

Response to a matter raised by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee: Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices

Background:

Many individual submissions to the Senate Inquiry refer to a lack of awareness by the helping professions of the loss, grief and trauma caused by adoption separation. 'I need the support of a counselling service that actually knows what an adoptee goes through' is a typical comment (Sydney hearing transcript page 4).

The matter of suitably qualified counsellors being available to the adoption community was reinforced at the hearing held in Melbourne on 20th April 2011. VANISH was invited to provide input (see below for the context).

Senate Inquiry:

Hearing in Melbourne:

Senator Moore -

One of the things that we have talked about in previous inquiries in this area is whether there should be some kind of formal course or some kind of formal developed qualification on issues of loss and adoption that counsellors could obtain. I am wondering whether an organisation like yours wants to give that some consideration today. You can do specialist upgrades in your skills in a whole range of areas. We have talked with people who had been caught up in institutions. The need for specialised knowledge when doing training is one thing, but perhaps there should be some discussion about whether that could be structured to form a special qualification with the right and appropriate skills. That would enable trained counsellors to study quite formally and be accredited in some way so that people would know who to go to. If you would care to give some thought to that, that could be something that you may want to give us some information on, because the people who work in your organisations are the ones who know best these issues and they could put something forward.

Christine Cole, Convenor, Apology Alliance, at the hearing in Perth:

I have done a degree in psychology and you do not even talk about adoption. Most mental health workers are not adequately trained to deal with the level of posttraumatic stress disorder that we are suffering from.

Jennifer Newbould, Counsellor/Manager, Adoption Research and Counselling Service, at the hearing in Perth:

With the sort of counselling that we do we have to have highly trained therapists.

Courses:

LaTrobe University offers a range of post graduate courses in loss, grief and end of life care from various locations across Victoria with some courses being available through distance education.

Information regarding the availability of the courses can be obtained from **Dr Bruce Rumbold**, Palliative Care Unit, LaTrobe University. **Email:** B.Rumbold@latrobe.edu.au

Correspondence with Dr Rumbold: In your post graduate courses on loss and grief, does any module address this topic with respect to adoption? Not directly. Postgraduate students can of course choose to focus on an area of interest for their assignments. In fact, at the moment I have a Masters student completing a thesis on adult adopted children's experience of parental bereavement.

Flinders University

According to the National Association for Loss and Grief (Victoria), the only Loss, Grief and Trauma course at graduate level in Australia is delivered by Flinders University in South Australia (link below), but it does not have an adoption focus.

Loss, Grief and Trauma Counselling

| Course name | Units | Duration (full-time equivalent) | GradStart code | CRICOS code |
|--|----------|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Graduate Certificate in Loss, Grief and Trauma Counselling | 18 units | 6 months | 2GC036 | 036367E |

Overview

The Graduate Certificate in Loss, Grief and Trauma Counselling provides you with an understanding of theories related to loss, grief and trauma experiences and the ability to counsel people in a culturally effective manner.

This is a specialised course for social workers, nurses, teachers, counsellors and other professionals who wish to gain the specific skills and knowledge required to assist people suffering loss, grief or trauma.

- [Graduate Certificate in Loss, Grief and Trauma Counselling](#)

Training offered by one post adoption services organisation (over 2 days):

Counsellor Training

Post Adoption Support Services (PASS), Relationships Australia South Australia provides professional development training for counsellors, psychologists, social workers, teachers and other professionals in adoption related issues and complexities. This training is for *professionals* who work with, or are interested in working with, people whose lives include adoption, such as birth mothers and families, people who have been adopted, and adoptive parents and families.

Topics covered are:

- Grief and loss in adoption
- Search and reunion issues and complexities
- Parenting children with histories of trauma and attachment disruption
- Impact on identity and belonging
- Indigenous issues
- Late discovery of adoption
- Who to refer clients to and why
- Services available for individuals and families affected by adoption.

Professionals attending this training can apply to be on the PASS preferred providers list. This is a list of qualified counsellors, social workers, psychologist and other professionals, who have experience in and knowledge of adoption related issues, who PASS can confidently refer their clients to for support.

Conclusions:

The short answer to the question posed above by Senator Moore is 'yes'. The training offered to counsellors by PASS, which is a mix of experiential presentations and research-based material addresses some of the subject matter that could be covered by a tertiary course. The exact content of such a course (or a tailored module within a course) is a complex issue, perhaps best addressed by, for example, the next national meeting of the Post Adoption Service Providers, to be held in Sydney, 26–28 October 2011. Organisations such as PASS, ARCS, VANISH and their ilk will be attending this gathering. LaTrobe University and Flinders University could become involved in subsequent discussions about the delivery of the course.