



13 May 2026

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your emails of 17 February 2026 to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting information relating to historic studies on the Adult Adoption Information Act.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my response to your request below. I apologise for the delay in providing a response to you.

The Adult Adoption Information Act enabled adopted children and birth parents to access information about each other but allowed birth parents to request a veto on their information so that the child would not have access to the information. The Ministry can confirm that there was a research study in 1988, which led to the then Department of Social Welfare released report titled **Early Contact in Adoption**. This document is publicly available at the following link: [www.tehaorangahau.msd.govt.nz/search/show/270](http://www.tehaorangahau.msd.govt.nz/search/show/270).

There are 35 documents in scope of your request that will be released in full. These are outlined in **Appendix One**, attached to this letter.

There are six documents that will be released in part with some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information. These are also outlined in **Appendix One**.

The Ministry intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments on the Ministry's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Graham', written in a cursive style.

Anna Graham  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**

## Appendix One – Documents for release

<b>BEFORE STUDY</b>	
<b>No</b>	<b>Document</b>
1	19860127 Hand notes of Ross McKay
2	19860128 Letter to Registrar General re Recording of demographic details
3	19860806 Letter to participant
4	19860807 Letter to ADG Policy Development
5	19860820 Letter recording of demographic details on persons requesting a copy of Original BC
6	19860829 Memo to all independent counsellors or approved agencies
7	19860909 Letter from University of Auckland to DSW
8	19860912 Letter to Director of research section
9	19860919 Letter to Jenny Rockel re Research AAIA
10	19861002 Letter to A Corcoran re Request to submit a research proposal on birth mothers of adopted children
11	19861210 Memo Policy Development Division Planning Group
12	19870217 Research project on adoption early contact in adoption
13	19870402 Letter to Anna Coffey referral
14	19870402 Letter to Anna Coffey
15	19870407 A proposal for research and discussion of underlying factors concerning AAIA
16	19870723 Note for file
17	19880525 Letter to National Library of NZ re ISBN
18	19880609 Letter to DG of DSW re AAIA handbook
19	19880616 Letter to regional director re AAIA
20	Draft Agreement
21	Amendment to letter to birth parents

22	Memo to all adult adoption information officers
23	Notes – approach to research
24	Project proposal
25	Provision of demographic information on birth parents who seek identifying information
26	Statistics
<b>AFTER STUDY</b>	
<b>No</b>	<b>Document</b>
1	19881124 Report to the Minister of Social Welfare
2	19890530 Suggested national conference
3	19890623 Letter from University of Western Australia
4	19890830 Letter re National Conference
5	19890905 Memorandum permission to hold conference
6	19890912 Proposed national conference
7	19910226 Press clippings
8	19920310 Letter to NZ CYPS re the collection of monitoring information under AAIA

#### **Documents released in part**

<b>BEFORE STUDY</b>	
<b>No</b>	<b>Document</b>
1	19870324 Letter to Ann Corcoran
2	19870406 Letter from Anna Coffey to Ross Mackay
3	19870610 Letter to Ross Mackay
4	List of staff
5	19880530 AAIA Departmental Handbook
<b>AFTER STUDY</b>	
<b>No</b>	<b>Document</b>
1	19890904 National conference for Adult Adoption Information



To—  
 Mr Ketko,  
 Divisional Director,  
 Policy and Development.

RECORDING OF DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PERSONS MAKING APPLICATIONS  
 FOR A VETO ON INFORMATION RELATING TO AN ADOPTION

1. You will recall at the last meeting of the Research Review Committee (6 December 1985) I tabled a paper (ref: ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT: MONITORING OF ITS OPERATION, 5 December 1985) which recommended action to collect some monitoring information on the operation of the new Act which is scheduled to come into effect this year. A copy of that paper is attached.

2. The first two recommendations were concerned with designing a form and setting up a procedure to collect a small amount of demographic information about people (birth parents, adoptive parents) who made application for a veto on any information on the adoption being made available to the other party.

In pursuit of this, I visited the office of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Lower Hutt (on Wednesday 15 January) and consulted with the Deputy Registrar-General (Bob Appleford) and his E.O. (Heather Simpson). We reached agreement about the sort of information which could be provided by with ease by their office.

Subject

3. Accordingly and following the agreements reached in this discussion, I have designed two forms which are to be used to record (separately) the information required on birth parents and adopted persons making applications for a veto. I have also drafted a memorandum to Mr Appleford setting out the procedures to be followed in the collection of this information. I attach copies of the forms to be used and the memorandum to Mr Appleford.

4. The information required on the form is minimal and will not involve much additional work on the part of the Registrar-General's staff. The possibility of collecting further information (particularly on ethnic group and marital status) was discussed but discarded as involving difficulties which might compromise the utility of the data.

5. As will be evident from the attached document, this is a very simple exercise which will yield only very basic information on numbers and age/sex breakdowns of persons applying for vetoes. It is proposed that a more sophisticated approach be taken in pursuit of the third recommendation in my paper to the Research Review Committee, to collect information on people making requests for information about the other party to the adoption. A full proposal on this will be written for the Research Review Committee.

6. Could you please review the planned course of action with respect to the present exercise and seek the approval of Mr Manchester as Acting Director-General to it, before

Subject

I forward the memorandum and forms to Mr Appleford.

Recommendation:

- 7. It is recommended that approval be given for the attached memorandum to be forwarded to the office of the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages, seeking his co-operation in providing statistical information on persons making applications for a veto on information relating to an adoption; and that the attached forms be approved for the purpose of collecting this information.

Ross Mackay,  
Senior Research Officer.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

# Department of Social Welfare

S.W. 32

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666

Extension:

Reference: RES 4-47 :  
RM:EI

28 January 1986

The Registrar-General  
Births, Deaths and Marriages  
Department of Justice  
330 High Street  
LOWER HUTT

ATTENTION: Mr Appleford  
Deputy Registrar-General

## RECORDING OF DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PERSONS MAKING APPLICATIONS FOR A VETO ON INFORMATION RELATING TO AN ADOPTION

1. Following our discussion during my visit to your office on Wednesday 15 January, I have designed two forms to be used to record statistical information on persons applying for a veto on information relating to an adoption. The forms are simple and seek only basic demographic information of the type we discussed (sex date of birth of adopted person, age of birth parent at adoption) as well as details of who the veto applies to (birth mother only, birth father only, or both) in the case of adopted persons, and whether counselling was required.
2. Could I ask you to begin use of these forms from 1 March 1986, recording the information required for each application received. I am enclosing a stock of forms for your use.
3. Two separate forms have been provided: one for birth parents and one for adopted persons. The reason for this is that slightly different information is required in each case. Details of birth mothers and birth fathers are to be recorded (separately) on the birth parent form. The details of each veto application can be recorded on one line of the form, and each form can contain up to 15 entries.
4. A new form should be used for each month (the month and year to be entered in the top left corner). Continuation sheets for each month should be used when a sheet is full. At the end of each month, a copy of all sheets used for the month should be sent to the following address:-

The Director  
Research Section  
Head Office  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
WELLINGTON

5. Could I also ask you to insert in your action sheet for the clerical staff who will be processing the applications a step noting that the statistical information should be recorded on the appropriate form. Could you please also insert in the appropriate desk file an instruction to ensure the forwarding of the forms to me each month.
6. If you have any queries about the above, or if any difficulties arise with the forms or with the procedures for using them, please contact me.
7. Thank you for your co-operation on this exercise. I trust that it will provide information that will be useful to your office as well as to this Department.

Ross MacKay  
Senior Research Officer  
for Director-General

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

**dsw**

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666  
Extension:  
Reference:

6 August 1986

Dear Friend

RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

The Adult Adoption Information Act enables adopted persons and the birth parents of adopted persons to obtain original birth certificates and identifying information about each other. This will make it possible for adopted persons to trace their birth parents and for birth parents to trace children they have had adopted, if they so desire (as long as a veto has not been placed on this by the other party).

The Department of Social Welfare is interested in finding out how the Act works for people who want to obtain such information. In particular, we are interested to know how many people use the Act to trace the other party to the adoption, how successful their efforts to trace the other party are, how helpful the Department of Social Welfare is in the search, how useful any counselling they may receive is, and what the whole experience means for them.

We would like to obtain your consent to take part in a research study to find these things out. If you agree to take part, could I ask you to sign the attached consent form and fill in your name and address and mail it to the Research Section of the Department of Social Welfare in the attached envelope. In the future, a sample of people will be drawn from among all those who have made use of the provisions of the Act. If you are drawn in this sample, the Research Section of the Department will contact you and ask you to take part in a personal interview with a research interviewer. Any information you provide in the interview would be treated in the strictest confidence and would not be made available to anyone outside the research team.

As the study will involve only a sample of people, it is possible that your name will not be drawn and that you will not be contacted to take part in the research. What we are seeking is your consent to take part if your name is drawn. The success of the research will depend on a large number of people agreeing to take part, so that the information we obtain is representative. Therefore I ask that you consider this request for consent favourably.

Everyone who takes part in the research will receive a copy of any research report which is produced from this project.

Thank you for your co-operation.

J W Grant  
Director General

4L/57R

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY ON  
THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

I agree to take part in a research study on the Adult Adoption Information Act, if my name is drawn in the research sample. I understand that this means that I will be contacted by a member of the Research Section of the Department of Social Welfare and will be asked to take part in a personal interview with a researcher.

I understand that I will have the opportunity to decline to take part in the study when I am contacted by the Department, if I so decide.

I understand that any information I provide will not be made available to anyone outside the research team in a form that will identify me.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ (Block letters please)

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

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OFFICE USE: Reference No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

7 August 1986

Mr Nixon  
ADG (Policy Development)

RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

1 In January of this year, I arranged for the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages to provide the Research Section with basic demographic information about persons applying for a veto on information relating to an adoption under the terms of the Adult Adoption Information Act. The provisions of the Act relating to the placing of a veto on information came into effect on 1 March 1986, and the Registrar-General has been supplying the Research Section with the required information each month since then. I made these arrangements with Mr Bob Appleford, Deputy Registrar-General, and indicated to him that we might be interested in collecting further information when the remainder of the Act (relating to access to original birth certificates and identifying information) came into effect on 1 September 1986. A copy of my memorandum containing details of the arrangements is attached.

2 The 1 September date is now almost upon us. I consider it would be useful to collect similar information on persons who seek original birth certificates from the Registrar-General's office and also on people who seek identifying information from this Department. Ms Corcoran (AD Adoption and Fostering) and Ms Iwanek (Adult Adoption Information Officer) have both indicated a strong interest in observing such information. The recording to provide the information is a small task only and both the Deputy Registrar-General and the Adult Adoption Information Officer have indicated that they are willing to carry it out.

3 Further to this, Ms Corcoran and Ms Iwanek have suggested to me that it would be extremely useful to undertake some research over the next year to monitor the working of the new Act - for example examining how many people are making use of its provisions, what population of people attempt to make contact with their birth parents (or conversely the child they had adopted out), how helpful the Department was in the search, how useful any counselling they may have received was and what the whole experience meant for them.

4L/61R

4 To develop a research proposal on this would require careful consideration, but it would probably involve making contact with people who had requested original birth certificates from the Registrar-General or identifying information from this Department. As this part of the Act comes into effect on 1 September 1986, it is timely to think about setting up a procedure now which would allow a sample of such people to be drawn subsequently if any research were to proceed. One approach could be to seek consent to participate in a research project from people as they require information from either the Registrar-General's office or from this Department. This would be done by providing them with a briefing letter and a consent form which they could be asked to return to the Research Section. Subsequently a sample of cases could be drawn from among the people who had given consent to participate in the study.

5 I have drafted some material to implement these matters, comprising:

- (i) a briefing letter to inform people about the research
- (ii) a consent form to be signed by people who agree to take part
- (iii) a memorandum to the Registrar-General, seeking his assistance in recording demographic information and providing letters and consent forms to adopted persons
- (iv) a memorandum to our Adult Adoption Information Officer seeking assistance in recording demographic information and providing letters and consent forms to birth parents
- (v) forms to collect the required demographic information

6 If we action this material now, it would provide us with demographic information on persons seeking access to information under the terms of the new Act, and allow us subsequently to carry out some research involving people who had made use of this aspect of the legislation. The matter of recording demographic details on persons seeking information under the Act is a small matter and will cost little in terms of resources. The other matter about seeking the consent of people to take part in the study may need more serious thought. My view is that it would be extremely useful to carry out some research on this sometime next year. (This Act makes radical changes to the whole practice of adoption and it would be valuable to have

information about how people are affected by it.) Unless we make provision to allow for the capture of a sample in time for the 1 September date, we will not be in a position to carry out any such research.

7 Would you please give consideration to this matter and let me know whether you think we should proceed. You may want to consult Mr Manchester (ADG Social Work Services) who gave approval for the first part of this to proceed. (Copy of the original approval is also attached.)

8 I am to be on leave from tomorrow Friday 8 August until next Friday 15 August. As this leaves only a couple of weeks before the 1 September date, we will need to take quick action if this is to proceed.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research

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# Department of Social Welfare

S.W. 32A

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

dsw

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666  
Extension:  
Reference:

20 August 1986

The Registrar-General  
Births Deaths and Marriages  
Department of Justice  
330 High Street  
LOWER HUTT

Attention: Mr R Appleford  
Deputy Registrar-General

RECORDING OF DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS ON PERSONS REQUESTING A COPY  
OF THE ORIGINAL BIRTH CERTIFICATE UNDER THE ADULT ADOPTION  
INFORMATION ACT AND REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

1 You will recall my earlier memorandum to you (28 January 1986) which requested your office to set up a procedure to collect some basic demographic information on persons applying for a veto on information relating to an adoption. I am now asking that a similar procedure be set up to collect information on persons seeking a copy of the original birth certificate, under the provisions of the Adult Adoption Information Act. The information sought is similar to that sought in the earlier exercise.

Recording of demographic information

2 I have designed a form to collect information on adopted persons who request a copy of the original birth certificate from your office. (It will not be necessary to use a second form for birth parents as was done in the earlier exercise, since birth parents do not need to approach your office, but come direct to the Department of Social Welfare.) Could I ask you to begin use of these forms from 1 September 1986, when the Act comes into effect. I am enclosing a stock of forms for your use.

3 A new form should be used for each month (the month and year to be entered in the top left corner). Continuation sheets for each month should be used when the sheet is full. At the end of each month, a copy of all sheets used for the month should be sent to the following address:

The Director  
Research Section  
Head Office  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
WELLINGTON

4L/60R

Request for consent to take part in research

- 4 As part of our monitoring of the operation of the Adult Adoption Information Act, we are interested in carrying out a research study involving a sample of people who make use of the provisions of the Act. It would be useful to seek the consent of people to take part in such a study when they contact your office for a copy of the original birth certificate. This will enable us to draw a representative sample of people who make use of the Act, and will allow us to investigate what proportion of these people proceed further in attempting to trace the other party.
- 5 I have drafted a letter explaining the research and a form seeking consent to take part. Could I ask you to provide each person who approaches your office for a copy of the original birth certificate with a copy of the attached letter, consent form and return addressed envelope. These could be provided to the adopted person along with the original birth certificate. Could you please also ensure that the file reference number is written on the bottom of the consent form (in the space provided) before the form is provided to the adopted person.
- 6 Could I also ask you to insert details of action required in your action sheets for the staff who will be processing the applications for original birth certificates - i.e. that the statistical information should be recorded on the attached form, that a copy of the attached letter, consent form and return-addressed envelope should be provided to the person seeking a copy of the original birth certificate, and that the file reference number should be recorded on the bottom of the consent form before providing it to the adopted person.
- 7 If you have any queries about the above, or if any difficulties arise with the forms or procedures for using them, please contact me.
- 8 Thank you for your co-operation with this exercise. I trust that it will provide information that will be useful to your office as well as to this Department.

Yours sincerely

Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General



29 August 1986

ALL INDEPENDENT COUNSELLORS/APPROVED AGENCIES

RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

- 1 The Research Section is to carry out some research as part of the Department's monitoring of the operation of the Adult Adoption Information Act. I am asking for your assistance with this research by providing some basic demographic information on adopted adults who require counselling and birth parents who seek identifying information under the Act; and by seeking the consent of these people to take part in a follow-up interview with a research staff member.

Recording of demographic information

- 2 The attached forms are for recording the required demographic information on adopted persons and birth parents respectively. The information is limited to basic demographic variables (age and sex), and should not involve much recording work. Could I ask you to record the required details for each adopted adult for whom you provide counselling and for each birth parent who approaches the Department for identifying information from 1 September 1986, when the Act comes into effect. One line of the form should be used to record the required details for each person. I am enclosing a stock of forms for your use.
- 3 A new form should be used for each month (the month and year to be entered in the top left corner). Continuation sheets for each month should be used when the sheet is full. At the end of each month, a copy of all sheets used for the month should be sent to:

The Director  
Research Section  
HEAD OFFICE

Request for consent to take part in research

- 4 We are also interested in following up a sample of persons who make use of the Act, and conducting in-depth interviews with them about their experience under the Act. I have drafted a letter explaining the research and a form seeking

4L/60R

consent to take part. Could I ask you to provide each adopted person for whom you provide counselling and each birth parent who approaches your office for identifying information with a copy of the attached letter and consent form. It would be useful if the form could be signed by the person before leaving your office. Otherwise the form could be taken away and mailed direct to the Research Section at the above address.

- 5 Could you please forward all signed consent forms at the end of each month to the Research Section at the above address. These can be mailed together with the returns of demographic information. When you run out of forms and letters, could you please photocopy a further supply using your office copying machine.
- 6 If you have any queries about the above, or if any difficulties arise with the forms or procedures for using them, please contact me. Thank you for your co-operation with this exercise.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General

Released under the Official Information Act 1982





## THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

PRIVATE BAG AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND TELEPHONE 737-999

Department of Psychology

9 September 1986

The Director  
Regional Social Work Services  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
AUCKLAND

Attention - Mr. R. Benjamin & Ms M. Shaw

Dear Sir,

Request to submit a research proposal on birth mothers

Following discussions with Mr. Benjamin and Ms Shaw over the past two months, the writers would like to indicate their desire to undertake research as to the benefits that may ensue for birth parents under the provisions of the Adult Adoption Act 1985. The research would be conducted by Ms M. V. Hogg, student, under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Field, Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Auckland. Ms Hogg is currently enrolled for a Master of Arts degree and a Diploma of Clinical Psychology. She was formerly employed as a generic social worker for the Department of Social Welfare, Auckland, from May 1981 until November 1984. The research would be in accord with the requirements of a thesis for a Master of Arts degree.

A full research proposal can not be submitted until January 1987 as a result of Ms Hogg's academic commitments in the 1986 year. However, it is envisaged that the research would be of similar design to that conducted by Winkler and Van Keppell at the University of Western Australia and reported in a paper entitled Adjustment of Relinquishing Mothers in Adoption. In order that this research be undertaken in 1987 the writers are seeking to know: (1) whether this is an area not already under investigation by other New Zealand researchers; and (2) whether approval in principle could be given by the Director-General of Social Welfare for access to information of birth parents, in the Auckland region, who apply for information under the Adult Adoption Act 1985 and who subsequently make contact with their adopted son/daughter.

It is envisaged that birth parents volunteering to take part in this research would be interviewed or sent questionnaires before and after a meeting with their adopted son/daughter.

2/...

9 September 1986

The Director  
Regional Social Work Services  
Department of Social Welfare  
AUCKLAND

Attention - Mr. R. Benjamin & Ms M. Shaw

Information that they provide would be treated in a strictly confidential manner and would be identified only by code number, never by name. The support and guidance of the Regional social workers at the Auckland office would be of great assistance in this work.

No application for a research grant is being sought from the Department of Social Welfare; however if this financial assistance was available this would be greatly appreciated.

Three copies of this letter are enclosed for forwarding, with your consent, to the Director-General and Ms A. Corcoran and Mr. A. Mitchell.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Jeff Field

*Jeff Field*

Ms Virginia Hogg

*M. V. Hogg*

→ *Ross McKay*  
*Mary Iwanek*

*For your comments please*

Encls.

*Chris Lawrence*

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



# Department of Social Welfare

District Office, Private Bag, Christchurch

**dsw**

Telegrams:  
Distwel,  
Telephone: 795-100  
Extension: 820  
Reference: JR : JJB

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION CENTRE  
4th Floor  
Development House  
200 Cashel Street

12 September 1986



The Director  
Research Section  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
Postal Centre  
WELLINGTON

Dear Mr Mackay,

I would be grateful for clarification of some issues regarding the research project for which you have asked assistance.

- (1) Your letter requests demographic details of both birth parents and adult adoptees seeking counselling under the Act, but the recording forms supplied refer only to adoptees. Am I correct in assuming that Head Office will be responsible for collecting details about birth parents, given the fact that all birth parent applications for identifying information will be made through Head Office?
- (2) Do you want details only of adoptees for whom this office receives birth certificates? What about those who nominate one of us as counsellor, but receive a vetoed birth certificate and seek counselling to deal with this, or who are considering placing a veto and seek counselling on this matter?

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

*Jenny Rockel*

(Jenny Rockel)  
Part-time Senior Social Worker

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666  
Extension:  
Reference:

dsw

RES 4.47

19 September 1986

Ms Jenny Rockel  
Part-time Senior Social Worker  
Adult Adoption Information Centre  
CHRISTCHURCH

## RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

- 1 I reply to your letter of 12 September 1986 seeking clarification of my previous memorandum relating to planned research on the Adult Adoption Information Act. In reply to your first query, you are asked to provide demographic details on adult adoptees only as information on birth parents is being collected at Head Office. It was only after the memorandum was drafted that I realised all birth parent applications for identifying information were to be handled by Head Office, and that this would be a more convenient collection point. I neglected subsequently to delete the reference to birth parents in my memorandum. I apologise for any confusion this may have caused.
- 2 In relation to your second query, we require information on all adult adoptees for whom counselling is provided in respect of a request for an original birth certificate. This would cover both adoptees for whom a birth certificate is produced and those for whom the certificate has been vetoed. It is important that the latter group be included, as any research on people's experiences under this Act will need to cover those people who met with a veto when seeking information.
- 3 Persons who are considering placing a veto on information and who receive counselling in relation to this should not be included, however. We are already collecting demographic information on people who place a veto on the birth certificate through the Registrar-General's office. Your assistance is required only in respect of people who make use of the provisions of the Act relating to obtaining information, and not provisions concerned with placing a veto.

4L/117R

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

- 4 I hope this has served to clarify our requirements. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

2 October 1986

Ann Corcoran  
Assistant Director  
ADOPTIONS AND FOSTERING

REQUEST TO SUBMIT A RESEARCH PROPOSAL ON BIRTH MOTHERS OF  
ADOPTED CHILDREN

1 You asked for my comments on the request from Dr Jeff Field and Ms Virginia Hogg relating to research on birth mothers who subsequently make contact with their adopted son/daughter. Dr Field and Ms Hogg ask:

- (i) whether this is an area not already under investigation by other New Zealand researchers; and
- (ii) whether approval in principle could be given by the Director-General of Social Welfare for access to information on birth parents in the Auckland region who apply for information under the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and who subsequently make contact with their adopted son/daughter.

2 The answer to the first suggestion, as far as this Department is concerned, is yes and no. As you are aware, the Research Section has given some thought to the development on a research project in this area. A procedure has been established to seek the consent of adopted parents and birth parents who request information about each other to take part in a follow-up research project. The Research Section is putting forward a suggestion to senior departmental management that such a project be taken on to the formal research programme. However, as yet, no approval has been given for the research project to proceed, and it will be considered alongside a number of other suggestions which will all be competing for the available research resource. Thus, arrangements have been put in place to allow a research project to proceed if approved, but approval has not yet been given.

3 I have no knowledge of other planned research in this area by researchers outside the Department.

4 In terms of the second question, I consider that more information should be sought from Dr Field and Ms Hogg as to the nature, size and design of their intended research. As the topic of adoption can involve matters of some sensitivity, it

15L/136R

would be prudent to give such permission only where the Department can be assured that the approach is a well-considered and sensitively managed one. Before making any decision on this, it would be necessary to ascertain:

- (i) the aims and objectives of the research;
- (ii) the required sample size numbers of people to be approached to take part in the study;
- (iii) how the approach to prospective research subjects would be managed, and what the precise wording of the first approach would be;
- (iv) the details of the particular questions to be asked of the research subjects;
- (v) how the information is to be treated in any account of the project.

To satisfy these requirements, it would be necessary for Dr Field and Ms Hogg to submit to the Department a detailed research proposal, together with drafts of questionnaires and letters making the first approach to prospective research subjects.

5 As the information on adoptions that is held by the Department is confidential, it would not be possible simply to pass over a list of names and addresses to Dr Field and Ms Hogg. It would be necessary for the Department to make first contact with prospective research subjects asking if they would be willing to take part in a research project. If they give consent, then they could be put in contact with the researchers. This is a procedure which has been used in the past when providing outside researchers with assistance in research on a population of DSW clients. As long as the Department can be satisfied of the integrity of the research proposal, there is no reason why this procedure shouldn't be adopted in the present instance.

6 In this case, however, there is an additional complicating circumstance in that the Research Section has already made an approach to birth parents seeking consent to take part in its research project (if approved). The question is what difficulties will arise with two possible research projects in this area. In part, the answer depends on what volume of people make approaches to the Department under the terms of the Act, and what numbers of people Dr Field and Ms Hogg will require in their research sample. If the latter number is small in relation to the former, there should be no real problem as there will be a sufficient pool of potential subjects to allow both projects to proceed. If the latter is large in relation to the former, then some compromise would need to be made in the sampling of either or both of the

projects. This matter can possibly be considered subsequently when Dr Field and Ms Hogg have provided additional information on their intended research project.

7 Any approach which the Department made to people seeking consent to take part in this project would need to be restricted to those individuals who have already given consent to the Department's own request. This might cause some difficulty in avoiding confusion between the two projects. This, however, would not be an insuperable difficulty, and could be managed by means of an appropriately worded letter about the project. Given the volume of response to the request for consent already made by the Research Section, it would appear that people who have experienced adoption are keen to participate in this type of research.

8 If the project is to proceed, it would be necessary to secure the agreement of the researchers to a number of conditions regarding confidentiality of the information, provision of draft versions of intended reports to the Director-General for vetting prior to publication, and so on. The Research Section has a standard quasi-legal agreement form to cover cases such as this. I attach a copy for your information.

9 In summary, I suggest that Dr Field and Ms Hogg be required to provide further information on their intended research plan in line with the points in paragraph 4 above before any approval is given. If the researchers can demonstrate that their approach to the research would be well considered and sensitively managed, then I consider they should be provided with assistance by the Department.

10 If you wish to discuss any of these points further do not hesitate to contact me.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research

10 December 1986.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION PLANNING GROUP

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

1. Attached is a memorandum I have received from Ann Corcoran, Assistant Director (Adoptions and Fostering), in support of the proposal to extend the work currently being carried out by the Research Section on the Adult Adoption Information Act, with further endorsement by Brian Manchester, Assistant Director-General (Social Work Services). I attach also a copy of the original document proposing the extension of the work, which was tabled but not considered at the initial meeting of the Planning Group.

Ross Mackay,  
Director Research.

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ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT PROPOSED EXPANSION OF RESEARCH

Further to Ross McKay's proposal on the above matter, I wish to make the following points:

1. <sup>From</sup> At the time the Act was fully implemented on 1 September 1986, adult adoptees and birth parents using both Departmental social workers and independent counsellors appointed under S.12 of the Act, have been <sup>asked</sup> asking if they would agree to be involved in further research and if so asked to sign a form to that effect. It is a measure of their interest that there has been a tremendous response to that request which means that there is already a "client population" available.

2. The Adult Adoption Information Act took some seven years to be passed which, I believe, showed the measure of concern felt by community generally at its provisions.

The Department, therefore has, I believe, a responsibility to have a quick follow-up so that we can rectify any mistakes and make any changes either by way of submission to the Justice Department for legislative changes or by changes in practice.

3. The Adoption Act 1955 is coming up for review and if the research revealed areas that could be changed it may be possible to use this Act to bring legislative changes for the Adult Adoption Information Act.

4. In this Act, birth parents have been given legislative rights that are unique in the Western World, even Great Britain in their 1976 Legislation did not include birth parents.

It is therefore a unique opportunity for New Zealand research to be available for the guidance of other countries should they wish to move along similar lines.

5. Effective research has the possibility of leading to changes in allocation of resources for this and other legislation, for example is the compulsory counselling really necessary?

How effective was the publicity? Did it reach and affect the population it needed to meet?

Who used the freephone? - is it an essential part of the successful launching of a new programme?

6. Demographic information has already been collected not only related to who has used the Department's services but who is seeking information from the Registrar-General's Office. This together with a population which has agreed to be followed up means that the information needed is freely available.

This project is strongly supported.

Mr McKay,  
Director,  
Research

I fully support follow up research in clarification of the effect of the statutory provisions, services and procedures introduced by the Adult Adoption Information Act.

R. J. Marchant  
A.D.G. (S.W.)  
11/11/86

## ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT - PROPOSED EXPANSION OF RESEARCH

### Background

The Assistant Director Adoptions and Fostering and an Adult Adoption Information Officer suggested it would be useful to collect information on the functioning of the Adult Adoption Information Act as it comes into effect. The Act makes considerable changes to the whole process of adoption and it was seen as important to have information on how people are affected by and are reacting to the changes. In December 1985 the Research Review Committee agreed to the collection of basic demographic data on adopted people and birth parents placing a veto, those applying for identifying information or an original birth certificate, and those receiving counselling. Consent of adopted people and birth parents to take part in further research on the Act, involving interviews, was also sought at the time of counselling.

### Objectives

It is proposed to expand the current research on the Adult Adoption Information Act (collection of demographic data) to carry out interviews with adopted people and birth parents requesting information, to determine how the new procedures are working and the experiences of people requesting information or contact under the Act. It is intended to describe the experiences of adopted people and birth parents seeking information and contact, in areas such as - the numbers actively seeking contact, achieving contact, or finding a veto on information; reasons for seeking contact and information; the process of making the request and receiving the result; the usefulness of and any difficulties experienced in counselling; the help and support wanted and gained from the Department of Social Welfare; how contact was arranged; the amount and type of contact; and the value of and difficulties encountered in making contact and receiving information.

### Design of Research

It is intended that information on experiences in seeking contact would be collected using individual in-depth interviews with adopted people and birth parents. A sample of adopted people and a sample of birth parents could be drawn from those who returned consent forms and indicated willingness to participate in further research. In order to gather data on the result of the adopted person's or birth parent's search, there will need to be a time lapse between implementation of the Act and the holding of the interview. Alternatively, it may be possible to hold a first interview at the start of, or during the process of requesting information or contact and subsequently carry out a follow-up interview on the outcome and value of the search.

The time frame, staff and resources needed will be dependent on the number and length of interviews to be conducted. However,

the interviewing could be labour and time intensive in the schedule design, piloting, actual interviewing, analysis and transcription (if tapes were used). Given this, another alternative method of collecting the information would be to conduct a postal questionnaire survey of all or a sample of those who returned consent forms. The addresses of those willing to participate are included on the consent forms, therefore posting out material would not be difficult. A small number of follow-up, in-depth interviews could then be held to supplement the survey data, provide more in-depth information on some issues, and provide some checks on issues arising in questionnaires.

#### Use of Results

The research results would be useful in finding out any difficulties experienced in the procedures for counselling, requesting information and contact, as well as where the particular strengths and benefits are in the procedures. The results may indicate areas where changes are needed, and whether the procedures and operation of the Act are meeting the needs of and are appropriate to people requesting information and contact.

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Ann Corcoran

Attached is a brief description of the Early Contact in Adoption Project. I would be more than willing to cover all of these subject areas in a seminar/workshop presentation, or you may wish a presentation to focus on a subject that is of particular concern to you.

I anticipate that for the DSW presentation two hours should be sufficient to present some of the main findings of the project and allow for questions and discussion.

I would be happy to make a presentation to the Adoption Conference in Hamilton. I would prefer a format where I presented findings of interest to a group followed by questions and discussion among participants.

Clare Dominick  
Research Section

17 February 1987

20L/300R

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Research Project on Adoption

TITLE: EARLY CONTACT IN ADOPTION

This study is an interview survey of 65 birthmothers and 156 adoptive parents (78 female, 78 male), for whom a Final Adoption Order was made in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Four general areas of concern have been investigated in this project.

- (1) The extent of contact between the birthmothers and adoptive parents (in the four district offices surveyed).
- (2) The birthmothers and adoptive parents experiences of contact (or lack of contact) with each other. This includes information on pre-adoption discussions and feelings about contact; meetings between the parties; experiences of and satisfaction with post-adoption contact.
- (3) The birthmothers' experience of grieving and whether contact had positively or negatively affected their feelings.
- (4) Whether contact had affected the adoptive parents feelings of entitlement towards the child and their attitude towards informing the child of his/her origins.

