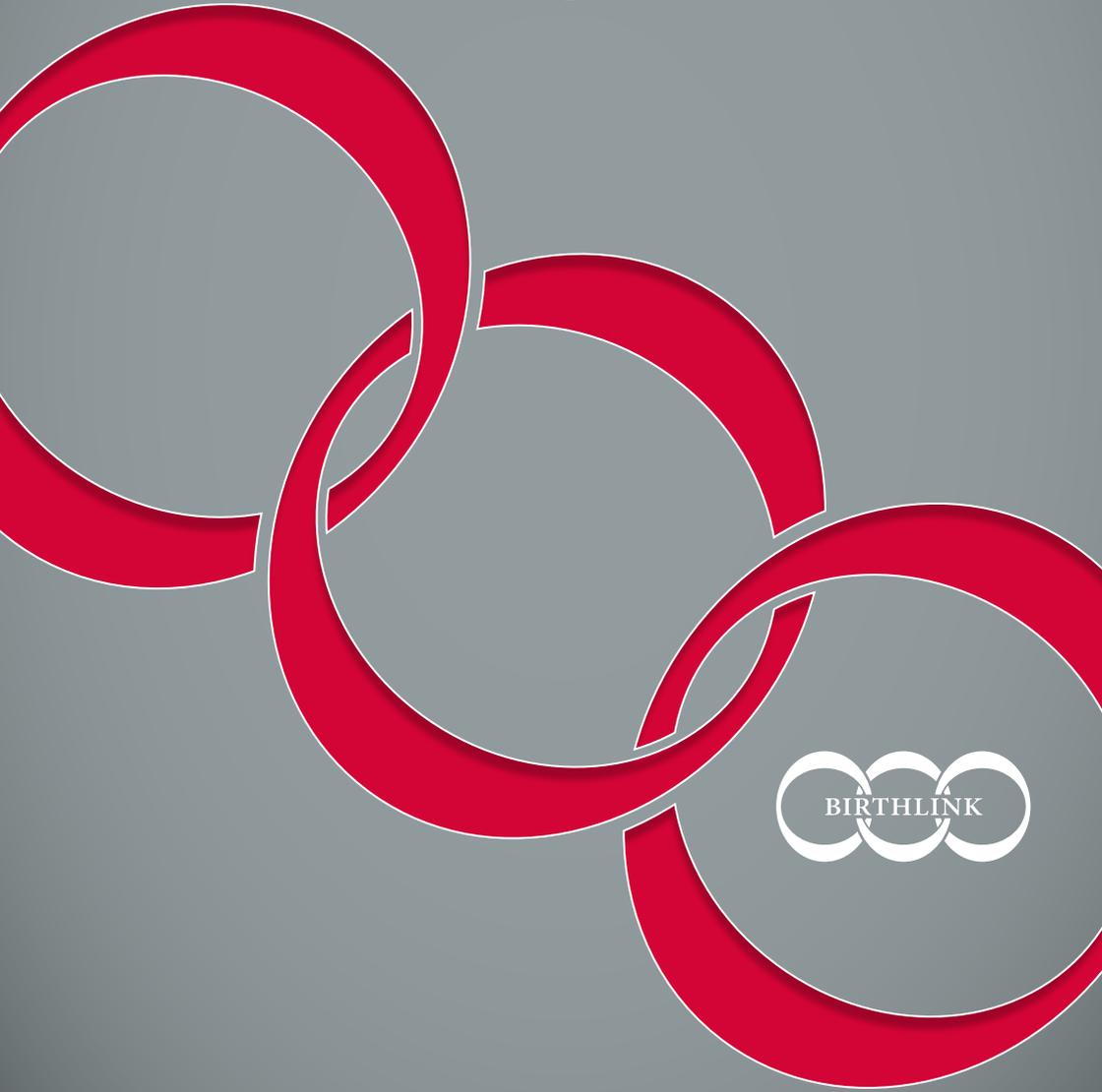


**Birthlink's Adoption
Services for Adults:
what they are and why
we provide them**



Our origins

The agency now known as Birthlink can trace its origins to 1911 when the Eastern Branch of the National Vigilance Association was established, its aim being to protect women and girls on the street. The Association increasingly found itself helping pregnant women and single mothers and doing casework with individuals.

