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EDITORIAL 

A multidisciplinary team: in theory at least, but what does it mean in practice?

There are numerous administrative and legal texts that foresee the obligation to convene a multidisciplinary team when it is time to take decisions about adoption. Such texts are helpful on the condition that safeguards are integrated for their effective implementation.

In an interview with ISS/IRC, Gabriele Schreiner, a sociologist and director of the Brazilian NGO Social Conscience says “the simple act of convening professionals from different sections in one and the same office does not turn them into a multidisciplinary team” (see page 6). This statement is full of common sense and sums up the whole of the

problem. Real interdisciplinary action depends on the establishment of a well nurtured inter-professional dialogue within the team as well as with the other bodies involved in the adoption procedure. Without this interaction, contradictory and sometimes radical points of view risk impeding the adoption of a decision that are most in line with the needs of the child in question.

To convene a multidisciplinary team is necessary, but it is not an adequate condition.

In order to guarantee that an adoption is the right step for a child deprived of his/her family, it is important to ensure that the different professionals involved (psychologists, social workers and lawyers etc) agree on this option, following a confrontation of viewpoints that are respectful and child centred. Unfortunately practice shows that this dialogue is often faulty. Bridges between the different professional groups are clogged or even non-existent. Everyone thinks in terms of their own professional and personal perspective at the risk of making decisions based upon their own outlook and not upon the real needs of the child.

The difficulties that can be observed in the field lead us to consider the importance of developing activities that will bring together professionals and agencies concerned to consult and act in a complementary and not competitive manner. This is a key element necessary to guarantee respect for the interests of the child in all decisions that affect them.

Building bridges thanks to training and co-ordination.

Training is one of the first elements that encourage effective multidisciplinary action. It enables professionals to take some distance and step back in order to be able to compare their own system of values and professional culture. To fully be able to listen to others, such distancing is essential. For example, it is not rare for deep rooted prejudices to prevent constructive exchanges between lawyers, social workers and psychologists.

The supervisory sessions also constitute a useful tool for the promotion of interdisciplinary and inter-institutional dialogue. The coordinator of the team and the intervention of an outside professional can contribute to the gradual set up of really interdisciplinary activities. One means available is making room for an in-depth analysis of certain delicate cases. Such spaces can produce vibrancy among professionals at the time when the difficulties are solved.

The organisation of seminars also permits interactions between judges and staff of the Central Authorities for adoption. For example, these seminars can help the different bodies to solve practical cases by working together with the help of a mediator if necessary. Such practices can be fruitful and promote a more rapid treatment of files that are blocked simply due to a difference of opinion

Finally the training of professionals is the clear responsibility of the States irrespective of their resources (see page 4). As Schreiner stresses, certain tools are already accessible for all and require few resources including the organisation of meetings with a view to exchanging experiences, the promotion of space for reading and debating as well as online training tools.

A multidisciplinary team, worthy of its name, is the responsibility of everyone both at the personal and professional levels. It also requires creativity. It is important to leave room for innovative initiatives which are sometimes necessary for finding a solution to files that seem to be stuck in an impasse.

ISS/IRC Team
March 2010

ACTORS IN MATTERS OF ADOPTION

Source: Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference: http://hcch.e-vision.nl/index_en.php?act=conventions.authorities&cid=69.

- **Cambodia:** This country has updated details of its Central Authority.
- **Denmark:** The application of the THC-93 has been extended to Greenland, one of its territories.
- **Ecuador:** This country has designated a foreign accredited body.
- **India and Czech Republic:** This country has updated details of contact persons within its Central Authority.
- **Kenya:** This country has designated its accredited bodies.

HAITI: Update on child protection measures post earthquake

UNICEF has published a short report summarising the situation in Haiti post earthquake, paying specific attention to the needs of children. ISS is working on a report (which is still at a draft stage) with UNICEF on the adoption situation in Haiti post-earthquake. Available statistics indicate that approximately 1120 intercountry adoptions were carried out in Haiti in 2009. As of 23 February 2010, at least 1539 children had been adopted out of Haiti following the earthquake on 12 January 2010. USA, France, Canada, Netherlands and Germany arranged the transfer of approximately 1500 children for the purpose of intercountry adoption. The remaining children were sent to Switzerland, Belgium, Spain and Italy. The latter two countries had suspended adoptions from Haiti in 2007 and only received the final authorisation for the remaining 9 children, from the pre-suspension period, to leave after the earthquake. ISS is concerned that the checks and balances, necessitating a 2 to 3 year period for processing intercountry adoptions under 'normal' circumstances in Haiti were not adequately respected post earthquake for all 1539 cases. Furthermore, UNICEF remarks that 'reports of children being illegally displaced across borders ostensibly for inter-country adoption, care (including medical care) or for exploitation notably in the Dominican Republic, have continued unabated since the very first days.'