Principal researcher: Clare Dominick  
Research Section  
Head Office  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
WELLINGTON

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Anna Corcoran  
9(2)(a)

24 March 1987

Ann Corcoran  
Assistant Director of Adoption and Fostering  
Head Office  
Wellington

Dear Ann,

You will find enclosed a graph I have constructed from an analysis - some based on memory, most based on logged notes made at the time - of conversations with adopted people.

I have done this for several reasons:

1. It gives us a basis for later comparisons; interviews, however well conducted and designed, produce artifacts, because the technique is a social process, not a clinical measurement of a subject, and bias will enter the resulting data. (We will try to minimise this by thoroughly training the collectors).
2. Research is a structured process - it has to be. What not uncommonly happens is that a social science researcher constructs (out of impressions or even out of the blue) a conceptual hypothesis, and then designs research to test that conception - which may be unfounded or not. This has certainly happened in our field of interest; Triseliotis is one example that readily springs to mind. So the first sort of bias is that which is actually imposed by the researcher's own concept - and can easily have a profound influence on the findings.

I think we are fortunate here, however, because we have an opportunity to explore the difference, if there is any, between the information given to a non-researcher (that is, myself, in the role of a listener to other adopted people) and a researcher - in the formal role. We can compare and contrast the results.

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...2

3. I am seeking feedback from Independent Counsellors, Birth Parent Counsellors, Adult Adoption Information Officers and other people who have a long term community involvement in adoption on their experience of reasons given for the need to search. That the experiences may vary is to be expected: we all have different personalities, and we are wearing (from the respondent's point of view) "different hats"; it may transpire that these differences don't occur - either way, this data performs the two-fold purpose of eliminating the need for qualitative, unstructured depth interviewing often done in this kind of research to establish the parameters in which the conceptual hypotheses will lie.

This will give us a stronger basis for ultimately comparing our findings with researchers in other countries - who have, in the main, had to operate within the restrictions mentioned. Few have bothered to conduct any preliminary unstructured work at all, instead formulating hypotheses from the basis of the "myths" - either to counter them, or confirm them. That has greatly limited the room to manoeuvre within the research context. Exceptions exist, such as the work of Sorosky, Baran and Pannor; so it will be interesting to observe later on, to which group our findings best approximate.

The graph is by no means definitive - I mean it to be a basis for discussion and comparison with your experience and Mary's, and others in whom you have confidence operating in the Wellington area.

The graph is not intended as a total statement - it ignores the interactions between adopted people and the social/familial context which has influenced their motivational position at the time of talking to me, and that context has to be addressed ultimately.

I found it very surprising, when I performed the analysis, to see that the categories did fall into the "normal curve" characteristic of human populations, a "normal curve" is a theoretical distribution that would result if an infinitely large sample of randomly chosen subjects were collected and studied. We can quickly see from it where the central tendency lies, and compare this against the sample we eventually use, noting similarities and discrepancies.

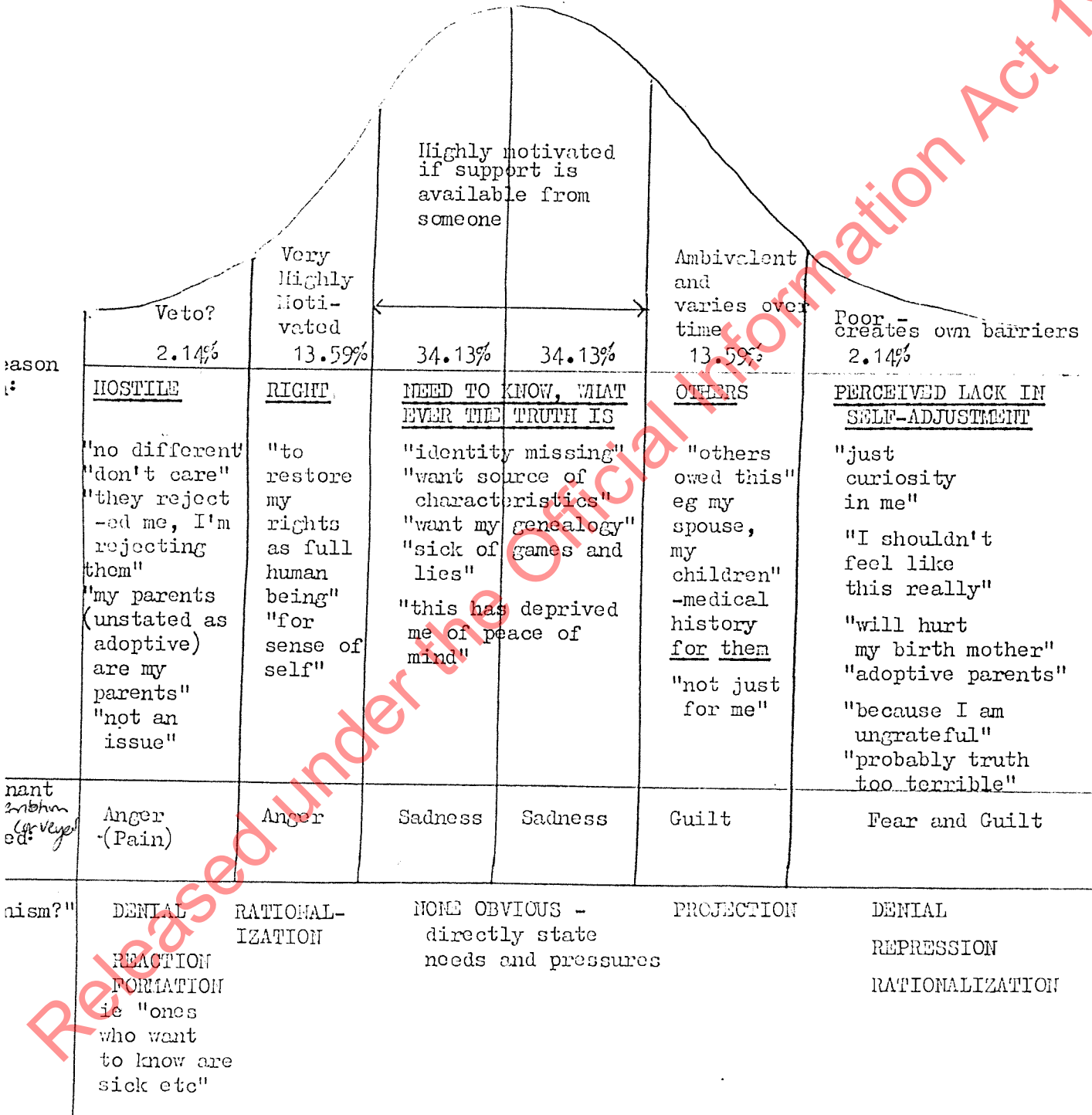
Lastly, would it be possible for me to have the consent-to-research forms (or copies of the data on them, so that I can look at the area distributions and make more notes on an appropriate sampling strategy.

All the best,

*Anna Coffey*

A THEORETICAL NORMAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE "NEED TO KNOW" BASED  
UPON 2½ THOUSAND UNSTRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS 1971-1987

Search/non-Search  
Motivation



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# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

**dsw**

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666  
Extension:  
Reference:

2 April 1987

Anna Coffey  
5/87 Speight Road  
St Heliers  
AUCKLAND 5

Dear Anna

Ann Corcoran has referred your letter of 24 March 1987 to the Research Section.

At our meeting of last month, it was agreed that you would prepare a proposal for research on the Adult Adoption Information Act which we would then meet to discuss with you. The proposal was to include detail on:

- (i) the issues you propose to investigate and the specific objectives of the Research;
- (ii) the ways in which you intend to address these issues (i.e. the research design);
- (iii) how you intend to gather the information (for example un/structured interviews, questionnaires, etc);
- (iv) where original collection is envisaged, details of the sampling frame (adoptees/birth parents, regionally/nationally based) and sample numbers;
- (v) forms of data analysis;
- (vi) a time budget for the project.

When we have agreed on these aspects of the proposal, staff in the Research Section will draw a sample based on the project specifications. You will then be provided with contact names and addresses. As the consent forms were provided to the Research Section under an agreement that they would be kept confidential except for the purposes of follow-up research, it is important that they be retained in the Research Section. Furthermore, as we will wish to do further work in the future to monitor the operation of this Act which will involve further sampling from this pool of people, it is important that we maintain oversight over the names of people who have already been contacted in relation to earlier work. I would expect

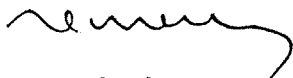
21L/367R

that the number of people you will be able to interview will be relatively small, so that this will not affect greatly the prospects of future random sampling.

I am unsure about the usefulness or application to this project of the graph you provided. The underlying dimension is unclear and does not appear to represent a continuum of high to low motivation with respect to the need to search. Furthermore, the hypothetical construction of a theoretical statistical curve from unsystematically gathered and nonquantitative data poses difficulties. My view is that it will be most fruitful to proceed with the development of a concrete proposal at this point.

We look forward to receiving your project proposal and discussing it with you.

Yours sincerely



Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

dsw

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Headwel, Wellington  
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21L/367R

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We look forward to receiving your project proposal and discussing it with you.

Yours sincerely



Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General

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Anna Coffey

9(2)(a)

6 April 1987

Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General  
Department of Social Welfare  
Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, WELLINGTON

Dear Ross

Thank you for your letter 2 April which I received today.

There appears to have been a misunderstanding: you appear to have been under the impression that the distribution I furnished to Ms Corcoran was a Research Proposal - when in fact it was intended as a discussion base for use amongst adoption workers, and by no stretch of the imagination was it intended to be interpreted in any other way.

However, I am of the view that qualitative work is ultimately compatible with formal research, in terms of a whole perspective. I look forward to responses from other counsellors on the issue as a matter of personal interest. It was to them, primarily, that the "graph" was intended.

I take your point that consent forms were provided for the purpose of follow-up research. As I am part of the research team, I am not certain of the difficulty in giving me access to them, which can be clarified in due course. I appreciate your concern over losing them, however copies would be just as useful, and I am happy to supply full details of which subjects are sampled, when and how, so that your proposed future work maintains oversight.

You must have thought me very foolish indeed in your appraisal of the motivational distribution, and I therefore understand the tone of your response. I trust the matter is now clarified.

I look forward to meeting you in Wellington during the coming week. I apologise for my part in creating the misunderstanding.

Yours sincerely

Anna

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Received via Ann Corcoran.  
Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 1987

A PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH AND A DISCUSSION OF UNDERLYING FACTORS

CONCERNING THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

ANNA COFFEY B.A. (Psych.)

C. 1987 A B Coffey

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION: THE PROVISIONS OF THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

AND THE "HARD TO KNOW"

Anna Coffey, Research Officer  
Department of Social Welfare  
New Zealand

The process of adoption has been "normalised" by law and practice in New Zealand since 1881. In September 1985 the New Zealand Legislature granted adopted adults and birth parents conditional access to identifying information. By statute these conditions included being of qualifying age, undergoing a formal procedure of "compulsory counselling" and the absence of a veto placed by another party to the adoption, excepting adoptive parents or unregistered birth fathers.

The general scope of this research project is to investigate the context and identify factors which influenced the making of applications under the provisions of the Act (with particular focus upon Section 4, concerning adult adopted applicants requesting original birth certificates) and the experiences of clients during and after the application for identifying information, including provisions governing access to subsidiary information.

Varying opinions exist as to whether a desire for identifying information is the result of "unsatisfactory" adoptive experience (Triseliotis 1973) or arises from the experience of adoption itself within the context of complete or partial "secrecy" (Day 1979, Haines and Timms 1983, Frisk 1964). Haines and Timms observe that a particular difficulty exists in studying adopted subjects.

When viewed from the "standpoint" of their psychological experience of being adopted, the process by which they are "socially differentiated" and its effects are ignored, and studies in isolation extend the process. Triseliotis suggested that search intention indicated unsatisfactory adoption experience (intra-familial), but other studies found no connection of this kind. Adoption experience is more related to the hopes held for events following reunion. (Thompson et al, 1978).

1 Compulsory counselling is mandatory for adoptees only

Although great significance has been given in past research to "age of telling" as a primary determinant of later efforts to obtain information, little attention has been paid to other variables which may be significant, such as the composition of the adoptive families (for example, whether composed of adopted-only or birth/adopted children), the age of placement, former ease or difficulty in obtaining any information about one's origins, positive or negative impressions of birth parents being supplied by adopters and the degree of communication within families concerning the general area of birth, conception and sexual matters. Some of these issues have been peripherally explored by Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978), though the degree of clarification remains vague in the research works as a whole. That adoption is not a process essentially no different from bringing up children born within the family is indicated strongly by the preferences intending parents express for the sex of child they wish to parent, adopters showing a major preference for girls in contrast to non-adopters preferring boys. (Oakley 1979) (Private conversations: Mary Eccles, Department of Social Welfare, Auckland; Major Eunice Eichler, Bethany Hospital, Salvation Army, Auckland). Whether adoption affects boys and girls differentially has been little explored except in the limited context of learning disability and related disorders (Kirk and Fish 1966; Scheppers 1975; Simon and Senturia 1966), and where "pathology" is a precondition of subject selection. Sachdev (1984, 1985) explored the "myths" of adoption using a large Canadian sample selected randomly. These myths are generally expressed as:

- "The birthmother obviously doesn't care about her child or she wouldn't have given him away."
- "Secrecy in every phase of the adoption process is necessary to protect all parties."
- "Both the birthmother and birthfather will forget about their unwanted child."
- "If the adoptee really loved his adoptive family, he would not have to search for his birth parents."<sup>2</sup>

Sachdev found little to substantiate these myths, consistent with other works (eg Langridge, 1984 University of Auckland MA thesis). What has not been explored is the degree of belief given to these myths by adoptees themselves, which can be addressed within the research study upon the Act.

2. Iwanek, M. Paper presented at Auckland Adoption Conference 1985.

A fifth myth concerns the viewpoint that adoptees are "childlike" even in adulthood. In England (Children Act 1975) adoptees were not considered responsible enough to consider fully the implications of their enquiries, hence the introduction of counselling made compulsory under Section 26 of the Children's Act. Counsellors later expressed surprise that their clients appeared to have well considered the issues involved. (Haines and Firms 1983). Yet adoptees grow up in a society which teaches them the "standpoint of the normal" (Goffman 1963) and the "socially normal" message is that adoptees are aberrant in that they are adopted.<sup>3</sup> New Zealand made a similar provision for counselling, though policy approaches were markedly different: counselling was designed to be informative, non-judgmental and supportive of the client's expressed intentions. What bearing this has had, if any, upon search and reunion adoption experience in New Zealand merits full investigation, from the alternative viewpoints of the clients, counsellors and policy makers. New Zealand adoptees could also exercise a choice of counsellor, from community volunteers appointed by the Act to "official" counsellors provided by the Department of Social Welfare. Factors of choice and degree of comparative client satisfaction may be explored. Little data on birth parents exists in New Zealand. What factors govern the transition from a desire for information to the process of actively seeking information are unknown and another focus of the research proposed. Basic demographic data is to be sought and qualitative studies are needed to establish the parameters of birth parents' experiences. In the absence of these no conceptual hypothesis can be furnished at this time in respect of birth parents, other than to suppose that some birth mothers may be highly reluctant to re-apply to the agency (the Department of Social Welfare) which they may have viewed negatively at the time of relinquishment.

The conceptual hypothesis for adoptees is that the decision to apply for identifying information is influenced by the degree and nature of information available to them in previous life experience from both intra-familial and extra-familial sources. The subtle interaction of how the adoptee views adoption, the adoptive family's view, the society-at-large view and the view of adoption professionals merits examination.

3 The presumption is commonly made that adoptee status is consistent with being "unwanted" in the community and the media. To be labelled "adopted" is to risk being viewed synonymously as "emotionally disturbed". That New Zealand policy makers elected to treat their clients as "normal" people is highly innovative.

## METHOD

### Subjects

Adoptee subjects have returned consent-to-research forms and number in excess of 1707 to date. Birth parents available on the same basis number in excess of 149. Further subject samples will be sought amongst birth parents contacted by adoptees (a consent form will be used). The general population will be sampled on attitudes to adoption and adopted people. Employees of the Adult Adoption Information Act will be surveyed on their impressions of the Act and its procedures. A "veto-receipt" group may be interviewed also.

### Design

#### Section 4 Adoptees:

Adoptees will be asked to complete a postal questionnaire involving some coded material. A sub-sample of adoptees will be selected for structured interviewing. These adoptees will have participated in the postal questionnaire previously. Structured interviews up to a duration of one hour will be used by a variety of interviewers in different parts of New Zealand. Data gathered from the postal questionnaire will not be available to the interviewers at the time of interviewing. Interviewers will be pre-briefed and de-briefed on procedures to be used. A few full case histories will be collected for illustration of major themes emerging in the research. It is hoped that 1000 adoptees will receive the postal questionnaire (estimated return in the vicinity of 75%) and that 100-150 of these will be interviewed. The questionnaire and structured interview will be piloted beforehand using approximately 50 subjects, which will also provide an estimate of the later response rate to be expected. A minimum of 30 data sheets will be processed in the pilot stage. Selective randomized sampling will be used.

#### Section 8 Birth Parents:

These parents will be researched similarly though smaller numbers will be used and interviews will be more incorporative of verbatim responses and less structured. More data of a strictly demographic nature will be sought.

#### Section '4' Birth Parents - ie those receiving contact in past by S.4 Adoptees

The size of this sample will depend on those receiving consent forms from adoptees, and choosing to participate in the research. Special emphasis will be given to their perceptions of reunion and its impact, to be contrasted with the views expressed by their adoptee sons and daughters. 50 subjects as a minimum will be sought in both birth parent groups.

### Population Sample

A questionnaire will be used in person by interviewers with subjects who consent to participate. Subjects will probably be selected using Alley and Irving's "A Socio-Economic Index for New Zealand Based on Levels of Education and Income", (revised version based on current census information), and information from the Department of Statistics. It is hoped that 50 completed questionnaires (minimum) will be processed. Straified sampling will be used where appropriate.

### Employee Sample

Structured interviews will be conducted by the researcher prior to pre-briefing for their research tasks as interviewers. Stratified sampling will be used to cover various areas of New Zealand.

### Apparatus

Tape recordings will be used as a control measure against **hand-recorded responses** on the questionnaire/structured interview sheets in some instances. A computer package can be used to asses cross-tabulations of data, such as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Seminar materials will be required to train interviewers. (Questionnaires and Interviews for collection of data, SAE's for return of postal questionnaires; Clerical and postal materials are required.)

### Procedure

The preliminary steps will involve an **analysis** of the samples already available and how these compare to the overall distribution of applicants using Section 4. As Counsellors have filed monthly returns of all applicants, this analysis is straight forward. It is anticipated that counsellors did not supply to all clients the consent-to research forms (some have verbally reported that omissions occurred as they felt the timing was not appropriate, or they forgot), so an assessment of this factor will be made. Consent-to-research adoptees will be compared with the all-applicant distribution for any differences in area, sex or other strategic variables, in order to assess how representative the sampled population of adoptees is. Demographic comparisons will be made where possible in the context of the New Zealand population as a whole. Data from the Registrar-General's Office will be re-evaluated from raw data into statistical formats. Adoptees already having consented will be sent the postal questionnaire. Whilst awaiting the return of these, the employee sample will be researched and the field workers trained and allocated area samples. Birth parents under Section 8 will receive questionnaires.

Respondents selected for depth interviews will be advised and asked to indicate willingness and time of availability. Interviews will, where possible, be conducted

in private in the subject's home, unless otherwise desired by the subject. While interview data is being collected the researcher will begin the general population sampling, and augment structured interviewing of Section 4 and Section 8 applicants. "Contactee" birth parents will be approached in the final stage of data collection. Interviewers and subjects will be debriefed. Case histories will be obtained from selected individuals once sufficient data has been analysed to represent findings and themes.

### Controls

Measures of variability across different interviewers will be examined. Cross tabulation between questionnaire responding and interview responding using coded data will be employed. Subjects interviewed by adopted interviewers will be asked at the conclusion of the interview if they were aware of the interviewer's status, and these results compared with sub-samples interviewed by non-adopted people. Some secondary variance can be minimised by careful instructions to interviewers - eg to note whenever a question is restated back to the interviewer and/or when interviewer uses a probe to clarify an answer. Error variance will be examined by using a second observer present at some interviews and contrasting reliability of recorded answers. Interviewers will notate any subjects who are being interviewed by the same person they elected as a counsellor. Control questions - in two forms - will be used. A clerical edit will be done on the pilot study.<sup>4</sup>

### Analysis of Results

Demographic analysis will be performed on areas of return for postally returned data, for areas of omission/non-return, and non-response investigated. Wherever possible, responses will be translated into numerical codes. Verbatim responding to "any other comments" will be analysed in terms of predominant themes reported. A listing will be performed on the pilot returns to determine the parameters of the coding frame for open-ended questions. A computer edit will be run to check for inconsistencies, in excess of expected error rate standards. Where results are based on purely qualitative responding this will be identified in the report.

- 4 The edit will investigate instructions misunderstood by interviewer; simple error; that answers are completed, and all supplements present; as well as universal errors indicating faults in the questionnaire itself.

The data will ultimately be reported in the form of tables, augmented by comment and statistical detail where appropriate, ie significant differences between female/male responding if this appears, and literary comment on themes.

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A. DISTRIBUTION OF MALE/FEMALE APPLICANTS : WHO ARE THE "MISSING" MEN???A Preference for Girls?

Various research studies have observed that women significantly outnumber men in applying for information about origins. (Haines and Timms 1983; Leeding 1977) Lay theories on this phenomenon tend to ignore the possibility that adopters may have a significant preference for the placement of a female infant. In the absence of data on the actual distribution ratio of female/male adopted adults, assumptions that the ratio corresponds to that within the general population may be unfounded. Some researchers have observed the preference for female infants; this may be happening less commonly in the present as fewer infants are available for adoption, and prospective adopters are prepared to accept a child without restricting their options. Some adoption professionals suggest that the preference for a female infant may be governed by the greater motivation to adopt on the part of the wife when adoption is considered by a childless couple. Occasionally researchers have offered the opinion that the preference for female infants may be related to the ultimate expectations and fears adopters hold when considering outcomes - anticipating that daughters will marry and cease to bear the family surname of the adopters, presumably a relief if the child has not lived up to the hopes nurtured by the adopters - whereas a son is seen as "carrying on the family name" and, in this way, as a more "permanent" family member.

A selection of files can be examined to assess preferential ratios recorded by prospective adopters as a guide to the validity of the "girl preference" theory, and a selection of placements examined similarly to explore the issue in New Zealand at relatively small cost. Looking at sex preference (non-adopter Oakley (1979) researched gender preference in respect of first-born children using an English sample of women and summarised her findings as follows:

TABLE Sex preferences and reactions

Wanted girl	22%
Wanted boy	54%
Didn't mind	25%
Had girl: pleased	56%
Had boy: pleased	93%
Had girl: disappointed	44%
Had boy: disappointed	7%

Source: Oakley, A. "Becoming a Mother" Oxford 1979, Martin Robertson.

Oakley observed post-natal differences: the "Didn't mind" group reported later that they had minded, though did not want to report a preference pre-delivery. Mothers of girls had significantly higher rates of post-natal depression. (Breen 1975) In non-adopting families, daughters provoked less positive and more negative feelings in mothers than sons did; a major contrast to adopting families. Westhoff and Rindfuss researching American families on "Sex pre-selection: some implications" Science 184, (1974) pp.633-6. concluded:

A preference for males was consistently found, (especially for).. the firstborn to be a male... there is also a tendency for women with daughters only to intend to have subsequent children ... in contrast to those with sons only".

Who then determines the difference between adopters and non-adopters - the husband or wife? Specifically, who determines the "girl-preference" in adopters? Do prospective adopting mothers "choose" girls, or does this apparent phenomenon reflect wishes more deeply held by the husbands, though expressed by the wife partner? David Kirk's research on adopters ("Shared Fate" 1964; "Adoptive Kinship" 1981) suggests that adopting mothers are influenced to make a decision to adopt by factors such as a positive relationship with their own mothers, and a desire to conform to the traditional role of "wife and mother". These traditional notions may include a dimension which leaves major family decisions to the husband, as "head of the household", though Kirk does not pursue his research that far. It is possible that "girl-preference" is husband-determined, even though adoption workers report the wish being expressed by the wife at the time of application for a child. In addition to being (possibly) under-represented in the ratio of male to female adopted adults, it may be that boys encounter more negative effects of adoption. Specific learning disabilities and impaired mathematical potential have been observed in adopted boys in New Zealand and elsewhere. (Speld, New Zealand; Dr Z Bach, in "The Search for Anna Fisher" by F Fisher 1973 p249). Formal procedures may have been an inhibiting factor for some adopted men; degrees of illiteracy are more widespread in the general population and particularly in adopted men than is commonly supposed.

Another factor which merits some consideration is that in conducting fieldwork with adopted people over the years, I have some impressionistic evidence that adopted sons are told of their adoption at a later age than adopted daughters. It may be that adopted daughters are told earlier as a precautionary measure - to dissuade them from sexual experimentation at adolescence. The unanswered and unanswerable question exists: is the proportion of male adoptees who never discover they are of adopted status higher in contrast to female adoptees? My impression is that this may well be so, and different rates of adult adoptee applications when men and women applicants are compared need to be set within a context which takes into account these possible factors.

New Zealand research does not report the ratio of male:female placements in adoption. In the New Zealand population as a whole, females outnumber men, though the difference (except for elderly samples) is minor. Major Eichler of Bethany Centre (Salvation Army, Auckland) has noticed the girl-preference as widespread in the past, justified by the reason of "We just like girls better" when prospective adopters are questioned. Some applicants express further considerations of "family line" or "taintedness" though this is viewed negatively by the agency.

Girl preference has been well documented in Canada. In the population as a whole, the male/female ratio is 51:49; however there is incongruence in the adopted ratio. More boys are placed in ward care than girls. Girls are desired by adopters significantly (41%); 26% will take boys, and 33% either sex. (Official figures for June, 1980, Adoption Desk, Canada). Source: M Lipman, in "Adoption, Current Issues and Trends," Ch.3. ed P Sachdev 1985). For international placements, girl preference is much higher still.

Girl preference is undocumented in New Zealand. From time to time community/media assumptions on higher female enquiry rates for information about origins are ascribed to either "intrinsic curiosity in women" or "women are child-bearers". Both explanations have weaknesses. Triseliotis found that only 16% of his sample were motivated by childbearing issues. (In Search of Origins 1973). No assumptions can be safely made until we can assess what the girl-preference ratio is in New Zealand; the proportion of female applicants may not be as high as a superficial reading of the applicant distribution (appx 71.5%) implies. Overseas, adoption researchers have not assessed the potential bias accruing from this factor.

B. MEAN AGE DIFFERENCES, MEN TO WOMEN

From the data supplied by the Registrar-General's Office summarising Section 4 applications, it is impossible to test whether the mean age of male applicants differs from (is higher than?) the mean age of female applicants. This issue has never been addressed in the major English studies, as data is grouped collectively. It is an improvement New Zealand might consider innovating.

C. AGE GROUPS AND ADOPTED APPLICANTS: ARE NZ APPLICANTS YOUNGER?

A superficial reading of data supplied by the Office of the Registrar-General creates the impression that the largest applicant group is 20-29. It has been theorised by media that this group is highest because of "less secrecy" about adoption. Proportionately, this group does not have the highest application rate.

The New Zealand application rates per age groupings can be contrasted against the number of adoption placements in the years up to 1966 (ie, the last year that an applicant to date could have been born in, in order to qualify at age 20 to apply under s.4 of the Act).

## SECTION 4 APPLICATIONS (September - December 1986)

Age Groups	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89
Number of Applicants:	1650	1120	663	267	153	38	4
Number of Adoptions: (appx)	25,000	12,287	8,964	3,706	3,934	?2,301	data unreliable
Approx. fractions in Application Groups by Age	1/16	1/11	1/14	1/14	1/30	Data unreliable and bias due to death	

Note: Maori adoptions are excluded

Analysed in this way, the application rate is highest from the age group 30-39, exactly as Day<sup>1</sup> found in the English study, and also Haines & Timms<sup>2</sup>. (It is interesting to note that the group 30-39 were particularly penalised by the changes brought about due to enactment of the Adoption Act 1955.) The cohesion of the collective findings tends to suggest that something more than changing philosophies and practices is at work. However, a longitudinal study would be required to explore those effects, if they exist. Conventionally regarded "critical factors" such as age of placement, age of 'telling', may clarify the matter, although relatively ignored factors such as adoptive family composition (eg, mixed/unmixed) may also prove to be significant. The opportunity exists to explore within the context of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 the nature of adoption itself.

1 Day C. (1980) in Hall T. (ed.) "Access to birth records".

2 Haines E and Timms N (1983) "Access to birth records and counselling of adopted persons under Section 26 of the Children Act 1975". (Final Report to the D.H.S.S., May 1983)

D VETOES - RECEIVED

I am uncertain as to whether applicants being notified of vetoes were sent consent-to-research forms, though my impression is that they were not, and if this is so they are presently absent from the sample available for reserach. However, their experiences are pertinent to the overall operations of the Act, and these people can supply valuable information upon the effects of receiving such information - uniques to New Zealand. Some of these people did, of their own volition, appraoch a counsellor for guidance and support at the critical time of receiving notification. I submit that this group would add a valuable dimension to the research project, especially in the light of reviews of the Act and policy in the future.

VETOES - PLACED

No means exist within the current structures to interview the poeple placing vetoes. However it would be helpful to set context perspectives by being able to comment on the letters and comments delivered by veto-placers, the number of vetoes subsequently removed, and overall impressions of the effectiveness of this provision.

E ACCESS TO MEDICAL INFORMATION

Often given as one of the reasons for legislative change prior to the 1985 Act, it would be pertinent to examine who is using this provision and with what effect. It appears to be under-used in contrast to the events precedent to 1986.

F ADOPTION EXPERIENCE: THE ADOPTEE IN RELATION TO FAMILIAL AND SOCIETAL CONTEXTS

Several dimensions of experience can be sorted into positive and negative groupings:

POSSIBLE GROUPINGSNEGATIVITY / POSITIVITY SCALE

1	Adoptee views adoption +;	adoptive family views adoption +;	society + =	+++
2	Adoptee views adoption +;	adoptive family views adoption +;	society - =	++-
3	Adoptee views adoption +;	adoptive family view adoption - ;	society - =	+-
4	Adoptee views adoption -;	adoptive family views adoption -;	society - =	---
5	Adoptee views adoption -;	adoptive family views adoption -;	society + =	--+
6	Adoptee views adoption -;	adoptive family views adoption +;	society + =	+-

Which of these groupings most commonly represents adoption experience is unknown; Without that knowledge, discussion of "outcomes" must be seen as limited and biased.

9(2)(a)

CONFIDENTIAL: Ross McKay  
Ann Corcoran

10 June 1987

Ross McKay  
Research Department  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag 21  
Postal Centre  
WELLINGTON

Dear Ross

I understand that Ann Corcoran has told you that

9(2)(a)

9(2)(a)

9(2)(a) I am happy to say, freeing me to attend to our project, which I am finding myself much more enthusiastic about. I think that perhaps I owe you an apology in that I didn't make a fuller attempt at opening the channels of communication between us? We didn't know each other before the project was initiated and on the two occasions we did meet, I was ill and you were burdened with other appointments. Not to worry, however, as one of the major misgivings I had at that time was that it was perhaps too early in the Act's operation to collect data particularly on search and reunion - as you will know only too well, the early search-completers are very likely to be a group quite different from later responders, and we'd like our net to catch both.

I have used the time up until now, instead, teasing out issues which may shed some light on sources of bias and variability later on and surveying literature in great depth; also reviewing some technical issues, which I am less confident about, and your help with those as this develops would be invaluable, as this is probably one of your major skills. A study by Davis (1971) observes that even a very slight change in question wording affects the variability of responding by 15-20%! So I would very much appreciate your advice on the tools we use, blunt instruments as they must necessarily be; that isn't my strong point.

You have mentioned that you plan to conduct further research in the future, and I wonder if my study can be useful to that? At the least I hope it will generate some hypotheses for future work, and provide some baseline information. If you have firm plans in mind already, would you let me know your plans, it may be that I can economise in my study or even extend it on some points which will be of later use to you.

I have developed a different proposal which I hope will suit us both much better and I will send this to you over the next few days. Once we have finalised that I'd appreciate definite listing of the basic resources available to me from the Department, which will probably include ones I am unaware of, not having ever worked before in this environment. I'll also be sending you a time budget, and in the next fortnight, I want us to have established firm parameters and definite goals together. Travel is particularly inconvenient for me, and I have taken

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that into account in my proposal, though a minimal amount will be necessary.

Could we establish a definite time and day each week for you and I to discuss progress, problems and solutions on the telephone? I'd really appreciate that. Conditions of my lease make it impossible for me to make toll calls though I can receive them, and am nearly always available on (09) 559-963 at 9-10 a.m. week days - that number is unlisted. Do Tuesdays suit you?