In 1941 the Association became the Guild of Service, working with single mothers offering support, arranging fostering and more and more often, adoption. In 1954 the Guild was registered as an adoption agency. By 1975 social changes meant there were fewer babies available for adoption – the Abortion Act was implemented; contraception was more effective and there were improvements in housing and benefits for single parents.

In 1975 the Children Act gave adopted adults the right, for the first time south of the border, to access their original birth certificates and trace their families of origin. Even though this had always been a right in Scotland, it had an obvious knock-on effect to work here. By the late 1970s more and more adopted adults were returning for help to find out about their origins, and birth mothers were also approaching us to ask what had become of their children lost to adoption in the past.

In 1978 the name of the agency was changed to Family Care. In 1984 Birthlink and the Adoption Contact Register were established by Family Care (the renamed Guild of Service). In 2007 after feedback was obtained from service users, we became 'Birthlink', a name which better reflects the services outlined in this booklet.

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Birthlink's Adoption Services for Adults: what they are and why we provide them

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When a child and his/her birth family are separated, this has both immediate consequences and others that endure long after that child has become an adult. In adoption, as well as a vulnerable child who goes to a set of adoptive parents, there is a birth mother who loses a child. Not only are there birth mothers, but birth fathers and other birth relatives such as aunts and uncles and grandparents who are separated from that child (Clapton and Hoggan, 2013, p.69)

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Foreword

This booklet has been produced to provide a single, comprehensive guide to the after-adoption services of Birthlink, Scotland's leading agency for adults who have been adopted, the relatives of adopted people and those adults that have spent time in public care. It begins with a brief account of adoption in Scotland and an identification of the various categories of people affected together with their needs.

Section One

Adoption in Scotland

Adoption has a long history as a way of providing a new family for a child by transferring parental rights from one set of parents to another. Sometimes this has been an informal arrangement and at other times it has been covered by legislation. In Scotland, adoption was made legal by the Adoption Act 1930. Since then there have been over 89,000 adoptions. Some of these are 'step-parent' adoptions where a new step-father or step-mother has joined with the child's birth mother or father to adopt the child. There have also been adoptions by other relatives, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. Since 1975 most other adoptions are arranged by an adoption agency, but in previous years many were 'private' arrangements made by third parties such as doctors, lawyers, ministers or family friends. The birth parents of these children may not have been married to each other and the birth father's identity may not have been revealed.

In the past many adoptions were kept a secret, even within a family, and sometimes children grew up not knowing the truth. When the information was discovered accidentally it was usually a shock. To avoid this adopters are advised to tell their children about their adoption when they are young and to talk about it when the children have more questions or if the subject comes up naturally. In order to help adoptive parents and their children, agencies are urged to pass on as much non-identifying information as possible. However, it can still happen that adoptive parents have very little information about the birth parents or this has got lost.

People who were adopted as babies or toddlers will have no recollections of their birth parent or parents, but since the 1970s there have been more adoptions of children who were older. They are more likely to remember, however vaguely, their birth parent/s or grandparents or other people who looked after them and some of the events that occurred before their adoption. Even so, the written information held by their adopters may be sketchy. It is possible that there have been face-to-face meetings and there may be some continuing contact between the birth and adoptive families, but sometimes adopters are reluctant to talk about this as they may be afraid they will lose their son or daughter or cause

them unnecessary distress. Many adopted people are equally afraid of hurting their adoptive parents, and some do not start a search for more information or for contact with their birth relatives until after their adoptive parents have died. Nevertheless, there are many stories of adopters supporting and helping their children with their searches

Wanting to find out more about our origins is an important part of establishing our identity and is part of the normal process of growing up. Some adopted people accept that the information about their birth family is limited and are content with their circumstances, but many have a longing to learn more if the opportunity arises. In Scotland this has always been easier than in other parts of the UK as the first Adoption Act in 1930 said that, from the age of 17, adopted people who were born here could see and obtain a copy of their original birth certificate. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 changed the age to 16, partly because this is the legal age of marriage. Adopted people may need to make enquiries to be sure they are not too closely related to the person they plan to marry and so, since 1st April 1997, any adopted person can ask to see their original Birth Certificate once they reach their 16th birthday.

