

# Bits & Pieces

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## Welcome to Bits & Pieces Winter Edition

Bits & Pieces is a quarterly newsletter produced by Jigsaw Qld. In each edition we aim for a mix of stories and information encompassing various perspectives relating to adoption. It also includes stories & information about our Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS). If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email us at [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au).

The winter edition wraps the commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions, personal stories, explains peer support and showcases Season 4 of Adopt Perspective podcast.

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## 10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoption

*A morning tea event to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions was held on Tuesday 21st March, 2023 at Events on Oxlade Drive, New Farm.*

The event was organised by the Forced Adoption Support Service (Jigsaw Qld) in association with ALAS Australia, Association for Adoptees, Origins Queensland and You Gave Me A Voice. It was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

This year's event marked a significant milestone and highlights included the performance of original music by adoptee, Sofia Fletcher and Natalie Lewis delivering the acknowledgement of country.



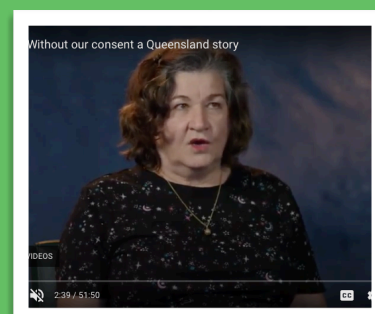
The full apology, delivered by then Prime Minister, The Honourable, Julia Gillard in 2013 was also streamed at the event.



*Sophia Fletcher performing at the anniversary event.*

Have you watched the *Without Our Consent: A Queensland Story* oral history yet? The interviews feature a mother who was forced to give her child up for adoption (Anne), an adoptee (Jo), and a father who was coerced into placing his son for adoption (Alan). It also includes interviews with representatives of post adoption organisations and Queensland politicians.

This video is a must watch for anyone affected by adoptions between 1950 and through the 1980s. You can watch it here: <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/without-our-consent-a-qld-story>



It was a moving, supportive and enjoyable morning shared with special people. As always, it was wonderful to see new faces who were attending the event for the first time as they explored their own adoption experience.



*Then Prime Minister, The Honourable, Julia Gillard delivers the apology on 21st March, 2013. Click to watch full apology.*

Apology anniversaries give people who were affected an opportunity to speak about their experiences and to be heard. For many, rebuilding relationships and identities shattered by their forced adoption experience is emotionally and practically difficult and events such as these provide a moment of pause to share with others who have been impacted, and reflect on our own experiences.

## The Lifelong Journey of Discovery

by Sofia Fletcher

*Born in Brisbane, Sophia Fletcher has been searching for her mother for over 35 years. In this article, Sophia talks about her adoption journey; her experiences growing up, her on and off again contact with Jigsaw, meeting her paternal sister who she found through DNA and their father. From an initial desire to know more about her mother, along the way Sophia has unexpectedly learnt more about herself.*

My relationship with my adoptive mother was always fractious, and as a result my adoption

was only fully confirmed to me by my adoptive father when I was in my forties.

Because there wasn't a real connection with my adoptive mother, I didn't feel like I had to be a certain way, which was kind of freeing. However, my adoptive father was always supportive of my dreams and encouraged my passion for dance and music.

I first came to a Jigsaw peer support group in the early 1980s when I was in my twenties. I went to a couple of meetings, and Jigsaw helped me with the paperwork to apply for my adoption information, which at the time was only non-identifying information. As there was no internet at the time, it was lots of paperwork. As I was only young when I received it, I didn't really process the documents, and went overseas for 11 years. Perhaps in a way I was travelling to find out, where do I belong?



In 2012, I applied for my adoption information again and with the authorisation I received, I applied to Births Deaths and Marriages for my original birth certificate. It was very sparse; however, it did say my birth mother's date of birth and where she was born. She was also from Brisbane. I felt more anchored to her. I also

felt for her, being 17 years old and pregnant. It must have been devastating.

