



Supporting People Separated by Adoption

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References Committee for inquiry and report:

The impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent
Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of
Social Services.

Origins Supporting People Separated by Adoption Incorporated

Origins supporting people separated by adoption is an incorporated association with DGR status and has been supporting people separated by illegal and forced adoption practices for the past 20 years.

Amongst its achievements, Origins has been responsible for three national mental health conferences into the mental health of people affected by separation, numerous presentations, workshops and the provision of research material from what we consider to be the largest library on forced adoption, family separation and removal practices. This library not only focuses on mental health, legal and historical material on past social welfare practices and policies, but also contains decades of the personal and intimate stories of people affected.

Origins through its support and advocacy has also petitioned for legislative change and acknowledgment of the damage caused by past practices, thus resulting in a number of parliamentary enquires leading to a Senate Inquiry announced in November 2010.

Not only having provided extensive research and evidence into these Inquiries, Origins has also extended its resources and access to its membership to engage with the Federal government in respect of consultations on the national apology, Institute of Family Studies Report and presently with the Forced Adoption History project delivered by the National Archives. Origins has gone beyond any expectation to provide a wealth of information and support to these events. This has been done without any support or funding by any state or federal government department.

Origins has provided unwavering support including welfare, counselling, social and healing events to those affected by these issues over two decades and to this date is still being supported and financed by its membership.

We will respond to the following terms of reference to this Inquiry as frankly and fairly as we see fit without maligning any particular organisation or individual.

According to the DSS this is what compromises Adult Specialist Support (from the DSS website)

THE ADULT SPECIALIST SUPPORT SUB-ACTIVITY PROVIDES SPECIALIST SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND ENHANCE WELLBEING FOR PEOPLE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY PAST INSTITUTIONAL AND CHILD-WELFARE PRACTICES AND POLICIES.

Services funded under *THE ADULT SPECIALIST SUPPORT SUB-ACTIVITY* should be underpinned by evidence-based practice, design and delivery principles that ensure:

- a tailored, flexible and holistic approach to support each client's needs.
- the importance of validating and respecting the different histories of people affected by former policies and practices.
- the client is central to all service design and delivery.
- people are empowered to make their own informed choices about their healing.
- service delivery staff have appropriate specialist skills / training and understand the unique and varied impacts of past institutional practices.
- people affected by past practices and policies are included in planning.
- where service delivery organisations have existing links to institutions involved with past child welfare practices and policies which may have adversely affected individuals, services will be transparent and, where necessary, publically acknowledge their involvement in past practices,

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confirm their commitment to deliver high-quality and independent services and outline their policies for handling real and perceived conflicts of interest.

The terms of reference

- a. the extent of consultation with service providers concerning the size, scope and nature of services tendered, determination of outcomes and other elements of service and contract design.*

Origins tendered for Forced Adoption Support funding that was specific to the funding allocated by the Gillard government at the time of the national apology into forced adoption practices. The funding was limited to a small number of organisations (20 applied) that had any vested interest in forced adoption, given that it was a specific area of funding already designated, there was no formal department consultation with this organisation in respect of the size, scope and nature of services tendered for.

The failure of taking peer support into viable consideration by the funding department is in breach of the recommendations set down by the Senate Inquiry into forced adoption, in that the government failed to take into consideration the importance of peer support organisations working in this field over the past four decades

- b. the effect of the tendering timeframe and lack of notice on service collaboration, consortia and the opportunity for innovative service design and delivery.*

The effect of the limited timeframe and lack of notice to collaborate and consult on the tender put a huge constraint on Origins, in that as an unfunded organisation it had to rely on the generosity of other professionals to be able to put together a funding application to apply for its own specific funding.

Given that the DSS intention/view was, that smaller organisations under “social equity” would be treated in a fair and equal way to larger generic organisations, we believe this not the case, and that larger well funded organisations have the capacity to “out-skill” smaller unfunded organisations in submission writing.

We are also aware that there have been “political” decisions on what organisations receive funding i.e an example being at the announcement of the NSW parliament apology for forced adoption the Benevolent Society (a past perpetrator organisation) was allocated \$900, 000 funding for forced adoption services without any open tendering for that funding, it was later relayed to Origins Coordinator Lily Arthur that the NSW Government would never fund an organisation such as Origins as we were seen to be “unpopular” with government

At the date of writing of this submission we have still not received information on which organisation is going to “service” forced adoption survivors.

It is relevant to note that on the announcement of the Senate inquiry into Forgotten Australians that the Care Leavers Network received \$100,000 to counsel their members

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c. the evidence base and analysis underlying program design.

Not Informative.

d. the clarity of information provided to prospective tenderers concerning service scope and outcomes.

Whilst the information in the funding guidelines seemed to take into account the importance of peer support and in particular, smaller organisations when it came to allocating funding, it appears that organisations that have been supporting clients for decades have been overlooked regardless of the many decades of unrelenting dedication to those affected by past adoption.

e. the opportunities created for innovative service design and delivery, including greater service integration or improved service wrap-around, and the extent to which this was reflected in the outcomes of the tender process;

To date as we are still ignorant as to which organisation was successful, we cannot comment on any opportunities, innovations of service delivery or the extent of any outcomes of the tender process

f. the extent to which tenders were restricted to not-for-profit services, the clarity of these terms, and whether they changed during the notification and tender process;

Unknown.

g. analysis of the types, size and structures of organisations which were successful and unsuccessful under this process;

Unknown.

h. the implementation and extent of compliance with Commonwealth Grant Guidelines;

Unknown.

i. the potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability;

Unknown.

j. the framework and measures in place (if any) to assess the impacts of these reforms on service user outcomes and service sustainability and effectiveness;

Unknown.