It has also been possible since 1930 for people who were adopted in Scotland to see the papers known as the 'Court Process' relating to their adoption. These papers are sealed when the Adoption Order is made and there are very strict rules about gaining access to them. How to do this, and the kind of information the papers may reveal, is one of the actions which is described in this Guide.

Now that more adopted people are searching for information or hoping to make contact, the publicity around this has made it easier for birth parents to voice their needs to know how their children have fared. Birth families do not have the right to obtain adoption certificates or to have access to the Court Process, but they may seek information from the adoption agency (if one was involved) and since 1984 they have been able to register on the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland – described in Section Three.

Section Two

What are the specific needs of everyone involved in adoption?

In Scotland, between 1930 when official records began and 1996 when a child adopted in that year would now be an 18 yr old adult, there have been nearly 89,000 adoptions. This means that if each adopted person and two birth parents are counted, then there are over ¼ million adult people in Scotland who are directly affected by adoption. If other birth relatives are added, this figure rises to such an extent that it has been calculated to be as many as one in ten of the Scottish population. If adoptive family members are included, the figure is even higher.

Adopted Adults

"I don't know what diseases come down my line; when dentist and doctors ask the old blood questions about family runnings I tell them; I have no nose or mouth or eyes to match, no spitting image or dead cert, My face watches itself in the glass." (The Adoption Papers, Jackie Kay 2000)

Adopted adults' curiosity about their origins is an evidenced fact that has nothing to do with deficient upbringing and everything to do with a natural need to know where we come from:

"I was told at a very early age that I was adopted and that I knew I was very 'special'. However, it did make me different. As a kid I could never join in the conversations about who I looked like, whose eyes did I have, whose hair colour did I have, where did I get my features from? I knew I wanted to find out the answers to these questions, it was a question of when."

Beyond curiosity many adopted adults feel a need to meet their birth parents. The most common reasons given for searching for a birth relative include 'getting information about me to help complete the jigsaw' and 'the need to know more about myself and make the picture whole'.' (Howe et al, 2001 p.346).

Satisfying curiosity is not straightforward for adopted people. For instance it is not uncommon for adopted adults to be referred to as the adopted child. When they seek to gain access to information about their roots. They have to receive services from children's services teams as if still 'children' (Clapton, 2008 p.137).

Other answers are also needed. According to Neil 'it is important for adopted people to know not only the details of their biological heritage, but to explore the question of why they were adopted. This entails understanding the issues that led to the adoption, including the circumstances of the birthparents and the actions of social workers and agencies' (2000 p.303). Neil goes on to state 'the need to know the truth is compelling' (p.304).

More practical information-based reasons also exist. Adopted persons often lack genetic and medical history, as well as other family information. A routine visit to the doctor's office, where the adopted person is asked to supply medical history information, may make adopted persons acutely aware of how they differ from those who were not adopted. Those who find out only later in life that they were adopted as infants are sometimes put at risk by their long-held assumption of a family medical history that they later find is completely incorrect' (CWIG, 2004). However information about their origins is often not readily or easily obtainable. For instance: '70% of searchers and 74% of non-searchers said they did not feel comfortable asking their adoptive parents about their origins' (Feast and Howe, 2000). In Iredale's accounts of adopted people's meetings with their birth relatives, one adopted person feared asking her parents for information: 'I was scared of upsetting the apple cart by broaching the subject' (1997 p.151), or for another, raising the matter was at the least a 'guessing game' (p.152). And in the words of playwright Edward Albee:

No matter how wonderful your parents are, what they give you and what opportunities they provide for you they can never tell you who you really are.



Howe and Feast (2000) tell us that adopted people who are **not** curious about their origins still have a need for services. Three quarters of the 'non searchers' amongst the adopted people they surveyed felt that it was right for agencies to let them know that a birth relative had made an approach.

And note that the search and contact process has been found to be more successful if an intermediary is engaged because this 'does give a better chance of ongoing contact being established' (Armstrong and Ormerod, 2005 p.7).

After contact, either by an adopted person or from a birth relative, people often need help with its impact. Trinder describes the unexpected letter from a birth relative as 'an unexpected and unsolicited approach that is highly likely to be a considerable bombshell' (2000 p. 20). Armstrong and Ormerod (pp. 21-22) provide a comprehensive list of emotions that may be experienced, ranging from shock to anger e.g. 'a mammoth shock' (p. 33).