There is one last small matter which I think is best mentioned and I mention it in confidence. It is unlikely, I think, that Clare and I could work together with maximum profitability. I do not wish to cast aspersions on her in saying this; at most I am saying that we simply tend to have different ways of getting communication established. I did not feel that in meeting you and your staff, Jane, Susan and Janice. I understand that due to Clare's immediate plans for travel this is not a problem at this stage, though at the completion of the project I would much prefer (as she perhaps would) to liaise with someone else.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

Anna.

Anna Coffey

I called Anna on 23/6  
to let her know that Ross  
was away and that I  
would handle in his absence.  
We agreed that the next step  
was dependent on review of  
her proposal - she reports  
this in the past

R.

23 July 1987

NOTE FOR FILE: ANNA COFFEY RESEARCH

1. I called Anna today to discuss with her questions raised by the latest version of her proposal (file copy marked June '87). The following points were covered:

- a) I explored with Anna how she saw the three tier data collection system in her proposal working. Postal questionnaires would be addressed solely to adoptees; the in depth interviews were seen as a means of pursuing with this group issues which seemed particularly important from the questionnaire returns in greater detail - tape and transcribe being the recording method; the group interviews were seen as a convenient means of networking to gain some general impressions of how those in the community not directly involved in adoption felt about the issue of release of information (the community groups in mind were not groups active in adoption-related matters).

I suggested to Anna that to do all she proposed well and to make use of the resulting information would not be feasible in the time remaining to her. Anna said that this had already started to dawn on her and that she would be prepared to drop the idea of in depth interviews. She feels that the group interviews are necessary for her to explore community perceptions of issues surrounding release of adoption information to the parties involved.

- b) I queried why it was that Anna had suggested confining the postal questionnaire sample to three geographic areas when there would be no additional cost in drawing a random national sample from the consent forms and when urban/rural differences could still be picked up by coding district information either from the questionnaire or the consents. I pointed out that to restrict the sample to specific geog. areas would mean considerably more work in drawing the sample, as the consents were filed in date order of receipt and would need to be sorted into area categories before this could be done. Anna expressed no firm idea as to why she had proposed the areas she had, and said that she would be happy to go with a national sample.

- c) I explored with Anna how how she saw any computer analysis being done. Anna has no computing skills and has not given any thought to this beyond a general hope that 'it may be able to be done in Wellington'. She

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said that she had not picked up any great resistance to this in early discussions with Ross.

- d) Anna was at the stage of having drafted questions for her postal questionnaire but not yet having composed these into a questionnaire layout. She reported that she had in the order of 100 questions, approx. 80% of these being of the 'read and tick a precoded answer' variety. Her next step was to do the questionnaire layout and then develop a code book. I asked whether she had an explicit framework of research questions she wanted to be able to answer through the questionnaire responses and whether she could link to this framework to her draft questions, pointing out that the research questions she would asking of the data should inform how the questionnaire responses were to be coded (to minimise the need for major file manipulations to get the raw data into a usable format). She reported that she was in the process of doing this. We agreed that the next step should be for her to send us a copy of her draft questionnaire.
- e) It became clear that Anna has received no clear guidance from the department on where to look for resources to carry out this work. Anne Corcoran had suggested to her that Auckland Regional Office would be able to assist with photocopying, postage, stationery, mileage and so on, but the same message does not appear to have been given Regional Office. I pointed out to Anna that the scale of computer work she would need would not be something the research section could do as a brief aside - while not demanding, the data entry and programming would probably require a sufficient time commitment to make DPG approval necessary. Anna's response to this was that she was open to recasting her work into a qualitative format that could all be done by her. I suggested that she should first send her existing questionnaire/research question outline to us so that it would be easier to judge just what level of resources would be required, and suggested that she should make some firm estimate for us of quantities and costs for the other resources she was seeking.
- f) Anna claims that she has received no clear steer from Anne Corcoran on just what it is that the department would like to see as the outcome of her work beyond a general indication that 'some information on adoptive parents would be nice' (As Anna's design stands, this is not a focus of the work she proposes, and what information would be collected would come indirectly from adoptee reports).

  
(Ron Lovell)



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14/16/1

*Veronique Vervoort*

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NUMBERS

Thank you for your advice of ...25.5... of the forthcoming publication(s), to which we have allocated the ISBN(s) shown:

AUTHOR: The Dept.

TITLE: Adoption  
The Adult Information Act 1985: departmental handbook

ISBN 0-473-00653-7

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

ISBN

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We remind you also of the provisions of Section 64 of the Copyright Act, 1962, as amended 1986 (of which a copy is enclosed), and ask you to send the 43 copies, using the enclosed address label, to the Legal Deposit Office, PO Box 12340, Wellington.

Yours sincerely

*Helen Boswell*

P.S. The Librarian Michelle Hill requested this 'emergency' number owing to the absence of the person who allocates ISBNs.

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# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand



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 Reference:

SWK 5-7-5

30 May 1988

The Regional Director  
 The Director

## Adult Adoption Information Act 1985

Subject: A guide to the principles, provisions, policy, practice, role and responsibilities of the Department of Social Welfare in relation to the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985.

1. The attached handbook has been produced as the departmental guide to the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. It is a comprehensive document which covers the principles and provisions of the Act as well as outlining in detail this department's policy, practice, role and responsibilities in implementing the Act.
2. It is intended to eventually incorporate a summary of the handbook into the Social Work Manual.
3. You are asked to ensure that social work and clerical staff working in the adult adoption information, post-adoption inquiry, and general adoption areas become familiar with the contents of this handbook and have ready on-going access to the handbook.
4. Districts which are currently providing an Adult Adoption Information service are being sent two copies of the handbook. One copy for the information and use of Adult Adoption Information staff and the second as a reference document for the rest of the social work staff. Those districts which do not currently provide an Adult Adoption Information service are being sent one handbook per office.
5. The handbook gives instructions on how to use the social work computer for record keeping purposes for Adult Adoption Information work. It is important that the computer is fully utilised in the way outlined in the handbook as it will facilitate the accurate tracing of records and information held in the department's record systems.

Independent counsellors have not been sent a personal copy of the handbook. They are free, however, to have access to the handbook and should be encouraged to become familiar with aspects of the content that relate to their role under the Act.

7. A system should be established in each District Office recording (similar to that for the Social Work Manual) who has been given the handbook, or is keeping it as reference material. This will help to ensure that when the content is updated in any way the new amendments will be incorporated into the handbook and not be overlooked. Unless the handbook is kept up to date in the District Office it will be of limited use or become unhelpful.

8. This handbook has been produced in Head Office by staff who will ensure that it is updated and amended as and when necessary. An information flow from Districts, via Regions, to Head Office is required so as to keep us informed of proposals for policy and practice changes, problems or lack of clarity in the handbook, and ongoing service delivery issues which have policy or practice implications.

9. The handbook is the culmination of work begun by Ann Corcoran, Denise Key and those involved in the enactment and implementation phase of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. More recently Eileen Preston and staff of the Adult Adoption Information Unit have provided much assistance in editing this document to its final version for publication.



Veronique Vervoort  
Senior Advisory Officer  
Children Needing Families  
for Director-General

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

DEPARTMENTAL HANDBOOK

MAY 1988

ISBN 0-473-00653-7

## ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

## HANDBOOK

RECORD OF AMENDMENTS

Amendments will be given a consecutive number. This serial number (shown on each page) is followed by the month and year of issue.

Amdt No.	Inserted (Initials & Date)	Amdt No.	Inserted (Initials & Date)	Amdt No.	Inserted (Initials & Date)
1		26		51	
2		27		52	
3		28		53	
4		29		54	
5		30		55	
6		31		56	
7		32		57	
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9		34		59	
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ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

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- 2.5 Applicants Receiving Original Birth Certificates (Sections 5 and 6)
- 2.6 Birth Parent's Access to Identifying Information (Section 8)
- 2.7 Departmental help with making contact (Section 10)
- 2.8 Access to Information on Medical Grounds (Section 11 and 15)
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In September 1985, the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act gave adults (aged 20 years and over) who were adopted as children, and their birth parents, new rights of access to information about themselves and each other.

It has never been illegal in New Zealand for any of the parties to an adoption to try to identify the others involved. Keith Griffith's book Adoption: procedures, documentation, and statistics: New Zealand 1881-1981 (1981) provides a comprehensive history of adoption law in New Zealand, including adoptees' access to identifying information.

The principal purpose of New Zealand's first adoption legislation, the Adoption of Children Act 1881, was to give some security to the adoptive parent and child. Prior to this Act, adoptions in New Zealand (as in England and other Commonwealth countries) had been a rather informal process, akin to fostering. Nothing in the 1881 Act or in the Infants Act 1908 limited access to birth records.

The Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1915 contained the forerunner of the present system for the registration of birth information for children who were adopted. Under that Act, the particulars of an adoption order were to be forwarded to the Registrar-General, the original birth certificate noted accordingly, and the birth re-registered with the new details replacing the old.

Section 8(4) of the 1915 Act required the Registrar-General to send an applicant the re-registered birth certificate unless the applicant certified "that the particulars recorded in the original entry" were "material for the purpose for which the copy is required."

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 1924 made it a little more difficult to obtain a copy of the original entry. In addition to the applicant's certificate, section 27(4) required the Registrar-General to be satisfied that the particulars in the original entry were material for the purpose for which the copy was needed.

The 1955 Adoption Act allowed a birth parent to give consent to an adoption without knowing the identity of the adoptive parents. The Regulations made under that Act provided two forms for consent - one to be used where the identity of the adoptive parents was not known and the other where it was. Section 23 of the Act limited the access to "adoption records."

Subsequent Births and Deaths Registration Amendments closed off access to information which had once been readily available.

The climate of secrecy surrounding the adoption process encouraged a number of erroneous assumptions about the people involved. Examples:

- Birth mothers gave their children away because they did not care about them.

- The less the birth mother and birth father had to do with the baby, the adoption placement, and the adoptive parents the easier it would be for them to go away and get over it.
- If adoptees were happy with their adoptive parents they would not want to know anything about their birth parents.
- Secrecy was necessary to protect everybody involved.

Joss Shawyer's book Death By Adoption (Cicada Press, 1979) made it clear that these assumptions about birth mothers were not valid. A growing number of adoptees and adoptive parents began to point out that the limitations imposed on the adoptees' natural need for a complete sense of self were unjust and discriminatory, even if the original intent had been to protect the adoptees' privacy.

The Act now provides choices for adult adoptees and their birth parents. Those who wish to preserve their privacy may do so by vetoing the release of identifying information about themselves; those who wish to obtain identifying information may apply for this and then proceed towards contact at their own pace.

An important aspect of the Act is the provision for counselling, whereby those receiving identifying information, considering ways of making contact, or intending to place a veto, can discuss the options open to them.

The Act also provides for medical practitioners' access to medical or genetic information relevant to the treatment of their patients.

The Act is administered by the Department of Justice with major implementation procedures being undertaken by this Department.

## 1.2 Principles

In carrying out the tasks required by the Act, the following principles should be observed:

- (a) Information about one's natural background is basic to the development of self identity in adoptees.
- (b) Information about a child placed for adoption helps birth parent(s) come to terms with their loss and move forward in their own lives.
- (c) Requests for information and contact are part of a normal developmental process and counselling should reflect this.
- (d) Contact and/or information, in general, enhances existing relationships.
- (e) Most adoptive parents, adoptees and birth parents are responsible people who are sensitive in their use of information and when making contact.

- (f) Adoption support and other self help groups have an important role to play as a community service in their own right.
- (g) Issues addressed by the Adult Adoption Information Act are relevant to all other aspects of adoption.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

## 2. LEGAL PROVISIONS

### 2.1 The Adult Adoption Information Act 1985:

The main provisions of this Act are summarised below. This summary is intended only as an introduction to the Act, and staff involved in its implementation should be thoroughly familiar with the Act itself.

### 2.2 Identifying Information (Section 2)

For the purposes of the Adult Adoption Information Act, "identifying information" in relation to any other person means that person's name or address, and includes any information that is likely to enable any other person to ascertain that person's name or address.

### 2.3 People who may apply for identifying information (Sections 4, 9, and 8)

- (a) Any adult adoptee (aged 20 years or over) may apply to the Registrar-General for his or her original birth certificate. If details of one or both birthparents appear on the original birth certificate, the adoptee can then apply for any additional identifying information from the Director-General relating to the birth parent (or parents) whose details appear on the birth certificate.
- (b) The birth parent(s) of an adult adoptee may apply to the Director-General for identifying information about that adoptee.

### 2.4 Restrictions on Access to Identifying Information (Sections 3 and 7)

- (a) Either birth parent of a person adopted before 1 March 1986 may, through the Registrar-General, request that no identifying information about her or himself be released to the adoptee and that the adoptee's original birth entry be endorsed accordingly.
- (b) An adoptee who is 19 years of age or over may, through the Registrar-General, register on the original birth entry his or her desire not to have contact with either or both birthparents.
- (c) In both of these instances, the Registrar-General is to advise the applicant of the counselling services available and await their response to this advice before proceeding with the endorsement.
- (d) The normal life-span of such endorsements is 10 years but a person who requests an endorsement be registered may renew it, or have it lifted at any time.

### 2.5 Applicants Receiving Original Birth Certificates (Sections 5 and 6)

- (a) If no identifying information relating to the adoptee's birth parent(s) can appear on the adoptee's original birth certificate, the Registrar-General will send the birth certificate directly to the adoptee.

- (b) If identifying information about one or both birthparents can be included on the adoptee's original birth certificate the Registrar-General must send the original birth certificate to the social worker or approved counsellor of the applicant's choice who gives or sends it to the applicant after the applicant has received counselling.
- (c) However, if the applicant is not living in New Zealand an original birth certificate containing identifying information can be sent directly to them.
- (d) Nor will counselling be mandatory for people adopted after 28 February 1986 who apply for their original birth certificates.

2.6 Birth Parent's Access to Identifying Information (Section 8)

Birthparents' seeking identifying information about adult adoptees apply to the Director-General.

- (a) If it is known that the adoptee has died, the birth parent(s) may be given any appropriate information available.
- (b) If an endorsement on the original birth entry restricts her or his access to information, the birth parent is to be advised of this.
- (c) If there is no endorsement restricting that birth parent's access to information, it is a social worker's task to try and contact the adoptee and find out whether or not he or she is willing to have his or her name and address given to the applicant.
- (d) The adoptee's name and address shall not be given without this consent unless they cannot be located and such information is seen as being non identifying.

2.7 Departmental Help with Making Contact (Section 10)

- (a) Adult adoptees and birthparents wishing to contact each other may ask a social worker to make an approach on their behalf.
- (b) Adoptive parents may also ask a social worker to make an approach to birth parent(s) on their behalf.
- (c) Social workers may decline requests for assistance made under this section of the Act.
- (d) When acting on requests of this nature, the social worker must inform the person approached of their rights under the relevant sections of the Act,

2.8 Access to Information on Medical Grounds (Sections 11 and 15)

- (a) Doctors may seek medical information about a patient's "unknown relatives" from the Director-General and also, with the patient's (or their guardian's) consent, supply the Director-General with medical information relevant to any "unknown relatives".
- (b) As part of such medical investigations, a social worker is entitled to obtain an original birth certificate and inspect Court adoption records.
- (c) No identifying information obtained as a result of these investigations should be disclosed.

2.9 Independent Counselling Provisions (Section 12)

The Minister of Social Welfare may approve individuals and organisations to undertake counselling under this Act.

2.10 Non-identifying Information (Section 14)

Nothing in the Act affects the disclosure of this.

### 3. CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

#### 3.1 Identifying Information

"Identifying information", in relation to any person means that person's name or address; and includes any information that is likely to enable any other person to ascertain that person's name or address (Section 2).

However, what constitutes both "identifying" and "non-identifying" information cannot be conclusively defined, and the exercise of administrative discretion is necessary.

#### 3.2 Confidentiality

Every precaution should be taken to protect the privacy of people requesting or exchanging identifying information under the provisions of the Act.

Letters for Adult Adoption Information staff often include personal details which the writer wants passed on to a particular person. Mail addressed to Adult Adoption Information staff either by name or by designation should not be opened by any other staff member unless he/she is specifically acting for the Adult Adoption Information Officer.

Sealed letters enclosed with other correspondence or handed to Adult Adoption Information staff for passing on to another person should not be opened by the Adult Adoption Information Officers unless the writer invites them to do so.

#### 3.3 Non-Identifying Information and Personal Privacy

For several years prior to the implementation of the Act, it was customary for social workers to provide applicants with non-identifying information. At that time, non-identifying information was all that the majority of birth parents and adoptees could expect to receive from official records.

While such information may have proved helpful to those prepared to carry out intensive searches, an out-of-date description and general background information could not, in the majority of circumstances, have been considered a potential invasion of any other person's privacy.

Nothing in the Act affects "the disclosure to any person of any information relating to any other person that is not in relation to that other person, identifying information" (Section 14).

However, the Act now gives birthparents and adult adoptees the right to receive identifying information from official records, and also the right to take steps to maintain their privacy, if that is their choice. Current departmental practice must take full account of the implications of these provisions.

For our purposes, non-identifying information is still that which is not likely to enable another person to discover the name and address of the person to whom it relates. In most instances, a physical description, jobs and hobbies, and a first name would not be sufficient to identify anybody. (See also First Names below).

The additional factor which adult adoption information social workers must now take into account is whether or not both identifying and non-identifying information released from departmental files could be considered as a betrayal of confidences made at the time of an adoption placement, or as an invasion of privacy. (See, for example, Sibling Enquiries, 11.4)

Adult adoption information social workers, and social workers handling post-adoption enquiries, should bear in mind that adoptees not yet old enough to apply for identifying information are quite likely to meet up with their birth parents at a later date, and adult adoptees making application for identifying information under Section 9 of the Act may intend to make contact with their birth parents.

Some personal details on file about the birth parents' lives and circumstances at the time of the placement may relate to matters which the birth parents would now prefer either not to disclose or to tell the adoptee themselves.

These considerations also apply to aspects of any non-identifying information supplied to birth parents about their birth children and their adoptive families.

### 3.4 Release of First Names

The release of first names has been a contentious issue in the adoption area. Discussion has turned on whether or not they should be classed as non-identifying information, and who should be entitled to receive this information.

Departmental policy is as follows:

(a) Release of Birth Names to Adult Adoptees and Adoptees under 20 years of Age

The 'birth name' is the first name given to the adoptee by the birth parents prior to the adoption. This can be released to the adoptee.

(b) Release of Birth Parents' First Names to Adult Adoptees

When an original birth certificate received by an adult adoptee does not have the name of a birth parent on it, either because of a veto or because the birth parent is not named on the original birth entry, the birth parent's first name can be given to an adult adoptee, along with other non-identifying information, provided that the "total package" does not enable the applicant to ascertain that birth parent's full name and address.

In some cases, an unusual or highly specialised occupation is more likely to give a real indication of a person's identity than a common first name is.

Consideration should therefore be given not to how "identifying" each part of the package is, but to its effect as a whole.

For example: A 5'4" fair-haired blue-eyed student from Wellington called Ann would not be traceable on the basis of that information alone. However, if the student was called Leonora, and came from Gore, she could be.

(c) Adoptees Under 20 Years of Age

The same considerations apply when adoptees who are not old enough to request identifying information under the Act approach us for non-identifying information about their birth parents.

(d) Release of Adoptees' Adoptive First Names to Birth Parents

A similar policy to that outlined above applies. If the first name given to the adoptee by the adoptive parents is either unusual enough to serve as identifying information or, when considered in conjunction with any other information already known to the birth parent, would make the adoptee easily identifiable, it cannot be released, despite the birth parent's very real need to know a name.

4. RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO IDENTIFYING INFORMATION (VETOES)

4.1 Endorsement on Original Birth Entries are Known as Vetoes

See Legal Provisions 2.4. The endorsements on the original birth entry described in Sections 3 and 7 of the Act are commonly called vetoes.

4.2 Only Birth Parents and Adoptees Can Place Vetoes

Only birth parents of people adopted before 1 March 1986 and adoptees aged 19 and over can ask for a veto to be placed.

People adopted after 28 February 1986 may register vetoes once they are 19, but no similar provision exists for the birth parents of this group.

People placing vetoes do so by telephoning or writing to the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. A friend or lawyer can act for them if they have written permission to do so, and in this case the friend or lawyer must contact the Registrar-General in writing. However, a friend or relative cannot, on their own initiative, place a veto on anybody else's behalf.

4.3 The veto procedure is the same for birth parents and adoptees

- (a) Applicant contacts Registrar-General requesting that the veto be entered.
- (b) Registrar-General advises applicant of counselling services available.
- (c) If applicant advises the Registrar-General that counselling is not wanted, or simply reiterates that the veto be entered, the Registrar-General endorses the original birth entry accordingly.
- (d) If applicant advises the Registrar-General that she or he does want counselling but does not confirm that the veto should be entered, or does not reply at all, the Registrar-General takes no further action until the applicant makes her or his wishes known.

This effectively means that an applicant wishing to place a veto is required to contact the Registrar-General twice, unless, when they first apply they advise the Registrar-General that they are aware of the counselling available but want the veto to be placed anyway.

The veto lasts 10 years, and can be renewed (even before the 10 years are up). It can also be removed at any time.

It is important to ensure that anyone intending to place a veto is aware of these provisions.

#### 4.4 Absolute Secrecy Cannot be Guaranteed

Social workers should warn those intending to place vetoes that, while vetoes prevent identifying information from being released by the Registrar-General and by this department, they do not provide absolute protection from identification or contact.

Vetoes do not prevent a person from applying to the Court under Section 23 of the Adoption Act 1955 or from obtaining information from solicitors' files or from random sources such as friends and relatives.

#### 4.5 Letters of Explanation for Vetoes

It is possible for those placing a veto to leave a letter with the Department of Social Welfare explaining the reasons for the veto to the person whose access to identifying information has been restricted.

This may help the other person accept and understand the situation, as well as giving the person placing the veto an opportunity to explain their reasons for doing so.

Such a letter may help maintain that person's privacy, because most people, having been given a reason, will respect the other person's wishes.

Letters of explanation for vetoes are held at the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit, and any such letters handed in at district offices should be sent there.

When the Registrar-General's office forwards original birth certificates containing vetoes to adult adoptees, the accompanying letter suggests the adoptee enquire if a letter of explanation is held by this department.

Adoptees must enquire in writing, quoting the Registrar-General's reference number which appears at the top right hand corner of the letter. This is the number of their original birth certificate. They must give their full adoptive name (first name(s) and surname), date and place of birth, and the full names of their adoptive parents.

Birth parents do not need to make a separate enquiry to the Lower Hutt Unit because the Unit processes all applications for identifying information received from birth parents. Staff will automatically check for a letter of explanation from the adoptee once they have ascertained that a veto is in place.

#### 4.6 Vetoes Removed Before Expiry Date

The Registrar-General's office advises the Lower Hutt Unit of any vetoes which are removed before expiry. Lower Hutt staff will cross check the list of enquiries received for letters of explanation, and will notify applicants whose access to identifying information is no longer restricted.

4.7 Requests for information from those who place vetoes

Most people who place vetoes wish for no further contact.

However, in some instances adult adoption information social workers may be required to act as intermediaries where the person who placed the veto has also indicated that she or he would be interested in receiving information about the other party, or having some kind of contact in the future.

When carrying out this task, social workers must take care that they do not inadvertently release any identifying information about the person who has placed the veto to the other party.

4.8 Where One Birth Parent has Vetoed the Release of Identifying Information About Her or Himself and the Other Has Not

In such cases, the birth parent who is willing to have contact with the adult adoptee is likely to be in a position to give the adoptee details about the other birth parent which could enable the adoptee to trace that parent.

The threat that this could pose to, say, a birth mother's privacy or peace of mind is a matter of concern. However, it must be remembered that the Act does not, and indeed could not, prevent private individuals passing on such information as they may have to anybody else.

It is the Registrar-General, not this department, to whom adult adoptees seeking identifying information about birth parents apply in the first instance. An adoptee may then approach us for identifying information about a birth parent who is presumed to be still alive, if, and only if, details of that birth parent appear on their original birth certificate.

It would be an infringement of both the adult adoptee's and the "willingly identifiable" birth parent's rights if any restriction were to be placed on what identifying information about that birth parent the adoptee should receive on the grounds that that birth parent may be in a position to pass on information about a third party to the adoptee.

The same considerations apply when one birth parent makes application under Section 8 of the Act for identifying information about an adult adoptee and the other birth parent is known to have vetoed the release of identifying information about herself or himself.

Social workers responsible for passing on details about the adult adoptee to the applicant should also advise him or her of the other birth parent's veto, and ask that this be respected. There is no reason to assume that this will not be done.

## 5. COUNSELLING

### 5.1 The Counselling task is an information giving and supportive one

Counselling is available from social workers, and from approved individuals and organisations (see Independent Counsellors, 5.6). Those providing adult adoption information counselling must be trained for the task, which is an information giving and supportive one. This concept of the task is in accord with the wishes of the client groups consulted prior to the implementation of the Act about the type of counselling they thought should be available to them.

Adult adoptees and birth parents of adopted adults are emotionally healthy people who are no more likely to be in need of therapeutic counselling than any other section of the community. People who feel they need therapy may decide to consult a therapist after using the counselling services available under the Act. The adult adoption information counsellor could then help them choose the most appropriate person to provide therapeutic counselling.

### 5.2 Counselling Provisions for Adult Adoptees Receiving Original Birth Certificates

Counselling is mandatory for adult adoptees receiving original birth certificates which contain details of one or both birth parents (Section 5). The adult adoptee asks the Registrar-General to send the birth certificate to the counsellor (either departmental or independent) of the adoptee's choice, and that person gives the birth certificate to the adoptee.

There is only one mandatory counselling session. Any further counselling is at the request of the adoptee.

The Act provides for the Registrar-General to send original birth certificates which do not contain any identifying information directly to the applicant. However, adult adoptees can ask the Registrar-General to send their birth certificate (regardless of its contents) to them care of the counsellor of their choice if they feel they will need support when faced with an original birth certificate which contains no details of their birth parents.

### 5.3 The Mandatory Counselling Session

This session could include:

- Discussion of any concerns the adoptee may have about information or contact.
- How to search, and where to go for any additional information.
- The way to make an approach which would achieve the best results.
- An offer of any support and guidance the adoptee may want.

The counselling may be given by telephone or face-to-face, depending on the wishes of the adoptee.

The counsellor does not have the right to withhold any information that the applicant is legally entitled to, even in exceptional cases where the counsellor is worried about possible consequences.

From time to time complaints are received from adult adoptees, particularly those in an older age group, who are concerned that they, as mature adults, must receive their original birth certificates containing identifying information through a third party.

It is important that all adult adoptees understand that the counselling task is to provide as much (or as little) information and advice as each individual wants, and that they are not required to participate in lengthy counselling sessions they do not want.

#### 5.4 Counselling for People Considering Placing Vetoes

Counselling is an option for birth parents/adoptees who are considering placing vetoes on the release of identifying information.

The counselling is not a means of influencing the birth parent/adoptee in any way, but rather of ensuring that a veto is the best way of achieving the purpose the birth parent or adoptee has in mind.

Social workers should deal with any such approaches with respect and sensitivity. Birth parents who had children 20 or 30 years ago did so in a different social climate. Many still carry the guilt and hurt of that time, and need the acceptance and support of the social worker at what is a painful and difficult time for them.

#### 5.5 Ongoing Information and Support Services

Social workers should be available to provide supportive counselling while the search and contact process is underway, and during or after meetings between adoptees and birth parents, if asked.

Social workers should consult and co-operate with independent counsellors (see below) and with other agencies and community groups with an interest in adoption. Support groups have already been formed in most areas. It is the social worker's responsibility, either to participate in the activities of existing groups as needed, or, in areas where a group does not exist, to ascertain community interest in setting one up and offer assistance.

In many instances, the social worker will be the first point of contact for anybody making enquiries relating to the operation of the Adult Adoption Information Act. This will include receiving enquiries from adoptive parents, siblings, grandparents and other members of the extended family.

While the Act makes no provision for counselling for members of the wider adoption family, social workers should respond sympathetically to any requests for advice or assistance that they receive in the field of adult adoption information.

#### 5.6 Independent Counselling

Under Section 12 of the Act, "The Minister of Social Welfare may, from time to time, by notice in the Gazette, approve any person or organisation to undertake counselling under the Act."

The provision of this independent counselling service gives birthparents and adult adoptees an alternative to the departmental counsellors. This element of choice is particularly important for adult adoptees as they must have counselling before they receive an original birth certificate containing identifying information about one or both birthparents.

#### 5.7 The Independent Counsellor's Responsibilities under the Act

These are twofold:

- (a) To provide counselling for birthparents and adoptees who are considering placing vetoes on birth entries and wish to discuss this matter with a counsellor. (Sections 3 and 7).
- (b) To provide counselling for adult adoptees receiving original birth certificates containing identifying information. (Section 5).

(Note: Adult adoptees who do not wish to be alone when they receive original birth certificates containing vetoes have the option of asking the Registrar-General to send the certificate, regardless of its contents, to the counsellor of their choice).

#### 5.8 Independent Counsellors Provide a Voluntary Service

Individuals providing counselling under this section of the Act are doing so in their own time.

Many adult adoptees wishing to make contact with birthparents are disappointed to find that identifying information contained in the original birth certificate seems totally inadequate for the tracing process, and that little or no additional information is available through the department. They will need advice on conducting their own search, and support while this lengthy process is undertaken.

While the independent counsellor will have some input into this, she or he will not necessarily have the time to provide all the help needed.

Nor do individuals and agencies approved to undertake counselling under Section 12 of the Act have any statutory responsibility under Section 10: Departmental assistance in approaching parent or child. This section refers to social workers (not counsellors) making approaches on another person's behalf.

5.9 Appointment under Section 12 does not Preclude other Adoption Support Activities

Prior to the implementation of the Act, many individuals developed considerable expertise, not only in counselling and supporting people undertaking the searching process, but also in acting as intermediaries for those wanting to make contact.

Their receiving Ministerial approval to carry out specific duties under the Act does not preclude their continuing to help others in a private capacity.

However, when making an approach to one person on another's behalf, an approved counsellor should make it clear to all parties concerned that she or he is acting in a completely private capacity (e.g. as experienced intermediary, or friend, or fellow member of an adoption support group) in order to avoid confusion about the nature of, and limits to, the independent counselling task. This is particularly important where the person seeking help is in possession of information obtained outside the Act, or when the approach involves people who are not provided for in the Act.

5.10 The "Ideal Appointee"

The "person profile" for independent counsellors is similar to that for adult adoption information social workers, with emphasis on their understanding of the Act, their ability to relate to all the people affected by its provisions, their knowledge of the adoption process, and some background or training in non-directive counselling.

Their counselling task, like that of the social worker, is one of information giving, not therapy.

Therapists in private practice who seek Ministerial approval under Section 12 would need to be able to demonstrate that they have had an active and voluntary involvement in the relevant areas, and that they intend to continue with this on a voluntary basis. The Ministerial appointment could not be used in advertisements of their professional services.

5.11 Independent Counsellors' Fees Payable by this Department

Independent counsellors' services are provided free of charge to the applicant, but the counsellor receives a fee of \$35.00 from this department for each person referred to them by the Registrar-General.

The counsellor only receives one payment per client, regardless of whether they see that person once or several times.

Claims for payment are to be forwarded to the director of their local office and paid from there. There is no specific claims form to be completed: a letter from the counsellor is sufficient. To maintain confidentiality, clients' names should not be given.

Instead, counsellors should keep a register listing all clients and giving to each an identifying number. Only the client's number should appear on the claim. No other records need be kept, but the counsellor's register should be available for inspection if the department's auditors request it.

Counsellors also return their completed IR 12s to the Director of their local office.

#### 5.12 Department's Relationship with Independent Counsellors

There should be a positive and complementary working relationship between departmental staff and independent counsellors and approved agencies, with regular liaison to offer mutual support, share any positive/negative aspects of the work, and identify joint learning needs.

Responsibility for community awareness and the development of support groups should be shared.

#### 5.13 Independent Counsellors' Access to Non Identifying Information Contained on Departmental Files

Departmental staff should note that independent counsellors and approved agencies are in this area of work because of their experience and skill. All counsellors have received intensive training, and they are fully aware of the provisions of the Act as well as of the confidential nature of the task.

Departmental records contain a variety of information about those involved in adoptions. The department would be failing in its responsibility to preserve confidentiality if complete files were to be made available to independent counsellors. However, photocopies of non-identifying material relevant to the counselling task may be taken from the files and made available to the independent counsellor or agency if the client wishes this.

#### 5.14 Appointment Process for Independent Counsellors

Agencies and individuals seeking approval to undertake counselling under section 12 of the Act apply to this department, which forwards their applications to the Minister of Social Welfare.

Agencies approved to undertake counselling may then notify the Director-General of the members or employees who will carry out this task.

This department arranges interviews for individuals who apply. The interview panel should consist of two or three people. (An adult adoption information social worker/an independent counsellor/a senior social worker/a representative from an approved agency).

Suggested interview questions are:

- (a) What experiences have you had with adoption?
- (b) What changes, if any, would you like to see in the Act?
- (c) What counselling training have you had?

