

# BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | AUTUMN 2017

## 2017 Events

Jigsaw has a full calendar of events scheduled for the year. For more information visit [www.jigsawqueensland.com/events](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/events).

Constructing Identity After Adoption Workshop (22 April)

## Upcoming Groups

Jigsaw's support groups have experienced an increase in numbers since late 2015. Meetings are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 - 3.30pm. Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

**Adoptee Support Group** - 13 May, 8 July, 9 Sept & 11 Nov

**Mother's Support Group** - 20 May, 15 July, 16 Sept & 18 Nov  
*For mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption.*

**Open Support Group** - 8 April, 10 June, 12 Aug, 14 Oct & 9 Dec

*"The Open Group helped me gain more insight into the experiences of others in the adoption triad."*  
Open Support Group Attendee



## Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

Understanding, Support & Information for all those with adoption in their lives.



## 4th Anniversary of the Federal Apology for Past Forced Adoptions.

**On Tuesday, 21 March (2017), the Forced Adoption Support Service (Jigsaw Queensland) in association with ALAS, The Benevolent Society, Origins Qld, and Association for Adoptees Inc, held a commemorative morning tea to honour the 4th anniversary of the Federal Apology for Past Forced Adoptions. It included an art exhibition, My Adoption Experience, coordinated by Pat Zuber.**

The event was well attended with people travelling from regional areas such as Grafton and northern NSW to be there. Some were coming for the first time to an apology event. The guest speaker was Professor Daryl Higgins, Director of the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University and co-author of the Australian Institute of Family Studies reports on 'Past Adoption Experiences: National Research Study of the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices' and 'Good practice principles in providing services to those affected by forced adoption and family separation'.

Prof Higgins' speech reminded us



**Forced Adoption Support Services**

Funded by the Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

## Welcome to FASS' Jane Sliwka

**To start off the new year, we welcome our new Information, Support and Referral Worker, Jane Sliwka to Jigsaw's Forced Adoption Support Services.**

Jane is an adoptee who has a long-term affiliation with Jigsaw Queensland, having volunteered in the past for the organisation and served on the Management Committee. Jane holds a Bachelor of Psychology (honours) and a Masters of Social Work Studies. Jane's honours thesis was about adoption, attachment and self-esteem. Jane has previously worked for Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) and also for Kids Helpline and Parentline for more than four years. Welcome Jane!

Jane is joining existing members of the FASS team who many of you know and have worked with, including Chris Mundy (Mon-Wed) and Andrea Lynch (Tues-Thurs). The team are available Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

**The FASS Service is funded by the Australian Government**



that the national apology demonstrated the Australian government's ability to reflect and acknowledge past wrong-doings, which offers us all comfort and hope for the future. He spoke about the importance of commemorating the anniversaries and continued advocacy to ensure that we keep alive what we have learnt about the impacts of family separation on individuals and society. In particular, he highlighted the need for vigilance in ensuring that current policies and practices truly represent the best interests of the child.

There were also reflections from representatives of all partner organisations and closing comments by, Sue Boyce, Deputy Chair of the Senate Committee for Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

The My Adoption Experience artworks were diverse, but all reflected the pain and anguish of forced adoption as well as the potential for healing and connection over time. Attendees were prompted by the art to share their own stories and experiences and said the exhibit brought a lot of 'heart' to the day. As part of the event, all attendees had the opportunity to record their own reflections and display them on a tree. They included:

***'Thank you for the validation of the wordless loss and yearning.'***

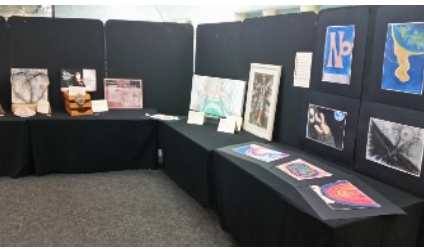
***'Key word 'forced' was not part of my thinking before today, but having listened to the speakers, I understand its meaning for the first time.'***

***'Thankful that the hidden suffering of so many has come to light and that we can share the burden together and build a different future.'***

***'Sending love, light and peace to all those impacted by these tragic events that occurred.'***



*This activity was funded by the Small Grants program, Forced Adoption Support Services funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.*



# Jigsaw Qld Welcomes Adoption Law Amendments

**Parents and adoptees who were adopted prior to 1991 in Queensland will no longer have the shadow of penalties looming over them as they seek to search and reunite with their biological families.**



The Queensland Government passed the Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill in October 2016, removing the unnecessary penalties.

President of Jigsaw Queensland Post-Adoption Resource Centre, Dr Trevor Jordan said the organisation was pleased that the offences and penalties for breaching a contact statement for adoptions prior to 1991 had been removed.

