
Welcome

Dear members, colleagues and friends,

I hope you are keeping warm and well this winter. We are sending you this bulletin to provide a few updates and give you a heads up that our General Meeting will be on 22 September.

You will see that we will be running our counsellor training later this year. We are also offering a Zoom webinar on memoir writing next month and Art Therapy for Mothers in October which we hope you will consider signing up for.

The wonderful team here at VANISH continue to provide search and support services as well as support groups and reading resources, so please don't hesitate to contact us to register or find out more.

Warm regards,
Charlotte Smith, CEO

Save the Date!

VANISH Special General Meeting

Date: Friday 22 September 2023

Time: 4.00 to 6.00pm

Location: To be confirmed

This year's AGM is a Special General Meeting where VANISH members will be invited to vote on some amendments to our constitution. Please save the date and stay tuned for further details.

We look forward to seeing you!



Are you interested in joining the VANISH Committee of Management?

The VANISH Committee of Management comprises VANISH members with a relevant lived experience as well as skills or experience that can support the governance and leadership of VANISH.

There is currently a vacancy in the Biological or Natural Parent Category: "namely a natural parent, a donor parent or a surrogate mother of persons eligible for the offspring category of eligibility." We also welcome nominations in other categories.

We are looking for members with:

- a relevant lived experience,
- relevant Board/Committee skills and experience and/or a relevant skill set that will support VANISH to achieve its purpose and objectives, and
- personal alignment with VANISH values and policy positions.

All Committee of Management members are required to undergo security checks prior to appointment.

Nomination forms must be signed by a Committee member and accompanied by a biographical statement. Nominations must be delivered, posted or emailed to the Secretary via the VANISH office to be received no later than **5pm on Friday 8 September 2023**. Please call the VANISH office to obtain a nomination form.

If you are interested in joining the Committee of Management or would like further information, please contact VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith on (03) 9328 8611 or email manager@vanish.org.au

INTRO TO MEMOIR WRITING

With Dr Sian Prior



We all have interesting stories to tell about our lives – but how do we choose which ones are worth writing down?

VANISH members are invited to join us for a special webinar with Dr Sian Prior, author of two memoirs and the facilitator of our Writing as Therapy courses. In this webinar, Sian will introduce you to some of the key skills and decisions involved in crafting an engaging memoir.

- Which 'voice' (or voices) should you use to tell your story?
- How do you depict vivid 'characters' (including real people) on the page?
- What should you avoid when you're writing about the self?
- Who is your imagined reader, and what do they need to invest in your story?

There will also be time to ask Sian any questions you have about memoir writing.

Open to: All VANISH members

Date: Thursday 17 August 2023

Time: 7.00 – 8.30pm

Location: Zoom

Register to join the webinar here: bit.ly/memoirwebinar

ART THERAPY FOR MOTHERS

With Michele Hutchins

Our next in-person workshop is Art Therapy for Mothers, with art therapist and meditation teacher Michele Hutchins.

In this 6-week course, participants will play with different creative materials such as oil pastels, collage, clay, painting, and textiles, with opportunities to share personal insights with the group if they wish. No artistic skill is required!

Feedback from a previous participant: "Very worthwhile. You will be amazed. Just do it."

Date: Thursdays from 5 October to 9 November 2023

Time: 10:00am to 2:00pm (includes 30-min lunch break)

Location: MacLaren Hall, 45 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn

Register here: bit.ly/artformothers

or call us on (03) 9328 8611 or email info@vanish.org.au

These workshops are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through Relationships Australia Victoria's Forced Adoption Support Service.



Exceptional Circumstances Fund

The Exceptional Circumstances Fund for mothers closed on 23 June 2023 and applications received before that date are now being processed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Mothers who were successful in accessing the Fund have told us how beneficial it has been for them. We also know that some mothers were still preparing their applications or had only just heard about the Fund and we are disappointed for them that it could not be continued.

We have regularly enquired about when the redress scheme will start but have no news to share at this stage other than that the implementation team have completed their consultations and are working on the design. We will continue to keep you updated.

