

# VANISH VOICE

Autumn 2024



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# CEO's Message

**Dear members, friends and colleagues,**



Thank you to everyone who has warmly welcomed me since I began as CEO in March 2024. I have been very grateful to have been able to spend time in the past few weeks with VANISH's outgoing CEO Charlotte Smith and to benefit from her deep knowledge and expertise.

Since joining VANISH, I can see that while there are many things that are unique to people impacted by adoption and family separation, we have a shared desire for connection and belonging. For many people, connecting with peers through VANISH has meant they have felt understood and less alone.

Our team are highly skilled and approach their work supporting the VANISH community with care and compassion. VANISH has an important role to play in ensuring that the needs of people impacted by adoption are recognised, understood and responded to.

VANISH continues to deliver high-quality search and support services that make a real difference to people who have been affected by adoption, donor conception or family separation. However, demand for our services continues to far outweigh the resources we have available and a priority for me will be making sure that VANISH has the resources it needs. This will mean building on our existing partnerships and developing new relationships with individuals and organisations who can help us to deliver on our mission.

I understand some of you may be curious about my personal journey and what has brought me to VANISH.

I have spent the last few decades in the mental health sector where I have been working to create more compassionate and inclusive cultures of care where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. This approach recognises the importance of past experiences and injustices, identity and relationships in shaping people's lives and valuing the role of lived experience leadership and human rights in changing systems. I hope these perspectives can contribute to VANISH's important work

I'm looking forward to connecting with you soon.

Warm regards,

**Dr Michelle Blanchard**  
CEO

## The VANISH Team

Dr Michelle Blanchard  
*Chief Executive Officer*

Gail Holstock  
*Support Services Coordinator*

Patricia Navaretti  
Tracey Hudson  
SallyRose Carbines  
Adelaide Tapper  
*Search & Support Workers*

Lorna Sleightholm  
*Administrator*

A banner for recruiting VANISH supporters. It features a purple background with a teal triangle on the left. On the left, there is a blurred image of a person's head and shoulders. A teal circular button with a heart icon and the text "Sign up now to make a regular gift" is overlaid on the image. To the right, the text "Become a VANISH supporter" is written in large, bold, teal letters. Below this, in white text, it says "Making a one-off or regular gift to VANISH will help us continue to deliver vital services to people affected by adoption, donor conception and family separation". Further down, in white text, it says "Register online at GiveNow or call us on 1300 VANISH". At the bottom, the website "www.givenow.com/VANISHInc" is displayed in white.

**Become a VANISH supporter**

Making a one-off or regular gift to VANISH will help us continue to deliver vital services to people affected by adoption, donor conception and family separation

Register online at GiveNow or call us on 1300 VANISH

[www.givenow.com/VANISHInc](http://www.givenow.com/VANISHInc)

# Committee of Management Update



Last month we said farewell to **Charlotte Smith** as CEO of VANISH.

Charlotte was first appointed as a volunteer support group facilitator in 2011 and in 2013, was employed to establish regional support groups across Victoria in partnership with ARMS.

In 2016 Charlotte went on to lead VANISH initially as manager then as

CEO and has led the organisation with a steady focus and deep commitment to its purpose, vision, mission and values.

During her tenure, Charlotte can be credited with:

- overseeing the establishment of the world's first funded search service for people affected by donor conception, in conjunction with VARTA
- leading VANISH to meet Human Services Standards certification, an incredible feat for such a small organisation
- coordinating the preparation of a comprehensive submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions and attending Hearings
- developing and maintaining strong relationships with peer support organisations and state-based services across Australia
- engaging the media, resulting in multiple radio interviews, newspaper articles and the documentary "The Cleaning Company" about Sandra Pankhurst.

I would like to thank Charlotte for her dedication and deep commitment to VANISH over these past 10 years.

Charlotte will be remembered most for honouring the grief of those of us with a lived experience of adoption and will be missed by the adoption community.

As Charlotte leaves, we would like to introduce **Dr. Michelle Blanchard** as the new CEO of VANISH.

Michelle is an experienced executive leader and advocate. With over 20 years' experience in the not for

profit and mental health sectors, Michelle has contributed to transformative initiatives that reduce stigma and discrimination, provide more holistic and compassionate care and improve wellbeing. She has stood up and led key strategic initiatives, secured substantial funding for critical research and service delivery efforts and advocated for policy change and reform.

From 2021 to 2023, she was an Executive Director at the National Mental Health Commission and led the development of a National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy. Before joining the Commission, Michelle was Deputy CEO at SANE Australia and the Founding Director of SANE's Anne Deveson Research Centre.

Michelle is also an Honorary Senior Fellow at the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

Prior to joining SANE in 2017, Michelle held leadership roles at the Butterfly Foundation for Eating Disorders and the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre.

Michelle holds a PhD in Youth Mental Health, a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in Psychology and Political Science, a Graduate Diploma in Adolescent Health and Welfare and a Diploma in Leadership and Management.

