

[REDACTED]

RE: INQUIRY INTO PAST FORCED ADOPTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Dear Committee

I was born in October 2003 at St John of God Murdoch Hospital. My biological mother presented as a concealed pregnancy to the hospital in active labour, 40 minutes later I was delivered. Within 3 hours of my birth I was transferred to King Edward Memorial Hospital. It was said they had the resources to deal with the 'situation'.

The day after my birth my biological mother signed the paperwork to 'relinquish her rights'. A concealed pregnancy is defined as 'a fearful, life-altering, and traumatic experience' (National Library of Medicine, 2018, John Wiley & Sons Ltd). All appropriate parties believed this 19 year old girl with no support was able to make a rational and educated decision surrounding a baby she had known for less than 24 hours.

Following my birth two days later I was placed into foster care where I resided for four and half months until my adoption.

Although currently I am too young to be reconsigned as a forced adoption due to the dates that are attached with this title, I believe I am an unrecognised forced adoption.

The governmental department states when a child is placed for adoption they do everything in the best interest of the child, this was not the case for me. I was let down by the department and the hospital staff.

I went through the first 18 years of my life never looking at someone who looked like me. I grew up watching my cousins look up at my grandparents and seeing where their physical features come from. I was never able to do the same. I had to form my entire identity from a packet of information my parents received containing a small amount of information regarding my biological mother and her family. I later found out it was filled with lies and misleading statements.

My adoption is considered to be an open adoption, yet this was not enforced during my childhood. Open adoption is defined as children are to grow up with the understanding that they are adopted and where possible to be supported to have a relationship with or knowledge of their family of origin and cultural heritage.

My parents were under the impression that they were to meet my biological mother, after enquiring on this matter multiple times they were told she did not want contact. Whether this was truthful we will never know.

Within my adoption plan it was agreed that a yearly letter was to be written including what I had done/achieved and also to provide photos. Not only did I hate writing this letter, we were instructed to send the letter to the department and we were never made aware if my birth mother actually received it. In short I do not feel as though the department gave sufficient, if any encouragement into implementing contact between myself and my biological mother.

Since turning 18 I have met my biological mother and have begun communicating with her. With this contact it has become very clear to me that the decision she made 19 years ago has influenced every decision and thought process she has made since. It is clear that she has lived with immense guilt, fear and anxiety. She was obviously not aware of the lasting impacts it would have on her and she was not aware that it would also leave me with abandonment issues, identity issues and never feeling good enough.

I applied for my medical records from King Edward Memorial Hospital. Upon arrival of said medical records all the medical professional's names and other information was redacted. I cannot describe how belittling and dehumanising this was.

My biological mother then applied for her medical records so I was able to read them. Upon reading her medical records we encountered redacted information and contradictory reports. It stated in her psychological report that she had a healthy loving relationship with her parents yet she would not include her parents in the discussion surrounding the baby.

It was clear after reading these reports she was a scared 19 year old girl who wanted to run from the situation she found herself in and adoption was portrayed to her as a quick and secretive way out, it would give the baby a better life than what she could ever provide. One report also stated she was annoyed with how long the process was taking. Along with many other observations made, I do not believe she had processed the trauma or was capable of making a logical and clear decision.

Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the 10 Year National Apology for Forced Adoptions where I learnt forced adoption is described as a child being forcibly removed without a birth parent knowing, forging signatures or a birth parent not being given all their options/information.

My biological mother was not given all the facts she should have had surrounding adoption and the long term effects of relinquishment. She was not given the opportunity to receive sufficient support while considering all her options at the time of my birth. Forced adoptions in my opinion should not be limited to the notable years of 1939 to 1980, I was born in 2003.

Being adopted has and always will affect me. Not feeling safe is something I constantly struggle with, your body starts to shake and you are consumed by the thought of running but some part of you knows you are safe, this was and still is a torturous event to experience and something I would never wish on anyone.

When I was ten my parents had to find short term alternatives to my schooling as they could not get me to my local school. I was suffering from bad anxiety and depression. There were days I struggled to get out of bed and the only thing I could do was cry. I couldn't leave the house without Mum, Dad or my brother with me as the fear I could be taken from my family was all too real for me. The confusion of not knowing where I came from was all too consuming, the feeling of being alone because no matter how hard my family tried they could never truly understand what I was going through, the fear of being different and never being able to fit in with friends and family is gut wrenching.

Adoption has changed my ability to create and maintain relationships as the fear of not being good enough or being rejected like when I was born has left me with a lasting impression.

My family was at a loss of where to go for help as they had tried other organisations with no success. We found ARCS (Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc.). They saved my life as they helped get me back to school, help me understand and process the loss and the grief I experienced. They gave myself and my family the tools needed to go through life while acknowledging the trauma we experience.

I did not ask to be adopted and so many decisions were made that were out of my control with lasting impacts on my life. Therefore I would like to be a part of the change surrounding adoption and would be very willing to be a witness in the hearing.

My family spent countless hours travelling to and from counselling appointments all travel and appointments were at their personal cost. These appointments were a necessity for me and I believe they should be provided to every adopted person as we are living with the decisions of other people and these decisions will always greatly impact us.

I want to see funding go directly to independent agencies providing counselling services specialising in adoption. I do not want to see it go to agencies that refer people on or into research. There needs to be emotional and financial help for those living with the effects of adoption.

Mistakes being made is a normal part of life, what sets apart progress and regression is whether you choose to acknowledge the mistakes and put practices in place to ensure we have learnt. Currently governmental departments or relevant parties are not doing that. The dates surrounding forced adoption needs to be removed, the department needs to acknowledge and address that forced adoption is still happening to this day and change their practices, failure to do so will mean history will continue to repeat itself thus making the National Apology for Forced Adoptions null and void.

I would like to see the governmental department reach out to adoptees and change the criteria of adoption plans. Personally, I had to write a letter every year to my biological mother. I cannot put into words how invasive, infuriating and cruel this was and it was far from my best interest.

Adoption is not a new practice, it has been around in various forms for many years. The department should be forging connections with people who have lived through adoption to help guide what was beneficial and harmful surrounding adoption plans. After all, who would know better than someone who has lived with the consequences?

Lastly, I would like to see more conversations around adoptions in schools. I attended a private all girls school, while in my last year and last week of school I was in a class room surrounded by our leaders and educators of tomorrow. They saw adoption as saving a child or taking your pick of the children, like picking out a "Build-a-Bear". You may think they are only children but they are our future and they are grossly uneducated on a matter that could be so easily integrated into the education system.

As an adopted person I am not weak, I do not need saving and I will be a part of the change that is long overdue surrounding Adoption.

Kind regards

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