In the longer-term it has been noted that 'People may need access to counseling over a period of years and not just at the point of contact' (Feast and Smith, 1995 p. 23).

Overall, adopted adults, according to the CWIG (2004), may seek help with interpersonal relations, integration of adoption experiences, struggles around adoption, healing processes, grief and loss, and preparation for a reunion with a birth parent. Based on their research, Trinder et al suggest that something like 50% of adopted people will seek information (2004). And one researcher has gone as far to say that 'we should perhaps explore why some adoptees do not search, rather than see it as a minority activity' (Selman, 1999).

"Maybe I am looking for something I never had which I may never get, but until I meet her I will never know. I am hoping I can have a relationship with her. She is flesh and blood and there must be a tie... I've got lots of friends but I want somebody that is like me, that's part of me."

Birth Parents

- ▶ Birth Mothers need services that address the persistence of grief and undimmed desire to know of their adopted children. An Australian study of 213 women found that while not all women experienced negative adjustment, for others the effects of relinquishment could be devastating and long lasting. In particular, the study found that it was inappropriate to view mothers who give up their children for adoption as women who have put their problems behind them (Winkler and van Keppel, 1984). Subsequent studies in the UK, have underlined this message, e.g. Bouchier et al (1991) and Half a Million Women – Mothers who lose their children by adoption, (Howe et al, 1992).

For a mother the adoption of her child produces 'profound and protracted grief reactions, depression and an enduring pre-occupation with and worry about the welfare of the child' (Brodzinsky, 1990 p. 304).

Throughout all my meetings and discussions with the various people concerned with adoption, one message was hammered home more than anything else, 'once he's gone, he's gone, you must forget him, out of your head, your life, start afresh, not for your sake but for the baby's sake, if you love him that is what you must do'. But there isn't a day goes by that I don't think and pray for my son.

- ▶ Birth fathers need a service that understands that for many men whose children have been given up for adoption, out of sight does not mean out of mind. Studies of birth fathers in the UK, Australia and the USA have all pointed to the many similarities of experience between birth mothers and birth fathers. These include: continuing to mourn the loss of their child throughout their lifetime, tracking the milestones of their child's life by imagining birthday parties, first days of school, graduation, and more. Attention has also been drawn to feelings of guilt and shame regarding the adoption (Clapton, 2003).



When you give up a child for adoption there is always sadness left and you have to carry this with you till you can have contact with them again. If you are a man then there is not much help out there.

- ▶ Other birth relatives need a service that appreciates their experiences, knows of the existing services and can advocate for them. For instance, siblings of adopted people have no statutory right of access to information that will identify their adopted sibling – even if they themselves were adopted.

Adoptive Parents

Adoptive Parents need a service that understands that the parenting they do is of value and that adoption brings with it specific and unique challenges, many of which are about how to acknowledge the importance of roots with their son or daughter and how to support them should they wish to trace their birth parents.

Two significant themes emerged from work with children. Firstly, their sense of “not knowing” about their birth family which occurred regardless of how well they had adjusted to being adopted. Secondly, sometimes very caring and supportive adoptive parents were unaware of their child’s wish to talk or hear about their birth family. Parents misinterpreted silence on the subject of birth parents as a lack of interest from the child. Often it more accurately reflected the child’s perception that their adoptive parents silence was discomfort or lack of permission to speak or ask questions. Bridging this gap can only be to mutual benefit of adopted children and their parents. (Adopted Children Everywhere in Scotland, Scottish Adoption 2006).

Such challenges often continue or re-emerge when an adopted person becomes an adult and expresses a wish to meet their birth parents.

Social Workers and other professionals

Local authority social workers are often poorly informed of the needs of adults in adoption and the services available to them. Accurate information on existing services, law and policy relating to adults in adoption is a must as is practical advice on, for example how to access public records. Advice on the processes of searching and making contact is also an essential. Social workers need a service that can pinpoint the whereabouts of the adoption records of someone with whom they are working. They and counsellors and those working in mental health fields will benefit from advice about the connections between adoption, well-being and esteem.