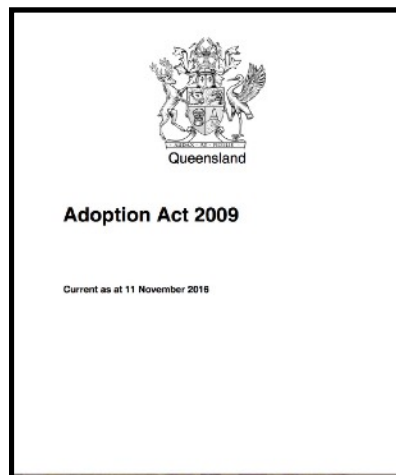


'We've always believed that people affected by past adoption need a helping hand, rather than a

heavy hand to ensure that the needs of all parties are met,' Dr Jordan said.

'The amendments will also improve access to information about birth fathers and also for grandparents and grandchildren to access the information about birth relatives.

'Many of the people we support have been asking for these changes for some time now.'



The amendments also allow for same-sex couples, single people and couples undergoing fertility treatment to be able to adopt a child in Queensland.

'We recognise that these amendments are consistent with contemporary community standards; nevertheless, it is important for everyone to manage their expectations,' Dr Jordan said.

'No floodgates will be opening. The numbers of adoptable children in Queensland will remain

low and there are many very good reasons for this. As a community, we support families better than we did in the past and there are now other permanency arrangements for children to experience the benefits of a life-long family commitment without severing their ties completely from their family of origin.'

Dr Jordan said Jigsaw Qld expected to receive an increase in enquiries as news of the amendments travelled.

'There will be many people who have not been able to find out information or contact their families in the past who may now have renewed hope.

'Help is only a 1800 number away. Contact us now and we can support you through the changes and assist you on your adoption journey.'

You can find the full Adoption Act legislation document at [www.legislation.qld.gov.au](http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au).



## Lion Roars Into Cinemas

Review by Chris Mundy

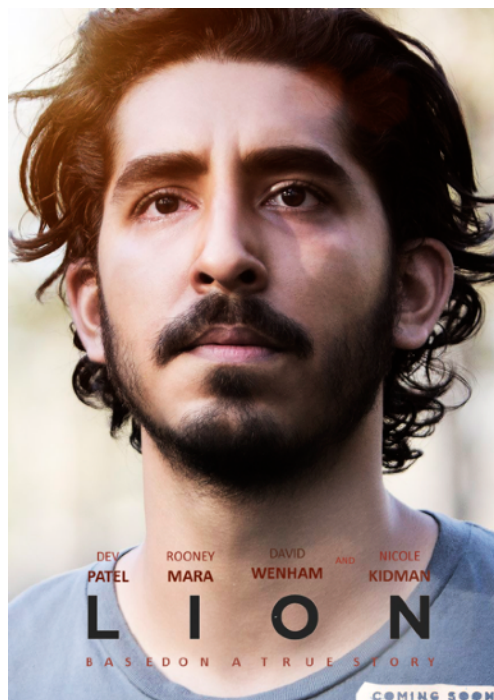
**Every adoption story is unique and deeply personal. It's important to keep this in mind as one views Lion, the movie adaptation of the biography "A Long Way Home" by Saroo Brierley.**

This is Saroo's story and despite being played out by such prominent actors such as Nicole Kidman, Dev Patel, David Wenham and Rooney Mara, to analyse another's adoption story is to tread on dangerous ground. Nonetheless this deeply personal story has much to say about adoption to the wider public and adopted people.

Lion tells the story of Saroo, a young boy residing in central India who becomes lost while travelling by train with his brother Guddu. While experiencing a close relationship with his family and single mother, Saroo is affected by poverty and his mother and older brother are forced to help the family survive by any means possible. Anyone who has travelled to India has some knowledge of the colour and chaos of Indian culture and the film perfectly captures the essence of this thanks to the cinematography of Oscar nominated Grieg Fraser. India has a population of 1.2 billion people many of whom are struggling against the remnants of the caste system, unemployment and intergenerational poverty. Little Saroo becoming separated from

his family on India's train system is further complicated by different regional dialects and he finds himself on the streets, vulnerable and eventually institutionalised. Acting by 8 year old Sunny Pawar is stunning and heart wrenching throughout.

The institutionalisation of children in developing countries, particularly in state run orphanages is a growing concern across the globe. Many children



placed in orphanages have surviving family members and are placed in institutions due to poverty and societal issues. Children in orphanages are vulnerable to abuse, attachment disorders and mental health issues. While family reunification, kinship and foster care are preferred alternatives, Lion presents the difficulties faced by authorities

and charities alike as they struggle with finding preferred outcomes for the 80 000 children that go missing in India each year. Inter-country adoption is presented as an alternative in the midst of this chaos.

