'other'.*

*I am grateful for Julia's courage and insight in naming our experiences so eloquently and acutely. I am grateful for her leadership and the acknowledgment her apology gave us. I feel assuaged. I don't expect to truly know healing, but I feel I have been seen and heard and that her apology on behalf of the nation was sincere and I am grateful for those things. On behalf of ARMS I thank her.*

**We were pleased to also hear from Charlotte Smith from VANISH.**

**Thank you to everyone who joined us to make this a special afternoon.**



## Forced Adoption Hardship Fund

As announced by the Premier and the Attorney General on 10<sup>th</sup> March the Victorian Government has committed to scope and design a redress scheme for people affected by forced adoption and intends to complete this work by July 2023. For mothers affected by forced adoption between 1958 and 1984 who have exceptional circumstances, including someone with a terminal illness and those in dire financial circumstances, the Victorian Government has announced the establishment of a forced adoption hardship fund. The fund can provide for discretionary payments. The full details of the fund are not yet confirmed however you can register your interest by going to

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/forced-adoption-hardship-fund>

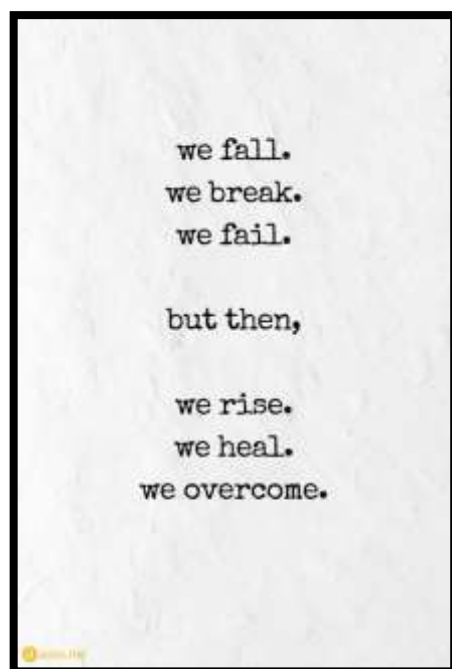
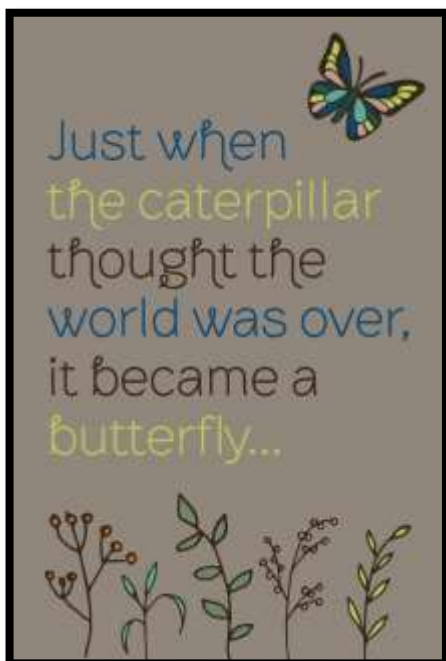
and filling out the registration form. On this form you can also request information on specialist counselling. If you would prefer to have a copy of the form posted to you call Jo on 0409 442 701.

Applications for this fund will be open from 1 July 2022.

A message from



The Victorian Government has indicated that the Redress Scheme will take one year to design. In the interim, a hardship fund will be established for mothers with extenuating circumstances (such as a terminal illness), to be open for applications in July. VANISH is assisting mothers to apply for adoption records should you wish to do so. They are also keeping a list of individuals who wish to be kept informed of any developments. If you are not a member of VANISH and want to get their updates you are welcome to contact them to register, either by phone (03) 9328 8611 or by email [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au)



## Victorian Government announces redress and counselling schemes for those whose babies were taken.

As you are aware, the Parliamentary Committee inquiring into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria tabled its report in August last year. 56 recommendations were made, including the creation of a redress scheme to include financial compensation, counselling and psychological support. The government has supported in full or in-principle 33 recommendations, and the remaining will be subject to further consideration.

On 10<sup>th</sup> March the Premier, Daniel Andrews and the Attorney-General, Jaclyn Symes addressed a media conference with Jo Fraser, Secretary of the ARMS committee to announce a redress scheme for mothers whose babies were forcibly taken from them. Daniel Andrews acknowledged the 2012 Victorian Government Apology and said: “It falls to us to go that step further to not only say sorry, but to try and repair that damage as best we can. Knowing of course, and acknowledging very clearly, that a redress scheme is absolutely important, but it can’t change what occurred in the past, and the pain and loss that so many people had to live with for so long. These practices were abhorrent then, and they are condemned by all of us today.”



A steering committee will be established to design the scheme and report back to the Attorney General within 12 months.

In the meantime, the government has committed \$4 million to design the redress scheme. A \$500,000 hardship fund will be established to provide payments of up to \$10,000 to mothers who had their babies forcibly removed and are currently in “exceptional circumstances”, including those who are terminally ill and in financial distress. It will also offer optional integrated birth certificates that include the names of both the adopted person’s natural and adoptive parents.

