



EDITORIAL

The adoption of older children: A project that measures up to the children's needs? (First part)

Whilst the number of older children intended to be adopted internationally increases, what about the abilities of adoption actors to undertake these specific projects? The ISS/IRC, which had already initiated this task in 2008¹, invites you to address, at first, the perspective of the child, and subsequently that of the parents (a second part will be published in our next Editorial).

In parallel to an ongoing decrease in the number of intercountry adoptions, which started in 2005, the age of children adopted internationally has been increasing without interruption (see Monthly Review N° 07-08/2008, 10/2010 and 09/2011). The numbers are revealing: *with regards to the receiving countries*, in France, 25% of those children adopted in 2011 were over the age of five years, 30% in 2012 and 33% in 2013². In Italy, the age of children adopted internationally has experienced a steady increase between 2000 and 2011 and is placed, on average, at five and six years old³. In Switzerland, 41% of those children adopted internationally in 2011 were over the age of five years, increasing to 53% in 2012⁴. *In relation to countries of origin*, in 2012, 41% of the total number of Peruvian children adopted domestically and internationally were aged between six and 17 years⁵; in Lithuania, 51% of the children were between seven and 14 years old⁶, in Burkina Faso and Chile, 45%⁷ and 81%⁸, respectively, of those adopted internationally were over the age of five years. Faced with this new reality, have measures been set up by the countries to promote the success of these particular adoptions?

Diverging factors of definition

Among the challenges raised by these adoptions, the considerable differences of opinion relating to the factors that define an older child, and which may be seen depending on the countries, may be mentioned. This situation is obvious with regards to the child's age: thus, in Burkina Faso, a child is considered to be older from the age of two years, in the Czech Republic, this age goes up to three years, in India and in Chile, to five years, in South Africa to six years, in Lithuania, it rises to eight years, and in Colombia and Peru, up to nine years⁹. In addition to this most obvious factor, others may also have an impact, such as the child's development as well as his personality, his ability to adjust and to create a solid bond with adults, his life story and his background.

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This last issue refers, in particular, to the child's cultural identity which, with his age, will take up an important place. Thus, an older child will already have gained a certain cultural background, which he will have to give up or distance himself from to some extent upon his arrival in the receiving country. For example, when the child comes from a country where the concept of family is clan-like, or if he has grown up in a family with several parental characters, he will have to give up this model upon his arrival in the receiving country, and learn to live within a more reduced nuclear family. This also applies to older children, who have spent a considerable part of their life in an institutional environment. This may be even more difficult when he becomes a single child, for example. The language also deserves a particular focus in the context of the child's adjustment to his new environment and educational learning (see p. 5). An in-depth dialogue will, therefore, have to be initiated between the professionals caring for the child and the prospective parents, in order to work together on these differences and to provide the prospective family with as many tools as possible. It is, in this sense of cooperation, that the *Enfant en Recherche de Famille (ERF)* programme – launched in 1981 by *Enfance et Famille d'Adoption* – is implemented in partnership with those bodies in charge of the alternative care of children (see Monthly Review 04/2012)¹⁰.

Persistent obstacles

Receiving countries as well as countries of origin are faced with the same obstacle: most prospective adoptive parents wish to adopt, as a priority, younger and healthy children for a variety of reasons, such as the wish to share their first times (first steps, first words, etc) or the fear of not being able to respond to the increased attention required by an older child. However, this trend is progressively changing in some countries, such as Chile and India, where, according to the Central Adoption Authority, a change in the Indian parents' attitude towards older children may be observed, in particular due to the long waiting list for domestic adoptions. Furthermore, several countries have launched initiatives aimed at promoting the adoption of children with special needs, including older children. In addition to the examples offered in the article on p. 9, others may be mentioned, such as the *Llamado Especial* programme, set up in Chile in 2010, which intends to reverse the flow of files for this type of adoption, the awareness-raising campaigns in the media in Lithuania, etc¹¹.

Are these adoptions respectful of the child's needs?

