



After Adoption Services

@ The Heart of Adoption
Connecting People Worldwide

Patron: Irvine Welsh

Birthlink Round up 2016/17

In November 2015 we highlighted National Adoption Week with an article in the Scotsman on the role of DNA analysis in family history and in reuniting people separated by adoption. Thanks go to Alasdair MacDonald one of our Birthlink Board of Directors for this piece. A special thanks to all of our Board members for their continuing interest, support and practical help in promoting the services.

We also welcomed three new students from University of Edinburgh as part of the Observational Placements process.

December brought our annual celebration get-together for staff, volunteers and service-users which was well attended and an extremely enjoyable evening. We also hosted an annual lunch to say thank you to our search volunteers.

In January 2016 we began a much needed office refurbishment including new carpeting throughout, painting and decorating the office and investment was made in new desks and new computer hardware.

The first planning meeting with Celsis and Scottish Government was held with the aim of providing a training session open to all local authority adoption workers to be held in Glasgow later in the year.

With Company Secretary Aileen Nimmo at the helm we began to plan a new financial strategy and also welcomed our latest Board member Val Clarke to join us. Val kindly helped to interview applicants for the vacant social work post and in March we welcomed our new team member Lara Wierzoch who has very quickly become a valuable addition to the team.

Lara joined us just in time for our annual staff 'Away Day' in early April which was once again kindly hosted by our consultant Dr. Gary Clapton at University of Edinburgh. This year, with thanks again to Aileen Nimmo, during the morning session we had the added benefit and skills of facilitator Claire Wheeler giving us an opportunity to focus on our Strategic Review.



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The afternoon session was facilitated by Gary Clapton giving us our annual opportunity to review and discuss services in general, promotion and publicity of the service and a timely reminder to celebrate ourselves as a team and the challenging but rewarding work we do.

Once again we were granted annual funding by the Scottish Government by way of the new Children, Young People & Families Early Intervention Fund (CYPFEIF). This new fund is managed by Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland. As part of this process there will be regular opportunities to network with other recipient agencies to share experiences and offer support to each other.

April also brought a photo opportunity with our Patron Irvine Welsh as he launched his latest book in Edinburgh when he kindly donated some signed copies to the Thrift shops.

The review of our Care Connect project and funding contract began. A focus group of service users met with City of Edinburgh Council Commissioning Officer and all relevant information has been provided to the Council. We await their draft Report.

Late April saw plans for a training day for local authority adoption workers come to fruition. This Seminar was called 'How can the past inform future adoption practice?' and was hosted by The Scottish Government and Celsis bringing together 16 of the 32 Scottish local authorities. Kate, Louise and Lara presented on behalf of Birthlink with a focus on the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland and siblings separated by adoption.

In May we successfully recruited for a new part-time administrative assistant and we welcomed Sheila Dunn to join our small the team.

During the summer months it was business as usual with holiday season upon us and callers from abroad dropping in. The Thrift Shops had a stall at the Meadows Festival which was great fun and raised a total of £537.24.

A big thank you goes to those who took part as Team Birthlink in The Great Scottish Walk when £1602 was raised. A good day was had by all and we look forward to next year's fundraising walk. Once again throughout the year we have also received several generous donations from thankful service users.

Throughout the year we were consulted by Ronachan Films in the making of their ITV documentary 'Britain's Scandal – Breaking the Silence' which told the stories of some of the many thousands of women pressured by Church and State into giving up their babies for adoption. Birthlink were able to put them in touch with some of these women our contact details were given as the Scottish Helpline.

Birthlink is also funding research into the long-term outcomes of reunions that have taken place via the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland (ACR).

As we head towards the end of another busy, successful year Birthlink prepares for our forthcoming Media Campaign.



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Birthlink Services

After Adoption Information Line (AAIL)

We have dealt with over 1000 enquiries from January – October 2016

Graham, an adopted person from Dundee said **“Birthlink is an indispensable service to society in general and all adopted people. Adoption was for so long a sensitive subject. It can be very hard for those searching for their past and their relations in the present. I found that you handle enquiries with tact and consideration and I appreciate your counselling skills. I also think your website is first class.”**

Ann, a birth mother from North Ayrshire said **“Everyone I spoke with at Birthlink was very helpful and approachable treating me with care and consideration.**

Adoption Contact Register for Scotland (ACR)

There have been a total of 205 registrations in this 10 month period and a total of 22 links.

