

ADOPTION SURVEY

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OVER 20 YEARS ON
THE EFFECTS OF ACCESS TO ADOPTION RECORDS
ENDING CONFIDENTIALITY.

LOCATION

BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA.

CLIENTS

THE RESPONDENTS WERE NOT CLINICAL CLIENTS OR FOUND BY ADVERTISEMENT. VOLUNTARY RESPONSES WERE MADE TO A NON GOVERNMENT ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP. CONTACT CAME THROUGH A LISTING IN THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY OF THE 5,000 RESPONDENTS 3,000 WERE DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ADOPTION.

DATA

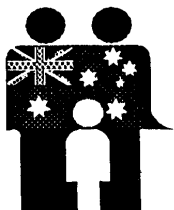
CASE HISTORIES AND PERSONAL REPORTS WERE COMPILED FROM INCOMING TELEPHONE CALLS OVER 13 YEARS AND 4 MONTHS
NON-IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL RECORDS WERE KEPT BY TRAINED VOLUNTEERS ON A DAILY BASIS. A SPECIFIC FORM WAS USED TO RECORD EACH CALL AND SIGNED BY THE VOLUNTEER. THESE CASE HISTORIES WERE SENT TO AN INDEPENDENT ANALYST, ANONYMITY WAS PROVIDED TO ALL CALLERS
PATTERNS BEGAN TO EMERGE FROM THE RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Factors which motivated Searches

- Pressure from a third person (e.g. spouse, fiancé or a teenage friend)
- An emotional crisis (e.g. death in the family or divorce.)
- When as an adult an Adopted person is made aware of their adopted status
- Feelings of Guilt
- Media publicity re reunions
- Curiosity

Common Results of Unsought Contact

- Divorces
- Personality changes
- Dynamics of Birth Families fractured
- Guilt
- Students dropped out of tertiary studies, had a personality change and left home.
- Adoptive parents devastated.
- Adoptive families, particularly sibling relationships are fractured when one child is contacted and absorbed by new relationships



Adoption Privacy Protection Group Incorporated

(Incorporated in Queensland, Australia from 1991 to 2011)

E-mail appg@powerup.com.au

Representing - Adoptees, Birth Mothers and Fathers and Adoptive parents

ANALYSIS OF INCOMING TELEPHONE CALLS TO A BRISBANE OFFICE

(Incoming calls from the 4/3/91 to the 30/6/2004, - a period of 13 years 4 months)

This analysis was compiled from detailed logs of each incoming phone call to the Brisbane Office of APPG Queensland Inc. The Adoption Privacy Protection Group was the only NGO Adoption Support Group, which provided without charge, information, referral and support services, while providing complete *anonymity for the caller*. APPG was only listed in telephone directories and did not advertise its services or outreach to clients

TOTAL INCOMING CALLS (From 04//03//91 to 30/6/04) 4,415

VARYING CATEGORIES INTO WHICH THE CALLERS WERE PLACED.

• REQUESTING INFORMATION ON RIGHTS AND LAWS.	3,004
• ANGERED BY THE RETROSPECTIVE OPENING OF ADOPTION RECORDS	769
• REPORTING TRAUMA AS A RESULT OF CONTACT.	537
• MAKING MISCELLEANOUS INQUIRIES	1,832
• WANTING TO ADOPT A CHILD **	660
• CALLERS REFERRED TO THE ADOPTION SECTION OF THE FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENT **	1,679

** (The last two categories were included from 1/7/92)

THE NUMBER OF CALLERS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ADOPTION WERE :-

• ADOPTEES	853
• BIRTH MOTHERS	669
• BIRTH FATHERS	82
• ADOPTIVE PARENTS	521
• SIBLINGS & RELATIVES	<u>539</u>

TOTAL OF CALLERS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ADOPTION. (as at the 30/6/04) 2,664

CASE HISTORIES OF TRAUMA REPORTED AS A RESULT OF CONTACT

On a percentage basis the callers reporting trauma were as follows.

