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EDITORIAL

The preparation of prospective adoptive parents: Is it attuned to the development of intercountry adoption?

The increasingly longer waiting periods, the specific needs of adoptable children, the strengthened requirements of countries of origin, new technologies... these are the current issues of intercountry adoption, which all prospective adopters must be adequately prepared for, if this is not yet the case...

Intercountry adoption cannot escape from the speed, which the world develops, changes and shakes up mentalities and behaviours with. Challenges increase and require a permanent 'update' of the adoption process, starting with the preparation of the prospective adopters – the entry into the process, which deserves the maximum attention of countries and professionals.

A preparation that is accessible to all

Even though the importance of the preparation of prospective adopters no longer needs to be proven, as evidenced by its systematic inclusion on the agenda of the last three Special Commissions on the practical operation of the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and its inclusion in the final recommendations, some gaps remain. The brief overview provided on page 5 highlights the significant differences from one country to another. One can only congratulate those countries that have included the preparation of prospective adoptive parents in their legislation and have made it mandatory – a practice, which the ISS/IRC promotes and which, it believes, should become a rule. Furthermore, in some countries, the preparation is very unequal from one region to another – an inequality which must be fixed. Indeed, all prospective adoptive parents should be able to benefit systematically from quality preparation, irrespectively of their place of residence and their financial resources (see p. 8).

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A preparation respectful of all

First, respectful of the child, by providing him with parents, who are aware of the challenges that must be overcome, and who are suitable to respond to his individual needs. Faced with the particular needs of some adoptable children (older children, disabilities or illnesses, etc), the preparation must be adapted to the diversity of parental projects and must draw on innovative practices, such as the one developed in Belgium, where a specific component has been established for prospective adopters in the adoption of children with disabilities (see p. 7). A fair balance between classic and specialised preparation must, however, be found, in order to allow some prospective adopters to be supported in their specific parental project from the beginning, and for others to be able to widen their perspectives – one could then talk about a preparation that is respectful of the parents. This approach finds support in the creation of a bond and an attachment in the United Kingdom, where the consideration of specific features must be combined with the classic process (see p. 10). In order to prepare prospective parents well, the professionals must, on the other hand, be well equipped and trained, in particular, on the various forms of parentality and the challenges that they may raise. Finally, it must be a preparation that is respectful of the wishes of the children's countries of origin, which, for some of them, may even impose their requirements on the content of the preparation of prospective adoptive parents (see p. 5).

A preparation in harmony with its time/s

The significant lengthening of waiting periods and the increasing state of uncertainty as to the outcome of adoption projects put prospective adoptive parents to the test. In order to help them accept this reality, and transform these difficult moments in opportunities, occasional activities, such as conferences, book clubs, film viewings, should constantly be offered to them (see p. 8). Alongside the latter, individualised support should be available in order to avoid that prospective adopters despair and resort to alternatives that are not compliant with ethics in this field. A study undertaken by the ISS/IRC has shown that some accredited adoption bodies use Skype or the Internet to offer support to prospective adopters during the waiting period. Furthermore, at a time of change, the preparation must include intercountry adoption's emerging aspects, such as the positive impact or the risks linked to the resort to new technologies in the adoption process, open adoption and its implications, or at least, the management of greater openness in the information shared and the potential contacts between the actors in the adoptive triangle. The ISS/IRC will address this issue again very soon.

In the spirit of the HC-1993, the ISS/IRC encourages States to include the preparation of prospective adoptive parents in their set of priorities. A preparation that is accessible to all, geographically and financially, that is respectful of all and in tune with the current context of intercountry adoption, contributes to the implementation of the rights of the child, prevents difficulties and contributes to the establishment of a safe framework for the thriving of adoptive families.

