



Donor Conception Network

DONOR CONCEPTION NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT

2007

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Introduction

Origins and history

The Donor Conception Network was established in 1993 by a group of parents who had decided to tell their donor conceived children about their origins and came together to support each other. At the start we set out a simple philosophy: we considered that our children needed to grow up with the knowledge of how they had been conceived. In our view the secrecy which doctors used to suggest no longer represented the best advice. We felt that it was best to start talking as early as possible both with children and with our own families and that secrecy over such an important issue as one's origin was an insecure basis for a lasting and loving family relationship. The more open society could be about infertility and family creation with donated gametes, the easier this would all become.

When the issue of changing the law on donor anonymity was raised by the UK government in 2002, we supported the ending of secrecy about the identity of future donors.

Over the years our membership has grown, and the range of activities and interests in which we became involved has extended. We had always been stockists and distributors of the children's story book about donor insemination "My Story", written by two of the Network's founder members. In 2002 we became publishers in our own right, when we supplemented the range with the "Our Story" books for children conceived by egg donation, for donor conceived children in lesbian families, and for donor conceived children in single parent families. In the same year we also published "Choosing to be Open about Donor Conception: the Experiences of Parents" by Sharon Pettle and Jan Burns – the result of a series of seminars they held with donor families. The following year we celebrated our 10th anniversary with the production of a professionally produced film, "A Different Story" by Liesel Evans (herself a Network member) featuring seven donor conceived young people talking about how they feel about being donor conceived. Over 300 copies of this unique film, in video and DVD format, have so far been distributed.

Since our start we have held two members' meetings a year, one in the spring in London and one outside London in the autumn. Twice a year we have distributed a newsletter with a selection of personal stories. As a self-help group the Network has survived through a large amount of voluntary input from many people, donations from members and occasional grants. By and large we have been self-sufficient.

Review of the year 2006

This year has seen the Network go from strength to strength. Our membership grew reaching over 1,000 member families, our website activity increased, the number of enquiries received and answered was a record. The main development of the year – the Parenting Fund funded "Telling and Talking" project – saw the publication of four booklets and a DVD film adding to our unique range of resources. Our finances remained healthy, and as usual we held two national meetings attended by over 250 members. Our international links were considerably strengthened with visits overseas and liaison with new contacts in Europe.

Membership

241 new members joined the Network in 2006. The most popular means of doing so was by joining online and paying via Paypal (40%), while 35% joined using the form on our website, printing it and sending us a cheque. The remaining 25% returned one of the membership forms that we distribute to fertility clinics. There is always a turnover of membership throughout the year as many new members join and some decide not to renew when sent requests. As is noted in the finance report below, some 350 members now automatically renew their membership by paying by standing order.

At 31 December 2006 we had just over 1,000 families or individuals listed on our membership database. Of these, 600 had children (many more may have had children but have not yet told us), while many are either contemplating donor conception or are undergoing treatment. 230 families either had children or were seeking to do so through egg donation, 12 through both egg and sperm donation and 8 through embryo donation. 210 women already have or were intending to have children on their own. There were 85 lesbian households with children or who were hoping to have them. Although these numbers overlap to a certain extent, there must be at least 450 heterosexual households in the Network for whom donor insemination is the route to family creation that they have taken or intend to take.

The vast majority of our members are from the UK. We also have many members in Ireland. In addition we have members who live in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Dubai, Falkland Islands, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Sweden and the USA.

Enquiries

The Network responded to around 650 calls on the telephone contact line: approximately 220 (35%) were from members wanting information and support; 250 (40%) were enquiries from non-members; 90 (14%) were from media researchers; 35 were from clinics and 25 involved serious telephone counselling.

There were over 2,000 email contacts across a similar range of topics – many of course from enquirers outside the UK.

Website and Forum

We have gradually enhanced our website throughout the year with regular news updates. Our Web Manager Wendy Clarke has been an invaluable support. We had 99,000 visitors to our site during 2006, with 242,000 page views. The number of visitors is increasing month by month. We introduced the “members only” forum in late 2005, but in 2006 this began to gather pace when there were 13,291 visits. There are 268 registered members and 628 messages have been posted on the forum. 3,778 private messages have been sent between forum members. It is clear that a very large numbers of members gain support from each other through our website offering. A regular 50 people per month download the Planning a Family open letters.

During the year we added the SibLink Forum on the website. This now provides the first place in the UK where people can seek / search for others born from the same donor's gametes irrespective of what regulations were in place at the time.

Services for Members

Our new members all receive a welcome pack of materials including the latest newsletter, an invitation to use the library service, and a list of members who are willing to be contacted. Each new member receives a welcome contact by phone or email from one of a team of welcomers appropriate to their situation.

Donor insemination

Karen Farr reports: As a welcomer for the D.C. Network, I telephone new couple DI members and welcome them to the Network. On average I speak to one couple every two weeks to provide a point of contact and to be a friendly voice. Generally we cover any queries they may have about the Network and sometimes we discuss their individual circumstances. I find that it is sometimes helpful to people also, because I have been a Network member myself for 8 years and now have two DI conceived children.

Single parents

Emily Engel and Ruth Walton between them greet new single woman members. Emily continues to send out a steady stream of articles and references to the 100 or so single women on her email list, as well as occasional newsletters. She regularly recruits volunteers to respond to the many requests from the press and researchers, and responds to phone calls for information and support when required. The welcome pack for single women includes a separate Contact List with over 70 women's contact details across the country as well as abroad.