Saroo is adopted by a couple in Tasmania along with another Indian child. Adopted people may experience mixed feelings as they watch the adopted family unfold. Kidman and Wenham's characters present as somewhat sanitised, Saroo a saintly child and his adoptive brother as deeply troubled. One wonders whether the role of compliant adoptee and rebellious adoptee is being played out within the family unit, however another possibility is that Saroo's adoptive brother has experienced severe abuse and attachment related issues in institutions prior to his adoption while Saroo has experienced a strong maternal upbringing despite the trauma of being separated from his family. Whatever the circumstances, adoption creates unique challenges for family and parenting. Saroo's loyalty towards his adoptive parents is noted in the film and it is possible that they are presented so honourably



because of a sense of adoptee gratitude by Saroo himself and his input into the film. His reassuring of his adoptive parents that “this changes nothing…” at the conclusion of the film can come across as somewhat naïve to those of us who have been on a journey of search and reunion however it is important to remind ourselves that this is Saroo’s personal journey and he is still travelling on it.



Some critics have raised the second half of the film has much slower pacing than the first half and the adoption search should have occurred more quickly. The second half gives the film integrity and adopted people will resonate strongly with it. Adopted people who make the decision to search know that searching is an inner and outer journey. Dev Patel perfectly encapsulates these two struggles as he uses Google Earth to find his family in India while struggling with the relationships around him as he discovers his true identity, wrestles with the pull between his ‘Australian self’ and ‘Indian self’ and life as an adult inter-country adoptee in multicultural Australia.

Bring your tissues as Lion is deeply moving for all viewers and especially triggering for those affected by adoption. The film is a reminder that everyone’s adoption

journey is unique, personal, powerful and lifelong.



## **Book Review Heartlines: The Year I Met My Other Mother**

Review by Andrea Lynch  
Written by Susanna McFarlane &  
Robin Leuba

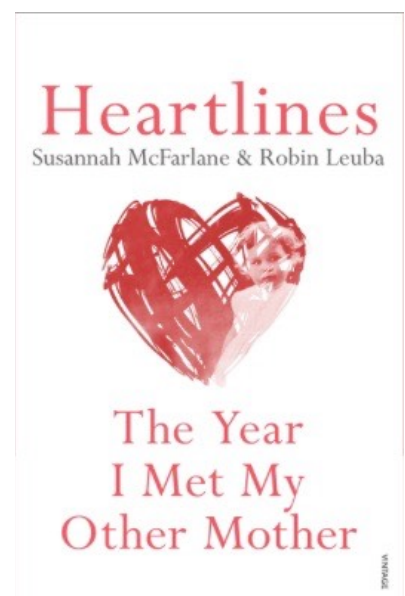
Susannah, an adoptee, and her mother Robin wrote this book collaboratively.

It documents the first year of their relationship following reunion. This book is different to other books on adoption reunion because it documents the journey by using the actual texts, emails, and descriptions of meetings and phone calls so that the interactions between them are recoded from both sides and in detail. This gives the reader an “insider view” to the experience of both of them as they progress through the ups and downs.

The complexities of post reunion relationships becomes clear through this book as it reveals the sometimes unexpected, strong and confusing emotions that arise, the wanting to rush in and then pull back, the impacts on other family relationships, the

misunderstandings that can occur, the hard work of facing emotional upheavals and working through relationship issues rather than avoiding or running away. Susannah and Robin were both very committed and courageous in working on building a relationship and this bears fruit.

The book is easy to read and will be valuable for people affected by adoption particularly in preparing for contact and working through post contact issues. It would also be good for family members to read to help them understand the complexities of reunion and post contact relationship building.



## **DNA tests can help connect families**

*By Andrea Lynch, FASS Team Leader*

*As a result of changes in the Queensland legislation in 2016, more adopted people have been getting the names of their birth fathers. The Forced Adoption Support Services (FASS) team at Jigsaw Queensland has been helping adopted people to search and reach out to their fathers and in this context DNA tests have been helpful in confirming paternity. DNA testing has also been used when the father has died but half siblings have been found and the DNA tests can again confirm the relationship. Local DNA labs have been used for these tests.*

Recently Jigsaw hosted a series of workshops offered by Kerri Small from the Australian DNA Hub and funded by the small grant program of the Department of Social Services. She ran an information session for adoption service providers and two sessions for adopted people.