Catherine, an adopted person from Highland said **“Once I contacted Birthlink the service was excellent. I only wish I’d known about you years ago. My sisters and I find we have many things in common as we get to know each other.**

Dorothy an adopted person from Renfrewshire and her twin sister Connie from Scottish Borders said **“We are very impressed. We had given up all hope of contacting each other until we contacted you. We have had a very successful first meeting and look forward to getting to know each other better. You have helped bring much happiness to two women and their families.”**

Access to Court Process

We continue to work closely with our colleagues at the Adoption Unit, National Records of Scotland and have accessed a total of 18 Court records on behalf of adopted people.

James, an adopted person from Falkirk said **“An efficient, discreet and most helpful service.”**

Search Service

Special thanks go to our group of searchers Ann, Jan, Kirsty and Jennifer for their specialist expertise and enthusiasm in this area of work. Sadly Liz has been unable to assist this year due to other commitments.



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We have undertaken a total of 86 active full searches of Scottish public records and a total of 40 original birth checks on behalf of service users.

In a typical month our searchers have donated a total of 265 hours of their time to support Birthlink and adults affected by adoption, giving an estimated saving of approximately £398 per month. We have also undertaken 9 searches of English public records.

Bruce, an adopted person from Angus said “A very professional service which has quite simply changed my life. A perfect mix of diplomacy, thoughtfulness, caring and understanding. All I can say is a big thank you.”

Michael, as adopted person from Dundee said “I didn’t imagine that I would discover so much about my origins and I thank you for your sensitive understanding in this private and personal matter.”

Mediation Service

We have undertaken and supported a total of 132 mediations this year.

Andrew, an adopted adult from Fife said “Birthlink is an organization that truly offers valuable mediation and support throughout.”

Tracey, a birth sibling from North Lanarkshire said “Your help has given me the support and confidence I needed to have contact with my new found brother and sister.”

John, an adopted person from Canada said “The work you do is amazing, difficult, trying, upsetting, joyful and rewarding and that is just in one day! Thank you so much for your support.”

Intermediary Service

A total of 10 Non-Disclosure Arrangements have been provided on behalf of record holding agencies i.e. searching on behalf of birth parents and other birth relatives.

Sheila, a birth mother from Dumfriesshire said “Without this service I would not have been able to find out that my firstborn son, who was adopted at birth, was alive and happy and had been well cared for throughout his life. To know this has given me true peace of mind after all the years of waiting and wondering.”

Care Connect

We continue to provide this Access to Care Records service to Care Adults on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council. Some Care Adults also avail themselves of our Search and mediation services in order to re-connect with family members.



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Angela from East Lothian said “From the very first phone call I thought here are people who want to help. This helped give me an understanding of why I was placed in care. Thank you for your support.”

Publicity

During the last 12 month period the following Scotsman articles have been published

23rd December 2015 an article ‘Going Back to your Roots Can be Quite an Experience’
25th February 2016 ‘Why I decided to find by birth mother when I was 40’
20th April 2016 ‘Still Secret After All These Years’
3rd June 2016 ‘Adoption and Father’s Day’
26th August 2016 ‘Anne & Karen’s Reunion Story’
October 2016 <http://stv.tv/news/features/1369921-adoption-stranger-said-my-parents-weren-t-real-i-didn-t-care>
November 2016 <http://www.itv.com/presscentre/ep1week45/britains-adoption-scandal-breaking-silence>

Our continuing thanks go to Dr. Gary Clapton for his ongoing support and advice and for writing regular articles and producing our bi-annual Birthlink Bulletin.

Partnerships with Local Authorities

We continue to work with the following 18 Local Authorities to provide a range of after adoption services with a view to enhancing the health and wellbeing of all adults affected by adoption.

Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Clackmannanshire Council
Dumfries & Galloway Council
Dundee City Council
East Dunbartonshire Council
East Renfrewshire Council
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Highland Council
North Ayrshire Council
Perth & Kinross Council
Scottish Borders
Shetland Islands Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling Council
West Dunbartonshire
Western Isles Council



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This year we have once again facilitated bi-annual After Adoption Professional Support Forums (AAPSF) which have been well attended, so much so that we have had to limit numbers for the future inasmuch as each local authority/agency will be asked to send one representative. Topics covered include Role of Counselling, Risk Assessment, Social Media, Identity & Lifelong need, Genetic Attraction and Descendants of deceased adopted people. Various articles of interest were distributed.

A participating social worker said: **“The Forum has been one of the most useful experiences in terms of professional development and a much needed platform to discuss After Adoption Issues.”**

Staff training

This year staff and volunteers have attended various training courses which include the following:-

- Child Protection
- Understanding Mental Health
- Financial Planning
- Mindfulness in the workplace
- Data Protection
- DNA
- Social Media
- Past & Future Adoption Practice
- Practice Learning & Social Work Education day
- Scottish Criminal Justice System Justice
- Providing Support over the Phone
- Adult Protection



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