The committee of management would like to welcome Michelle who comes to us with enthusiasm and commitment to work with, and on behalf of our community.

**Todd Dargan** Chair and **Hannah Spanswick** Vice Chair, VANISH



# A Note from Charlotte Smith

It has been such an honour and a privilege to work for and lead VANISH. It is such a unique organisation which delivers much needed services, so while I may be finishing up, I will still be cheering on from the sidelines! Supporting people affected by separation from their children or family has been both challenging and rewarding. Challenging because it is devastating to hear the impacts on people's lives and how isolated and unsupported they have felt, and rewarding because empowering individuals with information and validation, and providing search and support services, changes their lives for the better. Undertaking advocacy has also been challenging given the impacts of past practices are still so poorly understood or accommodated. I have been inspired to see more and more people find their voice and I am proud of the progress we have made, even the small wins. I am also conscious there is a lot more to be done and hope the community will keep at it and not give up.

During my time at VANISH I have been fortunate enough to meet and/or talk to many members and service users and I want to thank each of you who shared your personal experiences with me. I always felt very honoured to be trusted in that way. There is so much diversity of experience in terms of what has happened to each of us and how we have responded, yet there are many commonalities that bind us together as a community.

I have been very fortunate to work alongside many knowledgeable, talented and committed individuals, including colleagues, partners and stakeholders. I have learnt so much from them and am very thankful for their generosity. I am particularly grateful to those who volunteer on the Committee of Management and who are so passionate about the vision and mission of VANISH as well as good governance and leadership.

My sincerest gratitude goes to the VANISH team - small but mighty! I never ceased to be impressed by these smart, capable, dedicated and compassionate staff and volunteers. Adelaide, Gail, Lorna, Mandy, Patricia, SallyRose and Tracey, thank you so much for being such wonderful colleagues, I will miss you! I



extend those thanks Pauline Ley, Patron of VANISH to support group facilitators Hana, Michele, Rosie and Vicky and all the other people who have facilitated VANISH groups over the past decade.

I am really delighted to be leaving the organisation in the very capable hands of Dr Michelle Blanchard. She is incredibly well qualified and experienced, and I know she will do a terrific job as CEO of VANISH.

I want to finish by thanking everyone who sent me a farewell card or message. I have been really moved by these. Endings can be difficult for adoptees, and I am not immune to those common feelings of grief, rejection, fear and guilt. But these have been tempered by your kind and generous words which I have added to my collection of treasured memories to carry with me into the future.

Thank you and wishing you all the very best.



VANISH Team, Gail and SallyRose, with Todd Dargan - Committee of Management Chair, and Charlotte

# 11th Anniversary of the National Apology

On Saturday 23rd March ARMS and VANISH held an afternoon tea event in Melbourne, to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at the "Taken Not Given" memorial statue.

There were about 30 in attendance to hear guest speaker, outgoing VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith, share about the impact of the Apology over the years and the advocacy work of VANISH.

A few days prior to the Melbourne event Charlotte was also guest speaker for the 11th anniversary event in Queensland: which was commemorated with a morning tea organised by Jigsaw Queensland's Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS) in association with ALAS Australia, Association for Adoptees, Origins Queensland and You Gave Me A Voice.

Charlotte spoke about the recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions and the new redress scheme for Mothers impacted by Forced Adoption.

It was a wonderful gathering with 60 people attending. MC Chris Mundy, former Jigsaw worker and adoptee, opened proceedings with a candle lighting ceremony and introduced former Senator Claire Moore who spoke about remembering, thanking and celebrating the late Margaret Hamilton, a Queensland mother who was a strong and much-loved advocate in the community. Her daughter Claire responded by thanking everyone and saying that her mother's dying wish was to have her son listed on her Death Certificate and this has not been possible. She asked that someone take up the baton of integrated death certificates as an important complement to integrated birth certificates.



Former Senator Claire Moore, Charlotte and representatives from Jigsaw Queensland, ALAS Australia, Association for Adoptees, Origins Queensland and You Gave Me A Voice.



In her presentation, Charlotte noted that many individuals, groups and organisations had been advocating for recognition, justice and support for decades and

that through speaking their truth, providing evidence and never giving up, they had succeeded in bringing about inquiries and changes to some laws, policies and practices, however many promises made had been broken. She referred to the Senate Inquiry and in particular recommendations 11 and 12 which were about the states establishing reparation schemes and institutions responsible ensuring redress is available.

She then described the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria and the outcomes so far including the Exceptional Circumstances Fund and the Historical Forced Adoptions Redress Scheme for mothers. She noted some important aspects about the scheme including that mothers who receive redress are not prevented from taking civil action; and that eligibility includes mothers who were resident in Victoria and sent, or went, interstate to have their babies.

Following this, Kerri Saint, adoptee, advocate and founder of Association for Adoptees introduced her song 'Chasing Rainbows' which is about her journey as an adopted person – from the lies she was told and what was stolen from her to finding her worth and value. Her song was beautifully sung by Rachel Clancy.

