

INFORMATION FOR BIRTH PARENTS THINKING OF SEARCHING FOR A SON OR DAUGHTER WHO IS NOW OVER 18

The NSW Adoption Act (2000) allows both adopted people and birth parents access to identifying information about each other. The Post Adoption Resource Centre, together with the Department of Community Services and adoption service providers recognised that birth parents often carry the pain, hurt and grief of the loss of their child to adoption for many years, and can never forget the pregnancy or “leave it in the past” as they were so often advised to do. The legislation recognises the basic human right to know (a) one’s roots or (b) to know the fate of a child placed for adoption, these being given equal recognition by the law. The experience since implementation of the previous legislation in April 1991 has shown that, as adults, the parties to adoption can be trusted to deal responsibly and effectively with this aspect of their lives.

How do I search for my son or daughter who was placed for adoption?

If your child was not born in NSW, you should contact the Department of Community Services, or equivalent, in that state to get information about how to proceed.

For children born and placed for adoption in NSW

- The first step is to obtain a **Supply Authority** from the Adoption Information Unit at the Department of Community Services. For the fee of \$135 payable to the Department of Community Services (a reduced fee of \$35 is available to those on a Commonwealth pension or benefit, who have a Health Care Card) you will receive the following information:
 - The Supply Authority and Order of Adoption
 - A Search Guide
 - Registration on the Reunion & Information Register
 - Other information from departmental files

The *Supply Authority* must be applied for by completing the application form which should be sent to:

**The Adoption Information Unit
Adoption and Permanent Care Services
Department of Community Services
Locked Bag 4028
Ashfield NSW 2131**

When applying, whether by mail or in person you will need to provide 2 forms of certified identification ie. copies of your birth certificate, marriage certificates (if you have changed your name), passport or photo driver’s licence. Copies of your identification must be certified by a JP, doctor, solicitor, teacher or minister.

You are also entitled to apply for a copy of your child’s **Amended Birth Certificate**. This will cost an additional \$29 and must be applied for separately, after you receive

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the Supply Authority, through the NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages in Sydney. Their address is GPO Box 30, Sydney, NSW, 2001. We can send you an application form.

You will receive a book, **Adoption Search Guide** at the time of application which gives a "step-by-step" guide on what to do next, eg applying for the adopted person's marriage certificate and searching for an address on electoral rolls etc. Electoral rolls listing full names alphabetically for each state are now held at the main office of the Australian Electoral Commission in each state or at the State Libraries. Check your phone book for the nearest to you. The *Adoption Search Guide* gives details of other sources of information from which, having obtained the *Supply Authority*, you are entitled to apply for further details of the adoption. Application forms for this identifying information known as **Social and Medical Information (or Prescribed Information)** from departmental files and for entry to the **Reunion and Information Register** are part of the package given to you with the *Supply Authority*.

Registering on the Department of Community Services' *Reunion and Information Register* means that if your son or daughter also registers a wish for contact, you will be put in touch with each other by a mediator. Alternatively, any messages left for you can be mailed on to you if you register for information. There is always a chance that your son or daughter has registered so it is well worth your while registering.

What is a Contact Veto/Advance Notice?

Your son or daughter may not wish for contact with you and may have registered a **Contact Veto** or may wish to delay contact for a 2 month (usual term) period, registering an **Advance Notice**. You can still obtain the *Supply Authority* and apply for other information, providing you sign an undertaking not to:

- a) contact that person (*Contact Veto*)
- b) contact that person within the specified period
(*Advance Notice*.)

If a *Contact Veto/Advance Notice* has been registered against you, your son or daughter may have left some information for you with the Department of Community Services explaining their reasons. If you break the *veto* and contact your son or daughter you are liable to a fine of up to \$2750 and/or 12 months' imprisonment. Under the current legislation, contact vetoes are permanent unless the person who lodged it chooses to cancel or vary the veto.

Being confronted with a *Contact Veto* is always experienced as a very painful disappointment. If this should happen to you, you may find it helpful to phone a counsellor at PARC who can discuss the situation with you.

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 offering 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.

The experience of being a birth parent

You may be concerned about the possibility that your son or daughter doesn't know they are adopted. Or you may be weighing up whether to write to the adoptive parents or to the adopted person themselves. These are issues worth raising with a PARC counsellor.

We know that birth parents may suffer acute and long term grief associated with the loss of their child to adoption, and remain deeply concerned about the welfare and happiness of the child and the child's adoptive family. The vast majority of birth parents do not want to compete with or replace the position the adoptive parents occupy in their son or daughter's life, but believe their pain may begin to heal by learning that their child is well and happy or by finding and developing a relationship with their son or daughter.

The process of searching for a son or daughter needs to be seen as a step by step process which, for many people, can be quite quick and, for a minority, long and frustrating. For many, the search is taken up and dropped several times before reaching a conclusion. It is important that you decide your own pace and allow yourself time to absorb new information and assimilate new feelings.

Meeting with others

Many birth parents report that the pain of the adoption is made worse by the accompanying feelings of isolation and enforced secrecy. These same birth parents report a great feeling of relief when they are given the opportunity to be able to share their experiences with either a trained counsellor or a group of other people who are going through the same process.

Post Adoption Resource Centre

The role of the Post Adoption Research Centre is to offer a range of services including individual counselling, support groups, discussion meetings, and an intermediary service between parties wishing to make contact with one another. The centre is not involved in searching, but can give advice on steps to take and provide support at various stages along the way. We would welcome a call from you to talk further about your situation.

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