

Child Protection and Other Legislation Bill 2020
Adoption

Submission

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To The, Committee Secretary
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

I would like to thank the committee for accepting my personal submission and the opportunity to share my views in regard, to the Adoption Bill. Firstly, I would like to state that I believe that adoption should remain the 4th and last option for vulnerable Queensland children, needing care, and protection.

I am an adopted person, with 58 years of experience of the consequences of adoption. I am a mother and grandmother. I sadly have had to witness the effects of my adoption upon my children and grandchildren, as they remain disconnected from their biological family tree and adopted family.

I belong to a number of peer support groups for adoptees. I fully comprehend, and understand that there are many like myself, who are adversely affected by the experience of being an adopted person.

Please note, that I took the time to carefully read the inquest report into the tragic death of Mason Jet Lee and would like to offer my sincerest sympathies and condolences to Mason's siblings, and family members who have been impacted by this terrible loss. It is clear that there were failings at every level to protect this beautiful child.

I would like to point out that I was taken for adoption at birth, and placed with a married couple who were deemed by authorities to be appropriate care providers for me. I was raised with two other adopted siblings and one foster child, who was adopted by the same couple at the age of 17 years in 1989. Unfortunately, none, of us was ever safe, and none of us was ever given the protection and care we needed and deserved, within this adoptive family.

You see I understand what it is to be beaten, abused, suffocated, set alight, and tortured as a child. Both of my adoptive parents inflicted and or exposed all of us to physical, mental, and sexual abuse. No one stepped in to stop it. No one spoke up to try to prevent it, and like Mason, people knew something was wrong but chose to do nothing anyway. Then there were the abusers that the adoptive parents brought into my life. The alcohol abuse, the domestic violence, child slave labour, mental ill health episodes were an almost daily occurrence. As a baby, I was also taken to hospital with physical injuries, which was often wrongly blamed on a sibling.

No one questioned anything. My adoptive mother created lies that begged belief. I am completely perplexed how either of them could be assessed as suitable foster parents, when I was 12 years old, when our living environment and abuse was at its worst.

Therefore, I understand fully, what life may have been like for Mason and how those meant to screen for harm, or risk either chose to stay silent, were not experienced, or failed to do their job. Unlike Mason, I did not die at the hands of my caregivers. However, there were a number of times I really thought; my adoptive father would murder me.

Failings of Caboolture Hospital Mental Health: 2016

In 2016, my adopted sister alerted me that the adoptive mother was in very poor condition, mentally and physically, we believed her to be suicidal. We arranged to get a court order to get her admitted to hospital. We had hoped that finally after a lifetime of begging for help, we would finally get it, and the adoptive mother would receive professional help.

I arrived at the hospital and spoke to a social worker, who took some history and heard my concerns. The staff in the emergency ward were concerned about her very un-kept appearance, severe weight loss, and grey skin colouring. They witnessed my adoptive mother become erratic and angry towards me, changing her story a number of times and knew something was not right. I questioned if she had been seen in by mental health. They checked to find out if mental health had seen her and how long for. To the shock of us all, they only had her for 15 minutes, stating there was nothing wrong with her.

I was able to get access into her home; I had to wear a mask. There was cat urine and faeces all over the kitchen floor and benches, no edible food was in the house, and the fridge was piled with unwashed pots, pan, plates etc.. The home was built like FortKnox, no window could be opened. Her mattress was soaked in urine, even her washed clothing smelled badly. My sister had told me, the adoptive mother had threatened to shoot her some months prior; I was shocked to find a rifle in the bedroom, which the adoptive mother had no license for.

The adoptive mother was transferred to a small country hospital for only 2 weeks, where others witnessed her aggression towards all of her 3 adopted children, however especially to me. They released her after some improvements and tests. However, despite them saying nothing was seriously wrong with her, they told us to never be alone with her, ever! In addition, No one was willing to visit her at home (home help) for fear of risk of harm to themselves. Again, the responsibility was placed back onto the abused traumatised adoptees and to the add insult to injury, we were not offered any support to cope.

On the last day that I saw my adoptive mother, my sister and I took her to an appointment at the Caboolture hospital to see a counsellor, neither of us was allowed to attend that appointment or have any input. The adoptive mother lied to and manipulated staff, who refused to believe us and our concerns and as a result, our adoptive mother died by suicide weeks later.