The event was recorded and can be viewed at this link <https://bit.ly/Qld11thAnniversaryLogin>

The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP also issued a statement marking the 11th Anniversary of the National Apology. This can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/MediaReleaseAmandaRishworthAnniversary>



# Victorian Government Update

## Victorian Inquiry implementation update

The Victorian Government is continuing to progress the implementation of the *Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria*, with 34 of 56 recommendations now implemented or closed. The Victorian Government will continue to publish implementation updates as they become available at [www.vic.gov.au/forced-adoption](http://www.vic.gov.au/forced-adoption)

VANISH members may also be interested in the many recent improvements to the government's Adoption website, now located at [www.vic.gov.au/adoption](http://www.vic.gov.au/adoption).

Website improvements in relation to past adoptions include clearer guidance on:

- searching for family separated by adoption [www.vic.gov.au/searching-family](http://www.vic.gov.au/searching-family), and
- applying for discharge of adoption [www.vic.gov.au/discharge-adoption](http://www.vic.gov.au/discharge-adoption)

The Department has also refined information relating to current adoptions, including by publishing statistical data. Data for 2023-24 will be available by the end of July at [www.vic.gov.au/annual-adoption-data](http://www.vic.gov.au/annual-adoption-data)

The Department will continue to make refinements to the website to ensure information and guidance on past adoptions is as easy to find and helpful as possible.

If you have any queries, please feel free to contact the Forced Adoptions Inquiry Implementation (FAII) team via email [forcedadoptioninquiry@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:forcedadoptioninquiry@justice.vic.gov.au).

## Historical Forced Adoption Redress Scheme for Mothers

The Victorian Government's Historical Forced Adoption Redress Scheme for Mothers opened for applications in February 2024.

Mothers who gave birth in Victoria, or were a Victorian resident and gave birth interstate, and were forcibly separated from their newborn baby prior to 1990 are eligible to apply. The scheme will not accept applications on behalf of mothers who have already passed away.

The scheme provides financial redress and support to the many mothers who continue to live with the serious, complex and ongoing effects of their experience of forced separation.

**You can also apply to this scheme if you received funding through the Forced Adoption Exceptional Circumstances Fund (ECF).**

Redress outcomes provided by the scheme include a one-off financial payment of \$30,000. The scheme also offers access to counselling and psychological support, and apology processes. The Redress Design & Delivery team at the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) will guide applicants through the application process, answer questions, and assist you with any supporting information that may be required.

To contact the team you can phone 1300 217 425 between 9am to 4:30pm AEST Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) or email: [forcedadoptions.redress@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:forcedadoptions.redress@justice.vic.gov.au) For further information, frequently asked questions and to download the application form <https://www.vic.gov.au/redress-forced-adoptions>.



Historical  
Forced  
Adoptions  
Redress  
Scheme

*Would you like to contribute to an upcoming edition of VOICE?*

*Please submit your original pieces to [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au)*

- POEMS
- LETTERS
- NEWS ITEMS
- BOOK & FILM REVIEWS
- ART
- PHOTOGRAPHS

*We will then reply letting you know if and when it will be published*

## The impact of historical forced adoption practices on adopted people

The Victorian Government is continuing to progress the implementation of the *Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria*, with 34 of 56 recommendations now implemented or closed. The Department recently updated the implementation website to read:

*"After careful consideration, the Government will not establish a redress scheme for people who were adopted through historical forced adoption practices. Also, a further inquiry focusing on adoptees will not be undertaken."*

We know that this news has been deeply disappointing to many VANISH members who had hoped that a

further inquiry would shine a light on the needs of adopted people and a redress program for adopted people would be established alongside the scheme for mothers. We have written to Attorney General Jaclyn Syme to ask for this decision to be reconsidered and further action taken to recognise the impact of these historical practices on adopted people.

Below we have included a powerful contribution from VANISH member Fiona who in her own letter to Attorney General the Hon. Jaclyn Symes articulates the impact that adoption has had on her life and how an Inquiry would help to recognise this.

*To whom it may concern*

*My name is Fiona (surname removed). I am a 58 year old who lives in (location removed) Victoria and I was adopted in 1965.*

*I write to request that the government undertake an inquiry into the experiences and the effects of adoption on adopted people.*

*People usually say, "You should be grateful that you were adopted", but they weren't living in my house. My father was very abusive using belts and boots to carry out his anger over some perceived wrongdoing.*

*A punishment I often received was to be locked out of the house at night! I was just a kid. I used to scream and scream and hope the neighbours would come and help me. But they never came.*

*I would tell them I would go to the police and report them. Their response was always "Go ahead and we'll send you back and you'll become a Ward Of The State until you're 18."*

*I loved school because I wasn't at home, even though I was often teased by the other kids for being adopted. They'd mock me and say things like "No wonder your mother didn't want you."*

*At 16 years of age my father beat me for the final time. I was no longer wanted there and I for sure didn't want to be there. I had to become an instant adult and do things adults do. It was hard. I have been through a lot of painful things since then. I used to drink alcohol to try and cope with all the memories. I am now sober after a lot of personal hard work.*