The ISS/IRC team
May 2015



NEPAL: A POSITIVE APPROACH TO THE PROTECTION, ALTERNATIVE CARE AND ADOPTION OF CHILDREN IN THE AFTERMATH OF A NATURAL DISASTER

On 25 April 2015, an initial 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Nepal, leaving over 1.7 million children in need of help, according to UNICEF Nepal. However, the organisations in the country have made considerable efforts to ensure that the response and protection provided to these children are in line with international principles and standards and build on the lessons learnt in other emergency situations. In this context, ISS wishes to reiterate the relevant standards enshrined in the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, in particular para. 154, which states that *'the State (...) the international community and all (...) agencies providing or intending to provide child-focused services should pay special attention: (a) To ensure that all entities and persons (...) are sufficiently experienced, trained, resourceful and equipped (...); (b) To develop, as necessary, temporary and long-term family-based care; (c) To use residential care only as a temporary measure until family-based care can be developed; (d) To prohibit the establishment of new residential facilities (...); (e) To prevent the cross-border displacement of children (...); (f) To make cooperation with family tracing and reintegration efforts mandatory'*.

Indeed, in providing emergency alternative care, the recent Ebola crisis has offered some positive approaches: identification of children without parents or caregivers, immediate care and protection¹, issuance of a protocol and guidelines, amongst others² (for further information, see Monthly Review N° 189, February-March 2015). In a similar move, in Nepal, child-friendly spaces have been set up. These not only enable to address the trauma faced by the children through play and learning, but also to monitor their situation and to initiate family tracing procedures to ensure that they may be reunited with their families or relatives whenever possible.

Undoubtedly, a considerable number of children may have been separated from their families or orphaned following the earthquake in Nepal. In this regard, one may remember the dramatic processes taking place following the earthquake in Haiti, when a considerable number of children were airlifted out of the country rapidly, without reasonable time having been taken to ascertain whether they had indeed been orphaned. In addition, orphanages, which were already a gap in the adoption procedure in the country, practiced expeditious and irregular adoption procedures. In the present context, it therefore remains essential to remember the statements issued by the Hague Conference on Private International Law³, as well as by UNICEF – which represented a position shared by other organisations, including ISS⁴ – which clearly called for respecting international principles and standards in situations of emergency and for not undertaking premature, expeditious and irregular adoptions, but rather to focus and give priority to family reunification (for further information, see Monthly Review N° 08/2010, a special issue on intercountry adoption in emergency situations). In the spirit of the latter, SOS Children's Villages Canada, for example, promptly issued a statement explaining why intercountry adoption is not an appropriate option at this stage⁵. The Central Authority of the United States has also published an alert in this regard on its website⁶.

As mentioned above, it appears that child protection organisations in Nepal are also working to ensure that children who have been separated from their families following the earthquake are reunited with them, and not placed in orphanages unnecessarily, and UNICEF has been advocating against orphanage tourism in this context. Indeed, in addition to its humanitarian actions, UNICEF Nepal has been active in preventing harmful outcomes due to potential orphanage tourism in the country in the aftermath of the earthquake. Indeed, it has *'urge[d] those wanting to volunteer with #children in #Nepal, who are not qualified professionals, to reconsider. Unskilled volunteers use scarce resources and may cause more harm to children by not having appropriate skills and training. Further, there is potential for good intentions of volunteers to be exploited by those seeking to profit'*⁷. This series of initiatives from a variety of actors following the earthquakes in Nepal proves that the lessons learnt from other emergency situations in recent years are indeed shaping positive actions for the protection, alternative care and adoption of children following the earthquake in Nepal.

Finally, several international media have reported on the country's decision to suspend adoptions for a period of three months to prevent child trafficking - an announcement, which welcomed by the ISS/IRC, and which it intends to ascertain, to monitor closely and to further inform its readers about in forthcoming issues of its Monthly Review⁸.

References:

¹ UNICEF, 'More than 16,000 children lost parents or caregivers to Ebola - many are taken in by the communities: UNICEF', 6 February 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_79742.html.

² Better Care Network, Provision of Alternative Care to Children Affected and Infected with Ebola in Liberia (Draft), 28 September 2014, <http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=32576&themeID=1005&topicID=1033>.

³ The Hague Conference on Private International Law, Information Note: Haiti earthquake and intercountry adoption of children, 2010, http://www.hcch.net/upload/haiti_infonote_e.pdf.

⁴ UNICEF, Intercountry adoption, 31 July 2014, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html.

⁵ SOS Children's Villages Canada, International adoptions and the Nepal earthquake, <http://www.soschildrensvillages.ca/international-adoptions-and-the-nepal-earthquake-837>.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Notice: Children Affected by the Earthquake in Nepal, 1 May 2015, <http://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/country-information/alerts-and-notice/nepal15-05-01.html>.

