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EDITORIAL

The child's waiting for a family: Between hope and reality

Let us pursue our reflection on the waiting period by focusing on the child. Many factors must be considered when supporting him during this period, in which ambivalent feelings, the deep hope of being cared for by loving parents whilst also fearing what is unknown get mixed up.

To reflect on the waiting from the child's perspective raises several issues, the first one being whether the latter should be placed in a position of waiting for a family available to care for him forever, at the risk of disappointing this hope as a result of life or procedural obstacles. Thus, the Central Authority of the Philippines has decided to take this risk and to prepare the child for this encounter even prior to the matching phase (see p. 3). Several external factors may also have an impact on this waiting, either by extending its length, or, on the contrary, by speeding up its outcome. As has already been mentioned in the previous Editorial on the waiting from the perspective of the prospective adopters, sudden decisions or events, such as the establishment of a moratorium, legal or procedural amendments, a political crisis or a natural disaster, may result in longer delays, or even in the impossible conclusion of adoption projects. Furthermore, the child protection system in the country of origin also has a major impact on this waiting, in particular when it ignores family-type child protection measures and gives priority to long-term institutionalisation. All these are difficult situations, which jeopardise the waiting and the hope of a child deprived of a family of being cared for by loving parents; all these diverse situations require that those persons in charge of the child do have considerable adaptation skills and adapted tools.

To know the child well

The child's age, background, the conditions of his abandonment as well as his specific needs have an impact on how he will experience the waiting for a family. As stated by Dr Fanny Cohen Herlem, the concept of time is not approached in the same way by a child, who is three, six or eight years old (see Monthly Review N° 02/2010). Furthermore, when a child has special needs, it is important to raise his awareness as to the fact that his situation is different, in particular in comparison to that of very young and healthy children, who will have adopters coming to get them sooner. In these cases, it is worth considering other perspectives together with the child, such as access to independent living, when the child is older for example, or the establishment of more individualised

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32 Quai du Seujet ■ 1201 Geneva ■ Switzerland
irc-cir@iss-ssi.org ■ www.iss-ssi.org

support or tutelage (see Monthly Review N° 09/2011, 11-12/2012 and 02/2013). All these are data that the person in charge of the child must know in order to support him to his best.

Several tools, such as the 'later life letter' (see p. 4) or life story books for children, have been developed in this regard in order to support the work of professionals. On this point, ISS is currently finalising a life notebook, aimed more specifically at disabled children. This notebook will soon be presented in the Monthly Review (see also our online bibliographical database for access to other models). These tools will allow to adjust the child's waiting, to involve him in the progressive development of his family project and to offer him the possibility of expressing his emotions and feelings.

A favourable environment

The creation of a climate of trust, in which the child will be able to communicate to those adults around him his fears, doubts and hopes is therefore essential. Thus, it is worth giving priority to the child's temporary placement in a family-type environment, which is far more suitable to create a favourable environment for the child's waiting. As far as possible, foster care should be given priority over institutional placement, where the child's individual care is much more uncertain. Indeed, even though family-type measures may also raise issues, in particular that of attachment between the child and the foster family prior to an adoption procedure, these are an alternative to the harmful effects of institutionalisation on the good development of children, in particular among children between the ages of 0 and three years. On this point, regional initiatives have been launched in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (see p. 5), as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean through the project 'Let's stop the internment of babies'¹, which RELAF, ISS's key partner, has actively contributed to.

When does the waiting end?

The waiting does not end when a family has been matched with a child. The meetings may be numerous and spaced out over time before a child permanently joins his new parents. At this stage of the process, the prospective adopters have an important role to play in order to feed the child's waiting with trust and to reassure him of their presence despite the distance that still separates them. Thanks to tools, such as the 'welcome package' suggested by the Central Authority of the Philippines (see p. 3), the prospective adopters will be able, in particular, to support the child and to already place the first stones of their future relationship. For that matter, the waiting will only end when the parents and the child will have managed, thanks to tools such as those suggested by Johanne Lemieux (see p. 7) to accept each other as they are and to create this attachment bond that is so fundamental to the development of the family that has been so hoped for by the child and his new parents.

The ISS/IRC team
May 2013

Source:

¹ *Let's stop the internment of babies.* For further details on this project, see: http://www.relaf.org/pruebapiloto_eng.html.

