

Submission to Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Forced Adoption in Western Australia, policies and practices

In what capacity were you affected by forced adoptions practices?

I was affected by forced adoption practices as a relinquishing mother, who was 14 at the time of conception and 15 when I had her, with no knowledge of the birth process.

When and where did the adoption occur?

I'm not exactly sure of the location that finalises adoption but I was residing at Ngala Mothercraft Centre in December 1971 to January 1972. I was handed the paperwork for adoption at the centre by one of the staff and asked to sign, I was told they were to give consent for adoption. I didn't have anyone with me other than the staff member.

In what way was the adoption forced?

I was too young to access Special Support by 3 months, as in, if I had been 3 months older when I gave birth I could have accessed emergency special support from social services before being eligible for Sole Parent support when I reached 16. I found this out when I contacted Social services in October 1971.

I wasn't able to keep the child at my parents house. [REDACTED] Dad decided what happened in our house and he had decided I would go to Ngala and my child would be adopted. After failing to find any viable way of raising my daughter I accepted this as the only possible future for my daughter. After I completed my junior certificate in late 1971, I was sitting at home and my mother came to me and said, "your father and I think you're pregnant" with further talk as to what would be happening. I already felt defeated by then as I couldn't find a way of keeping her. I was 8 month pregnant, 5 foot tall and huge. I had spent the last 6 months at school hiding in the toilets at breaks as the hiding and shame and fear ran my life.

Ngala (admitted 6th Dec 1971) nurses and other staff where all about adoption being the only option at my age and best option for child and myself and my family. I'm sure the people at Ngala were doing their best but I was young without any knowledge of the birth process. Upon finding all this liquid that wasn't wee coming out, I was taken to King Edward, I had little idea of what would be happening other than the child was coming.

King Edward Hospital, wouldn't even let me see nor hold her.

I had no support for funds nor accommodation from government, medical personnel, child welfare personal, nor family.

A lack of options and support provided to prospective mothers?

I applied for various jobs unsuccessfully. Hoping I could find a job and maybe then I could get accommodation. I was in my 3rd year of high school and knew it would be difficult to raise a child in my circumstances but knew that I could at the very least do better than my parents had been able to, that I would love my daughter with all my heart and that this was the best option for my child. It broke me when after much effort to obtain, work or income and accommodation I knew that it was not a possibility.

I was taken to Ngala Mothercraft home in December 1971. It was all rather scary, I didn't know anything and while the experience was maturing me very quickly, I was still emotionally and actually very young. I shared a room with another girl who had been there for many months, she was 16, a state ward, and seemed mentally impaired, a lovely girl who had also wanted to keep her baby but had no option to do so and no say in her life either. Everyone else seemed a lot older than me, although I kept to myself as often as possible, I felt so ignorant, to the extent that I had no idea what or who I would ask for information from. I wasn't very trusting. The only time spent with others was on our work assignments. When my waters broke, I didn't know what was happening and was told then that the baby was coming and taken to King Edward (KEMH).

I recall three other experiences at Ngala. After coming back from the hospital I went to the TV room and was just watching whatever was on. It was an episode of My Three Sons and one of them had triplets and everyone was overjoyed and excited and looking after the mother. It was heart wrenching, I went outside then to my room. I remember coming back for a doctor's visit and seeing another girl from my year at school there. (██████████). My final memory was the first and last time I saw my daughter for 17 years, my parents took me back there (I think something to do with the adoption process) and I was given my daughter to hold. I can still feel her in my arms 51 years later

The whole experience at KEMH was actually horrifying. Primarily as I was by myself and had no idea of the process. I was taken to a room and had my pussy shaved and then to another room where a tube was stuck up my backside and I was told this was to remove poo. I was then wheeled into a dark corridor a blanket over me, and left there for many many hours with constant pain, no idea what was normal, with occasionally someone coming past and looking at my vagina. I was 15 and learning the process as it went along. I remember this, plus the theatre when she was born and seeing her in the distance in the room and being told no I couldn't hold her. I remember my parents visiting after Christmas sometime and going from there back to Ngala. This was 51 years ago, or yesterday, depending upon your point of view.

What effect did the experience have on you?

I have on-going mental health issues with, depression, anxiety, guilt and grief. Diagnosis from Clinical Psychologist of PTSD, depression and anxiety. I still see a psychologist when I can afford the \$120 odd dollar difference between psychologist's price and government mental health scheme payment. Its

affected my personal experience with men, particularly my husband. Communication difficulties primarily. It affected my concern and anxiety raising my second daughter.

This occurred some 51 years ago. My daughter [REDACTED] would have been 51 years old this January, instead she died at 29 (10/6/2001). I spent 12 years of [REDACTED] life, everyday terrified of what her life could be and having no knowledge of whether she had been adopted, whether she was healthy, or even alive or dead. I believed I wasn't entitled to any information, however in May 1984 I found out we have a genetic illness called thalassaemia and contacted the department. They sent back a letter with information about how [REDACTED] was at 2 years. It was such a relief, knowing she was adopted and healthy. I found out about Jigsaw and there having a register I could put my name on if my child wanted to contact me, some 4 years later and contacted them to register myself. [REDACTED] contacted me in mid 1989 and we met up later that year at Fremantle Museum. She gave me a photo album that her and her Mum put together for me of photos from [REDACTED] as a baby until now. I was very fortunate to have met my daughter and her family and still have a relationship with her brothers. Some support with our meetup and interaction would have been useful as I would have loved the opportunity to hold my daughter again. [REDACTED] needed help with her concern about getting too close and possibly upsetting her Mum. And [REDACTED], her Mum needed help with her guilt about getting someone else's child. Part of our last conversation when [REDACTED] died in 2020, was about her not feeling guilty, how grateful I was that [REDACTED] had a lovely family and loving, caring parents to raise her. I had to put aside that I would actually have wanted to do that myself and any feeling of resentment that I didn't have the opportunity to raise her myself. Let alone the enormous guilt I still harbour as to [REDACTED] death in 2001 at 29.

FASS will supply support on-line or if I drive to Perth. Successful Psychological help is dependent upon successful relationship between the practitioner and the client and needs to be face to face wherever possible.

What do you hope this inquiry will achieve?

I would like the inquiry to open up and allow the information about how detrimental adoption is to relinquishing parents, child and adopting parents and grandparents and gives the best future option for Public servants and the general public to comprehend how deleterious to health and welfare of all parties, that adoption can be, when parties are not fully informed, acting with full knowledge and understanding and with appropriate support.

When I returned from [REDACTED] funeral to my then small country town, I had 4 women come to me to tell their stories of living with being relinquishing mothers, with their difficulties with not being able to see their children, through lack of information allowed to access or through lack of desire from their children.

As a community leader, I have also had many an adopted person tell me of their enormous difficulties with accessing information, so they have an understanding of their family story. I've had nursing staff who were involved in encouraging adoption apologise to me for the process.

I would like to see sufficient support or redress from the government for my treatment, others treatment or experiences, to enable us to access appropriate professional psychological support wherever we live and whatever our financial circumstances are.

Fortunately, I was able to access support to enable myself to see [REDACTED] face after her death. I wasn't able to even see her in my mind until 6 years ago after many counselling sessions, meditation training and stress management training. I found dealing with authority in any circumstance near debilitating on occasion for many decades, mostly I managed by burying my feelings and not expressing emotion nor concern as I really felt it.