

ASSOCIATION OF RELINQUISHING MOTHERS (Vic) Inc.

A0040803Y

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NEWSLETTER AUTUMN EDITION 2012

COMMITTEE REPORT 2012

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2012.

Kate O'Dwyer and Joy O'Connor have resigned from the committee after many years and untold hours of work. Thank you, Kate for all your work and especially for your initiative of updating membership contacts. Thank you, Joy for the many support groups you have so caringly presided over and for the never ending work of compiling the ARMS newsletter on and off over the years. Thanks also to Diane who, for the last 5 or so years, has collated the articles and prepared the newsletter for printing.

The 2012 committee is now Jo Fraser, Kathy Wright, Dorothy Kowalski, Faye Nyssen and Tricia Lester. We welcome input from members, either to the ARMS telephone number, **03 9769 0232**, which is manned by a committee member, by email to arms@armsvic.org.au or in writing to ARMS at PO Box 645, Deepdene VIC 3103.

ARMS made a submission in 2011 to the Federal Senate Commission inquiry into past adoption practices and the Senate Committee's report was handed down on Wednesday 29th February. A report from three ARMS committee members who attended is contained in this newsletter.

The Fours Corners program on the 27th February on which one of our members, Faye was interviewed is still available for viewing on-line on the ABC website. There are many comments on the same site.

Updating of membership contacts is continuing and we hope to send the next newsletter by email to those members who have chosen this method. Of course, newsletters will continue to be mailed to those members for whom we do not have an email address.

Support Group Meetings

After trialling less frequent support group meetings in 2011 we have decided to hold them on the first Saturday of every month in 2012. The exception will be the April meeting, which falls on Easter Saturday and is therefore planned for the following weekend - Saturday 14th April. See the ARMS calendar 2012 on the back page for all support group dates. We look forward to seeing members at the support group meetings (see back page for 2012 dates).

Mothers' Day Meeting

This day, which celebrates our role as mothers of our relinquished children and allows us to do so with a shared awareness of the depths of grief we have all suffered, will be held on Saturday 5th May at the Queen Vic Centre (entry from rear). The committee will cater for this event. The ARMS banner and flags will be displayed and there will be an opportunity to add stars to the banner.

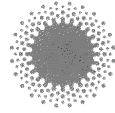
We look forward to seeing members at the support groups – the next one is at 2pm on Saturday 14th March at the Queen Vic Centre on Lonsdale Street, between Swanston and Russell Streets.

Kind regards,

Jo, Kathy, Dorothy, Faye and Tricia

The Royal Women's Hospital Report

ARMS initiated the RWH investigation into past policies and practices and has now received the hospital's Media Release dated Monday 23 January, 2012 and covering letter of the same date.



the women's
the royal women's hospital

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www.thewomens.org.au

23 January 2012

Ms Kate O'Dwyer
Chairperson ARMS Committee
Association of Relinquishing Mothers Vic Inc
20 Beau Vorno Avenue
Keysborough VIC 3173

Dear Ms O'Dwyer,

As you know, the Women's commissioned Professor Shurlee Swain of the Australian Catholic University to independently examine the hospital's past policies and practices with respect to single mothers giving birth at the hospital between 1945 and 1975. Our goal was to understand how past policies and practices, and the attitudes of staff at the time, affected the experiences of these single mothers.

The resulting report, *Confinement and Delivery Practices in Relation to Single Women Confined at the Royal Women's Hospital 1945-1975*, has today been submitted to the Senate Inquiry and should soon be available on the Inquiry website.

Professor Swain's study found no evidence of illegal practices at the Women's and no evidence of hospital-wide policies that discriminated specifically against single mothers.

