

## Submission to the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions

The Committee Manager  
Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
Melbourne Victoria

Sent via email 29 May 2021

Dear Committee Manager,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria.

Although my adoption occurred in New South Wales, I have been a Victorian resident since 2001 and I conducted my search and reunion with the assistance of VANISH in 2011. I have been accessing the services of VANISH via support groups ever since and without this organisation I would have probably never met my mother nor been able to process the grief, loss and pain caused by our separation.

I was born in 1971, the peak year for adoptions in NSW just as it was in Victoria. My mother 'K' was 22 and unmarried, and although she planned to marry my father, I was taken from her at birth and placed with another family.

Told she was 'a slut' and unfit to be a mother, K did not have any more children and went on to a life marred by alcoholism and mental health issues. Feeling deeply ashamed, she did not share her secret with a single person. Today my mother lives in a high care ward at an aged care facility and is very frail despite being aged only 72.

VANISH located K in 2011 and assisted me in writing contact letters. She initially refused contact with me; this rejection was very painful and I found the VANISH support group I attended every month to be very beneficial. Being able to talk to people who had similar experiences was of great help and comfort. The VANISH team leading the support group were also available to me on the phone between meetings and I was most grateful for this.

In October 2012, only days after I attended the Victorian Apology at Parliament House, K made contact via services in NSW; she had not kept my letters or contact details. I flew to meet her in regional NSW just a few weeks later, again with the support of the team at VANISH, who stayed in touch with me before, during and after reunion.

Having VANISH by my side was incredibly important as I my adoptive father was – and still is – actively against my reunion (my adoptive mother is deceased) and other immediate family have no concept of what it is like to be an adopted person. Society deems us 'lucky', and that we should be 'grateful' for a life with new parents who 'chose' us.

Over the years I have sought the professional help of counsellors and therapists but have found many to be unaware of the impact of adoption and the challenges of reunion. In my teens I was diagnosed with depression, looking back I believe issues of identity and loss – never raised by psychologists at the time – were at the heart of my illness.

For this reason I believe it is imperative that people impacted by past adoption practices have access to counsellors trained in adoption issues at little or no cost. VANISH has not

had funding for counselling services for some years, and the organisation that has Forced Adoption Support Services (FASS) funding does not prioritise counselling services.

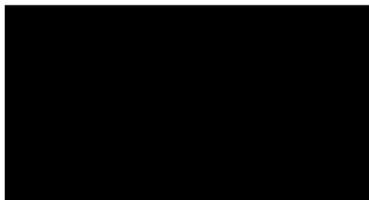
I find it incomprehensible that an organisation as valuable, experienced and knowledgeable as VANISH is so underfunded and struggles to maintain even its most basic services to adopted persons, mothers, fathers and others in the adoption community.

Time is running out for many adopted people to find their parents before they die. My own father died six weeks before I was able to find out his name. The grief I feel over this is not acknowledged by anyone in society at large and I also believe a lot more work needs to be done to educate the public about adoption issues, particularly in an era when celebrity adoptions are lauded and celebrated. VANISH is well placed to continue its work in educating health professionals, the media and the public, and should be funded to do so.

To this day I attend the VANISH adoptee-only support group every month. I have been able to support others through their own searches, rejections and reunions, and receive support in turn for the continuing impact adoption has on my life.

I urge you to consider the recommendations VANISH has made to this inquiry and am available to add further detail to this submission if required.

Yours faithfully,

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