- (d) What supervision is available to you in the task?
- (e) What is your special interest in the task at this time?
- (f) Have you been involved with adoption support groups?
- (g) A birth mother comes to you to discuss the veto provisions. What issues would you raise?
- (h) An adoptee wants help with finding and approaching their birth mother. What help should you offer?

The summary of interview notes to be forwarded to Head Office should be clear and concise (one or two paragraphs), with emphasis on the degrees of understanding/experience/skill which the applicant brings to the task, along with any comment the panel (as a group) wishes to add with regard to the applicant's experience, perspective on the task, or training. These notes provide the basis of reports to the Minister of Social Welfare recommending the appointment of individuals and/or agencies as Independent Counsellors.

Once the Minister of Social Welfare has approved an application, Head Office arranges for notice of this to appear in the Gazette.

#### 5.15 Reference List of Departmental and Independent Counsellors

The Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit maintains a reference list of the names, addresses and phone numbers of approved counsellors, and liaises with the Registrar-General's office on the preparation of the list of departmental and independent counsellors' names and phone numbers which is sent out to applicants by the Registrar-General's office. Advice regarding any changes of name, address or phone-number should be sent to Head Office for passing on to the Registrar-General's office and the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit.

Individuals who no longer wish to provide counselling should advise Head Office in writing, marking such correspondence for the attention of the Children Needing Families programme (see also 13), as it is through Head Office that recommendations are made to the Minister of Social Welfare regarding the appointment of Independent Counsellors. Head Office will advise the Registrar-General's office, the Adult Adoption Information Unit and the relevant district office of any such changes.

#### 5.16 Training for the Counselling Task

Both social workers and independent counsellors (including those from agencies) must attend a training session on the task before receiving referrals from the Registrar-General's office.

The training session may involve attendance at a live-in course, or it may take the form of several sessions with experienced departmental and independent counsellors.

It is also possible for trainees to spend some time at the Lower Hutt Unit, which also provides them with an opportunity to become familiar with the work of the Registrar-General's office.

Any travel expenses are met by this department and a training kit can be supplied by the Lower Hutt Unit.

6. APPLICATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

6.1 Access By Birth Parents to Identifying Information About Adult Adoptees (Section 8)

A birth parent makes written application to the Director-General for identifying information about an adult adoptee whose birth parent the applicant is. From any part of New Zealand and from overseas, the enquiry should be addressed to the:

Adult Adoption Information Unit  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag  
Lower Hutt

It should include the following information as at the time of the birth

Mother's Name:  
Father's Name (if applicable)  
Child's Name:  
Child's date of birth:  
Child's place of birth:  
Applicant's current name and address:

If, as is quite common, the applicant is uncertain of any of these details, it is usually possible to trace the registration if the best known information is provided.

This information is referred to the Registrar-General's Office for the original birth entry to be located.

If the adoptee has placed a veto on that entry, the Lower Hutt Unit is advised, and in turn advises the applicant of the fact of the veto and the date of expiry. A personal letter is written, referring the applicant to the nearest Adult Adoption Information Social Worker if further assistance is required.

If there is no veto, the applicant is advised of this in a form letter, and the adoptive name is given to the Lower Hutt Unit. If possible, staff of the Unit locate the adoptees current whereabouts, (D.S.W. Common Index, electoral rolls, old family benefit records, marriage registrations, updates from adoption files are commonly consulted).

When he/she is located the applicant is advised that we are on the point of making contact on his/her behalf and asked if they wish to provide any information at that point concerning their situation, their wish for contact and how that may be effected.

When a reply is received to this letter, the enquiry is referred to the district in which the adoptee is living and the Adult Adoption Information Social Worker asked to contact him to ascertain his responses to the parents' approach.

If there is a delay in being able to contact the adoptee or if s(he) asks for time to consider the approach, the applicant is advised of this in an interim reply. When the adopted person has made his/her decision, that may be conveyed to the applicant by the adoptee, if that is mutually agreeable, by the district social worker or by the Lower Hutt Unit as is appropriate in each case.

## 6.2 Clarification of Birth Fathers' Rights

In many instances, only one birth parent's name appears on an adult adoptee's original birth entry, and that name is, of course, the birth mother's.

For this reason, and also because the majority of requests for identifying information about adult adoptees come from birth mothers, the common concept of "birth parent" tends to be "birth mother".

Hence the need for clarification, both of birth fathers' rights generally and of adult adoptees' rights of access to identifying information about their birth fathers. (See also 6.9: Adult Adoptees Access to Information about Birth fathers).

### (a) Birth Fathers named on the original birth entry

Obviously, when a birth father's name is on the original birth entry, his rights under the Act are those of the birth parent as set out in Sections 3 and 8. He may veto the release of identifying information about himself; he may apply for information about the adoptee; he may opt to do nothing at all.

### (b) Birth Fathers can have their names added to the original birth entry

If a birth father's name is not on the original birth entry, he can apply to have his name entered there. To do this, he must obtain, either through an intermediary (such as a social worker) or of his own accord, the birth mother's confirmation that he is the father of her child. The birth mother makes a declaration to this effect on form R.G.257, available from the Registrar-General's office, requesting that "the particulars relating to the said father be recorded in the entry of birth relating to the said child".

The father signs a sworn affidavit, 257 G, and both statements are forwarded to the Registrar-General.

(If the birth mother is dead or cannot be located the birth father can continue with his application through the Registrar-General and will be advised by that office on the information he will need to supply.)

### (c) Section 8 Applications from Birth fathers not on the Original Birth Entry

Some concern has been expressed about the department's responsibility to birth fathers whose names are not on the original birth entries and who apply under Section 8 for identifying information about adult adoptees. There has been considerable debate as to whether a birth father whose name is not on the original birth entry can make application under this Section.

The Act states that (Section 8.1) "Any person may make a written application to the Director-General for identifying information relating to an adult adopted person whose birth parent the applicant is".

It is the Director-General (rather than the Registrar-General) who must be satisfied that "the applicant ... is a birth parent of the adult adopted person to whom the information sought relates ..." (See Section 8.2).

Where the adoptee is known to be dead, then any appropriate information about the adoptee may be given to the applicant; otherwise the Director-General is required to "enquire of the Registrar-General" whether there is any endorsement relating to that applicant on the adoptee's original birth entry before a social worker may attempt to trace the adoptee.

The Act does not require the Director-General, where satisfied of the applicant's identity, to seek any additional confirmation of this from the Registrar-General.

Therefore, there is no obligation on the birth father to be either named on the original birth entry or to be in the process of applying to have his name entered there before making an application under Section 8.

(d) If Applicant is named in Departmental Records

If the adult adoptee's birth mother gave the birth father's name as well as his description at the time of the adoption and his name appears on the adoption file, and if he confirmed that he was the father of that child (either orally or in writing) to a social worker at the time of the adoption or at a later date (and a Section 8 application would serve as confirmation "at a later date") then it is departmental policy to proceed with the application.

For departmental purposes he must be named by the birth mother. A description, no matter how detailed, is an insufficient means of identification.

(e) Where there is insufficient proof of Birth father's Identity

If the applicant's name is neither on the original birth entry nor on the departmental records, or if the name and other details from the records give cause for doubt that the applicant is the birth father, then we cannot proceed with his application under Section 8 of the Act.

He should be advised of the procedure for having his name added to the original birth entry, not only for his own sake, but also because his name cannot appear on any original birth certificate issued to the adult adoptee unless it is on the birth entry.

In any case it is helpful for birth father's to know that they have this option open to them. However, applicants should not be made to feel that they are under any pressure to do so, particularly if departmental records serve as an adequate means of identification for the purposes of Section 8.

There may be instances where an applicant claims to be the birth father of an adult adoptee, is not named on the birth entry or the adoption file, and is unwilling for confirmation of his paternity to be sought from the birth mother.

The applicant has no access to identifying information under the Act.

However, the applicant's details could be recorded as a separate statement and passed on to the adult adoptee if the adoptee approached us for non-identifying about his birth father, and on learning that there was no proof the applicant's paternity, expressed an interest in contacting him anyway.

In this case, both the applicant and the adult adoptee are in a similar position to siblings, grandparents and other members of the extended family who are able to use the department as a resource but who cannot receive identifying information about another individual unless that individual has specifically authorised its release to them. (See 11: Enquiries from people outside the provisions of the Act).

6.3 When social workers are unable to find the present whereabouts of an adult adoptee

Under Section 8.2(d)(iii), an adult adoptee's name and address cannot be passed on to their birth parent(s) without the consent of that adoptee.

However, in cases where, after careful searching, a social worker has been unable to trace the adoptee, the Department of Justice has advised us that the adoptee's name can no longer be considered to be identifying information if it has not enabled anybody to locate that adoptee.

The name (and last known address, if any) can then be given to the birth parent.

It is departmental policy to try and trace the adoptee directly, not through any third party source such as the adoptive family.

Some adult adoptees have negative feelings about anything other than a direct approach to themselves. Problems could also arise if, for example, adoptive parents were either unwilling to give the social worker the information sought, or were more eager than the adoptee for contact with the birth parents.

If the birth parent wants to continue searching and indicates an interest in contacting the adoptive parents, the social worker should discuss with the birth parent ways of making contact which would achieve the best results for all involved.

6.4 When an adoptee has died (S.8)

When the Lower Hutt Unit has been unable to find an adopted person in any available records, the registrations of deaths in New Zealand must be searched for all the years following the year he/she was last known to be alive.

When a death is established, all the information contained on the Register, including the name is given in a personal letter to the birthparent. This letter is not sent directly to the applicant but to the nearest adult adoption social worker with the request to convey the fact of the death in person to the birthparent and to leave the letter as written confirmation. The social worker will then be available to assist with obtaining further information when the birthparent is ready to do this. This may include inspecting the adoption file, contacting the adoptive family, writing for newspaper articles or notices, applying for coroner's reports.

6.5 Approaches to Adult Adoptees Resident in Psychopaedic or Psychiatric Hospitals

All people 20 years of age and over, regardless of their intellectual age or emotional state, are adults.

However, in some cases it may not be possible to ascertain what a severely incapacitated adult adoptee's wishes on the matter of contact with their birth parents would be.

Consideration should therefore be given to that adoptee's best interests, and whether or not the adoptee could be harmed by the advent of an extra person in their life. For example, if the adoptee is unable to comprehend the nature of their relationship with the birth parent, their relationship with their adoptive parents would not be disturbed.

Given that the adoptee is not able to make a decision on his/her own account, the social worker should discuss his/her condition with the staff of the hospital concerned to obtain a full health history and to ascertain the adult adoptee's likely response to any approach.

Unless the release of identifying information is likely to be damaging to the adoptee, the social worker should personally convey to the birth parent(s) the name and address of the adopted person, together with a full health history, as sensitively as possible. In the case of birth parents living overseas, such information will have to be conveyed in writing but again great care should be taken.

The social worker should also personally advise the adoptive parents of the action being taken. The response of the adoptive parents will vary, but care should be taken to assist them to see the positive aspects of the birth parent(s) involvement.

The birth parent(s) may also need assistance in looking at the role they want, and are able to play, in their birth child's life and how they can best be introduced to that person. It could be, for example, that an introduction as a special new friend rather than the confusion of another parent is in the adoptee's best interests.

Careful, sensitive, unhurried social work practice is essential in these situations.

6.6 Applications under Section 8 by Agents acting on behalf of Birthparents

From time to time Adult Adoption Information social workers receive Section 8 applications in the following ways:

- (a) A written application for identifying information relating to an adult adopted person is received from a birth parent of that person, but the birth parents requests that the information be given to a third person;
- (b) A written application for identifying information relating to an adult adopted person is received from an adult child of a birth parent of the adopted person. It may preceded or accompanied by the written permission of the birth parent for the adult child to make the application.

The "plain meaning" rule of statutory interpretation has been explained as follows:

"When the language of an Act is clear and explicit, we must give effect to it, whatever may be the consequences, for in that case the words of the statute speak the intention of the legislature."

Considering that rule in relation to Section 8 of the Adult Adoption Information Act there is no basis to apply the provisions of Section 8 to the two situations outlined in (a) and (b) above.

With respect to the first situation (a), the language of Section 8 (2)(a), (c) and (d) (iv) is quite clear - information is to be given to the applicant.

With respect to the second situation (b), the language of Section 8(1) is quite clear - the written application must be received from the birth parent of the adult adopted person. This is reinforced by Section 8(2), which requires the Director-General to be "satisfied that an applicant under subsection (1) of this section is a birth parent of the adult adopted person to whom the information sought relates" before he or she goes on to act under Section 8(2).

However, the question of agency must be considered. The "Birthlink" leaflet indicates that a veto may be put on the register by an agent. In answer to the question "Do I have to get in touch with the Registrar-General myself to put a veto on?" the leaflet says "No, if it is done by letter. You can ask a friend or a lawyer to write the letter for you, but the friend or lawyer must have your written permission to write the letter and should send it with the letter."

The decision to accept vetos placed by agents was made on the basis of the general principle that whatever a person could do himself or herself, he or she may do by means of an agent. The agent's authority was, however, to be tightly controlled. Thus, an agent's request to place a veto must be accompanied by the written permission to the agent of the person entitled by statute to place the veto.

The principle of agency could also apply to Section 8, provided the agency was subject to similarly tight restrictions. The essential point about agency is that the agent is acting for the principal (in this case "the applicant"). This means that the agent can do only what the applicant could do, the agent can do only what the applicant wants the agent to do, and the agent must act for the terms of Section 8; these principles mean that:

- (a) another person may make the written application required by Section 8(a) as agent of the applicant. The application should be accompanied by the birth parent's written permission for the agent to act under Section 8;
- (b) information may be given to the agent under Section 8(2) (a), (c) and (d) (iv) for transmission to the birth parent. The decision on what to do with the information must be made by the birth parent. Any action necessary to implement the decision may be carried out by the agent on the birth parent's behalf.

6.7 Access by Adult Adopted Persons to Identifying Information (Section 9)

An adult adoptee can make written application to an Adult Adoption Social Worker for identifying information about the birth parent(s) whose names appear on the original birth certificate. A copy of their original birth certificate must accompany the application. Given that the Adult Adoption Information Act enables people to attempt to obtain first-hand information directly from the source, this is considered to be preferable to consulting out-dated, and often inaccurate records.

(Note: It is possible for an adult adoptee to use the provisions of the Act to trace and contact their birth parents without dealing with the department at all. The adoptee receives the original birth certificate through an independent counsellor and then proceeds to trace their birth parent(s) without any help from us).

6.8 Little or No Additional Information About an Adoptee's Birth Parents May be Held by the Department

In many instances adult adoptees making application for identifying information about their birth parents under Section 9 of the Act will be disappointed to find that the department can add nothing to the identifying information on the original birth certificate.

The department simply did not have files for the majority of the adoptions which took place before the early 1950s, and the cards (now kept at the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit) on which these placements were recorded do not contain any information about birth parents.

If the adoptee was in departmental care before being adopted, there may be some information about the birth parents and the adoptee's earliest years in the files held in the Department of Internal Affairs' National Archives Records Centre or in Head Office closed files, but this is not always the case.

Any requests for information which may be held in either the Records Centre or in closed Head Office files should be made through the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit. Closed Head Office files are stored in more than one place; some have been transferred to microfiche. Searching for relevant material can be a slow process.

6.9 Adult Adoptees access to Information about Birth Fathers

(See also 6.2: Clarification of Birth Fathers Rights)

- (a) If the birth father's name is on the original birth entry, the adult adoptee's access to identifying information about him is as set out in Sections 5 and 9 of the Act. The adoptee applies to the Registrar-General for an original birth certificate and after receiving this may apply to the Director-General for identifying information about the birth parent or birth parents whose names appear on that certificate.
- (b) If the adoptee's birth father's name does not appear on the original birth certificate because he is not named on the birth entry, we are unable to give the adoptee any identifying information about the birth father from departmental records, unless the birth father is dead. (Section 9.3)

## 6.10 Enquiries From People Resident or Adopted Overseas

### Adult Adoptees Living Overseas

Adoptees born and adopted in New Zealand who are now resident overseas apply to the Registrar-General for their original birth certificates in the normal way.

Overseas applicants are not required to have counselling before receiving original birth certificates containing identifying information about their birth parents. In all instances birth certificates will be sent directly to them, with the address of the Director-General to whom they can apply for any additional information.

### Birth Parents Living Overseas

Birth parents of children born and adopted in New Zealand may apply to the Director-General for identifying information about those children (now adult). The normal Section 8 procedures apply.

### People Adopted in Great Britain now Living in New Zealand

Adult adoptees are unable to obtain their original birth certificates unless they go to Great Britain to receive mandatory counselling. There is no provision for the counselling to be given by telephone and the birth certificate sent on to the applicant, nor for agencies outside Great Britain to provide counselling. N.O.R.C.A.P., the national organisation for counselling adoptees and their birthparents, is a voluntary group which charges a small fee for service. They are situated at 3 New High Street, Headington Oxford Ox 35A5.

The British Association of Adoption and Foster Care (B.A.A.F.) 11 Southwork St. London S.E.1. I.R.Q. also provides an information service. This agency has a list of present and past adoption agencies and some information concerning whereabouts of records.

Great Britain has no legal provisions for birth parents' access to identifying information about adult adoptees.

Because of the number of private adoption agencies in Great Britain, one option for birth parents could be to contact the agency which arranged the adoption and register with them.

### Birth Parents and Adoptees Seeking Information From Australia

Legislation relating to access to adoption information differs from state to state in Australia.

Information about current legislative provisions may be available from the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit, which endeavours to obtain up to date information on the legal provisions in each state as it becomes available.

## 7. DEPARTMENTAL ASSISTANCE IN MAKING APPROACHES

### 7.1 Requests for Social Workers to act as Intermediaries

From time to time the department receives requests from people who want a social worker to act as intermediary between themselves and adoptees/birth parents/adoptive parents whose names and addresses they know.

Section 10 of the Act provides for social workers to be asked to:

- act as intermediaries for adult adoptees and their birth parents Section 10(1) and 10(2)
- act for the adoptive parents of an adoptee whose birth parent(s) the adoptive parents want approached Section 10(3).

A social worker may decline any request for assistance made under Section 10(4).

### 7.2 The Role of the Intermediary

Before accepting such a task, the social worker should consider whether she or he would be the most appropriate intermediary in this particular situation. The intermediary should with the applicant give careful consideration to the way the approach will be made, and think through the advantages and disadvantages involved in initial contact by telephone, mail, or in person. The way the applicant wishes the intermediary to report back should also be discussed. The social worker should remember at all times that they are acting on behalf of the person who has sought their assistance.

The intermediary should ensure that contact is only made with the person sought, and that communications/conversations are private and confidential. The person's right to refuse information and/or contact must be respected, and ongoing support should be available to both parties involved if needed.

### 7.3 When Person Making the Request Has Obtained Information Under The Act

#### (a) Adult Adoptees

Adult adoptees may ask social workers to approach their birth parents once the adoptee has received their original birth certificate containing identifying information and the birth parent has been located.

There is no evidence to suggest that contact initiated by a third party will be more successful than that made by the adoptee, provided that he or she has been given the opportunity to talk through the most appropriate way of making contact. Adoptees doing their own search and contact work can retain full control of their situation, and are not recipients of the social worker's efforts.

The social worker should respond to any such requests for help in a sensitive and appropriate manner involving the adoptee in the decision making process at all times.

(b) Birth Parents

When staff actioning Section 8 applications for identifying information have located an adult adoptee, a social worker must approach that adoptee and ask if the adoptee is willing to have his/her name and address passed on to the birth parent. An intermediary function is part of the requirements of Section 8, so requests for additional departmental assistance are not common.

However, where such identifying information about an adoptee as is known to staff actioning Section 8 applications has not enabled them to trace that adoptee, the adoptee's name can be given to the birth parent (see 3.3) as it can no longer be considered to be identifying information.

In these circumstances, a birth parent who does manage to locate the adoptee is quite likely to come back to a social worker and ask for assistance in making actual contact.

7.4 Where the Person Making the Request Has Information Obtained Outside the Provisions of the Act

Birth parents of adoptees under 20 years of age, adoptees under 20 years of age, adoptive parents, and other relatives such as the siblings or the grand parents of an adoptee sometimes independently obtain identifying information about a person they are seeking and ask a social worker to make an approach to that person.

Given that in these circumstances the person concerned may not be expecting an approach, may not have thought through the issues for him/her, and has not taken the opportunity of registering a veto (if, indeed, there is legal provision for him/her to do so) it is appropriate for an intermediary to act on the applicant's behalf to ascertain the response of the person the applicant wants to contact.

When acting as intermediary in this situation, the social worker should ensure that the person approached is aware of their rights and understands that the basis of the approach is on information provided by the person for whom the social worker is acting.

7.5 Requests for Approaches Where it is Known that a Veto is in Force

It sometimes occurs that despite the existence of a veto, identifying information about a person is obtained by somebody wanting to make contact and a social worker is asked to approach the person concerned. A veto clearly implies "no contact". However, given that the person wanting contact already has identifying information, it is appropriate for a departmental social worker to act on this request.

At the point of contact the social worker should immediately advise the person who has placed the veto that identifying information has been independently obtained by the person who wants contact. The social worker should also be in possession of as much information about the person seeking contact as they are able to obtain.

8. RECORDING

8.1 General

- (a) Every enquiry received under the Act should be entered in the appropriate register and given a number.
- (b) Any form issued in connection with an enquiry must have the reference number from the register entered in the top right hand corner.
- (c) Files should be prepared for each different type of enquiry and completed enquiries filed on these in numerical order.
- (d) All enquiries being processed should be kept in alphabetical order by the name of the applicant in a suspension filing system split according to the type of enquiry.
- (e) Any forms issued must be photocopied prior to despatch and the copy destroyed when the form is returned. This procedure should be followed every time a form leaves the office so that at all times either the original form or an up-to-date copy will be available in the office.
- (f) Copies of letters should be retained only when these differ from standard letters.

8.2 Birth Certificate received from Registrar-General

- (a) When an adult adoptee's original birth certificate contains identifying information about one or both birthparents, the Registrar-General sends it to the approved counsellor of the adoptee's choice who then issues it to the adoptee.
- (b) When the birth certificate is received in the office the details are entered in register SW 674 and the applicant advised using standard letter.
- (c) All certificates are to be kept in alphabetical order in a secure system.
- (d) When the applicant replies, an appointment is arranged for a counselling session and the issue of the birth certificate.
- (e) If no reply is received at the end of 6 weeks a second letter, is issued. No further action is taken unless initiated by the applicant.
- (f) Details of actions taken are to be recorded in the register as these occur and the register is to be checked regularly to ensure that any second letter is issued when due.

### 8.3 Birth Parent Enquiry

- (a) Under Section 8 of the Act a birth parent can make written application to the Director-General of Social Welfare for identifying information relating to an adopted person.
- (b) Most of these actions will be followed through by the Lower Hutt Unit and district offices will be involved only after the adopted person's whereabouts are known.
- (c) At this stage form SW 677 completed to section D will be forwarded to the district by Lower Hutt. District office staff are required to contact the adopted person, complete section E of the form and return it to Lower Hutt.
- (d) Districts are to record these enquiries in register SW 679.

### 8.4 Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit: Section 8 Procedure

- (a) Enquiry received, entered in register SW 675 and acknowledged. The number from the register is used on all forms relating to this enquiry.
- (b) Sections A and B of form SW 677 are completed and the form forwarded to the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
- (c) When returned the form will show any current veto and date of expiry. If there is a current veto this information is conveyed to the applicant and no further action is required.
- (d) If there is no veto the Registrar-General will complete section C. The applicant is advised and the steps on action sheet SW 676 are followed.
- (e) If the search routine in accordance with the action sheet results in "No Trace" the applicant is advised. No further action is required unless the applicant requests the available information. If this information is requested a copy of form SW 677 is forwarded to the nominated district office with a covering memo.
- (f) If as a result of the search the adopted person is "found" the applicant is advised. If no reply in 3 months a reminder is sent. No further follow up action is to be taken and if no reply is received in a further 3 months and the papers are filed.
- (g) If a reply is received and the applicant does not wish to proceed the papers are filed.
- (h) If a reply requesting contact is received form SW 677 completed to section D is forwarded to the appropriate district office. Section E of the form is completed by the district office staff and the form is returned to Lower Hutt Unit. The applicant is advised of the outcome by personal letter from the district social worker or, if this is not appropriate, by the Lower Hutt Unit and the papers filed.

- (i) Completed enquiries are filed in numeric order.

#### 8.5 Adopted Person Enquiry : Section 9 Procedure

- (a) Section 9 of the Act makes provision for an adopted person who has obtained an original birth certificate to make written application to their local office for identifying information relating to that person's birth parents.
- (b) Application received, entered in register SW 682 and acknowledged. The application must include a copy of the applicant's original birth certificate.
- (c) The first section of form SW 683 is completed, numbered from the register and forwarded to the district in which the birth was registered or, if known, where the adoption was approved.
- (d) When completed form SW 683 is returned by the district, information obtained is entered on for SW 686 and forwarded to the applicant with covering letter explaining the availability of departmental assistance in approaching the parent or parents.
- (e) Completed enquiries are filed in numeric order.

#### 8.6 Assistance in Approaching Parent or Adopted Person

- (a) Section 10 of the Act provides that an adult adopted person, a birth parent or an adoptive parent who has ascertained the name and address of a person whom they wish to contact may request assistance from a social worker in making this contact.
- (b) When a request of this type is received form SW 685 is to be completed and forwarded to the district in which the person to be approached is living.
- (c) All enquiries and subsequent actions are to be recorded in register SW 684. Acknowledgement will be required only for requests received by mail.
- (d) The receiving district office will approach the person identified on form SW 685, complete the second section of the form and return it to the originating office.
- (e) If the person approached does not wish contact to be established the applicant is to be advised of this and no further action is required.
- (f) If there is an acceptance of contact the applicant is to be advised of the extent of contact which is acceptable.
- (g) If any further assistance is required in making contact or any subsequent enquiries result from the advice to the applicant these should be handled by social work supportive services.

9. USE OF COMPUTER FOR ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION

9.1 Background

Enquiries under the Adult Adoption Information Act are being received at various offices throughout the country, however there are no detailed records about many of these adoptions. The purpose of the computer system is to identify where any updating letters or other information are held.

The computer system has been designed to give adequate security; there is no automatic connection made between birth names and adoptive names. Each entry contains only the birth name or the adoptive name, depending on which party is updating information. In order to make any connection, it is necessary to have the other name as obtained under the Act or from departmental records.

The computer shows where the information is, but says nothing about what information is there so it remains necessary to contact the office where the updating has been recorded in order to obtain the information.

During the setting up of the computer system, the question arose as to whether the existence of all updates and post-adoption enquiries should be recorded on the computer. Lower Hutt AAIU staff identified three types of information:

- (a) Updates, where people are clearly open to contact and have advised the department of this. Obviously these should be recorded on the computer.
- (b) Veto Explanations. These are not updates and should not be entered on the computer. They are held at the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit.
- (c) Enquiries, where people may have sought information and/or received counselling, but where there may be ambivalence about contact, or some restrictions recorded. Some people may have placed a veto, either before approaching the department or at a later date. A relative may be recording the death of a birth parent or adoptee.
  - (i) Under Section 8 of the Act, this department must attempt to locate and approach an adoptee at the birth parent's request. Therefore, any information as to the current name and whereabouts of the adoptee is helpful. The adoptee's wishes regarding contact are useful to know, but in no way affect the fact that he or she will be approached unless a veto has been placed. For this reason, all adoptees' enquiries should be recorded on the computer.
  - (ii) Lower Hutt staff also considered whether information/restrictions/feelings expressed by birthparents would be useful for the adoptee to know when considering making contact. In every case, the answer was yes, so all birth parent enquiries should be recorded on the computer.

## 9.2 Guidelines on using the computer

Because people might approach the department for information and/or counselling and later place a veto without staff being aware of this, there is a danger that an enquiry recorded on the computer could lead to the inadvertent release of identifying information. To prevent this occurring, identifying information should be given to an adoptee only on production of the original birth certificate under Section 9 of the Act, and to a birth parent only through a Section 8 enquiry via the Lower Hutt Unit.

In order to avoid raising false hopes, the mere existence of an update/enquiry on the computer should not be made known to the other party until it has been ascertained what the information is. For example, where birth siblings or grandparents have approached the department to record the fact that the birth parent has died, the computer entry will look the same as a birth parent enquiry.

Details of an update or enquiry from a birth parent can, in most cases, be relayed directly to the adoptee under Section 9 of the Act, but if in doubt, staff may like to check back with the birth parent for permission to release the information to the adoptee.

Where two parties have provided updating information about themselves but neither proceeds under the relevant Sections of the Act, the computer will not link the two pieces of information. This signifies a move away from using the files as a contact register towards using the Adult Adoption Information Act, with the computer as an aid in accessing the available information if, or when, either party is ready to proceed.

For other parties such as siblings, and birth fathers not named on the birth certificate, the computer entries will be useful in accessing information, but staff must ensure that they give out only the information they are permitted to release. The computer system makes enquiries more accessible, but in no way changes the criteria in relation to these enquiries.

The computer is useful only to assist in making contact between parties. Once contact has been made, the computer entry should be deleted. Clerical support staff will have the appropriate forms to request deletion of the Social Work number. The system is not useful for recording data once contact between birth parents and adoptees has been made.

Enquiries or updates can be recorded on a typed form, a completed sample of which is attached as Appendix. The form is self explanatory. The information recorded on the form must then be transposed on to the computer form SW 687: Notice to Establish Personal Social Work Master Record by clerical support staff. Alternatively, districts may prefer to enter the information directly on form SW 687.

### 9.3 Preparation of Computer Entries

Before establishing a master record, it is necessary to ascertain whether an Adult Adoption Information record in the same name has already been established by another district, as many adoptees and birth parents have left updating information in more than one office. The Common Index should be checked for the first name, surname and date of birth (if accurately known). Adult Adoption Information enquiries are conspicuous by the entry "address unknown". If the information to be entered clearly relates to a record already established as an Adult Adoption Information enquiry (disregard records about any benefits the client may be receiving), form SW 687 should not be used. Instead form SW 690 should be used to amend the existing record. Completed examples of the forms SW 687 and SW 690 are attached as Appendices (I, II, III) and should be read in conjunction with the instructions set out below.

#### 9.3.1 Instructions for entering information on form SW 687: Notice to Establish Personal Social Work Master Record

- (a) Every category on the top half of the computer form must be filled in.
- (b) Service Type: The service type 1622 is for Adult Adoption Information only.
- (c) Categories: Post Adoption Categories are as follows:

- 004 Client's First Name
- 005 Client's Surname
- 006 Address
- 013 Postal Code
- 085 Mother's First Name
- 086 Mother's Surname
- 200 Sex
- 201 Marital Status
- 210 Date of Birth
- 002 Primary District
- 800 Primary Storage Type
- 808 Race
- 802 Secondary District
- 803 Secondary Storage Type
- 810 General Comments
- 811 Date of Enquiry
- 813 Social Worker's Name

- Categories A006 (Address) A013 (Postal Code) A201 (Marital Status) A800 (Primary Storage Type) A808 (Race) and A803 (Secondary Storage Type) always remain the same and should be filled in as shown on the samples provided as Appendices and . For example, address is always "unknown" because the adoptee's address at the time of the adoption is irrelevant. Race is also "unknown" (entered as 14) because it is irrelevant here. Marital status is always "single" because everybody is single when born.

- Names (Categories A004 and A005):

- (i) When an adoptee updates, the names entered are the adoptive names given to them as a child by their adoptive parents.
- (ii) When a birth parent updates, the names are the birth names of the child. If no first name was given A004 should read "unnamed baby".

- District: - The name of your district should be entered.

- Primary District (A002) Your district code is entered. (A list of district codes is attached as Appendix IV).

- Sex (A200). The code is 1 for male, 2 for female.

- Date of Birth (A210). All spaces must be filled, therefore 3 August 1962 would be written as 03081962. If the birth date is not known exactly, 0's must be entered. August 1962 with no date would be written as - 00081962. 1962 with no date or month would be written as - 00001962; Where the birth date is unknown, enter - 10000000.

- Social worker: - The name must be written surname first.

- Date service established (A811) - The date of enquiry e.g., 1 September 1986 is written as. 010986.

(d) The details on the bottom half of the form are optional fields.

- A802 is the district in which the child was born and is written as 1, followed by the code. For example, Wellington is written as 1,004.
- A803 is the storage type, written as 1,06. This code always remains the same.
- If the place of birth is not known, leave out both A802 and A803.
- A810 is your file, volume and reference number for the enquiry. This line commences 1, indicating that it is the first (and usually the only) line of instructions.
- To maintain confidentiality, words such as 'adoptive' or 'birth parent' should not be used.
- A085 and A086 are the first name(s) and surname of the adoptee's mother. In the case of an adoptee updating, the adoptive mother's names should be entered. In the case of the birth parent, or other birth relative, updating, the birth mother's name at the time of the birth should be entered. If the first name is not known, enter A085 as "unknown".
- The form should be signed and dated, and a copy kept until establishment is confirmed via the Social Work current workload list.

