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25th May 2023

RE: INQUIRY INTO PAST FORCED ADOPTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES.

My husband and I are submitting this as adoptive parents of two children. As adoptive parents we have supported our children through fear, anxiety, grief, anger, abandonment issues, not feeling safe, loss of identity, lack of self-worth, inability to make friendships and schooling instability. We were unaware of the extent of these issues we would face even though we attended all required seminars prior to adopting. Over time it was clear we needed to find the help, resources and counselling we required, plus teach ourselves and our children the coping mechanisms to deal with these problems as best we could. We live in the country and over the years we have spent many hours travelling to and from counselling sessions with our children, we personally cover all travel, accommodation and counselling expenses. We have been willing and able to do this, however we are sure many families could not.

Our Son was born in 1998 at Geraldton Regional Hospital and adopted by us at 7 ½ months old. His adoption was an open plan adoption with contact mainly concentrated towards his maternal birth grandmother. This contact has been helpful in allowing him to form parts of his identity and has provided knowledge of his birth family and has helped towards reducing his passion for answers in comparison to our daughter's story. With partly knowing his birth story at this point in his life he does not wish to explore it further. Into the future we feel he will want further knowledge, especially regarding his birth father's identity. Currently we do not know, even with open contact, if his adoption had elements of force.

My daughter was born at St John of God Murdoch Hospital in 2003 and adopted by us at 4 ½ months. At the time of her adoption, we were provided with a history of her birth mother and family, her adoption was considered an open adoption. As per the adoption plan, we wrote yearly letters to her birth mother, even though as the years went on this caused considerable trauma to our daughter. We also reached out through our letters to being open to meet her birth mother. No response was ever received from her birth mother. We did receive confirmation from the department that the letters were forwarded on, but we did not know if they were ever actually collected or read by her birth mother.

At the age of 18 years our daughter immediately began the search for her birth parents. Provided with the correct help and procedures, my daughter has since found both her birth parents. These meetings have naturally been extremely difficult but also successful, mainly due to the years of preparation my daughter had done to be ready for this through her counselling service. Meeting her birth parents is only the beginning of the true knowledge surrounding her birth story, it is information she has craved to know for most of her life. She has since learnt the birth stories we always thought to be the facts, are in fact not completely true of her birth. This is yet another time where my daughter has had no control over what happened in her life from choices made by other people.

Since meeting her birth mother and with the information my daughter and her birth mother applied for and received from the hospital involved in her birth, we consider our daughter's adoption to be an unrecognised forced adoption. We do not believe a 19-year-old girl with absolutely no personal support at the time of such a traumatic event could intelligently provide a true and honest account of any details, little alone make any appropriate major decisions about relinquishing a child. The support offered to her around a momentous lifetime decision appears embarrassing and the timing inappropriate, being within days of our daughter's birth. Upon understanding the whole truth of her birth mother's story it has affected us considerably and with an enormous amount of shock and guilt. The indescribable joy of our child to us has come with a silent and inconsolable 19 years of grief for her birth mother. Sadly for all involved this outcome could have been severely diminished with earlier intervention and help from governmental departments involved in our daughter's adoption.

My husband and I sought help for both our children through ARCS (Adoption Research and Counselling Services Inc) we cannot describe the exceptional value of their services to our family. What we would like to achieve from our submission is the importance of counselling for all three sides of the adoption triangle, it should be mandatory and financially supported. We feel birth parents should have to attend ongoing support for the 18 years of the birth child's childhood to assess their needs around an enormous traumatic event. Adoptive parents need to be given guidance and taught the skills required to care for a child who has experienced trauma. With early intervention all parties involved may even be able to make connections allowing the best interest of the child to be achieved. Adopted children need answers, a sense of identity and they just want to feel safe. Having access to more of their life story would remove the uneasiness of what if, what happened to me, who am I and the chance to gain their truths earlier. We would like to see the time frame currently noted for forced adoptions under the enquiry to be removed, in our case it goes far beyond 1980. We are looking forward to seeing accountability for past mistakes and practices put in place to facilitate future change.

Kind regards

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