*I am a single mother of a 30 year old daughter and I parented her in the complete opposite way to how I had been. She's now an amazing, well educated woman who has a responsible job and owns her own home. She is my pride and joy and my rock.*

*Because of my upbringing where there were no hugs, no I love yous and no I'm proud of you, I've found it difficult to form lasting friendships and haven't been in a relationship for 30 years. I suffer from Major Depressive Disorder and was diagnosed when I was 23, although I'm pretty sure I had it long before that.*

*My request is for you not to think that all adoptees lived a happy normal life. Many of us did not. Please follow 'Recommendation 15' from the inquiry, and undertake an inquiry into the experiences and effects of adoption on adopted people.*

*Thank you for your time.*

*Regards Fiona*

# Member Contribution

## A Plea to My Mother in Nine Parts

*"Last year I was fortunate enough to attend the two writing workshops run by Dr Sian Prior for VANISH members. Sian was a generous and thoughtful facilitator. She taught me skills and new ways of approaching writing which I have been able to use when writing about my adoption. I was trying to capture the loss of identity felt by many adoptees. I hope this small piece of my story may have resonance with some of those whom VANISH support. I hope too that it will help to dispel some of the myths of adoption."* - Merryn.

Tell me who I was

as you fled interstate, your shame and your fear stowed in your suitcase. Tell me who I was as you boarded the plane with me securely packaged in my amniotic bubble. Your daydreams and your desperation bobbing around me. Tell me who I was as you left your family and your name and your lover; the other woman's husband, whom you loved with all the intensity and passion of a young woman in love for the first time. My father.

Tell me who I was

as you hastened from the airport toward your pre-arranged accommodation in a city you had never visited. Alone, but not, because I was there thickening your waist and causing rolling waves of nausea. You rented a single room from a woman who was intrusive and unfriendly. She would rifle through your things and open your room to her cats when you were out. You recoiled at their smell.

Tell me who I was

as you found employment using a cover story and a new name. And a wedding ring. Your 'husband' was in the defence forces, commissioned elsewhere. He was overjoyed about the baby. You would work until the birth. When he would return.

Tell me who I was

as you sat in your room in the evenings, knitting my jacket. White wool, sliding across the clicking of the needles and through your fingers. Knit one. Purl one. Knit one. Purl one. Rhythmic and soothing. Knitting me into your heart. You telling me our story. Altering the ending. Your dreams reaching me across the membrane of my private ocean. Your voice as familiar to me as your heartbeat.

Tell me who I was

as you browsed through the shops. Did you linger in Georges' baby department, choosing bunny rugs and outfits, snuggle toys and bibs? Pretending? Did you sense I would be a girl? Had you chosen my name? Did passers-by recognise in you the healthy bloom of pregnancy? Did you feel me somersaulting and stretching as you carried yourself to the supermarket? *Quickening*. Like the months.

Tell me who I was

when you later shared a cat-less apartment with your new friend from work. Your friend who knew about me and about the fake husbands. The friend who eased the loneliness. Not so solitary now, yet you still whispered our story to me. When the time came, the friend would drive you to the hospital. In your anguish, your memories of her were lost and she disappeared from our story.

Tell me who I was

as you attended your doctor's appointments. The doctor poking and prodding and measuring, dispensing his opinions and his moral judgements in equal measure. Did he acknowledge your effort to keep us both healthy? Did he tell you the only cure for your disease was adoption? Were guilt and shame prescribed? Drugs that would cross the placenta. Tell him who we were.

Tell me who I was

as you felt the urge to nest. No nursery to prepare. No need to borrow a cot or bassinet from your sister, already a mother and a wife. No baby clothes to wash and fold and rest your cheek upon. No wisdom to be gained from the generations of mothers in your family. Did you stop to clutch your belly as Braxton Hicks contractions hit? Had your breasts begun to leak milk in rehearsal for their redundant role? Did you pack a bag ready for hospital, with nighties and underwear and toiletries and, perhaps, a book? A hand-knitted baby jacket on top.

Tell me who I was

as you doubled over through every agonising contraction. Alone in a sterile room devoid of kindness and hope. Abundant though in fear. Wave after wave, a relentless assault, for twenty-two hours. Our bodies working in tandem to expel me. Your mind clutching me. Believing we both may die. I would not leave you. Tell me who I was as the forceps reached in to clamp my head. Dragging me through the birth canal. Away from you. Forever.

Tell me who I was.

Before I was taken from You.

And erased.

# Member Contribution

## The Lost Detective

I can but reflect  
That after years  
Of detective work  
Searching for my son  
I find him  
Yet we do not connect

He does not want to know  
And I feel  
As lost  
As I did  
Before I set out  
Keen to seek and grow.

