

Adoption Action

Adoption Law Reform

Annual General Meeting Thursday 19 April 2018

Convenor's Report

With the change of government in the 2017 general election, I am now feeling more positive than I have in a number of years about adoption legislative reform. Jacinda Ardern has been very supportive of adoption reform while in opposition, and gave strong support at our lobbying meetings with her in recent years. Now that she is Prime Minister, and given that adoption reform was included in Labour's manifesto, I am hopeful that there will be some meaningful legislative changes in the near future for children who will be adopted. When biological relationships between children and their families are recognised in future adoptions, and when a legal framework that supports openness, honesty and integrity in adoption occurs, only then can New Zealand be assured it is providing good and proper legislative support for adopted people and their families.

Earlier this year we requested meetings with the Minister of Children (Tracey Martin) and the Minister of Justice (Andrew Little). The Minister of Children has declined to meet with us and has referred our letter to Minister Andrew Little. To date, we have not had a response from Minister Little's office to our own meeting request, or the Minister of Children's referral, but are hopeful to secure a meeting soon.

Paul Eagle MP, in his 2017 maiden speech, emotionally spoke about his birth mother and the importance to him of hearing certain words from her. In a following interview, he noted that it was the first time he'd openly said that he was adopted and he touched on the importance of identity, and a child's needs when it comes to knowing his or her parents.

The Human Rights Commission (HRC), represented by David Rutherford and Anneliese Boston, facilitated and invited Adoption Action to attend a meeting with Paul Eagle on 14 December 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to provide some background on the HRC's Adoption Act project to draw up new adoption legislation that will avoid the discriminatory provisions highlighted by the Human Rights Review 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. I was privileged to attend that meeting and am pleased to report that Paul Eagle further indicated his keen willingness to work where he can to support adoption law reform.

The HRC Adoption Act project is progressing. Adoption Action has now undertaken the massive task (led by Robert Ludbrook) of writing 15 issues papers identifying issues that require consideration when writing new legislation. We have this week provided those finalised documents to HRC and are looking forward to meeting with them to decide the next steps, which will likely involve assistance from other interested organisations and individuals.

We continue to work with the Law Reform group of Victoria University's Wellington Community Justice Project (WCJP). Robert Ludbrook and I attended the WCJP 2017 AGM in October and I attended the WCJP annual launch in March 2018.

Adoption Action has this year implemented a new initiative to provide better face-to-face support to the volunteer students in terms of preparing the leaders for their launch, and helping the students gain a better understanding of adoption as a lived experience. We have had two meetings with the volunteers this year as part of this new initiative.

During their 2017/18 term, the Law Reform Team Leaders: Vivian Tan and Josiah Koh, along with their volunteer student team Cameron McCracken, Lola Stoodley, Angel He, Poppy Donoghue, Grace Collett and Fina Weight assisted us with four main pieces of work – as outlined in last year's convenor's report.

I'd like to personally thank the volunteer students for your work and support in 2017/18. Your assistance is immensely appreciated.

We welcome the 2018/19 Law Reform Team Leaders Cameron McCracken, Abby Shieh, and Georgia Petry, along with team members Sarah West, Harriet Reid, Catherine Finegan, Laura McLaughlan and Poppy Donoghue. We very much look forward to working with you this year on the tasks already set, and towards involving you on the HRC Adoption Act project.

We invited last year's WCJP team leaders to join our Adoption Action committee this year, and Vivian Tan has accepted our invitation.

This year Louise Brazier has stepped down from the role of secretary as she is currently travelling. On behalf of the committee, a heartfelt thank you Louise for your commitment and assistance while on the committee.

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.

The committee is again very grateful to Charlotte von Dadelszen for hosting Adoption Action's meetings.



Fiona Donoghue

Convenor

19 April 2018