

# **DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**2022**

## **Donor-Conceived People – Kirrily**

### **Start**

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

This week, in anticipation of the Government's response in the next sitting to the motion I moved on Assisted Reproductive Technology regulatory framework and the potential for a donor registry, I am reading the stories of three donor-conceived people to bring attention to their experiences and highlight the need to consider their perspective in any review of current regulatory arrangements. These are Kirrily's words:

My name is Kirrily and I am a 33-year-old born and raised Canberran. My story starts in the late 80s when my incredibly strong and independent mother decided that she wanted a sibling for my older brother. Being a single mother, from a failed relationship in the late 80s, it was a tricky time to be considered a suitable candidate for sperm donation. After many attempts at a clinic, she finally fell pregnant with me.

I am forever grateful to my mother because she has always been honest and open with me about how I came to be. My family are extremely loving and supportive, and my early childhood was a happy one.

I didn't know any different and life to me seemed very normal until I was about 8 years old when I started having friends sleep over at my house.

Friends would always ask about the absence of my Dad and I didn't know what to tell them.

Although Mum was very honest and open about everything with me, she came from a very strict Catholic community, and I was forbidden from talking about 'our secret' with anyone. As an 8-year-old girl, it was very difficult to hide the truth from my friends and family and be secretive about who I truly was. I started to feel alone and different, and deeply sad that I was unable to share this part of my life openly. Being donor conceived started to feel more like a burden than a blessing.

Growing up as a teenager in Canberra, I was very conscious of dating or having an intimate relationship with others for fear that I could potentially have a consanguineous relationship without knowing. I also had poor mental health during my later teenage years, and I believe that this is due to not being able to discuss being donor conceived or receive any support for being donor conceived. There were not any available programs or support services publicly available to donor conceived people like me. It wasn't until I started university that I was comfortable engaging in the dating scene because people came from other states and cities.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I became very passionate about finding out more information about my donor and medical history, if not for me – for them. I decided to write a letter to the fertility doctor my mother had seen and requested a meeting to find out any possible information that I could. I paid my \$250.00 consult fee to meet with this doctor.

Unfortunately, he was not willing or able to tell me anything about my medical history or donor records. When I asked about the possibility of having any half siblings, he assured me that it would be extremely unlikely and that once there had been a successful pregnancy with a sperm donor, they would not use that donor again. I remember walking out of his office feeling even more confused, frustrated, and disregarded as a human being.

After a decade of searching for answers, I decided to do pay \$129.00 to do a DNA test through Ancestry.com which is where I matched instantly with a half-brother that I never knew I had. This was INCREDIBLE, because not only could I speak to someone who was like me and who could completely understand and empathize with my situation, they were undoubtedly a part of me and shared my DNA. A few years later and even more incredibly, we finally found two more half-brothers also conceived in the A.C.T from a different fertility clinic. Ultimately, I was right to be extremely cautious when dating because I had three older half-brothers all within the small community of Canberra that I was completely unaware of.

Currently, we are still searching for the missing pieces and for more information on our medical history and donor. We still do not know who our donor is. It has proved extremely difficult to find any information or records about our existence. There are currently no records of my conception, no medical records accessible to me, or history of my existence at the fertility clinic I was conceived.

It is stories like Kirrily's that make me incredibly determined to see reform in the ACT and to see the rights of the child front and centre of legislative reform.

Ends