BRIEF NEWS

Democratic Republic of Congo: Mission of assessment of child protection and intercountry adoption

At the beginning of May 2013, the Director of the ISS/IRC, Hervé Boéchat, together with Mr Aimé Wata, PhD in Law and acting as an external expert, undertook a one-week mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a view to assessing the situation of child protection and intercountry adoption in the country. Thanks to the support offered by UNICEF's local office, the experts met with a number of Congolese actors and professionals and led several workshops throughout their stay. Their presence in Kinshasa also coincided with the debates within the Congolese authorities in relation to the decision to suspend authorisations to leave the territory for Congolese children in intercountry adoptions, made by the General Directorate of Migrations in April, and whose lifting has not yet been confirmed. A public report will be drafted by June and further information will be provided in our next Monthly Review.



Ghana : Suspension of domestic and intercountry adoptions

A temporary suspension of domestic and intercountry adoptions has been announced by the government of Ghana. This information, posted on the website of the U.S. Department of State on 20 May 2013, has been confirmed by ISS/IRC's local contacts. The official reasons for this temporary suspension as well as the measures relating to the treatment of pending adoption cases are unknown to date. The ISS/IRC will soon inform of any forthcoming developments in this country.

Source : U.S. Department of State, http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_alerts_notices.php?alert_notice_type=alerts&alert_notice_file=ghana_2.

PRACTICE

The Philippines: The child's preparation for adoption during the waiting period

In this article, the Central Authority of the Philippines shares its experience of preparing children for their placement and adoption during the various phases of the adoption process and the waiting that the latter entails.

There is no hard and fast set of rules and standards applicable to all profiles of children when referring to the preparation for their placement. The various waiting periods during the adoption process offer opportunities to undertake this preparation in accordance with each individual situation. Preparing a child for eventual placement, either with the extended family, in foster care, or in adoption, depends on many factors, which are child specific. Between the two schools of thought – one advocating for the preparation of children for potential adoption and giving them the hope of finding a permanent family versus not giving the children any 'false hopes' as they may be further wounded if the expectation of finding a permanent family does not materialise – the former is applied in the Philippines.

Waiting and preparation

It is a fact that adoptable children have been, in one way or another, abandoned, neglected, abused. They are children born of a profound loss, in difficult circumstances and in need of permanent families that will provide them with the opportunity to heal. From the outset, it must be stated that no amount of preparation of the child for placement will result in a positive outcome if the preparation is not based on a comprehensive child profile and an in-depth home study report of the prospective adopters. Preparation

therefore is not an isolated task by the child's social worker or caregiver but the effect of the consolidated work of the stakeholders in the process of adoption, which must work hand in hand with a careful and 'multidisciplinary' system of matching children.

Pre-matching preparation

The Philippines has, in the last three years, placed 1,285 children in intercountry placements; 35% of the children were under the age of three years. The preparation process of children in this age group focuses, basically, on ensuring that all medical/behavioural conditions, if any, are monitored and recorded and appropriate intervention is undertaken when necessary. An in-depth analysis of the child's medical, psychosocial and family background or history and the circumstances of their finding or abandonment are crucial to the undertaking of an effective 'multidisciplinary' matching process. The individual members of a multidisciplinary committee must have a sufficient basis when selecting a family whose expectations will meet the needs of the child.

For children aged three to six years old, the expectation of finding a permanent family is highlighted by their personal observation of the entrustment process of their peers in the institution. It is an opportunity to explain to the child that when



the time is right for him, he will have his own permanent family.

For children six to 18 years of age, the focus is less on the preparation for the possibility of an adoption and the support in the waiting focuses instead on enhancing academic and skills development for potential independent living. At this stage, the children do not necessarily have a diminished expectation of adoption, but because they begin to be more independent, a shift from learning through observation and experience to learning via language and logic using serious, logical thinking and reflection, the focus on permanency placements is not the main concern, as a deeper reflection of their person as individuals and interaction among their peers takes precedence. Special needs children and sibling groups, like older children, are made aware of the possibility of adoption; however, this is tempered by the realities of the degree of the special need or the number of siblings in a set of related children and their ages.

Post-matching preparation

In intercountry adoptions, the matching of the child with a prospective adoptive parent does not translate into an immediate physical placement of the child under the custody of the prospective adopters. The reality is that after a matching is made, immigration proceedings with the receiving country may translate into a waiting period of two to six months before an actual physical entrustment can take place. In order to ensure that the waiting period between the matching and the physical entrustment is productive for both

the child and the prospective adopters, the Inter-Country Adoption Board of the Philippines requires that the parents send 'blown-up' photos or a 'welcome album' for their adopted child. The 'welcome album' is a collection of photographs of the immediate and extended family members, the child's future home/room, including photographs of the immediate area surrounding the home and the pets, if any. Authorised partner agencies are requested to send a list of practical and basic words that the child must know in the native language of the prospective adopters. A brief description of the weather and a snapshot of the daily routine/schedule of the family is part of the 'welcome home' package. The welcome materials are tools for the preparation of the child for entrustment during the waiting period. The careful preparation eases the stress during the initial contact between the prospective adopters and the child and smoothens the child's transition into his new environment.

