

Newsletter from Barnardos Origins Service *January 2012*

Barnardos Origins Service is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Its purpose is to assist former residents of industrial schools with family tracing, mediation and information, and is the only tracing service that caters solely for people who grew up in the industrial schools.

In 2012 the Origins service will be centralised in Dublin and the service will no longer be delivered from Cork and Galway.

The staff in Galway, Josephine Togher and in Cork, John Murphy ably assisted by the administration staff, Audrey O' Toole and Fiona Raissa, have completed 325 tracing cases in total since the service started in 2002. They will be greatly missed by everyone on the Origins team, the staff in Barnardos and in particular the Origins clients - those whose families have been traced and those they have helped in tracing family information. We wish them every success in the future.

Supreme Court Case

The Supreme Court handed down its judgement on the case appealed by a Dublin hospital regarding a High Court decision that the hospital should not delete the age of the mother on the requestor's birth record. This case has been mentioned in previous newsletters. At the time the case was appealed in the High Court the requestor was over 80 years of age.

Six cases were joined in the appeal to the Supreme Court of which the Origins case was one. The Court considered the above case only as the issue was the same in all six cases.

Sadly the judgement was a setback for those seeking information about their family of origin under the Freedom of Information Act 1997 and 2003. The majority ruling was that any information given to a hospital whether for therapeutic purposes or otherwise had absolute confidentiality. There was one dissenting Judgement.

The Origins Case

Vera (not her real name) has given permission for the details of her case to be publicised.

Vera now 85 years of age was born to a single mother in a Dublin hospital. She was boarded out until she was seven years of age and then committed to an industrial school until she was sixteen years of age. At sixteen years of age she went to work in the school kitchen and subsequently the convent kitchen. During that time she contracted TB and while she recovered, the long term effects of the illness prevented her from having children of her own. When she was twenty-two years of age she went to work in Dublin as a nanny looking after four children. Vera married in Dublin and emigrated with her husband to Africa. Not knowing about her family, particularly her mother, was never far from her mind.

When Vera applied to the Origins service to trace her mother, the hospital released her birth record but deleted the age of her mother from the record. Her mother's age at the time of Vera's birth would have helped to identify her from others of the same name. The hospital's decision was successfully appealed to the Information Commissioner, and then won in the High Court, before being ruled out on appeal at the Supreme Court.

Vera's mother's home address was found on one remaining boarding out record and this enabled Barnardos to trace her family. Her mother never married, had worked all her life as a children's nurse and had lived to a great age, she died in 2001. To think she could have met her mother and her family if she had the information about her background earlier, was upsetting for Vera.



Vera came to Ireland to meet her family. She met 17 cousins, visited her mother's home and her grave. She attended an All Ireland GAA match with relatives and enjoyed the game thoroughly.

Even though her tracing was successful, Vera still wanted to pursue her case on a point of principle so that others would not be denied knowledge of their family and as a consequence suffer the grief that she had felt throughout her life.

Statistics

Outcomes of completed tracing cases since 2002:

To date we have completed 1130 tracing cases.

The broad outcomes are set out below:

- 600 of these cases led to either a reunion or information about the family of origin being traced.
- In 129 cases, the family member being traced was deceased.
- In 62 cases where a relative was traced, contact was denied
- In 174 cases, we failed to trace any information about the family.
- In 165 cases, the case was transferred to another agency such as when it was discovered that the person being traced had been adopted and the agency which dealt with the adoption was identified by Origins.

Applications

Since the service started in 2002 we have received a total 1229 applications. Included in this figure are 36 cases on the waiting list and 63 cases which are being worked on at the moment.

Prior to 2006 the priority of the Origins service was on providing records for those who wished to take their case to the Redress Board. At the end of 2006 we had received 643 applications for tracing. Since 2007 we have had a further 585 applications for tracing and family information.

The breakdown by each year since 2007 is as follows:

- 91 Applications in 2007
- 102 Application in 2008
- 168 Applications in 2009 (Reflects the impact of the Ryan Commission report)
- 109 Application in 2010
- 115 Applications in 2011

The above figures show that after the closing date in 2006 for applications to the Redress Board, there has been a steady demand from former residents of industrial schools and their families for information and tracing.

Age Group of Applicants

When one takes into consideration that the industrial school system was phased out in the late 1960s, it is not surprising that the majority of our applicants are in the older age group. Priority for family tracing and information is given to applicants who are over 75 years of age and also to applicants on health grounds.

2012

Barnardos will continue to provide a service in 2012 for those who wish to trace their families and in this context we invite people to apply.

Clodagh Donnelly
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Barnardos




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