On the last day that I saw her, I knew I had exhausted every avenue to prevent her death. Those with the skills, power and authority to do something, shut the door on those who knew her best. They

placed us, the abused, traumatised adoptees under the bus, yet again. We were totally abandoned in help and support. To top this whole tragic event off, is the fact that there are NO adoption trauma trained specialists available to help adoptees cope with such horrific events. The stark truth of this that the system failed us as adopted children, and still fails us as adopted adults. None of the staff in either hospital understood adoption trauma, they have no training at all on this subject despite the federal inquiry into forced adoption, and recommendation made, in 2011.

Since 2008, I have consistently tried to get the Queensland government to acknowledge the abuses that occurred, to my siblings me and others. All political parties have refused to apologize and right the wrongs of the past when it comes to abuse by adoptive parents. Along the way, I have met countless other adoptees who have suffered in the same way I have. Due to the pain of abuse and separation from our biological family, unable to access adoption trauma trained services, has resulted in many adoptees suffering very poor mental health outcomes and increased early death.

I have come to realise that if I ever ended my life by suicide due to not coping with the abuse and trauma, no coroner would question the cause and effect of my adoption, nor would they question the failure of my government to accept accountability and the impact it has had on me. There would be no inquiry, on my behalf, to find out what went wrong. If I had been murdered by my adoptive parents, my adoption status would not be noted, because my birth certificate has been changed, showing that I am the biological child of the adoptive parents. There would no investigation, to discover and unearth every failure of adoption upon me.

The sad fact is that coroners have sighted murdered adopted children. However, they would never have known it. The same would apply if an adoptee died my suicide, as the reason is that there is No data collected at all on these 2 types of deaths for adopted people. Therefore, as a society with the absence of such data, we are lead to believe that adoption is a safer form of care.

The Coroner's report, Mason's death, and similarities within adoption

903: Of the inquest report, Ms Bentley concluded that the department failed in their duty to protect Mason from the rise of serious harm that he faced, in the months prior to his death. None of the CSO's conducted an appropriate investigation. None of them took the time to look into the information held by the department. Failing to make case notes. Did not consider information from the hospital. Submitted inadequate documents. No team leader or Manager took steps to ensure the CSO's were directing Mason's case appropriately. Failure to even sight Mason, Etc.

549: (Parental Deception) Dr Wittaker, explains disguised compliance, a parent or carer gives the appearance of cooperating and that workers were more adult centred than child centred in their assessments, and decision making. The mother, describing herself as a victim and workers responding to her needs, rather than the needs of the child.

555: Credibility is the tendency to believe statements to be true if they come from a source perceived as trustworthy. And 553: Studies show that all people are not very accurate at detecting when somebody is lying, even though they may consider themselves to be so. (Dr Wittaker)

I would like to point out that these factors also applied to my adoptive parents and others wanting to adopt or who are adoptive parents. The pro-adoption agenda focuses on the individual and couples who present well, and who speak the right language, and seem to tick all the right boxes. Due to the lack of information, data, and studies in Australia, our society in general tends to hold adoption and adoptive parents up, as a pinnacle of standard for children. Adoptive parents and those wanting to adopt can and do practise parental deception. As a society, they are automatically perceived as trustworthy, due to the honourable estate, that the position of “adoptive parent” or “orphan saviour” places them on..

The fact that Coroner Bentley, does not even question adoption, and that the previous committee denied the voices of the 36 out of 38 submissions against the changes, exposes this very point. The previous committee received an overwhelming majority of submissions against the changes, yet those submissions were ignored, in favour of adoption.

Even the department themselves responded against adoption.

948: The department submits to the coroner that the findings should NOT comment on adoption on children, as it was not an issue to be explored at the inquest and was not in fact explored.

Ms Bentley’s reply

949: Ms Bentley states she disagrees with that submission. Saying, the main issue to be explored at the inquest and the task I am bound to undertake is the identification of ways to preventing similar deaths in future.

Again Stating:

942/951: Although the issue of adoption was not explored at the inquest, it was fully explored by the Carmody inquiry.

The Coroners reasoning for adoption

The Coroner refers to the “Carmody Report” in reference to a Dr Elizabeth Hoehn and a Professor Stephen Stathis , who provided evidence that a child’s first two to three years are formative to developing secure attachments, healthy development and solid neural pathways. The Coroner, Ms Bentley makes sure to note their study in her inquest findings, on the study in Bucharest, called the **“Early Intervention Project”**. This study is used as her argument as to why she beleives children under 3 should be removed for adoption.

