

Federal Government funding cut hurts Australian intercountry adoptees

It is now harder for Australians adopted from overseas through intercountry adoption, to find their biological families due to the Federal Government's decision to end its funding of the Intercountry Adoption Tracing and Reunification Service provided by International Social Service (ISS) Australia.

The service supports Australians adopted from overseas to navigate the complex pathways to trace and reunite with their biological family members and have been able to do so free of charge because of government funding.

"Unfortunately, we are now in the position where we will most likely have to discontinue the service due to a lack of funding. In the few months since we have found out that our government funding won't be renewed we have tried finding other sources of income, but we know that government support is vital," said Damon Martin, ISS Australia's Intercountry Adoption Service Manager.

"It is our absolute belief that if Australia is to allow intercountry adoptions, then it has a duty to provide post adoption services which allow opportunities for intercountry adoptees to trace and reunite with their biological families. For the Government to cut intercountry adoptees access to this service is a clear failure to carry out the full obligation of its original commitment to these Australians and their mental health," said Mr Martin.

ISS Australia is calling on the Federal Government to restore its funding of the service immediately, to ensure that the more than 10,000 Australian intercountry adoptees have access to this important service. It will also ensure that the 230 existing Australian intercountry adoptees currently listed as clients of the service can continue their journey to trace their biological families.

Current clients of the service have also added their voice to the campaign to get government funding reinstated.

"Knowing one's biological and cultural heritage is a fundamental right. I spent some five years toing and froing with NSW's Family and Community Services with zero traction and a lot of despair. Within two months of getting in touch with ISS Australia my biological family was located, and I made contact for the first time. ISS Australia even put me in contact with their Korean translator. The sense of empowerment this brought me was life changing," said Sally, a Korean born Australian adoptee.

"If a country decides to allow intercountry adoption, by default, the same investment and equal flow of resource and money needs to go into post adoption services. This is no longer an ethical or moral understanding, but with all the evidence we now have on hand, this should be built into underpinning policy and procedures on a national level," said Kimbra, a Taiwanese born Australian adoptee.

Article 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that people have a right to know about their biological and cultural heritage. Australia ratified this human rights treaty in December 1990, thereby recognising these rights. Continuing funding for this much needed and successful service is a meaningful way to recognise the rights of Australian intercountry adoptees to connect with their countries and families of origin.

ISS Australia has set up a Go Fund Me page, so members of the public can donate to the service - <https://uk.gofundme.com/Adoption-And-The-Right-To-Search>.

For interviews with ISS Australia's Intercountry Adoption Service Manager Damon Martin, please call 02 9267 0300 or email ica@iss.org.au