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k. the information provided to tenderers about how decisions are made, feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful tender applicants, and the participation of independent experts in tender review processes to ensure fairness and transparency;

Unknown.

l. the impact on advocacy services across the sector;

Disastrous, the forced adoption community and peer support networks are in a state of uncertainty and insecurity. Since the announcement of the Senate Inquiry, forced adoption victims have been left to languish in a state of turmoil with no support services or networks through which they could receive counselling to help them through the traumatic retelling of their stories. A national apology put no support networks in place for them and left them with a further two years plus of not knowing where they were able to receive any kind of specialised counselling, peer support networks etc.

We have been denied the opportunity to find our own autonomy, self empowerment and ways and means of healing in a safe and secure setting that is understood by those who have suffered past abuse.

And speaking specifically for Origins we have been unable to provide any form of material, resources other than our quarterly newsletter to inform our membership of the response of the Federal government and its funding bodies. This has had a devastating effect on our membership and in a recent survey focused on the outcomes of the apology, 95% of our membership responded negatively to the apology and the subsequent lack of acknowledgement and indifference by the government to the forced adoption issue.

m. factors relating to the efficient and effective collection and sharing of data on outcomes within and across program streams to allow actuarial analysis of program, cohort and population outcomes to be measured and evaluated;

Not known.

n. the extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants; and

Not known.

o. any other related matters.

The Statement of Requirement by DSS would not have posed a problem for Origins given that it had been providing these services for 20 years.

The Forced Adoption Support Services will provide specialist support to people affected by forced adoptions through:

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- delivering telephone information, referral and support service via a national 1800 number for calls originating in their jurisdiction
- delivering these services face-to-face where appropriate/possible
- developing Local Networks of service providers – mainstream, post-adoption specific professionals and peer support
- administering Small Grants totalling between 5% - 10% of the funding through subcontracting arrangements to peer support and advocacy groups

According to the DSS Families and Communities Programme Families and Children Guidelines Overview “DSS recognises and supports the work of civil society organisations.

The DSS approach to working with civil society is based on reducing red tape, providing greater flexibility and respecting the independence of the sector” and yet it did not recognise the work done by Origins to bring about a Senate Inquiry into forced adoption.

20 years of activism by victims of illegal and harmful practices to bring this matter to the forefront and recognition by society has taken a huge toll on those involved and in particular, Australian mothers who as young women lost their newborns to an abusive and illegal system overseen by state and federal governments.

The cost of this activism has been horrendous, in that, the majority of women who started this movement that has set a precedent across the world are now suffering either chronic illness or are now deceased.

The hope that those affected to be treated respectfully and in a dignified manner has been diminished by the very nature of the “felt” discrimination that still exists towards women who had children outside of marriage.

The mere fact that it has been nearly 5 years since the announcement of the Senate Inquiry and that they are no more acknowledged or allowed self determination now than they were then

We are currently providing support for Aboriginal Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians who are reluctant to approach other organisations.

We wish to also express disappointment that services for long standing issues of abuse, trauma and complicated conditions suffered by those affected by past abuse is being “tendered” out to generic organisations who do not have the capacity to understand or address specific experiences suffered by clients who have chronic psychiatric conditions.

We believe that these organisations do not properly engage with clients.

Clients refer to us that organisations that are contracted to service them “just do not get it”. It is also important to note that these generic organisations or organisations that are funded by State governments in effect basically “silence” their clients even more so, and take away the confidence that the organisation “assisting” them will advocate on their behalf.

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It is a bitter pill that the current government has rushed to create adoption agencies to facilitate the expedient process of inter-country adoption whilst ignoring the plight of those in this country who are still languishing in the misery and despair of the effects of past practices.

Whilst forced adoption across the world is now being acknowledged with Inquiries emanating in Ireland and exposed in countries such as England, Canada, Spain, Germany etc, a movement created by the activism on this issue was generated by Origins in Australia.

We would also bring to the attention of this Senate Inquiry that there are still unresolved legal matters associated with illegal adoption practices, whereby a national apology cannot circumvent the Common Law in respect of crimes committed against Australian women.

The response of this government to this important human rights issue has been dismal to say the least and it is obvious to state that a Royal Commission is needed to investigate the failure of this government to address the issue of the Commonwealth of Australia allowing the states to breach Common Law and UN conventions of human rights to which it became a signatory

Regardless of whether this organisation is funded or not there is a desperate need for organisations such as Origins to exist as we are now being approached by people looking for support and young women who are losing their children today to forced adoption.

The need for an advocate organisation is essential to protect the interests of young women Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and their children today who are at risk for future decades of serious mental health issues.

Origins not only provides advocacy for those at risk but also offers education and work placements for those people who are entering the social work or community welfare professions.

Finally

We would also like the Senate to comment on why victims of crimes committed by the state are not only not likely to ever receive justice, but to be disallowed to pursue their own healing with the unconditional support of the governments responsible for the damage they have caused, and continue to inflict on their citizens.

If this is an example of how Australia reconciles the abuses of the past, it is not a good outcome or inspiration to countries that are undertaking to address similar issues of past abuse. They look to us as world leaders to help with a solution to heal their citizens.

We would also once again state that a Royal Commission is needed to address the issues not resolved from the Senate Inquiry and the subsequent response by the Commonwealth and its States.