

Supplementary submission from:
Erik Spinney (Standing Bear)
Submission number 133

RE Senate inquiry into past adoption practices and their effects of these practices on adoptees and both birth & adoptive parents. Supplementary Submission

After attending and speaking at the Sydney day 29/04/2011 for this enquiry I felt compelled to expand my original submission as well as to cover other areas not previously stated.

To begin I need to state that the laws giving people the ability to adopt a child are the creation and the continuing responsibility of the federal and state governments that implemented them. Even if the laws were put in place decades ago, as adoption is still conducted according to these laws, the government of today is still ethically, morally and lawfully responsible for all outcomes that are as a direct consequence of the adoption act in it's present form.

All who acted on behalf of the government, including all religious organizations that facilitated the forced removal and adoption of children and new born babies from mothers, need to be investigated and held accountable for any unethical or illegal act.

We all heard during the process of this inquiry the recounts of women who tell of horrific treatment at the hands of many of the institutions and hospitals that handled the collection of children deemed to be made available for adoption, all because they were seen as unworthy to raise their own children, not because of having a history of abusing children or even one of neglect but only because they were young and unmarried, often from poorer or indigenous families.

During this process these institutions committed horrendous abuses to these young vulnerable women. Including physical and psychological assaults, forced barbiturate drug regimens, forced unpaid work, and imprisonment, all designed to break the women's sense of self and support to facilitate an unlawful signature on the adoption placement orders as well as to disrupt the creation of memories so that they would be unable to fully recount what was done to them to alleviate further action against the perpetrators.

The results of this are thousands of women who are highly traumatized with long term psychological and emotional trauma based issues that impede in every way any ability to rebuild their lives and move on to have successful future families and to become a functioning member of society.

There needs to be held a full unbiased criminal and negligence investigation into every service, government department, hospital, agency, religious run home or organization that had any involvement in past and present adoption processes.

Those services, government departments, hospitals, agencies, religious run homes or organizations deemed to have had questionable practices in the past should be removed from any involvement in the adoption process today, and prevented from being involved in any way with the healing and recovery of any person affected by adoption in any way. This includes those that have changed their name to try and separate from their past actions and associations.

You cannot begin to heal when the support offered comes from those that have a vested interest in keeping what has happened to you a secret and to remove their liability for their actions. That includes department heads who are now ministers in parliament.

Secondly there needs to be full and open disclosure of the actions taken against these mothers so that all those who refused to believe what happened to them will see the truth (i.e. the children that were, often forcibly, removed from them and adopted out), so that the bridge building and healing can begin. As I am an adoptee from these circumstances I would like to know what my birth mother went through so that I too can begin to understand the world I came from and I can begin to heal.

All documentation needs to be made available to those that request it regardless of liability and/or veto agreements.

There needs to be a body created that is tasked with the complete process of obtaining all available information and records. It is almost impossible to do the searches ourselves as records are scattered between different organizations, government departments, hospitals and agencies.

These searches need to be funded as the cost of searches is well beyond most people.

In the cases of missing and or lost information such as medical records and past family medical history, Medicare should cover all necessary medical tests including gene mapping to create that medical record. For this will provide any information needed by doctors in the future for the treatment and diagnosis of illness, potential birth difficulties and or defects, proneness to particular diseases such as heart attacks, diabetes etc. As birth mothers were given medications known to cross the placenta, we need to know the potential effects of these medications, as well as which of us adoptees are affected by being exposed in that way.

Thirdly: a complete psychological and social impact study needs to be commissioned to gain a full understanding of all the effects adoption has on all those associated with the experience, not just the psychological and emotional effect but also the financial and sociological. As there are many consequences to adoption that lead people to be on disability pensions with nothing and no hope to rebuild their shattered lives, the understanding of this is important. Especially as the government is considering opening the doors to inter-country adoption to feed the market for all the same sex couples that wish to adopt.

Fourthly: an official apology is meaningless without all the necessary support and resources allocated to back it up. As adoption in the way it has been done has completely ruined so many lives, the appropriate means and long-term support needs to be given to rebuild those lives to some semblance of normality. Not just to the level of the disability pension and a Housing-commission flat.

