

4th May 2018

RE: The second term of reference of the Inquiry into local adoption. ...appropriate guiding principles for a national framework or code for local adoptions within Australia.

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this submission for the Inquiry into local adoption.

I have been directly affected by forced adoption since 1976 when my son was taken from me at birth. My family lost everything that a grandchild brings. I lost my son and he lost his mother and everything that was his birthright. Our family has been irretrievably unravelling ever since; the silence surrounding the entire event and the lack of understanding has created estrangements. I could not have imagined my family becoming like this.

I have ideas that I think should be considered as part of the foundation of an entirely new framework concerning the adoption of children in foster care. These ideas are based around the best interests of the natural family.

NAMES AND IDENTITY.

Should adoption become the case, I would strongly suggest that it become a condition of adoption that the child's original name and birth certificate remain intact and be upheld and used as his or her name.

A way around the adoptive parents having their own surname become the child's 'new' name, and the issuing of any altered, and thereby false, birth certificates, would be by the use of the adoptee of a double barrelled or hyphenated surname, employing the use of both surnames. This would allow the baby or child, already traumatised through the loss of its mother, to at the very least have possession of his or her own identity, and the identity that is connected intrinsically to the name they were given at birth, that should be respected.

The maintaining of the child's true name would provide an anchor, a point of reference for him or her. A happy by-product of this change is that with the knowledge that their child knows their family name would have the benefit of slightly smoothing the sharp sting of futile longing; giving a small light of hope to the blood parents for a future reunion.

There is abundant empirical knowledge that proves that adult adoptees experience major psychological and mental health issues that are firmly rooted in their loss of identity. Prospective adoptive and foster parents will need to understand the fundamental importance of identity. It is unnecessary to impose a new name upon a child who already has a name, and

an identity that attaches to that name. Young children and babies have absolutely no agency in regards to what happens to them or how their lives are determined, and with this in mind, siblings should not be separated; that is a double loss. However, it does occur, so the child's own name becomes of the utmost importance. As he becomes at home with strangers it remains an invisible thread to his roots.

An adopted person's life can become so vastly different from the original family they have lost all contact with. Reunion is fraught with not just the trauma of separation but by a severing of the only tie left to bind you to yourself, your name. Having people respect and use an adoptees birth name can benefit the separated mother and child by creating a sense of grounding, a diminution of shame, to ease the way towards reunion.

It does go deeper, there is of course more to a name than just a name.

ADVOCATES AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS.

There have been countless studies undertaken into the trauma of mother and child separation, and the results show that it affects both irreparably. I realise I'm stating the obvious, but after the removal of a child, its mother suffers incredibly deeply. The natural parents find themselves set adrift, shamed and subject to inflexible rules and the rigidity of government-employed social workers.

I suggest that the family of loss be allocated an advocate working and supporting them and their children. The child also interacts with the same advocate assigned to their family. The advocate would preferably be from a non government organization. Down to earth people with legal training would be required for this area of social work. The representation of the family in court proceedings would be done by the advocate and not a government employee whose interests may not be entirely altruistic. The advocate would not be intimidated or waver under untenably stressful and foreign court documents or papers. This is an enormous stumbling block for parents to tackle alone and unsupported. Thereby alleviating the chance that supervised visits and court proceedings are not spoiled by overzealous case managers. Providing a family at risk of separation, or a family fighting the system for their children back, would have a much improved chance of changing their situations for the better if they could feel genuinely supported. That feeling of support is a rare thing in the adoption industry for natural parents.

Government funds that currently go towards financing foster care would be better utilised if directed towards training and supplying objective and compassionate advocates towards family support. Physical help could be provided, for example, in the form of half of the rent being paid, nappies, food, free counselling, in the form of clothing and school uniforms. The advocates give regular contact, availability, assistance and encouragement.

From the opposite perspective, foster carers should understand that their care is temporary and is not a waiting period with adoption being the ultimate outcome. So the names/terms 'Mum and Dad' should be legally disallowed. Aunty or Uncle are appropriate and respectful

familial terms that carry a strong connective meaning. They are just not as loaded as the former. Foster carers should undertake counselling prior to fostering, to ensure they will be psychologically prepared for the return of the child to its original family.

CONCLUSION

Five years ago, the Federal Government issued a National Apology to all Australians affected by forced adoption. Part of that apology was the reassurance that this would never happen again. Yet here it is, repackaged and happening again. If there were nothing wrong with the current policies then logically there would not be another inquiry.

I ask you from my heart, change the current systems in place to policies that are focussed on maintaining the family unit. As a humanitarian nation, how can we blithely allow yet another generation of discarded mothers to reflect the same look as a caged chimp in her eyes?

Yours Sincerely