There are two thriving support groups in the London area that meet monthly. The DIY group predates the Network, with children ranging up to 14 years old, and the newer group Single Women's Information Group (SWIG) is now over 6 years old. The last meeting had to be held in a church hall when 19 women attended, so a third group is taking shape, to cater for new members who are starting on their journey towards motherhood. There is a group that meets 3 or 4 times a year in the West Midlands area, and a hint of groups in Bristol, Edinburgh and Manchester.

Lesbian households

Bridget Moss and Andrea Prout report: In 2006 we were fortunately able to attend both of the national meetings, all be it one of us at each but logistics with a young family are not always as simple as they appear. In March Andrea attended the London meeting and was thrust into being a 'body double' for the lesbian representative on the 'Talking and Telling' film. As one of a group of speakers recruited to share experiences from a variety of diverse families, the event was well received.

From the personal responses at the meeting and subsequently, it is reassuring to know that no matter how diverse we are as a network we all face issues daily that bond us and allow us to see a commonality to which we can relate. For some members I spoke with on the day personal circumstances were irrelevant when the most important issue was exactly what it said on the packet 'How to tell'.

September was Bridget's opportunity to attend a meeting, this time in Bristol. Here she enjoyed fascinating speakers who were no doubt an inspiration to many. Again the opportunity to meet people, talk and listen to others with similar issues and share all of our joys and sorrows with friends and strangers alike, really created a chance

for us to reflect on the many journeys we have either been on ourselves or supported from afar, and to recognize how important the whole network is to families.

2007 is upon us already and although this sub-group may not be the most proactive we do have aspirations that it will continue to grow with the whole network. As some of you will be aware we have been unable to give the group the attention we feel it deserves and have voiced our intentions to pass the coordinators title to anyone willing and able to take it on. However we have had no volunteers so far and as such will continue to be here.

We would like to take this opportunity to offer our continued support either by phone or email and would also encourage all sub group members to either let us know what is going on near you or contact us if you feel we are in a position to support or facilitate setting up a local group.

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Egg donation families

Rachel Sargent who has been our welcoming coordinator for egg donation families and those contemplating egg donation for seven years has decided to retire from the role, and has handed on to Alison Cobb. Hundreds of members will testify to the unstinting support that Rachel has given them over the years. We welcome Alison to the role.

Newsletters

We published and distributed two 12 page newsletters to members, one in April and one in November. As usual the contributions – personal stories, news updates, and reflections – maintained the high standard that members have come to expect. Nick Comer-Calder our editor is always keen to receive articles for publication.

Meetings

In 2006 we held two national meetings for members.

London meeting

In March our meeting in London was attended by 150 adults – many for whom this was their first time at a Network meeting, while for some others it was a chance to meet up again with families they had seen at meetings before. No less than 53 children were cared for by Angie Willats and her excellent team of 15 carers in the crèche. An experimental innovation was a day long drama group around donor conception themes for 18 older (8 to 11 year old) children, led by specialist family and drama therapists Sharon Pettle (known to us as the co-author of DCN publication “Choosing to be Open”), and her colleague Janet Marks. The children constructed a number of scenarios for short play/performances designed to let them explore what they felt about being donor conceived and how they coped in a variety of circumstances.

In the main meeting we had four presentations from donor conception families on the “telling and talking” theme – each with a different story to tell: Julia and Nick talked about their eight year old egg donation twins and how their family developed with two naturally conceived children; as a woman who had decided to conceive by DI on her own, Gwyneth talked about how she helped her eight year old daughter to understand her situation and how to answer questions about a dad; Andrea explained how she and her partner Bridget had handled donor conception issues in a lesbian household with their eight year old daughter and four year old son; and 14 year old DI conceived Sam and his mother Jane performed a question and answer double-act.

Members then broke into small groups to discuss what they had seen and how any of it related to experiences they had had. A different set of options for small groups followed in the afternoon, before a brief annual general meeting at which the committee for the year was elected.

Bristol meeting

Our provincial meeting this year was organised by a group of members from Bristol and around 100 members attended. 30 children were cared for in the crèche. The highlight of the day was a presentation by three sisters - Alex, Charlotte and Helen who told the moving story of how through a combination of egg donation and surrogacy, the other two had helped their sister Alex who had been left infertile after chemotherapy, to have a baby. Their story had been seen by millions since it had been filmed for a BBC documentary, but we felt privileged to have our own in person presentation.

Then as usual we broke into smaller groups before and after lunch to have the chance to talk more intimately to each other. Finally to end the day, in a show of West country hospitality, a set of jazz musicians entertained us while scones, jam and cream were provided.

Members' feedback

As usual there were some heart-warming comments from those who attended the meetings:

"An emotional day listening to such wonderful stories and experiences."

"It's all very well being a member, but it's at the meetings that you really get the most out of the Network."

"DCN supports me along the way, from making decisions, to support from other members, to practical advice about telling my daughter about her donor origins."

"Very positive affirming experience. Allowed me to understand issues others face and to reflect on my own experience."

"For me, the Network is all about embracing (or trying to embrace!) our situation as parents, and expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be parents. It's a tremendous support through difficult and happy times."