30%	were reported by	Adoptees
24%	were reported by	Birth Mothers.
3 %	were reported by	Birth Fathers
19 %	were reported by	Adoptive Parents
20 %	were reported by	Sibling/Relatives
4 %	were reported by	Other Persons

GENERAL UPDATE AS AT THE 22/07/08

APPG HAD RECEIVED OVER 5,000 TELEPHONE CALLS, WITH OVER 3,000 CALLS FROM PERSONS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ADOPTION

1 IN 5 CALLERS, SOME 556 PERSONS, SUFFERED TRAUMA AS A RESULT OF CONTACT.

APPG Inc. consistently received calls from people reporting personal distress or a complete family breakdown. The number of case histories would easily double if anecdotal evidence was included. Four cases of Genetic Sexual Attraction were reported. Telephone calls taken in 1990 and cases of trauma reported prior to the systematic keeping of telephone logs are not included in this analysis.

A SMALL SELECTION OF CASE HISTORIES FROM TELEPHONE CALLS RECEIVED.

(Not always the happy ending portrayed by the media)

- A Brisbane man, married with teenage children, eventually was compelled to have an expensive DNA test to prove he was not the biological father of an adopted person. An adopted woman had come from interstate and had over a considerable period of time harassed this man and his family because he denied he was her biological father. The harassment included threats of violence against him and his family and caused a great deal of distress. Following the DNA results the Birth Mother conceded that he was not the birth father. He had been a flat mate of the real birth father and she had been chosen him because of his higher profile educationally and professionally.
- A man who had been married for over 28 years with adult children reported that his wife had been contacted by a young woman whom she had placed for adoption some 30yrs previously. His wife had a complete change of personality and even her mode of dress and hair style changed. She left him and her family to live in a lesbian relationship with the adopted woman. (Genetic Sexual Attraction can often occur)
- A birth mother and her sister had been victims of incest. Their father had sexually abused them and she had become pregnant and the baby placed for adoption. She had been contacted by the adoptee now a young professional woman who was persisting in her quest for the birth father. The birth mother was very distressed and wanted to know what to do. Her own daughter from her later marriage who knew what her mother and aunt had suffered and had lived with that knowledge, said that if the birth mother did not tell the adoptee how she was conceived, she would. Adoptive parents later reported their daughter a bright happy young woman had committed suicide. The only unusual thing they found in her possession was a letter from Jigsaw. Whether it was the same adoptee no one can to know.
- For years the official Birth certificates of birth mothers and adopted persons were released without their permission or knowledge. A young Queensland man of Italian extraction, who did not know the Adoption records had been opened retrospectively, reported that his identity had been stolen as a result of his official birth certificate coming into the hands of relatives without his consent or knowledge. His bank accounts had been accessed and he had lost considerable sums of money. Title deeds of property had also been transferred. He was absolutely stunned to find such a thing could happen to him because he was an adopted person.
- Wife of a birth father reported that her husband had been contacted by a young woman who he had fathered when he was a teenager. The wife and her husband were happily married with young children. The adoptee reunited the birth father and birth mother who renewed their teenage romance. The birth father left his wife and small children to live with the birth mother who also left her husband and family.