In order to respond to the child's needs, these specific adoption projects must, on the one hand, be subject to an informed decision by the adoptive parents; it is not a matter of considering these children by default. On the other hand, the preparation provided to these children must be adapted to their age and degree of maturity. Indeed, it will play an essential role in the child's ability to overcome the challenges linked to his numerous past experiences and in his integration in a new permanent family (see pp. 5 and 8). Ideally, several aspects of this preparation should be addressed and clarified, such as his identity-building (see p. 3), the process of transmission of information to the child, the gathering of his opinion or how his participation is foreseen. In particular, the child's preparation must take into account the specific features of this type of adoption and be adapted to each particular case. For example, when the older child proves to be the eldest child among various siblings, and he has assumed the responsibility for his younger brothers and sisters for some time, the preparation will then have to address the issue of integration into the adoptive family and the its dynamics in such a context. Although some countries of origin have experienced important developments in this field (see pp. 3 and 5), gaps still remain.

If the adoption of older children clearly fits into the future of intercountry adoption, then receiving countries and countries of origin must work together to continue providing adoption actors with tools and to support, to the best of their ability, the children and the parents, whose skills and resources will be strongly required in order to complete this life project. Finally, is the adoption of an older child not a means to give adoption its full meaning as a measure of protection of a child, who truly needs it?

The ISS/IRC team, May 2014



References:

- ¹ Romanens-Pythoud, S., *L'adoption des enfants grands*, ISS/IRC, 2008 (Monthly Review N° 10/2008). On sale at: http://www.iss-ssi.org/venteonline/product.php?id_product=7.
- ² Statistical Report 2012, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport_statistique_2012_cle8c651d.pdf; Presentation by Thierry Fraysse, December 2013, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Intervention_de_Thierry_FRAYSSE_17-12-2013_cle031bdb.pdf; Statistical Report 2013, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/statistiques_2013_cle076137.pdf.
- ³ Report on files of the Commission for Intercountry Adoptions, http://www.commissioneadozioni.it/media/141301/dp_2012_eng.pdf, p. 20.
- ⁴ Swiss Statistics, BEVNAT, <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/01/06/blank/key/03.html>.
- ⁵ Ministry for Women and Vulnerable Populations, Peru, http://www.mimp.gob.pe/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=344&Itemid=353.
- ⁶ Reply to the ISS/IRC survey, 2013.
- ⁷ Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.publications&dtid=32&cid=69.
- ⁸ Replies to the ISS/IRC survey, 2013.
- ⁹ Replies to the ISS/IRC survey, 2013.
- ¹⁰ See also: Reports of the EFA conference 'Construire un projet d'adoption pour les enfants grands'; 'L'apparementement: élaboration du projet, préparation des enfants, préparation des parents, rencontre' by S. Dekens and M-L. Bouet-Simon. DVD on sale at: <http://adoptionefa.org/index.php/component/content/article/36-generalites/687-construire-un-projet-dadoption-pour-les-enfants-grands>.
- ¹¹ Replies to the ISS/IRC survey, 2013.

ACTORS

- **Burkina Faso and Italy:** These countries have updated the contact details of their Central Authority.

Source: The Hague Conference on Private International Law, http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.publications&dtid=43&cid=69.

PRACTICE

Argentina: The *Hojas de Vida* programme, rebuilding identities

Eliana Kuipers¹, Coordinator of the Hojas de Vida [Lifemap] programme and Santiago Carranza, of the Communications Department, introduce us to this programme, which has been developed by the Fundación Sierra Dorada. Based on article 8 of the UNCRC, this programme addresses the need to work for the right to identity of institutionalised children and adolescents.

'... **A**nd my brothers and sisters, do you know something about them?' 'Do you know who my biological parents are?' 'I do not know where I was born ... I have always been in institutions'... These, like many other questions and statements relating to the vital story of the children and adolescents, who are placed in the Sierra Dorada home, inspired the search, registration and compilation of all the available information relating to each of them. In general, the work with children and adolescents focuses on responding to their basic needs, such as their health, education, diet and clothing; but only on very few

occasions is priority given to the right to identity that each one of them has. The *Hojas de Vida* programme grew from a need to give a response to those questions, which children in the home raised repeatedly, reflecting a fragmented identity, where pieces of their personal story were missing.

Development and objectives of the programme

Hojas de Vida has two objectives: to promote the active exercise of the right to identity through workshops with children and adolescents; and to search, compile and keep all the data relating to their story by creating a digital and personal file.