Integrated Birth Certificates in Victoria

Legislation passed in April 2002 regarding Integrated Birth Certificates (IBCs) comes into effect on 5th October 2023.

This is a new form of birth certificate which shows an adopted person's name and their parents both before adoption (at birth) and after adoption, combining the adoptee's full history in one official identity document. IBCs will be available for adopted people over 18 who choose to apply for them and will be free of charge.

Family information included on an adopted persons' IBC will reflect the information shown on their original birth certificate. **If the adopted person's father is not shown on their original birth certificate (which is common), it will not be included on the IBC.** If you wish to have your father's name added to your original birth certificate prior to applying for your IBC, you can apply through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDMs). You may also apply at a later date and then request for your IBC to be amended.

VANISH has received feedback from adopted people who have found adding their father to their original birth certificate to be complex, expensive and distressing. We have continued to advocate to BDMs to remove the requirement for legal/medical DNA evidence, in line with the Department's undertaking noted in the Inquiry report (p.268). We hope this will be resolved in good time.

New contact details for Adoption Information Services (AIS)

VANISH has recently been advised that the Victorian Government's Adoption Information Service (AIS) now has a dedicated phone number: **1300 194 757**

You can still contact them by email at: adoptionrecords@justice.vic.gov.au

All applications for adoption information are now made through the Adoption Information Service, following a recommendation from the Parliamentary Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria that records be centralised.

If you want to apply for information relating to an adoption, you can now download the application form on their website: justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/adoption/past-adoption/applying-for-adoption-information

The AIS has also updated their website to provide clearer information about:

- Applying for a birth certificate: justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/adoption/past-adoption/applying-for-a-birth-certificate
- Searching for family: justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/adoption/past-adoption/searching-for-family
- Annual adoption data: justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/adoption/annual-adoption-data
- The government's response to the inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria: justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/adoption/implementation-of-the-vic-gov-response-to-historical-forced-adoption

VANISH Counselling Scheme Extended

VANISH has just received additional funding from the Victorian Government to extend our critical counselling scheme. Through this scheme, VANISH can provide a referral to a counsellor from our register and pay for (or contribute towards) up to ten appointments. The scheme is open to adopted people, mother and fathers, whose separation and/or adoption occurred in Victoria or who now reside in Victoria, and who are facing barriers to accessing existing counselling services. Priority will be given to the people on our waiting list.

VANISH can also assist with referrals for individuals who would like counselling and do not require financial assistance. All counsellors on the VANISH register are qualified professionals with at least five years' experience in clinical practice, who have undertaken training related to past and forced adoption practices. Some have extensive experience working in this area.

If you have any questions about the scheme or would like to participate, please contact VANISH on 03 9328 8611 or info@vanish.org.au

VANISH Counsellor Training

VANISH will be offering our two-day counsellor training program **Working with Loss and Trauma Related to Past and Forced Adoption Practices** with Dr Sue Green in October or November this year.

Day One of the training is open to professionals in the health and community sector such as GP's, nurses, community support workers, case managers, drug and alcohol workers, and mental health professionals. Day Two is for counsellors, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists who are registered with a recognised professional association and have completed Day One.

Dates and costs will be announced on our website soon. If you would like to register your interest or would like more information, please contact us on 03 9328 8611 or info@vanish.org.au



New research about DNA testing

A new study into the use of DNA testing by people with an adoption or out-of-home care experience is being conducted by researchers from the University of Melbourne, with guidance from community partners VANISH, ARMS (Vic) and Open Place. The research project, entitled *The use and impacts of direct-to-consumer genetic testing and data platforms for family tracing after adoption or out of home care*, seeks to understand the experiences and outcomes for those using DNA testing, with the aim of improving supports for future users. It is funded by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute.

The research team will hold workshops in August to design the research questionnaire. Individuals who have used Direct To Consumer Genetic Testing or who have been contacted by someone who has, as well as those who assist people to access records or offer support, are invited to participate. VANISH will circulate the research questionnaire once it has been developed later this year.

If you would like more information about the workshops or if you are interested in participating, please email **Dr Jenny Conrick** at jeanette.conrick@unimelb.edu.au

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