- Gary Coles, author of *The Invisible Men of Adoption*

## Weavings with Patches

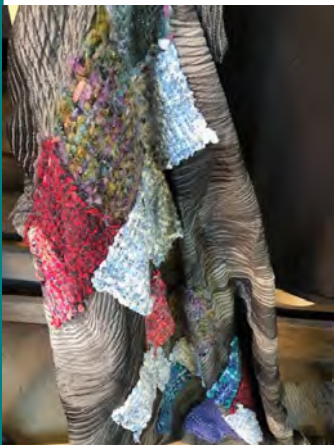
I walked into The Drying Shed Art Space in Castlemaine and was greeted by this wonderful quote:

*Not many escape trauma in their life-time.  
To cope we pick up the threads and patch ourselves.  
These patches are what make us beautiful and unique.*

The artist Sandra Hart was there setting up the exhibition of her delicate wool woven shawls. When I looked more closely, I noticed that there was a scattering of patches on the shawls, connecting me back to the quote. We spoke and I shared why the quote was so profound for me and how it reminded me of the Common Threads project that a group of adopted people worked on last year. Sandra shared her story and that she participated in the Arts Therapy group for mothers run by VANISH last year. A wonderful, serendipitous meeting.

The exhibition is at the  
The Drying Shed Art Space - hours **Thursday to Sunday  
11.00am – 3.00pm**  
The Mill, Parker St Castlemaine  
Sandra will be at the gallery doing a weaving  
demonstration 1-2 pm  
19<sup>th</sup> May, 1<sup>st</sup> June, and 16<sup>th</sup> June

SallyRose  
April 2024



# News

## The Aboriginal History Western Australia Unit: A new place for Aboriginal People seeking family history in Whadjuk Noongar Boodja

The State Library of Western Australia has now established a face to face service desk in the Library at the Perth Cultural Centre where Aboriginal people can go to learn more about their family history.

"AHWA's new service space is a welcoming area for Aboriginal people to come and have a yarn, and to learn more about their ancestors and previously untold stories from the past.

The service desk is part of a collaboration between AHWA, the State Library and State Records Office to establish a Cultural Hub for Aboriginal people seeking personal and family history materials that may be held by the three organisations.

If you're an Aboriginal person who would like to find out more about your family's history but don't know where to start, visit the AHWA service area on Level 3 of the State Library in Northbridge where dedicated staff will do their best assist you with your research." For more information visit: <https://bit.ly/DLGSCWAGovNews>



## THANK YOU VANISH VOLUNTEERS!

VANISH is supported by a wonderful community of volunteers including Committee of Management members, support group facilitators and others who assist with administration, research, policy submissions and so much more.

**20-26 May is national volunteer week**  
**The theme is 'Something for Everyone'**

Our sincere thanks to all who contribute their valuable time, skills, energy and enthusiasm to VANISH and the people we support.

# Legislative Reforms in Donor Conception

## Victorian Reforms to Health Regulations

The Victorian Government is proposing legislative reforms to improve the regulatory tools available under health portfolio legislation, and to change how assisted reproductive treatment (ART) is regulated in Victoria. The consultation paper outlines proposed reforms to the regulation of ART including:

- Transferring the regulatory functions of registering ART providers and monitoring and enforcing compliance to the Secretary, Department of Health.
- Transferring responsibility for maintaining and managing the Central Register and Voluntary Register (the registers) to a new Donor Conception Registrar within the Department of Health.
- Removing the requirements that counselling be offered or undertaken before disclosure of information from the registers or lodgement of a contact preference. This is proposed to be replaced with a requirement that the Donor Conception Registrar provide prescribed information to the person which will cover matters currently required to be covered during mandated counselling.
- Removing the functions relating to education, consultation and research promotion from the ART Act.
- Improving regulatory tools in line with reforms being proposed to other health regulatory schemes.

VANISH intends to make a brief submission highlighting the critical need to provide specialist and trauma-informed information, counselling and support to people receiving information from the registers or deciding to record their contact preferences. We know from our long history of working with people who receive information relating to adoption, donor conception or other family members they have been separated from, that the way in which this information can be life-changing and without the right supports in place, can have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

Submissions are due by 31 May 2024 and we encourage VANISH members to consider making their own submissions via the Victorian Governments website: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/legislation/reforms-to-health-regulation-in-victoria>

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## South Australian Legislative reform

South Australia's Parliament recently approved new laws regarding donor conception, granting all donor-conceived individuals in the state access to information about their genetic heritage and relatives. Under these progressive reforms, donor-conceived individuals aged 18 and over will gain retrospective access to information about the donor and genetic siblings. This groundbreaking step encompasses even those donations made under the veil of anonymity before September 2004, heralding a new era of openness in reproductive technology. This retrospective nature of the register makes SA the third jurisdiction in the world, and the second in Australia to offer retrospective information to donor conceived people, following Victoria's world first Right to Know legislation and Narelle's Law, passed in 2017. <https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/media-releases/news-items/new-donor-conception-laws-pass-parliament>

## Change in SA Birth Certificates

In SA Birth Certificates will also explicitly denote donor conception status, with the option to include additional donor-related details—a vital acknowledgment of diverse family structures and genetic origins. This

legislative reform is due to extensive lobbying from the donor conception community for over 20 years, and we congratulate all members of the community for their recent success.