"Every year we learn something new and we feel inspired and supported by everyone who we meet, as they're all on a difficult journey."

"The DCN meeting is always a very moving experience. People are so open and willing to share information and experiences – many of which are quite painful."

"Loved the up-beat enthusiastic atmosphere. Will certainly come back to more meetings."

"I found the atmosphere welcoming and people friendly – as usual."

"A thought-provoking day. It was great to meet people in the same situation as us."

"It was the first time I felt that we were part of a small but supportive group of very loving families, as opposed to being very much on our own."

"Great to see one is not alone and how interested and supportive everybody is. We met some very inspiring people."

Local groups

Yorkshire

Charlotte writes: Yorkshire DCN Group was set up in 2005. The first meeting was held just outside Sheffield and attendance was very encouraging at 20 adults. The next meeting was in 2006 and was held in Leeds and attendance increased to 25 adults and 8 children as creche facilities were available. A variety of topics were discussed concerning donor conception, tears were shed, tea and coffee was drunk, laughter was heard and new friendships were forged. We had overall group discussions together with smaller group discussions so everyone had a chance to have their say and contribute as much or as little as they felt comfortable with. Two or three Yorkshire meetings in 2007 are anticipated as the feedback from members who attended the meeting was extremely positive and more regular meetings were requested.

South Manchester

Gareth writes: The South Manchester group met for the first time on a very, very cold day at Dunham Massey Country Park, Cheshire in November 2005. Since then, we have met twice more at the weekends in 2006 and will be having a first evening get-together in 2007 just for the adult members of DCN. Currently the group is a dozen families strong. The meetings are deliberately informal, but as many of us have got to know each other better over the last eighteen months, friendships are forming which hopefully will pass onto the children. Even non-Mancunians are welcome at any event!

West Midlands

Alison writes: Started six years ago, the West Midlands group covers Birmingham, Telford, Coventry, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Worcestershire. We meet twice a year in winter and summer, get-togethers on a Sunday either in a pub/restaurant venue with an indoor soft play area (winter) or an outdoor venue with restaurant/visitor centre such as a country park (summer). There is usually someone new to chat to who hasn't been before and just about everyone who comes brings children. Several families have said they appreciate these small-group social events as much as the national meetings but in a more informal way and that it is valuable for the children to get to know each other.

South West London

Mandy F writes: The South-West London Local DC Group is organised by members of the Network who live in the area and have children through DC. The group has been meeting since 2003 and has held meetings in a variety of venues from parks and church halls, to members' homes. We have now established two regular meetings a year and have a summer picnic for those members who like to come with children and a winter meeting in a wine bar for adults only. We felt it was important to provide all members with the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation, particularly for those members still considering DC. Therefore, a meeting for adults only was considered to be particularly important.

Feedback from members is always positive regarding the meetings. Sometimes, it is a member's first contact with others who have gone through the DC experience and both emotional and practical support can be offered. Other members struggle with certain DC issues and find it very helpful to talk to others in a similar situation. Other families come to meet with old friends and in particular at the summer picnic, to give their children the opportunity to get to know other children conceived in a similar way.

As well as giving members the opportunity to meet others, it also enables members to strike up friendships with other families living locally who they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet.

North/North West London

Mandy R writes: We meet about three times a year on a Thursday evening in a private room up stairs in a pub in Hampstead, leaving the children at home. Approximately 10 to 25 people attend each meeting (there are about 100 people on our books), which are lively, sometimes controversial and always supportive and informative. The group has a diverse makeup, including heterosexual and same sex couples, single women and mothers, and people with a mix of adopted, biological and donor children, who are at different points along the journey of sperm, egg or double gamete donation.

In the Summer we have our annual picnic, an informal gathering which gives our children the opportunity to play with other donor conceived children, and a chance for us all to relax and chat with other DC members; in the sun this year, which was a bonus! Angela and Andrew who coordinated the group for the past six years since its conception (no pun intended), moved out of London last year. We miss their humour and warmth. Danny and I have taken over their role, and hope that the group will continue to flourish.

South East London

Paul writes: The South East London group meets several times a year usually in Bromley. Meetings are usually hosted by Molly and Russell Hedley in their lovely garden so there is plenty of space for children of all ages to enjoy themselves. Members from across South East London and Kent are welcome to attend and the group is a mix of people in terms of the stage we are all at in the donor conception cycle.

Old and new members of the DC Network have attended our get togethers. Currently we have 16 contacts on our list of people/ families to invite to meetings. If there are any members who are living on the fringes of Kent/ South East London then they too are very welcome to attend.

Essex

Amanda reports: A new group based on Essex and East London began planning in late autumn 2006 for a meeting in the new year, and the first meeting was held in January 2007 with 15 adults and 6 children attending and it was a big success. There was a real appetite for the group and six other families are also in contact. The plan for the year is to hold four adult-only evenings and a family picnic in the summer. We have already linked up with the North London group to learn from their experience.

Bristol/South West

Jem writes: DC members in the Bristol area have had a number of gatherings this year. The big one was of course the DC national meeting that took place last September in Bristol. In the run up to this event a number of network members were meeting up regularly to plan and organise the event.

On a smaller scale we have had a few family-based events, meeting up, usually on a Sunday afternoon roughly every four months. The first of these this year was hiring a soft play area for children followed by a cream tea together, and this was very successful. We had a lovely picnic tea - seems to be the favourite DC meal - in a sunny park in Bristol in the summer.