- A mature male confronted an elderly spinster living in a nursing home. He called her “mother” much to her distress and embarrassment. She had no idea if he really was a child she placed for adoption some 50 years ago. She was relieved to be able to place a late Objection to Contact.
- A birth mother reported that she had been contacted by a young woman she had placed for adoption when she became pregnant as a teenager. The adoptee insisted on meeting her children and her husband. The birth mother found that the formerly close relationship she had shared with her own children was destroyed. Because of her own problems when young, the birth mother had brought up her children up with strict moral guidelines for behaviour and responsibility. Her children looked on her as a fallen idol, family dynamics were destroyed and her relationship with her husband was never the same again.
- A Birth Mother was contacted by the young man she placed for adoption as a baby, soon after the records were opened in 1991. For a short time the relationship was congenial between her and the adoptee and also with her daughter who lived with her. Before long the adoptee became aggressive and threatened the birth mother with violence. The birth mother lodged a late veto on contact but the threats and harassment continued. Officers of the Adoption Section told her to change her job. The birth mother eventually obtained the Minister’s permission required by law to instigate court proceedings against the adoptee. The magistrate found him guilty and placed him on probation (not the promised fines or jail terms). The harassment and threats continued against the birth mother and her daughter. The daughter who was an apprenticed hairdresser and was forced to move from Brisbane. The adoptee found her at her place of work on the Sunshine Coast threatening her and later on he broke into those premises and stole money. Court proceedings were instigated for the second time. The defence for the adoptee included evidence that he had behaved normally prior to finding his birth mother. The adoptee was once again placed on probation with stronger terms of supervision. In 2004 the birth mother reported she now lives alone still in fear of future reprisals. She has learnt that her daughter was in fact raped by the adoptee. The birth mother says that because of the continued trauma over the years she has lost all her family including her daughter.
- A young woman, who was an adopted person, rang in some distress to explain that she had been contacted by her birth mother some years ago. The birth mother was married with a young son. The adoptee did all she could to be considerate and maintain a cordial relationship with the birth mother and the son. When mother’s day came the young woman explained to the birth mother that that special day was for her own mother and that the birth mother’s special day would be the date of the day they first met. This compromise was not accepted by the birth mother and she created considerable distress. The birth mother had recently rung the adoptee at midnight abusing her over a trivial matter and attacking her upbringing. The adoptee said “she lost it completely” and the phone conversation finished with an unpleasant argument. She found it all terribly distressing and could not go to work the next day and felt an emotional wreck. She had tried so hard to be kind and loving all to no avail.

- A young man reported that when playing football, a young teenage girl came up to him in front of his friends and told him she was his half-sister. He was an adopted person and he was to discover that the young girl had lodged an application for information illegally using her mother's name.
- In 2000 an adoptee reported that she was being placed under pressure by an Officer of the Adoption Section to lift her "Objection". She was given letters written by the birth mother and was asked to come into the Department to receive a gift from the birth mother. She was accosted in the city street by the same Officer when she was with friends. The young woman showed the Officer concerned that in fact if she wanted to she could identify the birth family from the supposedly non identifying contained in the letters and how she herself could be identified by the non-identifying information given to birth relatives. This could be done quickly by using a computer at a public library. The Officer's response was "everyone is not computer literate". Subsequently the adoptee was to discover that in fact the birth family was already aware of her identity and that she was under surveillance.
- An adoptive mother reported that when she came down the aisle to take her place at her daughter's wedding her place was already taken by the birth mother and family.
- An adoptive family reported that they had been contacted by their son's birth mother. She was never out of their home even answering the phone as though she lived there.

An email from an Adoptive Mother;

Well i really don't know where to start, or even what what to say. My heart is broken and i just want to die. Nothing my husband or i did, the love the caring or sharing everything we had made a difference. it does not count you know. because of one person three families are torn apart, and no one cares , i don't understand why someone would want to do this, when you thought you were doing something good by taking these children, loving and caring for them as if they were your own. now it has all been taken away. I just don't know what to do. One question i asked was, does this woman care about what she has done, the answer i got was, why should she care, she got what she wanted. Anyway i guess nothing matters now, the damage is done. Thanks for listening...

FACTS AND FALLACIES

FALLACY All Adoptees have a need to know their biological origins

FACT

- **World wide only a small percentage of adoptees and fewer birth mothers actually seek information which will allow identification and a reunion.**

FALLACY Adoptive Parents do not bond to their children as biological parents do.

FACT

- **A compelling high percentage of adoptive parents experience strong attachment to their adopted child. A bond develops which, equates to that in a biological family.**

FALLACY. Reunions will make people whole, and not adversely affect family relationships.

FACT

- **Many reunions do not survive past the honeymoon stage, resulting in identity confusion, personality changes and broken families. On average once a week, a case of destabilisation or family traumas reported.**

FALLACY. Adoptees and Birth parents have an unconditional right to know the other party.

FACT.

- **The rights of all parties as defined by U.N. Charters should be respected and balanced one against another. No one right is unconditional.**

FALLACY. Adoptees do not have their own sense of identity.