## ACT Legislative reform

The ACT Government has today legislated increased protections for people who access and are conceived using assisted reproductive technology. The *Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2024* requires providers in the ACT to continue their adherence to strong clinical and ethical standards. It will ensure Canberrans have access to culturally appropriate and inclusive services that better support the health and wellbeing of donor-conceived Canberrans and their families.

Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, said the Act provides greater confidence in assisted reproductive technology (ART) services in the Territory and improves access to donor information for donor-conceived Canberrans.. Link to media release to read further: <https://bit.ly/ACTGovtLawsToSupportDC>

## Bangladesh launches investigation into children adopted overseas

Following a recent investigation and series of news stories by The Guardian, police in Bangladesh have launched an investigation into historical allegations that children were adopted abroad without their parents' consent, between 1976 and 1979.



Photographs of families and children in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taken between 1972 and 1977 by the British doctor Jack Preger, 93, who compiled a list of mothers who said their children had been taken away.

It is the first time police have investigated allegations that children were lured from mothers using a tactic known as the “boarding school scam”, where vulnerable families were offered temporary shelter for their children only to find they were adopted abroad without their consent.

Women living in camps for refugees of Bangladesh's war of independence were told by people who claimed they were from Terres Des Hommes Netherlands that a local care home would look after their children. Decades on, many are still searching for them.



Sayrun Nisa now 80, has not seen her son since he was 6.

Sayrun Nisa was told her son would get a good education at the children's home but she never saw him again.

When she went back to the home she was told he was no longer there.

“I waited for over an hour until an officer came to the gate and told me to go home.” When Sayrun refused, she says the guard pointed a gun in her face.

In 1977 Rezia Begum laid her three-month-old down to sleep and went to the bathroom but when she returned, her daughter was missing. “I was only gone for a moment” says Rezia, now 72. “Everyone started to search the area. We went from door to door until nightfall but we couldn't find her anywhere.” Rezia was finally reunited with her daughter 40 years later thanks to the help of a pioneering group of Bangladeshi adoptees. Other mothers are still waiting.



Kana Verheul was adopted from Bangladesh and grew up in the Netherlands.

Kana Verheul founded the Shapla Community to help reunite adoptees in the Netherlands with their families. Kana was the first witness to be interviewed by police. “The Dutch state has turned a blind eye to these allegations for far too long,” she told the Guardian. “I hope Bangladesh, my birth country, will cooperate with adoptees and grant us access to the support and information needed to recover our identities and reunite with our families.”

You can read more at: <https://shaplacommunity.org/>  
All photos: The Guardian

<https://bit.ly/BangladeshInvestigatesAdoptions25Jan2024Guardian>

<https://bit.ly/BangladeshiMothersChildrenAdoptedwithoutConsent25Jan2024Guardian>

[bit.ly/StrangerMySisterUncoversTragicPast26Jan2024Guardian](https://bit.ly/StrangerMySisterUncoversTragicPast26Jan2024Guardian)

# Adoption in the News

## On ABC TV and ABC iView



White Fever is a new edgy TV series made by and about Korean Adoptee Ra Chapman that covers many contemporary themes in the lives of adoptees. "There are so many great documentaries, so many great podcasts, so many great essays [about the adoptee experience], but I thought what was missing was something that was deeply funny," says Chapman, who has drawn on her own life experiences for the series.

<https://about.abc.net.au/media-room/cameras-roll-on-abc-sexy-new-comedy-white-fever/>

## Fake Orphans and Stolen Babies

**Foreign Correspondant** - (South Korea) Screened on 2nd May but catch it on ABC iView.

In the decades since the Korean War, 200,000 children have been adopted to families worldwide.

<https://bit.ly/44NZhrS>



## 'You'll have to get rid of her': Adopted Child discovers stark family truth

Bianca Welsh's world was turned upside down when she went digging for the truth about her family.

<https://bit.ly/CanberraTimesExpertsSayOnOSadoptions>

## Documentary from New Zealand 'Closed Adoption' by Mata Reports

Documentary *Closed Adoption* by Mata Reports follows Jenny Small's search for her whakapapa (Māori genealogy and ancestry). Unable to access the name of her father from her adoption records held by the Ministry of Justice, Jenny takes a DNA test and, with the help of researchers, finds her whānau. You can watch the documentary here

<https://youtu.be/-iRPjKvXBuY>

The barriers Jenny faces in her search represent what University of Auckland Law Professor Mark Henegan refers to as another form of state abuse, saying the government has a duty of care to assist and resource adoptees to find their identity and family. The adoption community now awaits reforms following a recent inquiry into Aotearoa's 68 year old Adoption Act, yet when these will occur is not clear.

