

Information for birth parents who are thinking of searching for their adult adopted child in NSW

To search or not to search

Concerns about whether to search are common for parents whose child was placed for adoption. Many birth parents express worries that their child may not know they are adopted, will not want to have contact with them or that they will disrupt their child's life in contacting them. Other birth parents talk about feeling that they don't have a right to search because they gave consent to their child's adoption or feeling judged by society for wanting to search. Some birth parents have never told anyone about the birth of the child they placed for adoption. Everyone's experience of adoption is different as are motives for obtaining more information and tracing.

Many birth parents were told they would never be able to have contact with their child or to forget that they had a child. These messages that may have been given long ago have often had long lasting and serious consequences, and very often birth parents will have considered the possibility of tracing their child long before making any inquiries. This preoccupation is often not discussed for fear that it may arouse feelings of anxiety or judgement. At the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC), we have been impressed by the sensitivity which birth parents show towards both their adopted child and adoptive parents.

Searching needs to be seen as a step-by-step process which, for many people, can be quite quick and, for some, long and frustrating. It is important that you decide your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings.

How do I find out about my adopted child?

1. The first step is to obtain a **Supply Authority** from the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS). PARC can send you this fact sheet and application form or you can download them from:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/adopt_supply_form.pdf

The Supply Authority is like a passport to further information and will also tell you if a Contact Veto or Advance Notice have been lodged (you can read more about the Contact Veto in Information Sheet 15 *Birth Parents Affected by a Contact Veto* and the Advance Notice in Information Sheet 13 *Advance Notice Information*). There is a fee for the Supply Authority and the information about how to apply for the Supply Authority is included in the Fact Sheet which accompanies the application form.

When you apply for the Supply Authority you will receive:

- The Supply Authority and Memorandum of Adoption
- A Search Guide
- Registration on the Reunion & Information Register
- Social and medical information from departmental files

2. Additional Social and Medical Information

The *Adoption Search Guide* also gives details of other sources of information from which, having obtained your Supply Authority, you are entitled to apply for details of your child after the adoption which may be on files. The most likely source of information will be the adoption service provider who organised your child's adoption. The Department of Community Services will tell you whether the adoption was organised by one of the private adoption service providers. It can often be helpful to acquire all of the social and medical information prior to searching and making contact with your adopted child. It may give you some information about your child's life after the adoption and the family in which he or she was placed. It may also provide you with some information that might assist you with your search.

3. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Once you have received your Supply Authority you can apply for information from the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can apply for the result of a marriage search for your adopted child which is particularly important if you are searching for a daughter who may have changed her name after marriage. The registry will also search their records of deaths. If your child married you will receive a notice with the marriage details. If he or she has died then the registry will contact PARC who will then telephone you to inform you of the death. The registry will then send you the details of the death.

Should you wish to do so, you can apply for your child's amended birth certificate although there is no legal necessity for this.

There is an additional fee for searches conducted by and certificates provided by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. You can contact the Registry at:

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

35 Regent St, Chippendale NSW 2008

Postal Address:

GPO Box 30, Sydney 2001

General Enquiries: Tel: 1300 655 236

Adoptions Section: Tel: 02 8306 8513; Fax: 9243 8663

Email: bdm-adenq@agd.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.bdm.nsw.gov.au

4. Electoral Rolls

Once you are sure of any change of name for your child, you can search for his or her current address by way of an Australia-wide Electoral Roll search. You can only conduct an Australia-wide search at one of the main Electoral offices. The list of these offices can be found on the Australian Electoral Commission's website:

http://www.aec.gov.au/About_Aec/Contact_the_AEC/

You can also search Australia-wide information at the Family History section of each state's State Library.

5. The Reunion and Information Register

Registering on the Reunion and Information Register means that if your adopted child also registers a wish for contact, you will be put in touch with each other by a mediator. Alternatively messages left for you can be mailed on to you if you register a wish for information. The application for the Reunion and Information Register is included on the Supply Authority Application form.

How do I make contact?

Having located your adopted child and checked the information you have, you may then wish to make contact with her or him. It is at this point that birth parents often feel the need to discuss with an experienced counsellor the various ways of making contact and the pros and cons of each. You may wish to read Information Sheet 11 *Writing to an Adopted Person* to assist in your decision making.

Should I use an intermediary?