The past practices at the Women's, and elsewhere in the nation, were in keeping with social attitudes, available financial support, and medical and social work knowledge and beliefs of the time. Some of these practices, such as the immediate removal of the baby following birth to prevent bonding, were thought at the time to be in the best interests of the mother's emotional and mental health post-relinquishment. Others, such as the belief that a couple was better suited than a single mother to bring up a child, were reflective of both the era's societal attitudes towards illegitimacy and the then extremely limited social and financial support available to single mothers. When considered by today's standards, these past adoption practices were clearly misguided.

The Royal Women's Hospital acknowledges that, whatever the intentions and beliefs of the time, past adoption practices caused lasting consequences for many relinquishing mothers, their children and their extended families.

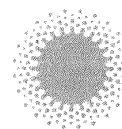
On behalf of the staff, past and present, of the Hospital, I apologise to those of your members who felt they had no choice but to relinquish their babies for adoption while in our care.

I understand that many relinquishing mothers experienced, and continue to experience, feelings of grief, pain, anger, helplessness and loss, and I apologise unreservedly to those of your members who have experienced these feelings.

I hope the Hospital's efforts towards uncovering our role in past adoption practices, our sincere apologies and our acknowledgement of pain and loss will bring some comfort to your members, and their families, and be accepted as evidence of the regret and sorrow we feel for our involvement in past adoption practices.

Yours sincerely

Dale Fisher
Chief Executive



the women's
the royal women's hospital

Media Release

Monday 23 January, 2012

The Royal Women's Hospital today submitted its independent report to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

The report, entitled "*Confinement and Delivery Practices in Relation to Single Women Confined at the Royal Women's Hospital 1945 -1975*", details the findings of a study undertaken by Professor Shurlee Swain of the Australian Catholic University. The study was commissioned by the Women's to assist management to understand the hospital's historical role in adoption, specifically with respect to single women, from 1945 to 1975.

The Women's has today apologised to relinquishing mothers. The Chief Executive Dale Fisher said it was important to acknowledge that, whatever the intentions and beliefs of the time, past adoption practices caused lasting consequences for many relinquishing mothers, and sometimes also for their children and their extended families.

"On behalf of the staff, past and present, of the Hospital, I apologise to every woman who felt she had no choice but to relinquish her baby for adoption while in our care," Ms Fisher said.

"I understand many relinquishing mothers experienced, and continue to experience, feelings of grief, pain, anger, helplessness and loss, and for this I apologise unreservedly."

The hospital also offered an unreserved apology to any adoptees and other family members who have also experienced, and continue to experience, feelings of grief, pain, anger and loss.

Ms Fisher said she hoped the Hospital's efforts towards understanding the hospital's role in past adoption practices, the sincere apologies and acknowledgement of pain and loss will bring some comfort to relinquishing mothers and their families, and be accepted as evidence of the regret and sorrow the hospital feels for its involvement in past adoption practices.

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Others, such as the belief a couple was better suited than a single mother to bring up a child, were reflective of both the era's societal attitudes towards illegitimacy and the extremely limited social and financial support available to single mothers. When considered by today's standards and knowledge, these past adoption practices were clearly misguided.

For more information please call:

Sofia Dedes, Media Manager at the Royal Women's Hospital on 03 8345 2953 or 0400 512 618.

COMMENT

Professor Swain's findings are disappointing as they do not acknowledge fully and clearly that RWH was, and continues to be, responsible for the discriminatory and demeaning treatment many relinquishing mothers received at the RWH. Although RWH has apologised, it is not an unreserved apology. It relies heavily on what was "in keeping with social attitudes", claims discriminatory practices "were not set down by the Women's nor were they hospital-wide" and "depended on individual staff values". Surely RWH should have had a policy and ensured that all staff were aware of that and followed it at all times.

RWH glosses over the fact that unmarried mothers were forbidden contact with their babies, claiming again that professionals in the 1960s believed "it was kinder for a relinquishing mother not to have contact with her child". Was reliance on professionals another part of RWH's policy which was never set down?

The committee will respond to RWH in writing, requesting a copy of the full report, and will include comments received from ARMS members. The consensus so far is that the apology is a disgrace and is in fact an insult to the many ARMS members who suffer ongoing mental trauma and have had the facts of their experiences dismissed as not being validated by evidence.

