

## Editorial

Spring is sprung and so is this issue of our Bulletin. We hope that readers will find something of interest in these four pages. We begin with good news about another development in our continuing journey to do the best we can with people and their families.



**Adults Affected  
by Adoption**

### **Birthlink News**

#### **New Horizons**

Birthlink, aka Family Care aka Guild of Service has always moved with the time. Supporting destitute and unmarried women, adoption and fostering, local work in north Edinburgh, search and reunion services for birth parents and adopted adults, accessing case records for those who have been in care. This is just a few of the milestones across our one hundred plus years of family work. Now we are to work in partnership with the Scottish Government under its Redress Scheme. This scheme makes redress payments to people who were abused while in care as children before 1 December 2004, and, according to the Scottish Government website, some next of kin. The Redress Scheme replaces the Advance Payment Scheme which provided payments to care-experienced people aged 68 or over or with a terminal illness. Birthlink has become skilled at access to and interpretation of case records and our work with the Redress Scheme is an extension of this work.

Find out more about Scotland's Redress Scheme, including who is eligible, how to apply and where to access support at the [mygov.scot website](https://mygov.scot) - or call 0808 175 0808.

#### **Frozen Fees**

Bulletin readers will probably know that over the years our various services have expanded to include access to birth records, searching and contact and mediation, and the Adoption Contact Register. As wages and other costs have gone up we have tried to keep our charges as low as possible (as well as ensuring that those on low or no income were supported). But now, in a move to the opposite of current financial trends, we have suspended all our fees. Obviously, should anyone wish to make a donation, we will never refuse...but yes, for now, Birthlink is not charg-

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ing. And we hope to make this permanent.

## Integrated Birth Certificates

New legislation introduced to the Victorian parliament in Australia on Tuesday 5 April allows adopted people to have both their biological and adoptive parents on their birth certificate. This follows last year's parliamentary inquiry into historical forced adoption, revealing 40,000 children in Victoria were forced into adoption between 1958 to 1984. Included in the recommendations of



the inquiry was an integrated birth certificate. Integrated birth certificates have already been introduced in South Australia, Western Australia, and New South Wales. Attorney general, Jaclyn Symes, said the legislation would enable adopted people to update their records with a certificate that “better represents their own story”.

Included in the updated certificate, would be their birth parents, adoptive parents, and the date of their adoption. “We know we can't change the past, but we can try repair the damage caused,” Symes said in a statement “This is something that victims of forced adoption have asked for – we're putting their voices and wishes at the centre of this process.”

“This is a meaningful change we can start to make right now to help people who were adopted to tell their stories”. “We know we can't change the past, but we can try to repair the damage caused,” Symes said. Currently, people adopted in Victoria are given a new birth certificate with their adoptive

name and the names of their adoptive parents, while the original birth certificate is stamped with “cancelled” or “adopted”. The integrated certificates are expected to be available by late 2023.

## UK Government announces new funding to promote and support adoption (3 March 2022).



Here at Birthlink, our ears pricked up on reading this headline. A fully-funded campaign to encourage birth mothers to register on the Adoption Contact Register? A leaflet through every door informing adopted people about the ACR? But no: “the government today announced a new £160million funding boost to help recruit and support adoptive families over the next three years. The investment includes £144 million for the Adoption Support Fund and a pledge to provide “additional support including cognitive therapy, family support sessions and activities to help children recover from earlier traumas like abuse or neglect, helping them settle into their new families and homes”. There's no doubt that adoptive families often need help, but wouldn't it be nice if birth parents and adopted adults got some financial support to help them find each other?

## Six Questions After Discovering Your Birth Father's Contact Details. And Answers! \*

### 1. Are you prepared for a meeting or not?

Whatever. You (the searcher) are better prepared than him.

### 2. Does he know a child exists or not?



If he does know about you, it is not a foregone conclusion that he will welcome your contact, but at least he has an advantage over the man who does not know about you. Ways forward start to become tangled from here:

1. If he does not know about you, the options are acceptance (maybe provisional – “proof please”) or denial.
- 2 If he does know, the options are acceptance or decline contact.
3. Three worst case scenarios: the first being that he does not know and does not want to know (not even denial of paternity) – I have photographs and a letter in safe-keeping awaiting a response from a man that I know received our letter. The second scenario is that of the man who knows and communicates that he does not want to know. The third of the worst cases is that of the man who just does not reply (did he get the letter at all? Will he reply one day?). In many senses, this latter – nothing, silence – is the worst.