⁷ UNICEF Nepal (including Facebook posts and updates), <http://unicef.org.np>.



⁸ 'Le Népal suspend les adoptions pour trois mois', *Le Figaro*, 27 May 2015, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2015/05/27/97001-20150527FILWWW00119-le-nepal-suspend-les-adoptions-pour-trois-mois.php>; 'Nepal suspende las adopciones tres meses para evitar el tráfico de niños', *AFP*, 27 May 2015, <http://www.afp.com/es/noticias/nepal-suspende-las-adopciones-tres-meses-para-evitar-el-trafico-de-ninos>. See also: UNICEF, Nepal Humanitarian Situation Report 6, 5 May 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Nepal%20Earthquake%20-%20Sitrep%20%236-%205%20May%202015.pdf>.

Further reading: 'Earthquake orphans: what Nepal can learn from Haiti', *The Conversation*, 5 May 2015, <http://theconversation.com/earthquake-orphans-what-nepal-can-learn-from-haiti-41165>; Child Rights International Network (CRIN), *CRINmail* N° 1427, 6 May 2015, <https://www.crin.org/node/41416>; 'Les enfants du Népal ont besoin de soutien, pas d'orphelinats', *Le Temps*, 18 May 2015, http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/b594de48-fcb0-11e4-a492-3cf978da05db/Les_enfants_du_Népal_ont_besoin_de_soutien_pas_dorphelinats.

BRIEF NEWS

First Regional Expert Consultation on Violence against Children and Care: Latin America and the Caribbean – December 2014

Led by an inter-agency group of UN agencies, governments and civil society (e.g. Special Rapporteur of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, NY-based Working Group on alternative care, the Government of Brazil, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Latin American and Caribbean Movement for Children, etc), attention to cross-cutting issues of violence and alternative care were the focus of an expert consultation in the this region. As a result of this expert meeting, a joint statement was submitted to the 21st Pan American Child Congress, which set the agenda for the next five years for the region, calling, in particular, for measures for child protection from violence as well as preventive measures to avoid placement in alternative care. The consultation was highly effective in ensuring that children in need of alternative care or at risk of so being, and subject to violence, were kept on the agenda of the Pan American Child Congress. Other regional consultations are in the pipeline, with the objective of having a similar impact on Governments and civil society.

Source: Further information available at: https://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/story/2014-12-15_1201 and <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=32842&themeID=1004&topicID=1029>.

ISS/IRC NEWS

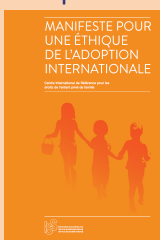
The International Social Service launches its Manifesto for Ethical Inter-country Adoption

ISS is pleased to share the publication of its Manifesto for Ethical Inter-country Adoption, which will replace the "Ethical Guide" published over a decade ago. In this Manifesto, ISS appeals, in one way or another to the practitioner's sense of ethics. Long considered a private matter rather than a mainly legal process, intercountry adoption has always raised moral issues. Building specifically on the underlying principles of the 1993 Hague Convention, the Manifesto seeks to promote ethical practices to better protect children and all those involved in adoption proceedings.

The Manifesto is available in English, French and Spanish and is downloadable at the following links:



[English¹](#)



[French²](#)



[Spanish³](#)

ISS encourages professionals to take the Manifesto into consideration in their work, and to disseminate it amongst their networks, in order to ensure that intercountry adoption remains a protection measure that is used only in the best interests of the child. For further information, please contact irc-cir@iss-ssi.org.



¹ http://issuu.com/issirc/docs/iss_manifesto_eng/1

² http://issuu.com/issirc/docs/iss_manifeste_fra/1

³ http://issuu.com/issirc/docs/iss_manifesto_esp/1

LEGISLATION

Two key elements for the preparation of a successful adoption

The benefits of preparation courses for prospective adopters are clear and numerous. For a successful adoption preparation, it is essential that receiving countries take into account the requirements laid down by certain countries of origin as well as the continuity of the preparation.