Around this time, I was assigned a case worker from the Salvation Army and was given my mother's full name, Gwendoline Leslie Graham (pseudonym). Frustratingly, the Salvation Army couldn't find a birth record, marriage record or a death record for Gwendoline in Queensland. Since then, I've learnt that Gwendoline also went by other first and last names at various times.



Fast forward to May 2021 and a second cousin contacted me via Ancestry and helped me find my paternal half-sister, Selina. I contacted her first by email and then by Facetime. It was amazing! We'd talk on the phone for ages. I knew from adoption-informed counselling that it is important to take it slowly and after nine months we met in the capital city where she lives. The 10 days spent with Selina were just incredible. My whole life changed. We had a really beautiful time. She totally embraced me. We had many of the same interests, such as yoga and we looked alike. Before her I never knew what it was like to look like someone. I was blown away. I couldn't believe that I felt that I belonged.

I also met my father, Lawrence during this trip. He said to me, it was the 60's you know...I don't really remember. Later, he said to me quietly, I'm sure that you are my brother's daughter. From then on, a tension developed because Selina didn't want to refer to Lawrence as 'our father', however, she very much wanted me to be her sister, and I felt the same. While I tried to put this to one side, not long after that, I knew that we just needed to get real.

Knowing that the science doesn't lie, the next step was for our father to DNA test. Selina agreed, however, then came back saying that her parents were too old, and they didn't need the stress. While I understood her loyalty, I also thought, there's been enough secrets in my life and now I just have to do it for me.

I linked with Jigsaw again at an adoptee retreat and they supported me through interpreting my DNA results, building my understanding of my family story and helping me work through the complex emotions that my search has bought out. Jigsaw's staff have bestowed on me kindness and assistance. Their finding of my heritage and ancient bloodlines has helped me meaningfully connect to my history. I am grateful for them being on this amazing and empowering journey with me.

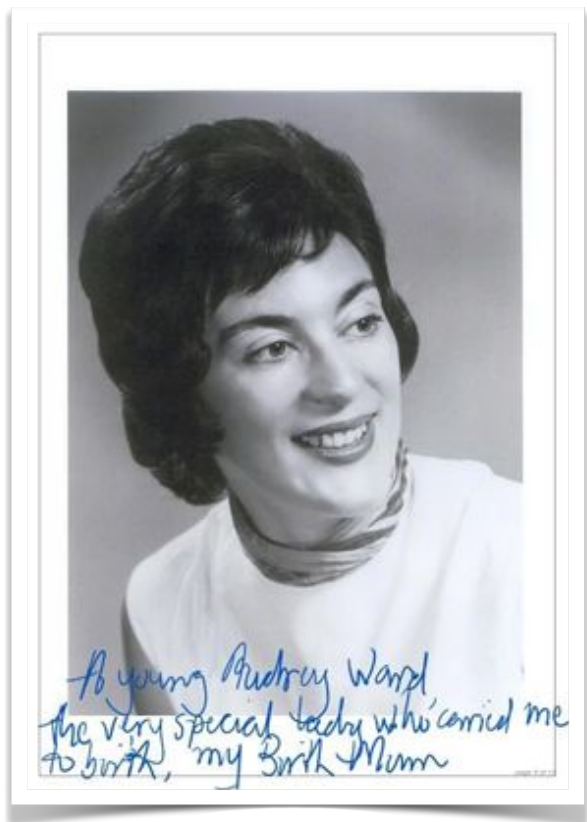
## If I met my Mothers

**Poem by R. White**

Life points its way, while time moves right on,  
Forging memories arrayed in lines in reflection.  
As a sun casts its rays filling the Earth with colours,  
My thoughts raise the day in honouring mothers.  
Adopted, my mothers I had more than one,  
Both have now passed, in Heaven with God's Son.

Time has matured me to ponder and pray  
Bringing me to a place I can openly say  
As a son yearns but a moment to see them again,  
Cries God to come in this indisposition,

Then pause in reflection to quietly listen,  
As my heart and my mind take on a new vision.



