

BIRTHLINK BULLETIN

Spring in the Air?

There's some good news about, and this Bulletin brings you the best of it. That's all folks. We hope you have a good and productive Spring and Summer.

Something In The Air?



Eight links on the Adoption Contact Register since the beginning of the year and April just begun. This is a record and if the rest of the year lives up to this success then the ACR will have had its best year ever.

The circumstances of the first link are as follows. A fifty-year old birth mother whose child was adopted in Dundee registered in one year old son trig- when he registered in now lives in England mained in the area in born. Alan (this and names have been al- sister. Sometimes in registrations that have taken place a number of years ago, we find that the person has moved house and omitted to tell us of a change of address.



1994. Her thirty-gered the link March 2009. He and she has re- which he was all following tered) has a half- the case of regis-

Fortunately, Agnes has kept us informed of her whereabouts and, well watch this space and perhaps there will be an opportunity in the next Bulletin to provide readers with an up-date about Agnes and Alan. In the meantime, we wish them good luck.

In one of those spooky adoption coincidences, Alan's registration form must have been in the post on the day of his birth mother's birthday.



Our second linked pair are further afield. They are sisters. Both born in Glasgow, and both now on the other



side of the world. Lesley lives in New Zealand and Maggie lives in Australia. Maggie was born in 1949 and adopted. Lesley was born three years later. Maggie registered first in 2003 and now Lesley has. No uncanny elements to this

except that two sisters both born in Glasgow now live thousands of miles away from their place of birth and yet are now a short hop apart...



Care Connect Developments

Busy, busy, busy.

Since the beginning of 2009, we have had seven new people seeking a Care Connect service. Interestingly, a number of requests have involved older men (year of birth 1939 in one case) seeking information relating to their time in foster care. Additionally, we have begun to work with relatives of those who have grown up in local authority care – a man living overseas who now wishes to trace a younger brother who was taken into care (but not adopted). In other case that illustrates the diverse nature of the work, a man in his late twenties who has just become a father, wants to find about his time in care from when he was a “toddler”.

Our Care Connect-related work for City of Edinburgh Council is also on a surer footing now that news of Edinburgh's commitment of financial support for another year has come through.

The Money Column

Huge thanks go to the Friends and supporters who responded to our request for help to buy vital pieces of equipment and we are not talking about comfy arm-chairs. £700 came in and we have used it to buy, among other things, the latest Info disk (invaluable search service tool) and a printer.



many who for office



Another round of applause goes to Gary Clapton. Why? Instead of presents for his sixtieth birthday in December, he asked that friends and relatives give the money to Birthlink. So

happy birthday Gary and thanks for the donations totalling nearly £500. Hopefully he'll do the same at another milestone. Maybe everyone ought to.

Lastly a big thank you to Fife Council. Letters from Councils usually augur bad news as in "we've cut the tiny nation we make to you". In Fife's case we were stunned to read that they were increasing their contribution to the After Adoption Information Line by 2%. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this were to happen across all the Scottish authorities?



do-read

Staff ups and downs

Welcome to Kirsty Anderson who replaces Heather on general administration.

So Farewell Heather, and good luck in your job.

On the other hand, Winnie is dropping her hours to three days a week...

BBC Alba – Adoption Stories

The work of Birthlink will be featured as part of a forthcoming TRUSADH - BBC Alba's topical issues series.

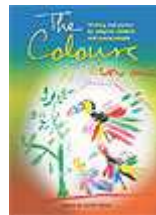


New Book

The Colours in Me, an anthology of writing and artwork by adopted children and young people.

The Colours in Me is a unique collection of poetry, prose and artwork by adopted children and young people. Eighty contributors – ranging from four to 20 years of age – tell it like it is, revealing what it feels like and what it means to be adopted. With extraordinary clarity and candour they describe the huge changes that adoption brings and the impact of these changes on their identity, their relationships and their understanding of the meaning of "family".

The book is divided into five sections exploring many aspects of the adoption experience:



- life before adoption;
- on being adopted;
- on being parted from birth family;
- staying in touch;

revisiting birth places.

The Colours in Me is edited Perlita Harris and is available from British Association for Adoption & Fostering.

Birth Fathers

The Impact of Relinquishment on Birth Fathers (Passmore and Coles, 2008) is the title of a paper given at the 9th Australian Adoption Conference that took place in September 2008. The following extracts give something of the flavour of the presentation.

Passmore and Coles' research was among 27 biological fathers of children who had been relinquished as infants. In the highest number researched so far, 21 had had some contact or a reunion with their child (though not all had searched). The six most important search motives were:

- To assure myself that my child was okay.
- To find out what happened to my child.
- To tell my child about family background.
- To let my child know about me.
- To establish a relationship with my child.
- To tell my child about the circumstances of his/her birth.

When asked what type of relationship they have with their child now, only 2 indicated that it was a father-child relationship, though 10 other participants indi-

cated that it was a family relationship, but not father-child.

One of Passmore and Coles's conclusions is:

'Thus, the overall results of this study challenge previous stereotypes of the birth father as the "uncaring cad". Rather, most of the birth fathers in this study did care very much for their child, many were still in contact with the birth mother (including six who were actually married to the birth mother), and many reported that the relinquishment had had a negative impact on their lives.'

This echoes the findings of previous research and adds to our increasing research-based knowledge of birth fathers, and especially in the case of this particular study, our knowledge of birth fathers experience after meeting and contact.

Relatively Familiar?