- (e) The attached sample forms are about the same imaginary adoption, but one is an update by the adoptee (Appendix I) and the other an update by the birth mother (Appendix II).
- (i) Appendix I - Kathleen Brown, nee Young, wrote to the department on 15 August 1986 to update her file. She was born in Christchurch on 14 July 1953 and adopted by Agnes and David Young.
- (ii) Appendix II - Her birth mother Angela Street, nee Green, updated her file on 3 June 1986 with the information that she had a daughter in Christchurch some time in July 1953.

Note

- Neither party's married name appears on the forms.
- If another relative leaves information on file, the computer entry will look exactly the same. For example, if Angela Street had died but her sister wished to leave a letter on file for the adoptee, the form would be filled out in exactly the same way as for the birth mother's update.

9.3.2 Instructions for Amending Records

If the information to be entered clearly relates to a name already established as an Adult Adoption Information enquiry the existing record need only be amended by adding information as a secondary district. The form SW 690 should be used when amending details on a master record. (See Appendix III).

An alphabetical code is used to identify the type of change required. The following are the change codes for the system:

- B = Addition. This is used to add details to an existing master record.
- C = Amendment. This is used to amend an item of information already contained on a master record.
- D = Deletion. This effects the deletion of an item of information on a master record.

To Add Secondary District Details using Form SW 690: Notice to amend Social Work details

Enter the name of your district.

Enter the client's social welfare number, obtained from the Common Index.

Enter the client's initials and name.

Enter 0's in the service type and sequence number boxes.

To add a secondary district, enter B 802 followed by 2, plus the district code. Also enter storage code B 803 2, 06.

To add yet another secondary district, enter B 802 followed by 3, and the district code. Also enter storage code B 803 3,06. Up to 6 districts may be recorded in this way.

Details of the date and reference number of the enquiry for each additional district should be recorded by amending the General Comments field 810. Appendix III is an example of an amendment by Christchurch office who wish to add themselves as a secondary district. In amending the General Comments field C810 they have repeated the reference 4292 V4 302 entered by Head Office who established the master record for Kathleen Young. (If the original reference is not repeated it will be lost.) Christchurch then entered the date of their own enquiry, (21 November 1986) and their reference number (2420 V3 F110.) There is a limit of 90 characters in this field.

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10. DEPARTMENTAL STAFF AFFECTED BY THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

A number of staff members are personally affected by the provisions of the Act and may be reluctant to approach the adult adoption information workers in their own office for information or advice.

Those who prefer to make their enquiries away from their place of work can contact the Adult Adoption Information Unit, Department of Social Welfare, Private Bag, Lower Hutt. Phone (04) 666939. (As well as carrying out the usual adult adoption information tasks, this Unit handles all birth parent enquiries, and holds letters of explanation for vetoes placed).

The approved independent counsellors and agencies can also be approached by staff wishing to discuss the Act, how it affects them, and what steps they should take to obtain identifying information.

A list of all counsellors, both independent and departmental, is available from the Lower Hutt Unit.

Districts should ensure that all staff are aware of the options open to them.

11. ENQUIRIES FROM PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

11.1 Adoptive Parents of Adult Adoptees

The Act provides "for greater access to information ... by adult adopted persons and their birth parents ..." There are no specific provisions allowing for adoptive parents to have access to, or to place restrictions on, the release of identifying information.

While many adoptive parents welcomed the Act, it has also created some feelings of hurt and anger for those adoptive parents who feel that, as parents, they should have the right to be informed and consulted when the search and contact process is underway.

While the Act is clearly for adults it is important to remember that the adoptive parents of those adoptees now able to use the Act were given different messages about adoption at the time of placement (see Introduction) and, like all groups in society, they have members who feel threatened by changing attitudes and assumptions.

One option could be for social workers to help set up groups where adoptive parents could talk through their feelings, but not everybody is comfortable about sharing their feelings in a group situation.

Discussion on radio talkback programmes and articles in the local press may be a source of information and support for the adoptive parents, particularly those who have the specific problem of not having told their adult children that they are adopted.

Information about the local counselling services which adoptive parents can use to discuss the best ways of informing their children about their adoption should be widely publicised.

11.2 Adoptive Parents and Birth Parents of Adoptees Under 20 Years of Age

Since the implementation of the Act there has been an increase in the number of post-adoption enquiries from birth parents who have no identifying information about their birth children but who would like a social worker to see if the adoptive parents are interested in some communication/exchange of news.

There has also been an increase in the number of adoptive parents with teenage children who approach the department asking us to try and locate birth parents.

In these cases, any information which those making the enquiries would like to have passed on to the other parties should be recorded, but no moves towards contact should be made by us unless/until all parties involved have independently requested this.

The exceptions to this rule are:

- (a) Where the adoptive parents already have identifying information about the birth parents and ask a social worker to act as intermediary (see Part 7 : Departmental Help in Making Approaches), and

(b) Where we are notified of an adoptee's or birth parent's death (below).

11.3 Action to be Taken When Notified of an Adoptee's or Birth Parent's Death

Should an adoptee die, before the age of 20 years and the adoptive parents contact the department asking that the birth parent(s) be located and advised of this, it seems appropriate that this should be done wherever possible.

While only a small number of birth parents of adult adoptees use the Act to obtain identifying information, many more update files with information about themselves and advise that they would welcome an approach from the adoptee. We are also aware that almost all birth parent(s) continue to think of the child they placed for adoption and wonder about the outcome of the placement.

A very small number of birth parent(s) may consider that social worker contact regarding an adoptees death is an intrusion. This risk needs to be balanced against the feelings of other birthparents who perhaps will be finally able to work through their grief.

When a birthparent(s) dies the family sometimes wish to advise the adoptee or the adoptive family of the situation. Similar considerations as above apply.

11.4 Sibling Enquiries

Departmental policy is that siblings who are interested in exchanging information or making contact with each other can leave information with us or receive such identifying information about each other as we have permission to provide. However, we cannot initiate contact between two adopted siblings unless both have indicated their interest in this.

In the past it was normal practice for social workers to tell adoptive parents of any siblings the adoptee may have had as part of the non identifying information about the birth family given at the time of placement.

It was also usual practise to offer adoptive parents any subsequent children the birthmother may have wished to place for adoption. This information was often passed on to the adoptee by the adoptive parents.

When adult adoptees approach us for either identifying or non-identifying information about their birth parents, we cannot give out information about the existence of any other children placed for adoption unless an adoptee has some details about the sibling who has also been adopted and asks us to confirm these as well as supply non identifying information about that person.

In all other cases information about the existence of other birth children placed for adoption is for the birth parent(s) to give or withhold. There may be instances where the birth parent would rather the adoptee did not know about the existence of another child or children, and for us to release this information without the birth parent(s) consent would be an invasion of privacy (unless, of course, the birthparent is dead, in which case the adoptee can be told of other adopted siblings).

The policy above applies only to siblings who have been legally adopted as this is information belonging to the birthparent(s) and adoptive family and is not available to the public except through as application to the Court (See Section 23 applications).

An adoptee can be told of the existence of any siblings who remained with the birth parents or who were in Foster Care.

Where the Department retained some ongoing responsibility for children by having for a significant period guardianship responsibilities it is acceptable to put another family member from whom they have been separated at an earlier date in touch with them.

However we should not try to contact an adopted adult on behalf of any other siblings unless the adoptee has indicated an interest in contact.

Even though an adoptee may not have placed a veto he/she has the right to rely on the Act for protection from being contacted by people in circumstances other than the law allows.

This rule applies even when a birth mother has either made or expressed interest in making an application under Section 8 of the Act but has died before the application could be completed and her other surviving children want to continue with her application in order to make contact with their adopted sibling.

#### 11.5 Other Members of the Extended Family's Access to Information

Because the Act only provides for birth parents' and adult adoptees' access to identifying information, we are unable to release any identifying information about an adoptee to the parents or siblings of that adoptee's birth parent, even if the birth parent has died. We can, however, record the interest of other relatives and pass this on to the adoptee if the adoptee (and in the case of an adoptee under 20, the adoptive parents) approaches us.

12. ROLE OF THE LOWER HUTT ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION UNIT

12.1 Provision of a National Service: The Head Office Unit was transferred to Lower Hutt district office in December 1987. However, it continues to provide a national service in a number of areas.

(a) Section 8 Applications:

The Unit actions all applications received under Section 8 of the Act up to and including Subsection 8.2 (d)(i).

(b) Veto:

The Unit holds letters of explanation for vetoes placed by birth parents or adult adoptees;

- receives requests for letters of explanation for vetoes placed by birth parents or adult adoptees;
- maintains a list (as advice is received from the Registrar-General) of any vetoes removed before expiry date;
- holds any messages left by people who have had their access to information restricted by vetoes.

(c) Practice/Case Issues:

Unit social workers are available for consultation with both social workers and independent counsellors who want to discuss any practice/case issues.

(d) Training:

Unit staff can provide initial training for new social workers and independent counsellors, should this be requested by the district office.

(e) Liaison with the Registrar-General's Office:

The Unit handles any requests for information from the Registrar-General's office;

- liaises with the Registrar-General's office on the preparation of the list of approved counsellors (both departmental and independent) for distribution to applicants requiring counselling;
- maintains a record of facts and figures of people accessing the Act for distribution when requested.

In addition to a national service, the Unit also provides the Adult Adoption Information service for the greater Wellington region and responds to requests from other districts for information which may be held in closed Head Office records or in the Department of Internal Affairs National Archives' Records Centre.

Please note that these records are likely to contain minimal information as not only were they, in many cases, set up for a different reason (e.g. a maintenance record) but the value of the keeping of adequate family histories was not appreciated.

### 13. RESPONSIBILITIES OF HEAD OFFICE

Head Office staff in the Children Needing Families programme of the Families in Special Circumstances Directorate have responsibility for the client group adult adoptees and their birth parents.

Head Office will have on-going programme involvement through Regional Directors in relation to:

- (1) case-management advisory service,
- (2) the provision of practice guidelines and standards,
- (3) policy and legislative development,
- (4) monitoring and evaluation
- (5) inter-departmental liaison on policy matters,
- (6) recommendations to the Minister regarding the appointment of Independent Counsellors under section 12 of the Act,
- (7) policy liaison, as required, with inter-country governments, agencies and interest groups,
- (8) facilitating inter-country social service agency contact in relation to case matters as required,
- (9) development of a national data base.

### 14. ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION: DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

#### The "Ideal Appointee"

The ideal appointee to the task should have a broad understanding of the whole adoption area, with the basic perception of the issues involved which may come from being an adoptee, birth parent or adoptive parent. The appointee also needs the maturity to relate to a wide variety of people, some experience of the tasks to be carried out under the Act, (particularly non-directive type counselling), and a willingness to consult and co-operate with co-workers and community groups. Flexibility and patience, and the ability to cope with stress and others' expressions of pain and grief are important qualities.

#### Specific Duties

- To provide counselling to birth parents/adoptees who are considering placing a veto and who choose to talk this over with a counsellor. (Sections 3 and 7).
- To give original birth certificates received from the Registrar-General's office to adult adoptees who are required to have counselling. (Section 5) The counselling may be given by telephone or in person, depending on the wishes of the adult adoptee, and the birth certificate must be released to the adoptee after the mandatory session.
- To provide assistance to adoptees and birth parents who ask for information from departmental records and who may need support while the searching process is underway.

- To provide supportive counselling during and after meetings between adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents whenever appropriate.
- To respond to requests for medical information made by registered medical practitioners (Section 11).
- To consult and co-operate with independent counsellors and with other agencies and community groups with an interest in adoption. Support groups have already been formed in most areas. It is the social worker's responsibility, either to participate in the activities of existing groups as needed, or in areas where a group does not exist to ascertain community interest in setting one up and offer assistance.
- To respond to requests from the Lower Hutt Adult Adoption Information Unit regarding birth parent applications for identifying information about adult adoptees (Section 8). It is the responsibility of Lower Hutt staff to locate the adoptee, and then to ask the district office social workers to approach that person and ascertain their willingness to have contact with their birth parent(s). After the initial approach is made the district should advise the Lower Hutt Unit of the outcome and can then continue to work directly with the adoptee and birth mother as needed.
- To act as intermediary should an adult adoptee ask for help in approaching their birth parent (Section 10.1).
- To act as intermediary if approached by birth parents who know the name and address of their birth child (now adult) and who want an approach made on their behalf (Section 10.2).
- To act as intermediary if adoptive parents want an approach to be made to birth parents whose name and address they know (Section 10.3).

#### Adoption Support Groups

Prior to the implementation of the Act a small number of Support Groups existed in the community to support people who were looking for adoptees or birth parents. These groups are seen as providing a valuable service and have the support of the Department. It is the role of the Adult Adoption Information social workers to encourage the development of such groups in their area. Regional Directors have funds for allocation to Support Groups. This money is available for distribution on an annual basis and can be applied for by groups through District Offices.



# Department of Social Welfare

DATA PROCESSING CENTRE, PRIVATE BAG, 27/1 UPPER HUTT



Telephone: 287 609

If telephoning or calling about  
this letter, please ask for

Miss K Baine

Reference: (Please quote)

Pay 5/10/1

9 June 1988

Director General  
HEAD OFFICE

ATTENTION: V J VERVOORT  
FAMILIES IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1988 HANDBOOK

With reference to section "USE OF COMPUTER FOR ADULT  
ADOPTION INFORMATION" in the above handbook.

This information should not be made available to the  
public. The instructions on the use of input forms  
for establishing or updating records is quite detailed,  
reducing the security on the computer system.

I would recommend that this handbook be withdrawn from  
going to the National Library. Two versions of the  
handbook could be printed, one with the computer  
information for Social Welfare staff only and the other  
without the computer information for the National Library.

Thank you for advising us of your concern about this  
handbook.

*K Baine*

K Baine  
for Director

13/6/88

SWK 5-7-5

16 June 1988

REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

Subject: (1) Amendment page for the departmental handbook on the  
Adult adoption Information Act 1985.  
(2) Advice regarding the release of information from part  
9 of the handbook dealing with the computer.

1. An amending front page for the handbook is being issued. The reason for this is that the handbook is an internal departmental document and as such does not require an ISBN number. Please ensure that the original front page is destroyed and replaced with the attached amending page.

2. The Data Processing Centre have advised us that the part of the handbook which deals with the computer, Part 9, should not be released to the public as the instructions contained there are of sufficient detail so as to reduce the security of the computer system. Therefore, any request to release the contents of the handbook from the public should take this fact into consideration.

*Veronique Vervoort*  
Veronique Vervoort  
Senior Advisory Officer  
Children Needing Families  
for Director-General

AGREEMENT made this ..... day of ..... BETWEEN HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN (Director-General of Social Welfare) hereinafter called "the Department" of the one part and ..... of ..... hereinafter called "the Researcher" of the other part NOW THEREFORE IT IS AGREED by and between the parties as follows:

That in consideration of the Department permitting the Researcher to have access to files, documents or other material of the Department or assisting the Researcher in other ways the Researcher covenants to comply and be bound in all respects with the undertakings set out in the Schedule appended hereto.

SCHEDULE

- That the Researcher shall not remove from the premises of the Department any file, paper, document or other type of record which is the property of the Department, except when he/she shall have been given authorisation by an officer of the Department;
- That the Researcher shall not make, or have made on his/her behalf any photocopy, photograph or other form of reproduction of any document or record which is the property of the Department, except when the Researcher shall have been given authorisation by an officer of the Department;
- That the Researcher shall not mark, annotate or alter any document or record which is the property of the Department of Social Welfare, except when the Researcher shall have been given authorisation by an officer of the Department;

Initials of the parties: ..... ..

Initials of the witnesses: ..... ..

- That the Researcher shall treat carefully all documents and records made available to him/her by the Department and shall not cause any such document or record to be lost, misplaced, defaced, damaged or destroyed;
- That the Researcher in any presentation of the results of his/her research (whether by way of a published or unpublished report, thesis, book, academic paper, article, lecture, speech, broadcast, letter, conversation or any other form) shall express his/her presentation in such a way as not to allow the identification of individual persons or to reveal confidential information;
- That the Researcher in any substantial account of his/her research (such as, for example, without limiting the generality thereof, a thesis, book, academic paper, published research report, conference or seminar paper, report or essay submitted as a requirement for a course of study, or the like) shall acknowledge the assistance he/she has received from the Department;
- That the Researcher shall submit to the Director-General of the Department for his scrutiny or the scrutiny of any person nominated by him the final draft of any substantial account of the research (such as, for example, without limiting the generality thereof, a thesis, book, academic paper, research report intended for publication, conference or seminar paper, report or essay intended for submission as a requirement for a course of study, or the like), recognising the said Director-General or his nominee has the right to require such deletions or alterations as are considered necessary to prevent the identification of individual persons or to avoid confidential information being revealed;

Initials of the parties: .....

Initials of the witnesses: .....

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

- That the Researcher shall not without written authorisation supply or show to any other person any document or record, or transcript or reproduction of such, obtained through the Department, or divulge or communicate anything he/she has learned as a consequence of the assistance in his/her research given by the Department providing however that nothing therein stated shall prevent him/her from making any presentation of the results of his/her research which would otherwise be not in breach of any other paragraphs of this schedule;
  
- That the Researcher shall keep in a secure place, inaccessible to other persons, all files, papers, documents, records, copies of documents and records, transcripts, filled in questionnaires, attitude inventories, psychological and sociometric test results, notes and working papers containing information derived from these sources, and such like, which come into his/her possession or are created by him/her as a consequence of the assistance provided by the Department and shall destroy all such material, apart from that given or returned to the Department, when he/she no longer requires it for current or future research purposes;
  
- That the Researcher acknowledges that any participation in his/her research by Departmental staff or Departmental voluntary workers as research subjects (such as, for example, without limiting the generality thereof, persons who are interviewed, fill in questionnaires or psychological tests, make themselves available for observation, provide physiological or physical measurements, or the like), shall be entirely optional for them;
  
- That the Researcher acknowledges that any participation by clients of the Department as research subjects (such as, for example, without limiting the generality thereof, persons who are interviewed, fill in questionnaires or psychological tests, make themselves available for observation, provide physiological or physical measurements, or the like), shall be entirely optional for them;

Initials of the parties: ..... ..

Initials of the witnesses: ..... ..

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

- That the Researcher acknowledges that all practical arrangements for providing him/her with assistance shall be at the convenience of the Department;
  
- That the Researcher shall provide free of charge to the Director-General of the Department or his nominee, to become the property of the Department, a copy of any completed substantial account of the research (such as; for example, without limiting the generality thereof, a book, a paper published in an academic journal, a published research report, a conference or seminar paper, an essay, report or thesis submitted as a requirement for a course of study, or the like).

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties have hereunto subscribed their names.

Signed by )  
the said ..... )  
at ..... )  
this ..... day of ..... )  
in the presence of )  
 )  
Witness ..... )  
 )  
Occupation ..... )  
 )  
Address ..... )  
..... )

Signed for the Director-General )  
of Social Welfare by )  
the said ..... )  
at ..... )  
this ..... day of ..... )  
in the presence of )  
 )  
Witness ..... )  
 )  
Occupation ..... )  
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Address ..... )  
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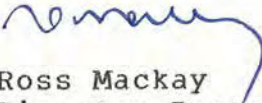
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NOTE FOR FILE

RES 4.47

AMENDMENT TO LETTER TO BIRTH PARENTS WHO SEEK IDENTIFYING  
INFORMATION UNDER THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT ABOUT  
FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

- 1 Eileen Preston of the Head Office Adult Adoption Information Unit based at Lower Hutt contacted me to say that she had had a query from a birth parent as to the possibility of obtaining an original birth certificate in respect of a child she had had adopted out. Eileen said the birth parent had been prompted to do this by the letter about the research which had said that the Act "enables adopted persons and the birth parents of adopted persons to obtain original birth certificates and identifying information about each other."
- 2 This provision of the Act in fact applies only to adopted persons and not to birth parents, so Eileen suggested that the letter to birth parents could be slightly amended so as to solve confusion. I amended the letter accordingly as attached. This version of the letter will now be used for all birth parents who approach the Department seeking identifying information.

  
Ross Mackay  
Director Research

10.9.86

4L/121R

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

**dsw**

Telegrams:  
Headwel, Wellington  
Telephone: 727 666  
Extension:  
Reference:

16 September 1986

Dear Friend

## RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

The Adult Adoption Information Act enables adopted persons and the birth parents of adopted persons to obtain identifying information about each other and to seek assistance from the Department of Social Welfare in contacting each other (as long as a veto has not been placed on this by the other party).

The Department of Social Welfare is interested in finding out how the Act works for people who want to obtain such information. In particular, we are interested to know how many people use the Act to trace the other party to the adoption, how successful their efforts to trace the other party are, how helpful the Department of Social Welfare is in the search, how useful any counselling they may receive is, and what the whole experience means for them.

We would like to obtain your consent to take part in a research study to find these things out. If you agree to take part, could I ask you to sign the attached consent form and fill in your name and address and mail it to the Research Section of the Department of Social Welfare in the attached envelope. In the future, a sample of people will be drawn from among all those who have made use of the provisions of the Act. If you are drawn in this sample, the Research Section of the Department will contact you and ask you to take part in a personal interview with a research interviewer. Any information you provide in the interview would be treated in the strictest confidence and would not be made available to anyone outside the research team.

As the study will involve only a sample of people, it is possible that your name will not be drawn and that you will not be contacted to take part in the research. What we are seeking is your consent to take part if your name is drawn. The success of the research will depend on a large number of people agreeing to take part, so that the information we obtain is representative. Therefore I ask that you consider this request for consent favourably.

Everyone who takes part in the research will receive a copy of any research report which is produced from this project.

Thank you for your co-operation.

J W Grant  
Director General

4L/57R

Kees McKay

list of Independent Counsellors  
Below

ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

SOCIAL WORK STAFF

Whangarei	Ms Pat Gray
Auckland Region	Ms Moya Shaw Mr Ron Benjamin
Hamilton	Ms Heather Birch
Rotorua	Ms Phillipa Savage
Whakatane	Mr Peter Dawson
Tauranga	Ms Nancy Baird
Gisborne	Ms Norma Miller
Napier	Ms Barbara Beeby
Hastings	Ms Penny Humphries
Palmerston North	Ms Valerie Gerstgraser
New Plymouth	Ms Patricia Brookes
Wanganui	Ms Merle Tattersal
Nelson	Mr Paul Grocott
Blenheim	Mr Derek Borland
Greymouth	Ms Mary Anne Martin
Christchurch	Ms Jacquie Rimminton Mr Don Clarkson
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Invercargill	Ms Diane Halstead
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National responsibilities for:

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LIST OF INDEPENDENT COUNSELLORS AND APPROVED AGENCIES

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✓ Mrs Kathryn McLean,  
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BLenheim

✓ Mrs Annette Rattray  
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28 August 1986

ALL ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

RESEARCH ON THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

- 1 The Research Section is to carry out some research as part of the Department's monitoring of the operation of the Adult Adoption Information Act. I am asking for your assistance with this research by providing some basic demographic information on adopted adults who require counselling and birth parents who seek identifying information under the Act; and by seeking the consent of these people to take part in a follow-up interview with a research staff member.

Recording of demographic information

- 2 The attached forms are for recording the required demographic information on adopted persons and birth parents respectively. The information is limited to basic demographic variables (age and sex), and should not involve much recording work. Could I ask you to record the required details for each adopted adult for whom you provide counselling and for each birth parent who approaches the Department for identifying information from 1 September 1986, when the Act comes into effect. One line of the form should be used to record the required details for each person. I am enclosing a stock of forms for your use.
- 3 A new form should be used for each month (the month and year to be entered in the top left corner). Continuation sheets for each month should be used when the sheet is full. At the end of each month, a copy of all sheets used for the month should be sent to:

The Director  
Research Section  
HEAD OFFICE

Request for consent to take part in research

- 4 We are also interested in following up a sample of persons who make use of the Act, and conducting in-depth interviews with them about their experience under the Act. I have drafted a letter explaining the research and a form seeking

4L/60R

consent to take part. Could I ask you to provide each adopted person for whom you provide counselling and each birth parent who approaches your office for identifying information with a copy of the attached letter and consent form. It would be useful if the form could be signed by the person before leaving your office. Otherwise the form could be taken away and mailed direct to the Research Section at the above address.

- 5 Could you please forward all signed consent forms at the end of each month to the Research Section at the above address. These can be mailed together with the returns of demographic information. When you run out of forms and letters, could you please photocopy a further supply using your office copying machine.
- 6 If you have any queries about the above, or if any difficulties arise with the forms or procedures for using them, please contact me. Thank you for your co-operation with this exercise.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research  
for Director General

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need to be more specific

Broadly speaking we can take either of two approaches: on the one hand we could perform a descriptive narrative, asking of the sample "Who are these people" "What lead them to use the Act" and "What was their experience with it" and so on. At present I am inclined to think that might be the most suitable approach, obtaining good basic information which can also form a basis for building upon later. An alternative approach would be more of an investigative type. For example we could do a comparative study (or set of studies) looking at questions such as: what differences exist between groups, eg those who follow up receipt of identifying information with a search compared to those who do not - that is just an example. There are lots of possibilities in that comparative area - and also a lot of research problems.

Research in any social science area has design problems, which at best the researcher can minimise. I have read, and I accept the comment, that "any social scientist who claims to have a perfect research design is practising dramatic art, not social science!" Another fault which sometimes occurs when a research plan is being formulated is that the researcher makes the mistake of attempting to solve all the problems of the universe with one piece of work, enthusiasm can lead us astray. I recognise the potential tendency in myself!

Much of the existing research on adoption issues suffers from three flaws very commonly found in studies of their kind. Please bear with me if this reads very tediously, as I think it is important to be aware of them.

There is a very human tendency to find what we want to, and see data collected through the "glasses" that we wear. This kind of bias may not operate deliberately nor consciously. Interviewers have a certain set of hopes and expectations which interact with the subjects' desires for a positive evaluation. These factors, in the absence of a controlled laboratory setting, (quite inappropriate here) can congeal to create an impression which becomes the theme of research conclusion: this kind of flaw is tolerable if the researcher adequately acknowledges the faults and if the major research findings by other researchers are generally in accord with the findings, with an understanding of "demand characteristics".

A second kind of flaw, especially likely in comparative studies, is confounding of significant factors, attributing causality where none actually exists. The classic example is of "proving" that because drowning accidents are more likely to occur on hot days when people tend to buy more icecream, then icecream must be the causative agent in drowning. There are very elaborate and expensive designs which can sort out error values in comparative studies, but these would have functional difficulties in what we are considering.

Thirdly, a researcher may fail to take into account the nature of his or her actual sample, believing it to be more representative of the actual "population" than it is. Assumptions are shaky territory here. While it is difficult to obtain a really representative sample, we have to know how unrepresentative our sample is, in so far as we can assess. I think that this in particular is a part of research that is very often glossed over in adoption research. Researchers do, nearly always, give the relevant characteristics of the sample they actually studied, (as they should) but fail to include details of the population at large, and how their selected sample might or might not vary from it. Since we can obtain some factual data on our population as a whole, we have some scope to ascertain more precise findings in this area.

We can see, even without any kind of research, that our Act applicants are not completely representative of the adoption population as a whole, eg, we have a ratio of male to female applicants amongst adopted people that does not

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correspond to the ratio we know to exist in the community. We can see that without any kind of research, but we cannot explain it except on the basis of completely random assumptions - eg "women are naturally nosier" as I heard one broadcaster say. This kind of assumption ignores all the other possible explanations, and if we tried, we could generate very many off the top of our heads. A study able to investigate every single one might find that, in fact, the order of sibling adoption into an adoptive family was really the crucial factor which influenced application; (again, this is just an example). Even if the superficial explanation is true, we still need some reasonable method of testing that it is so, and to map out an appropriate design strategy. Age of telling has been isolated by some researchers as highly significant, and it may well be so; but in several studies this was precisely the factor the researchers looked for, using very small groups (a danger) or, occasionally too many, which raises analysis problems.

It could well be appropriate to do a pilot study first, and then the major study in this case. A pilot study could assist in isolating faults in approaches to question-based interviewing, helping to weed out negative questions. It could also be compared in its findings with the final study.

Practical considerations are important too; there will be a feasibility limit to the number of people who can be interviewed in a certain time over a number of months, and the size of the sample has to be balanced against this. For validity it would be lovely to use a huge sample, but this is not practical, so we compensate by choosing as tight a sample as we can select.

Another consideration is: for what purposes do we want this research? That is particularly pertinent in this area, where we could theoretically investigate such a myriad of things. If, for example, we decided that the most important thing we wished to know from it was how to improve the overall functioning of adoption placements, and how to better train the people handling this, then beautiful findings about the age of telling/Act applications would be largely unusable. If our goal was to improve client satisfaction with the working of the Act, orientation would be quite specific; if our major goal is to inform both the public at large and the adoption public, then again, a descriptive narrative would be a suitable approach. If our goal is to simply add to the overall knowledge on adoption and investigate some aspect of the process, to add to the world bank of information, then we might choose a more novel aspect. Personally, the last does appeal to me, though I don't feel it is timely nor appropriate at this point. We need a clear idea of which publics we aim to inform, and what we wish to inform them about. (Again, another old saying in social science is that the questions are harder to establish than the answers)

Having established that, my task will be to develop appropriate tools to gather data which is capable of being analysed and/or reported as accurately as possible

I have focussed on the problems ahead in these notes, certainly not because the project lacks appeal. I think it is a very worthwhile undertaking, and it is important to demonstrate the wonderful achievements that have been made, for they are of intrapersonal, interpersonal and international value. While that may be a personal opinion we hold as individuals, it is also well vindicated in the review literature of a superior kind. A soundly planned design is important to me, as my personal views are clear, and I do not want to fall into the trap of demonstrating solely what I believe because I happen to believe it. It may occur that the findings do indeed coincide with the beliefs I hold, or the reverse may occur. Be that as it may, it would be a very satisfactory exercise to perform, and the answers would be of great interest to me.

I have noticed very distinct differences between those clients who do not know I personally am adopted, and those who do; I have also witnessed clearly behaviour changing in clients who learn I am adopted also midway through their counselling experience. Though "not knowing" clients may experience me (and I hope they do) as warm and responsive to their needs, the revelation factor still makes a very major difference to their degree of open self-disclosure. As little thoroughly designed research has been done of this nature by self-disclosed adopted researchers, it would make for a very interesting comparative study indeed to contrast those two groups; three alternatives are possible - disclosure to all, disclosure to none, or a divided situation. Whichever we decide upon, my feeling is that even my being an adopted person (even if they don't know it) would be a hidden significant factor, so we could best exclude this by either telling all subjects, or division.

Clients I have seen, personally, in the course of the Act would have a "difference" in research terms, from the rest of the potential sample, and they would probably be excluded. The ultimate sample will experience a bias whether we include them or extract them, and it seems that less bias would enter if we excluded them.

Overall I am of the view at this stage that a descriptive narrative is the road to pursue; I will look forward to your feedback on this, and if we are of one view, I will develop that idea further, or otherwise focus on alternatives, as you may suggest.

I have been assuming that I will be the sole collector of data, at least in the ultimate study, with a view to the new strain of problems that comes about when different interviewers are used; in that way, demand characteristics would be more constant a factor across subjects. It influences very much the working design; as we can't use sophisticated analytical techniques, to analyse out variance very accurately, it is an important factor.

Finally, another source of bias would be to use solely an Auckland sample; though we might choose to do this, it is something to consider in terms of the possible effect on the findings.

I hope this is adequate as a starting point for further ideas you may have considered.

*Final  
questions  
openness  
helpful  
in research  
a problem*

*also  
for more  
bias*

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June 87

PROJECT PROPOSAL

THE EXPERIENCES OF APPLICANTS UNDER S4 OF THE ADULT ADOPTION  
INFORMATION ACT 1985 AND FACTORS INFLUENCING APPLICATION

ANNA COFFEY  
RESEARCH SECTION  
HEAD OFFICE  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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PROJECT PROPOSAL: SUMMARY SHEETTitle:

The Experience of Applicants under s.4 of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and Factors Influencing Application

Background:

Considerable interest has been expressed in the working of s.4 by the media, community applicants and professionals working in the area of adoption. Ms Ann Corcoran suggested that a research project be performed by Anna Coffey to investigate outcomes of s.4 under the auspices of the Research Section, Department of Social Welfare.

Issues Involved:

Previous research has generated two main theories concerning application for original information, which can be termed the "disturbance" theory and the "experience of difference" theory. The conflict of theories centres upon whether the motivation to seek information arises from unsatisfactory adoption experiences or the experience of being differentiated in status and rights from the general population.

Project Objectives:

To assess the factors significantly affecting application application and search, in relation to adoptive experience, adoption structure and theoretical perspectives.

Type of Project:

It is envisaged that a three level survey will be conducted, to be initially explored in a pilot study. The bulk of data will be sought using postal questionnaire largely pre-coded. In addition to supplying data pertinent to the two theories a further pupose of this questionnaire is to augment existing demographic data. Secondly structured interviews will be conducted to explore emerging themes in greater depth. Thirdly attitudes current in the general population will be assessed by conducting group interviews and by some networking.