We communicate these meetings to all local members who have expressed an interest, and we think these provide a useful and informal chance to meet up, sometimes to talk about DC issues. We also encourage those who are considering treatment to come and join us, as this can sometimes be very reassuring.

A spin off from all this is we are currently trying to organise a drink one evening in Bristol for DC men, and we welcome anyone who is interested in meeting up.

Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire

Margaret writes: We are currently a very small group consisting of 3 families with 4 children all conceived by sperm donation. We meet about twice a year with the children and as there are so few of us we do pre-arrange a date that is suitable for all (it's still difficult even with only 3 families as the children seem to have parties and activities every week!).

Our meetings vary from a day out at a local country park or similar in the summer, tea at someone's house or, most frequently, lunch at the Bonnie Prince Charlie pub which has a great childrens' play area.

We all find the meetings very supportive and give us the opportunity to talk about issues relating to DC (there is also a lot of talk about football, football, work and football). In addition the 4 children, aged approx between 4 and 8 years, all get on so well. We all feel it's very important for the children to know other DC children as they're growing up and hopefully they will stay in touch with each as they get older. If anyone in the region would like to join us, contact the DCN office.

Oxford and Thames Valley

Richard reports: A new group based on Oxford, Reading and the Thames Valley began canvassing interest in meeting up last year and a first very successful meeting took place at our house in January, and plans for future meetings are well advanced.

Telling and Talking

This was our major project of the year. In 2005 we entered an application for a grant to the competition for funds from a Department of Education initiative called the Parenting Fund. The idea for the project had been around for several years – originally suggested by committee member Jane Ellis; many members of the Network had commented that while the “My, and Our Story” books had been a really helpful resource, they did not really tackle the issues around how and when to tell, and how to carry on the process in later years.

Our application requested a grant of £61,000 over 18 months to support the writing of booklets on this subject and the making of a film. Olivia, our Network manager who is a qualified counsellor and co-founder of the Network, was to write the materials, and Liesel Evans, a network member and professional film-maker who had directed the 2003 film “A Different Story” agreed to make the film. We were lucky to be successful in the competition and the work then began in earnest.

A number of day long workshops involving Network members were held on the “How to Tell” theme, and then the process of writing and filming began. It was decided to produce four booklets to cover the issues raised for parents with children up to 7, from 8 to 11, 12 to 16 and those over 17, to print these and to make them freely available to download on the website. Since the materials were launched until the end of the year, there were 1,501 downloads of the 0-7, 621 of the 8-11, 516 of the 12-16, and 492 of the 17+ materials.

Ten member families featured in the film, covering the situations of couples with children conceived with donated sperm, donated eggs and with double donation; in lesbian and in single parent households. Over 150 copies of this unique pioneering film have been distributed in DVD format.

The layout, design and printing of the booklets was the work of Aspen Creative Resources of PO Box 22, Taynult, PA35 1WZ who have worked with us over a number of years and have printed most of our resources; the film was directed by Liesel Evans and edited by David Richards.

A launch event was held in May at the offices of the HFEA at which Dame Suzy Leather spoke.

The project was completed on time and although we spent more on the booklet printing than budgeted, it was a deliberate decision to use general network funds to ensure that the finished publications were of good quality.

Telling and talking feedback

There has been an enthusiastic response to the Telling and Talking materials:

"I've just downloaded the 0-7 document from the website. I really want to congratulate you and thank you for producing such a well written, easy to read booklet. Although I feel comfortable telling our children about how they came to be, I am finding the booklet incredibly useful. It is an absolute credit to you that you have put so much time and effort into producing such wonderfully useful booklets." Network member

"The materials are wonderful, and deserve more than praise and more than thanks. They are thorough, thoughtful, and accessible and I don't think there is anything like them anywhere." Diane Ehrensaft, clinical psychologist, California; author of *Mommies, Daddies, Donors, Surrogates*

"Your Telling and Talking brochures are absolutely outstanding. You deserve the utmost congratulations. They are beautifully written and your experience as a mum, teacher and counsellor are all reflected so well. It is such a well needed resource and will help so many families. It is wonderful for people to be able to download them free of charge. The DVD film is fabulous!" Kate Bourne, counsellor at Melbourne IVF clinic, author of *Sometimes It Takes Three to Make a Baby*

"The booklets look wonderful and are a credit to you - I am sure that so much hard work and careful thought has gone into producing them. It is brilliant, too, that the Network is making them available free from the website. I shall certainly be telling all of the new DI patients about them." Jean Haase, social worker and infertility counsellor, Ontario Canada

"I envy all the English-speaking families who can read these materials" Dr. Petra Thorn, Germany

Media management

It is a rare week that passes without at least one journalist or researcher from the print media, TV or radio telephoning the London office. If there has been a donor conception story in the news then we can get up to a dozen calls often looking for 'instant' radio interviews, demands to come round to the house with a TV crew or an assumption that we can produce on the spot 'case-studies'.

Then there are the independent film companies looking for donor conception stories. Mostly their researchers know little about the issues and a decision has to be taken whether to give them a half hour concentrated A level in donor conception studies or tell them to go away and read the web site before phoning again. Discovering whether or not a film has actually been commissioned by a TV channel or whether they are on a 'fishing' trip often helps with the decision making.