It was decided to start rebuilding the identity of those with most time in institution, and who had little information about their life. Those, who do not even know where they come from, nor why they are where they are, or when they will leave, these children in relation to whom we used to see that their life progressed in an 'eternal here and now'.

Tracking of information

The first step of the programme is to study the file, which the children and young people at Sierra Dorada arrive with. Then, an interview of the child or adolescent is undertaken, to register emotional information and memories that do not appear on the file, and which are used as the basis to rebuild his story. Once this stage has been completed, the gathered data is analysed, and one proceeds to searching the missing information: schooling information, medical registers, psychological reports, photographs, among others.

At the same times, meetings are undertaken with those affective reference persons, whom the child or adolescent has mentioned in the subsequent interviews, and also with those contacts, which have been identified in the file, in order to obtain accounts about his life story. As information is obtained, it is systematised by

In brief, the construction of an identity is very difficult if fundamental data are not known, such as the place of birth, the origins and biological parents, the family bonds and the reason for having been institutionalised. In Sierra Dorada, we consider that the *Hojas de Vida* programme will facilitate the construction of a more solid and sound identity, by recovering those basic elements in the life of a person y by promoting the full exercise of the right to identity.

items and registered in a unique and confidential file that the children and adolescents will take with them when they leave the institution.

Active participation of the children

Through the workshops, various aspects relating to the construction of the identity are addressed, amongst which the following may be highlighted: human rights and individuality, implementation of a diary, construction of the child's life story by incorporating documentary evidence (letters, photographs, drawings, etc), development of empathy as a life stylem establishment of a locker as a personal and private space, a healthy self-esteem (see box for further information on its content). The workshops are led by a socio-pedagogue and psychologist, Romero M.

Soledad, who works together with two social workers on the various topics; all of them are members of the technical team of the Fundación Sierra Dorada. Finally, it is important to highlight that, in order to implement this programme and for it to be viable, it is necessary to be able to rely on close collaboration amongst all those bodies involved in the process of institutionalisation of the children and adolescents, such as the Judiciary, the public administration, the various institutions and the involved professionals.

The 'Healthy Self-Esteem' workshop

This is one of the workshops with most impact, in particular on the adolescents. Its objective is to reassert their self-esteem by reinforcing the qualities and abilities of each one.

It starts using transfer pictures, as a tool for the children and adolescents to describe themselves, and subsequently, a group debate is undertaken on the selected pictures. In this way, it is possible to work on the observation, reasoning and analysis of various personal and group situations. Subsequently, work is undertaken on the concept of 'self-esteem' and how the latter is built. Finally, it is sought to identify those words, situations or experiences that result in thinking and saying negative things about oneself and that are represented by stones – symbolising the latter like something 'heavy' in life and which hinders us in moving forward. Then, for each stone, a word, sentence or action is sought, which will transform, value and reclaim them as a person. At the same time, during the week, it is suggested to 'think about how I treat myself and others'. During the workshop, it is possible to put into words the difficult situations, which they have experienced, in order to transform them. A 16-year-old adolescent, who has been living in the Sierra Dorada home for four years, told us: *'Those who know my mother tell me that I am like her. That hurts me, that bothers me... But I am different, I am myself and will not be like her'*. Not only does the workshop achieve the objective of reasserting the self-esteem of every child and adolescent, but it can also be used to solidify the individuality and value that everyone holds.

Reference:

¹ Eliana Kuipers is a Socio-Pedagogue, with specialist knowledge of children and adolescents at risk.



The profile of older children and their preparation for adoption: Experiences in various countries of origin

Even though it is impossible to generalise the psychosocial conditions of older children, the ISS/IRC has been able to observe a certain permanent feature in some countries of origin. Some of the latter have, indeed, experienced important developments in terms of preparation of these children for their adoption.

In the framework of the conference *Construire un projet d'adoption pour les enfants grands*, organised in February 2014 by *Enfance et Familles d'Adoption* (EFA)¹, France, the ISS/IRC undertook a brief survey among several countries of origin², in order to better identify the profile of older children and the support offered to them in the context of their adoption.