Expert help for an adopted person, birth relative or adoptive parent will be improved by access to up-to-date research findings, reading and web resources.



Adults Who Have Been in Care

Who placed me in care and why?

Why did no one visit me?

Who were my real parents?

Who arranged for my foster parents to care of me?

Which social work department was involved, and how were decisions made to keep me in care?

There are at least 300,000 adults who have been in care in the UK and agencies receive some 4,000 enquiries each year from such post-care adults wishing to have access to their records while in care. The need to receive this information is great and its importance should not be underestimated. Adults who have been in care share many common needs with adopted people in relation to issues of identity and information relating to their families of origin yet there is very little assistance available for these people if help is needed to find information about their past or tracing estranged family members. This group of people may have had to come to terms with considerable change and transition in their lives and help is often essential if they need to move on in their adult lives (Goddard, Feast and Kirton, 2008). Information from records can explain why an individual came into care and the decisions that were made about them. This can help the post-care adult have a greater understanding of their family background, and help them make sense of their identity and history.

Yet, information is hard to access and at best can be patchy. Norfolk Council, for example, admitted to having been unable to meet more than one-third of its requests for access to files by former care adults between 2000 and 2006 because their files had been destroyed ('Care leavers who are now adults seek access to information' Community Care, 18 July 2007).

Even more serious, until the early 1980s, it was standard practice, according to Quarriers chief executive Phil Robinson, for any child taken into care in Scotland not to be told that they had siblings. The theory was that the family the child had been removed from was deemed so damaging to them that it was better that all ties were severed. At the very worst estimates, Quarriers says this could mean there are up to 100,000 children who went through the system from the 1900s to the early 1980s and were never told that they had siblings. Although many of these people may well have died, tens of thousands of men and women aged from their mid-30s and up are still alive and have no knowledge of their “lost” families (The Sunday Herald, Jan 26, 2003).

Section Three

How do Birthlink services help?

As can be appreciated, adoption is a life-long process. As a result of any one adoption, someone, sometime, may need help whether it is derived from curiosity, grief, a need to understand or to talk things over. The same may be true for those who have been fostered.

Here are our main services:

The Adoption Contact Register for Scotland

The Adoption Contact Register for Scotland provides a confidential, central point of contact between adults who have been separated by adoption and serves the needs of adopted adults, birth mothers and birth fathers and other relatives such as siblings and grandparents.

Adoption Contact Register stories

The Adoption Contact Register has brought together many people since its establishment in 1984. One story which worked out happily is that of Alisdair, his half sister Jean and his birth mother Catherine.

Alisdair, Jean and Catherine

It was Catherine's step-daughter Jean who registered as a birth relative after she had been told that her father and step-mother had given up a baby boy for adoption prior to their marriage and so she had a younger half brother.

By searching the database, it was discovered that Alisdair had already registered, hoping to trace his birth family. Alisdair was told that Jean had registered and he was asked whether he wished to meet her.

An emotional reunion followed, first with Jean and then with his birth mother. Now Alisdair and Catherine are busy making up for 45 lost years.

However, things did not go so smoothly for George and Margaret.

continued on next page

George and Margaret

George registered as an adopted person indicating he would shortly be emigrating. He left his sister's address as a contact. Several years later George's birth mother Margaret also registered, resulting in a link. Contact was made with George's sister but unfortunately she did not have an up-to-date address for George, who was back-packing in Australia. No link has been made and Margaret continues to wait for news (this illustrates the importance of everyone who registers on the Adoption Contact Register updating information regarding their whereabouts).

How does the Register work?

A registration on the ACR is logged on computer and should there be a match on the data base (i.e. someone else already registered with a connection to the registrant) then the two parties can be put in touch with each other, exchange information etc. This is done via a professional social worker and in negotiation with each person. The Register can be used to link any two parties who have registered and want this to happen. Registration costs £20, however due to the numbers of unwaged people who use the service, the income from the fees represents a small fraction of the operational costs.

What is the value of the ACR?

The ACR is a caring, professional and ethical answer to a widely expressed need and in particular has two key values. Firstly, registration indicates a willingness to have contact. Once a match has taken place on the ACR's data base, both parties can be secure in the knowledge that a wish for contact is mutual. Secondly, the process of contact is monitored and supported by professional and highly skilled mediation and counselling is available to both parties. This is also available beyond any initial contact and meetings.