Source: UNICEF report [http://www.crin.org/docs/UNICEF%20HAITI%20One-Month%20Sitrep%2012%20Feb%20\(updated,%20compressed\).pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/UNICEF%20HAITI%20One-Month%20Sitrep%2012%20Feb%20(updated,%20compressed).pdf)

NEPAL: Hague Conference calls for reforms to prepare the country for its ratification of THC-1993

In November 2009, the Hague Conference undertook a preliminary mission in Nepal in order to assess the needs of the country to prepare itself to the ratification of THC-1993 at the demand of the Nepalese Government. The results of this mission demonstrate clearly that an adequate legal framework for intercountry adoption in Nepal is missing. The Nepalese Terms and Conditions 2008 are not compliant neither with the art.21 of the Convention of the Right of the Child nor with the most important principles of THC-1993 such as the best interests principle, the principle of subsidiarity, lack of support and counselling for the birth parents about the legal effects of relinquishment or abandonment of their child etc. Other challenges include the identification of abuses linked to the declaration of the adoptability of the child, lack of transparency and accountability of the money coming to Nepal, falsification of documents of the child and the absence of a clear policy of intercountry adoption as a child protection measure. In light of these weaknesses, the Hague Conference with a number of receiving countries and other international organisations have offered to provide continued support to Nepal. In particular, the Hague Conference made some key recommendations such as the development of programmes for family preservation, a better regulation of Children's Homes, the establishment of a new law on adoption integrated in a comprehensive law on child protection, capacity building and the elimination of financial gain form intercountry adoption. The Hague Conference finally underlines that a temporary suspension of intercountry adoption system will be necessary to reform the intercountry adoption system.

Source: Hague Conference Report http://www.hcch.net/upload/wop/nepal_rpt09.pdf

'Adoption from Viet Nam, Findings and recommendations of an assessment' a report produced by ISS

The 82 page report is based on an independent assessment in 2009 by ISS/IRC, commissioned by UNICEF Viet Nam and by the Department of Adoption of the Ministry of Justice of Viet Nam. The main aims were to firstly identify and address problems in the adoption processes, with a view to assisting Viet Nam in its preparations to accede to the THC-93 and secondly, review the new draft law on adoption, and propose any relevant amendments. A number of observations were made including, inter alia, the level and nature of intercountry adoptions from the country being essentially influenced by foreign demand as opposed to the needs of the children, the circumstances under which babies become "adoptable" are invariably unclear and disturbing, the

ICA procedure is influenced by a remarkably unhealthy relationship that can exist between agencies and that specific residential facilities as well as Governments of “receiving countries” have not effectively committed themselves to applying the basic principles of the THC-93. In light of these observations, a list of key recommendations directed at Vietnam, International Agencies as well as “receiving countries” is provided at the end of the report.

ISS/IRC welcomes wholeheartedly the efforts of the Vietnamese Government to take on board the recommendations of the report and have already seen improvements in the draft adoption law. We are also pleased to see that the report has provided guidance to receiving countries in their dealings with Vietnam. For example, one country has already made the decision to suspend intercountry adoptions until further safeguards are in place. It is one ISS’ greatest wishes that the international community work together to ensure that real efforts be made to ensure that Vietnamese children be given the opportunity to remain with their family and local communities and that only the children, who are really in need of adoption, benefit from this solution.

Source: ISS website <http://www.iss-ssi.org/2009/index.php?id=49>

SPECIAL SERIES - GUIDELINES FOR THE ALTERNATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN 

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES: The professionalism of carers of children separated from their parents

Some of the Guidelines’ provisions address the professionalism and ethics of the personnel of institutions or of foster families, in particular the means of accreditation, training and supervision of these carers.