FACT

- **Adoption has little impact on the identity formation process of the majority of adoptees. They have healthy levels of self-understanding and self-esteem. Adoption is not a major part of self-understanding it is, simply, a part of life that they accept.**

FALLACY. Adopted children are not as attached to their parents as naturally born children.

FACT

- **Adopted adolescents are as deeply attached to parents as are their non-adopted siblings and peers. One in three adoptive families have both adopted and naturally born children.**

FALLACY. Adoption does life long damage to all parties.

FACT

- **Adoption is a proven success for the vast majority of adopted persons. Most Birth parents go on to lead satisfactory new lives.**

FALLACY. At eighteen years of age young adults cease to be part of a family.

FACT.

- **Families are bonded for life. A family is bent by unique family experiences, what happens to one member of a family are of concern to all in a family.**

FALLACY. Adoptive Families are unstable and adoptive children are at risk.

FACT

- **Adoptive Families have a low divorce and separation rate. The child least likely to be abused is the child with adoptive parents.**

FALLACY. All Adoptees develop problems of social adjustment.

FACT.

- **Recent research shows adolescent adoptees are mostly better adjusted than their peers, with lower scores on risk factors such as drug and alcohol abuse (Growing Up Adopted. U. S. Research)**

FALLACY. Secrecy is an integral part of Adoption.

FACT

- **Parties to an Adoption were given a binding and legal undertaking of confidentiality. Proponents of open records have used the word "secrecy" to engender guilt and attack those who do not wish to search or reunite.**

FALLACY. Legislation promising fines and jail terms will prevent unwanted contact.

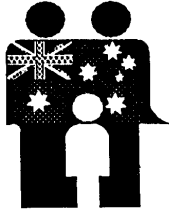
FACT.

- **Offenders who have broken the law in relation to vetos have only been put on remand and have re-offended**

FALLACY. Those who campaigned to open records maintained they only wanted to find biological relatives.

FACT.

- **Promoters of open records now seek to abolish adoption**



Adoption Privacy Protection Group Incorporated.

Represented - Adoptees, Adoptive
and Birth Parents

**THE ADOPTION PRIVACY PROTECTION GROUP
INC. WAS NOT OPPOSED TO THE RELEASE OF
IDENTIFYING INFORMATION OR CONTACT,
PROVIDED IT IS WITH THE *VOLUNTARY* WRITTEN
CONSENT OF BOTH PARTIES.**

One in Five Australians is affected by adoption

Profile

The ADOPTION PRIVACY PROTECTION GROUP INC. was a non political, non-sectarian, community based organisation, and is the only Adoption support Group which provided services for the mainstream adoption community and members of the public, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, factual information and personal support.

APPG Inc. Queensland was part of a Statewide network with Member Agencies in provincial cities. Independent branches operated in other states.

The Adoption Privacy Protection Group Inc. had no paid staff. During business hours throughout the year, phones were answered by trained volunteers who provided, without any charge or membership requirements, information, support and referral services. APPG Inc. was financed by unsolicited membership fees, donations and fund raising activities.

In 1990 following a groundswell of public opinion against the retrospective opening of confidential Adoption records, the Adoption Privacy Protection Group Inc. was formed. APPG Inc. provided a continuous telephone answering service for those in need of assistance. **APPG Inc. received over 5000 calls from Queensland citizens seeking help.** Systematic documentation of each incoming telephone call, in a non-identifying form has provided valuable data for analysis. Annually, the categories of callers, the content and nature of these incoming calls are classified. This analysis provides valuable information regarding the effects on the community of the retrospective opening of adoption records. Independent researchers and academics have expressed interest in these findings.

This analysis of incoming calls shows that on average, **at least once a week; a call is received from a person whose life has been adversely affected by the retrospective opening of adoption records.**

APPG always supported a Contact and Information Register as a dignified and cost effective way of facilitating reunions, and of updating medical and non-identifying information. APPG supported the release of identifying information provided it is with the voluntary written consent of both parties.