In accordance with Article 5.b of the HC-1993, the competent authorities of the receiving country should ensure that prospective adopters have received ‘*counselled as may be necessary*’. However, this freedom to decide the content of such advice has its limits when the countries of origin themselves impose specific requirements. In the spirit of cooperation of the HC-1993, receiving countries must ensure that they respect the conditions laid down by the country of origin: whilst some do not address the preparation, others impose it, and for some, it even constitutes a criterion for eligibility, *i.e.* they specify the exact content of the preparation. This is the case of the Chinese¹ and Russian authorities (see Monthly Review N°171 of April 2013). The present article only discusses the latter. Furthermore, it is essential that pre-adoption preparation is implemented throughout the process of adoption and until the arrival of the child.

The content of the preparation course: ¿Does it meet the established requirements?

Numerous receiving countries provide for compulsory preparation courses², which enable prospective adopters to have a comprehensive understanding of intercountry adoption today and to address some specific aspects (*e.g.* the child’s development; risks and problems linked to the needs of the specific child, such as malnutrition, violence, behavioural problems, etc). The duration of the course varies according to the country, but it is usually an average of 18-24 hours long³, which may be offered over several days or months. Depending on the country, it is the Central Authorities⁴, accredited adoption bodies⁵ or the social services⁶, which train and inform the prospective adopters.

However, it is a shame that, in some receiving countries, the courses only take place in

the early stages of the adoption process, sometimes before the assessment of the prospective adopters’ suitability to adopt. Thus, the courses can hardly focus on the specific conditions of the countries of origin, because they precede the completion of the adoption project. These courses, adapted to the characteristics of countries and to the profiles of the children, are often offered on an optional basis, at a later stage of the adoption process. Yet, meeting the requirements imposed by the countries of origin should not be optional but, on the contrary, should be considered as a means to promote the implementation of the HC-1993, one of whose central principles is international cooperation. In view of these shortcomings, it is therefore not surprising that the authorities of a country of origin, such as Russia, conduct the preparation of foreign prospective adopters themselves through obligatory courses of 30 to 80 hours.

An ongoing and appropriate preparation

In addition to this general aspect of the preparation, once the adoption project is set out, the prospective adopters should benefit from a preparation that adapts and evolves throughout the adoption process. This is particularly true considering the lengthy waiting periods. In this respect, there are some promising practices in certain receiving countries.

In New Zealand⁷, Chile⁸ and the United States of America⁹, for example, pre-adoption preparation and training take place at different stages of the process (including after obtaining the approval or even prior to the arrival of the child in the adoptive family). This model allows the prospective adopters to become more familiar with the characteristics and requirements of the country of origin. In the U.S.A., pre-adoption preparation is subject to a monitoring system,



because completion of the preparation course must be documented in a report.

Specific content

In most receiving countries, preparation for the care of a child with disabilities is often part of general preparation courses. Despite the increase in the number of adoptions of children with health problems, specific and compulsory courses do not necessarily exist. Nevertheless, in Italy¹⁰

and Sweden¹¹, some accredited adoption bodies organise courses that focus on the needs and challenges linked to the adoption of a child with special needs. Different techniques and modules are offered to the prospective adopters, in order to expand their knowledge and skills. Belgium has also developed an innovative tool in this field (see p. 6).

In addition to the fact that compulsory preparation of the prospective adopters should be systematically included in the legislation, it should also enable the latter to gain essential and specific knowledge related to the profile of the child and to the chosen country. This preparation should be provided, in particular, if so required by the country of origin and should be given on an ongoing basis throughout the adoption procedure.

References:

For further information; see: The Hague Conference on Private International Law, Intercountry Adoption Section, Country Profile, State responses: http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=publications.details&pid=6221&dtid=42.

¹ See: *Agence Française de l'Adoption*, <http://www.agence-adoption.fr/chine/3/>.

² For example: Belgium, Switzerland, the U.S.A., New Zealand, Australia, Luxembourg, Spain, Denmark, The Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Sweden.

³ For example, the U.S.A.: Minimum 10 hours.

⁴ For example: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Germany, France.

⁵ For example: Luxembourg, Switzerland, the U.S.A, Belgium.

⁶ For example: Italy, New Zealand.

