



38 Derwent Street
Island Bay
Wellington 6023
Aotearoa New Zealand

Annual General Meeting Thursday 25 May 2017

Convenor's Report

In line with the aims and objectives of Adoption Action, we continue to work towards adoption legislative reform.

Since the last AGM, in my roles as contact person for Adoption New Zealand, Adoption Support for Adopted People (ASAP) and Adoption Action, I have continued to receive emails and phone calls from people affected by the adoption legislation. It is both encouraging and discouraging to hear how adoption and the current legislation affects people's lives. Discouraging because I hear of the challenges, frustration and sadness many people are experiencing under the current legislation, yet encouraging because our work to reform adoption legislation is validated with every contact.

Generally, the enquiries have been from adopted people or natural families trying to reconnect. In the past fortnight alone, I have received 14 new enquiries. Of the 14 recent enquiries, one is from an adopted person seeking information on how to dissolve a step-parent adoption. The person making the enquiry asks whether in future legislation it will be possible to have a mechanism for adopted people to dissolve their adoption. This is a very important provision for adopted people who require it, and is not an unusual request.

Additionally, in the last year there has been an increase in the number of enquiries by adopted people from the 60+ age bracket wanting to reconnect with their birth families for the first time.

Almost every person who makes an enquiry comments in some way on how out of touch the current legislation is with the society we live in today. We now live in a society that expects openness, honesty, transparency, and integrity. I look forward to a time where we have good legislation for our vulnerable children and when the secrecy and legal fiction of the current adoption legislation is seen as an archaic tool of outdated social norms where children's needs were neither seen nor heard.

In December 2016, representatives of Adoption Action met with David Rutherford, of the Human Rights Commission. David Rutherford proposed that the Human Rights Commission would take the initiative, with assistance from Adoption Action and other interested organisations and individuals, to draw up new adoption legislation that avoided the discriminatory provisions highlighted by the Tribunal, and would bring New Zealand into line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, other United Nations Conventions and New Zealand's other child protection laws. Although Adoption Action has put forward proposals as to how the massive task of writing new adoption legislation should be managed, little progress has been made to date.

We continue to work with the Law Reform group of Victoria University's Wellington Community Justice Project (WCJP). During 2016, students Fady Girgis, Vivian Tan, Anna Huang, Michele Tustin, Rebecca Scoular-Sutton and Sherlene Ho were tasked to provide Adoption Action with draft comparisons between former Green MP Kevin Hague's Adoption and Surrogacy Bill with the Ministry of Justice's draft 2006 Adoption Bill.

In March this year Louise Brazier and I attended the WCJP launch. Vivian Tan and Josiah Koh are the current leaders of the student law reform group. This year the WCJP students have assisted with:

- writing an article for NZ Law Journal on our Part 1A claim
- drafting a Communication to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- drafting an OIA request
- attending a Select Committee hearing and taking notes on our behalf

We thank the volunteer students for their ongoing support.

I have also been encouraged this year by the work other people are doing to change New Zealand's adoption legislation and to support people impacted by adoption.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and honour the mothers who recently made submissions to the Social Services Select Committee in relation to Maggie Wilkinson's petition for an inquiry to past adoption practices.

The re-telling of their experiences touches these mothers' deepest emotions. The courage that they have in not only sharing their experiences with others, but presenting their experiences to a committee of strangers is honourable. I hold these mothers in highest regard and thank them for their courage. A happy story is a much easier story to re-tell. However, a painful experience of a life lived with loss and grief of the kind, and to the depth these women have lived, can be harrowing. Again, I thank you each for finding the courage and strength to tell your stories and to share your experiences. I wish you every success in your endeavours.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of meeting the Auckland-based organisers of the *I'm Adopted* project that was founded and is run by a Russian-New Zealand adopted person, Alex Gilbert. Alex runs a website (<https://imadopted.org/aboutus/>) and Facebook page where adopted people can share their stories and assist each other with advice and support.

It was a privilege to meet and hear their individual experiences and views, and to learn more about their project. It was very useful to be able to pass on the link to Keith Griffith's short piece *History of Adoption in New Zealand* (which has been reproduced with permission of the author on www.adoptionnz.com).

I would also like to express my gratitude to our deeply committed Committee members and to loyal members of Adoption Action Inc who continue to support us with financial and hands-on assistance.

We are again very grateful to Charlotte von Dadelszen for hosting Adoption Action's meetings.

Fiona Donoghue
Convenor
25 May 2017