Long-term outcomes of contact and reunion: some findings from the literature



General

- The perspective and experiences of adopted people make up most of the literature, followed by those of birth mothers and adoptive parents then, far back in the field, fathers (birth and adoptive) and other birth relatives such as siblings.
- Most studies have only focussed on the early weeks and months.
- Those who respond to interview requests tend to be those who have had a positive experience.
- Everyone involved has to negotiate but adopted people seem to manage this whereas some birth mothers sometimes struggle with the desire to nurture and be maternal.

For adopted people, **being the subject** of a search may produce negative feelings. This may be about feelings of lack of power, often expressed by adopted people as 'I had no choice in the matter' and 'no-one asked me if I wanted to be adopted.'



Durability and quality of the relationship

- For adopted people, their primary familial relationship is with their adoptive family.

Another feature of ongoing after-reunion relationships is that the adopted person and birth relative will have **more in common than blood ties** – personalities come into play as do common likings and shared out-

looks. Class and culture obviously emerge here as a possible obstacle to successful reunions.

Effect on self and other relationships

- The majority of relations between the adopted person and their existing (adoptive) family were unchanged or even enhanced.
- Meeting and the establishment of a relationship partially relieves, for the birth mother, grief. For birth mothers, although contact is desired, old wounds may be opened in the process.
- The ripples caused in the lives of those close to the birth mother have attracted less attention e.g. relations between the birth mother and her existing family (e.g. husband and other children).

Adopted people may sometimes feel overwhelmed by **new family obligations** i.e. towards the extended birth family (e.g. birth brothers and sisters, aunts, grandparents). But this was not to the point of ending the relationship.

Overall

- Overall, most studies indicate that there is satisfaction felt by the majority of those who have been involved in reunions, although a study of the longest relationships - average sixteen years duration - concluded that:



with them.

The participants in this study lived with ambivalence, a degree of uncertainty and dissatisfaction with these relationships – longstanding though they were – persisted

In one case, this study reported that **even after 26 years of contact**, many matters remain unresolved.

- For contact to develop into mutually productive and beneficial relationships a reunion ought to be seen as **life-long process** rather than a one-off, big-bang resolution.

There is no one post-reunion pathway and no blue-print for these meetings or any relationships that may develop.

(The above is derived from an unpublished paper by Dr. Gary Clapton and was provided to Birth Link staff for a training session with adoption workers – references available on request)

Scottish Parliament legislation up-date

Periodically when matters arise that directly affect adults in adoption, we go to Holyrood:

The Adoption Information (Scotland) Regulations and the Adoption (Disclosure of Information) (Scotland) Regulations

Consultation on Draft Regulations



Comments from Birthlink (formerly known as Family Care)

Birthlink has undertaken intermediary work, involving search, contact and reunion and post-reunion support, with adults affected by adoptions in Scotland for over twenty years. Birthlink operates the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland and the Scottish Adoption Registry (a database which holds information on the location of Scottish adoption records). Birthlink also runs an After-Adoption Information Line and is supported by a majority of Scottish councils and the Scottish Government.

These are our comments on the current set of Draft Regulations.

Regulation 2 - Information to be kept about adoptions.

Use of the term 'adopted child' is confusing.

We recommend avoiding the infantilisation of adopted adults (who are often referred to as 'an adopted child' all their lives). We suggest the use of 'adopted person' especially in light of Regulations' references to the need to consider welfare throughout adopted person's life.

Regulation 3 - Disclosure of information to adopted person

Linking disclosure of information to a request for counselling sets up a barrier to the adopted person's access to birth details, never mind proposing counselling that may not be geographically convenient for someone who may live remotely or in another part of the world.

Linking counselling to access to information also introduces the possibility of having to pay – for counselling – before obtaining information from the records. If the hope is to encourage the use of official and professional intermediaries, then making counselling a condition of help may have the effect of turning the adopted person towards unregulated sources such as the internet. Disclosure of information should be the default position.

Regulation 4 - Disclosure of information to other persons

An adoption agency ought to be able to disclose adoption information not only to the local authority but also to an adoption support agency and as such this regulation does not sufficiently cover the organisations that may need access to the information.

This regulation ought to be re-titled to substitute 'other agencies' for 'other persons'

Additional Comment

Adoption records (if they are not to be separated into adopted person/ birth parent/ adoptive parents, and they generally are not), ought to be regarded as the record of a process that involves all three of these parties. As such information from the records ought not to be seen as solely a matter for the adopted person's access. Where in the regulations is birth parent access to information discussed?

Regulation 5

Additional Comment: access to information in the case of private adoptions.

An Intermediary Service for Birth Relatives in cases where the adoption was arranged privately, i.e. without the participation of an adoption agency, is normally not possible because in these 'private' adoptions there are usually no case records that would enable a search and contact process to commence. The only means of establishing a link between a birth name (often the only information held by a birth mother or other birth relative) and an adoptive name is from records held by the Registrar General and these are not publically available. Those birth relatives affected by a private adoption and who seek an intermediary service are therefore disadvantaged because without an adoptive name, no service is possible. Birthlink therefore recommends that in private adoption cases an agency offering intermediary services ought to be able to apply to the Registrar General for identifying information linking the adopted person's birth name to that of their adopted name.

Sponsor our runner in BUPA Great Edinburgh Run Sunday 3 May 2009

Michael Crosbie runs again - for Birthlink. Please sponsor him again. The run is 10 kilometres.

All sponsorships gratefully received. Contact Linda Hay at Birthlink for details of how to help.

Michael
crossing last
year's finishing
line.