



Submission No. 253

AUTHORISED: 3-11-05

Indrak

5 October 2005

Secretary
Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

It has come to Jigsaw's attention that erroneous claims have been made about our organisation by Mrs Doral Law and Mrs Rita Carroll of the Australian Council for Adoption (ACFA). Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll are also the driving forces behind the Adoption Privacy Protection Group (APPG).

1. The claim by ACFA that Jigsaw is anti-adoption is false, and is a claim rooted in their own agenda.

ACFA and APPG are known for their strong opposition to the opening of adoption records so that birth parents and adoptees can have information, if they want it, about their biological relatives. Jigsaw exists because it supports the rights of individual to access this information, if they so choose, and, if they also choose, to contact a birth relative. We will advise them how to do so in ways that will respect the feelings and rights of all concerned.

Misrepresenting organisations with such aims as being 'anti-adoption' mirrors the lobbying strategy of the late Mr William Pierce of the US organisation the National Council for Adoption. Evidence of this direct influence is in ACFA's claim in a portion of their written submission (written by the late Mr Pierce) that the US groups Bastard Nation and the American Adoption Congress are also anti-adoption. Both organisations consist primarily of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents and adoption professionals who advocate for the opening up of closed records. Bastard Nation focuses exclusively on the rights of adoptees to access their original birth certificates. The American Adoption Congress (AAC) also lobbies for the opening of records, but it also supports a wider range of reforms, both in legislation and adoption practice. Far from being anti-adoption, the organisation is widely seen as actively supporting best practice in adoption, including intercountry adoption.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that 'anti-adoption' is a label used by ACFA, and its US counterpart NCFA, to denigrate organisations who promote access to birth records.

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STANDING COMMITTEE

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on Family and Human Services

2. The claim that Jigsaw is 'heavily funded' is false.

I admit to being somewhat confused at this point in their submission. Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll live in Queensland, but are they referring to Jigsaw here or in WA. Apparently, for example, there is no Origins group in WA, and ARMS is an organisation in SA. Assuming that their claim is about Jigsaw in Queensland, it is clear from their own evidence that we are not heavily funded. It should be noted that their information is not at all current or accurate. We do not pay any amount to the government for our rooms as they claim, for example, as they are not the government's rooms.

3. The implication that Jigsaw wants adoption removed from the statutes and intercountry adoption eliminated completely is false.

Jigsaw makes no such claim. Jigsaw provides support for all adult members of the community who have been touched by adoption—this includes, adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parent, siblings grandparents and spouses.

Jigsaw Qld. has been an invited participant in community reference groups advising the Queensland Government on prospective changes to adoption legislation. So, too, have ACFA and APPG. Our major contribution has been to provide advice to the government in these forums based on our experience of providing post-adoption services to those affected by adoption. We have never argued that there should be no laws relating to adoption, or that adoption should not occur, and have supported the notion that to prevent abuses intercountry adoption ought to be carried out in a manner consistent with the principles of the Hague convention, even where sending countries are not signatories to that convention.

4. The claim that Jigsaw charges fees is false.

Jigsaw is supported by memberships and support from individuals, the community and government. Jigsaw does not receive sufficient funding to support a full-time service; however, all calls and emails are followed up by our trained volunteers.

5. The claim that Jigsaw goes to the register of births, deaths and marriages if people give us an order is false.

This is a ridiculous claim. Jigsaw has never done this. There is no need to, since Adoption Services gives individuals the relevant authority to undertake such searches themselves, and the Registry office usually does not allow third parties to make such requests anyway.

The fact is Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll do not appear to know what we do, or care enough to ask, because they are more interested in promoting their own causes by running others down.

Jigsaw provides direct support to those who contact us if adoption is currently an issue in their lives. This support is given by trained volunteers (who, incidentally, pay for their own training). Where appropriate, advice is given on what we call the outer journey (the paper trail of accessing information) and the inner journey (the

psychological issues) in adoption. Individuals can also receive support by attending one of our monthly support group meetings. Separate support groups are convened for birth mothers, adoptees and a general group for all those affected by adoption. Our trained volunteers and group facilitators receive professional supervision each month.

6. The claim that membership is mandatory is false.

No fees are charged for any of these services, and one does not need to be a member to attend or get advice. As we do not conduct searches for people, no-one has to sign away their rights as claimed. Individuals who join Jigsaw do get further support through a regular newsletter, a handbook on adoption issues and further advice on how to approach issues of contact with birth relatives in an ethical manner.

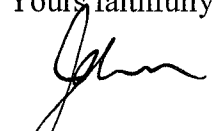
7. The claim in the ACFA submission, written by the late William Pierce, 'Death of Adoption in Australia?' that Jigsaw is partly to blame for the decline in adoption since 1971 is false.

Not only is this claim false, it is risible. The organisation did not even exist for a large part of that time. Rates of adoption were already declining in the western world over those years, in a variety of contexts and for a variety of reasons. ACFA, APPG and NCFA often seem to imply that granting birth parents and adoptees access to their records has somehow been a contributing cause of this decline. The facts do not support this, as the decline began in 1971 and records were only opened in 1990 in most cases. In most states in the US records are still not open, but the same decline has occurred with respect to domestic adoptions.

I hope I have been able not only to refute the claims made about Jigsaw by Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll, but also account for the possible origins of their misconceptions. I have found them to be earnest advocates of adoption whose single-minded commitment to a cause, however, may lead them on occasion to provide distorted accounts of the activities and motives of others.

Finally, it seems that Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll were granted permission to table 'philosophical statements' allegedly from our organisation, although it is not clear whether these are not simply the erroneous statements of the late Mr Pierce. However, it appears that the Chair of the Inquiry Committee found these philosophical statements to be 'quite offensive' and formed a connection between them and Jigsaw. Because this is on public record, this is of serious concern. As a matter of natural justice, I would like to know what these claims were (if they are not simply the verbal claims made by Mrs Law and Mrs Carroll which I have already refuted above).

Yours faithfully



Trevor L Jordan
President