*Robert's mother Audrey*

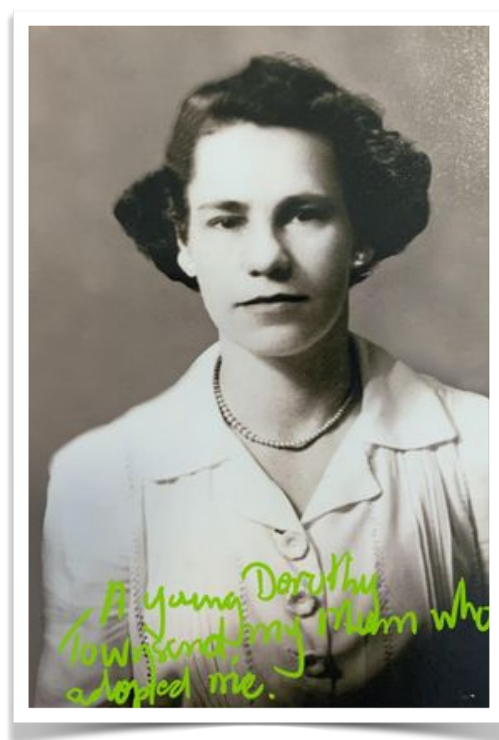
If I met my mother, what words would I say?  
What things would we speak of? What compliments pay?  
With my Mother who raised me from babe to a man,  
Would I have enough time to thank her again?  
And to my birth Mum, would I know her this time?  
To be face to face, as a man in my prime?

The lessons of life can take a lifetime to learn.  
What is taken for granted can easily turn  
To a memory only, from substance to air.  
Yet even a memory one needs not despair!  
If we but realise how special is Mother  
For she comes as a gift like not any other.

And as I pray as a man who will meet them again,  
My faith in my God has grown out of them.  
That a mother prayed with a priest at my birth  
That the child she let go to another on Earth,

And that special lady, with her husband,  
adopted  
Me, then my sister, for the family they wanted.

And perhaps as I close thinking of meeting my mothers  
That I would invite a most significant other.  
He is the One Who answered those prayers long ago  
And I imagine how much joy would bring Him aglow,  
To be thanked in person for what He endowed  
In bringing my mothers so I can write now.



*Robert's adoptive mother, Dorothy.*

## Jigsaw spreads the word about forced adoption at Older Women's event.

Jigsaw Queensland's Forced Adoption Support Service recently attended an Older Women's Network Queensland Inc event, held in Ipswich, sharing information about Australia's history of forced adoptions and the service.

The Women Connecting Women in their Communities event hosted a panel discussion on

## DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

Do you have a story to tell? If so, we'd love to hear from you. We regularly feature personal stories, poems and articles in our newsletter and on the website, or you can submit a form to be interviewed on the podcast. Email us at [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or go to [www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective) to fill in the podcast prospective guest form.



*Panel at the Older Women's Network Queensland Inc event.*

the importance of staying socially connected in our communities and the impacts on the health and well-being of older women.

The speakers panel was chaired by former Queensland Senator and Deputy Chair of the Senate Inquiry into Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Claire Moore. FASS Team Leader, Caroline Slade was able to speak to attendees about the services offered by Jigsaw and spread the word that help is available now.

## Adopt Perspective Season 4

Season 4 of Adopt Perspective Podcast is well underway with six live episodes at the time of publication.

To commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions we've included interviews with several guests who were involved during this period.

Following on from our interview with Former Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable Julia Gillard, who delivered the apology, we interviewed former Senator, Claire Moore who was Deputy Chair of the Senate Inquiry into Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

Kathryn Rendell, a mother who lost a daughter to adoption shared with us her personal experience and her experience as a member of the national Forced Adoptions Apology Reference Group and the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group. The latter



**Louise Gleeson**

**A podcast for anyone affected by adoption.**



group's role was to provide key advice to government on services and projects to improve support for people who have been affected by these practices.

