

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria

Wodonga—Tuesday, 18 May 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Mr David Southwick

Ms Christine Couzens

Mr Meng Heang Tak

Ms Emma Kealy

WITNESS

Ms Jodie Kensington (speaking on behalf of Ms Helen Nicholson).

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The CHAIR: Good morning. My name is Natalie Suleyman, and I am the Member for St Albans. To my right is Christine Couzens, the Member for Geelong, and to my left is Meng Heang Tak, MP, the Member for Clarinda. Thank you so much for being here this day. I might start with the official proceedings.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

I now declare open the public hearings for the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria. At this point all mobile phones should be turned to silent. I do, for the record, acknowledge Jodie Kensington, who is speaking on behalf of Helen Nicholson and who is here today.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media and other platforms, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Any verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations or handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible, unless it is deemed confidential.

For the record we also have Debbie, who is here with us, and she is a counsellor. Debbie is available to talk to any members during the hearing, but importantly we can provide her details at a later date as well.

The committee is very much interested in hearing about the experiences of forced adoption and in particular the services that you may have accessed or more importantly what outcomes you would like from the inquiry. I now invite you to provide a brief opening statement to the committee. Thank you so much for being here, Jodie.

Ms KENSINGTON: The committee has Helen's full statement, which I will not read; I know you have got that there. The two things I will be reading are from Helen's actual statement, but she also sent through some other information to give some context regarding the Victorian relevance for her. So I will read that out first before we go any further.

My birth mother "E" was born Colac (Victoria) and moved to Warburton (Victoria) where my grandmother left my grandfather as he was an alcoholic. "War neurosis" was written on his death certificate.

When "E" was old enough she became a mother craft nurse in Melbourne and met my biological father, "G", from Thoona, a Vic Country Party Politician.

My birth mother "E" was sent to Sydney NSW from country Victoria to have me.

That just gives the context for what I am about to read now.

Helen really wanted to be here in person so you could hear her speak, hear her verbalise the contemporaneous pain and suffering she is feeling. The tone of her voice that conveys the unwritten words. But due to a previous commitment she cannot be here so I, Jodie, am her voice.

I want to thank you very much for visiting—taking your precious and valued time to hear the voices of us affected by The Historical Forced Adoption Act of the 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's.

My name is Helen. I am a 1968 baby. I have suffered from "severe attachment wounds" from the moment of my birth; the moment of my separation from my birth mother—pre-verbal pain and still do to this day. It is a life-long trauma. Most days I wish I was aborted.

Please take this letter and my story with you today and hopefully you find the time to read what I have endured the last 52 years.

I have suffered from Depression most of my life due to my adoption experience. It wasn't until I connected with VANISH in 1991 that I was validated and acknowledged in my feelings of being unloved, worthlessness, isolation, rejection, abandonment, despair and anxiety. I wasn't alone. They assisted me with a successful reunion with my Birth Mother however due to my fear of abandonment again, I have recently severed contact with her, before it happens to me again. True terror isn't being scared; it's not having a choice in the matter.

These people—

I think she means from VANISH—

all sing the same song with a different tune. Please listen with compassion in your heart. What if it was your mother, brother or sister?

VANISH established a Support Group for those affected by the Act in Albury/Wodonga. I was cofacilitator for this time and have just resigned because my head and my heart are broken with Adoption issues. We are the strongest Support Group in Victoria and growing. The people I have met in the group over the last seven years are hurting and every meeting is news of a rare high or a new low in their lives. Mostly it is a story of unresolved pain. The Support Group has been an extremely valuable resource and support to these people as they have felt acknowledged and safe in a confidential and familiar environment. I stress, please, continue funding for VANISH as they are a much-needed agency. They are extremely short-staffed and overworked yet dedicated to supporting us. I am keen for people to understand how isolated people can feel and how much the group helps with that and gives a sense of belonging. I have been seeing an Adoption trauma trained Counsellor on and off, over the last ten years. Without hers and VANISH's support, I don't know if I'd be alive today. I am about to start EMDR treatment with a psychologist.

The Government of this time made an appalling decision to take into their own hands what they ignorantly thought what was best for women and children of which they had no intellectual or emotional understanding of their circumstances nor the life-long impact it would have.

It is time for acknowledgement, validation, retribution, and cost-free life-long counselling. As well as continued funding to keep VANISH going and reinstate the counselling service. More than just some pathetic formal apology. That in no time becomes dated and meaningless. More training needs to be given to medical specialists to treat those of us for which there is no cure. During numerous sessions with different psychiatrists, I have been told, "I do not believe in adoption trauma".

I invite you to contact me if you wish to discuss this with me personally.

Again, thank you your time today.

Kind Regards

Helen Nicholson

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The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Jodie, for being here before the committee on behalf of Helen. We truly do appreciate the submission and the contribution here today. Of course the next step will be that the committee has a couple more public hearings, and all evidence will be deliberated by the committee before we table a report in August to Parliament. But please be assured, and please pass on our sincere gratitude and thanks to Helen for her submission. You can keep up to date with the progress of the report, but of course Yuki will be able to email the details once the report is finalised. But again, thank you so much, Jodie, for being here and being the voice for Helen. We truly do appreciate it.

Ms KENSINGTON: Thank you for having this inquiry. It is wonderful. We appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much.

Witness withdrew.