The workshops showed us the potential that using genealogical DNA databases such as AncestryDNA Family Tree DNA and 23and me can offer. Some people who have exhausted all other possibilities for finding family have been able to connect using these tools. Kerry is very knowledgeable and a good resource for those wanting to use these tools. More information about the Australian DNA hub is available at <http://www.australiandnahub.org.au/>

Jigsaw Qld has produced a DNA information sheet which you can find on the Jigsaw website and are happy to help anyone who is wanting more information about the process.



Kerri Small from the Australian DNA Hub.

## **Membership / Donations / Bequests**

*Jigsaw is a non-profit organisation, relying on a mix of trained volunteer helpers and professional support to provide a range of services to all those affected by adoption. We rely on membership and donations from individuals, business and government to achieve our objectives and to help us provide ongoing services to our members and the community at large.*

We are grateful for one-off or regular tax-deductible donations and can assist you to make a bequest in your Will. A bequest is a very real way to make a positive difference. A donation or bequest to Jigsaw Qld can help us in all areas including to influence government polices for better legislation and to educate future leaders about adoption-related issues. Find out more at the membership and bequests tabs at [www.jigsawqueensland.com](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com) or call us on 07) 3358 6666.

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## **Broader eligibility for funded training**

*The Australian Psychological Society has announced that a broader range of mental health professionals working with people affected by forced adoption are now eligible to access subsidised funding by the Department of Health.*

Eligible professionals include counsellors, therapists and relevant case workers, as well as Aboriginal health workers, psychologists, general practitioners, social workers, occupational therapists and mental health nurses. There are two courses that are funded and available *free of charge* for health professionals:

[Working with people affected by forced adoption: training for mental health professionals \(8hrs\)](#)

This course is suitable for all mental health professionals who are currently working or plan to work with people affected by forced adoption. it gives a brief overview of the past forced adoption policies and practices in Australia and suggests frameworks and principles to guide clinical work and the development of effective therapeutic relationships.

[An overview: understanding past forced adoption policies and practices \(1hr\)](#)

This course is suitable for professionals who wish to gain general knowledge but are not currently working or do not plan to work with people affected by forced adoption. It gives a brief overview of the past forced adoption policies and practices in Australia and the impact it has had on individuals and families.

Email: [forced\\_adoption@psychology.org.au](mailto:forced_adoption@psychology.org.au)

## Forced Adoption Reflection

**Dr Jo-Ann Sparrow**

*(This article was published nationwide on 13 March in Fairfax Newspapers)*

**Like many others, I found myself at my first forced adoption apology anniversary event years after the apology was first delivered. I'd never thought to attend the apologies delivered at state and federal parliaments themselves, because I believed they had nothing to do with me.**

When I reunited with my mother in 1991 at age 19, she told me that I was not a forced adoption. She said it as though to wave away the notion that a terrible trauma had occurred at the time of our separation. She said that she wasn't drugged, restrained or forced to sign paperwork to 'relinquish' me for adoption as had happened to many. She was benchmarking her experience against those of others and was dismissive of her own as a lesser event. At the time, I was relieved for her...for us both really.

I know better now.

I was adopted in Queensland in 1971 at the pinnacle of the Australian closed adoption era, when the stigma of illegitimacy was a worst-case scenario for unmarried mothers and their babies. My mother was told to leave her Sydney home and to not come back until she'd dealt with the issue (I was the issue). She travelled north to Queensland alone, holding only a small hope

of finding a way to keep me, but found only closed doors.

She worked throughout her pregnancy as a nanny to two children in Brisbane to support herself, as her father refused to help. On the day I was born, we parted ways without ever sighting or touching each other. She was offered no options or alternatives that would allow her to keep and raise me. Because she was not forcibly coerced into signing the adoption paperwork, she believes that my adoption was not forced, but what choice did she have but to place me for adoption? How can it be said that it was not forced?

***"Consents obtained from unmarried mothers who were not fully informed of alternatives to adoption, were unaware of the consequences of adoption, or were influenced or manipulated by authority figures including their parents, doctors, social workers and church figures, cannot be said to be informed consent."***

**National Forced Adoption Exhibition, 2012.**

Before I attended my first anniversary event, I didn't understand why a yearly commemoration was necessary. I attended as someone seeking to support and acknowledge the loss of others and when I departed, it was as an adoptee acknowledging my own loss through forced adoption policies and practices and those of my mother, who was cornered into a checkmate

position by society, her parents and the government.

It was moving hearing mothers speak of their experiences and having our losses openly acknowledged. One of the characteristics of forced adoption is that society didn't acknowledge there had been any loss. Honouring it now, through yearly anniversary events is important, not only for the grieving and healing process of mothers, fathers and adoptees - many of whom will come to their first event years after the apology itself, but also for broader Australia. This was a period when voices were silenced, and anniversary events are an opportunity for society to hear and honour them now and for the people affected to know they are not alone and that they are heard.