Fifthly: as the Federal Government is currently reassessing the adoption act, why have only those organizations that have a vested interest in having adoption expanded been invited to participate and advise on policy? Why is their opinion asked for, and not those that know and understand what the effects are when adoption goes wrong? This is ludicrous. If you want the truth, speak to those that have suffered it, not only those it did not affect or that have a vested interest in covering up the truth. Just because the head of a pro-adoption organization like "Orphan Angels" is famous, like Debora-lee Furness, doesn't mean they are right. Representatives of "Orphan Angels" have been desperately seeking people that see, or have had, a positive adoption

experience. They flatly refuse to listen to, nor do they have any interest in, learning how to avoid the adoption mistakes of the past. They only want their babies regardless of the consequences.

The psychological and emotional effects of adoption and the necessary understanding needed to aid in the healing process

To address the psychological and emotional effects of forced adoption you need to first understand that the needs of the people involved are widely varied. The first step is to assign a case worker to evaluate each individual case to assess what is needed as well as to create a program of support that will best serve the individuals needs. Creating a plug and play group of resources to enable the caseworker to create a support program to me sounds the easiest. As many areas don't have all the necessary resources within a reasonable distance, the use of video conferencing over functional internet is the simplest way to move forward.

Any counselor, caseworker, psychologist or department coordinator that deals with those affected negatively by forced adoption needs to have a deep understanding of the level at which this affects you as well as all the consequences that arise from those traumas. To give an idea of the level of understanding needed:

If you have a woman who at age 16 years is forcibly removed from her home because she is unmarried and pregnant, (in some states she is arrested by the police and placed in jail until a placement in a unwed mothers home is available) she is separated from family, friends and the man she is intermittently involved with. She has been told that she is not allowed to use her own name and is to be called by another name. She is continually told that she is unfit and unable to raise the child she is carrying, she is told that she has no option but to sign the relinquishing orders, if she refuses to sign she is given reduced rations and put to work for 14 to 16 hrs a day usually in an industrial laundry. She is also given barbiturate medications and in some cases tied to her bed.

Then comes the day she is to give birth. She is taken into a room tied to the bed. She is not offered, nor does she receive, any pain medication during labor. In some cases to receive pain medication she has to sign the relinquishing orders. She is not allowed any family support during labor, when it is time to bring her child into the world she has a pillow placed over her face so she has no ability to see the child she has carried for 9 months and has just given birth to. The child is immediately removed from the room and she is allowed no contact with it; if she hasn't signed the relinquishing orders they are placed in front of her right at that moment and she is ordered to sign otherwise she is not allowed to see the child she has just given birth to. In many cases she has her breasts bound to reduce the ability to breast feed and to make it very painful. If she is lucky enough to be granted to feed her child then due to the binding she has difficulty lactating and is told "*see you can't even feed the child so how can you even think that you are able to raise it*". Soon after all of this she is sent home or to a hostel and told to forget that this ever happened.

The scenario I just wrote, as horrific as it sounds, is more common than not. It is made up of several of the mother's recounts that gave evidence and sent in submissions to this inquiry.

List a few of the psychological and emotional issues faced everyday by women who have had this level of trauma inflicted upon them as well as those that through family pressure did choose to relinquish their child:

- PTSD post traumatic stress disorder
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Guilt
- Dissociative disorders
- Delusional disorders
- Sociophobic , agoraphobic
- Attempted Suicide or has suicidal tendencies
- Drug and alcohol addictions and issues
- Anger and trust related issues
- Family related issues, relationship issues
- More likely to accept abusive relationships and the consequences of
- Low self-worth, unmotivated to succeed
- Prone to violent and irrational thoughts in relation to society and future children

Many women have had their experiences reinforced through years of self-abuse, guilt and self-harm. The road to healing and recovery is long and hard due to the level of trauma and the length of time the trauma has been ignored by those with the ability to help.