I wanted to try to understand how this study placed so much weight for adoption. Therefore, I decided to do my own research into it. In doing this I realised that much had been, cherry picked from it and added to Mason’s inquest. The following is what I found.

Firstly, I looked at the words of Professor Stathis that Ms Bentley provided to the inquest report. 943; Professor Stathis, “I don’t care whether you call it adoption or permanent placement or WHAT EVER, this is their family until 18 or beyond, this is their family.” (Extract taken from The Carmody report).

To understand that what he exactly said, “ **This is their family until 18 OR beyond, this is their family**” If he was stating strongly for adoption, his statement would be “ **This is their family for life**” because that is what adoption is, a legal life change!

I would argue that Professor Stathis was more interested in providing stable permanent care for a child until 18 years of age, where the child see’s this home as family. If they can build a solid relationship, it could last beyond 18 years. He is NOT placing adoption as the model. In fact, he states that he does not care what you call it. However, Ms Bentley takes his statement as his confirmation for adoption, to suite her beliefs.

Professor Stathis, even expresses his concerns for the mothers: We cannot forget the mum’s, if you take the child from them and you stigmatise them and you CRUSH them, they are going to have another child.

Therefore, Professor Stathis words, clearly expresses his aim is permanent care for children and respective care for the mother. He knows that such actions of removal lead to reactions, using the term, crushed. Our adoption system legally severs the child from the mother, father, siblings, and grandparents, for life, they are often left with NO help and assistance to cope with such crushing trauma, grief, and loss.

What was the Bucharest Early Intervention Project really about?

Under Nicolae Ceausescu, both abortion and contraception were forbidden. Ceausescu believed that population growth would lead to economic growth. He ensured that abortion, for women under 40 was especially forbidden. People were taxed for being childless and higher taxes for families with less than five children. The increase in the numbers of births resulted in many children being abandoned in orphanages, which were also occupied by people with disabilities and mental illnesses. Together, these vulnerable groups were subject to institutionalized neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and drug use to control behaviour. Many of the parents placed the children in the orphanages believing they would receive proper care.

After 1982, conditions in the orphanages rapidly declined, Ceausescu’s seize on the country’s economic output to repay foreign debt caused terrible economic downturn; electricity, heath and food were scarce. Virgin Carson Young noted that many of the children were not orphans but were in fact children who had parents unable to afford such large families. The orphanage situation was created by the mandated national requirements, not because the children were abused or not loved. Many of the parents placing their children in the orphanages believing that their children would receive good care, hoping to go back and retrieve them once in a position to do so.

After the death of Ceausescu and his wife, information of the plight of the children reached Western Nations in 1989. Hence, the study began.

The project was the first ever-randomized controlled trial of foster care as an alternative to institutional care. Based on the horrific conditions of the orphanages it is hard to believe that anyone would need to form a study to realise the obvious.

Joseph J Fins, MD, MACP published his findings on the study “ Children & Families, Clinical Trial & Research Ethics, Pandemic Planning 2013.

He states that his own research into the scientific studies on the children left him very concerned and troubled. He believes that the children and families had been exploited, even sacrificed for a scientific end. The study randomized 136 children. Sixty-nine would be put into foster care to see how they would develop. (Foster care was in short supply in Bucharest, so arrangements had to be made up with families) Sixty-Seven children stayed in the orphanages, even though most of them were not even orphans. They had parents who were forced to relinquish them under the experimental coercive dictatorial regime. His assessment and findings left him stating that the Bucharest study held transgression of omissions similar to a study done in the 1940's where the University of Pittsburgh deliberately infected men with venereal disease, to test their hypothesis that penicillin could prevent gonorrhoea and syphilis. His comparison of the Bucharest Study and the Pittsburgh study should create some alarm and questions around using it to advocate for adoption.

During the trial, parents relinquished their children yet again, and did not remove their children from the orphanage due to pressure by the Study investigators. Many parents felt they had no control or say as they were conditioned to follow orders, which is typical of those subjected to communist rule.

The investigators of the study found a lifetime of developmental risk from institutionalization and claimed the study presented no more than minimal risk. However, Joseph J Fins concludes that the institutional environment was a highly toxic standard of care during the study.

