



NEWSLETTER
SUMMER EDITION
February 2014

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CONVENOR'S REPORT

Well Hello Ladies here I am writing my first convenor's report for 2014.

Last year was an interesting year with Tricia doing an informative and excellent job as convenor; I can only hope to emulate her.

So here goes...

It looks as though 2014 will be a year for our political involvement once again, with Tony Abbot's announcement of his intention of making adoption easier. He plans to make overseas adoption easier with shorter waiting times. As well he has urged state governments to change domestic adoption laws. Adoption laws will be top of the agenda at the next summit of federal, state and territory leaders in April, Mr Abbott said. A taskforce of "senior officials" will provide advice on how to make adoptions easier for Australians and will report to the prime minister in March.

Families Minister in the NSW Government Pru Goward says she wants to boost NSW adoptions by 100s. Reportedly Barnados Australia (an adoption agency) is strongly backing the change in legislation in NSW - well of course they are as they will get \$37,000 for each child they place in adoption. Parents of children in out of home care will be "deemed unfit" and thus their permission will not be needed to allow their children to be adopted. I am not quite sure who will get to make that decision and I certainly would like to know who is qualified to decide that someone is an unfit parent (possibly Adolf Hitler).

Obviously no one is suggesting that children should stay in abusive or neglectful situations and of course I realize there are instances when a foster home or under alternative guardianship is the best place for a child to live. However adoption is designed to sever the ties with the original family. Loss of identity is a serious issue for adoptees. There are also instances of mothers being temporarily in strife then straightening themselves out and once again being able to raise their children. Children in foster care get funding from the government and once they are adopted they do not. So is money more important?

Deborra-Lee Furness and Hugh Jackman are certainly using their influence to help to get the adoption laws changed. DLF stated years ago that Australian Adoption Laws are archaic and should be changed to make adoption easier as they are in the US. "I just want to savour this moment, this has been years we have been talking about this issue and now things are going to change." Said Furness at the Abbott announcement.

I see the two of them looking at me from magazine stands almost every week at the supermarket. (I no longer purchase the Women's Weekly and now not the New Idea either). I'm sure that it has been pointed out to her many times that women (mostly ARMS founding members) fought long and hard to get Australian Adoption Laws changed and in 1984 they succeeded with a few compromises.

Some members of the adoption community are organizing a rally in front of the State Library on March 16th at 12.00 midday. There will be further details in this newsletter. I personally do not want to stand back and watch the good work undone.

That stated I will get back to 2013. We held our AGM in December at a room in the Centre for Excellence. This was a lovely venue and we are we are hoping to use it again, if available, for our Mother's day meeting and our 2014 AGM. We managed to elect seven members to the ARMS committee - fantastic. What wonderful speakers, Nahum Mushin, Chair of the Reference Group of the National Apology, talked about what we can realistically expect from the concrete measures following on from the Federal Apology - quite enlightening. He also stated that he would like to see all adoption matters handled by the Family Court. This would be a great move and I think mothers would get a much better deal legally regarding continued access in open

adoptions. However that would require adoption being under Federal Jurisdiction instead of State and that would be a big change which is probably not likely to happen any time soon. Kate McNaughtin from NAA talked about the National Archives needing our stories. What a lovely woman - she spoke beautifully with obvious compassion and understanding and answered everyone's questions clearly. After this we had a delicious afternoon tea, not to mention the glasses of bubbles for those who wanted it. Altogether a fabulous day greatly enjoyed by our lovely members and guests.

Back to 2014... we are raising our annual membership fees to \$30 per annum. We have such little money to survive on. Of course if this presents difficulties to anyone please see Dorothy as we certainly do not want to lose any valued members.

As we have no January meeting some of us met for lunch in the Botanic Gardens at the Café near the Shrine. It's gorgeous. It was great to see everyone and catch up on the news. We would love to make that a regular unofficial event, even with the grumpy café lady and rather high prices.

We seem to have quite a variety of adoption stories featuring in the media at the moment. Kate Blanchett is winning accolades for her role as an adoptee in the latest Woody Allen movie. We have Philomena on offer also. I haven't seen it yet but have heard it is excellent. I'm Having Their Baby, a show on channel 22 around 8.30 Friday nights is a bit depressing. It shows girls in the US losing their babies to adoption. Strangely I just heard Barack Obama on the TV say "I believe when women succeed America succeeds" HELLO!!! Love Child is coming up on TV, will wait with bated breath for that one. If anyone could put it on DVD for our library it would be greatly appreciated.