Being a child that is adopted out from this environment means we inherit many of the psychological and emotional issues from our birth parents. Recent studies in England have shown that the emotional state of the mother during pregnancy has a direct influence on the mental and emotional development of the child. They have shown where children whose mothers during pregnancy were placed under high anxiety and stress are more likely to suffer from developmental disorders such as A.D.H.D. and A.D.D. as well as have a psychological and emotion pre-disposition to stress, depression, anxiety, and dissociative disorders.

As a child develops within its mother, the genetic information is instructing every cell in its body to prepare for life. Each generation expands this genetic information so those future generations are better prepared for an ever changing environment. Much of the final neural synaptic brain functions or the wiring of our brain happens in the final few months before we are born. If the mother is in a high state of stress and anxiety, the developing child is going to be prepared to be born into a hostile environment. We are born hypersensitive, hyperaware and in survival mode. Our brain is wired to constantly look for danger and threats not to receive information and learn. This leads to learning difficulties which directly effect our ability to have meaningful employment, also we are pre-wired to have bonding issues so that any sense of connection to family and relations is highly challenged from before we are born. We are also prewired to suffer from many of the same emotional and psychological issues as our birth mother. Then there is the reinforcement from being removed from our mothers and given to adoptive families and raised with people who have a completely different set of genetic tendencies and personalities. Within the first few years of life for an adoptee there are so many things that adoptive parents need to be aware of (and are not) that result in a child having massive conflicts of identity, personality and

belonging that result in many associative and emotional disorders. These directly affect our ability to form relationships throughout our lives.

Another common trend for adoptees caused by looking and being different from the family that is raising us, is bullying in and out of school. This commonly starts in primary school and carries on throughout our school life. We as young children are being asked to answer questions that we don't have the life experience and knowledge to answer.

We are being asked to answer questions like

- Why do you look different from your mum and dad? When answered as to why we are asked
- What is adopted?
- Why aren't you good enough to be with your mum and dad?
- What did you do wrong?
- Were you bad?

How is a 5 year old supposed to answer questions like that? And how are we supposed to feel?

When you are seen as different to the other children around you, you are bullied relentlessly. To survive you either hide or you become the bully. This again reinforces your need to be in survival mode and again affects your ability to gain an education, which directly affects your ability to find meaningful work. You are set up to fail in the society that you are being raised in. We are again reminded that we are different and in most cases we take that to mean we are outcast and wrong.

To survive, we either blame our birth mother for everything that happens in our life, or we blame our adoptive parents, or we blame the society that surrounds us, or combinations of all three. With this, our internal need to be part of something and our lack of identity, we very easily can be led into the negative aspects of human society: crime gangs, street gangs etc. We can very easily become caught up in the cycle of crime and antisocial behavior and jail. We have a predisposition to seek a way to cope with how we feel and this directly leads to common addictions like drugs and alcohol, which again feeds into the cycle of unemployment and jail.

There are so many aspects of normal human life that being an adoptee changes, that the resources needed to address the healing process for an adoptee need to be varied and highly adaptable. That is why caseworkers with all the necessary skills and knowledge to create a healing program and support network that will address the individuals needs and situation as well as having access to all the necessary skilled resources, is the only way that will work in the long term. Also as the most common issues that adoptees have to deal with will involve and affect the relationships we have, the support services need to also be made available to our husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends and children.

To not allocate adequate funding under the perception that the immediate cost is daunting is unethical, because we did not create this but it was thrust upon us. If you added together the existing drain on the mental health services, hospitals, correctional services, drug and alcohol

detox, family law courts, police, welfare and social services you will find that the expense is already very high and structured in a way that will never work.

To add to the existing concerns that surround adoption is that now the federal government is reassessing the adoption act. Not to put an end to it but to make it easier to bring in children from other countries to feed the need for adopting in Australia. A need that is massively increased by the allowing of same sex couples to adopt. It is my understanding that the short sightedness of the NSW government and some other states that already had this legislation in place was to support the same sex couples that were involved in long-term foster care. The price tag for this legislation means, sadly, that some of the foster children already in care will be dumped and future placements will be jeopardized because most same sex couples would rather raise a baby than somebody else's unwanted older child.