The child must be ensured the best possible transition into his permanent family and the family must be equally protected to prevent any damage due to their receiving a specific child. Preparation is the responsibility of all parties in the adoption process, and the various waiting periods of the adoption proceedings offer an opportunity to undertake this preparation in accordance with the child's specific characteristics and the prospective adopters' profile and circumstances.

Source:

■ Inter-Country Adoption Board, The Philippines: <http://www.icab.gov.ph>.

Writing a 'later life letter': A post-adoptive support tool - very useful in the meeting and discovery of oneself

Fran Moffat, training consultant at BAAF, has just finished writing a good practice guide on the 'later life letter'. A 'later life letter' has been shown to help an adopted child to understand his history, to give a sense of his past, to help his self esteem and to reinforce his resilience.

The publication aims to guide social workers on how to write a (later life) letter without providing a rigid framework. The guide suggests the points, which should be covered, according to the history of the child and how the difficult subjects should be dealt

with. The guide also contains numerous extracts from actual real-life letters. It also considers the style of questions and language to be used keeping in mind that it is primarily intended for a child or a young person.



Definition, legal basis, aim

A 'later life letter' is a letter written at a certain time by a social worker who knows the child and therefore is in a position to provide information on the events that have taken place in the life of the child before his adoption. The letter places particular importance on the social worker's point of view. The letter is intended to give the child or young adult a more detailed, more personal and more human point of view than an administrative or judicial report. The child will feel valued rather than being just another number in the administration.

In December 2005, the 'later life letter' became compulsory in England. The degree of confidentiality has to be evaluated in each case, and depends on what has been decided upon with the judge.

The 'later life letter' is not to be confused with the 'life story book' of the child. The letter is intended to be read at a later stage by an adopted child, at a time where he is emotionally ready to become familiar with the explicit details of the events preceding his adoption. This requires a certain degree of maturity from the adopted child or young adult.

Content

Firstly, the social worker must introduce himself to the young person, who will read the letter and only use the young person's Christian name. He must also explain his role as a social worker in the adoption process. All the details concerning his birth and the events which led to his adoption, could help the child

construct an identity and to remove any doubts he may have. Information on the pregnancy, the delivery and the child's house before his adoption are precious. Details concerning the culture, religion and ethnicity of the child can also be included and allows the child to address any misunderstandings.

Often the child knows well the story of his biological mother but not that of his father. This letter allows for information that is known on this subject to be provided, for example from the point of view of the mother.

The guide also covers a number of delicate and specific topics, notably abuse, rape, incest and describes how to explain the circumstances in an appropriate manner.

Use

The guide also explains to adoptive parents when and how to use this letter. If necessary, the parents should be able to access help during this stage of the process, which consists of speaking to one's adopted child about his past.

Doubts or ignorance often lead to confusion, anger or sadness. The 'later life letter' is intended to dispel those feelings and to allow the adopted child or young adult to pursue his life in a positive way. The ISS/IRC promotes the use of this good practice guide, which is enshrined in the promotion and implementation of the rights of children to know their origins.

Source:

Moffat, F, *Writing a later life letter, Good Practice Guide*, BAAF, 2012.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCES

Europe: UNICEF's report on children under the age of three in formal care

UNICEF recently published a comprehensive rights-based analysis of the situation of children under the age of three in formal care in Eastern Europe and Central Asia¹; its main elements are outlined in the present article.

In a region in which reliance on residential institutions and centralised planning has historically been the norm, this report provides essential information to understand the current situation of children in formal care in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. As stated by the report, 'although major progress has been achieved in the reform of child-care systems, these have not yet been translated into the capacity of

social protection systems to prevent family separation', which is a major pending challenge for the region as a whole in fully ensuring the rights of children at risk of family separation and in alternative care. This situation analysis provides concrete information in the framework of the OHCHR/UNICEF call to action 'End placing children under three years in institutions'².