Women's magazines are always looking for 'feel-good' stories about families or DC adults and we are grateful to a number of members who have co-operated with this low-key but effective way of spreading the news about the viability of DC families and the importance of openness.

Early in the year there was considerable interest by journalists in people going abroad for egg donation. We were able to make some connections with academics and journalists in other countries which resulted in articles exposing the exploitation of some egg donors, particularly in Eastern Europe. Norwegian TV filmed Walter, Olivia and their daughter Susannah talking about the importance of 'openness' as part of a programme designed to influence the government to allow egg donation in Norway. The resulting film, sub-titled where necessary, is available in the network library.

In the summer the papers were full of the shortage of donor sperm. Despite Olivia spending considerable time trying to convince journalists that the connection between the ending of anonymity and the shortage of sperm was not a linear one, endless articles appeared blaming the ending of anonymity for denying people the chance to have a baby. Sadly it was not just the tabloids that took this line. Olivia was able to put a broader perspective in a Radio Five Live interview. Beginning in the spring we co-operated with the BBC working towards their 'Infertility' season in the autumn focused around the TV series A Child Against All Odds and towards the end of the year and into 2007 we have been working with BBC 3 towards a short series designed to promote recruitment of sperm donors.

Publications service

Jane and her family operate the publications fulfilment service from their home in Nottingham. On average there are 10 or so items a week to dispatch – more last year when Telling and Talking first came out when the load was 15 to 20 items for a couple of months.

In 2006, apart from increased UK orders (which only accounted for 56% of 450 transactions), we have received payments via Paypal from 22 other countries - Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA.

Library Service

Gwyneth Wray writes: Between January and December 2006, 65 members have used the library service, and borrowed a total of 120 items. Items can be borrowed both at the national meetings and at other times by post. There is a link on the website which enables members to make requests by email, and the only charge is the cost of the return postage. Items can also be returned in person at the national meetings. The library also keeps a collection of newspaper and magazine articles related to donor conception, which are updated every 6 months and displayed at the national meetings.

The most frequently borrowed items were the Telling and Talking and a Different Story DVDs and videos, and the books Building a Family with the Assistance of Donor Insemination by Ken Daniels; Experiences of Donor Conception by Caroline Lorbach; Mommies, Daddies, Donors, Surrogates by Diane Ehrensaft; and Choosing Single Motherhood by Mikki Morrisette. There is also a popular demand for children's books, including Let Me Explain a story about donor insemination for children age 8+, which is now unfortunately out of print, but there are 3 copies in the library.

Recent additions to the library include 2 copies of Voices of Donor Conception by Mikki Morrisette, a set of children's books from the USA called Before you were Born: our Wish for a Baby by Janice Grimes, and an Australian book about infertility from a male perspective called Swimming Upstream: the struggle to conceive.

Research

The Network is committed to advancing knowledge about donor conception and how families fare. There is an increasing interest among researchers in seeking to use the experiences of our members as a research base. Keen though we are to support research, we do not want to expose our membership to repeated approaches from researchers. It is also vital that any plans are soundly based, and we are lucky enough to have among our membership two experienced professional researchers who can scrutinise and comment on proposals. Last year they considered and approved a proposal that might draw on the experiences of single women in the Network. It remains to be seen whether this will attract the necessary funding.

Policy development

UK Government

In 2005 the Department of Health published a review of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act and sought responses to a range of issues. Included in the consultation were a number of proposals to change the law about donor conception issues and the rights of donors to know about the children born from their donation, and of conceived people to know about their siblings and about their origins.

We responded to the consultation, encouraging information for donors and rights for donor conceived people to know about their siblings. We were however opposed to the proposal that, in order to ensure that donor conceived people were told of their

origins, their birth certificates should be marked “by donation”. We were pleased when the Department’s White Paper, published in December 2006, supported the main changes we had welcomed, indicated that it did not propose to introduce legal measures to force parents to tell their children if they were donor conceived, believing this to be a matter best encouraged through good practice rather than compulsion. The Government also made it clear that new legislation would allow donor conceived individuals over 18 to find out if they have donor conceived siblings.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

www.hfea.gov.uk

The HFEA is the regulator of donor conception treatment and maintains the register of donor conception treatments and births. Walter Merricks, our secretary and treasurer, was re-appointed a member of the HFEA board in 2005 for a further three year term, and was able to contribute to HFEA policy discussions from a donor conception viewpoint. We were saddened when Dame Suzy Leather resigned as chair of HFEA on being appointed to chair the Charity Commission. Suzy had been a strong supporter of donor openness and donor issues. It is really good news that Rebekah Dundas has recently been appointed a member of the HFEA board as a patient representative. Rebekah and her husband Bill have been Network members since 2002 and have been active in patient organisations in Scotland. Rebekah has given evidence to the Scottish Parliament on assisted reproduction issues.

During the year, the transitional period for the use of anonymously donated material came to an end, and it became clear that as far as donor sperm was concerned, many clinics had failed to anticipate the need to put extra effort into the recruitment of willing to be known donors. As a result a shortage of sperm developed, and patients seeking donor insemination at UK clinics were faced with waiting lists of the kind normally encountered by patients seeking egg donation.