Children who are placed with relatives, foster families or in institutions are more likely to be the victims of inadequate care, discrimination or abuse. In order to reduce this proven and recognised risk, it is important to train and supervise their carers. Domestic laws and some practices sometimes provide for regulations relating to the training and requirements expected from persons working in homes. In addition, the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (Guidelines) provide the first international regulations on this issue (see enclosed box).

In particular, paragraph 54 of these Guidelines stipulates that the authorities should develop appropriate criteria for assessing the professionalism and ethics of care providers, as well as for their accreditation, monitoring and supervision. This article presents the various means, through which these criteria may be taken into account in the law, programmes and practice.

Professionalism within the legal framework

The Guidelines or other relevant rules may sometimes be found in domestic legal frameworks or in the practice of some countries. Thus, in Switzerland, article 15 of the Federal Order of 10 October 1977 regulating the placement of children, stipulates that the authorisation to establish an institution will be granted, among other conditions, ‘if the personal qualities, state of health, educational skills and training of the entity’s director and of his staff, enable them to take responsibility for their task and if the number of members of staff is sufficient compared with the number of beneficiaries’.

Each canton in Switzerland can define its own conditions. Therefore in a note of May 2009, Bern established that ‘two thirds of the educational personnel must hold a diploma in the educational field and some experience in a residential environment. In addition, the Director will also have to possess skilled training, i.e. a recognised diploma in the socio-educational field (or equivalent training), additional education or particular experience in a field related to the management of a home’.

Professionalism within the framework of programmes

Some national programmes also insist on the professionalism of child carers. An article in an American review (*Practice Notes for North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers*, Vol 14, N° 1, April 2009) offers some practical and interesting suggestions aimed at improving training and above all, motivating the personnel working in children's institutions. This practice note recommends improving the personnel's motivation, through more encouragement, individual recognition and implementing rewards that are adapted to the efforts made.

Furthermore, the foster care programme 'Ieladeinu' – launched within the Argentinian Jewish Community following the identification of situations of domestic maltreatment includes a detailed methodology for the training of families applying for the temporary care of children. This training – the content of which is available in Spanish at the ISS/IRC – takes place over five meetings. Various issues such as stability and life project, background of the child and his biological family, etc are discussed. A better understanding of such issues is further facilitated through group activities (role playing, guided awaken dreams, etc). This programme has proven that the prior training of families contributes to a smoother development of the period of care.

Professionalism within the practical framework

Moreover, the Butler Institute for Families has published a report, which describes the results and lessons learnt from a five-year project relating to the recruitment, selection, and training of staff working with children. This programme was implemented in the United States in both rural and urban areas.

Interview guidelines, realistic videos of the work to be carried out, workshops, flexible working hours and a programme of recognition and reward have been established. As a result of this project, it has emerged that with motivation, more opportunities for growth and support can result in a decrease in the risk of burnout and increased work satisfaction. The level of staff retention rose from 3% to 21%. All the participants in the training programme admitted that they had increased their knowledge.

Family Health International (2009) has also published a guidebook for the directors of

programmes of care for vulnerable children and young people: 'The Way We Care'. This manual aims at developing awareness, strengthening knowledge and assisting those who create, establish and manage programmes for children and young people affected by poverty, AIDS and other illnesses. This guidebook offers explanations on training people, organisation and quality supervision

Further regulation is necessary

It is now worth questioning how the authorities of each country should draft adapted criteria for the evaluation of the professionalism and ethics of persons caring for children. It is also

important to address how countries can be assisted which do not have any regulations.

To date, there exists only limited training, which is specific to residential environments or which relates to the management of a home. Learning mainly takes place through practice. Courses or internships undertaken exclusively with professionals from residential environments would enable them to better define the needs of children separated from their parents. The main point to keep in mind

Paragraphs of the Guidelines relating to the professionalism and ethics of child carers (in addition to paragraph 54)

Par. 66: States should ensure the right of any child who has been placed in temporary care to review (by duly qualified and authorized persons) of the appropriateness of his care and treatment.

Par. 70: Importance of the professional skills, selection, training and supervision of carers.

Par. 79: The personnel should be specially trained and, in principle, not wear any uniform.