General situation

The initial chapter of the report stocktakes the situation of children under the age of three placed in formal care in the countries of the region: today, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 1.3 million children still grow up separated from their family. As a result, the report issues two major conclusions: there are too many children under the age of three in formal care and these children are deprived of their basic human rights – a situation that clearly violates para. 22 of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Indeed, although fewer children under the age of three have been placed in institutions during the past ten years, the decrease has been uneven. Furthermore, the report concludes that foster care – as a main alternative to institutionalisation – is barely used for children in this age group, although it states that these children are at higher risk of losing parental care. Finally, and of great concern, the report reiterates that institutional care may blatantly jeopardise children’s rights and their development.

Root causes of this situation

The report’s second chapter looks more closely at the potential root causes of this situation. Despite the failure of statistics to reflect a complex reality, an issue (also existent in other regions) is that only a very limited number of children in this group are truly orphans (2 – 5 % in the CEE/CIS countries), and that the issue remains rather in a lack of support to the family. It is interesting to mention that the report states that poverty is not a sufficient factor for their placement, but that it sets the stage for other elements to motivate a placement (e.g. ill health, poor or unequal provision of social services, belonging to a vulnerable and discriminated group, etc). The report also mentions that these are often rooted in the

historical, social and institutional systems of the region, such as strong existing stigma, discrimination and belief in institutional care.

Five core interventions for governments

The report finally concludes with five core interventions aimed at governments in the region:

1. Legislative changes – in particular a prohibition of the placement of children under the age of three in institutions, a focus on being a last resort and under strict conditions, and the consolidation of gatekeeping mechanisms;
2. Development of appropriate local alternative solutions to institutional care – in particular ensuring a continuum of services, and the preparation and implementation of the removal from institutions of children currently institutionalised;
3. Proper budget allocation to support families and prevent abandonment and relinquishment – in particular putting an end to the belief that alternative solutions to institutionalization are too expensive, investing in better parenting initiatives and implementing family-strengthening policies;
4. Capacity-building and establishing standards of practice for medical and social welfare services; and
5. Information and awareness-raising – in particular to prevent abandonment and relinquishment and to promote the social inclusion of children deprived of parental care.

‘In accordance with the predominant opinion of experts, alternative care for young children, especially those under the age of 3 years, should be provided in family-based settings.’

Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, para. 22.

In the framework of this issue’s Editorial on the waiting of children, this report focusing on a particular group of children should also lead us to reflect on the waiting of all these very young children in formal care – of which many remain in institutions for many years.

Sources:

¹ UNICEF, *Children under the age of three in formal care in Eastern Europe and Central Asia – A rights-based regional situation analysis*: http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_Report_Children_Under_3_FINAL.pdf.

² OHCHR/UNICEF, *End placing children under three years in institution - A call to action*, [http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_A_call_to_action_En_Web\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_A_call_to_action_En_Web(1).pdf).



READERS' FORUM

'Adoptive normality: The keys to support the adopted child'

Johanne Lemieux¹ hereafter presents us her new book, the first in a series of four volumes, which represent the collected *Adopteparentalité* works. This educational and therapeutic approach, which was created by the author in 1996, has extended beyond the borders of Quebec.

When ISS asked me to present my latest work, I found the task to be very tricky and hardly objective. I hope that it will, at the very least, be reasonably useful.

The adopted child: from subject to Subject

Even though the *subject* of adoption is the object of numerous publications and tools written by specialists, this is not the case of the true *Subject* of the adoption, i.e. the child himself. Publications, whose true vocation is to convey serious and accessible knowledge on the bio-psycho-social aspects of the adoptive reality, as experienced in daily life, are even rarer. It is with the intention of trying to fill this gap to a limited extent that my colleagues, Patricia Germain and Dr Jean-François Chicoine, and I published *L'enfant adopté dans le monde* in 2003. In particular, this publication has enabled my educational and therapeutic approach, *L'adopteparentalité: L'art de devenir parent par adoption* [*Adopteparentalité: The art of becoming a parent through adoption*], created in 1996, to be disseminated for the first time across French-speaking Europe. Ten years later, parents and professionals ask for more. They raise the need for concrete and practical tools that may be applied daily by adoptive families.

Adopteparentalité: The child at the heart of concerns, the parent at the heart of solutions

In order for parents to be at the heart of solutions, it was absolutely necessary to convey to the professionals, who support them, the required knowledge to understand the normal characteristics of children having survived non-standard ordeals. Without some of the knowledge, these parents will not be able to become the tutors of resilience for their child, as is expressed so well by Boris Cyrulnick. The originality and relevance of the tools of *Adopteparentalité* result from the use of concrete and accessible concepts full of pictures. Serious and oppressive subjects are addressed with tenderness and humour. This approach downplays problems, without banalising them, it makes them understandable, without emptying them of their true

depth. We do not address merely theoretical aspects; neither do we content ourselves with setting a list of potential problems. Mostly, we explain the possible and efficient solutions that may be applied in daily life.