The Adoption Contact Register for Scotland

1. How Many Are Registered on the ACR?

There are 11,000 names on the ACR data base. These consist of, in decreasing proportion, adopted people, birth relatives (grandparents, siblings), birth mothers and birth fathers.

2. How Many Register Per Year?

In recent years, typically 200 people have registered. This has dropped from a height of 400/500 per year in the late 1990s, possibly because of the use of the internet to search and make contact. In 2013 two hundred and fifty people registered. This welcome upturn was probably because of increased efforts to publicise the ACR.

3. How Many Are Put In Contact With Each Other?

There is an average of twenty-four links every year and although there were forty-one in 2001, two links a month reflect longer term trends. Whilst initially involving two registrants, the term 'link' fails to reflect the effect on the wider families that can follow. For instance, in the process after a link has been established many more people are potentially linked with each other. Sons are introduced to sisters they never knew they had, fathers meet grandchildren that they have never seen and half-siblings strive to make accommodations with new-found knowledge of each other's existence. The number of 'blood relatives' drawn into potential contact with each other as a result of a link between two people can conceivably be very high. Take the, not unusual, scenario of a birth mother whose parents are both alive and who has two subsequent children (siblings of the adopted person) and has four grandchildren. When the birth mother is linked with her adopted daughter who has two children, grandchildren of the birth mother, this makes for contact between twelve people as a result of one link. Add aunts and uncles and other more distant relatives of the birth mother and the number increases exponentially.

4. Risk Of Unwelcome Contact Is Avoided

As noted above, the consequences of searching and contacting relatives where there is no mutual indication of a wish for contact can often be distressing and harmful for all concerned when there is surprise, confusion and rejection.

A major review of adoption in Scotland took place between 2001 and 2005 and, inter alia, the Review concluded that 'The work of Birthlink on the adoption contact register has shown the value of involving the voluntary sector in this area'. (*Adoption: Better Choices for Our Children: The report of the Adoption Policy Review Group*, Scottish Government, 2005, p. 104) www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/06/27140607/07362

The Review's recommendations have been enacted in law and policy and Guidance on the subsequent Regulations states that 'there are already well established services especially in relation to tracing and the use of the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland operated by Birthlink' (*Guidance On Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 And The Adoption And Children (Scotland) Act 2007*, Scottish Government, 2010, p. 201) www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/01094202/28

The After-adoption information line (AAIL)

The After-Adoption Information Line is a 'one stop shop' that provides information and advice on every aspect of adoption where adults are concerned and is free to the public and professionals. It is specialised and unique and help includes how and where to access records, rights and entitlements, legislation and adoption agencies practices. Direction to helpful web resources, specialised reading and support networks is also a feature.

"I am certain you would like to know why I want to trace my birth parents and I hope curiosity is a valid reason! I had never considered it before, but more recently I feel that I seem to know where I'm going, but don't really know where I came from! I feel sure most adopted people have the same natural curiosity about their origins." (adopted person)

2000 direct contacts are made each year via social media, telephone and letter, mostly from within Scotland, but a substantial number also comes from anywhere Scottish people have settled, e.g. England and the Commonwealth countries. In addition the combined website and Facebook pages received 30,000 views in 2013.

"My reason for wanting contact is partly to feel a sense of belonging to some other blood relative apart from my own children and partly because I just want my birth mother to know that I have often thought of her and have often wondered who I or even my children have inherited looks, character etc from." (35 year old adopted woman)

Direct work ranges from two-minute telephone calls to lengthy investigations after which a call will be returned or a detailed email response sent.

Our Search Services

Highly skilled searchers and genealogists work in the records responding to search requests. Records searched include births, marriages and deaths but also extend to other relevant sources such as electoral rolls and parish records. Service users (mainly adopted people) are provided with comprehensive family trees that enable them to make informed choices as to where to proceed in their quest for information and possible contact with families of origin. The results are complemented by help with understanding information discovered and professional advice and counselling as to any next steps. In 2012 250 searches were undertaken.