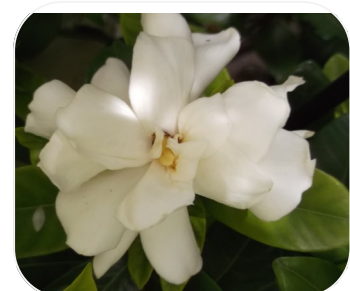
Most important to note is that we now have a new webpage. Our old host Vicnet, at the state library, decided they were no longer hosting webpages so the hunt was on to replace them. I would like to thank them for their past help and work on our site. We now have Rob Hore from Webres Solutions who is not only hosting our webpage but has kindly volunteered his time to develop our new webpage and all that goes with it. We are most fortunate. It seems the old one had too many problems and viruses to be worth saving. So if any of you are looking for a great techo for webpage development please support Rob - it's the least we can do. The new Webpage is still being developed so it will probably keep changing a little over the next few weeks until we have it perfected. If anyone has anything they would like to contribute please let me know.

Well this report is rather long oh dear. May this newsletter bring you comfort and I hope that you have all survived the silly season feeling safe and well. I am hoping you have all coped with the hot weather without too many melt downs. I live near the beach so of course I don't mind it at all. I look forward to Autumn and the long calm evenings of February and March on the beach with my dogs. Sorry to close on a weather comment but it would be almost un-Australian not to.

Faye Nyssen

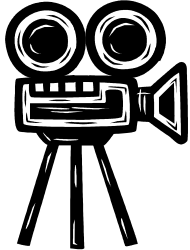
As well as the ARMS telephone number 03 9769 0232 the following committee members are happy to be contacted (between 9am and 9pm) on their personal phone numbers:

Jo Fraser	0438 833 861	03 9885 1991
Faye Nyssen	0411 865 836	03 5985 8833
Dorothy Kowalski	0411 098 773	03 9889 358
Louise Watkins	03 9772 0094	



Some comments from ARMS mothers on the film *Philomena* and *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee*, the book on which the film is based:

The film *Philomena* is about a true story of Philomena Lee losing her child to adoption in Catholic Ireland.



I wasn't expecting to enjoy this film, but it covered both difficult and emotional adoption issues with humour and some great acting. The film showed the Catholic Church in its true light, making money from the vulnerable by selling their babies to wealthy Americans and then making the defenceless mothers slave away in their laundries for years with little remuneration. I would be interested in reading the book on Philomena's life for greater detail than a 90 minute film is able to portray.

Marilyn: Although there were aspects to the film that exposed the corruption, and subsequent removal of Philomena's son, the film did not portray the depth of the trauma and grief experienced by the natural mother (Philomena) on a deep enough level. However, some of the scenes exposing the catholic church were excellent., and reinforces how this institution really perceives mothers and their babes - merely as commodities, for the taking, with no interest in how they cope or what they might be exposed to after they leave the locked gates of the monastery.

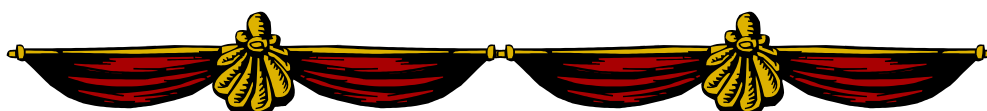
Dorothy: A very worthwhile film on the Irish adoption issue which is totally damning of the actions (and inaction) of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Evelyn: Evelyn read "The Lost Child of Philomena Lee" on which the film is based and commented in her review for Amazon: "I was hoping that the author would illustrate the impact of the separation on those mothers and children and also highlight the injustices which were perpetrated on both. However, he chose to downplay these and generally showed little insight into adoption issues, although he did hint that some of Michael's self-destructive behaviour and his tendency to sabotage his relationships with others may have been related to his experience of adoption separation.... . . . the overriding messages of the book are that family members who have been separated by adoption suffer as a result of that separation, that it is morally wrong for any government to prevent adults separated by adoption from knowing the truth about each other and that there is no way of knowing how life might have been, had an adoption not taken place".

Mannix Flynn, an Irish MP wrote: "A lot of it [Philomena] is clichéd and it never really deals with the horrendous tragedy and evil of what was perpetrated on thousands of mothers and their abducted children"

Kaye wrote: "Yes I saw *Philomena*. I felt it was my story. I definitely identified with her character in many ways - not allowed to ask etc, treated like a leper and a slut by the nuns. When I was literally hauled to confession for " MY filthy sin" I dared to ask the priest - "how does someone actually rape herself?" and was made to sit in the dark confessional for 1.5 hrs.

