

Convenor's Report 2023

Welcome to my report for 2023. I will be stepping down from my role as Convenor for ARMS. I have been finding transport to meetings difficult and I am now also putting my energy into interests that allow me to stay closer to home. Of course I will always be interested and involved in ARMS but I feel it's time to allow someone who can be more present to take the role. Thank you to all ARMS members who have supported me in the past.

Of course the major news this year was the announcement by Attorney General Jaclyn Symes of the implementation of the Redress Scheme. Under the \$138m scheme, mothers affected by historical forced adoption practices prior to 1990 can apply for \$30,000 in financial compensation. They can also receive counselling, psychological support and individual apologies under the program. Applications open from 1 February 2024. Any mothers who received funding through the Exceptional Circumstances Fund will still be able to apply for this Redress Scheme. The amount the Government is offering through the Redress Scheme is extremely disappointing and quite an insult to us if it is compared with other redress schemes. We are, however, pleased that free counselling will be provided. Let's hope it is enough for our needs. This has been a very long time coming and we see it as an acknowledgment by the Government of the trauma and grief we have endured all these years.

21st March marked the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. A number of ARMS members were invited to attend events in Canberra to commemorate this, along with others affected by adoption and support and advocacy organisation representatives. Three events were held: a panel discussion at the National Archives of Australia called 'Saying sorry: Do national apologies change the world?'; a commemorative dinner hosted by the Hon Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services; and Minister Rishworth read a Statement of Significance in the House of Representatives the following morning. Prior to the events we were led to believe there would be a big announcement, and were disappointed that the only concrete measure announced was an additional \$700,000 in funding for training for aged care, allied health and Forced Adoption Support Services providers. Once more funding going to agencies and not to us.

The following weekend ARMS and VANISH held an event commemorating the tenth anniversary at our 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 outlined 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.

A very special event was held in May at our Mothers' Day meeting - the celebration of ARMS' 40th anniversary. We had a very interesting panel of early and foundation ARMS members – Marie Meggitt, Tricia Harper, Rosemary West and Fae Cuff, who took us through the inception of ARMS and the early days of the organisation. This is a remarkable milestone and it was a fitting tribute to Marie and those who travelled with her to bring the fight against adoption out into the open. We are eternally grateful for her courage and tenacity against huge odds. We were once again entertained by the Willin Wimmen social choir and our newly revamped banner was unveiled.

In July Chiaki Shiria, a sociology teacher at National University Corporation, Shizuoka University Japan, contacted ARMS requesting a meeting while she was in Melbourne for the International Sociological Association Conference. Chiaki does social work and research on adoption and is president of the Japan Adoption Agencies Association. Jo met with her and they discussed adoption in Japan. Chiaki conducts interviews with Japanese women who have lost their children to adoption, who are very isolated due to the shame they feel. There is still no network for these women in Japan and they tell no-one about their experiences. Up until the 1960s no original birth certificate was generated for a child who was taken from its mother. Midwives organised adoptions and wrote birth certificates in the name of the people raising the child. Therefore there was absolutely no way that anyone would be able to make contact as there was literally no information. There are approximately 600 adoptions per annum in Japan (pop. 100 million) and the Government has a policy to increase adoption because there are too many babies in institutions for their entire childhoods, as couples are not really interested in fostering. Jo was able to pass on much of ARMS' written informative material and they visited our Taken Not Given Memorial.

ARMS is working in partnership with VANISH and Open Place in a pilot study by a team at Melbourne University seeking to understand the effects of using Direct to Consumer DNA testing by the adoption and out of care communities in tracing their families. I have attended a couple of meetings as ARMS' representative, and workshops have been held.

The findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care recommended Forced Adoption victims as one of nine special needs diversity groups within the Specialisation Verification Framework to ensure older Australians with diverse backgrounds and life experiences can access more reliable information when choosing their care providers. Jo and Jude took part as a specialist panel in a webinar provided for leaders and managers of aged care services. These webinars are designed to encourage and support care providers to deliver inclusive and culturally appropriate services to older people in their homes.

We were delighted to have Jeannot Farmer, who was here on a Churchill Fellowship from Scotland, speak at the 11th anniversary of the Victorian State Government Apology and fifth anniversary of the unveiling of Taken Not Given in October. While in Australia, Jeannot visited WA, Queensland and Victoria, speaking to many people about the response to the National Apology. We were pleased to hear recently from another Churchill Fellow – Sharon Graham – who will be visiting Australia and New Zealand from Scotland in the new year.

ARMS committee members recently met with the CEO and the Chief Communications Officer of the Royal Women's Hospital Sue Mathews and Tania Angelini. They expressed their regret for past practices of the RWH and discussed how they can make amends, including a new apology, as those who heard it know how inadequate their last attempt at an apology was. However the RWH has also opened a bank for sperm and egg donations this year. I have to wonder if this will become a slightly altered repeat of history in the future.

Through the year ARMS has applied to RAV for grants through funding allocated to RAV as a result of the Federal Apology for Forced Adoptions. We have acquitted two of our most recent grants – Digitisation of ARMS' History Part 1 and the Banner Rejuvenation Project. The event held to launch the new side of the banner was held in conjunction with our 40th anniversary and it was a fitting way to align the past with the future. We have applied for two new grants recently, one being to continue with digitising the extensive ARMS records and the other to help us pay for the five events we hold each year. We are very grateful for these grants and thank RAV for the provision of the funds.

As you know we have fabulous Newsletters that we send out every 3 months. These are always informative and beautifully produced. We want to once again thank Dorothy for her ongoing work. We would also like to thank Diane for her invaluable contribution. Many people who are unable to attend meetings for various reasons cherish our Newsletters as a way of being informed and as a reminder that they are not alone in their experience. Unfortunately there have been some problems with our mail out system for the newsletter and many on our mail out list were not receiving them. Please accept our apologies for this inconvenience. We are now using a better platform for sending them. Past newsletters are on our Website and can be emailed to you if required.

You would be aware that during Covid we held our support group meetings on Zoom. The silver lining was that women who were not usually able to join us due to distance or health issues were able to do so on Zoom. So we decided to continue holding a Zoom support group. These are on the third Thursday of each month. As our members age and move we are able to keep them in touch and provide support this way. We still hold our in person Support Group Meetings on the first Saturday of each month except January. Please keep your eye on our website and the

newsletter for dates and venue. ARMS would like to thank Jo for her really wonderful efforts running all of these Support Groups.

Thank you, and once again I would like to thank ARMS members for their support of myself in the role of Convenor over the years. It has been an honour to contribute in this very small way.

Faye Burnham