Beryl Shaw, an ARMS member and former committee member of JIGSAW ... *'No evidence' means "Well, we didn't write it down at the time because of course we didn't want anyone to know". And "No illegal practices"? Give me a break! To deny any mother contact with her child, in the outside world, would be considered illegal - and treated as such; quite apart from the coercion to sign away her child, which you and I know happened - and happened sometimes within the time frame where it was written in law that this was not legal...*

Chapter 9 of the Senate Committee Report is devoted entirely to apology. One section is headed "What constitutes an effective apology" (page 194) and RWH does not score well on any of the five points made:

- Acknowledgment of the wrong done—admission that moral standards were violated
- Accepting responsibility for the wrong that was done
- Expressing sincere regret
- Promising the wrong done will not recur
- Reparation through concrete measures

The Senators who spoke to the Report were uniformly unimpressed by the RWH apology.

Uniting Church Apology—The Age , February 28, 2012

In the article by Alana Rosenbaum, the Uniting Church's Victoria and Tasmania synod moderator Isabel Thomas Dobson apologises "*unreservedly for any physical, psychological or social harm that might have occurred through the past adoption practices and processes of the church*".

Senate Inquiry in Forced Adoption

On Wednesday 29th February, 2012, three members of the ARMS committee – Dorothy, Kathy & Faye- flew to Canberra to witness the tabling in the Senate of the Community Affairs Reference Committee report into forced adoption policies and practices.

It was a very emotional experience for us and the 100 or so other women and men who attended for the same reason. There was a general feeling of camaraderie amongst the many relinquishing mothers and adoptees there, with many harrowing stories of loss and/or losses being exchanged (we felt a strong sense of unity and connection even though we had just met), and we were made to feel very welcome by the members of Parliament and their staff. We really felt we were part of something special.

We were very fortunate to be shown to the front row of the gallery, to watch and listen to 7 Senators, led by Senator Rachel Siewert, who introduced the report with a passionate and informed speech which revealed she had a deep understanding of every aspect of the adoption process and profound sympathy for all mothers, fathers, adoptees and extended families who had suffered, and who continue to suffer. She applauded the courage shown by those who had bared their souls in writing submissions and during attendance at the hearings, which were held in most capital cities during the past two years.

It was apparent that all members of the committee had involved themselves intensely in the two year process and were unanimously in favour of pursuing the ten recommendations made, including appropriate apologies, provision of counselling, reparation and assistance in reuniting mothers and their children. They were all very emotional as they spoke – many of them choked back tears. Listening to the many women who made submissions during the hearings had obviously affected them greatly. They all mentioned the unquenchable love for their child which so many mothers had expressed in their submissions and personal appearances. They assured adoptees they were not “given away” or unloved. It was found that past practices were often illegal and always immoral. The recent apology by the Royal Women’s Hospital was dismissed as being equivocal and meaningless, had outraged mothers and exacerbated their feelings of not having their experiences validated in any meaningful way. They also found instances of illegal actions by the hospital and its staff without having to look too hard.

After the reading the whole Senate turned to the 100 or so women and 20 men in the gallery and applauded us. We all stood and applauded back.

Afternoon tea was provided and we were joined by the Senators. They told us that realistically out of the 10 recommendations probably only 5 will be put into practice, but they would all work hard to try to get all of them through. Rachel Siewert said it was only the beginning. They also need our support to help.

We found it an amazing experience. To have these people acknowledge that we were treated badly and that our babies were treated badly was really important. The torturous suffering through separation and disconnection from their loved ones, society and family was finally acknowledged. Their pain would now be legitimate in the Australian Government eyes.

The veil has begun to be lifted. Too late for some who have died, those who will never meet, and others with permanently scarred souls. For them, everyone involved – not just Parliament – needs to stand up and honestly say “sorry”.