One of the risks within this practice is what is happening already in America with inter-country adoption. When you create a market for something people will do horrific things to fill that need, especially when large sums of money are involved. In an ideal world we would think that removing babies and small children from orphanages is a good thing. But sadly we don't live in an ideal world. Most people who want to adopt a child want a baby, not an older child, so that rules out most of the existing children in these orphanages and homes. You end up with the initial lobbying tool that meant to help these helpless children being forgotten, and replacing it with a worldwide market searching for babies.

Right now, to feed the American need for babies to adopt, there are baby selling rape camps in Somalia and Nigeria. The warlords kidnap women and rape them till they fall pregnant, put them to work until they give birth and sell the babies through third parties to the American based adoption services for on average \$10 000 US each. Then the women are raped again and the cycle continues.

When you create a high price market for something, sadly people will do the most horrific things to fulfill it and make money. To a degree we have already seen this in Australia with the forced adoption practices of the last 60 years.

Then we come to the improperness of same sex couples being allowed to adopt in the first place. It is not that they are incapable of providing a loving environment for a child; it is that the main driving force, regardless of what they say, is that to raise a child means they are seen as a normal couple. The evidence is obvious as many of the same people that are pushing for the right for same sex couples to adopt are the same ones pushing for same sex marriage. The issue I have with this is that they have a very strong emotional need that is placed upon a traumatized child to fulfill. That emotional expectation will reinforce all the emotional issues the child has and will in time destroy not only the relationship with the adopting parents but also that child's life. This is not a social experiment that you can walk away from and say "*well that didn't work*". Children are not a commodity and we can't fix ourselves. As the already existing failure to address the needs of people who have suffered greatly the effects of adoption are not being addressed or even really acknowledged, how can you even think of increasing the problem?

To add to this is there are certain things that same sex couples are completely unable to fulfill due to the couple being of the same sex. In a heterosexual relationship you have both male and

female, and with children both are needed. Because there are certain essential rolls that the child needs fulfilled.

A child need both male and female in the roll of parents to gain a true perspective and understanding of what it means to be male and female. Also if you have a male same sex couple raising a girl when does it become inappropriate behavior? An example: the girl's first menses, which one will insert the girl's first tampon and teach her about what is happening? You cannot claim that a Dr or nurse will do it as there is no real 100% accuracy of when it will happen as well as the existing health system can't cope now with the workload it already has. How are two males going to even comprehend how to teach a girl what it is to be a woman? If a male same sex couple is going to raise a boy then what kind of balanced perception is that boy going to have on relationships? How are they going to learn how to respect women? And how are they going to know how to deal with heterosexual relationships? Because all children learn far more from what they observe than from what they are told.

The same goes for female same sex couples, how are they going to teach a boy what it is to be a man? How are they going to teach him about his penis? What care it needs and what is happening when he starts puberty? What pressure will these children be under to be gay just like their adoptive parents? What chance do they have to be accepted as normal in the society that we have?

The emotional expectation most same sex couples will have of the child they are wishing to adopt will only re-enforce the emotional and psychological damage that child already has. They hope to remove a societal stigma by placing several on a young child. How is a young child supposed to answer questions like?

- Why do you have two dads or two mums?
- Why do you look different from them (inter-country adoption)
- What's gay?
- Your two dads screw each other, you're sick
- Your dads/mums hate god
- You are evil just like your dads/mums

And sadly there are many more. In an ideal world with the right support and education a loving home is enough, but again we don't live in an ideal world. The society we have created is not a very nice one and anything that makes you out to be different will result in relentless bullying, assaults and abuse. Children are driven to suicide through bullying at school just because they have the wrong cell phone or hair cut, let alone being adopted and being raised by a same sex couple. It is not a child's responsibility to carry the burden of societal change; that is in the hands of the adults that are shaping the world we live in.

