

Reunification. From a carers perspective.

Editors note: This story was sent to us by Tony White, who recently travelled to the UK with Alan Jones on an ISS funded reunification trip. Joan Kerry located Alan's family last year and had worked with them in preparation for this trip. Alan and Tony were met by Joan on their arrival in the UK, and she took them to meet the family members. Tony's story tells us what the reunification experience was like from the point of view of the carer.

(Go to: www.cbbers.org)

Tony White
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Having recently been a carer on a reunification trip I thought I would share some of my experiences of the two week journey.

I travelled with Alan, a CBERS client, to the UK, where he was to meet six of his siblings and numerous cousins, nieces, nephews.

Without a doubt the prospect of meeting his birth relatives was a daunting experience for Alan. He expressed many doubts, anxieties and "what ifs" prior to leaving, and during, the trip to the UK. However he was determined, and persisted with the trip regardless of these emotions and thoughts. This is in itself, so it seems, testimony to the importance of such reunification's.

After a long and tiring flight we arrived on the door step at the home of one of Alan's sister's. Joan Kerry had met us at the airport, and it was an amazing moment to be standing there, the three of us, waiting for this man to meet his sister for the first time.

We knocked, the door opened, and there she was - looking at him and him at her. This is an event that I will never forget for the rest of my days. A truly unique experience - brother and sister meeting in essence for the first time ever. It was a very emotional experience and you could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. What do you say? What do you do?

Alan and his sister greeted warmly with a hug, and smiles and tears. We all went inside and he met his sister and his nephew. An unusual situation to say the least, but again, one which I felt very privileged to be part of.

After this, we all travel to Alan's brother's home where we met three other siblings. Again Alan (and we all) went through the same process - the knock at the door - the face to face meeting for the first time ever. A highly charged emotional experience.

Over the following days they talk a great deal and got to know each other. Fortunately the family were very welcoming and were kind enough to include me in many of their activities, and so I felt a part of their reunification - an

extraordinary experience. I felt like I too established relationships of some strength with the family members. In essence I had been thrust into the heart and soul of this family and I felt honoured to share their experience.

Further meetings have been arranged and I have also arranged to meet with Alan's brother when he comes to Australia later this year.

Time will put the reunification and family relationships into perspective and the emotions will become less raw. Will the bonding and intimacy that was generated in the emotional environment of the initial meeting continue, only time will tell, but I will always feel happy to have been part of one family's reunification.