The psychosocial conditions of older children

Older children in the surveyed countries are either placed in institutions or in foster families. Except for South Africa and the Czech Republic, where foster care prevails, elsewhere the placement in institutions unfortunately remains common. This is the case in India, where foster care is still not widespread among the population³, as well as in Lithuania and in Peru, where 95% of children over the age of nine years and adolescents appear to be living in an institutional environment.

In general, older children suffer from emotional problems and, in some cases, from neurological problems, which intensity depends on the time they have spent in institutions and on their age when they first entered them.

Furthermore, the disorders identified amongst adoptable children partially come from the environment, which they have grown up in. Addiction problems faced by some biological parents, for example, may considerably jeopardise the child's good physical and mental development, and prevents the development of sound affective bonds. A study undertaken by Lithuania amongst children adopted abroad aged between 10 and 17 years old⁴ reveals that these children are afraid of trusting new persons, given the losses and difficulties experienced in the past. They wish to be independent and to have a certain distance in relation to adults. 'These children have had a very hard childhood. On the

one hand, they remain children, who need attention and assistance. On the other hand, they are nearly adults with a determined character and a strong temperament'.

The child's preparation

As highlighted by Peru, the preparation of children for adoption is all the more important when they are older. In this country, the adoption professionals and those in the institution are responsible for this process, which they will adapt to the child's age and degree of maturity. In particular, the Peruvian Central Authority insists on the right of the child to express his opinion, which assumes particular importance in the case of adoption of older children.

In India, a specific handbook on the adoption of children with special needs has been drafted for several involved professionals⁵ (agencies and staff of institutions, such as social workers, nurses, teachers, psychologists, volunteers, etc). In particular, this handbook states that older children need to receive counselling and preparation with a view to their new life in a permanent family. For example, they must be able to have photographs of their prospective family and to gain knowledge of the language spoken by the adoptive family – an essential condition for their positive integration. Furthermore, the handbook states that these children must benefit from school education during the transition period, in order to be able to adjust to the schooling environment in their receiving country. In addition, it is advised that the professionals of adoption agencies teach the children some habits that may be different in this country in terms of food and hygiene, amongst others.

In Lithuania, adopted children benefit from preparation since 2011 – the year in which a training programme for the staff of children's homes was launched for this purpose.



In Chile, children are prepared by the psychosocial teams of the institution they are placed in, or through a specific programme set up by the Chilean Central Authority (*Servicio Nacional de Menores*). This programme – called *Programa de Intervención con Niños Institucionalizados y su Preparación para la Integración a Familia Alternativa a la de Origen* – provides the children with a therapeutic intervention aimed at easing their family integration, and includes, among other aspects, processes of preparation and support to those adults, who will assume the role of parents.

The feedback from older children adopted internationally

In the above-mentioned Lithuanian study, the children mention the huge shock experienced upon arrival in their adoptive family, their great pain and this feeling of loss of all connection with their country of origin, the persons they knew and their environment. In general, the children state they do not wish to stay there and do not really understand what adoption means, which raises, again, the issue of child preparation (random until 2011 in Lithuania) and the obtaining of their opinion. The situation is often made worse due to the frequent calls by the latter to members of their biological family or friends in the institution.

The study also highlights that older children usually remember the neglect, and sometimes even situations of exploitation and violence, experienced in the institution or foster family, which makes the process more complex. Furthermore, they are afraid of committing themselves to a relationship of lasting trust. This situation is changing very slowly and the child's adjustment is very progressive (as the child learns the language, makes friends, etc).

Indeed, language is an important obstacle, which makes it more difficult for the child to adjust to his new environment and school learning. The child often requires a lot of help from his parents and private teachers. About one year is necessary for child to learn the language well; his knowledge only becomes excellent after two to three years. Finally, 70% of the surveyed parents expressed their wish to establish or maintain bonds with the Lithuanian culture. Based on the personal accounts gained, once integrated, the children reject any connection with their country of origin and, with time, forget their mother tongue. It is only later that they remember some memories and wish to travel to Lithuania or to find members of their family.

References:

¹ DVD of the conference on sale at: <http://adoptionefa.org/index.php/component/content/article/36-generalites/618-dvd#DVD2014>.

² Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, India, Lithuania, Peru and South Africa.

³ However, actions have recently been taken to remedy this situation; see Monthly Review N° 179 of February 2014 and 180 of March-April 2014.

⁴ *Analysis of feedback on children over 10 years of age, adopted by foreigners*, State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. This analysis is based on the feedback from 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years, adopted internationally between 2009 and 2012. Available in English at the ISS/IRC.

⁵ Available in English at the ISS/IRC.



Post-adoption contact and the use of mediation

Lisa Parkinson – an accredited family mediator in the United Kingdom¹ – explains to us how mediation can facilitate post-adoption contact and agreements. She shares the experience of the Contact Mediation Service set up in London and emphasises the importance of a child-inclusive process.

Traditionally, the legal adoption of a child was a 'closed' arrangement that severed the child's ties with birth parents and transferred parental rights and responsibilities to the adoptive parents. It was assumed that continuing contact between the child and birth parents would undermine the stability of the adoption, possibly causing it to break down completely. But once the stigma of illegitimacy was removed, many unmarried mothers chose to keep their children, resulting in fewer babies being given up for adoption. Children placed for adoption were more likely to have been removed by a child protection agency from abusive or neglectful parents. These children were on average older than previously adopted children and, according to records in England and Wales in the 1990s, 50-66% of these children had some contact with their birth parent(s) or family. Their placement for adoption was often strongly contested by their birth parents. Disputes in court between birth parents and child protection authorities, or between birth parents and adoptive parents, made it difficult or impossible to reach negotiated solutions. With the growing use of 'open' adoption arrangements, professionals and researchers saw the need to facilitate agreed decisions over contact between adopted children and birth parents.

The need to facilitate negotiated solutions on post-adoption contact

The need to facilitate negotiated solutions on post-adoption contact coincided with the rapidly developing role of mediation in private family law, mainly in separation and divorce. The growth of family mediation stimulated interest in the application of mediation concepts and methods in adoption and other areas of child welfare. The Post-Adoption Centre (PAC), based in London, an independent agency experienced in providing counselling and other services to adoptive and birth parents and adopted people, saw a role for mediation to help negotiate new sets of relationships following adoption. In response to requests from adoptive and birth parents and

from professionals working in the field of adoption, PAC took the initiative to establish a Contact Mediation Service (CMS) to assist adoptive and birth parents to negotiate agreements on post-adoption contact.

Creation and first results of the CMS

A small-scale research study was undertaken to evaluate the outcomes and experiences of parents, who used the CMS during the first two years of its operation. The findings from this study were published in 1999². The CMS used a structured mediation model derived from Coogler and Haynes in the United States (also known as *la négociation raisonnée*). Coogler (1979) emphasised the importance of a clear structure with agreed procedures and rules, based on:

- joint sessions only (though with separate time for each party included);
- direct negotiation between the parties;
- limiting the issues to those for which decisions are needed for settlement to be reached (Roberts, 1997, p. 113).

During the two years of the study, 49 cases involving 62 children were recorded. 25 of these cases were dealt with by letter or telephone, without any meeting with birth or adoptive parents. A further 17 cases involved one or more initial meetings with birth or adoptive parents, but did not reach mediation. Only 8 of the 49 cases involved mediation meetings. The researchers carried out follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of the birth and adoptive parents, who had used the service.

Most of the parents thought their experiences and concerns had been listened to and validated by the mediators, who were able to maintain impartiality, but the parents had felt highly vulnerable and anxious. Many of them were reluctant to attend a joint meeting and, if they did so, the authority and control exercised by adoptive parents created power imbalances that undermined attempts to mediate. Whereas separated or divorcing parents have usually had a



relationship and most have lived together, birth parents and adoptive parents are usually strangers coming from 'dramatically different family and social backgrounds' (Kedward *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 25).

A structured mediation model requiring face-to-face meetings in a limited time-frame may not be the model best suited to negotiating post-adoption contact arrangements. Anxieties about such meetings may have been a major factor in the low take-up of the service, while the reluctance of adoptive parents to negotiate over contact was reflected in the low rate of agreements reached (just under one third of cases). Although the researchers concluded that they had found no evidence to support a particular approach, they noted that the average age of children in the study was nine years, yet the mediators had allowed adoptive parents to speak for their children and exclude them from the mediation. 'Parents confirmed that children's voices were not readily heard in the mediation process' (Kedward *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 24).

