

Editorial

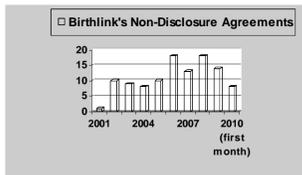
For this Bulletin we have decided to showcase one of our key services - Non-Disclosure Agreements with adoption record holding agencies.

Our Non-Disclosure Agreement Service *

Birth parents and other birth relatives such as siblings of adopted adults have no way of knowing how their son, daughter, brother or sister has fared in later life. Unlike the more pro-active tracing and intermediary services for adopted people, birth relatives have normally had to

The centre-piece of the service is the Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) between Birthlink and the adoption record-holding agency. The process begins when a birth parent or relative approaches the original agency that arranged the adoption and asks for help in finding out about their son, daughter or sibling. The NDA enables the record-holder to confidentially pass identifying details to Birthlink and a search is then made.

Generally, we are able to trace a person. Once this is done a choice is offered – details can be passed to another social worker to proceed with contact and possible mediation or Birthlink can handle this. The original-



make do with leaving their names on file in the hope that one day the adopted person will return to their placing agency. Bulletin readers will not have to be reminded of all the facts but suffice to say that there is now well-established evidence regarding the negative long-term-effects of adoption on birth parents involving poor mental health, worry over how their child has fared and, at the least, a wonder and curiosity about them.

In recognition of such needs of birth parents, we launched our Non-Disclosure Agreement service in 2001 and since then, in partnership with Scottish local authorities and other adoption record-holders, Birthlink has successfully provided a service for birth parents - and other relatives – in tracing and contacting adopted adults. This service also includes intermediary help once contact has been made.

ing agency decides. Contact details are exchanged only when the adopted person agrees.

Over 100 NDAs have been completed involving eleven

Feedback from Local Authority Partners

"Excellent – always find staff friendly and very knowledgeable"

"Would recommend your service to relevant clients"

"Have always found the staff at Birthlink to be very helpful and informative, especially when seeking advice"

"Ongoing contacts friendly and welcoming and approachable"

Scottish Social Work Departments and three non-statutory adoption record-holders. As our chart on the first page shows, the demand for NDAs has increased.

The majority of service users have been birth mothers. But also twenty five siblings have been helped to trace a brother or sister and five birth fathers have been put



in touch with their adult children. Although most of the people involved have been resident in Scotland, many are hundreds of miles apart and in some cases, people have been reunited across continents – in one case a birth mother in the USA was enabled to have contact with her daughter now living in Australia. In another case of a grandmother resident in the Highlands, she has been put in touch with a grandson in Dumfries.

Not all cases result in meetings. Many involve exchanges of information and this is often sufficient to assure birth parents that their son or daughter is alive and well.

names and Non-Disclosure Agreement, whilst doing what it says on the tin, is a bit of a mouthful. Suggestions for a better title would be very welcome.

Court Process

We recently were told that an adopted man was required to see a Sheriff in person and made to plead their case to gain access to their court papers. He managed to persuade the Sheriff but was then told that he could not photocopy the documents and would only be allowed to take notes. Our man argued against this - and won. However he was then charged £15 for photocopying!

We believe this man's account of the various hurdles that adopted people have to negotiate when seeking the basic facts about their lives is not unusual. We'd be happy to give publicity to any other examples of the 'brick wall'.

Feedback from Birth Relatives

"First contact was sympathetic, professional, efficient and helpful" (Birth Father, Rutherglen)

"I tried many years ago with no success, with this time though: extremely helpful with speedy results" (Birth Mother, Ayr)

"Every time I called staff were extremely pleasant from the receptionist through to ... Never made to feel I was taking up their time and always felt that they were happy to spend time explaining and talking and listening to me. Thank you for your time and patience" (Sister, Hamilton)

We have found it interesting that adopted people are among those who have praised the NDA service. Although being on the 'receiving end' of tracing, feedback we have received from adopted people has expressed a sense of satisfaction over having been sought out. One such person especially welcomed details of genetic medical information featured in his biological family. Other adopted people have welcomed the opportunity to discover more about their roots.

* We are always on the look out for snappier titles and

Upcoming Conference

This looks like an interesting event. The Conference is being organised by After-Adoption and we have chosen to run full details because the conference blurb is interesting and whilst there are many conferences and events run by professionals for professionals, not a lot takes place that so directly sets out to involve adopted people. Hopefully some Bulletin readers might manage to go - we'd love to run a Conference report in the next Bulletin.

'Let's Talk Adoption'

Tuesday 20th April 2010, Millennium Centre, Cardiff

About the Conference

Lets Talk Adoption will bring together adopted people of all ages and nationalities as well as professionals in the field to discuss and explore what it means to be adopted

Who is it for?

The conference is open to anyone who had been adopted, adoptive parents or those affected by adoption as well all those working within the adoption field and others with an interest in adoption.



What will the day involve?

Designed to explore and celebrate the difference adoption brings to people's lives, 'Lets Talk Adoption' will feature inspiring speakers, engaging workshops allowing lots of time for discussion as well as time for networking.