Fin States; I would counter that what they sought to prove was already known. “Unsurprisingly, cognitive development in children who remained institutionalized was markedly lower than that of never institutionalized children or of children who were removed from institutions and placed in foster care. By the standard of the day, and like their predecessors in the Pittsburgh study (injecting men with gonorrhoea and syphilis) The Bucharest study on the Romanian orphans did something that was “ethically Impossible” Dark shadows of the Tuskegee study are repeated here, when vulnerable innocents , are used as a means to science, he says.

What did the study reveal; that you were NOT told

*The study debunked the official notions of the regime that children entered the orphanages already damaged. It also exposes that these were not unwanted children, who were abused and damaged by their parents. Or very young girls willing fall pregnant.

*The children placed in the orphanages was the result of a dictator who destroyed the country and the society he ruled, forcing thousands of struggling parents to seek an alternative care for their children .

*The foster children did not attain levels of functioning comparable to the community raised Romanian Children. This suggests that foster placement made possible some, but not complete recovery following early deprivation. In light of the fact that the country was still struggling and many

Families were poor; it is interesting to note that those who were raised by their biological families fared better than the paid foster care.

*After the study, many of the foster parents no longer wanted the children. As the money was no longer on tap by Western funding

*Many of the parents reclaimed their children and those that had been adopted, were returned back to their biological parents.

*Parents were brainwashed by the regime into believing that the orphanages were good for their kids, were most likely impressed by Western investigators who asked their permission to allow their children's participation in the research. Invoking the Nuremberg Code's language on voluntariness. Did the socio political context, power dynamics, and poverty compromise independent decisions by the orphan's parents? Parents had been stripped of their parental authority and standing.

Abuse related to Romanian orphans and international adoption;

After the fall of the communist regime, after the conditions of the orphanages were made public, adoption was promoted as a solution. As a result, large numbers of children were adopted by foreigners in the 1990's and early 2000's. Nevertheless, there were many irregularities, fuelled by corruption and loose regulations. As a result, in 2004, the government banned international adoption (except for grandparents) the ban was passed under pressure from the EU (Which Romania later joined in 2007) in order to curb the abuses of the system

In Conclusion

How can an unethical study, comparing the development of children in a barbaric institution vs a fully funded foster care study in Romania, which was identified as unethical, and abusive, have anything to do with Australia and Queensland children and adoption?

The Study done in Romania had nothing to do with Adoption at all. So why it even referred to in Mason's tragic death, (who wasn't even in foster care) and an argument for adoption?

What happened to Mason Jet Lee is truly tragic, and should never have happened. However, what happened to me and my siblings should never have happened either, but all I hear is silence in fixing on the ongoing trauma of past adoptions.

To the pro-adoption agenda, adoptees like myself, amount to nothing. There is no cause for concern or compassion towards us, for what we have lived through, and what we still endure. There is no willingness to address our fears and concerns around the safety of children, within adoption. They choose not to engage with us. They would prefer that we stay silent and disappear, taking our pain and suffering to our graves. If I choose to have no voice, or do not face my pain and overcome my fears to find the courage to speak my truth, then you would remain un-informed. The very ones that can attest to the very difficult and painful aspects of adoption are the ones with the lived experience of adoptio

Dr Wittaker, in his evidence in investigating Mason's death, stated that those who were supposed to keep Mason safe were more focused on the needs of the adults. I totally agree with his findings. I also believe that the call/push/ and pro-adoption agenda is doing the same thing; focusing on the needs of those wanting to adopt. Adoptchange, would NOT exist if there were no childless couples requiring children.

I believe that they are, strategically lobbying and using the tragic death of Mason in an attempt to influence and take advantage to their own benefit. This is not child centred.

When adoptees like me see drastic changes, real efforts to hear our voices, and when you willingly create services that will support us and help us heal. When you acknowledge the pain, suffering, and trauma we endure, then we know we have a government and a society that does put children first.

Whilst there is no accountability in adoption, no supports for future children past 12 months of their adoption, changed birth certificates, no adoption trauma trained specialists, no data and studies collected on adoptees, no help to prevent adoptee suicides etc, then everything you do in passing this bill, will be for show only.

Before passing this Bill, Queensland should first hold an inquiry into adoption. This should be your first step, to really look into whether adoption stacks up against other forms of care.

I would be more than happy to speak directly to the committee and would appreciate it, if you would consider taking the time to really learn what is to be adopted.

Thanking You
Kerri Saint