The child's right to have a voice and the benefits of child-inclusive mediation

The rights of a child of sufficient age and maturity to have a voice on matters concerning the child are upheld in international and domestic

Thus, mediation services need to expand and develop fast, if they are to help children and parents caught up in these complex family situations to communicate with each other in seeking to reach agreed, child-centred solutions.

law. They are referred to in national Standards and Codes of Practice for family mediators in the United Kingdom. There is not space here to consider how children can be consulted and included in mediation in appropriate and helpful ways, nor to summarise research findings from Australia and the United Kingdom on the benefits of child-inclusive mediation for children and for parents. The CMS that operated in London during the 1990s helped to draw attention to the needs and experiences of birth and adoptive parents and adopted children. Fresh approaches are needed that offer more flexible models of mediation with greater emphasis on listening to children. Post-adoption arrangements need to take account of children's wishes and feelings, without, however, giving them responsibility for decisions.

Facebook and social networking

The need for mediation to help resolve family matters, including post-adoption contact, has become more urgent, now that adopted children can make contact with birth families within hours or even minutes of conducting a search online. Some adopted children run away to birth parents they have just located through Facebook, or threaten to do so in arguments with their adoptive parents.

References:

¹ Lisa Parkinson is also Vice-President of the Family Mediators Association (England and Wales) and member of the ISS advisory group on the *Guide for Parents to international family mediation on relocation and parental child abduction*; contact: lisaparkinson@btinternet.com.

² Kedward, C., Luckock, B. and Lawson, H., 'Mediation and post-adoption contact', *Adoption and Fostering* 1999, Vol. 23, N° 3, pp. 16 – 2.

IN THE WORDS OF ADOPTEES

The story of a person of Colombian origins, who was adopted in 1974, at the age of six years, by Swedish parents (Extracts)

At six years old, one already has a certain understanding of things. I was anxious to be able to have parents one day. I knew that other children had parents and I felt this need in me. I do not remember many things from my life in Colombia before being adopted, but I remember that I lived with several different families and in several different institutions. I arrived on the eve of Christmas, with a group of 20 other children, whom I did not know. I had not received any information, nor preparation, as to what was going to happen to me (at the time, preparation for adoption was not developed in Colombia). I



remember feeling very stressed, I did not know what was going to happen. One of my reactions at the airport was to hide. I felt a real shock when I heard that I was going to be separated from the group of children and leave with two strangers. It was very cold and I had never experienced cold weather before. My parents, and particularly my dad, had learnt Spanish, which greatly helped us to be able to communicate. Subsequently, language was not a major obstacle, as my mind was so busy understanding what was happening in my life. My parents were old, they had already adopted a boy at the age of three months and had no experience of adoption of older children. At the time, parents were not prepared and had no expectations as to adoption. They had no idea as to *how this was going to and should happen*. Mine did not talk much – this being a characteristic of the Swedish culture – but had a lot of patience. This quietness and silence suited me, they gave me my space. It is not so much through words, but rather with time, that we learnt to know each other, very progressively. One of my major worries was food. I was undernourished when I arrived and I was always stressed to know what we would eat and if there was something to eat. I needed many years to integrate the idea of permanence, I carried within me my past experiences. It was like a ‘mark’ that followed me. Up until today, I continue thinking that things can change from one day to another, that nothing is set, which sometimes reassures me when things do not go well. After my arrival, and in the years that followed, I had no contact with Colombia. However, my parents were always very open in terms of my origins. They took me to meetings where there were other children, who had also been adopted. However, I did not like this and I asked them to no longer attend. Indeed, it stressed me to find myself with these other children, who had had the same experience as me, but who developed different strategies to adjust. I soon forgot Spanish. My objective was to integrate myself, to make friends, to be with my family. At 18, and encouraged by my parents, I wanted to learn Spanish again. My parents suggested that I go on a study trip to Colombia. That experience was crucial for me. It enabled me to understand many things about me, to find some pieces of my life’s puzzle again. Nowadays, I view my adoption and adoption in general as a positive thing that helped me personally. I maintain a strong bond with Colombia, but I never felt the need to know who my biological parents were. It is my daughter, who is now 12 years old, who asks me a lot of questions on this issue. According to me, adoption does not only affect the adopted person, but also the following generations.

