

- (a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions; and
- (b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subject to forced adoption policies.

## **Re: Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices.**

I lost my first child, a son, to adoption in Western Australia in June 1969. I was 16 years old. We were reunited in January 1995. Our reunion came about due to my innate yearning to know if he was alive and well and have him back in my life where I believed he belonged and needed to be. I applied to the Department for Community Development (as it was called in WA at the time) for an outreach to the adoptive parents which was recommended to me. He was 26 at the time but once again I complied and followed the rules as I did at the time of his birth and the approach was made through his parents rather than directly to him.

At the time of his birth I was completely unaware and not supported or offered any other option for me and my son, not by my parents or the Matron or nurses and assistants of the Salvation Army Hillcrest Hospital for unwed mothers in North Fremantle. There was at no time a social worker offered for information or support or a counsellor ever considered.

In the early stages of reunion, I became involved with Adoption Jigsaw WA when I realised that I desperately needed help and support and couldn't continue to live my life in such painful suppression, isolation and alienation. These were the feelings I had experienced when I became pregnant out of marriage, and when I gave birth and lost my child in such horrendous circumstances and shameful secrecy. My association with Adoption Jigsaw and need for counselling has been ongoing for the past 16 years. I have also worked voluntarily in administration at Jigsaw for more than 10 years so I am very much aware of their stretched resources and the pain and difficulty of the many clients who use their services.

I am still coming to terms with and endeavouring to understand and heal the devastating effects of my loss and the impact of my unacknowledged grief. Not only is it society's general perception that unmarried mothers in the past chose to give up their babies for adoption, it is also my son's perception and conditioning. He is angry and resentful about being "given away" and missing out on being raised by me in his natural family. His punitive and abusive behaviour is hurtful to all his loved ones and is devastating to me.

I believe our separation came about by coercion due to Government and social unacceptability and the unavailability of moral social support and legal information. I also believe that the Federal Government bears some responsibility to now provide funding to Australia wide adoption search and support agencies to assist with search and therapy. This would be a powerful acknowledgement to those experiencing the traumatic consequences of adoption separation, loss and grief.