[Adoption Law Reform | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)

## "Somebody's Daughter" Film by Zara Phillips

Advocate, educator, singer, songwriter and filmmaker Zara Phillips recently released her new film "Somebody's Daughter".



Zara was born and adopted in England in the 1960s and moved to the US as an adult. Her film is based on her book and one woman show, in which she finally finds her Italian father Vittorio, through a sister she connected with through DNA who is also adopted. Set to music by legend Richard Thompson (Fairport Convention), Zara's film showcases her remarkable talent for story-telling and her zany, and very funny sense of humour. It also conveys with great poignancy, her complicated feelings and devastating losses to which many adoptees will relate. Zara weaves together scenes from her childhood and teen years, singing with famous bands, getting sober, and the extraordinary highs and lows of search and reunion.

Driven by her passion for education about the complexities of adoption, Zara once again hits the mark and demonstrates that her creativity knows no bounds. *Somebody's Daughter* is currently being screened to select audiences and is about to be released online. For more information go to <https://www.zaraphillips.net/events>



## Ireland's Redress Scheme for Mothers and Their Children

The Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions Payment Scheme is open for applications. To be eligible for benefits you will need to have spent a certain amount of time in one (or more) of the [Institutions Covered by the Scheme](#) for at least one night, as a mother, for reasons relating to your pregnancy, or the birth or care of your child, or for at least 180 days, as a child.

The level of the financial payment will depend on the amount of time spent in one of the institutions. Further information on the payment rates for general and work-related payments is available [here](#).

If you have received a court settlement in respect of the circumstances experienced and relating to the same time period in the institution or institutions being applied for, you will not be eligible to apply for a general payment or work-related payment. However, you may still be eligible for health supports.

You are eligible for a work-related payment if you were in any of the institutions listed in table 1 on the [Institutions Covered by the Scheme](#) page for more than 90 days for reasons relating to pregnancy, or the

birth or care of your child.

You are eligible for health supports if you spent 180 days or more in any of the institutions listed on the [Institutions Covered by the Scheme](#) page. These health supports will be either an enhanced medical card; or for people living outside of Ireland only, a health support payment valued at €3,000, instead of the enhanced medical card.

If you are applying for health supports, you will need to confirm that you have not received health supports under the [Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme](#). If you have, then you will not be entitled to any health supports through this Payment Scheme.

It is possible for the personal representative of a deceased person to apply for a financial payment where the person died on or after the date of An Taoiseach's apology to survivors on 13th January 2021.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/2938d-the-mother-and-baby-institutions-payment-scheme/?referrer=https://www.gov.ie/paymentscheme/>

Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

**VICTORIA'S CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME**

**WHAT CAN YOU RETURN?**

Check for the 10c mark

| Eligible                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Ineligible                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aluminium cans</li> <li>Plastic bottles</li> <li>Glass bottles</li> <li>Paperboard cartons (under 3L)</li> <li>Steel bottles/cans</li> </ul> <p>Most beverage containers (between 150ml and 3L) made from aluminium, glass, plastic, steel and liquid paperboard are eligible.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wine and spirit bottles</li> <li>Milk containers</li> <li>Paperboard cartons (over 3L)</li> <li>Cordial bottles</li> </ul> <p>Don't throw these out! Ineligible containers may still be accepted in your kerbside recycling bin.</p> |

Still unsure? Ask us or use our website container eligibility scanner.  
visit [cdsvic.org.au](https://cdsvic.org.au)

CDS VIC VICTORIA State Government

## Recycle your beverage containers to support VANISH

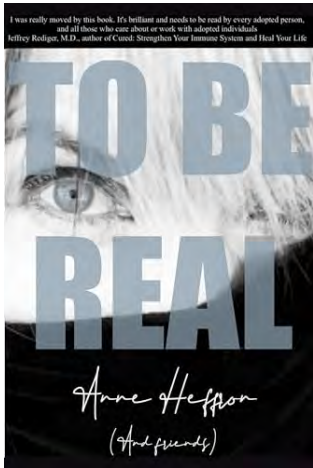
VANISH is now a proud donation partner of the Victorian Container Deposit Scheme (<https://cdsvic.org.au/>).

It's simple:

- Collect Eligible Containers:** typically marked with a refund symbol (e.g., '10c refund at collection depots when sold in Victoria').
- Return Containers:** To any designated collection point participating in the Victorian CDS. These collection points include over-the-counter depots, automated depots, and reverse vending machines located across Victoria. You can find your nearest one here: <https://cdsvic.org.au/locations>
- Donate to VANISH:** Let the collection point staff know that you'd like to donate your container refund to VANISH (the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self-Help). They'll facilitate the donation process. Our Donation Partner ID is: C2000017359.