A number of UK clinics then applied to import sperm of willing to be known donors from US sperm banks. These donors however are men who, as is usual in the USA, have been paid to donate – which is not now permitted in the UK. The HFEA imposed a freeze on imports between July and September until new policy guidance was agreed, allowing a transitional period for import until February 2007, but making it clear that thereafter the conditions applying to UK donation should also apply to imports of sperm.

British Fertility Society

www.britishfertilitysociety.org.uk

The BFS is a multi-disciplinary organisation representing professionals working in the field of reproductive medicine. As a result of the donor sperm shortage the BFS set up a working group to consider donor recruitment and the distribution of donor sperm from recruiting clinics. The Network was invited to nominate a representative to serve on the group and Olivia attended the two meetings that were held during the year.

Progar

The British Association of Social Workers Project Group on Assisted Reproduction, has a particular concern for the welfare of donor conceived children and adults, and

campaigned for the ending of anonymous donation for many years. Its committee includes many of those who are known to the Network having spoken at Network meetings –Eric Blyth of Huddersfield University, Marilyn Crawshaw of York University, and Jennifer Hunt, senior counsellor at Hammersmith Hospital. Olivia also is a Progar committee member. One of Progar’s principal concerns now is to ensure that proper intermediary services are in place to support both donors and donor conceived people when identifying information is made available from the HFEA register.

UK DonorLink

www.ukdonorlink.org.uk

UK DonorLink is a pilot voluntary contact register set up to enable people conceived through donated sperm, and / or eggs, their donors and half-siblings to exchange information and where desired to contact each other. The register is specifically for anyone over the age of 18 who was conceived using donated sperm or eggs, or who donated in the UK before the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act came into force in August 1991. Olivia serves on the advisory committee of UKDL.

National Gamete Donation Trust

www.nqdt.co.uk

Simon Freeman, the Network’s representative on the Trust, reports: Extreme uncertainty for our Department of Health funding in early in 2006 placed a lot of pressure on all concerned at the National Gamete Donation Trust. There were several delays before greatly reduced funding was announced and in that meantime, many ongoing projects were halted. We did however secure a Grant from the Scottish Executive for £15,000 over 3 years. This is to be used exclusively in Scotland for the use of donor recruitment and we are currently awaiting feedback from the Scottish clinics about their suggestions of how best to allocate the Grant. The office and landline have moved and there is now one member of staff; enquiries and web statistics show an increase compared to previous years. We are called upon more for policy and guideline issues and were contacted last year by over 70 media organisations for quotes, information and statistics. A busy and challenging year.

British Infertility Counselling Association

www.bica.net

We are members of BICA and have a good relationship with many members who are counsellors in fertility clinics. Walter, Olivia and Jane Ellis from the Steering Committee have spoken at meetings in the past and we always have a stand at these events. Our Telling and Talking materials were very favourably reviewed in the BICA Journal in the summer and we sometimes contribute articles to this publication. Olivia often refers enquirers to the BICA website or information line when they are looking for counselling support and BICA members seek information from us to help them in their work.

Other patient support groups

We maintain good links with our fellow generalist and specialist support groups and charities in the field: Infertility Network UK www.infertilitynetworkuk.com (the country's leading infertility support charity), the Daisy Network www.daisynetwork.org.uk (for women experiencing premature menopause) and Acebabes www.acebabes.co.uk (supporting families with children born after assisted conception). The Twins and Multiple Births Association www.tamba.org.uk has amongst its members many who have experience of donor conception. Olivia was invited to speak at the association's conference in Guildford in November 2006.

We met twice last year with a wider group of support organisations for whom infertility issues are part of their concern and interest; the focus of these groups includes adoption, surrogacy, and specific conditions such as endometriosis. This group is coordinated by Infertility Network UK.

National Infertility Day 10th June 2006

Organised by Infertility Network UK, this day long event is held at the Connaught Rooms in London includes speeches, workshops and an exhibition, and attracts hundreds of visitors. As usual we took an exhibition stand, which was manned throughout the day by Alison, Matthew and Gwyneth where they were able to deal with a large number of enquiries about donor conception.

International links

European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE)

This leading organisation holds an annual conference attended by up to 5,000 clinicians, scientists, product providers and counsellors. It is a prestige event, and an honour to be an invited programme speaker, so it was particularly pleasing that Olivia was invited to speak at the ESHRE conference in Prague in June, on the subject of Telling the Children. An audience of at least 250 delegates attended the session.

International Consumer Support for Infertility (ICSI)

www.icsi.ws

This organisation brings together infertility consumer groups from around the world and normally meets in advance of the ESHRE conference at the same venue. Olivia and Walter represented the Network at the Prague ICSI meeting, and were able to make good links with a number of new contacts in Europe.

France: Association Maia

www.maia-asso.org

This French organisation is a campaigning and support group on a number of women's issues including surrogacy and donor conception. During the year we have made strong links with Maia – first when Walter and Olivia attended and Walter spoke (in French) at a donor conception meeting it organised in Paris in March. About 80 people – mainly couples contemplating or undergoing donor conception treatment attended, and there were presentations from two donor conceived young people both with serious and emotional stories to tell about the way they learned about their origins. It was clear that those who attended felt heartened to hear about how our Network had developed and how the climate about openness was changing in the UK.

Maia then decided, with our encouragement, to translate into French some of our open letters from our website and put them on their own site – and also have translated and published a version of the “Our Story” children's story book for egg donation couples “Dans Notre Histoire”, using charming new illustrations by Nicolas Hunerblaes. The book contains a handsome acknowledgement of the Network's “inestimable” assistance.