Par. 102: Persons exercising legal responsibility should be reputable individuals with an understanding of any special and cultural needs of the children to be entrusted to them. They should receive appropriate training and professional support.

Par. 114: Anyone entrusted with the care of children should be provided with training on the rights of children without parental care. Cultural, social, gender and religious sensitization should also be assured. States should also provide adequate resources and channels for the recognition of these professionals.

Par. 115: Training in conflict resolution techniques should be provided to all child care staff.

is the particular vulnerability of children separated from their parents and their rights to be supported in a professional and sensitive manner.

Source: Butler Institute for Families, www.thebutlerinstitute.org/images/WRRRPFiles/WRRRP%20Final%20Report%20Final.pdf, The

Way We Care
http://www.fhi.org/en/HIVAIDS/pub/guide/res_The_Way_We_Care.htm and Practice Notes
<http://unlockit.com/docs/performance-coaching-self-assessment.pdf>
http://www.envisioninc.com/resources/Performance_Coaching_Worksheet.pdf-Cyclone-1-Year-Report-05-2009.pdf

READER'S FORUM

Interview with Gabriela Schreiner: The views of an expert in capacity building of multidisciplinary teams

Based on her wide experience, G Schreiner offers us her thoughts on the importance of capacity building of multidisciplinary teams in the field of adoption as well as the challenges raised.

Name, Surname: Gabriela Schreiner

Place of residence and work: Sao Paulo, Brazil

Professional position/responsibilities: Sociologist, Director of *Consciência Social* (www.conscienciasocial.net), and International Consultant in public policies relating to childhood, family and gender

1. Could you briefly present your organisation?

It is an organisation made up of individuals who believe and are committed to people as well as the human and social development of Brazil and Latin America. Our mission is to foster critical capacity, gender equality, social responsibility and human rights. At the moment, we are working on the empowerment of technical teams from government and civil society, who work with families and children at social risk.

2. Could you describe your experience in the field of capacity building of multidisciplinary teams involved in the adoption process?

Over the past 12 years, I have worked with these teams in Brazil and Peru. Two issues usually prompt the demand for capacity building: firstly the reality that that despite there being children declared adoptable, not all of them find an adoptive family and secondly, the 'returns', which may occur when the applicant family and the child do not manage to adapt. In general, the training sessions last between 32 and 60 hours, which includes, an exchange in theory, reflection, experiences and case studies as

well as offer tools for ensuring each stage of the adoption process is more successful.

3. Why is the capacity building of these teams something fundamental to you?

It is essential because it empowers the technical teams by providing them with an update on tools as well as the opportunity to view old issues with new eyes. It intends to renew energy, organise tasks and goes through the real life exercise of recognising the child as a subject of rights, who finds himself with his right to a family being contravened. It is also fundamental as it promotes the efficiency of multidisciplinary activities. It is important to note that training is not a solution in itself, but that it is a fundamental component to foster multidisciplinary teams.

4. What are the obstacles, which make it difficult to establish a true interdisciplinary dialogue?

I believe there is a significant deficiency in the academic training on this topic in Latin America. University education progresses in isolation to practice and professionals have great difficulties in applying what they learn. Furthermore, multidisciplinary teams have to overcome a considerable obstacle brought by the type of academic training, which leads them to think uniquely and exclusively from their specific area which then makes a dialogue among various disciplines difficult for them. Another obstacle is the idealisation of public policies with the hope that the

simple action of bringing together professionals from different sectors in an office transforms them into a multidisciplinary team. This is clearly not sufficient to ensure interdisciplinary actions.

5. How can these obstacles be overcome?

This can be done by relying on the supervisory work with technical teams, either externally (participation of a professional unconnected with the team) as well as internally (involvement of the team's direct Coordinator). It is important that the Coordinator himself takes on a leading role in promoting the interdisciplinary work and acts as a true mediator by enabling moments, which would allow the members of the team to be heard. In addition, when one addresses the relation between the team that is directly responsible for the adoption and other bodies (eg: the judiciary), it requires other efforts such as planning defined and known methods, common instruments and guidelines for inter-institutional attention.

6. How is each participant's system of values and representations addressed in accordance with his family, cultural and professional background?