Adoptee, Louise Gleeson shared how the internet, social media and DNA were game changers in her search for her biological family.



**Heather Kinang**

**A podcast for anyone affected by adoption.**



ADOPT  
Perspective

## What is peer support?

By Dr Trevor Jordan

*Where can I get help if I am struggling with adoption issues?*

If I am a swimmer struggling in a current some things will help and some will not. While they have their place and time, I don't need helpful sermons, TED lectures or FB memes from experts on the riverbank and it's probably too late to start reading a swimming manual.

A lifeguard would help. They could jump in and save me and then return safely to the riverbank. Their skill and expertise would come in handy, but are they going to be there every time I go for a swim and who would be paying for that? And is just getting rescued all the time going to help in the long run? Will I have learned how not to get in trouble in the first place?

Let's face it. Professional support is not always available, accessible or affordable. And, honestly, not everyone having difficulties requires the services of a highly-trained professional. Still, some of us will require more help than we can get from a fleeting chat with family or friends. Those of us who have discovered the power of peer support have realised that there are a lot of us in the river all the time. Thankfully, we are not all drowning at



**Angela Irving**

**A podcast for anyone affected by adoption.**



ADOPT  
Perspective

Canadian born adoptee, Angela Irving told us about her experience solving an international mystery and connecting with her biological family while living in Australia during the pandemic.

Himalayan climber, trekker, yoga teacher, espresso lover and late discovery adoptee, Heather Kinang shared her experience of finding out she was adopted at the age of 47 and how her adventurous life has helped her through the aftermath.

The podcast is hosted, produced and edited in-house by Jigsaw's President, Dr Jo-Ann Sparrow.

Adopt Perspective can be listened to on all great podcast apps including, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, Deezer and [here](#).

once. We find that we can be supported by others and they can support us.

The value of peer support, or as it is now called 'lived experience', has long been recognised. It works particularly well where there is a creative collaboration between professionals and peer supporters.

The lifeguards are still there to help, but it's also good to be in the room with others who 'get it' when it comes to adoption. Make no mistake, some of us will need professional help from time to time when the impacts of adoption issues prevent us from carrying out our normal role at home, work or school. Nevertheless, getting professional help from your GP, a psychologist or a psychiatrist takes time and money, even when your GP can help with a mental health plan.

Peer supporters are not volunteer experts. Peer support is emotional and educational support provided by a person who in some fundamental way shares something of your experience. In our case adoption. Peer supporters will share 'something' of your experience' not 'all' of your experience. They don't need to be emotional clones.

Even while we wait for or are getting professional support, we also need social support. We need to be comforted, listened to, taken seriously and given opportunities to share our feelings, even difficult ones like anger, fear, anxiety and bewilderment. Our peers can help us sift through information overload and identify what information and services are relevant.

Peer support also reduces social isolation. Through friendship, self-confidence and trust can grow. Being supported by peers is a positive step towards taking responsibility for ourselves and standing on our own two feet.

So, what are the characteristics of a good peer supporter? Good peer supporters are friendly and approachable, trustworthy, they don't judge you. They listen and don't tell you what to do and they won't tell anyone what you told them.

They are kind, and honest, and help solve problems.

As people affected by adoption, we can give and receive strength, insight and support from our peers.

Jigsaw Queensland runs support groups for adopted, persons, and mothers and an open meeting for anyone affected by adoption.

## 2023 Events

**Support groups are adhering to current government recommendations and directives. To get the latest information, please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page. The below dates are our scheduled meeting dates - restrictions allowing.**

**Adoptee & Open Meetings and Mothers' Morning Teas are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm.**

Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

**Open Support Group - (1.30pm to 3.30pm)**  
10 June, 12 Aug, 14 Oct, 9 Dec.

**Adoptee Support Group - (1.30pm - 3.30pm)**  
8 July, 9 Sept, 11 Nov.

**Mothers' Morning Tea - a regular morning tea from 10am to 12 noon (address above)** 19 July, 20 Sept, 15 Nov.