SPECIAL SERIES: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND ADOPTION

Promoting the adoption of children with disabilities: Examples of promising practices

Throughout the world, civil society and governments are implementing strategies to promote the adoption of children with disabilities, both domestically and internationally.

Owing to the better care of children deprived of their family in their countries of origin, people wishing to adopt very young children through intercountry adoption are faced with years of waiting, not knowing whether their project will be successful or not. Although young healthy children are increasingly being adopted in their countries of origin, it is a different story for children with disabilities. Indeed, still too many of these children are placed in institutions without a family life project being even considered. In response to this phenomenon, associations have developed various strategies, such as awareness-

raising campaigns, in order to evolve the plans of prospective adoptive parents and to encourage the adoption of children with disabilities when this solution meets their needs.

Raising the awareness of prospective adoptive parents on the circumstances of children with disabilities

One of the obstacles for the adoption of children with disabilities is the lack of knowledge of the various disabilities that adoptable children suffer from and the disparity between the realities of intercountry adoption and the projects of prospective adoptive parents. In response, some



associations focus on raising the awareness of prospective adoptive parents to better understand the circumstances of children with special needs, including children with disabilities:

- The 'I and we' Parent-Child Centre in Lithuania, for example, developed a programme using educational videos. These videos are intended for local prospective adopters and are designed to help them better understand what is meant by the term 'special needs' and to encourage, when it is in his best interests, the child's domestic adoption (see Monthly Review Nº 02-03/2012).

- Another example of awareness-raising campaigns is from British Columbia. In this Canadian region, a quarterly newsletter presents the profile of children in the 'Waiting Child Program', all of whom have special needs, aimed at recruiting adoptive families and at increasing the visibility of these children.

Promising practices in the adoption process

An example of promising practices is Guatemala. A number of organisations actively work on the establishment of interesting projects to promote the adoption of children with special needs. Technical guidelines have been developed by the

The ISS/IRC welcomes the initiatives taken by these organisations and governments to better understand the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities and to improve the prospective adoptive parents' knowledge about them. Raising awareness about the reality of children with special needs in their countries of origin and in the receiving countries is a fundamental step in the implementation of the right of every child to a life adapted to his characteristics.

Reference:

¹ 'Más de 400 niños del programa Ángeles que Aguardan esperan ser adoptados' (in Spanish), *La República*, 3 May 2012, <http://www.larepublica.pe/03-05-2012/mas-de-400-ninos-del-programa-angeles-que-aguardan-esperan-ser-adoptados>.

Government to guide the professionals, who work with those parents interested in adopting children with special needs. In addition, the files of children with special needs are in a different colour so that they are easier to identify and may be treated as a priority. Finally, Guatemala is also acting in the search for domestic prospective adopters. For example, in information workshops, parents, who adopted a child with disabilities, are asked to describe their experiences in order to motivate other prospective adopters to make that choice.

In Peru, the *Angeles que aguardan* [Awaiting angels] programme aims to promote priority adoptions. This programme was implemented to reduce the number of special needs children living in institutions. Under this programme, the adoption process is much simpler and more direct. In addition, these children's prospective adoptive parents are not subjected to any quotas. A visual campaign has also been implemented. The *Angeles que aguardan* campaign generated results quickly: since 2005, 53 children with special needs have been adopted through this programme (see Monthly Review Nº 07-08/2012).

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **Ireland:** *Ensuring the rights of the Child and Family-Based Services*, IFCO European Regional Conference, Waterford Institute of Technology, Waterford, 26-29 August 2014. For further information, see: <http://www.conference.ifco.info>.
- **Lithuania:** *Children's Rights and Needs: Challenges to School, Family and Society*, 36th Annual Conference of International School Psychology Association (ISPA), Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, 15-18 July 2014. For further information, see: <http://ispakaunas2014.vdu.lt/index.php/ispa2014/ispa2014>.

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