

Response of the CPAA to questions on notice from the Community Affairs References Committee of 16/12/2011 in Hobart.

Question : Do you keep records of how many contacts there are through other sources for example, perhaps somebody gets a friend to ring or uses the Department?

The records that the CPAA keep are those of clients who requested AIS services from CPAA; records indicate access to their file, the information given, mandatory counselling session and any follow up sessions and the outcome of a search for the adoptee/relinquishing parent if that was requested.

No database has been kept of former CPAA clients requesting that their information be provided through the DHSS. In those circumstances the request is made by DHSS, CPAA transfers information from the file directly to DHSS. DHSS also has access to all formal information from the sealed records following the granting of an application from the Magistrates Court. I have asked DHSS if they have information concerning this, but they also do not have a data base giving this statistical information except for the immediate current 12 month period.

My experience as an adoption worker is that both agencies have clients requesting AIS services from the agency that was not involved in the original adoption process but not in significant numbers. I regret that I cannot give you an accurate figure and will amend our data base to collect this statistic in the light of this question. From the change of legislation in 1985 to 2011 a total of 351 requests for information has been received from all parties to adoption.

Question: Is it possible for you to outline on notice the work of the Catholic Private Adoption Agency?

I commenced working as an adoption counsellor with CPAA in 1989, at which time there was a clear procedure for working with relinquishing parents, adoptees and adoptive parents. The underpinning principals are of support, respect and the provision of information to enable clients to make informed decisions. I have reviewed records of relinquishing mother from 1962 onward to respond to this question.

The main sources of referrals to the CPAA were:

- The family of the pregnant girl (and father where involved)
- The pregnant girl herself coming directly to the CPAA
- The parish priest
- The family doctor
- Friends
- Employers

Each relinquishing mother was supported by a CPAA Social Worker before, and after the birth of their child. This support was given by sessions in the CPAA office, at the place of residence of the client, in the hospital or in, the case of rural access, at a venue acceptable to the client.

Records indicate that the assessment included

- The needs of the pregnant girl – did she have accommodation, was she supported by her family or other significant people.
- If help was requested for accommodation, this was given by –
 - Host families in other parts of the State
 - Family members in other parts of the State
 - Assistance in finding accommodation and support interstate if this was requested
 - Access to hostels such as Elim.

Where the girl/woman moved to another part of the State, a CPAA Social Worker in that region gave support.

Records also indicate that family members were often involved in the early discussions about the options for the pregnancy, and the level of family support often determined where the girl went for the later part of the pregnancy and delivery.

The role of the Social Worker was to help the girl (and the birth father) to consider options and support that option.

Where that outcome was relinquishment of the child, practical plans were put in place, including the wishes of the parent regarding what was important to her in the choice of adoptive parents. Contact was consistently maintained from first point of contact to after the adoptive placement of the child.

Where the girl was able to keep the baby, practical support was given to enable this to happen. This increased significantly after 1975 with the introduction of income support.

CPAA in Tasmania did not have a mother and baby home and the children were born in hospital. The Social Worker visited the girl at the hospital post birth and consents were usually taken at the hospital by the Social Worker.

Full details for the relinquishing parents were taken and these provided the basis for information for the child in later years, and non identifying information for the adoptive parent at the time of placement of the child. Non identifying information about the adoptive family was given to the relinquishing parent prior to the placement.

From the mid 1980's onwards CPAA has supported the practice of open adoption where exchange of information and contact between the parties is established.