There are some things we as human beings just need to accept. If you as an adult choose to have a same sex relationship, then you must also accept that relationship will be childless. It is the same as if a rock climber who chooses to climb mountains and falls and becomes paralyzed, he needs to accept the consequence of his choice to take that risk.

It is not the children's responsibility to fulfill the needs of the people raising them; it is the responsibility of the people raising them to fulfill the needs of the children.

If we listen to those that claim to have the children's best interest at heart, we must also ask them to show they truly understand what it means to be an adopted child growing up in this world. Throughout my own childhood I was told many times that I needed to be grateful for being adopted and that my adoptive parents chose me and that it was for my own good, to accept it and just move on. This did nothing to help me with what was happening to me and what I was feeling, rather it made it worse.

If the people that wish to adopt children truly understood what effect adoption has on a child and they truly wanted to do what is right for a child then they would be against adoption. Sadly they are not as they only have their own selfish needs and feel that the child will accept what they want at any cost.

To begin to resolve the problem of the children being stuck in orphanages around the world is simple: adoption is not the answer. Part of the answer is changing the guardianship laws so that families who truly have the necessary resources and knowledge can raise these children in their home. Guardianship allows the child to choose to call them mum and dad. This may sound like a tiny difference but in a child's perspective this is something they can comprehend and it will help them to make sense of what has happened to them and the reasons that their own mother and father are not raising them. Guardianship will also weed out those that have un-realistic emotional expectation of the child they wish to be raising.

For the government to give in to populist politics by opening the door to inter-country adoption and allowing the unrealistic needs of organizations like "orphan angels" and the gay rights movements would be societal suicide. The simple need for an inquiry like this one on forced adoption shows that the necessary understanding to achieve this is not there.

There has as far as anyone knows been no comprehensive study into the long-term effects of adoption on the child, the birth parents, the adoptive parents and the society the child is going to be raised in. There is nothing in place for when adoption goes wrong and the government has no policy and procedures within its departments to deal with the issues surrounding adoption now, let alone increasing it.

If we start to bring in children from overseas for adoption, we open many other doors to serious societal issues. The predominate perpetrators of crime, drug and alcohol related violence, domestic violence, anti-social behavior are from foster-care, adoptive and state ward childhoods. Now if you open the doors to inter-country adoption to the level of what "orphan angels" and gay right lobbyist wish, what do you think will increase?

In other countries that have had this in place for some time, the societal problems relating to these areas only increased. Many of the children that have been adopted in countries like America have come from countries like Somalia and Nigeria and when the children have reached their teens they wish to associate with people from their country of origin. In America many of the refugees from those countries are of a radical fundamentalist religious persuasion. It has been stated that the FBI is concerned about a growing movement of home grown terrorism building in these refugee populations.

It's not rocket science to see how, when you are of a different culture to the people that are raising you, you will seek out with everything you have a group, culture or belief to belong to. I myself for a time was involved within several gangs including a white power organization (This was before I knew of my First Nation ancestry). I was angry and needed to belong, no one around me understood or even listen to what I was going through and I hated the society for rejecting me as a child, so I became part of organizations that were totally against everything. Being in this state of mind makes you very pliable and easily convinced if members of a group or organization say the things you want to hear. The reality for me was that they had no interest in my wellbeing; they just wanted to turn me into a human bulldozer as I am over 6 foot tall and not small. They manipulated my anger to fit their needs.

The simple truth is, we are not ready to increase adoption or to even allow it. We as a country do not know or understand enough to make it work. None of us can ignore the effects adoption has, so until there is enough understanding and resources are put in place to deal with adoption, it is cruel and unethical to move forward with new laws. To all those that have the power to change what we have been through I ask a few simple questions:

- Is it right to ignore those that have directly suffered at the hands of poorly thought out legislation?
- What is the acceptable number of children that you will allow to fall through the cracks?
- When is arrogance accepted over truth?
- Is it better to support a mother to raise her child or is it better to remove them?
- Are the poorer people in the world only here to support the needs of the wealthier ones?
- What does it mean to value a human being?

Thank you for your time
Erik Spinney (Standing Bear)