Adoptive normality: Everything you wanted to know about what is similar and different in an adopted child

This book also aims at finally responding to this question, which has resulted, for too long, in two totally contradictory responses. As if there were only two possible choices: either the adopted child is normal, if his functioning and his development become identical to biological children, or he is strange, abnormal, even pathological, if he maintains some characteristics, which most biological children do not share. I suggest a third approach, where the normality of most adopted children is neither biological, nor pathological, but adoptological!

Addressing the risk factors indeed, but mainly conveying the protection factors

Too many professionals still believe that to equip the parents well consists in providing them with an exhaustive list of all potential risks. My experience is very different. It is when the professional can enumerate in concrete terms all the protection factors that the parent may self-determine himself, make choices and change some educational methods. This is why *Adopteparentalité* is inspired by humanist, systemic therapeutic approaches and positive psychology, focused on solutions, on the parental task and guidance. We use objects such as ribbons, Russian dolls, pictogrammes, pictures of bridges and simple allegories to make specialised scientific data understandable and usable. Clear, simple and easily day-to-day transposable educational techniques are taught and practised. These are justified scientifically based on the latest discoveries in neurosciences, post-traumatic shock treatment methods and the developmental aspects of the human functioning.

Brief presentation of the various elements addressed in the publication



- **The concept of adoptive normality as a Q&A:**

This section aims at counteracting prejudices, unfounded beliefs and superficial reactions, which harm the acceptance of the adoptive reality.

- **12 beliefs to demystify** on the reality of the adoptive parent himself, who also experiences an adoptive normality, as much on his way towards the adoption as daily with the child.

- **12 elements of the adoptive normality:** Each of these 12 characteristics is a form of key that one must know and understand in order to better support the adopted person throughout his development.

- **Children's words:** I found it necessary to leave a chosen place to the touching and relevant words of children. They are my greatest teachers.

- **Tales and allegories** illustrating symbolically each key in order to provide pictures for complex concepts and to make them emotionally accessible.

- **A description of theoretical and scientific knowledge** necessary for the understanding of each of the 12 keys. I wish to convey a synthesis of the most updated knowledge on the development of the human brain and its consequences on the development as well as the physical and mental health of children.

- **Over 50 practical educational factsheet**, which I call *know-hows* [savoir-faire] and *personal skills* [savoir-être]. Each factsheet describes how to

better act in some situations, thanks to parent-child activities, questionnaires, precise educational methods, therapeutic activities to be undertaken in the framework of a psycho-therapeutic follow-up. These are also designed to be shared with other actors surrounding the child, such as the extended family, those in charge of day-care services or teachers. Thus, Factsheet N° 19, for example, suggests a 'written' letter from the prospective child to his grand-parents, aimed at raising their awareness and calling upon them in view of a respectful reception of his true needs.

- **Brief pieces of knowledge**, which, I admit, pretend to be a wink to the numerous dads, who often ask their spouses to read the books and then to provide them with a short summary. Each brief knowledge [savoir en bref] includes a short description of those risk factors to be avoided and of those protection factors to be promoted.

I hope that, once you have read this first book, you will have a better idea of the knowledge, know-how and personal skills mastered in order to positively integrate an adoptive parenthood, made of supplementary options and of challenges to be overcome. In short, it is sufficient to have the necessary keys to treat the adopted child as who he is, and not as we would like him to be!

Source:

¹ For over 15 years, the name of Johanne Lemieux – a Social Worker, Psychotherapist at the Office for Adoption Consultation of Quebec and a mother through adoption of three children, now all adults – has been closely linked to the world of adoption and attachment. Her fame is now established, as much in Quebec as in French-speaking Europe.

In order to receive the newsletter on the forthcoming publications and potential translations by Montreal's publisher Québec-Amérique, see: www.johannelemieux.com. The book is also available electronically

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **Spain:** *2013 Fourth International Conference on Adoption Research*, ICAR4, Bilbao, 7-11 July 2013. For further information, see: <http://www.ncfr.org/events/calendar/2013-fourth-international-conference-adoption-research>.
- **United Kingdom:** *The Neuroscience of Adoption & Fostering*, BAAF, Cardiff, 3 July 2013. For further information, see: <http://www.baaf.org.uk/training/allevents/2013-07-03t000000/en>.

As a reminder, this Monthly Review is distributed to a selected network of Authorities and professionals. It is not aimed at being posted on an internet website without the authorisation of the ISS/IRC.

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