Two alternatives are suggested for the scope of this project. It could be performed in the Auckland area solely; or be undertaken by sampling populations in selected city and rural populations - for example, Auckland, Christchurch and Hastings.

Data will be analysed to identify significant themes and subject differences, with case studies to illustrate predominant indications. Demographic material will be tabled with explanatory commentary where appropriate.

Contribution to Departmental Goals:

It is hoped that this study will provide a basis for future research by generating testable hypotheses and indicating likely parameters.

Resources Required:

Questionnaire: printing, postage, stickers, envelopes, incidental stationery  
 Interviewing: tape machine, microphone, tapes, transport, assistant if needed  
 Analysis: coding materials, stationery, computer and trancribing materials  
 Time frame: Estimated date of completed report 31 March 1988

Utilisation:

The report may be made available to applicants, policy makers and the community.

PROJECT PROPOSAL:THE EXPERIENCES OF APPLICANTS UNDER S4 OF THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985 AND FACTORS INFLUENCING APPLICATIONINTRODUCTION

In recent decades and during the prolonged Parliamentary debate concerning the Adult Adoption Information Bill argument took place concerning the nature and effect of providing information on origins to adopted persons. Opponents of liberalisation of law and practice asserted widely held views which maintain that secrecy was vital to successful adoptive bonds and for the protection of all parties to adoption. Adopted people who sought information were often depicted as disturbed exceptions, as failures of adjustment to normal adoptive situations, and their searches as selfish desires bound to cause disruption to birth and adoptive parents. These views were founded in opinion and custom rather than the provisions governed by the Adoption Act 1955 (Webb 1979).

In September 1985 Parliament enacted the Adult Adoption Information Act and the provision concerning application by adopted people for original birth certificates came into full effect on 1 September 1986. This meant that subject to the absence of a veto placed by a birth parent, applicants were entitled to receive certificates after complying with requirements for a session of "compulsory counselling". It is to be noted that applicants were not entitled to receive certificates as of right, an important distinction between New Zealand legislation and access law in England and Scotland. The applicant was then able to conduct a search on his or her own behalf, if reunion was sought in addition to information on original names.

It is a truism that changed attitudes, assumptions and practices do not immediately and automatically follow upon change in legislation. At regional seminars conducted by the Department of Social Welfare during the first months of the Act's full operation, participants appointed to perform counselling continually noted the need for publicity and education on the phenomena of searching and its sequelae, which they felt to be grossly misrepresented in the community. This project is seen as a contribution to that need and an endeavour to place the perceptions of the Act's operations upon a researched base.

In 1987 Ms Ann Corcoran, Assistant Director of Adoption and Fostering, appointed me to conduct research into these matters under the auspices of the Research Department of the Department of Social Welfare's Head Office.

ISSUES:

Central to the debate are the "myths" surrounding adoption. These are summarised by Silber and Speedlin as:

- . the birth mother obviously doesn't care for her child or she wouldn't have given him or her away;
- . secrecy in every phase of adoption is necessary to protect the parties;
- . both the birth mother and the birth father will forget their unwanted child;
- . if the adopted person really loved his adoptive family, he would not have to search for birth parents.

If the first three myths are valid, then contact should be found to be largely unsuccessful; if the fourth myth is valid then support would be demonstrated by strain or estrangement within the adoptive family after reunion with birth parents.

THEORIES ON THE NEED TO KNOW

The two main theories can be termed the "secrecy-alienation" view (Haines and Timms 1983) and the "bad experience-disturbed" view (Raynor 1980). Both perspectives acknowledge the modifying influence of what have been called "trigger factors", experiences which are considered to intensify the felt need to search, such as age of telling, marriage, bereavement, pregnancy and similar events. Another important determinant of search intensity appears to be the degree of support available to the would-be searcher. (Triseliotis 1973; Sorosky, Baran and Pannor 1978). The "disturbed" theory increasingly lacks support of research findings. Unsatisfactory adoptive relationships do not appear to be related to the desire to search, though it has been cited as influencing the adopted person's hopes for the aftermath of reunion (Day 1979).

CONCEPTUAL HYPOTHESIS

The need to know arises from an adoption experience characterised by the absence or deficiency of factual and meaningful information concerning the adopted person's birth family, a basic need modified by experiential factors. Here, the "need to know" is defined as application under s.4 of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and degree of search activity; "meaningful information" is defined as that which is specific to the person it describes. For example, "she was just a young girl" is not meaningful information; "she was born in Wellington of Samoan and Scottish parents" is. "Experiential factors" are demographic characteristics relevant to the type of adoptive family (eg intra-familial adoption) and trigger events. It is supposed therefore: the need to know is a function of secret adoption and experiential factors.

### OBJECTIVES

The project's aims are:

- (i) to examine search and reunion experience and its effects
- (ii) to investigate experiential factors influencing the need to know;
- (iii) to obtain client feedback on s.4 provisions and procedures;
- (iv) to collect demographic information with particular reference to adoptive family structures and type of adoption category;
- (v) to compare community perceptions of the adopted with perceptions held by the adopted in relation to the same.

### TYPE OF PROJECT

Methods of collecting data involve the use of pre-coded questionnaires, structured interviewing and group discussions, producing both quantitative and qualitative data. Projected sample sizes are 250, 50 and 4 respectively. It is envisaged that this would be carried out using sub-samples drawn from the Auckland, Christchurch and Hastings areas; alternatively it could be performed using an Auckland sample only, which would cost less but introduce a further degree of bias. The costs of extending the project to other specified areas are not a major component of the project estimates, and considering the extra information to be gained, the wider option is recommended. A sampling pool is available from the returned consent-to research forms already forwarded by s.4 applicants. After finalizing area determination, a form of selective randomization will be used to select subjects, using sample sizes proportionate to area size.

### FIELD PROCEDURES

The questionnaire will be distributed postally. A pilot study using 50 subjects will be conducted to refine the content and coding frames. Interviews will be no more than 60 minutes, conducted with individuals in their own homes and taped if consent is obtained. Subjects will be assigned index numbers so that material remains confidential. After data analysis this index will be destroyed. Group interviews will be conducted in settings elected by consenting groups and taped subject to consent. Two interviewers will be used in the structured interviews with individuals if the recommended area proposal is authorised. These subjects will be de-briefed by interviewers at the conclusion of the data recording phase.

### PROCESSING OF DATA

A coding analysis will be performed on questionnaire data, and tested for significant results, then reported in tables and percentages as appropriate. Qualitative material will be transcribed and subjected to theme analysis, to be illustrated by case history reporting.

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CONTRIBUTION TO DEPARTMENTAL GOALS

It is hoped that this project will provide material useful to future research by providing hypotheses and indications of parameters.

UTILISATION

Findings may be used as training material for counsellors and social workers; as a resource for future policy; and to provide educational material to the general public and the media.

TIME FRAME SUMMARY

1987	June:	Design of instruments and communications
	July:	Sample drawn from consentees (Head Office) Group interviews
	August:	Piloting of questionnaire Transcription of group data
	September:	Finalisation and sending of questionnaire Preparations for structured interviewing Monitoring questionnaire responding
	October:	Structured interviewing
	November:	Transcription and summary of interviews
	December:	Initial questionnaire analysis
1988	January:	Preparation of results for computer analysis
	February:	Writing up of project and presentation of draft
	March:	Finalisation and summary of results sent to subjects

COSTS AND RESOURCES

Clerical and Stationery Costs: photocopying, postage, envelopes, typing materials, stickers, carbons et al, sampling resources, typing resources

Instrument Costs: printing, tapes and taping machinery

Travel Costs: mileage, travel in structured interviewing preparation phase

Analysis: computer resources

Communication Costs: STD calls, courier costs.

Assistant's Payment: wage and reimbursement of any costs incurred.

Costs will vary depending upon which area strategy is implemented.

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Also Consulted

Hansard

Archival material from the New Zealand Herald, Christchurch Press and Auckland Star

Reports of the Statute Revision Committees

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<u>Dates</u> 87	<u>Task</u>	<u>Work Days</u> (6hr)	<u>Task No:</u>	<u>Equipment /Resources</u> Costs	<u>Copy &amp; Postage</u> Volumes	<u>Notes</u>
June 16-21	Proposal completion time track	4	1a	stationery, typing (o) postage	2 ea	stationery paper and envelopes
22	Outline and Courtesy letters to S.12 appointees	1	1b	stationery, photocopy, typing (o), mileage	57 ea	ARO
23	confer with ARO on resources	1	2	mileage		
24	Design of all communications req. for sub-samples	1	3	stationery, photocopy, typing (o)		copy late: step 5
25 June to 20 July	Design postal questionnaire	16	4	stationery, typing (o) photocopying, postage good paper needed for pilot pq Task 9	3 ea	2. to HO order paper?
July 21-22	Introductory letters to Comm. groups; Design group Ivws. Start Networking links going	2	5	stationery, postage, photocopying, poss. mileage	copy 10 group-sheets & 50 ny sheets	ARO - copy at same time as task 3
23-31	Group interviews and networking -first part of this segment	8	6a	mileage .tapes, microphone, tape machine		discuss PQ & sample dra progress with HO - sample ready when
August 3	Preliminary compilation of group data	1	7	stationery, typing (o)		
4	Notify pilot subs	1	8	stationery, postage, triplicate sheets for addressing/follow-up		could be done at same time as 10 task
5-9	Make any final amendments to PQ suggested by HO.	4	9	stationery, <u>Typing (D)</u> , copying ARO?	copy 60 PQ for pilot	Or print?
10	serialize, stuff, address and post pilot PQ	1	10	envelopes, sae's, and postage for both -extra for non-resp. follow-ups	150 env. & stamps	

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<u>Dates</u> 87-88	<u>Task</u>	<u>Work</u> <u>Days</u> (6hr)	<u>Task</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Costs</u> <u>Equipment/Resources</u>	<u>Copy &amp;</u> <u>Postage</u> <u>Volumes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
August 11-20	Networking & group interviews - contd Send thank you letter to Community Groups  Monitor pilot returns and book-in earlies	8	6b  11	Mileage, tapes, stat.  Envelopes, postage  stationery, typing (o)	about 6	Can Dept supply tapes etc?
26-27	Transcribe and summarise Group & Network results	2	12	Stationery, typing (o)		
28-31	Summarise pilot resp. - to HO	2	13	stationery, typing (o), postage, copying	4 ea	Check it is received
Sept. 1-10	Finalise S. Interview design, type, copy and send to HO	8	14	stationery, typing (o), copying, postage	3 copies	
11-12	Print or Copy PQ. PQ to full sample - enveloped and indexed and serialised; stuff and post	2	15	Printing or typing (D) envelopes, sae's, postage for both, triplicate address labels on carbon, cards to monitor non-or late responding; mileage	sample size 250 so will need about 600 postage 250 copies	may need to swap with tasks 17 & 18 if PQ not avail. now
14	Draw up coding/edit lists for PQ return	1	16	stationery, typing (o), copying ARO, mileage?	?50 sheets	check copy number when design done
15-18	Tying up loose ends thus far	3	17	-to be determined		
21	Preliminary prep. for S/Interviews - & arrange meeting with 2nd interviewer;	1	18	possibly tollcalls; postage, stationery, typing (o) and copying	20 pages	arrange(D) typing or printing of 55 S.I'
22 Sept to 14 Oct	Monitor responding to PQ. Follow up Non's; Index and edit return, list codes	17	19	stationery, typing (o)  (have postage etc already)		
Oct 15-16	Collect SI forms; Final preparation for S/Interviews; brief assistant; send out appt letters, index	2	20	inter-city travel & accommodation; postage, mileage stationery	55-60 letters & post.	

<u>Dates</u> 67-68	<u>Task</u>	<u>Work Days</u> (6hr)	<u>Task No:</u>	<u>Costs:</u> <u>Equipment/Resources</u>	<u>Copy &amp; Postage</u> <u>Volumes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Oct. 19-20	confirm arrangements for S.I's.	2	21	Possibly toll-call stationery, typing (o)		make sure SI's recvd.
22	CUT-OFF POINT FOR PQ	-	22	Folders		Note NR's on index
23 Oct to 4 Dec	Structured Intervws. conducted in subject homes	31	23	Mileage; possibly travel; costs for assistant; tapes etc Dictaphone???		check return of SI's from assistant
Dec 7-17	Transcribing and analysis of SI's; De-brief helper.	9	24	Stationery, typing (o) -perhaps some help ARO in transcribing		cards for computer?
17-23	Begin PQ analysis	6	25a	Stationery, typing(o)		check codes form with HO
23 Dec to 4 Jan	Leave Without Pay	-	-			
1988: 4-31 Jan or sooner	Complete results -tables, codes, etc for computer	20	25b	Stationery, computer sheets		check avail of computer with HO
1 Feb to 7 March	Writing Up		26	Stationery, typing (o) and typing (D) of final draft		Check ARO Typing avail? when?
9-10 Mar	Research Report forwarded to HO for consideration	2	27	Copying, Postage, Stationery, Mileage	-?	
1 Mar - 31 Mar	Any final amendments and tying loose ends Arrange with HO printing/sending of Report to publics and subjects			postage, stationery	-? 300	PROJECT COMPLETE

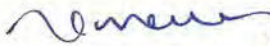
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NOTE FOR FILE

RES 4.47

PROVISION OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON BIRTH PARENTS WHO SEEK IDENTIFYING INFORMATION UNDER THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT AND REQUESTS FOR CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

- 1 After the memoranda to Adult Adoption Information Officers and Independent Counsellors/Approved Agencies of 28 August were drafted, I was contacted by Eileen Preston of the Head Office Adult Adoption Information Unit based at Lower Hutt, to find out what action we would be requiring in respect of the planned research into the operation of the Act.
- 2 In the course of our discussion, Eileen indicated to me that all approaches by birth parents to the Department for identifying information would be handled by her unit. She suggested that it was appropriate that the demographic statistics of birth parents be collected by her unit, and that the requests for consent for birth parents to take part in the research should also be made through her unit. I agreed with this approach.
- 3 Thus, a stock of 50 forms for collection of demographic information, 100 letters explaining the research and 100 consent forms (as attached) together with 100 franked return-addressed envelopes was provided to Eileen for use in respect of birth parents who approach the Department for identifying information.

  
Ross Mackay  
Director Research

29.8.86

4L/121R

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APPLICATIONS FOR A COPY OF THE ORIGINAL BIRTH CERTIFICATE  
 SEPTEMBER 1986 ONWARDS

YEAR AND MONTH	MALE (NO.)	FEMALE (NO.)	TOTAL (NO.)
-----			
1986			
September	402	1180	1582
October	451	1099	1550
November (1 missing)	128	308	437
December	96	231	327
	-----	-----	-----
	1077	2818	3896
1987			
January	107	167	274
February	123	218	341
March	97	168	265
April	91	139	230
May	76	135	211
June	78	147	225
July	78	138	216
August	62	112	174
September	66	167	233
October	89	171	260
November	57	110	167
December	45	95	140
	-----	-----	-----
	969	1767	2736
1988			
January	55	80	135
February	55	122	177
March	75	119	194
April	59	107	166
May	61	110	171
June	67	127	194
July	57	94	151
August	78	133	211
September	58	113	171
October	65	95	160
November	137	242	379
December	57	89	146
	-----	-----	-----
	824	1431	2255
1989			
January	54	90	144
February	70	175	245
March	76	132	208
April	65	116	181
May	61	170	231
June	67	101	168

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5/1/70  
 104

July	56	85	141
August	45	94	139
September	54	71	125
October	32	72	104
November	52	94	146
December	26	58	84
-----			
	658	1258	1916

BIRTHPARENTS REQUESTING IDENTIFYING INFORMATION  
SEPTEMBER 1986 ONWARDS

YEAR AND MONTH	BIRTH- MOTHERS (NO.)	BIRTH- FATHERS (NO.)	TOTAL (NO.)
1986			
September	354	9	363
October	102	6	108
November	73	30	103
December	60	5	65
-----			
	589	50	639

1987			
January	72	5	77
February	62	1	63
March	50	1	51
April	63	1	64
May	38	3	41
June	62	3	65
July	44	3	47
August	49	7	56
September	51	1	52
October	60	6	66
November	47	3	50
December	34	2	36
-----			
	632	36	668

1988			
January	1	32	33
February	3	36	39
March	4	51	55
April	6	46	52
May	2	36	38
June	1	40	41

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July	2	48	50
August	1	33	34
September	4	48	52
October	8	73	81
November	11	150	161
December	1	35	36
	-----		
	44	628	672

1989

January	3	41	41
February	3	76	79
March	3	58	61
April	2	41	43
May	5	61	66
June	5	55	60
July	3	53	56
August	4	33	37
September	1	34	35
October	4	30	34
November	3	47	50
December	1	21	22
	-----		
	37	550	584

VETOES PLACED BY ADOPTED PERSONS MARCH 1986 ONWARDS

YEAR AND MONTH	MALE (NO.)	FEMALE (NO.)	TOTAL (NO.)
1986			
March	31	81	112
April	18	43	61
May	40	62	102
June	23	34	57
July	24	52	76
August	89	155	244
September	52	112	164
October	7	18	25
November	4	10	14
December	1	5	6
	-----		
	289	572	861

1987

January	5	1	6
February	4	5	9
March	2	10	12
April	1	6	7
May	3	3	6
June	1	3	4
July	2	5	7
August	1	2	3
September	1	1	2
October	2	8	10
November	1	3	4
December	3		3
-----			
	26	47	73

1988

January	2		2
February	1	5	6
March	2	1	3
April	3	1	4
May	1	3	4
June	1	3	4
July	2	2	4
August	2	3	5
September	2	2	4
October		2	2
November	2	7	9
December		3	3
-----			
	18	32	50

1989

January	2	2	4
February		1	1
March	1	2	3
April	2	5	7
May	3	2	5
June	3	3	6
July	1	3	4
August	1	1	2
September	3	3	6
October	1	3	4
November	1		4
December		1	1
-----			
	18	26	47

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VEHICLES PLACED BY BIRTHPARENTS MARCH 1986 ONWARDS

YEAR AND MONTH	BIRTH- MOTHERS (NO.)	BIRTH- FATHERS (NO.)	TOTAL (NO.)
1986			
March	458	6	464
April	264	3	267
May	256	7	263
June	207	8	215
July	242	1	243
August	781	10	791
September	377	6	383
October	48	1	49
November	36		36
December	19		19
	-----		
	2688	42	2730
1987			
January	17		12
February	23	1	24
March	13		13
April	13		13
May	17		17
June	11		11
July	15		15
August	7		7
September	4		4
October	6	1	7
November	3		3
December	8		8
	-----		
	137	2	139
1988			
January	3		3
February	7		7
March	5	2	7
April	10		10
May	7		7
June	6		6
July	2		2
August	13		13
September	15		15
October	6		6
November	9		9
December	3		3
	-----		
	86	2	74

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1989

January	3	3
February	6	6
March	6	6
April	6	6
May	9	9
June	5	5
July	5	5
August	5	5
September	3	3
October	2	2
November	4	4
December	2	2

-----  
56

-----  
56

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DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PERSONS APPLYING FOR VETOES  
UNDER THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

The attached sheet gives demographic details of persons who have applied for vetoes during the first six months of the Adult Adoption Information Act (from March 1986 to August 1986).

Adopted Persons

652 adopted persons had applied for vetoes, approximately two thirds of whom were <sup>fe</sup>male and one third female. The great majority of these people were young - 70% were under the age of 30, and only 7% were aged 40 or more.

Birthparents

There were 2243 applications for vetoes by birth parents, 98% of them by birthmothers. Again, it was predominantly younger people who had applied for vetoes - over 80% were aged less than 25 and less than 7% were aged over 30.

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DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PERSONS APPLYING FOR VETOES  
UNDER THE ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT

MARCH 1986-AUGUST 1986

Adopted Persons

Sex

Female	=	427	65%
Male	=	<u>225</u>	<u>35%</u>
		652	100%

AGE AT APPLICATION

<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>		<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>	
19	37	6%	50-54	3	-
20-24	247	38%	55-59	2	-
25-29	179	27%	60-64	-	-
30-34	83	13%	65-69	1	-
35-39	59	9%	Data missing	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
40-44	30	5%		652	100%
45-49	10	2%			

Birth Parents

Applications By:

Birth Mother	2208	98%
Birth Father	<u>35</u>	<u>2%</u>
	2243	100%

Age at Time of Application. ) Veto.

*Age*

<u>Years</u>	<u>No</u>	
13	1	-
14	13	1%
15-19	913	41%
20-24	927	41%
25-29	229	10% ←
30-34	80	4%
35-39	45	2%
40-44	19	1%
45-49	6	-
57	1	-
Data Missing/ Not Recorded	<u>9</u>	<u>100%</u>
	2243	

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19	37	6%	50-54	3	-
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25-29	179	27%	60-64	-	-
30-34	83	13%	65-69	1	-
35-39	59	9%	Data missing	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
40-44	30	5%		652	<u>-</u>
45-49	10	2%			

Birth Parents

Applications By:

Birth Mother	2208	98%
Birth Father	<u>35</u>	<u>2%</u>
	2243	100%

Age at Time of Adoption

<u>Years</u>	<u>No</u>	
13	1	-
14	13	1%
15-19	913	41%
20-24	927	41%
25-29	229	10%
30-34	80	4%
35-39	45	2%
40-44	19	1%
45-49	6	-
57	1	-
Data Missing/ Not Recorded	<u>9</u>	<u>100%</u>
	2243	



# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

S. 225



Facsimile: (04) 726 873  
 Telephone: (04) 727 666  
 Extension:  
 Reference: ADM 24-18-88  
 SWK 5-7-1

*Noted*  
*I have given*  
*a copy to*  
*John Hunt*

24 November 1988

## REPORT TO THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE

### ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT 1985

You asked for a report on the current departmental resourcing of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, as background information for a meeting with the Hon Jonathan Hunt.

#### 1. Brief History

On 16 December 1985 Cabinet approved the initial resource requirements to implement this Act. This department was allocated fourteen extra permanent positions and twelve temporary positions (CM 85/46/27).

In July 1987, Cabinet Social Equity Committee (SE (87) 73) confirmed that the requirements of both departments (Justice and Social Welfare) in respect of Adult Adoption Information Act can be met within existing permanent ceilings of each department, and agreed that the twelve temporary staff employed by this department and devoted to Adult Adoption Information Act activity, should be shed on a gradual basis by 30 September 1988. The Committee noted that during the year 1987/88 the staffing and resources required to administer the Act, should fall to a stable level and permit staff and resourcing matters to be addressed by normal means.

#### 2. Current Situation

From 1 April 1988 control of funding for Adult Adoption Information Act activity was decentralised from Head Office control to the control of Regional Assistant Directors-General. This marked the end of the implementation phase of the Adult Adoption Information Act.

Also from the 1 April 1988, the extra permanent staff positions allocated to the department by Cabinet in 1985 were incorporated into each region's permanent staff ceiling. These fourteen positions were already in place throughout the country (see Appendix 1). The twelve temporary staff positions, that had been allocated on an hours basis throughout the country, for the implementation phase of the Act, were shed on gradual basis by 30 September 1988.

Each Regional Assistant Director-General was asked to consult with District managers about the incorporation of Adult Adoption Information Act activity into local social service priorities in areas where there were no permanent positions already allocated for that activity. This process is continuing.

From 1 April 1989 onwards, Regional Assistant Directors-General will incorporate Adult Adoption Information Act service activity into their budgets for regional social service activity. The priority that Adult Adoption Information Act activity receives is, naturally, dependent on the whole range of social service priorities which require resourcing.

3. Comment on the representations made to the Hon Jonathan Hunt

It appears that Mary Thornton of Nelson has either misunderstood or been misinformed about Adult Adoption Information Act activity. It seems that the "two years" mentioned is, in fact, reference to the end of the implementation phase, not the end of Adult Adoption Information Act activity.

The issue raised by Rosie Coelings of Oamaru, is somewhat different. Adult Adoption Information Act activity for Oamaru is being covered from the parent District Office in Timaru. The local Senior Social Worker in Oamaru is able to take referrals and it is understood that these are forwarded to Timaru. There are community concerns about the level of Adult Adoption Information Act services delivered in this part of the country. These concerns are heightened by the fact that the local Independent Counsellor left the area earlier in the year. This means that, at present, there is no alternative available to local people besides the limited service offered by the department. It is understood that the Director at Timaru is to consider further nominations for Independent Counsellors for the area. Nominations for approval to act as an Independent Counsellor under Section 12 of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985, are forwarded to you via Head Office after the recommendations are received.

The issue of "user-pay" was also raised by both correspondents. There is no intention at present to increase the "user-pay" element of the Act. At present adult adoptees pay a fee to the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages to obtain their original birth certificate. No fees are charged by this department to people using departmental services under the Act.

Concern was also expressed about possible legislative change to the Act. There is at present no intention to promote any legislative change to the Act.

The third letter received by the Hon Jonathan Hunt is from Mark Duke, Director of Latter Day Saints Social Services. He raises issues about general adoption policy. He has also raised these policy matters with you and a draft reply is being prepared. You may wish to forward a copy of that reply to Hon Jonathan Hunt, in due course.



P B Dickens  
Programme Director  
Children Needing Families  
for Director-General

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APPENDIX 1

Adult Adoption Information Act 1985

Staff Distribution by Region

- \* Denotes the distribution of the permanent positions allocated by Cabinet to the Department for Adult Adoption Information Act activity.
- o Denotes the location of staff who undertake Adult Adoption Information Act activity, this is usually in conjunction with other social service activity.

Northern Region

- o Whangarei - covering Northland

*	Northern Services Office Auckland	2 social workers 1 clerical worker
---	--------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

(these positions provide the regional service for the remainder of the Northern region i.e. metropolitan Auckland, including the South West Auckland region).

Central North Region

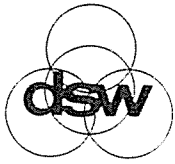
*	Hamilton	1 social worker 1 clerical worker
o	Tauranga	
o	Whakatane	
o	Rotorua	
o	Gisborne	
o	Paeroa	
o	Tokoroa	
o	Taumarunui	
o	Taupo	





# Department of Social Welfare

NORTHERN SERVICES OFFICE SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION  
Private Bag, Wellesley Street, AUCKLAND



Telegrams: Distwell  
Fax: (09) 370-359  
Telephone : 794 800

If telephoning or calling  
about this letter, please  
ask for:

Mr Benjamin

30 May 1989

TO:

All Adult Adoption Information Officers

File Ref:

## SUGGESTED NATIONAL SEMINAR FOR ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

Now that we have been working under the Act for three years and in view of the recent staff changes, restructuring within the Department, etc. we have become increasingly aware from our contact with other Adult Adoption Information Units that some of you are feeling isolated as we are. We also understand that some of you would value the opportunity to spend some time together discussing practice issues, policy changes and possible amendments to the Act.

We are writing to all Units to see if you would be interested in getting together for several days to discuss some of these issues.

Could you kindly let us know whether you feel a national seminar/workshop is a good idea and if so some of the areas you would like to have covered. Any other suggestions relating to length of seminar, organising committee, etc. would be welcomed. We would like to suggest that if there is enough support for this it could be organised for either just before or after Labour weekend this year at Wellington.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Ron Benjamin  
Social Workers  
Adult Adoption Information Unit

Moya Shaw

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*The University of Western Australia*

**ADOPTION RESEARCH &  
COUNSELLING SERVICE**

Department of Psychology  
Nedlands, Western Australia 6009  
Telegrams Uniwest Perth, Telex AA92992  
Telephone (09) 380 389 8711

June 23, 1989

Mr R Benjamin  
Department for Social Welfare  
6th Floor  
State Insurance Building  
Wakefield Street  
Auckland

Dear Mr Benjamin,

We receive many requests for information from adoptive parents, adoptee and relinquishing parents who have been involved in an adoption which took place in New Zealand. In order to be in a better position to inform these people of what is available and from where, we request your assistance.

Could you please forward information to us on the services which your department provide. It would be extremely helpful if you could also send us a list of all the self help and community groups throughout New Zealand which provide services to the adoption triangle. We will then write to each of these.

Your help in this would assist us to provide more accurate information and support to those West Australian residents affected by New Zealand adoptions.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

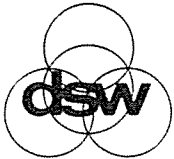
Co-ordinator  
Adoption Research & Counselling Service

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# Department of Social Welfare

NORTHERN SERVICES OFFICE SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION  
Private Bag, Wellesley Street, AUCKLAND



Telegrams: Distwell  
Fax: (09) 370-359  
Telephone: 794 800

If telephoning or calling  
about this letter, please  
ask for:

3 August 1989

Mr Benjamin

TO: ALL ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

File Ref:

Thanks to those of you who replied to our memorandum of 30 May 1989.

On the basis of the positive response in general that we've had, Don Clarkson and myself have decided to organise a National Conference for Adult Adoption Information Officers and their clerical support.

Place: South Pacific Motor Inn, Lower Hutt.

When: Wednesday 18 October 10.00 a.m. to Friday 20 October 3.30 p.m.

The above motel has accommodation available, conference room and restaurant facilities.

Twin \$25.00 per person; single \$50.00.

Breakfast \$11.00 cooked; \$7.70 continental; lunch \$10.00; dinner \$18.00 to \$25.00.

The conference room will cost us \$90.00 plus G.S.T. a day which we will pay for out of charging a conference fee of \$15.00.

Could you kindly confirm by 25 August 1989 the numbers attending from your Unit, the names of those requiring accommodation, and whether twin or single is required.

The following is a list of suggestions put forward for discussion at the conference.

1 to 10 were suggested several times.

1. Practice issues and methods in general.
2. Future changes/amendments to the Act and changes to policy.
3. Training in the Adult Adoption field.
4. Grandparent/sibling inquiries. No rights for them under the Act. How do various officers handle sibling inquiries?
5. Lack of uniformity in practice issues. Standardisation of practice.
6. Present use of the computer for Adult Adoption Information work.
7. Any new ideas for support group meetings. Role in relation to support groups.
8. Any research being done. Findings from any research.
9. Vetoes and letters of explanation for vetoes.
10. What happens after reunions? Difficulties/problems faced by adoptees and birth mothers.
11. Comments about television programme 'Missing'.
12. Looking at the Adult Adoption Information Act (parts of Act unclear).

13. National publicity for updating files, especially encouraging birth mothers of adoptees to register their willingness for contact.
14. Resourcing (staffing/facilities).
15. Independent counsellors.
16. Record systems, file transfers, etc.
17. Renewed community awareness of Adult Adoption Information service.
18. Some sort of integration with adoption officers, streamlining of the service.
19. Funding of the National Adult Adoption Unit.

If there are any further topics relating to the Adult Adoption Information field that you would like to see covered, could you let me know. We won't be able to include everything, but will choose those areas in which the majority has expressed an interest.

We are endeavouring to arrange for an outside facilitator to hopefully keep us on track over the three days, but we feel that there are people with enough knowledge and skills from within our existing Units to run the individual sessions.

If you would like to facilitate/present one of the sessions and have a preference for the topic you would like to present, could you indicate that when you confirm names and numbers attending.

Once we have drawn up the programme we will advise you of this and confirm arrangements with those who have offered to take a session.

We will only proceed with organising this conference if at least 20 people are interested in attending. Also for your information, the Lower Hutt Adoption Support Group are in the process of organising a National Conference on adoption to be held in Wellington in May 1990. Mary Iwanek should be able to answer any queries you might have about this planned conference.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.



Ron Benjamin  
Adult Adoption Information Unit

---

Names of those attending:

Names of those requiring accommodation:  
(Single or twin)

Names of those requiring lunch at  
the motel on the first day:

Attached is a letter I have received from the Adoption Research and Counselling Service of the University of Western Australia. Could you kindly forward to me the names, contact addresses and/or telephone numbers for any support groups in your area so that I can complete a list for them.

Once I have drawn up this list, I will also forward a copy to all Adult Adoption Information Officers so that you will have an up-to-date record of support groups throughout New Zealand.

Thanks.

Ron

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# Department of Social Welfare

NORTHERN SERVICES OFFICE  
Private Bag, Wellesley Street, AUCKLAND



Telegrams: Distwell  
Fax: (09) 3022 056  
Telephone: 794 800

If telephoning or calling  
about this letter, please  
ask for:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## MEMORANDUM

File Ref:

**TO:** All Adult Adoption Information Officers  
**FROM:** Ron Benjamin, Adult Adoption Information Unit  
**DATE:** 4 September 1989  
**SUBJECT:** NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

On the basis of the response we have had to our memorandum of 2 August 1989, Don Clarkson and I will proceed with the arrangements to organise this conference to be held at the South Pacific Motor Inn, Lower Hutt, Wednesday 18 October 1989 to Friday 20 October.

