



Connecting Kin

*My first family to work for me
My relatives were mother and kind.*

*children are
my days and
relatives were*

My relatives were

 NSW DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY SERVICES
Linking families, individuals, communities.



What is Connecting Kin all about and how can it help me?



Connecting Kin is a project which aims to help people who have been separated from their birth families (through adoption, fostering etc) locate records about their separation and their families.

The project will produce a **Guide to Records** which will list all known holdings of records in NSW relevant to separation. It will help you to find where your records, your family's records or a family member's records are

held, and how you can get access to them. The *Guide* will include information on both government and non-government agencies in NSW from 1900 to the present.

If you know, or have reason to believe that you were separated from your birth family, the Connecting Kin project may be able to help you locate records about your separation. This in turn may help you if you want to find your birth family.

Where can I find a copy of the *Guide to Records*?

The *Guide to Records* will be published in June 1998, and will be distributed to:

- all offices of the Department of Community Services;
- public libraries;
- historical and genealogical societies;
- all agencies which have contributed to it; and
- relevant support agencies.

The *Guide* will also be available for sale through the NSW Government Bookshop, they can be contacted on (02) 9743 7200.

I've never tried to find my birth family before. Where do I start?

Doing family history research can be quite daunting if you have never done it before. The *Guide to Records* will provide some basic advice on how to go about doing research.

There are also a number of organisations which specialise in advice on family history research. The largest one is the Society of Australian Genealogists, which can be contacted on (02) 9247 3953. There are also a number of local and family history societies throughout NSW; most towns have such a group. Another option is to check the local history section of your public library.





What information do I need to know before I start the search for my birth family?

The more you know before you start the easier your search will be. Most people start with very little.

Knowing the following facts is a good start and will be helpful when you approach an agency for help.

- Your date of birth.
- Where you were born.
- Where you were brought up (ie. the name of the children's home, and/or school you attended).
- The name/s of your foster or adoptive parents.

Where do I get information about my birth family?

If you know the agency through which you were adopted or fostered, you should contact them to see if they hold any records which may help you in your search for information.

You could also contact the Family Information Service of the NSW Department of Community Services which may be able to assist you. The Family Information Service can be contacted on: Phone (02) 9865 5961 or 1800 049 956 (freecall).

How much does it cost to access records and how long will it take?

This will depend on the agency which has custody of the records you wish to search. Each agency has its own policies and procedures regarding access, copying and costs, so you will need to contact them to clarify these details.

Should I visit the agency in person?

Once you know which agency has custody of your records start with a phone call, they will let you know how they prefer to operate. Some agencies offer a research service by phone or mail, others prefer you to visit their offices.

The time it takes for an agency to respond to your request will depend on the number of requests they receive, and the number of staff they have available to answer requests. Many non-government agencies, especially churches and charities, are very short staffed and rely on volunteer help, so it may take a little longer to get a response from them. So it helps to be patient.



What sort of information will I find?

The sort of information you find will depend on a number of factors such as:

- whether the agency concerned was government or non-government;
- whether the agency still exists;
- whether the agency kept records relating to the time you were in their care; and
- whether the records still exist (eg. they may have been destroyed in a fire, lost when the agency moved, etc).

I lived in a church-run children's home which no longer exists. Will there be any records of that home?

Many institutions which operated in the past no longer exist. The records of such institutions may be kept by the agency which ran that particular home, hostel or school.

For example, if a church run orphanage closed down, the records may be deposited in the archives of that church. They may also be in the custody of the local history collection of the local public library or in the collections of the local historical society, the State Library or even in private hands.

It is possible, however, that the records have been destroyed or lost as there are no legal requirements for non-government agencies to retain records.

If the institution was operated by the government records may be with the responsible government department or in the relevant government archives.

I tried once before to get information but the agency concerned was very unhelpful. Why should it be any different now?

In the past some agencies have been either unwilling or unable to assist people in their search for their birth families. This may have been because they did not have the resources to cope with the requests for information, or they may simply not have known the location of records relevant to your search.

In recent years many agencies, both government and non-government have employed staff to catalogue their records and prepare listings, so many are now better equipped to assist people with their enquiries. They are also aware of how important it can be for people who have been separated from their birth families to establish links with their past.

Since this project commenced many agencies have shown a willingness to cooperate and to be involved with the project. We have also had a number of requests from agencies to assist them in setting up indexing and/or conservation programs to ensure their records survive for the future.

I want to find out about my birth family but I am scared. Is there anyone who can help me?

Tracing your birth family can be a scary task. What you find out may be distressing or upsetting, so it's a good idea to seek some sort of support during the course of your search.





A number of the agencies which hold records offer support and counselling services. These include:

- Family Information Service, NSW
Department of Community Services
(02) 9865 5961 or toll free 1800 049 956.
- Anglican Adoption Agency (Careforce)
(02) 9890 6855.
- Barnardo's Adoption Agency
(02) 9281 5510.
- Centacare Adoption Service
(02) 9744 7055.
- Mercy Family Centre (02) 9487 3022.
- Salvation Army (02) 9266 9829.

In addition, there are a number of groups which offer advice, information, mediation and counselling. These include:

- Adoption Triangle NSW Inc which has a number of country and interstate groups. Phone (02) 4965 5888 for the number of the nearest group to you.
- Origins Inc (02) 9560 8808.
- Post Adoption Resource Centre
(02) 9365 3444 or toll free 1800 024 256.
- Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation
(02) 4759 1911.



NSW Department of Community Services

www.community.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 0 7310 4257 3

The Department would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following groups and people by allowing us to reproduce the photographs in this brochure: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS); Barbara; Burnside Heritage Centre (Blairgowrie); Link Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation; Wesley Mission - Dalmar Child and Family Care.