My lasting memories of the film was that I wanted to punch that Mother Superior right out of her wheelchair as it reminded me of the head Nun who demanded I call my son by a saint's name of her choosing before getting dragged out of the Women's Hospital and made to leave my baby behind.



MARCH IN MARCH



Some members of the adoption community are organising a rally
in front of the State Library on March 16th at 12.00 midday
Express our feelings about the proposed legislation changes
Join ARMS members who will be there with our banner and brochures

REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUPS

ARMS has been working in conjunction with VANISH to set up support groups in regional areas of Victoria.

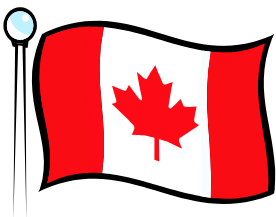
Support group meetings will be run in Traralgon, with meetings for mothers on 15th March, 21st June and 20th September.

Please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611 for the venue details.

ARMS convenor, Faye Nyssen, will be at the meetings.

We are in the process of setting up a support group in Ballarat, and will keep you posted as to when and where they will be held once details are finalised.

Visit by Sandra Falconer Pace



Vice President of Canadian Council of Natural Mothers, Sandra Falconer Pace, is spending 3 days in Melbourne in early March and would like to meet up with ARMS women.

Sandra wrote: “ *in Canada we’re always a bit in awe of what Australia has accomplished for mothers who’ve lost children to adoption, and it would be lovely to chat with you about how that’s been accomplished, and maybe understand some of the cultural differences that may have facilitated your success. I have been on the Executive of the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers for some years now (over a decade, I believe) and would love to share the information I gather with our members.*”

The committee will be organising a get together with Sandra on the 8th or 9th March. If any members are interested in meeting her, please call Jo on (03) 9882 6319 and leave a message with your name and phone number and we will let you know when details have been finalised.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy future to Robyn Morris, snapped here at the beginning of January 2014 enjoying her first meal in eighteen months. We admire your courage, Robyn, and take off our hats to your wonderfully supportive husband and family.



SOME CLEVER ANAGRAMS

PRESBYTERIAN

ASTRONOMER

DESPERATION

THE EYES

THE MORSE CODE

DORMITORY

SLOT MACHINES

ELECTION RESULTS

SNOOZE ALARMS

A DECIMAL POINT

THE EARTHQUAKES

ELEVEN PLUS TWO

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THAT QUEER SHAKE

TWELVE PLUS ONE

WOMAN HITLER

Enquiry from Meg HALE

Meg is a mother who lost her daughter in 1968 in Adelaide. She became an ARMS (SA) Management Committee Member in the early 1980s and did her social work placement at ARMS in 1987 which was the same year that she met her daughter, aged 19 years at the time. Meg left ARMS to pursue a career in Mental Health, and later as an ombudsman investigator. In 2012 Meg went to SA's Adoption Apology and decided to write a book about ARMS, which had closed after 26 years of service. "Mothers in ARMS – the story of forced adoption in South Australia" is being published by Wakefield Press and will be out in April of this year. Meg remains an advocate for mothers and in particular assists them where possible to put their experiences (and their adoption file if they have it) into a format where they might be able to seek legal advice. More about Meg on www.meghale.com

Meg is asking: "Did Victorian mothers get copies of their consent form and a copy of the revocation form to take home with them? Late 60's is probably the era I'm looking at, but I'd be interested if it was the usual practice at any time in Vic because to my knowledge it wasn't in South Australia nor in other States to give copies of the consent form, and definitely not to give mothers a copy of the revocation form in case she wanted to exercise her right to change her mind. I have seen a document which states that both of these forms HAD to be provided to the mother when she gave consent to adoption. This was apparently supposed to be the practice in 1969 in Victoria".

Another query from Meg: A legal firm here in Adelaide (Tindall, Gask, Bentley) is looking for cases where the mother only signed a consent to adoption and where adoption DID NOT occur. These will be cases where the mother was never asked to sign a form making her child a ward of the State and was never told her child had not been adopted. TGB is interested in either mothers or children where adoption did not happen and they believe that they might be able to make a case on the basis that the consent form only stated "adoption". They don't mind which state the case(s) come from. Are there any mothers in Victoria who might fit these circumstances and who might be interested in taking their case further? The lawyer concerned is Mal Byrne and he can be contacted on 08 8250 6668.