The following is a list of those who have confirmed that they will be attending:

9(2)(a)



- Tauranga
- Christchurch
- Timaru
- Palmerston North
- Taupo
- Dunedin
- Invercargill
- Masterton
- New Plymouth
- Wanganui
- Hamilton
- Wellington

For those who have requested accommodation, the cost for a twin or single is as outlined in our memorandum of 3 August 1989. Payment for accommodation is to be made direct to the Motor Inn at the time of the conference.

We will collect the conference fee of \$15.00 per person (which will cover the cost of hiring the conference room at the Motor Inn) from those attending on the morning of the first day of the conference.

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Don and I are working on the conference programme at the moment and will forward a copy of this to you by the end of this month. We will also contact, personally, those of you who have offered/agreed to facilitate one of the sessions prior to the conference.

For anyone who has not yet replied, who wishes to attend this conference and requires accommodation, would you kindly let me know as soon as possible.

RB:RV

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# Department of Social Welfare

NORTHERN SERVICES OFFICE  
Private Bag, Wellesley Street, AUCKLAND

Telegrams: Distwell  
Fax: (09) ~~350 860~~ 3022056  
Telephone: 794 800

If telephoning or calling  
about this letter, please  
ask for:

R Benjamin

Ext 834

RV

## MEMORANDUM

File Ref:

TO: The Assistant Director General, Northern Region

THROUGH: The Director, Northern Services Office

FROM: R K Benjamin, Adult Adoption Information Unit

DATE: 5 September 1989

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO HOLD A NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR  
ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

The need for this conference has arisen out of an expression by many Adult Adoption Information Officers that they have felt increasingly isolated due to the specialised nature of the work that they are doing and that they would value the opportunity to spend some time together discussing practice issues that have arisen, the need for policy changes and amendments to the Act, etc.

The objectives of this conference are as follows:

- 1 Discussion of practice issues leading towards more standardisation of practice.
- 2 Training sessions in specific areas:
  - a Working with community groups
  - b How to intervene in order to assist an adoptee, birthparent, etc, who is experiencing difficulties after reunion.
  - c Grief resolution for the birthmother.
- 3 Discussion of what changes in policy and amendments to the Act are needed and how we can achieve them.

- 4 To bring as many Adult Adoption Information workers together for the first time since the Act came into effect three years ago to discuss important issues such as ongoing support, training and resourcing for adult adoption information units.

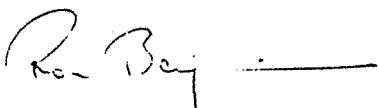
Arrangements have been made for this conference to be held at the South Pacific Motor Inn, Lower Hutt, from Wednesday 18 October 1989 to Friday 20 October 1989. The Motor Inn has accommodation available and conference facilities. Accommodation costs are: Twin, \$25.00 per person, Single \$10.00. We will be charging a conference fee of \$15.00 per person to cover the costs of the conference room.

Mary Engles, Regional Trainer, Central South Region, has been contacted and she has undertaken to provide a facilitator for the conference.

To date, 25 people have advised that approval would be given to attend the conference.

Attached are copies of the memoranda sent to Adult Adoption Information Units and a programme which is in the early stage of development.

I now understand that, before such a conference can take place, permission is required by the Executive Management Group and I would be grateful if this submission could be put before them for a decision.

  
R K Benjamin

I support Mr Benjamin's recommendation that permission be given for this conference to take place.

E W Gensik (Mrs)  
Assistant Director

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## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE



7h

If telephoning or calling  
about this letter, please  
ask for

Mr Deyell

NORTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE  
PRIVATE BAG, WELLESLEY STREET  
AUCKLAND 1

Telephone:  
392-543

FAX 375-852

Reference: (Please quote)

*Doug's EMG Page*

12 September 1989

EMG MEMBERS

PROPOSED NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR  
ADULT ADOPTION INFORMATION OFFICERS

A member of the Adult Adoption Information Unit of the Northern Services Office has begun to organise a National Conference and has now somewhat belatedly accepted that he needs to seek permission to hold the Conference. This ... request for permission is attached.

Adult Adoption Information Officers around the country have been canvassed to assess the level of interest in such a Conference and I understand that some 22 staff have indicated they would attend. As such, it is accepted that there may be particular needs that this group of staff may have that could be met in some way by a Conference. In this respect the proposal is supported by the Director of the Northern Services Office.

On the other hand, no financial provision has been made in the Northern Region for such a Conference, and I imagine the same is true for other Regions. In view of the pressure that will be on departmental operating costs this year, it would be necessary to clarify how costs were to be met before such a Conference could proceed.

Also, it may be more appropriate for such an event to be co-ordinated by the Principal Social Work Unit, from the national perspective.

It is recommended, therefore, that EMG:

- (i) decide whether a National Conference for Adult Adoption Information Officers be held in October 1989 as proposed;
- (ii) confirm whether resources would be made available to support the proposed Conference; and
- (iii) establish whether the Conference should be co-ordinated by regional staff as proposed.

*R.J. Deyell*  
(R.J. Deyell)

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# Department of Social Welfare

Head Office, Private Bag 21, Postal Centre, Wellington 1, New Zealand

12 FEB 1990

Facsimile: (04)-726 873  
 Telephone: (04) 727 666  
 Extension:  
 Reference: F&C 4-11-8-1

Records pse file



8 February 1990

9(2)(a)

Dear 9(2)(a)

I am replying to your recent letter enquiring about research reports on the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. As yet, there is little material available on the effects and outcome of the Act. The department is keeping as much statistical information as is possible, and I have enclosed a set of the most up to date figures available.

With the support of the department's Research section, Mr Geoff Field, Senior Lecturer in the Psychology Department of Auckland University is doing research on the effects of the Act on a sample of birthmothers. We do not have his report as yet. You are free to write to him and ask for his results once they are published.

I understand from our Research section, that a social work student is to do a thesis on the effects of the Act on a sample of adoptees, who have applied for their original birth certificate. This study will not be completed until early 1991.

There is, of course, anecdotal material on the effects of the Act. This is mainly in the form of newspaper articles and general news items. I presume you could access this information through a library search once you are in New Zealand. Also, in 1988 Television New Zealand, with support from the department, made a documentary called "My own Flesh and Blood". It is about a woman tracing her relinquished child who uses provisions of the Act to assist her search. You might find it useful as background information. Copies of the video can be bought from Television New Zealand Enterprises, PO Box 3819, Auckland. There will also be copies of it in the department's library and other libraries who store video-resource material.

0005t/3144t

I hope this information is of some use to you. Best wishes for the work on your book.

Yours sincerely



V J Vervoort  
for Director-General

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# Adopted son finds his roots — 48 years on

3sw

Marjorie Cole was 14 and Alexander Haftka 16 when they met. A year later, when Marjorie had to confess that she was pregnant, their families separated them.

By then Alexander was in the Army and posted to Palmerston North.

"My mother wrote and told me that Marjorie was expecting a baby. I didn't know what to do," Alexander Haftka, now 66 remembers. "At the first opportunity I rushed back to Lower Hutt to see her. But her father chased me round the table and that was that."

He had just a few seconds with Marjorie, but it was time enough to make her a promise.

"I will be back," he vowed, "and we will get married some day."

Marjorie's lonely predicament was concealed in a tight corset. Not even her sister knew.

She was to keep working at her job in an ammunition plant for as long as possible, and plans were made for her to go

later to the Salvation Army home in Wellington. But that was not to be.

On June 21, 1942, Marjorie Cole was rushed from her parents' home in an ambulance.

"An appendicitis," the assembled neighbours were told.

Later that night she gave birth to a tiny boy, weighing just 1.6kg and two and a half months premature.

She never did see him, but she gave him the name Alexander Cole.

Forty-five years later when the Adult Adoption Information Act was passed, Tim Allan, a successful designer with his own fashion house in Parnell, applied for a copy of his original birth certificate and discovered his birth mother's name was Marjorie Agnes Cole.

It was another three years before he felt emotionally ready to search.

He combed through electoral rolls, but could not find her.

A Department of Social Welfare adult adoption

worker counselled him to send for Marjorie Cole's birth certificate.

The document eventually arrived — with her marriage certificate as well, and all the information Allan needed.

Marjorie at the age of 20, had married her sweetheart Alexander John Haftka. A Lower Hutt telephone book listed their number.

It was June 11, 1990.

Tim Allan drank six cups of coffee and smoked five cigarettes. Then he picked up the telephone and made the call.

"Is that Mrs Haftka?" "Yes."

"My name is Tim Allan. Could I ask you a personal sort of question?"

"Well... yes... so long as it's not too personal." Marjorie suspected a prankster, or worse, but something stopped her from hanging up.

"Mrs Haftka, were you Marjorie Agnes Cole?"

"Yes, I was."

"Mrs Haftka — I am your son!"

How did Marjorie

under no circumstances would they give us any information."

Tim Allan had chosen the timing of his first telephone call to his mother carefully. It was about midday, a time he thought he might find her alone.

He had prepared himself for rejection, he had prepared himself for the fact that she might want to continue to conceal his existence from those in her subsequent life. Allan suspected, but could not know for certain, that Alexander Haftka might be his father.

He had to ask. "What about my father?"

"He's here," said Marjorie. "Would you like to speak to him?"

After the traumatic day when Alex had been banished by Marjorie's furious father, he had returned to his Army posting, and the war. He served in Egypt, Italy and Japan.

It was five years later that he returned, and made a beeline for the

Funny things run in families.

Forty-eight years after his birth, just one week short of the day, Tim Allan flew to Lower Hutt to meet his natural parents and all his siblings.

It was another instant reunion.

"I just slotted into the family straight away," he says.

He describes the flight from Auckland as the worst in his life, "as if the plane was going backwards." It was far worse than nervousness, he says, with every possible emotion spinning through his being.

Tim Allan did not have a particularly happy childhood. His adoptive mother had died when he was five and he was "farmed out" for nearly three years to various relatives.

He did not discover he was adopted until he was 13, and the fact was thrown at him, he says, without warning, at the

26 FEB 1991

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## A time of joy, pain

The genetic links between birth parents and children they adopted out can be so strong that even experienced social workers, who have facilitated hundreds of reunions, are "thrown."

It is not just the discovery of close physical resemblances.

Personality, propensities and predilections can be remarkably similar, an overwhelming feeling of connectedness can sweep between two such people meeting for the first time.

This first stage of the reunion process is well recognised by social workers involved in adult adoption information services. They refer to it as the "honeymoon" stage, and describe it as a "magical time" of intense emotions.

The second phase begins as the high fades, reality returns and readjustments demand to be made.

In contrast this can be a down time, one of confusion and turmoil.

Birth mothers many find it the point of their grief, the former secrecy surrounding adoption having forced their feelings from that time underground and unresolved. Contact with their adopted child can release all those feelings — the joy and the pain.

Adopted families may be apprehensive at this time, although research shows that 12 months on, their family bonds are likely to be stronger.

Partners of the adopted person can also feel left out.

The birth mother in particular has the difficult job of reconciling this person from her past with her present family.

The third stage, when it comes, is of resolution, as the relationship for the future evolves.

Rarely is that relationship a close parent/child relationship. The adopted person usually feels that they already have a mother and a father in their adopted family.

A deep friendship is more common.

Contact may settle into a regular, but casual, keeping-in-touch. Or occasional contact, on birthdays and at Christmas, perhaps, may be most comfortable.

For some, contact ceases.

In time relationships may change and grow.

Since March, 1986, when the Adult Adoption Information Act became law, about 12,100 original birth certificates have been issued to adopted people — two-thirds of that number to women.

About 2940 birth mothers have applied for information about their adopted child.

There is no indication that the numbers seeking information from their past is slowing.

Because of New Zealand's small population locating a lost family member by the determined seeker is almost guaranteed.

Haftka feel when she heard those words?

"I felt marvellous," she says, her blue eyes brightening with tears at the memory of that day.

Alex Haftka: "We had talked about him, Marjorie and me, especially every year on his birthday."

But their other children, Dianne, now aged 42, Garry, 41, John, 40, Kevin, 38, and Margaret, 30, knew nothing of this senior son.

"Twenty years ago we tried to find him," Marjorie says. "But the authorities told us not to bother. They said that

local hotel where he felt he just might meet Marjorie's mum, in a certain corner, at a certain time.

He did and they sat and talked over a drink and then Alex walked home with her.

They found Marjorie's father chopping and stacking timber and Alex gave him a hand.

"We'd finished that and I was washing my hands when in came Marjorie from work," says Alex.

"She gave me a welcome home kiss — and that was it. Bang. We were married in February 1947."

height of a family argument.

"That was dreadful," he says. "Suddenly all my faith had just flown out the front door."

"I felt that I didn't belong, and I didn't really know why. I had no idea of my real circumstances, or my background."

But at Wellington Airport, on June 16, 1990. Allan, doing all the things he had determined he wouldn't do — laughing and crying and getting the shakes — finally came down to earth.

He found his family, and he says, "found at last what I was all about."

Bruce AA1

# Adoptees' stories, four years on

3sw

Reunions between birth parents and their offspring have become much easier to obtain since the Adult Adoption Information Act came into being September 1, 1985.

At the least adoptees now have ready access to any unidentifying information held on file at the DSW office through which they were adopted. Others get no further than written contact with their birth parent(s), others still have made contact and involved their natural family in their day to day life. Others still meet a dead end when they find a veto on the information.

In March and April 1987 Cynthia Brooks ran a series of stories in The Saturday Express telling of four individuals from this area and their experience in seeking out their birth families. Five years have now passed since the Adult Adoption Information Act was passed, we thought it timely to track down the four and see what had been happening in their lives over the last four years.

## LYNDA NICOLL

When we spoke to Lynda four years ago we found that she had been able to pre-empt the Act and had traced her birth family some years before. The Act meant that she was finally able to get a copy of her original birth certificate.

In brief Lynda's story was that she had been the youngest of six children born to Albert and Nance Clifton of Wellington. Nance was 41 and in poor health when her youngest was born and the couple decided to adopt her out. They told her siblings that the baby had died.

Mayla and Harry Tomlinson of Blenheim adopted Lynda and later had three natural children of their own. It was a private adoption and as such Mayla knew a certain amount of information about the birth parents but she withheld that information until she considered Lynda was mature enough to handle it and to face any possible disappointments she might encounter in her search for her birth family.

Lynda was married with a family of her own before she pursued her ambition to find her birth family and at the time we called on her, one of her birth siblings, brother Ron was staying at Lynda's home.

Since then two birth sisters, Ron and Lynda's birth mother have come to live in Blenheim.

Lynda has found this particularly good especially in recent times.

"My mother has not been very well lately and my birth family members have been really supportive to me during this time," she says.

Far from interfering with the relationship Lynda enjoys with her adoptive family members, having contact with the birth family has only enhanced that relationship.

"We are closer now than ever before," Lynda says.

## ANDY

Andy was driven by a medical condition to find his birth family. Deteriorating eyesight had forced him out of the work force. His specialists were keen to have access to Andy's medical records to help them plot the path of the disorder.

He was 36 years old when he was told that he was adopted. It was three years ago before the Adult Adoption Information Act came into being and his elderly adoptive parents had only admitted that he was adopted when they realised it was important to his future health.

All Andy had to go on in his search was the possible name of his birth mother. He spent a couple of years trying to trace her but the name was misspelt so it was all to no avail.

He then had to sit back and wait until the Act was passed before applying for his original birth certificate. From there his search began in earnest. He had the whole family network traced mainly through electoral rolls, before plucking up the courage to make the approach to his birth father and mother. Both agreed to meet him, but neither were keen to continue the contact.

Andy would have liked to have maintained contact, but respects his birth parents wishes. His mother has kept his existence a secret from her family. After all that, the reunions failed to reveal any sign of the eye condition in the family's concerned although it may appear in those of Andy's generation.

So in Andy's case there was little to report four years on.

## GAYLENE DONEIHUE

When we met with Gaylene four years ago she had just met her birth mother — 25 years

after the woman had placed her daughter up for adoption. It had been a highly emotional and quite exhausting time for the young mother of three and her birth mother, and a somewhat anxious time for Gaylene's adoptive parents John and Gloria Henson.

At that time too Gaylene had learned of her birth father but had no desire to meet him.

Four years later and Gaylene and Joy (the birth mother) are still in regular contact. They communicate by audio tape and enjoy a harmonious relationship. Gaylene has also met her birth father and his ex-wife and family. She gets on particularly well with them but doesn't see much of her birth father. They write from time to time.

She says that her parents are now much more comfortable with the reunion of their daughter and her birth mother.

"They have met Joy a few times now and they really like her," Gaylene says.

## JOHN

The fourth of our subjects John (not his real name) had very little difficulty tracing his birth mother once the Act was passed in parliament. He simply sent off to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Lower Hutt for his original birth certificate.

That document gave him his mother's maiden name. He then sent off for her marriage certificate which duly arrived. After quick perusal of the electoral rolls and the Christchurch telephone book, John had four where she lived.

He contacted the then DSW adult adoption information officer Derek Borland and asked him to make contact with his birth mother on his behalf.

Derek did this only to find that the birth mother did not want to meet her son, preferring to leave the past where it belonged. Regardless of this, John did call his birth mother and they later met briefly but the encounter soon became hostile and he retreated, vowing to try again one day.

Four years on and he still has not done so although he is thinking now that he might try and make contact with her again around Christmas. Meanwhile he gained a fair amount of satisfaction from meeting her, noting the likenesses and finding out something of her life to that point.

All better than knowing nothing, he feels.

### Adopted children 'not asked'

The recently released report of the Adoption Practices Review Committee is flawed because the committee did not consult children of open adoptions, says Rae Julian, a Human Rights Commissioner.

The committee, chaired by Victoria University family law expert Bill Atkins, endorsed the open adoptions practised by the Social Welfare Department.

Open adoptions enable birth mothers to have ongoing contact with the baby and adoptive parents.

The report said the secrecy surrounding the closed adoptions of the past caused great suffering for children and birth mothers. However, Ms Julian believes the committee did not talk to children in open adoption situations.

"The report is generally enthusiastic about open adoption, based on the views of birth and adoptive parents. We do not know how children feel about such situations, whether they cause identity confusion or have any other adverse effects."

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is now before the Government for ratification. All of New Zealand laws concerning children must be examined for compliance with the convention.

Article 12 gives effect to a child's right to express an opinion, and to have the opinion taken into account, in any matter concerning the child.

EVENING POST  
24 - 10 - 90

### Hope for NZ open adoption

The opinion of two adoption experts that open adoption is failing in the United States does not mean it will fail in New Zealand, Adoption Practices Review Committee chairman Bill Atkin says.

A senior lecturer in family law at Victoria University, Mr Atkin said the political, religious, social and welfare scenes in the two countries were very different.

The Post published a story yesterday in which the pioneers of open adoption, Reuben Pannor and Annette Baran, said further changes were needed.

They said open adoptions, in which adoptive parents and adopted children had some contact with the birth mothers, failed to eliminate the feelings of rejection adopted children often had. It left contact with birth mothers at the whim of adoptive parents. They favoured a move toward "guardianship adoption" in which the birth parents had a legally defined role in their child's life.

Mr Atkin said: "Present practice in New Zealand does encourage and allow for childcare by birth parents or the extended family. In some cases this leads to adoption within the extended family, but guardianship may be an alternative worth consideration."

"Adoption outside the family is an option chosen far less often, but it is still sought by some birth parents and the committee considered there should be a good service available for these people."

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FOR YEARS WOMEN GIVING UP BABIES FOR ADOPTION WERE FORCED TO SWEAR ON THE BIBLE NEVER TO TRACE OR CONTACT THEIR CHILD. NOW NEW ZEALAND LEADS THE WORLD IN REUNITING BIRTH PARENTS WITH THEIR LOST CHILDREN. BUT MANY CAUGHT IN THE ADOPTION TRIANGLE STILL HAVE SERIOUS RESERVATIONS ABOUT A PRACTICE THEY BELIEVE TREATS BABIES AS COMMODITIES. JOANNA WANE TALKS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISCOVERED THE MISSING PIECES OF THEIR LIVES.

# Are You My Mother?

Josie Hendry was married and in her 20s when she walked up to a well-dressed woman in an Auckland coffee shop and asked: "Are you my mother?" She had always known she was adopted. Josie was told her mother died when she was very young and her father was away at the war. His new wife refused to accept another woman's baby. Josie never believed the story. "I was always looking at people," she says. "In the street, everywhere. Underneath, you're always looking for someone or something. The woman in the coffee shop was very gentle with me. But she said she was sorry, she wasn't my mother."

Josie's 30-year search for her past finally ended in March when she travelled to the United States to find her father. They met in secret and he has still not told his wife or children about the daughter he left behind in New Zealand.

Her birth mother, Maureen, lives in Auckland. After a traumatic reunion in 1978, which soured and led to a severing

of contact for five years, they have slowly rebuilt their relationship. Says Josie: "I am the shadow that comes in and out of her home. She rings me occasionally but she doesn't come here. We don't go out shopping together. We don't venture too much into the past. It was done with the best of intentions. No one can relive the past."

Josie's father, Patrick, a United States marine, had been married for just six weeks when he was posted to New Zealand during World War II. Maureen (20) was working for the army. She was dumped on her parents' doorstep in Hamilton, five-and-a-half months pregnant. Living at home with the baby didn't work out. Maureen moved to a boarding house in Auckland and found a job with a sewing firm. But the world was harsh for a young, unwed mother and she gave her daughter into the care of the Home of Compassion nuns.

Josie was two-and-a-half when she was adopted by a wealthy, childless couple. She says the woman, who was 43,

ALAN McDONALD



**Josie Hendry: "I find myself looking in a mirror and seeing myself in two."**

and her husband (10 years older) had fostered a small baby several months earlier. It cried at night so they took it back.

Right from the start Josie was a fish out of water. She and her adoptive mother — two very different personalities — frequently clashed. At 15 Josie left school. Two years later she was married and a mother. "There was always a conflict of ideas and thoughts. They put perming rods in my hair and tried to turn me into a second Shirley Temple. We had a housemaid and I went to private schools. My adoptive father had his own dark-room. I even had jigsaw puzzles of myself. I had designer-imported dresses, piano and ballet lessons — I was kicked out of piano.

"They never told me the truth about my mother. I think they wanted me to come from good blood. Years ago I'd snooped into my mother's writing desk and seen papers with the stamp of the Supreme Court. I looked for it after her death but she had destroyed it."

Josie's marriage lasted 12 years. In 1978, after the last of her four children was born (she has two children with long-term partner Gavin), she began searching in earnest for her own birthright. On November 4 she placed an advertisement in the personal column of the *NZ Herald* under her birth name, Judy. Four days later a man knocked on her door. "He said: 'Are you Judy? Well, I married your mother.'"

After being separated for more than 30 years, mother and daughter were like strangers. They did not hug. Neither of them knew what to say. Later, when Josie met her half-sister and three half-brothers, she says they peered at her as if she was unreal.

The two families had Christmas dinner together, but it was already starting to go wrong. "I could feel it in the air and I guessed it was coming from him [Maureen's husband]. I had started pushing about my [birth] father. Here I'd turned up, her flesh and blood. Now I was making her think about my father and that ate at him."

Josie walked out the door and didn't see her mother again for five years. Her search turned towards her father, Patrick. She wrote to the Pentagon and haunted visiting American warships. She knew his full name but the odds seemed stacked against her. One day a friend visiting Los Angeles went through the phone book searching for his initials and struck gold. In March, after corresponding through a post office box number for three years, they finally met. "In his wartime photos he was the image of my eldest son," says Josie. "He still has a flat-top haircut and wears a ring to this day that my mother gave him."

Josie had quietly kept track of Mau-

*"THEY NEVER TOLD ME THE TRUTH ABOUT MY MOTHER. I THINK THEY WANTED ME TO COME FROM GOOD BLOOD."*

reen. When she saw a death notice for her mother's husband in the newspaper she went round with a box of photos. Maureen welcomed her daughter as though she had never been away. Later, after Josie's visit to the United States, she was visibly moved by the new photographs of Patrick. "But it wasn't the Patrick she knew. She said she could see him clear as a bell in his uniform, hear his laugh, hear his voice, but she would have walked past him in the street," says Josie.

"I'm not physically affectionate," she says. "I can cut off from anything. I think that's because of the adoption. There's not that close bond. We don't fall into

each other's arms. But it does something inside of you. Just knowing. We're both outspoken, we're both claustrophobic. I always won running and swimming races at school and that comes from my father. Now I know who they are so I know more of what I am. Not all of it. I can't relive what's gone. But, even if it had ended badly, I wouldn't have gone back to not knowing."

Josie's experience has made her judgment harsh. She believes adoption is damaging and couples who are unable to have children should accept nature's ruling. But, she says, her adoptive parents gave her a world of opportunity her own mother could never have offered. "It's weird sometimes," she says. "I find myself looking in a mirror and seeing myself in two. The life I had and the life I could have had. And, despite everything, I prefer the life I had."

New Zealand was the first country in the world to give legal rights to birth mothers under the 1985 Adult Adoption Information Act which opened access to records. A 'clean break' had always been considered best. But, for many birth parents, the loss of a child by adoption is a living death.

Karen Svendsen spent years searching the death notices for any teenaged girl killed in a car accident who might have been the daughter she was never allowed to touch or even see. "I'd look at them in the street, searching their faces," she

says. "If I thought they looked like her I followed them. I couldn't stand the sight of women pushing prams. I wanted to scream at them. I thought I was going crazy."

Karen was 18 and training as a nurse when she discovered she was pregnant. When it started to show (at five months she couldn't do up the belt on her uniform) she was sent to Nelson to have the baby in secret — hundreds of miles away from family and friends. She stayed with a couple who took in unwed mothers and expected them to be grateful. Karen did the housework and considered herself an unpaid babysitter. She was made to wear



Karen Svendsen: "I was shaking with fear and felt very vulnerable."

a wedding ring and people were told her husband was away at sea.

At the hospital Karen was left to labour on her own and given a general anaesthetic for the birth. A retained placenta caused infection and she was kept in hospital for two weeks. Karen says the nursing staff were cruel and insensitive. She has since been told of young mothers who were stitched up without any anaesthetic and told by the doctor: "You'll remember this — don't do it again."

Says Karen: "I could hear her crying in the nursery. I'd stand outside the door,

Sylvia Arnold with photos given to her by her birth mother, Karen Svendsen.



incredibly distressed, really wanting to go in. They told me it wasn't my baby, but I knew." The experience was so horrific Karen blocked it from her memory and for years could not remember signing the adoption papers or even the date of her daughter's birth. "At times I would wonder if I'd imagined it. It still feels a bit like a dream. I came back to Auckland on the edge of a nervous breakdown, desperate for my baby. My mother never talked about it again. Eighteen months later I was pregnant and married. I believe being a replacement baby has damaged my second child. But it was a way of survival."

It was not until Karen was 38 and facing the break-up of her marriage that she decided to search for her daughter. In 1985 she founded the Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group several months before the new act freeing access to information came into effect.

At that stage the Department of Social Welfare could only provide non-identifying information. But Karen left a letter on file welcoming contact and within weeks she was approached by the adoptive mother who had begun searching on behalf of her daughter. They exchanged letters and photographs then, five months later, Karen flew to Wellington to meet a young woman who had been named Sylvia.

"I was shaking with fear and felt very vulnerable. I wore sunglasses on the plane and kept crying the whole way. I was terrified of what I might find at the other

end. The most terrifying part was that I might not like her. I was going there to meet my baby, not a 20-year-old girl. It was the most difficult and most wonderful experience of my life."

Karen and Sylvia bought pies and coffee and sat on a bench together outside the railway station. Four days later they didn't know how to say goodbye. Karen says the years have taught her how to close off emotionally. But she now feels as close to Sylvia as she does to her other three children. "I have reclaimed part of my identity," she says. "I have reclaimed myself."

Sylvia's birth father rejects any contact and denies she is his child. Karen's eldest son has found the situation difficult to accept and initially refused to meet her. But her younger son feels angry and cheated at the years they have lost and her second daughter is delighted to find a big sister. And, rather than distancing Sylvia from her adoptive mother, the reunion with Karen has brought them closer.

But adoptees reunited with birth parents often find themselves straddling two very separate worlds. Naomi Wilson (17) contacted Jigsaw (see separate story) 18 months ago. Within two weeks she had found her mother and six brothers. "People say you're conditioned by your environment but I know that who I am has come from [my birth mother] Helen," she says. "She is a physical clarification

Naomi Wilson says her birth mother is a physical clarification of herself.





**Naomi feels she's part of two different worlds.**

of myself."

Naomi's adoptive parents live in Mission Bay. Their only child, she has a television and phone in her bedroom. Helen lives in a state house and money has often been tight. Naomi had always been told a little about her four older brothers — a precaution against any unsuitable romances. When they met she was in a 'Goth' phase and dressed in black. Her brothers took her to parties where no-one would believe she was their sister.

"I'm part of these two different worlds," says Naomi. "I like the 'busyness' of Helen's. Brothers everywhere copying the latest wrestling holds on the dog. Sometimes I'm sorry I missed out on being picked on for so long. But Helen would have had me in pink frilly dresses. You'd probably be talking to someone with a spiral perm, bubble gum jeans and Ug boots.

"You say to your Mum and Dad: 'You wouldn't do that if you were my real parents.' When you meet them you realise they probably would. I owe both Helen and my adoptive parents a lot. Helen had the courage to give me away because she knew she was giving me a better life."

Helen bumped into Naomi's father in the street three months after the teenager had made contact. Naomi has met him once but says they have little in common. "It's like the jigsaw which always has pieces missing. My mother was the important piece. My father was an added extra."

Helen had separated from her husband and was struggling to raise four boys when she fell pregnant — with Naomi — again. For years only a handful of people knew her secret. She later discovered her best friend used to live four houses away from Naomi. "I probably saw her going past in a pram," says Helen. "It's as if our paths were destined to cross."

Alex Kemplen met her birth mother, Cheryl, two days after her 15th birthday. They had started searching through Jigsaw within a fortnight of each other. A self-confessed teenage horror, Alex had shaved half her head, run away from home and nearly been expelled from school. The change was gradual but Alex (19) says finding Cheryl reminded her she wasn't the only person in the world. She still lives at home with "Mum and Dad" who have welcomed Cheryl into her life.

Last year Alex went back to school, gained a 'B' bursary and is now working in a pre-school centre. Her birth mother Cheryl is a kindergarten teacher. Alex is

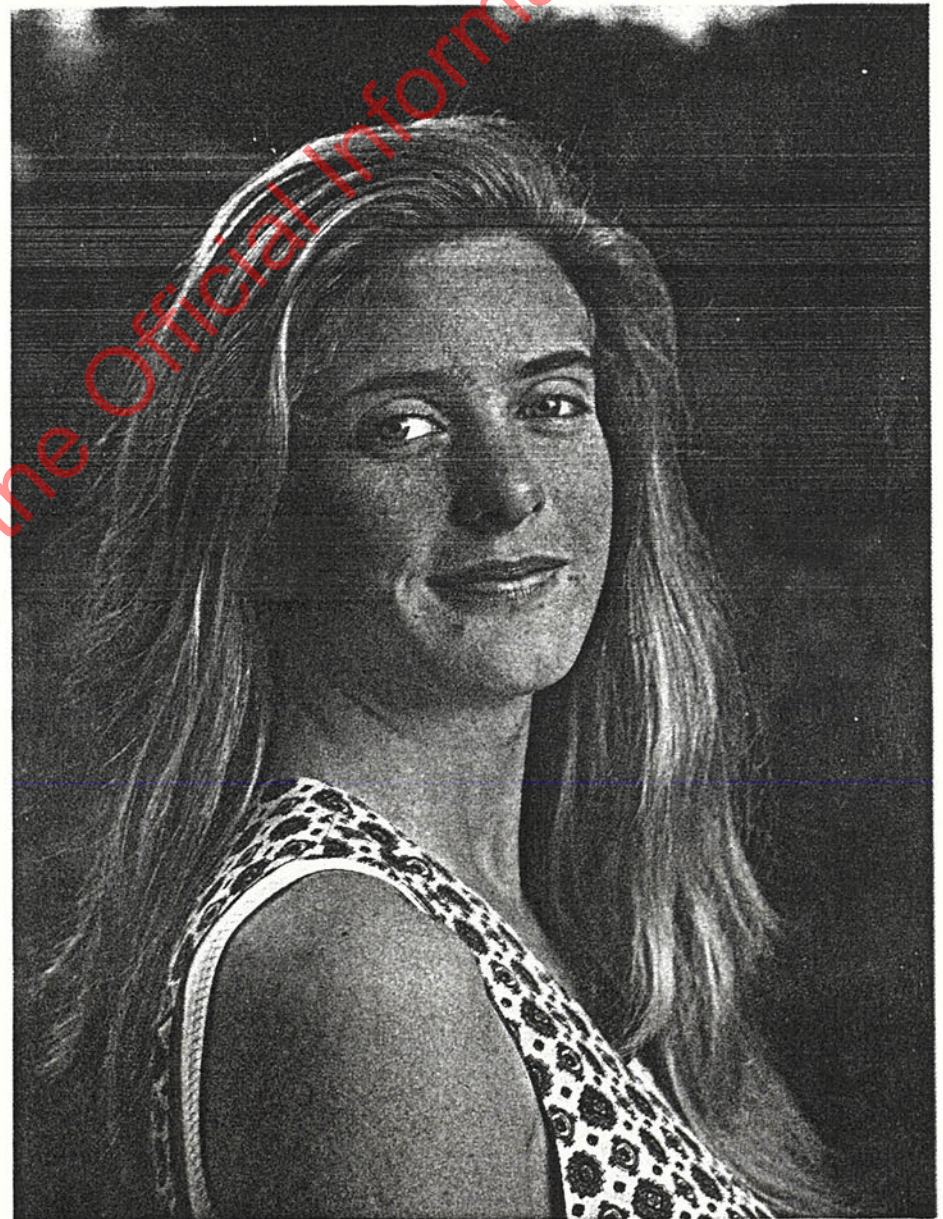


**Alex Kemplen and her adoptive parents.**

fair with long, blonde hair. Cheryl is dark (Alex's grandfather was Maori) but the likeness is unmistakable. Both women are close to six foot.