Ms Symes said the statute of limitations would be removed to allow mothers who were subject to forced adoption to take the matter to court, and the steering committee would draw on the work of the Stolen Generations redress scheme to determine how it could be best implemented.

Jo Fraser welcomed the redress scheme that she said would go a long way to healing the traumas of the past.

*“There are very, very many women who haven’t lived the lives that they could have, if they had not had their babies taken from them. The redress scheme is a huge opportunity for these women to live a different part of their lives that is not completely impoverished and where their mental health issues can be addressed.”*

This commitment from the Government is a good start. There were 56 recommendations in the Report and we need to make sure that the Government enacts them at the earliest opportunity. Please contact your local State member to let them know how important this is to you. As we have mentioned in previous newsletters, MPs do take note of contact from their constituents. They know that if one person contacts them about an issue that there are many, many more with the same thoughts. There is a State election coming up later this year. Make sure you let them know what you want!





*Some people  
come into  
our lives and quickly go.  
Some people  
move our  
souls to dance.*

## **SOME PEOPLE**

*make the sky  
more beautiful to gaze upon.  
They stay in our lives for a while,  
leave footprints on our hearts,  
and we are never,  
ever the same again.*

This touching quote was sent to Lynette by the adoptive parents of her son, who died at the age of four.

Some days she's a warrior.  
Some days she's a broken mess.  
Most days she's a bit of both,  
But everyday she's there.  
Standing. Fighting. Trying.

**40 years on** and I'm thinking about all of the wonderful ARMS pioneer women who didn't have:



Computers or iPads from which to email  
The Internet and internet banking  
Mobile Phones  
Photocopiers or fax machines  
Facebook, Twitter and the myriad of social media



They licked stamps, wrote cheques, hand addressed envelopes, typed or hand wrote letters, used carbon paper to make copies of letters and documents, kept records without MYOB or spreadsheets, custom ordered letterheads,



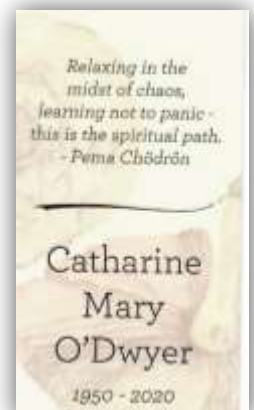
**What amazing, dedicated, hardworking women.**



### Vale Kate 'Dwyer

Kate passed away at the start of the Covid pandemic. Her family was finally able to hold a life celebration in Kalorama on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022.

The large number of family, friends and colleagues in attendance was testament to Kate's standing in the community and of the place she held in their hearts.



## Taken Not Given Memorial statue relocation....

Members will be aware that St Andrew's Reserve has been reconstructed to include the Family Violence Memorial. As a consequence our memorial statue, Taken Not Given, has been moved to a more central position in the reserve, with a new curved concrete bench seat positioned under the tree. While we were unhappy with the initial lack of consultation, we have worked with the City of Melbourne for more than a year to ensure the new position enables our memorial to continue to hold a place of importance in the reserve.



The Family Violence Memorial was unveiled on April 4<sup>th</sup> and the reserve is now open for visitors. We would encourage all those affected by adoption to visit Taken Not Given to reflect and remember, and we look forward to holding more events there.



### **DISCLAIMER:**

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





*The top drawing represents me, my grandmother and my aunt, both of whom would have supported me in keeping my son. (My grandmother suggested keeping him in a home as she was considered too old to be considered a suitable adopter and my aunt who was overseas while I was pregnant and who would have adopted him had she known.) They are silenced and I, with a faint outline of a mouth, am passive and powerless. The monoliths of societal norms tower over us. The other sketches represent the mental process, anguish and confusion of the journey to relinquishment. The drawings were done 28 years after he was born, the day that I met him.*

*Rosemary*



# ARMS (Vic) CALENDAR 2022



## SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

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

5 <sup>th</sup> March	2pm	Support Group
20 <sup>th</sup> March	<b>Recognition of Anniversary of 21 March 2013 National Apology</b> at 'Taken Not Given' Memorial, St Andrews Reserve, East Melbourne	
2 <sup>nd</sup> April	2pm	Support Group
7 <sup>th</sup> May	1pm - 3.30pm	<b>ARMS Special Mothers' Day</b>

Venue: Ross House 247/251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne  
between Swanston Street and Elizabeth Street

Also on Zoom - ask Jo Fraser for a Zoom invitation

**We are no longer able to hold our meetings at Centre for Excellence in Market Street. We are looking for a new venue. Once this happens, we are hoping to also Zoom those meetings. We will keep you informed.**

4 <sup>th</sup> June	1pm	Winter start time
2 <sup>nd</sup> July	1pm	Winter start time
6 <sup>th</sup> August	1pm	Winter start time
3 <sup>rd</sup> September	2pm	
1 <sup>st</sup> October	2pm	
25 <sup>th</sup> October	<b>Recognition of 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victorian Apology</b>	
5 <sup>th</sup> November	2pm	
3 <sup>rd</sup> December	1.30pm – 4.30pm	<b>2022 AGM</b>