France: Procréation Médicalement Anonyme

www.pmanonyme.asso.fr

PMA is a French association campaigning for the ending of donor anonymity in France with which we have also made strong links this year. PMA was founded by Pauline Tiberghien, a gynaecologist who now works in an infertility clinic in Northern France. Pauline was herself adopted having been born under the French system where mothers anonymously give up babies for adoption, known as “née sous X”, under which the mother's name on a birth certificate is marked as X.

At the instance of Pauline, we were invited to send a representative to the November conference in Paris of the Société de Médecine de la Reproduction www.s-m-r.org. This body represents scientists and clinicians in most of France's private infertility clinics. The agenda included a session on whether the issue of donor anonymity should be reviewed and Walter gave a presentation on the UK experience following the ending of donor anonymity. It became clear that the French are a long way from changing the law in the way the UK has done.

Germany

Our main contact is with Dr Petra Thorn a social worker and family therapist who has been working as an infertility counsellor with a keen interest in donor conception for over 10 years. www.pthorn.de. She does voluntary work supporting the German patient organisation Wunschkind e.V., and more particularly holds residential weekends for German couples contemplating donor conception. This has resulted in the formation of the IDI Gruppe, a self-help group of parents with children conceived by donor insemination. Their website is www.spendersamenkinder.de.

Petra has recently written and produced a charming children's story book for children conceived by donor insemination "Die Geschichte unserer Familie" – the Story of Our Family, with beautiful colourful illustrations by Tiziana Rinaldi. It is available through the website of Famart – www.famart.de.

In March 2006 the Heinrich Böell Foundation jointly with the Institut Mensch Ethik und Wissenschaft invited Olivia and Walter to attend and speak at a Berlin conference on European Bioethics – and in particular to address the issue of fertility tourism, and the risks and dangers for both women egg donors and the risks for the children so conceived. There we were able to make contact with concerned academics, counsellors and clinicians from Germany and from Eastern Europe.

Canada

The Toronto based Infertility Network – largely the work of Diane Allen – provides a daily online news update of infertility issues from around the world www.infertilitynetwork.org. Olivia attended an IN conference last year in Toronto since when we have maintained good links with counsellors and concerned families and individuals in Canada. These include Barry Stevens the donor conceived award-winning film-maker – maker of the film "Offspring" which charts his search for his origins and half-siblings in the UK; Irene Rhyl – mother of three DI children - from Edmonton, Alberta who monitors donor conception news; and Jean Haase, social worker/counsellor at a leading clinic in London, Ontario. The Canadian government has recently passed reforming legislation on assisted reproduction, and we have maintained contact with lead officials in Health Canada.

Australia

The Donor Conception Support Group of Australia (www.dcsq.org.au) was founded at about the same time as the Network in 1993 and we keep in regular touch with Leonie Hewitt and her family and the other leading members of the group, exchanging our newsletters and other useful publications. In July, while Leonie was visiting the UK, Olivia and Walter hosted a summer barbeque of London Network member families at their home to welcome her. We are delighted to congratulate Leonie on the recent award to her of the Order of Australia for her work for DCSG.

New Zealand

Although Professor Ken Daniels has now formally retired from his teaching and research post at Canterbury University at Christchurch, Ken remains a source of inspiration and support for us and for donor conception families and support groups around the world. Ken has been writing academic articles analysing the case for openness, questioning anonymity, and conducting research on donors and donor conceived families for over 20 years. We are the UK distributors of his recently published book "Building a Family through Donor Conception" which draws on many of the experiences of Network members.

Japan

Professor Mari Saimura of Osaka University in Japan visited us during the year and is keenly interested in promoting open attitudes about donor conception in Japan.

She has arranged to translate our children's story book about egg donation "Our Story" into Japanese.

USA

The Donor Sibling Registry is more than its name implies. Founded by Wendy Kramer and her son Ryan as a means for donor conceived families to link through donor numbers if they have common donors, its online forum (moderated by Wendy) maintains one of the most active discussion boards on donor issues in the USA – or the world. www.donorsiblingregistry.com. Olivia is a regular contributor.

Ireland

The National Infertility Support and Information Group is Ireland's main patient support group www.infertilityireland.ie. Its national conference attended by over 100 delegates in Dublin in November 2006 was entitled The Changing Face of Infertility in Ireland. Olivia was a main speaker at the event on the theme of Telling and Talking, and also led a well-attended workshop later in the day.

Financial report

Our financial year runs from 1 August to 31 July, and as at the end of July 2006 we were in the healthy position of having free funds of £14,014 after a year in which we generated a small surplus of income over expenditure. Of our grant of £61,000 over 18 months from the Parenting Fund for the Telling and Talking project, the amount remaining at the end of July was £4,534. By the end of December 2006 the remaining funds of the Parenting Fund grant had been spent, but our reserves had increased to £16,920. This was despite paying the manager's salary for two months after the grant had run out. The main reason for the improving position is the enormous contribution of our ability to collect income (both subscriptions and publications sales) through Paypal.

Over 350 members now pay their subscriptions by standing order which saves a great deal of administrative work. And over 500 members who pay their subscriptions out of UK taxed income have signed Gift Aid declarations allowing us to reclaim the tax from the Revenue.