### **3. Is he willing to make contact or not?**

Let’s assume that by whatever route, acceptance (gladly or reluctantly!), or proof provided, he’s talking. Nb here the importance of an intermediary cannot be stressed enough. This is because they provide a buffer that can take some of the surprise out of the first contact.

### **4. If he does want to talk, what does he want to talk about?**

So, he’s in touch. He will be thinking all sorts of things and going through all sorts of emotions (elation, guilt, nostal-

gia, shock, regret and ta dah! pleasure and relief that you’re well). What’s he thinking when thinking? “What does she/he want from me?”, “why now?” (but also “why not sooner”). Men tend to deal in facts and often the reluctant/hesitant/doubting father can be engaged with on the basis of the (universal) need for medical, genetic, health-associated facts. Men can be less likely, in the first instance, to respond to the ‘bigger’ issues; such why you were given up for adoption.

Here I believe that you have to give a lot about yourself in order to get a lot: a photograph, a brief bio.

### **5. How could you go about broaching the big topics?**

See above, a degree of shock needs to subside, information-driven communication in first instance (can include how he and your (birth) mother, his previous girlfriend that is, met, even if it was for one night).

Certain topics such as why you were given up for adoption, he might know little about (but maybe not, my research uncovered stories of young men struggling to stay involved once the pregnancy happened, of getting thrown out of hospital wards or trying to visit mother and baby homes).

Much depends on if he knew of you, if not, some topics cannot be progressed. But if he knew of you, then once again, some basic universal rules apply, you tell him about the worry of the gap on your original birth certificate, how you grew up wondering if he was a prince or a frog.



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Once again, some stereotypes seem accurate, in taking matters forward. These men are best asked for information (reasons, feelings etc can often follow).

## **6. Has he had other children/ marriages and what effect might that have in your connecting?**

The demographics here are a maze.

Some birth fathers will have had children after you (maybe even before), though some research indicates something called ‘secondary infertility’ that is no further children; in the cases of a few of the men in my research, there were varied reasons, mostly connected with the adoption.

Some of your fathers will have settled into family lives, second marriages, grandchildren. They’re old men now. One man I worked with was so fixated on and angry with his birth mother that he couldn’t see beyond the image of her from the file. This was a photo of what seemed a brassy blond with a beehive hairdo, a good time girl. Once we located her, against my advice he drove straight to her house, double parked his car and banged on the front door, at which point her husband answered and called down a wee grey-haired, stooped woman in her slippers...He found and lost his adoption fury in the space of a day.

Some birth fathers will have ensured that everyone close to them knows about you. This is important, because spouses, wives, partners can be of immense help in facilitating contact. Some men will have unsupportive

partners who may feel threatened. Others will positively celebrate another member of the family.

Your contact poses a challenge for these men and their families. Many of the fathers in my research struggled with their identity, especially when called to acknowledge and include their adopted child. One called his adopted-out child his: “personal plus one”.

Those men that haven’t been open about you (or do not know of you) may be the hardest to reach out to because they have kept a secret for decades and built up a persona to those around them, so much so that I’ve heard said to me, they’re too well-established in their stable lives, and networks of family and friends, have too well-established an image for this to be disrupted. So, I have arranged for some meetings to be held in secret..., other times, the birth father appointed his own go-between with a separate mail-drop.

Brothers and sisters tend not to feel threatened. The connections between you and them are more horizontal with less baggage. The binary ‘me and him’ can be navigated differently in these cases.

Ultimately, everyone has to deal with their own trepidations, the risk-averse feelings of not wanting to ‘rock the boat’ and so on. In my experience and from what I know of the existing research, no-one feels that the search and contact, irrespective of any long-term outcomes, was not immensely worthwhile.

\*contributed by Dr Gary Clapton

**Birthlink registered in Scotland (SC078854). Registered Charity (SC013007)**

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