# New Books

## To Be Real by Anne Heffron (And Friends)



Anne Heffron won't stop talking about adoption and the importance of adopted people feeling enabled and empowered to tell their stories. She is a big believer in the transformative nature of community for adoptees. She writes books about these subjects, blogs about them, and posts on Instagram about them because a silent adopted person is bad news. Just as a plant without roots is not long for the world, an

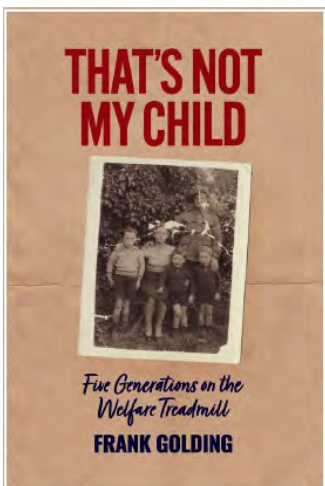
adopted person without the felt-permission and ability to know and tell their story is already one step out the door.

You can't take a mother away from a baby and expect the baby to live a normal life.

(A not-normal life can be a gorgeous thing when you stop thinking it's supposed to be something else.) Anne writes about that. Anne is author of *You Don't Look Adopted* (in the VANISH Library).  
Source: Amazon

## That's Not My Child Five Generations on the Welfare Treadmill by Frank Golding

There is more to Frances Sinnett's secret pain than the



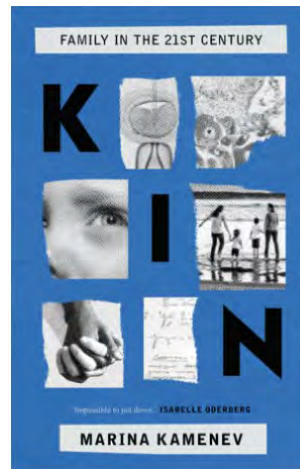
loss of her children — including the author — to an orphanage.

Battalions of sorrows begin when her grandfather at 11 years old is imprisoned on a hulk in 1865. Then comes Gallipoli and the Somme. Her father's war does not stop when the guns fall silent. The family is ripped apart by trauma, alcoholism, violence and betrayal at home. State intervention

makes matters worse.

Meticulous research by historian Golding finds more than 30 Sinnett children in institutions over five generations. Has the cycle been broken at last?  
Source: Australian Scholarly Publishing

## Kin By Marina Kamenev



The shape of family has changed in the 21st century. While the nuclear family still exists, many more types of kinship surround us.

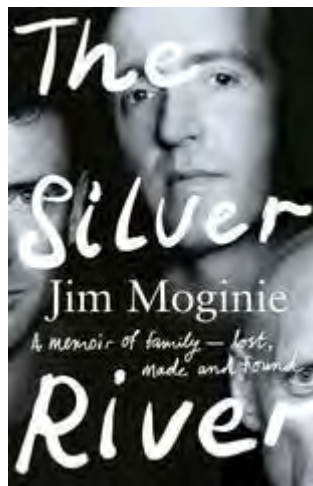
Kin is an investigation into what influences us to have children and the new ways that have made parenthood possible. It delves into the experiences of couples without children, single parents by choice and rainbow families, and

investigates the impacts of adoption, sperm donation, IVF and surrogacy, and the potential for a future of designer babies. Assisted reproductive technology has developed quickly, and the ways in which we think and speak about its implications — both legally and ethically — need to catch up.

Written by journalist Marina Kamenev, *Kin: Family in the 21st century* is an incisive and powerful look at how families are created today, and how they might be created in the future.

## The Silver River A memoir of family—lost, made and found By Jim Moginie

Jim Moginie was 11 when he learned he was adopted. His mum broke the news in a few perfunctory words as the family returned by sea from a holiday in Tasmania. He nodded silently, she walked away, and he continued fiddling with some little paper cups.



Jim Moginie was raised in Sydney's northern suburbs and attended high school in the city, where he befriended future Midnight Oil drummer Rob Hirst. Together with another friend, Andrew James, they

formed the band Farm, before recruiting singer Peter Garrett and changing their name to Midnight Oil.

Jim is best known as a songwriter, guitarist and keyboard player for the Oils, but his career has also spanned dozens of less well known creative adventures.

**We look forward to bringing you more from Jim and his recent book tour in VOICE soon.**

# Upcoming VANISH Support Groups

All groups are for adults 18+

## ALBURY - WODONGA

Albury Library Museum, 540 Kiewa Street

**ADOPTED PERSONS 10.30am—12.30pm**

**August 10**

**MIXED GROUP 10.30am - 12.30pm**

(Adopted Persons, Natural and Adoptive Parents)

**June 8, September 14**

## BALLARAT

Eastwood Leisure Complex, 20 Eastwood Street

**ADOPTED PERSONS 2pm—4pm**

**June 15, July 20, August 17**

\*Please register to reserve your place

## MELBOURNE

VANISH Office, Suite 2, Level 1, 50-52 Howard Street,  
North Melbourne

**ADOPTED PERSONS 7.30—9.30pm**

**May 28, June 25, July 23 Aug 27**

\*Please register to reserve your place

## ZOOM

**ADOPTED PERSONS 6.30—8.30pm**

**June 12, August 14**

\*Please register to reserve your place

To register or for more information, please call or email us via [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au)

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