Meg can be contacted by phone 08 8339 7012 or by email meghale@bigpond.com

A BIG thank you to everyone who has contributed to sourcing material, writing articles, putting together the newsletter and distributing it. All efforts are greatly appreciated!!



Printed courtesy of the office of
Senator Gavin Marshall
Labor Senator for Victoria

MAKING ADOPTION EASIER

Members have no doubt seen the news that Deborra-Lee Furness has persuaded Prime Minister Abbott that Australia urgently needs to change its adoption laws and procedures to make it easier and quicker to take a baby from its mother in another country and bring it to Australia to live the good life.

In December, Mr Abbott announced that his government would deliver "reform on overseas adoption" within 12 months. "We need to make it easier for that to happen. For too long, adoption has been in the too-hard basket. That must change . . . and it will change within 12 months."

Mr Abbott said he did not underestimate the complexity of changing laws to make it easier for Australians to adopt children. He has ordered the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to establish an interdepartmental committee on overseas adoption. "The committee will consult extensively and report to me in March 2014 including on the immediate steps that could be taken to make inter-country adoption easier and faster for Australian couples," Mr Abbott said.

This is an interesting announcement given that Mr Abbott disbanded the National Intercountry Adoption Advisory Group in November.

If there are to be intercountry adoptions in Australia, we have to be very careful that the children are ethically available for adoption, and unfortunately there have been too many examples of corruption through lies, deception and baby stealing. Prospective adoptive parents are required to undergo an assessment as to their suitability. If the process is to be reformed (i.e. quicker), does that mean these assessments will not be so rigorous? But surely the best interests of the child demand a full assessment of those seeking to adopt them? Australia is admired and respected around the world for reducing the number of domestic and intercountry adoptions. Let's not be taken back to the dark days of pretending that family ties and heritage can be ignored and are irrelevant.

The Prime Minister and his committee on overseas adoption need to hear from us. They need to hear that just because some people with money, fame and the desire for other people's children want it, they should get it. You can let them know how you feel by contacting them on the following email address or writing to them:

intercountryadoption@pmc.gov.au

The Hon. Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Following is a list of Federal and Victorian members of parliament. PLEASE get in touch with them. Make an appointment to see them. Send them emails. If we do nothing they will repeat the same mistakes they made when we were young and pregnant! Don't let them do this to another generation of vulnerable women, wherever they live.

Victoria

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The following letters have been sent to newspapers and the Prime Minister.



"Adoption win for stars" - what an interesting front page headline this morning! If the propaganda that Deborra-Lee Furness and her mega-rich public figure followers give us is to be believed, it's all about the children, not the prospective adoptive parents. So shouldn't the headline have read: "Adoption win for starving orphans"? Unfortunately it's not about the children, but about who has the most money and power and political friends in high places. Will Mr Abbott include people on the taskforce who have had an adoption experience and know the perils all too well? Or will he be guided by those with an agenda to impress celebrities?

Tony Abbott stood in the Great Hall on 21st March this year as Prime Minister Gillard said: "We resolve, as a nation, to remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child's right to know and be cared for by his or her parents." If he did not agree with this, he should have said so at the time.

Just because children come from another country doesn't make the separation from their extended family any easier. Please Mr Abbott, speak to those who know what they are talking about and stop trying to impress celebrities.

Jo Fraser, Secretary ARMS (Vic)

Jo's letter was re-worded by the editor and published as:

"Child comes first" – On the taskforce Tony Abbott has asked for [us] to guide him on removing impediments to adoption ("Aussie homes for foreign kids", *HS* Dec. 20). Will he include people who have had an adoption experience and know the perils all too well?

In March, Mr Abbott said "We resolve, as a nation, to ... remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child's right to know and be cared for by his or her parents".

Just because children come from another country doesn't make the separation from their extended family any easier.

Jo Fraser, Secretary, ARMS (Vic)

It is alarming that as well as providing homes for ORPHANS from around the globe that Tony Abbott has stated local children with ineffective parents will also be adopted. For starters Mr Abbott please DEFINE ineffective. In March this year he stood alongside Julia Gillard as she apologised to all the women whose children were taken from them and the gist of Mr Abbott's speech was that this was appalling and should never happen again. Most of the women who lost their children were very young girls, unmarried and treated appallingly because of this. Most have suffered a lifetime of pain, depression and in many cases have committed suicide.