⁷ In New Zealand, it is the accredited adoption bodies, which require the preparation of the prospective adopters throughout the procedure. See, for example: <http://compassionfororphans.org.nz/index.php/pre-adoption-education-and-post-adoption-support-programme>.

⁸ Chile's Adoption Law N° 19.620 provides for an ongoing preparation programme for prospective adopters: <http://www.sename.cl/wsename/estructuras.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=521>.

⁹ There is also a possibility for personalised preparation.

¹⁰ See: 'Preparing prospective adoptive parents to adopt children with special needs', ISS/IRC Monthly Review N° 182 of June 2014.

¹¹ See: 'Sweden: A specific assessment and preparation model for PAPs wishing to adopt a child with a disability and/or disease', Special Series of the ISS/IRC Monthly Review N° 02-03/2012.



Specific preparation for prospective adopters in the adoption of a child with disabilities: An innovative scheme from Belgium's French Community

Jean-Michel Charlier, the Coordinator of the accredited adoption body Emmanuel Adoption, who has specialised in the adoption of children with disabilities for over 30 years, presents an original scheme implemented in Belgium in relation to the preparation of prospective adopters for this specific type of adoption.

Although a minority, the adoption of children with disabilities constitutes a current challenge and calls for appropriate responses. Thus, in the course of the assessment of the adoption system in Belgium's French Community (see Monthly Review N°183 of July 2014), an hypothesis was raised that certain applicants for the adoption of a child with disabilities could be discouraged by the procedures in place within the framework of the general system of preparation. The Community's Central Authority and our accredited adoption body have attempted to develop a response aimed, not at removing some steps, but rather at adapting some of them, so that these potential parents feel, from the beginning, that their needs are understood. The simple fact of creating a specific pathway and informing applicants of its existence is also a way of underlining the adoption needs for this profile of children.

A necessary balance

The specific pathway put into place stays deliberately close to the 'classical' route. Indeed, it is essential that the process is not merely focused on the disability but that the child remains at the centre of this action. Of course, medical information will be necessary, but it is also important to keep in mind the child and the adult he will become, his strengths and personal experiences together with the tools which will allow the child, as well as the family, to live in the best possible conditions. The 'particularity' should not be a divider between the adopter and the adoptable child, nor should it be put to one side, the aim is to 'cross' and join each together. In such a pathway, it is advisable to leave room or indeed even to 'cultivate' a certain impulse from the heart, even if this will waver due to some doubts. The information provided will shed some

light on areas which have remained obscure.

Work on the openness and the limitations of the adoption project

As for all the candidates after registration with the Community's Central Authority, the journey begins with a preparation, in which the first two sessions have been adapted. During these special sessions, introduced within the framework of the new scheme, we initially check the information gathered from the applicants by deconstructing certain misconceptions. At their request, the applicants are informed about the particularities of the children and the consequences of such an adoption project on their daily life, in order to confirm that it corresponds to what they are open to and also to their limitations.

Even if our wish is to place the child at the centre of the process when we talk about the adoption of children with special needs, the initial questions primarily concern the specific features of the disability. This attitude is reinforced by certain countries of origin, which require the applicants to immediately choose from a list of disabilities or illnesses. Questions, which come up frequently among the applicants, are: Can we choose? How can we express our limitations? Thus, we counsel on the need to deviate from the precisions of their original plan and, when we work together, it will always be through information rather than persuasion. Other questions frequently asked are: 'When we are no longer here, what will become of our child?' 'Will his/her brothers and sisters have to assume the care?', 'What will be the adopted child's capacities for future autonomy?'. Our experiences of supporting adopted children, who are now adults, demonstrate that it is essential to prepare for the future. As for all adoptive parents, the



challenge will be to let go and to help the young adult to achieve his autonomy in a manner, which is more or less structured according to each case.

Meeting witness families

The second step is to meet with witness families. Experience demonstrates the importance of this encounter. These 'witness' families are chosen, not on a criterion of 'success', but on their ability to share their experience together with all the joys and difficulties. Following these meetings, the applicants are invited to provide feedback and discuss to what extent the information received has helped them to confront the reality. These exchanges are opportunities to put the information received into context and to direct certain remarks.