"The emotional bond was immediate," says Alex. "We have the same favourite colour and number. We both love

**Alex Kemplen: Meeting her birth mother was a time of confusion and adjustment.**



ALLAN McDONALD

ALLAN McDONALD

songs no-one else has ever heard of. She was a teenage horror too." It was also a time of confusion and adjustment. Cheryl lives in Kerikeri and Alex fell out of contact for several months. "It's a really unnatural thing. You feel immediately close to this person who is a complete stranger. Cheryl had been waiting for years. My birthday had always been traumatic for her. She felt a lot of anger and bitterness. Perhaps her expectations were greater than mine."

Alex also discovered she has a great-grandmother, who is 83 and lives in Auckland, and a grandfather. He had never spoken of his lost granddaughter but when Alex met him he told her not a day had gone by when he had not thought of her.

Jan Bean, a genealogist, believes discovering the past gives an understanding of the present. She decided to trace her birth parents in 1987 after returning to New Zealand from England and setting up her own business, 'Family Ties'.

She knew she was born in 1948 at Bethany, a home for single mothers. Her mother, Doreen, was 21. Jan applied for her own original birth certificate then her mother's. She also found a wedding certificate which showed Doreen had married in Wellington. Cross-matching between electoral rolls and street directories, she traced the family through several changes of address.

"Then I knew where she was," says Jan. "But I knew nothing about the family or what situation she might be in." She went back to the street directories to

he came to New Zealand to hide a marriage in Scotland or possibly a criminal past. From old school records held in the National Archives Jan learnt Doreen, who grew up during the Depression, had little education.

She had no idea if Doreen's husband or children knew of the adoption. A friend offered to act as go-between and letters were sent in early 1988. Doreen did not reply. Finally Jan approached one of her mother's sisters who lived in Auckland. In the winter of '88 Jan's aunt and her son (Jan's cousin) came to her house with a carrybag full of photographs and a lifetime of stories that helped build a picture of the past.

Doreen has told her sister she desperately wants to make contact with Jan but feels the time is not right. Last Christmas she sent Jan a card — the first direct contact she has had with her daughter for more than 40 years. Jan, who is married with one child, says she is prepared to wait.

Says Jan: "She [Doreen] finds it difficult to express emotions. It's almost as though she's built up a barrier and that could be related to the adoption. I think she's emotionally worn out. I'm curious to see what she looks like, whether we have anything in common. She also holds the key to the identity of my father. If you don't know where you come from, you have no real idea of what kind of person you are."

*"IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM, YOU HAVE NO REAL IDEA OF WHAT KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE."*

track Doreen's father, James. When she could find no further references to him from 1940 she guessed he had died and found his death notice in the newspaper. James' wife Henrietta (Doreen's mother and Jan's grandmother) lived until 1967. Her death notice showed all the daughters' married names.

By this stage Jan had visited her grandparents' graves and traced Henrietta's family tree back several generations to the 1700s. James was more of a mystery. Jan believes he changed his name when

Rebecca (not her real name) used the non-identifying information available to under-20-year-olds from Social Welfare to trace her birth mother to the South Island. They have spoken on the phone but not met. Rebecca is 18 — nearly the same age her mother was when she was born. "I used to look round the dinner table and no-one looked like me," she says. "But I didn't actually think of my birth mother as a person. It was when I found out her name she became real to me."



Jan Bean: Discovering the past gives an understanding of the present.

The Department of Social Welfare estimates one in five New Zealanders are affected by adoption. But the extended family of adopted children is often a forgotten link. Grandparents and siblings have no access to records under the Adult Adoption Information Act.

Judy Callingham, the executive producer of TVNZ's *Missing* series, received dozens of letters from people who had lost brothers or sisters through adoption. "Sometimes the need was absolutely desperate," she says. "One woman remembers going on a train journey with her younger and older sister and being told they were going on holiday. She was collected off a platform and never saw either of them again."

Callingham's request that the legislation be amended to include sibling rights was passed on to the Ombudsman who has advised individuals to apply under the Official Information Act. She has also set up a national family register where people can record their family details at no charge by writing to Antrim House, Station Rd, Huapai, Auckland.

Women such as Josie Hendry and Karen Svendsen would like to see adoption stopped. But they accept there will always be situations where a mother feels unable to keep her child. The Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group advocates guardianship, where the adoptive couple would take the role of custodial parents and birth parents would have legal right

to access. Says Karen: "The distaste I have of adoption is that the child becomes a commodity. Birth mothers are still made to feel dirty and ashamed. You're damned if you keep and damned if you don't. The child has a right to its identity. The mother has a right to respect."

The declining number of babies offered for adoption (41 in the Auckland district from Wellsford to Mercer last year) is giving added power to the birth mother's voice. Open adoption is becoming increasingly common although adoptive families are not legally bound to maintain contact.

Birth mothers can request the parents be of a particular age (most prefer under 35), lifestyle (city or country, musical, sporting) and are offered a selection of families to choose from. But their only

right in law is to determine their child's religious upbringing. Social Welfare has a policy of placing babies in families of their own race and culture.

Alison Cleland, an independent adoption counsellor, has two adopted children of her own. Her daughter's birth mother was killed in a car accident and the loss reinforced Alison's growing belief in the rewards of open links with birth families. She and her husband met their son's natural mother when she was pregnant and were by her side during the labour. Says Alison: "Between Matthew and his birth mother there's a feeling of connectedness but not a feeling of being mothered. It helps me understand him because I have been able to know her. Every time she sees him it reinforces that she has done the right thing — not given her child into a void."

Alison has helped several prisoners at Paremoremo trace their past. One man, who thought he had Maori blood, discovered he was Indian and had been identifying with the wrong culture.

Josie Hendry, a past president of Jigsaw, says jails are full of men from broken homes who have been fostered or adopted. Men are less likely to trace their birth mothers and often see the adoption as a personal rejection which can affect their relationships with other women.

Josie believes adoption is still tainted by guilt and secrecy. She says that will only change when the birth mother has on-going contact with her child. "Adoptive parents take the greatest gift of life from someone — a human being. They think they can take the baby and mould it into their world. But something about that child will always be different."

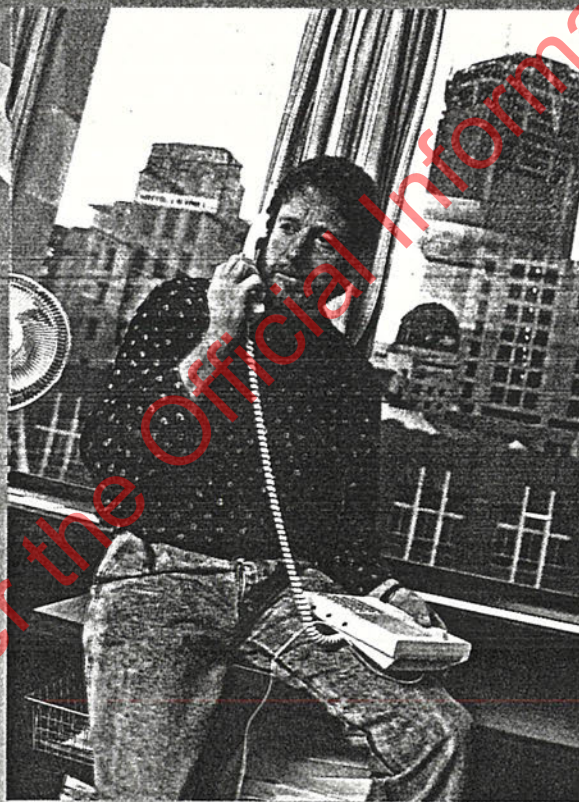
## MAGICAL AND FRAGILE

About 105,000 New Zealanders are adopted. 'Stranger' placements peaked in 1968-71 then dropped with the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1972 which gave single mothers financial support for the first time. Until then adoption was considered the best option and openly advocated by a conservative medical profession who saw the mutilation and infertility caused by backstreet abortions. In the '60s the contraceptive pill was not easily obtainable for a young, unmarried woman.

The 1955 Adoption Act severely restricted access to adoption records. Birth mothers were often forced to swear on the Bible that they would not trace or contact their child. Thirty years later the 1985 Adult Adoption Information Act opened the floodgates. By the end of 1989 11,164 adoptees aged over 20 had applied for their original birth certificates. The Department of Social Welfare has received 2766 applications from birth mothers under the act to have their sons and daughters traced and contacted. Birth parents still do not have equal rights with adoptees and must work through the department.

Only a small number of vetoes have been placed on the release of information. The veto option does not apply if the child was adopted after March 1986 and does not take away an individual's right to continue searching or make contact.

Adult Adoption Information social worker Ron Benjamin says



Ron Benjamin

reunions can be a magical time when people almost feel like they are falling in love. But when the honeymoon is over, new and fragile relationships emerge.

Benjamin and Karen Svendsen of the Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group are researching the post-reunion process, a period of disillusionment and uncertainty which almost inevitably follows the excitement of discovery. Adoptees can feel caught in the middle with loyalties split between their adoptive and birth parents. They may suffer from anger, resentment, guilt and even indifference.

The reunion is the real point of grief for birth mothers, who may be unsure of their role and feel elated and devastated at the same time. It is also a period of adjustment for others close to the adoption. But each relationship gradually finds its own level — ranging from occasional or no on-going contact to a close friendship or bond. Assistance through the post-reunion process is available from Adult Adoption In-

formation workers (who can be contacted through the Department of Social Welfare) and adoption support groups.

- Adoption Support Link (PO Box 4164, Auckland) has four support groups in Auckland and holds monthly meetings open to anyone touched by adoption.

- Jigsaw (phone (09) 523-3460) runs a national contact register where people can record their name and birthdate for a \$25 fee. A case worker will aid a full search for an extra \$10.

- The Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group (PO Box 5479, Wellesley St, Auckland, phone (09) 366-0752) offers telephone and personal support. ■

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3 February 1992

The Director  
Research Section  
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Private Bag  
WELLINGTON

	<u>1992</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1991</u>
	January	December	January
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	3	1	5
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	Nil	1	Nil
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	Nil	2	Nil
Vetoes from Adoptees	Nil	1	7
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	Nil	2	2
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	Nil	Nil	Nil
Original Birth Certificates	<del>146</del> 149	108	143
Department of Social Welfare Searches	39	27	64

  
Angela Robertson  
for Registrar-General

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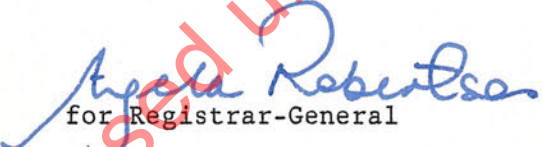
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	1992		1991
	February	January	February
Vetoed from Birth Mothers	3	3	4
Cancelled Vetoed from Birth Mothers	2	Nil	3
Expired Vetoed, Birth Mother Deceased	Nil	Nil	2
Vetoed from Adoptees	1	Nil	2
Cancelled Vetoed from Adoptees	Nil	Nil	2
Vetoed from Birth Fathers	Nil	Nil	Nil
Original Birth Certificates	106 <del>159</del>	146	126
Department of Social Welfare Searches	52	39	99

  
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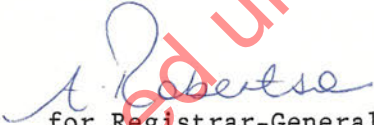
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	1992		1991
	March	February	March
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	2	3	7
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	Nil	2	2
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	Nil	Nil	Nil
Vetoes from Adoptees	2	1	5
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	1	Nil	1
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	Nil	Nil	Nil
Original Birth Certificates	<del>137</del> 142	159	131
Department of Social Welfare Searches	40	52	121

  
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	1992		1991
	April	March	April
Vetoos from Birth Mothers	5	2	4
Cancelled Vetoos from Birth Mothers	1	Nil	2
Expired Vetoos, Birth Mother Deceased	Nil	Nil	Nil
Vetoos from Adoptees	2	2	5
Cancelled Vetoos from Adoptees	2	1	Nil
Vetoos from Birth Fathers	Nil	Nil	Nil
Original Birth Certificates	147 <i>110</i>	137	146
Department of Social Welfare Searches	66	40	129

*R.*  
 Angela Robertson  
 for Registrar-General

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| 8 June '92.  
 as requested by  
 phone today,  
 copies of stats  
 for vetoos + o.b.c's  
 for May + June.

3 June 1992

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	1992		1991
	MAY	APRIL	MAY
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	1	5	2
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	Nil	1	Nil
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	Nil	Nil	Nil
Vetoes from Adoptees	4	2	4
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	1	2	2
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	Nil	Nil	1
Original Birth Certificates	141 <sup>148</sup>	147 <sup>110</sup>	160
Department of Social Welfare Searches	80	66	120

dup : 3/6/92.

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	1992		1991
	JUNE	MAY	JUNE
Vetoed from Birth Mothers	2	1	6
Cancelled Vetoed from Birth Mothers	1	NIL	3
Expired Vetoed, Birth Mother Deceased	NIL	NIL	NIL
Vetoed from Adoptees	1	4	4
Cancelled Vetoed from Adoptees	2	1	NIL
Vetoed from Birth Fathers	NIL	NIL	NIL
Original Birth Certificates	<del>166</del> 150	141	185
Department of Social Welfare Searches	56	80	137

*Bridget Totton*  
 for Registrar-General

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4 August 1992

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	<u>1992</u>		<u>1991</u>
	June	July	July
Vetoed from Birth Mothers	22	2	3
Cancelled Vetoed from Birth Mothers	1	0	4
Expired Vetoed, Birth Mother Deceased	0	0	0
Vetoed from Adoptees	1	1	5
Cancelled Vetoed from Adoptees	2	0	1
Vetoed from Birth Fathers	0	1	0
Original Birth Certificates	166	200	136
Department of Social Welfare Searches	56	85	98

*B. Tolson*

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	1992		1991
	July	August	August
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	2	1	3
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	0	3	2
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	0	0	0
Vetoes from Adoptees	1	2	2
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	0	1	1
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	1	0	0
Original Birth Certificates	200	145	177
Department of Social Welfare Searches	85	83	64

*B. Todd*

for Registrar-General

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	1992		1991
	September	August	September
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	4	1	3
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	4	3	1
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	-	-	-
Vetoes from Adoptees	2	2	5
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	3	1	3
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	-	-	-
Original Birth Certificates	154	145	164
Department of Social Welfare Searches	77	83	23

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WELLINGTON

	1992		1991
	October	September	October
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	4	4	3
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	1	4	0
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	0	0	0
Vetoes from Adoptees	2	2	3
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	0	3	0
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	0	0	0
Original Birth Certificates	119	154	129
Department of Social Welfare Searches	105	77	18

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	1992		1991
	NOVEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
Vetoes from Birth Mothers	2	4	2
Cancelled Vetoes from Birth Mothers	2	1	1
Expired Vetoes, Birth Mother Deceased	0	0	2
Vetoes from Adoptees	4	2	1
Cancelled Vetoes from Adoptees	1	3	3
Vetoes from Birth Fathers	0	0	0
Original Birth Certificates	142	154	131
Department of Social Welfare Searches	92	77	25

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12 January 1993

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	1992		1991
	December	November	December
Vetoos from Birth Mothers	2	2	1
Cancelled Vetoos from Birth Mothers	0	2	1
Expired Vetoos, Birth Mother Deceased	0	0	2
Vetoos from Adoptees	1	4	1
Cancelled Vetoos from Adoptees	4	1	2
Vetoos from Birth Fathers	0	0	0
Original Birth Certificates	95	142	108
Department of Social Welfare Searches	81	92	27

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Mr E J Rowland  
Mr J Stenhouse  
Mr R Sceats

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To: Jackson

Benjamin & I think of this proposal for a Conference in Oct - have already suggested to Ben Benjamin that the timing was not good - I confirmed this with Wynn Gov. He last week at the ICA workshop.

One of the difficulties is that there is a whole range of policy type legal issues unresolved - we are currently awaiting an opinion from the Ambassador about the interpretation of AAI Act, Adoption Act & Official Info Act.

"CWP" has budgeted for a Workshop around these issues in this financial year - but will not happen (the way things are going) until Feb/March next year.

We believe that AAI laws can only properly be examined in the context of a whole lot of other things - an integrated approach.

Wynn Gov. says the expectation that 4 people go to the Conf. from Northern Districts office - she can't afford that. Already one District has promised to be one of the will finance delegates.

Ben Benjamin has AAI as his sole purpose in life & I doubt if he's interested in integration if that's his purpose for the day.

WV earlier said that if there is a Conference in Oct - she might offer at least one session to wind up & fill page in all the related issues

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1001-11

Subject

To-

Time is precious with 1-11-89. as  
you know. AA I not a priority to CWF at  
moment & ? not a priority to DSW.

Having said all that  
we acknowledge that haven't done much  
to acquaint AA I workers with all the  
issues floating round. Understandably  
the AA I people went a bit together because it  
is of vital importance to them.

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Records  
PSE file  
on FTC

12.12.89

Allen Nixon  
ADB P+S

4-11-9-1

19 DEC 1989

Re EMG Agenda item 7 (h)  
from 17.9.89 - Adult Adoption  
Information Workers Workshop

1. As you know the policy and practice guidelines covering this area of work are in urgent need of revision. It is intended to revise the guidelines by 31.3.89 and after that hold a small workshop with practitioners to consider the draft guidelines and their "goodness of fit" in practice terms.

2. We would envisage holding the workshop in mid-April. We have budgeted some money for the workshop. The workshop would be attended by a maximum of 2 persons per region, i.e. 12 persons from regions, plus H.O. legal and advisory staff.

Veronique Vervoort  
SAO Families & Children

10.12.89  
/pa.

Paola Dickens  
A/ND Fac.

Assoc Adapted Information Officers

For next EMG (17<sup>th</sup> Oct) a one  
page note on proposed seminar  
(1990) for AAIO's is required  
"for information" & "agreement"

J. Row  
A/ADG P.S.  
2.10.89

*[Handwritten signature]*

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE



HEAD OFFICE, PRIVATE BAG, POSTAL CENTRE, WELLINGTON 1

20 February 1988

Barbara Roeke  
Legal Deposit Librarian  
National Library  
Wellington

Telegrams: Headwel - Wellington  
Telephone: 727-666  
Extension:  
Reference: (Please quote) SNKS-7-5

Dear Barbara Roeke,

As discussed with you today, I am returning you request for the Adult Adoption Information Act handbook. Enclosed are 6 copies of the Birthline pamphlet, which details the rights of consumer in respect of the Act.

Yours faithfully  
Veronique Verwoert  
SAO  
for Director-General

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MINUTE SHEET

Department: .....

Subject:

Section: .....

File No. ....

63961D-46,000pads/11/86 MK

Rowena Treanor . SED

Date: SWK 5-7-5

To -

Work Documentation

Adult Adoption Information Handbook

- I have sent 1 further handbook to the Adult Adoption Information Unit at Lower Hutt which brings their total to 4.

Could you please note your register accordingly.

Thank you.

Veronique Vervoort

SAD CNF

3/8



Item 504

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Rowena Treanor  
SEO  
Work Documentation

SWK 5-7-5

Re: Adult Adoption Information  
Act - Departmental Handbook

1. You will recall that this handbook was recently distributed through work-documentation to the appropriate districts & organisations.
2. Unfortunately, DPC, advised after the handbook had been sent out that the section of the handbook dealing with the computer contained sufficiently detailed information which in the hands of the general public would potentially compromise the security of the computer. Therefore, the ISBN number on the front cover of the handbook has been withdrawn and the handbook is now a departmental document only. Accordingly I have had an amended first page printed with a covering letter explaining the situation.

3. As you have the master list and master copy etc could you please distribute the amending page and letter accordingly.
4. In my note to you of 31/5/88 I mentioned to distribute handbook internally in H.O. and I will give those people the amending pages.
5. The 3 copies to the Legal Deposit office have been permanently retrieved.

Thank-you.

Veronique Vervoort

Senior Advisory Officer

Children Needing Families

for DC

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From Issues Previously  
Discussed

To-

(1) Objectives -

no. (v) - was discussed and thought it would be a study in itself, too large, sampling difficulties and very time consuming. As far as recall, thought was towards not including this in the research.

(2) Sampling :- still not clear :-(i) Rationale for using

- pre-coded questionnaires - postal
- structured interviews
- group interviews

what the limitations & advantages of these techniques and how they suit the information being gathered, is not discussed.

is being gathered thru' each technique

(ii) What information/sample questionnaire/interview schedule is not included

(iii) Why the sizes of the samples have been chosen - what they do and do not allow. Also why the areas for sampling have been chosen.

(iv) Who exactly (and how many of each) is being sampled eg birth parents, adoptees

To-

(vi) No clear who will sort consent forms into geographical areas (for drawing sample).

(vii) The procedure for ~~make~~ getting size of "area" she is sampling in so it will be related to her own samples is unclear.

(viii) where the questionnaire will be piloted is not stated; whether the structured interview questions are piloted is not stated.

(3) Analysis:-

Full description of how the information will be analysed and how it will be linked together or treated separately is not discussed.

(4) No Budget

(5) Before starting - arrange servicing.

Has included

Pilot, Timescale, aims.

Subject

Section: .....

File No. ....

Date: .....

To-

Anna

(1)

Demographic data Adoptee Age  
Sex

Extension

Demographic factors within adoptee family  
→ where fit in family

(2)

Birthparents demographics

(3)

Clients experience of the Act  
Qualitative in type

What led to decision to apply

Independent counsellor / reasons for choice

structured interviews

3a) (4)

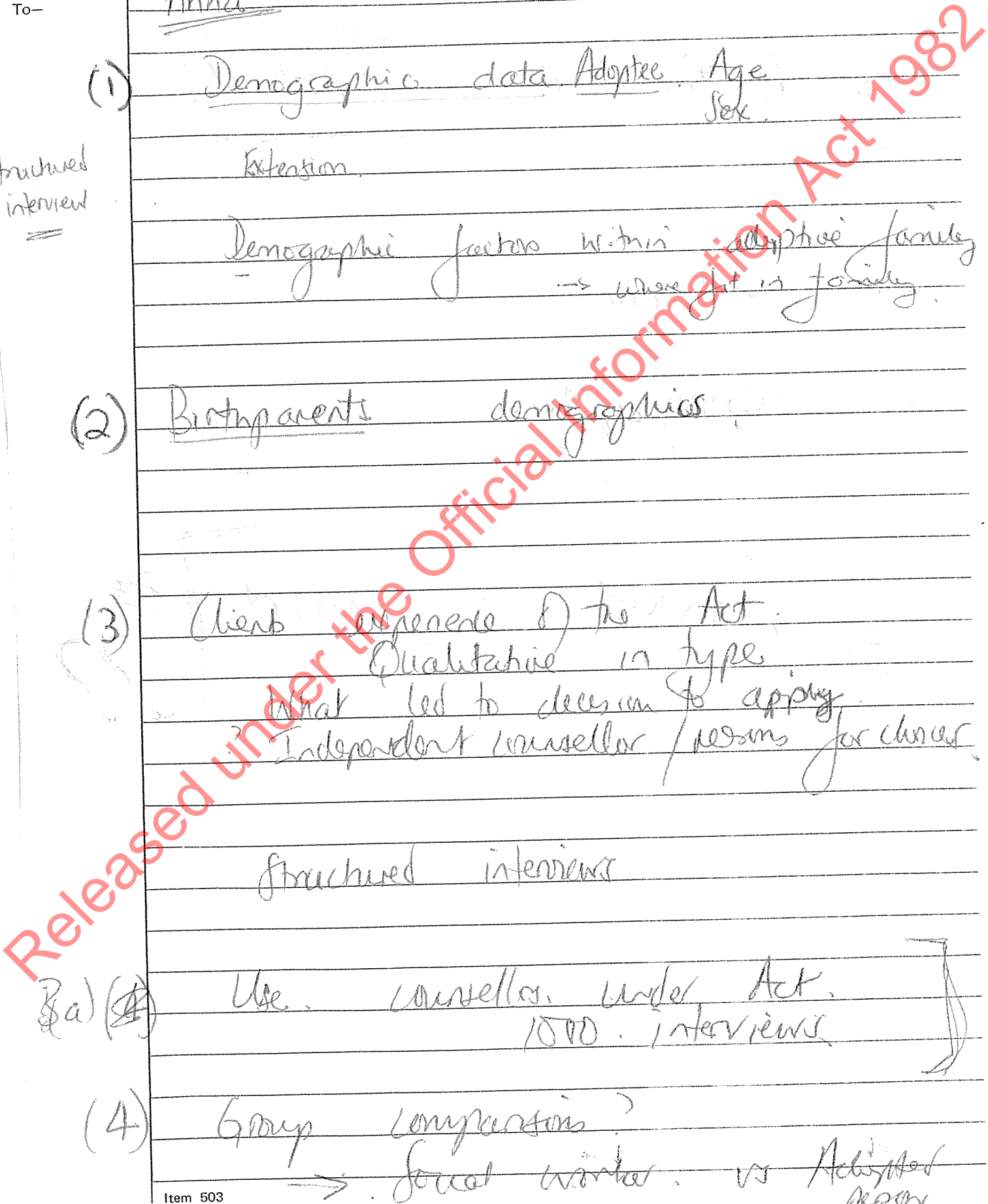
Use counsellors under Act  
1000 interviews

(4)

Group comparisons?

→ social worker vs Adopted  
mother

Structured  
interview  
=



→ Britanones

found

→ Britanones

applied

→ Satisfaction

→ Demographics

→ Adoptees

found

??

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1) Define Aims (Before method)  
And who information will be used by  
and how it will be used (Purpose)

2) Recognition of Personal Bias  
& - how to lessen it.

3) Sole interviewer; -

- (i) limits sample possible
- (ii) may emphasise personal biases
- (iii) stress / 'debriefing' from interview
- (iv) to check out ideas, questions, not working that may arise

4) Why the idea to limit sample to one area (ie Auckland)

5a) Sample unclear - adoptees + birth parents?  
or only one or other (at) & if both how would  
the 2 sets of information be dealt with eg. <sup>separately</sup> <sup>or</sup> <sup>under</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>exp's.</sup>

5) Sample size - goes back to aims & design.

6) Analysis of data - resources available of computer time, assistants.  
- Plus, how will it be done - affects aims, sample, design.

MINUTE SHEET

Department: .....

Subject

Section: .....

File No. ....

Date: .....

To-

→ Population of interests  
 (Vets) → structuralist  
 → information → adoptees  
 letters →

Interview  
 self  
 population  
 select

from 10 min. sessions

→ Objectives of research  
 - what questions do you want answered

→ Descriptive narrative - what is it?

→ potential for diverse characteristics  
 high if done interview, bios  
 plus using descriptive narrative  
 techniques

Follow up exercise → time lag

pilot work

Numbers interested in making contact  
 } Vets  
 reasons  
 experiences of contact

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10 March 1992

To: Christine Grant, Operations Manager, New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service

From: Ross Mackay, Director Research, Social Policy Information Services, Social Welfare Policy Agency

Re: The collection of monitoring information under the Adult Adoption Information Act and consent to research forms, and whether the current gathering of this data should continue.

### Background and Introduction

Prior to the implementation of the Adult Adoption Information Act in 1986 the Assistant Director Adoptions and Fostering suggested to the Director Research that it would be useful to gather monitoring information on how the Act was working, as it came into effect. The Act made large changes to the practice of adoption and the ability of people to gain information about their birth relatives and it was considered important that information was gathered on how people were affected by and were responding to the changes.

A two stage information collection was established. Following discussions between the Director Research and the Deputy Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and the Adult Adoption Information Officer it was agreed that basic demographic data would be collected on adopted people and birth parents placing a veto on birth information, those applying for identifying information or an original birth certificate, and those receiving counselling.

Also, it was agreed that the consent of adopted people and birth parents who requested identifying information or an original birth certificate would be sought to take part in further research on the Act, involving an interview. This provided a pool of people from which samples could be drawn for future research. It was intended that future research would determine how the new procedures were working for birth parents and adopted people, and what their experiences were of requesting information or seeking contact under the Act.

Forms recording the demographic data were filled in monthly and these and the completed forms giving consent to future research were sent to the Research Section.

### What Information has been Collected

- 1 The date of birth and sex of adopted people placing a veto, who this veto applies to and whether the adopted person required counselling at the time of placing the veto (collected monthly since March 1986)
- 2 The sex of the birth parent placing a veto, their age at the time of their child's adoption, the date of birth of their adopted child, and whether the birth parent required counselling at the time of placing the veto (collected monthly since March 1986)

- 3 The sex and date of birth of adopted people who have applied for a copy of their original birth certificate (collected monthly since September 1986)
- 4 The sex of birth parents requesting identifying information from the Department and the date of birth and sex of their adopted child, and the district from which the birth parent applies (collected monthly since September 1986)
- 5 2600 consents from adopted people (collected from 1 September 1986 to 1991)  
1150 consents from birth parents (collected from 1 September 1986 to the present)
- 6 The sex and date of birth of adopted persons for whom counselling was provided and the office or independent counsellor who provided this (collected since 1986, collection now virtually ceased)

#### How the Information has been Used

- 1 The monthly returns of demographic information of people placing vetoes and people applying for identifying information and original birth certificates are collated and provided to adoption staff in the Children Young Persons and their Families unit of the department (last year's information is attached as an example). This information is also used in the reporting of Adult Adoption Information Act activity in the Department's Annual Report.
- 2 Two research studies have been conducted, one with birth parents the other with adopted people, drawing the samples from the completed consent forms held in the Research Section.

Dr Jeff Field, of the Department of Psychology, University of Auckland, carried out a study of "The Long-term Adjustment of Relinquishing Mothers in Adoption". The study compared the psychological well-being of birthmothers who had experienced a reunion with their child with those who had not experienced a reunion, investigated factors that may contribute to differences in feelings and well-being over time for birthmothers who had and those who had not had a reunion with their child, and gathered the birthmothers' views on the procedures under the Act for obtaining information and making contact with their child.

A postal questionnaire was sent to all women who had returned consent forms between September 1986 and March 1989 (581 in total) and individual interviews were also held with 21 birthmothers in Auckland. The findings from this research have been published through articles in two journals and in a report published by the University of Auckland.

A study of the experiences of adopted people under the Act has been carried out by Jill Kennard for a Masterate in Social Work at Victoria University. The research collected information on what adopted people had done and the choices they had made regarding searching for and making contact with birth family following requesting their original birth certificate. It also gathered adopted people's views on how the

provisions of the Act had worked for them and what their views were on aspects such as vetoes, compulsory counselling and mediation.

A postal questionnaire was sent to 300 adopted people who returned consent forms and had applied for their original birth certificate from November 1986. The thesis titled "Adoption Information: The Repossession of Identity" has been completed and is due to be published soon as part of the Research Section occasional report series.

I am now seeking a response from you as to whether you require and are interested in the collection of the monitoring information and consent to research forms relating to the Adult Adoption Information Act to be continued. The amount of staff time involved in these activities is small and the financial cost involved is for the provision of pre-paid envelopes for the return of completed consent forms.

Both envisaged stages of monitoring the functioning of the Act have been addressed in terms of the collection of demographic data and through some collection of more descriptive and in-depth research in the two studies outlined above. There are sufficient numbers of consent forms from which a further sample could be drawn if the collection was stopped now, however as time passes the number of addresses which are no longer current may increase which would cause difficulties for future research using these consents.

Could you please consider whether you wish to retain this information collection and inform me of your reply. I look forward to your response.

Ross Mackay  
Director Research

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**Fax**

**Social Policy Agency**

Date: 18 July 1997

To: Ann Weaver  
(Adoptions)

Fax To:

384 2250

Company: CYPFS  
Wellington office

Fax From: 64-4-916-3775

From: Social Policy Agency

Subject: Adult Adoption Information Statistics

Pages: 1/ + 1

(Including this cover sheet)

Here is a sample page from the statistics your unit sends to me each month, giving details of Birthparents requesting information about their adult adopted children. Instead of these statistics being sent to me each month, could they now be sent to Brenda Farrell Adoptions CYPFS National office.

Thanks for your help in sorting this out. Please call me if there are any difficulties.  
Bryony Walker  
(Research Unit.)

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