Along comes the wife of a celebrity, who wants Inter-Country adoption made easier and bang - all of a sudden we have the potential for another human rights disaster.

When Mr Abbott was electioneering he never said anything about this, so was it a thought for the minute or policy on the run to impress Mr Jackman and his wife.

Expect your phones to run hot pollied!!!!

Georgina Johnson

Adoption pain

I am discouraged to read that our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, wishes to make adoption quicker and easier, just a matter of months after our former prime minister, Julia Gillard, apologised to our nation for past adoption policies and practices, which caused so much pain and distress. If he is successful in bring about these changes, this will seriously damage the reputation of our country around the world.

Sadly, he appears to have been influenced by those who are adult-focused rather than those who are child-focused.

Australia is today admired and respected around the world for reducing the number of both domestic and international adoptions in recent years.

We have learned from the mistakes of the past and we now understand and acknowledge the importance to children of their heritage and family ties. We have honoured those connections by replacing adoption with more child-centred alternatives.

Tony Abbott is threatening to undo all of that good work and wind the clock back to the dark days when parents and countries who were struggling were not supported, but rather exploited by having their children taken from them.

He has a responsibility to the children of the future to educate himself and listen to those who have experience of adoption separation and those who have worked with them.

Evelyn Robinson, Christies Beach

Marilyn has agreed to this shortened version of her long letter being published in the ARMS newsletter:

Yet again we have people thinking they are "entitled" (to the offspring of someone less fortunate than themselves). Let go of your superior Miranda Devine upper crust "that we can give them so much" attitude. Instead, jump on a plane and spend some of your precious money building modest homes, schools etc and keep them in their own country, and while you're at it, try finding some of their extended family. Now that would really be humanitarian.

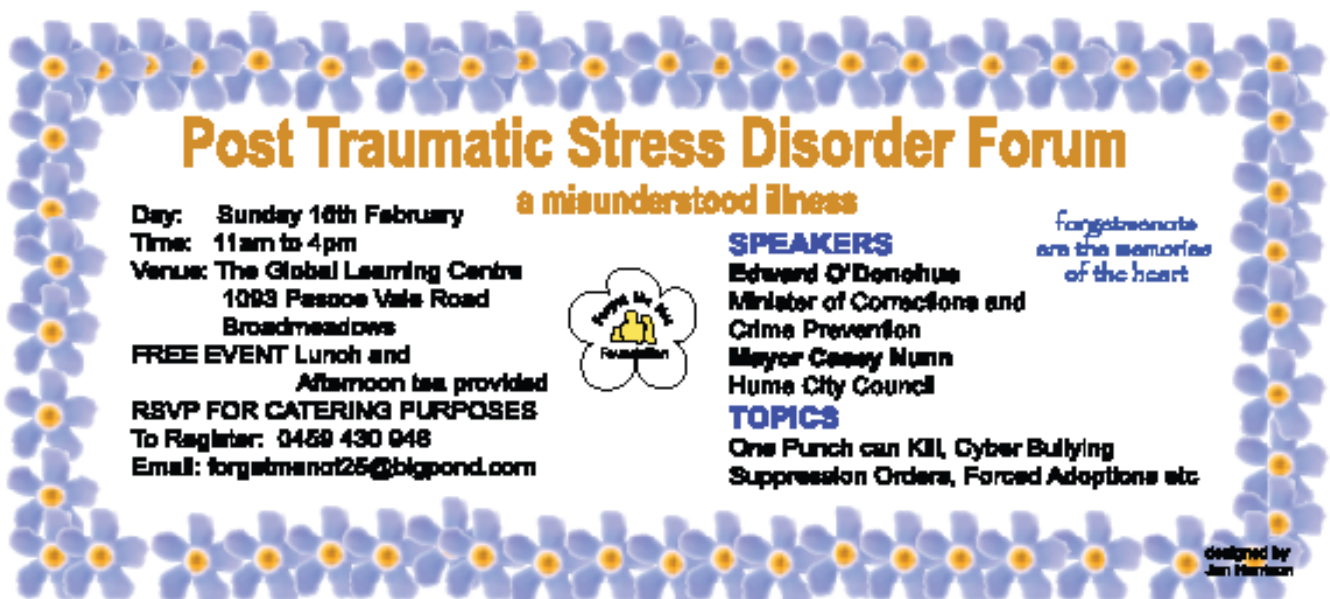
Wake up - no babies in Australia available for adoption now - I say thank God, young women aren't going to part with their own sons and daughters as they were forced to in the past, so let's go offshore, and rape impoverished mothers of their offspring instead.