This is a compilation of the three members’ reports. Their full reports can be read on the ARMS’ website -www.armsvic.org.au

AUSTRALIAN BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Summarised from an on-line posting

alasqld.blogspot.com/2011/07/australian-birth-certificates.html

of a paper prepared by Janice Benson (Kashin)
24th September 1993

Every Australian born in this country is issued with a birth certificate. It is the most important document to be issued by the Government to a person and states the most fundamental information about the person:

Date of Birth

Place of Birth

Mother

Father

It is worth 40 points if one wishes to open a Bank Account. If applying for a passport it is an essential prerequisite. Its validity is not questioned. To date, approximately 250,000 birth certificates, issued by the Department of the Registrar General, simply are false ... and perpetuate the 'myth' ... that adoptive parents are the birth parents of the people they adopt ...

The woman who gave birth to the person has been legalistically annihilated. Her name does not appear anywhere on the birth certificate. She is nullified ...

By leaving the issuing of birth certificates to the States the Federal Government turns a blind eye to the interpretation of the word "mother" ... [which] on a birth certificate should mean 'that which is the origin of something' ...

This practice denies the recipient of the birth certificate the truth. The birth certificate deliberately misleads the adopted person to think the adopted parents actually gave them birth ...

It is now up to women to demand the truth and eradicate past injustices and current discriminatory practices ...

[Janice Benson recommends]:

As the Constitution provides that in areas of joint responsibility, a Federal law will override an inconsistent State law, ... [it is time] to eradicate inconsistencies that currently allow the compilation of untrue entries being made on birth certificates ...

... where surrogacy is permitted, names of the actual birth parents and donors must be on the official birth certificate. Doctors may destroy files after seven years, so the genetic forebears must be recorded on an official government document 'for all time'.

... in cases of IVF births, doctors must, by law, provide the names of donor progenitors and birth mothers, to be recorded officially on the birth certificate ...

Janice Benson is a member of Adoption Loss Adult Support, Brisbane, Queensland; Founder of Adoption Triangle, Queensland, Association for Relinquishing Mothers, Queensland and Adoption Contact Information Service, Queensland

DISCLAIMER:

All contributions are presented with the aim of sharing ideas.

Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by ARMS

ARMS' Thirtieth Anniversary

Thirty years ago, ARMS was founded by a group of women, including Marie Meggitt and Jo Clancy. The encouragement, concern and support of The Council for The Single Mother and Her Child (especially that of members Rosemary West and Patricia Harper) was vital to establishing ARMS.

In what manner would members like to celebrate this milestone at the 1st December 2012 AGM?

If the committee receives sufficient input, they envisage preparing a booklet containing some photographs and articles about our experiences over the past thirty years. We hope members will provide original prose and poetry contributions or just reminisce about what ARMS has meant to you.

Perhaps write a couple of paragraphs about your pre-birth feelings, your hospital experience, your reunion (or lack of one), ongoing reunion issues, how you have "got on with your life" after the biggest trauma a woman/girl could possibly experience.

Have there been articles in the ARMS newsletter which you would like to see re-printed?

Later in the year, there will be a flag-making workshop. If you have never made a flag, please make sure you attend this workshop (or ask for the materials and make your flag at home). If you would like to make another flag, that's good too.

BUILDING ON WHO YOU WERE BEFORE ----

One of the great strengths of women is that we are the creators of relationships. As with so many other good things, this can also be a double edged sword.

Over recent years I've been struck by several of our top singers, Casey, Delta for two, who have become romantically involved with other performers, then shifted their own unique singing style to fit in with this powerful other person, not only in their personal life but their professional life as well. And I've been dismayed to watch as they changed their style to fit in. This has watered down the very style that set them apart from and above other singers.

What a blessing when they've shifted away from the chains of these partnerships and moved back into the reality of their own strong persona.

