

Dear members of the forced adoptions inquiry,

I am writing this submission on behalf and with the input of my mother Shannon Kathleen Quinlan. Upon hearing of the inquiry, she felt it would provide the long-awaited opportunity to tell her story and the profound impact that her adoption journey has had on everyday life. She stated to me, "I hope the redress will shine some light on this area and maybe, just maybe, I will be seen by somebody".

Incidentally in 2012, my mother was contacted by her biological mother who had signed up for [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), with no intention of finding her long-lost child. What followed, was a short span of infrequent contact via text and email. Although they reconnected briefly, it brought no closure to my mother, who felt like she was being used by her biological mother and sister as a way to fill a hole in a broken family, who were severely impacted by the adoption. My mother didn't want to meet her birth mother, stating that the one phone call she had with her, was painful enough. The main thing gained from their contact, was information provided by her biological mother, who described the accounts that took place after the birth of Shannon, at 6.11 am, on the 31st of December 1972, at Armadale Kelmscott Memorial Hospital.

Her birth mother was threatened by the hospital matron stating that if she did not sign the adoption papers, her 14-month-old daughter would be forcibly removed and rehomed. Her birth mother was scared and insecure by this prospect as they were both already known to the state welfare authority so she believed the threat. In hospital, her birth mother had expressed concerns about her ability to raise two children and this, combined with her unmarried status, seemed to label her as an unfit mother. Instead of receiving guidance and being connected with possible services and options, or being counselled through this challenging decision, she instead received an impossible and unthinkable ultimatum.

Past adolescence, my mother seeking answers, applied for information regarding her adoption from the Family Information and Adoption Service, which wrote, "your birth mother informed the hospital that she was thinking about adoption for you because she was having difficulty coping with your older sister... however she left the hospital before making up her mind...Ten days later she approached this department's office in Canarvon...she stated that she did not want you to be adopted but asked if you could be fostered until she was financially stable enough to care for you herself... within a few days your birth parents had left...they could not be traced after that". In the emails my mother received, her birth mother admitted the following. " I was absolutely terrified and just ran and ran, so sorry that happened but I thought I had no choice"... "too young to think it out rationally".

There were several missing person enquires which failed to find her birth mother, who stated to her in emails, "they had no chance of finding me... I never stayed in one place long enough... I hope you can forgive me. I can't forgive myself". Her birth mother admitted she was scared her older daughter would be taken away, as she had already bonded with her.

After her birth, my mother remained in the hospital until 16/2/1973. I have heard her recall these weeks, stating the time without a primary caregiver caused a deep ache of loneliness and formed the beginning of her attachment disorder. This was compounded when she was placed for a short time in the care of a foster mother until the 31st of March. After this, she was rehomed into the care of two foster carers, who would four years later become her adoptive parents. My mother reflects on this period being a ward of the state, stating she felt that although she was under the guardianship of the welfare agency, reasonable action was not taken to promote and protect her physical, emotional and mental well-being. I assisted my mother in writing the rest of the letter from her first-person perspective. This is something she is both eager and reluctant to share, as she feels her attempts have been overlooked and dismissed many times before.

After being placed with my adoptive parents, there was a four-year wait while the state attempted to find my birth mother until my adoption could be finalised. This four-year period was filled with uncertainty and was a challenging beginning to life. As a child, I would hide under the couch, shy away from touch and isolate myself as I felt frightened. I had learned that people were unreliable, so I did not seek comfort when upset, I would avoid eye contact and to the observer, I did not appear to be bonding with those around me. I attended welfare visits with social workers who described me as "painfully shy" and "withdrawn"; however, no action was taken to assist my struggling younger self. My biological mother was coerced to put me up for adoption, only for me to be subjected to a system ill-equipped to provide the support I required. I reflect on this part of my life, feeling I had fallen through the cracks. My adoptive mother did not receive the education or resources needed for the early intervention I wish I could have received.

Although I am grateful for my adoptive family, I have lived feeling like an outsider and struggled with attachment both within my family and my relationships. I grew up with a lack of identity, feeling like I didn't belong. My main comfort was animals, which I felt were easier to connect with. As I became older, I constantly strived to please others to gain approval and acceptance. I struggled daily to ensure I had done enough, so I would not be discarded. From childhood, I have worked tirelessly to be considered useful and earn the feeling of security within my family unit. I have an overwhelming fear of being a burden to the people I love, which results in me overcompensating with my actions, causing burnout as I bend over backwards to ensure I am seen as having value. My sense of worth is dictated by the views of my family and those around me, and my primal fear of rejection and abandonment means I am afraid to reveal too much of myself. I have always endeavoured to ensure people need me more than I need them. At age 17, I became pregnant with my son, who finally provided me with the sensation of having roots, a part of my own family tree. Before this, I felt like a tumbleweed, not belonging with anyone or anywhere. My adoption trauma is a daily struggle, as my distorted self-perception colours how I view myself and influences my actions.

Despite my repeated efforts to seek and receive the assistance I desperately need to process my adoption, I have made little progress, which is incredibly frustrating as I have tried so hard, only to be let down repeatedly.

It is exceptionally challenging for me to ask for help, and though I have tried to find services that will provide assistance, I have left feeling misunderstood, minimised and re-traumatised. I feel like the government has made promises to ensure access to help, however, have not delivered services that are truly knowledgeable within this field. Recently, I found a psychologist via Adoption Research and Counselling Service, who I found was very helpful, but she then transitioned to private practice. Due to my financial limitations, my family paid for sessions with her. Unfortunately, I felt I was becoming a financial burden to my family and the guilt created by this meant I chose not to continue with the treatment. Previously, I have also spent my own money trying to access health professionals with the expertise to help me process my trauma.

My hopes for this inquiry, are that people who have experienced trauma due to the forced adoption practices, are assisted in accessing funded specialist services including counselling, psychologists and psychiatrists who have the necessary knowledge to deliver services capable of helping. For people with adoption trauma, it can be extremely difficult to trust, so it is essential to have more flexibility in choosing a health professional and be assisted with the costs associated with treatment. I have utilised the funded services already available within Western Australia, but it seemed the health professionals I interacted with required more training. Also, I only learned of this inquiry as my adoptive sister mentioned it, but there should be a site with easy access to these updates about forced adoptions.

While I am grateful for the opportunity to express my voice, I am exhausted from living with the adoption trauma and hope the collection of submissions you receive will result in action that will help myself and others.

Sincere regards,

Shannon Quinlan

Saxon Eatt (son)