Speakers & Performances**Lynn Charlton, Chair**

The day will be chaired by Lynn Charlton, Chief Executive of After Adoption. Lynn is originally from a social work and counselling background and has specialised in adoption and permanency since 1987. She has worked with all groups touched by adoption and adoption support, from birth parents and adoptive families, to children of all ages in the care system. She is co-author of 'Still Screaming' a pioneering book that looks at the perspective of birth parents in adoption.

Alan Mann - Secrets and Lies, Compartments of History - adoption seen through the eyes of an adoptee.

Alan Mann has been a trustee of After Adoption since 2005. He is a retired Chartered Surveyor, but remains a non-executive director of his company and trustee of his company's charitable trust. He has served as a Justice of the Peace in London and Chairman of the Prison Board of Visitors of two Young Offenders Institutions. In 2004, he completed an MA at Ruskin College, Oxford on Public History and has written academic papers and gives lectures on adoption and modern social and family history. He has also served as a trustee of another adoption charity. He is an adopted person who searched for his birth family.

Heather Ottaway - Sibling Kinexions: Exploring adopted people's sibling relationships

Heather Ottaway is a PhD researcher and associate tutor at the University of East Anglia who is researching the birth and adoptive sibling relationships of adopted adults. She is particularly interested in understanding what birth sibling relationships mean to adopted people and how they are experienced, both for those who grew up with birth brothers and sisters and those who grew up apart from them. Heather's interest in adoption is personal and professional. She is an adopted person herself, and is also a very ex-

perienced social worker who worked for many years with children and their families in Scotland and England, both in front-line child protection work and in fostering/ adoption. She became interested in researching the sibling relationships of adopted people when she was an Adoption Panel member in Cornwall, and has left full-time social work practice to undertake this piece of research.

Anwen Lewis, Performance Poet

There will also be a performance by acclaimed poet Anwen Lewis on her experiences of meeting her birth family.

Adoption Voices Film

Young adopted people from the Getting it Together project in the North will also be presenting a film they made in collaboration with The BALTIC centre for contemporary art. Adoption Voices is a moving film in which the young adopted people made, starred in and devised the animation for, to help people understand more about what it means to be adopted.

Nerys LLOYD - Presenting 'Adoption in Myth, Film and Legend workshop'

Nerys has had a varied career as an award winning actress, TV presenter and researcher before setting up own TV and film production company, Boda, in 1993. She has produced four feature films to date and won a Best Film BAFTA in 2008 for 'Daddy's Girl'. She is currently working on a Creative Wales Award exploring intercultural adoption and has begun a film/opera project with dramatist Gerald Tyler exploring the same theme.

In her personal life Nerys was born in London but adopted by a Welsh speaking family in North Wales. She accessed After Adoption's services which she says "helped me in unpicking the effects of adoption and identity issues". Nerys went on to trace her birth mother in 1995 and continues to enjoy a rewarding relationship with her.

See www.afteradoption.org.uk/letstalkadoption for further information and how to sign up.



'Father Unknown': Amending an original birth entry

We recently received a letter from an England-based solicitor informing us that he had:

"recently acted for a man who obtained an order from the High Court that allowed him to re-register his birth, so that it included the details of his father, who had only been entered as 'unknown'. This important case for the first time allowed someone who had been adopted to re-register their birth to include and correct the details of their parentage... I know that an increasing number of those who were adopted, but whose records of birth do not reflect their heritage, want

to correct their records. However many remain unaware that this could be available to them. I am therefore writing to you with the hope that you will help me to draw this to their attention."

Bulletin readers can read the full account of this development at:

http://www.cumberlandellis.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/77249/Who_do_you_think_you_are.pdf

A question for readers: is there Scottish examples of such amendments? If so, we'd like to hear of them.

Child Migrants

On Wednesday 24 February PM Gordon Brown apologized to the tens of thousands of poor British children shipped to former colonies such as Australia, where instead of a better life many were treated to harsh conditions, neglect and abuse. The migrants were sent off when they were as young as 3 to foster homes, state-run orphanages and religious institutions in Australia and Canada. Many were falsely told they were orphans and sent without the consent of their parents.



Brown said the country was sorry for the "shameful" and "misguided" child migrant program of the 1920

to 1960s, in which an estimated 150,000 British children were sent to distant colonies:



"We are sorry they were allowed to be sent away when at their most vulnerable. We are sorry that instead of caring for them, this country turned its back," he told the House of Commons.

Gordon Brown said he would create a 6 million pound (\$9.2 million) fund aimed at reuniting families separated by the program.

About 7,000 survivors of the migration program still live in Australia.

And, while we are about apologies...

According to *The West Australian*, "West Australia is set to be the first Australian state to publicly acknowledge aggressive adoption practices which resulted in thousands of mothers being unlawfully separated from their babies after giving birth out of wedlock...during the 1940s to the early 1980s. Health Minister, Kim Hames said: "You look back on those attitudes of the day and wonder how we could be so harsh. Things like taking children away from their mothers as soon as they were born and not letting them see or touch them. We are apologising in the same way as with the Stolen Generation".



The West Australian goes on, "Christine Cole, convenor of the NSW-based Apology Alliance which lobbies on the issues said a memorial dedicated by a State health minister would be the most significant acknowledgment by authorities "probably anywhere in the world". (State to apologise for 'harsh' adoption acts, 5 March 2010)

"Stolen Generation: those children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments. The removals occurred in the period between approximately 1869 and 1969, although in some places children were still being taken in the 1970s.