It is a great illusion to expect neutrality from these professionals; what cannot be accepted is for the latter not to be aware of it. During the capacity building sessions, there is an emphasis on the system of values and beliefs that is inherent in each person with the aim of discovering other forms of existence and world views. To achieve this aim, each training session must combine technical knowledge and emotions, which always stem from what the group already knows and can contribute.

7. What type of tools do you resort to?

I use a group exercise, which brings the participants closer; I create opportunities to listen to them; I offer theory that is always linked to practice. I also generate opportunities for experiencing the realities, either through a case study, a debate on a movie, through individual or group tasks, or other exercises. The courses are generally organised in advance based on each context and the expectations of the participants, noting that the latter's expectations may have

altered as time goes by. It is an exercise aimed at strengthening the team, by adopting an open attitude to other views and acknowledging their pre-existing abilities.

8. How do you measure the success of good training?

All capacity building sessions have some form of formal evaluation, but this is not sufficient. The training objective of each session may differ depending on the needs and request so that the impact may only be seen later. However, it is important to establish criteria that not only evaluate what has been learnt in theory but also verify how it has been applied in practice.

In general with those teams who work in other areas and not just on adoption issues, I reinforce the impact of the training through periodic technical supervision over a period, which can last between three and six months, through meetings lasting eight hours a month. This is useful to help the teams in the practical implementation of the tools and concepts, and offers an opportunity for each professional to remedy doubts in relation to what has been learnt.

READING PROPOSITION

Nina a été adoptée (Nina has been adopted), written by Dominique de Saint Mars and illustrated by Serge Bloch, Editions Calligram, 1996. This book is part of the collection « Ainsi va la vie » (So life goes by) which reunites more than 24 comics, in a pocket book format which targets children as well as their surrounding family and school. These works aim to treat numerous questions that children may have, of which parents and teachers sometimes have difficulty in answering, especially when intimate issues are dealt with. Nina has been adopted is an excellent tool for explaining what adoption is to children, by answering questions that are common among them, such as when one of their classmates is adopted. The work poses a number of questions targeting children in general but can also include adopted children. The aim is to help the latter explore their feelings and help them explain their adoption to persons around them.

9. Intercountry adoption is a meeting between different cultures; how do you address this aspect with the professionals?

If one places too much importance or too little importance or even ignores cultural differences, this can create an infringement of one's identity. This intercultural aspect is addressed from the above perspective, which can be applied not only to intercountry adoption but other situations. Even domestic adoption has this dimension, which is often ignored by the teams. Adopting a child who was born in the same town as the adoptive parents is not the same as adopting a child who was born in another region. Cultural shocks may arise from religion to customs and habits, which will not be incorporated into the preparation of the applicants and the child if the teams do not take them into account, and which may then result in problems. It is important to provide professionals with opportunities to perceive and remember situations, in which cultural shocks caused them some unease, in order to address with them, what their feelings were and what could have been different. At this stage of the capacity building, it is important that the group acknowledges the significant role that they must play, as professionals to ensure that there is an exchange of cultural differences between parents and children,

especially for those who have experienced traumatic situations. The new family can only win by integrating this cultural diversity in a respectful manner.

10. There are many countries with limited resources; how could they access training?

The responsible authorities must guarantee time for study and capacity building. One form of capacity building, which requires decision-making and not so much budget, is to promote and ensure that meetings where experiences are exchanged take place. The professionals themselves often look for means of capacity building and require an authorisation to attend them. One can promote reading and knowledge exchange for as well as the dissemination of articles which could be debated at an upcoming meeting. The internet is an important means of information and can also be used for self-study. Moreover, the promotion of information exchange with universities will not only generate capacity building fora, but will also bring them closer to practice such as by creating academic study groups on adoption.

For professionals interested in online and bibliographical references, please contact the ISS/IRC.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, SEMINARS, SYMPOSIA AND COURSES

- **France:** *Adoption: Evaluer et Accompagner (Adoption: Evaluation and Accompanying)*, COPES, Paris, 17-18 June 2010 and 23-24 September. For more information: www.lecopes.org.
- **United Kingdom:** *Promoting Resilience with Disabled Children and their Families*, BAAF, London, 20 May 2010. For more information www.baaf.org.uk

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www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Resource_Center_EN/About_ISS-IRC/about_iss-irc.html. See Activities.

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