I attended the Federal Apology to Mothers in Canberra March 2013 - what a day, but Mr Abbott couldn't help himself, he had to refer to us as birth parents, a term used to reduce us to no more than incubators of babies for more deserving "decent" people.

We are about to repeat history, fuelled by the same elements - the predatory seeking out of vulnerable mothers and children (under the guise of perfect adoptive parents wanting to give these "poor" children a better chance in life). It is an attitude of "entitlement" by the rich to have what they automatically "deserve" and what others don't, because of their circumstances.

Furness and Jackman are playing their finest roles, a severe case of denial in my view I wonder how the mothers of their adopted children are surviving the anguish of having the fundamental bond of mother and child shattered.


Marilyn Murphy, Melbourne



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Forum

a misunderstood illness

Day: Sunday 16th February
Time: 11am to 4pm
Venue: The Global Learning Centre
1093 Pascoe Vale Road
Broadmeadows
FREE EVENT Lunch and
Afternoon tea provided
RSVP FOR CATERING PURPOSES
To Register: 0459 430 048
Email: forgetmenot25@bigpond.com



SPEAKERS
Edward O'Donoghue
Minister of Corrections and
Crime Prevention
Mayor Casey Nunn
Hume City Council

TOPICS
One Punch can Kill, Cyber Bullying
Suppression Orders, Forced Adoptions etc

*forgetmenot25
are the memories
of the heart*

designed by
Jan Harrison

1st National Conference on the Mental Health Aspects of Persons Affected by Family Separation

Thursday 10th - Friday 11th October 2002

Keynote Address

Title: Post traumatic phenomena following separation from a baby

Presenter: Dr Geoffrey Rickarby MB BS FRANZCP

Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP MANZAP Consultant Psychiatrist

Abstract

This paper deals with a range of post-traumatic phenomena that might be variously diagnosed under modern classifications of psychiatric disorder: commonly: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Panic Disorder, Dissociative Disorder and Major Depression, or distressing phenomena, which, on the other hand, would not reach diagnostic threshold, yet still pervade and undermine the further life of those separated.

It describes the various traumas of mothers who lost a baby or young child to adoption or separation by fostering, and follows the sequelae of these traumas in the mother's future disorders, symptomatology and relationship difficulties. It draws on the author's previous work with adopted families and thirty years of experience as a Child Psychiatrist with a special interest in the survivors of adoption.

It considers post-traumatic phenomena as elements of dysfunction, that when identified, are likely to respond to appropriate treatment, in contrast with those elements of Pathological Grief which are only covered by newer layers of defence to reappear in different form.

From Dr Rickarby's article:

- Nine out of twenty Australian mothers who have lost a child to adoption have not gone on to have another baby. Some reasons given are distrust, fear, betrayal by their own families and uncertainty as to their own ability to stand against dominant and authoritarian others
- Mothers who do go on to have other children often don't bond easily with the subsequent child
- PTSD sufferers are vulnerable to substance abuse

What help is available?

Relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation, cognitive behaviour therapies, medication (cautiously used) – but most of the healing comes from the work that is done by the sufferer.

DISCLAIMER:

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



ARMS Support Group CALENDAR 2014
Melbourne and Geelong Meetings are both held
on the first Saturday of the month

2 nd February	SUPPORT GROUP
1 st March	SUPPORT GROUP
5 th April	SUPPORT GROUP
3 rd May	MOTHERS' DAY - venue to be advised catered by ARMS committee <u>Geelong mothers warmly welcome in Melbourne on this special day</u>
7 th June	SUPPORT GROUP
5 th July	SUPPORT GROUP
2 nd August	SUPPORT GROUP
6 th September	SUPPORT GROUP
4 th October	SUPPORT GROUP
1 st November	SUPPORT GROUP
6 th December	Annual General Meeting – Venue to be advised <u>Geelong mothers warmly welcome in Melbourne on this special day</u> Followed by Christmas Party <i>Please bring a plate of food to share and a small gift</i> <i>Value approximately \$15</i>

All MELBOURNE meetings (except May and December) are held at
Queen Victoria Women's Centre
210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne from 2.00 – 4.00pm

All GEELONG meetings (except May and December) held at
South Barwon Community Centre
33 Mt Pleasant Road, Belmont 3216
Contact Thelma Adams on 5243 8302 or 0430 948 923

ALL MOTHERS
WELCOME