How many of us have allowed ourselves to become someone else's vision of who we should be? How often has this been the very thing that landed us in the morass of having to give up our own blessed children? Whether it was a shift to fit in with a partner, or the mould society has required of us afterwards. How many of us have become 'less' than we were meant to be because of the fracture this has caused in our individual persona?

Many relinquishing mothers have, like myself, ended up in marriages that ended in divorce - adding yet another trauma to our stories. And how much has that changed who we were meant to be? Do we live within a view of ourselves as 'damaged people', even collude in this outside view so we feel this is the truth and makes us less?

This can be the year when you will rise up, look at who you really are and start again. Personally I've found that life itself moves me on. Unfortunately this has often been because of yet another illness or disaster that's shifted my focus. But being the person I am, each time I have eventually used this as another opportunity to understand and help others experiencing this same difficulty. Many of you have done the same through your involvement with ARMS. How great.

How about putting a question to yourself right now "Who would I have been if I hadn't given my power away to someone else?" and build on that image. Because this can be your reality and a new image for you to live out.

Start by writing a story of the life you'd have had if you hadn't been forced (whether by other people or circumstances themselves) to give up your beloved child. Write yourself a new story of 'This is who I started out to be. And this is who I am determined to become now. I will create a new destiny for myself'.

Then you can begin to live it out. Congratulations for the person you already are, the person you may have felt separated from. Welcome to this new world where you can be the strongest performer in your own life.

Beryl Shaw

(If you have a problem writing the story of a new life for yourself, give me a call. I'm happy to help you put your new image into words, since this is my expertise. Ph: 9569 1412)



We wish to acknowledge the generous support of the office of:

Mr Mike Symon MP

Federal Minister for Deakin

Electorate Office: Whitehorse Road, Mitcham

who has provided photocopying facilities for this ARMS newsletter

VANISH membership

VANISH has invited ARMS members to continue/reinstate membership without payment of a fee (members are encouraged to make a donation in lieu of a membership fee). VANISH would like your contact details to keep you informed whether you choose to continue membership or to become a new member. If you would like to be a new member of VANISH either download the membership form from their website or if continuing membership complete and return this form (you might like to copy it if you would like to keep the information on the reverse)

I wish to continue/reinstate my membership with VANISH and receive information by:

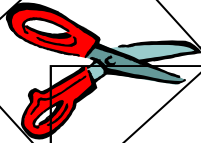
mail email: _____

Name: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Please return this information to , VANISH, P O Box 112, Carlton South 3053

My donation is enclosed:



ASSOCIATION OF RELINQUISHING MOTHERS (VIC) INC.

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MEMBERSHIP FORM



NAME:

ADDRESS:

POSTCODE: TELEPHONE/s:

I ENCLOSE \$20 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEE for 1/7/2011 to 30/6/2012 financial year

SIGNATURE: DATE:

RELINQUISHING MOTHER (Financial Member) (Non-Financial Member)

ASSOCIATE MEMBER I WISH TO MAKE A DONATION TO ARMS \$

Please forward to: ARMS, P O Box 645, Deepdene 3103

Your membership is needed to enable us to continue sending out the newsletter

Are you interested in receiving your newsletter via email?

Please add your email address here: Email :

ARMS CALENDAR 2012

3rd MARCH	SUPPORT GROUP
14th APRIL	SUPPORT GROUP
5th MAY	MOTHER'S DAY – catered by ARMS committee
2nd JUNE	SUPPORT GROUP
7th JULY	SUPPORT GROUP
4th AUGUST	SUPPORT GROUP
1ST SEPTEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
6th OCTOBER	SUPPORT GROUP
3rd NOVEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
1st DECEMBER	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by Christmas Party*

** Please bring a plate of food to share and
a small gift - value not more than \$15*

*Would all members attending support group meetings please bring a
small plate of food to share*

**All meetings held at Queen Victoria Women's Centre
210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne from 2.00 - 4.00pm**

ALL RELINQUISHING MOTHERS WELCOME