"I am still in contact with my natural family. I don't see them very often but just being in touch has made a very big emotional difference to my life." (adopted person, four years after first contact and meeting)

"Please excuse my impatience but once one starts these events the need becomes quite pressing. I was adopted in Scotland in 1958 and now I'm in my fifties I feel the need to have some questions answered, and the need to search for my origins." (54 year old adopted man)

"I am well aware that my birth mother may be married with a family, and unwilling to be confronted with her past, or even no longer alive, but I feel strongly that I would like to at least be given the chance to find out more about her, even if this does not lead to a meeting. I am very happy with my adoptive family and am not seeking to substitute them with my 'real' mother. It is more a question of satisfying my curiosity." (22 year old adopted woman)

Mediation (Go-between) Services

Adoption contact and reunion understandably involve high anxiety, the potential for crossed wires and great emotions. Mediating between the parties involved is necessarily a constant feature of our work.

“Despite all the feelings of apprehension and nerves, the hug when we met opened something in my heart that I really can’t describe. There was no strangeness at all. We talked and stared (no matter what she says, I do look like her) and compared hands and feet.”
(adopted person)

“My parents were very pleased to meet my birth mother and everything went so well. At first Linda (birth mother) and I could not keep off the phone to one another which has resulted in very large phone bills! And I think she has seen nearly every photograph that has ever been taken of me — we do look very alike. The next step is now to meet my half sisters. Hopefully what has happened for me will encourage others to search as it has been one of my most rewarding experiences and I’m glad I went ahead with it.”
(17 year old adopted person)

“I was so pleased she came to find me and very glad that my family knew about her birth. Our reunion is going well and there are plans for her and her adoptive mum to visit our family very soon for a holiday.” (birth father)

“I can understand my birth mother’s silence, her reasons for wanting to keep me hidden and out of her life. Yet I feel that even though she perceives me as a threat, there must be an ache deep inside her, a loss, an emptiness that could be healed.”
(adopted person who tried to contact her birth mother)

“At her age, perhaps it is enough to know that I am fine. Although the thought of me finding her stresses her, knowing that my life has been a good one is all she needs to ease her mind; contact is just not necessary; contact would be too painful.” (adopted person coming to terms with her birth mother’s reluctance to meet)

Because a large part of the work involves putting people in touch with each other, either as a result of a successful registration on the Adoption Contact Register or after a conclusive search of records by one of Birthlink's skilled searchers, a particular expertise has been built relating to mediation. There are many beginnings in adoption. For example, the decision to act on curiosity, a major one is beginning contact with someone you have never known but yet to whom you are related. Once someone has been found, mediation can take the form of a letter from Birthlink, three-way telephone or email contact, then go-between work that involves passing on letters and, if agreed, help and advice in setting up a meeting. After such meetings staff are on hand for both parties should they need someone impartial and skilled to help them reflect.

Increasingly, as searches have occurred using the internet, Birthlink has been providing mediation for people who have approached us with details of someone with whom they wish contact. Similarly, we have witnessed an increase in requests to 'repair' contact or relationships that have occurred by such means, generally without the help of professional advice.

Mediation required after a successful registration on the Adoption Contact Register or a successful search is free for a period after contact. In 2013, 350 people benefited from mediation.

Counselling

Counselling is a central part of the work we do.

“When someone like me used you (Birthlink staff member) as a link between my past and my present, it's hard to remember that you're only doing your job, and you're not a close friend. Many a time I've felt like phoning you for a chat – even though you said a couple of things that annoyed me!” (32 year old adopted person)

“Your patience and understanding really made such a difference to an incredibly difficult time.” (34 year old adopted person)

“Thank you for your help and support. Knowing there is a kind voice on the end of the phone is appreciated.” (29 year old adopted person)

Skilled guidance is available throughout all possible phases, e.g. in decision-making regarding access to papers, reading and interpreting records, whether to search or not, whether and when to make contact, then during and after the contact and into relationship-making.

Professional help is also available to other involved parties such as adoptive parents. Counselling is generally provided on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis but is also undertaken at arm's length either by telephone or email. Three hundred counselling hours were delivered in 2013.

The first hour of counselling is provided free (see p. 26 for details of costs of further sessions and other services).

