

# Jo Willis Coaching

**Live Well Lead Well**

## Biography



Jo was adopted as an infant during the closed era of adoption practice in New Zealand. She grew up in Auckland and later Napier. Growing up, Jo longed to know the truth about her relinquishment and her birthfamily. She was reunited with them at the age of 21yrs with the help of Jigsaw, an Auckland based agency at that time. From the age of 16yrs Jo kept a journal to process her experience and navigate the impact adoption had had on her life which she hoped would one day help others. It was the beginning of a journey to creating a collaborative work that became a book called 'Adopted, available from 11 August 2022.

The impact of Jo's adoption experience lead her to be a passionate supporter of adopted people and advocate for legislative change. In 1985 the Adult Adoption Act was passed and Jo's passion became her career as an Adoption Social Worker, Counsellor and Senior Practitioner that spanned over 23 yrs.

### Professional

Jo is a leadership and personal development coach. She specialises in adult adoption personal and professional development, working with those who feel confined by, or languishing in, life limiting adoption related patterns. Jo supports them to understand, accept and grow beyond these patterns, providing empowering tools to support the development of a positive mindset towards themselves, and life.

Another area of expertise is in coaching leaders who are also adopted. She partners with them to find or deepen their own brand of authentic leadership and develop high levels of Self and people management. Her focus is on the whole person and their wellbeing for sustainable performance and to thrive. As an adopted person herself, she brings a unique insight into the additional challenges that being both adopted and a leader can bring.

Jo also provides education to professionals; social workers, psychologists, counsellors and therapists on the 'Lived Experience of Adoption' to help them understand the unique experience and needs of this client group. In 2020 Jo was invited to educate adoption social workers New Zealand wide on this topic.

Recently, Jo was interviewed and appeared in the NZ Listener (May 22-28 2021) about the reality and impact of adoption under the 1955 Adoption Act being what is referred to as 'closed legislation and practice.'

As an expert in the adoption field Jo is often asked to present at National and International Adoption conferences.

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jo@jowilliscoach.com | www.jowilliscoach.com | +64 274 856 164

Jo recently appeared on a national podcast and her networks are national and international. [https://play.acast.com/s/two-lucky-bds/s1e12navigatingrelationshipsasadoptedpeople?fbclid=IwAR3lBctzWsTq6sxPHweVJgW96lkWb7CR-1aiK\\_VBcH9GGzOTitMWCFtBtRU](https://play.acast.com/s/two-lucky-bds/s1e12navigatingrelationshipsasadoptedpeople?fbclid=IwAR3lBctzWsTq6sxPHweVJgW96lkWb7CR-1aiK_VBcH9GGzOTitMWCFtBtRU)

Jo was recently introduced on a radio interview as- *“Jo could be considered New Zealand’s foremost expert on the experience of adoption. Adopted herself, Jo’s upbringing was a reasonably happy one – but as an adult, she began to explore exactly where her ongoing feelings of disconnection and low self-worth had come from, and what she could do about them. Through her extensive training as a social worker specialising in adoption and working for 30 years as a leader and trainer within the government departments that manage adoptions in New Zealand, she has built up a wide, deep knowledge of the many and varied impacts of adoption.*

*Her message is twofold – every adopted person, whether their adoption is something they class as “good” or “bad”, experiences an impact from it. Being separated at birth from the one person you were physically and psychologically bonded and attached to is always going to show up somehow. BUT that there is much that adopted people can do to reduce that impact.*

*“Adoption is this wonderful gift to adoptive parents,” explains Jo. “But often they haven’t been informed enough about the adoption experience to adequately meet the inevitable issues that arise as the child grows. Adopted children need acknowledgement, validation and support at various life stages. Adopted adults have additional layers to deal with in their lives and due to lack of awareness this often goes unrecognised.”*

#### **Other contributions;**

- Co-ordinated and facilitated the first Hawke's Bay Adoption Support Group for 8 years
- Facilitated a therapeutic Healing/Support group for Adult Adoptees for 2 years
- Designed a healing programme for Adolescent Adoptees used in Adoption Units nationally
- Presented a paper at the International Conference on Healing in Adoption in Wellington in 1997 'Traversing the Many Layers of Adoption.'
- Tutored Psychotherapy students at Eastern Institute of Technology on Adoption Practice and Issues
- Trainer at an Adult Adoption Social Worker induction training Auckland 2018
- Presenter at the Australasian Post Adoption Conference Sydney 22/23rd October 2019
- Designed and facilitated a weekend workshop for Adopted People in Wellington March 2020
- Co-authored and published an E-book called 'Adopted'- Loss, Love Family and Reunion. It tells the story of two adopted people growing up in NZ during the 1960's – 1980's, illuminating the impact, the potential flow on effects and how to grow and flourish beyond any constraints to well - being due this experience (E-Pub/Amazon on 1st Feb 2021)

## Professional background

- Director & Lead Coach at Jo Willis Coaching LTD – Leadership Coaching, Adoption Coaching and Facilitation 2016-
- Senior Advisor in Organisational Development in the Leadership Development Team- Manager of Emerging Leaders Programme, Leadership Coaching & Workshop Facilitation within MSD Wellington 2012 – 2016
- Principal of 4D Transformational Coaching and Consulting 2006 - 2012 (20hrs per week)
- Adoption Senior Social Work Practitioner for the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) 1987 – 2004 & 2005 – 2012 (a total of 23years experience)
- Counsellor in private practice P/T 15 yrs).

## Qualifications

- MA in Coaching and Mentoring Practice (Merit) from Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, United Kingdom
- Diploma in Counselling
- Certificate in Executive and Organisational Coaching
- Certificate in Professional Coach Supervision
- International Coach Federation Member ACC Accredited
- Member of NZ & International Positive Psychology Associations

Linked In: [https:// www. linkedin.com/in/jo-willis-444ab03b](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jo-willis-444ab03b)

## Personal

Jo Lives in Napier Hawkes Bay with her husband Lawrie. They spend a good deal of time with family; their adult daughter Hollie her husband and son's Hugo and Leo. Their son Will and his family live in Sydney so there are frequent visits to see them.

Jo has regular contact with her birthparents Sue (Tauranga) and Tony (Napier). Her adoptive parents Keith and Noeline are now deceased.

Jo's other passions outside her family and work are; the outdoors - walking half marathons, cycling and paddle- boarding. Indoors she loves reading personal development books, relishing a good novel and watching a wide array of films. She also loves to travel.