Walter as treasurer handles the financial affairs of the Network. We hold two accounts at Lloyds TSB, one being a current account and the other an interest bearing deposit account. In addition we hold an account with the electronic money institution Paypal through which we receive an increasing amount of income both from publications and subscriptions.

We are grateful that chartered accountant and Network member Gareth Harrison has scrutinised our financial records and accounts and has provided an Independent Examiner's Report meeting the requirements of the Charity Commission.

Management

The hub of the Network's operations happens at 32 Cholmeley Crescent in London. It is here that the Network's helpline is answered by Olivia Montuschi, the Network Manager, and from here that emails are answered; new member applications and renewals are registered; cheques and bank dealings are handled, and Network paper records and files are kept. Computer operations are carried out on the Network's Mac OSX computer. The main database and other network files are regularly backed up.

While we were in receipt of the Parenting Fund grant in 2005 and 2006, Sarah Gillam provided secretarial and administrative support to the project – and to the Network more generally. We are grateful to her for all the help and support she was able to give us. In January 2007 Nina Barnsley has been appointed as part-time administrative assistant after an open competition. Nina has extensive administrative and advanced computer skills and we look forward to working with her through the year.

Governance

Constitution and compliance

The Network is an unincorporated association and our governing instrument is a constitution adopted in 1994. The Network's object is to advance education in human fertility, fertilisation and embryology, assisted conception, genetics and the impact of non-genetic relationships by the provision to parents of children conceived by DI (donor insemination) or by egg donation, to the children themselves and to those contemplating or undergoing treatment, of information, advice, counselling and support.

The constitution entrusts the management of the Network to a Committee of members, elected by the members at each annual meeting. The current members elected at the March 2006 annual meeting are:

Walter Merricks (London) (Chairman and Treasurer)

Suzy Abbott (W. Sussex)

Nick Comer-Calder (Devon)

Jane Ellis (Nottingham)

Emily Engel (London)

Julie Maycock (York)

Alison McKee (Wolverhampton)

Graham Newsome (London)

Marion Scott (London)

Gwyneth Wray (Bucks)

Matthew Davies who had been a Committee member for three years resigned at the March meeting, and we are grateful for all the support he provided to the Network.

The Committee held two meetings during 2006 and also took a number of decisions by email consultation.

The Network is a charity registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales (charity number 1041297), with the Inland Revenue's charities branch for the purposes of Gift Aid receipt (charity XR54725 0), and for data protection purposes with the office of the Information Commissioner.

Annual Accounts

Donor Conception Network year ending 31 July 2006

Restricted funds

Receipts	2005/06	2004/05	Payments	2005/06	2004/05
Parenting Fund grant	£ 30,556.00	£ 30,558.00	Project Manager salary & NI	£ 16,460.00	£ 14,885.00
			Project admin expenses	£ 3,647.00	£ 1,761.00
			Telling and talking film	£ 12,246.00	
			Booklets publication	£ 7,582.00	
Total receipts	£ 30,556.00	£ 30,558.00	Total payments	£ 39,934.00	£ 16,646.00
Surplus/deficit for year	-£ 9,378.00	£ 13,912.00			
add opening funds	£ 13,912.00				
balance at year end	£ 4,534.00				

Bank reconciliation at 31 July 2006

funds at Lloyds TSB

current account	£ 3,628.00
interest bearing account	£ 14,921.00
Total	£ 18,549.00
represented by	
unrestricted funds	£ 14,014.00
restricted funds	£ 4,534.00

Donor Conception Network year ending 31 July 2006

Unrestricted Funds

Receipts	2005/06	2004/05	Payments	2005/06	2004/05
New member donations	£ 2,973.00	£ 2,793.00	Printing	£ 4,318.00	£ 4,187.68
Recurring donations	£ 8,550.00	£ 7,088.00	Postage/stationery/phone	£ 5,697.00	£ 2,959.60
Additional donations	£ 228.00	£ 660.00	Publications purchase	£ 2,284.00	£ 1,852.50
Sale of publications	£ 5,553.00	£ 5,863.00	London meeting costs	£ 3,285.00	£ 2,162.50
B'ham meeting receipts	£ 923.00	£ 1,310.00	B'ham meeting costs	£ 2,218.00	£ 2,104.32
London meeting receipts	£ 2,211.00	£ 2,123.00	Travel	£ 1,293.00	£ 584.60
Inland revenue rebate		£ 1,908.00	Computer	£ 180.00	£ 1,766.38
Bank interest	£ 516.00	£ 232.00	Subscriptions	£ 575.00	£ 460.00
			Professional serv/website	£ 790.00	£ 799.94
			Refunds/bank charges	£ 172.00	£ 199.72
Total receipts	£ 20,954.00	£ 21,977.00	Total payments	£ 20,812.00	£ 17,077.24
surplus for year	£ 142.00	£ 4,899.76			
add opening funds	£ 13,872.00				
balance at year end	£ 14,014.00				

“DCN supports me along the way, from making decisions, to support from other members, to practical advice about telling my daughter about her donor origins.”

“For me, the Network is all about embracing (or trying to embrace!) our situation as parents, and expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be parents. It’s a tremendous support through difficult and happy times.”



Donor Conception Network

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www.dcnetwork.org
enquiries@dcnetwork.org**

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