We found that Birthlink provided a very valuable post adoption service to adults affected by adoption. (Care Inspectorate, 2013)

Care Connect

Care Connect is a service provided to adults that have spent time in foster or residential care. Files are obtained from agencies responsible for such placements, the person is assisted in reading these and, where necessary, intensive work is done to interpret these records and help the person clarify any events and gain a perspective on the reasons for their time in care. When this is requested, help is also provided in reuniting people who have become estranged from each other during and after the process of someone coming into care. Birthlink already provides its Care Connect service to one Scottish local authority and is keen to provide this service to more local authorities and other care record holders.

Danny's story

Danny came in to the office when he was 44. He had been taken into local authority care when he was two months old during a period when his mother could not look after him. Danny was not adopted because the plan was that his mother would eventually return to provide for him. Her plans failed to materialise and the social work department lost touch with Danny's mother. Danny spent his first eight years in two local authority homes. Then a placement with a foster family failed after three years. Following this Danny spent time in reform schools and with temporary foster parents. Danny was 'discharged from care' in his teens and his case closed.

After an early adult life of ups and downs Danny married, settled down and now has a child of his own. Danny told us that he had always wondered about his mother. He has looked up the 'phone book for his place of birth but not knowing his mother's present name makes the job of tracing her "like finding a needle in a haystack". From time to time thoughts of his mother and any other members of his family had become intense and made him feel like a piece of his personal jigsaw was missing. Danny saw a reference in a newspaper to Birthlink's services for adopted people and contacted us with little hope that we could help him.

After discussion Danny engaged our Care Connect service and we obtained the information that existed on file. We went through 'his papers' in great detail, often with Danny spending much time just gazing at the most mundane of items, in one instance a receipt for a pair of trainers that he vividly recalled going shopping for.

We found out that Danny had a brother and discovered that Danny's mother had re-married. In the file there was also a description of Danny's father. We shared this information with him and now Danny is considering whether to use our intermediary service as a go-between. If he does he will have access to our search service and support in managing the first of the renewed contact between him and his family of birth.

Care Connect is available to all adults who have been in care and have been out of local authority care for more than five years (if less than five years then help is available directly from the care record- holder).

Our Other Services

- ▶ The Scottish Adoption Registry provides details of the whereabouts of adoption records;
- ▶ Non-Disclosure Agreements with adoption record-holders, many of whom are local authorities, allow searching on behalf of birth relatives who approach these agencies;
- ▶ Obtaining copies of birth certificates, legal papers (Court Process) and case notes and files (the latter on behalf of people who have been fostered);
- ▶ Informative publications such as *Relatively Clear: A Search Guide for Adopted Adults in Scotland* (2009) and *Relatively Unknown: a year in the life of the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland* (2003);
- ▶ Training for social workers and other professionals that briefs busy workers with up-to-date information regarding practice, policy and the law and shares expertise and experience drawn from thirty years of service provision to adults affected by adoption;
- ▶ Provision of a regular support forum for Scottish after-adoption practitioners.

Cost of Services*

Adoption Contact Register	£20
After-adoption Information Line	free (all Scottish local authorities are asked to contribute to the availability of the AAIL, unfortunately some do not)
Search of Public Records	£80
Mediation	£40
Counselling	£30
Care Connect	free (cost borne by record-holder)

* Birthlink subsidises all of its services to the public. These costs contrast highly favourably with other comparable agencies and private services. Furthermore those unwaged are eligible for reductions.

Note: the above costs are correct as at June 2014 but under review

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The Care Inspectorate regulates and inspects care, social work and child protection services and is contactable at Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee, DD1 4NY, Tel: 0845 600 9527, Email: enquiries@careinspectorate.com

It's nice to know where you come from and where you belong, and I will treasure this knowledge always (adopted person, *Relatively Clear: a search guide for adopted people in Scotland, 2009*)

Giving up my baby for adoption was a dreadful experience. I am filled with regrets and after 40 years my realisation of my love for my baby never once faded in all these years. I am very happy, alive! and in contact with my sweet little baby with the black, thick, silky hair. I can still smell that hair today (birth mother, *Relatively Unknown: a year in the life of the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland, 2003*)

My present wife knows about everything and is quite happy for me to have contact with my son. When you give up a child for adoption there is always sadness left and you have to carry this with you till you can have contact with them again (birth father, *Relatively Unknown: a year in the life of the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland, 2003*)