The *Adoption Search Guide* provides a useful summary of the arguments for and against using an intermediary. PARC has an intermediary service which offers supportive counselling for both parties. Ask for further details of this if you are interested. You may, on the other hand, prefer to enlist the help of a trusted friend or relative or of a support group. Whatever method of approach you choose it is important that you give yourself time to consider your own hopes and expectations and that you allow the person you are approaching time to consider their response. You may find Information Sheet 32 *Intermediary Service* helpful in deciding how to go about making contact. PARC undertook a piece of research in 2000 entitled *At Least Now I Know* about the experiences of people who have made contact. You can borrow this from the PARC library or you can purchase it from our bookshop. A summary from the results of the research showed that those people who contacted their birth relative indirectly either through an intermediary or by writing a letter were generally more successful in their reunion experience. It is usually a good idea to take things slowly and consider the situation from all the different points of view.

Getting help

The experience of some birth parents is that they have not been able to discuss their feelings with anyone for fear that they may be misunderstood or their motives misconstrued. The opportunity to hear other people's experiences, to discuss things individually with a counsellor or in a group with other people who share a common interest can be very helpful and supportive. These are all services that PARC offers. The centre is not involved in searching, other than for people who are isolated or have a disability, but can give advice on steps to take and provide support at various stages along the way.

Below is a flow chart of the basic steps that need to be undertaken in searching for an adopted person. If your search is not straightforward and you cannot find your adopted child using the steps outlined in this Information Sheet, then you can contact the Salvation Army Special Search Service who may be able to assist you further with your search. Their contact details are:

Salvation Army Special Search Service

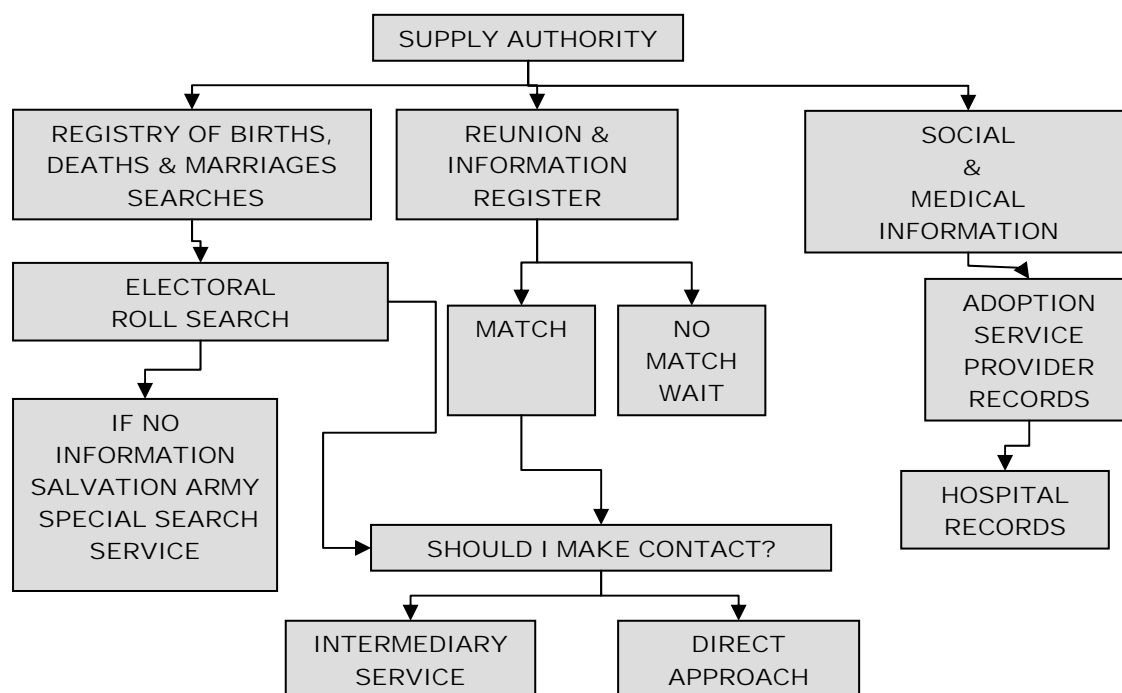
PO Box A435, Sydney South NSW 1232

Tel: 02 9211 6491

Fax: 02 9211 2044

Email: SpecialSearchServiceNSW@ae.salvationarmy.org

Web: www.salvos.org.au



Please phone us if you wish to talk further about any issues raised in this information sheet.

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