



Origins Supporting People Separated by Adoption Incorporated

Submission to the

INQUIRY INTO RESPONSES TO HISTORICAL FORCED ADOPTIONS IN VICTORIA

R D Fetherstone Memorial Lecture 'THE ANXIETIES OF PREGNANCY'. 1965

By D. F. LAWSON, M.B., F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G., Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne

*"The last thing that the obstetrician might concern himself with is the law in regard to adoption. All of you here belong to some club or another—the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, golf clubs, tennis clubs—and you all know that if you do not behave properly you can be thrown out".*

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We will open this submission with the above quote where Dr D F Lawson in 1965 encouraged his colleagues to in effect "break the law" when it came to the issue of pregnant unmarried mothers.

His directions on the treatment of young women was not only an act of punishment but also a breach of young Australian women's legal rights, not only in Melbourne Victoria, but enacted all over the country.

The 'punishment' saw 150,000 young women lose their newborns to strangers from the peak years of the 1950s-1970s.

Much has been exposed about forced adoption in the past few years leading to a number of inquiries, including a Senate Inquiry where Origins branches including Victoria produced a large volume of research, including the consequences of forced adoption and lifelong mental health damage to mothers and adopted persons.

It was determined by a Senate Inquiry that past adoption practices were unlawful and harmful, subsequently a framework was put in place that was supposed to address the on-going effects, this included a national apology and other services including funding for service provision.

We (those affected by forced adoption) have had enough time (7 years from the national apology) to reflect back to the responses so far, and it paints a dismal picture on how this issue has been responded to:

In effect:

- The legal issues of forced adoption have not been addressed or resolved by the States and the facilitators of unlawful adoption practices.

- There has been no accountability by the States and adoption organisations for unlawful practices.
- The mental health damage to those affected has not received adequate responses.
- Funding for forced adoption organisations has not been adequate, forcing survivors to seek service from organisations that little or no experience in dealing with the complex issues of unlawful adoption.
- Senate recommendations of redress have not been forthcoming.

And the list goes on of unresolved grievances affecting ageing women and their lost children.

Whilst the erecting and acknowledgement of mothers and adopted persons in the recent memorial by the Victorian Government, and its given apology is commendable, and a tangible reminder of past human rights abuses, it does not provide a viable response to the un-resolved issues of criminal behaviour and the effects on its victims

Mothers have still been sidelined by the Statue of Limitations when it comes to seeking legal action against perpetrators.

They have not been put back to their original position of being the legal mothers of their taken children, not have they received compensation for the damage they have suffered, so in effect the 'crime' still continues.

We (Origins) would say while the limited responses to the unlawful practices have been enacted, the genuine response to this issue has a long way to go to achieve the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry.

We commend the Victorian Government for this review on where this issue stands, but would emphasise that apologies and memorials cannot circumvent the Common Law.

Restitution, Financial Redress and Accountability, may go some way to an acceptable outcome to the misery of those affected, and a reminder to States and organisations that the separation and destruction of the family unit comes with life-long consequences.

Thank you for the opportunity of contributing to this Inquiry and we can be contacted on [REDACTED] for further comment on this issue.

The Committee of Origins Supporting People Separated by Adoption Incorporated