Collective awareness-raising

To complete their preparation, applicants for the adoption of a child with disabilities join a group of applicants on a 'classic' pathway and attend three sessions of collective awareness-raising. These meetings are an opportunity to reflect on the specificity of the adoption (issues of

abandonment, attachment challenges, etc). Within the framework of our post-adoption monitoring, we have noted that, more than the disability itself, it is these issues which are central to the concerns of parents.

A non-exclusive scheme

In no way does this specific scheme exclude the fact that the accredited adoption body mentions the adoption of children with disabilities to all applicants during the 'classic' information sessions. The domestic and international context of adoption encourages us to undertake this type of awareness-raising. Even if the majority of applicants are not ready to consider this route, they are nevertheless advised about the existence of this alternative and that it is just as able to respond to the encounter of two wishes, even if it involves taking the steeper path. With the purpose of enabling the applicants' project to evolve based on the information received, through 'bridges' between the 'classic' and the 'specific' preparation have been considered in both directions.

Although this new scheme is still in its early stages (implemented since early September 2014) and it is too early to talk about results, it has been developed on the basis of experience and with tools, which are already proven. Our hope is that it allows more families to open up to this type of adoption, in a free and informed manner, for the ultimate benefit of these children, who are waiting for a family and a special place to develop and to integrate into society.

Reference:

For further information, please contact Emmanuel Adoption: www.emmanueladoption.be and info@emmanueladoption.be.

READERS' FORUM

Thoughts on parental projects within the current context of adoption

In this interview, Nathalie Parent – who is the President of Enfance & Familles d'Adoption (EFA) – has kindly agreed to share the thoughts and experiences exchanged at EFA's most recent conference titled 'Quels projets parentaux pour l'adoption aujourd'hui ?' [What parental projects for adoption today?].

1. Is the support for parental projects in adoption attuned to the profile of adoptable children?

French legislation does not provide for any obligation to support adoption applicants. Nonetheless, one may currently observe that parental projects are not, or are little,

attuned to the profile of adoptable children, with most of them relating to a healthy child under the age of three or four years. The applicants often find themselves alone after receiving their suitability certificate, with a project that is sometimes unachievable, and the temptation to overbid to be able to achieve it, without any true



reflection and preparation, and with a risk of jeopardising the adoption following the child's arrival.

In relation to domestic adoption, there are, however, some relevant initiatives in some General Councils (i.e. the governmental bodies at the level of the French departments (GC)) or organisations. The adoption department within the GC of the Saône and Loire has set up a preparation scheme for applicants prior to their assessment. Some very precise information is provided on the profile of adoptable children in France and worldwide. Following these meetings, 30 to 40% of the applicants do not confirm their project. Once they have been granted the suitability certificate, this same department organises preparation sessions on the basis of the tools developed by J. Lemieux (see Monthly Review N° 172 of May 2013).

2. How are the prospective adopters supported in the development of their parental project? Are alternatives offered?

In France, despite repeated demands on behalf of the associations of adoptive parents, amongst others, there is no mandatory preparation for parenthood, like there exists in other countries. The support provided is very disparate across the territory. The GC of the Marne meets the prospective adopters individually, supports them systematically and periodically once they have been granted their suitability certificate and meets with them again at least once a year. Furthermore, the prospective adopters may benefit from the support offered by EFA in nearly all departments.

As for the alternatives to adoption, these are almost nonexistent. If the studies are positive, the legislation does not allow to reject a suitability certificate on the basis of the adopters' older age, or the lack of adjustment of their project. These will be granted a suitability certificate, which they will not be able to use, and it is only at the conclusion of the latter that they will become aware of this and will then move towards other parental projects.

3. How are the preparation and support offered to prospective adopters adapted to the increasingly longer waiting periods?

If the applicants are approved by the *Agence Française de l'Adoption* or by an accredited adoption body, the support provided is incumbent upon the latter (see <http://www.agence-adoption.fr/lafa-vous-accompagne/se-preparer-pendant-lattente/>). EFA also undertakes some preparation at the level of some departments or nationally (http://adoptionefa.org/images/FORMATIONS/2015_stage_reflexion.pdf) and systematically offers support to its members in each department: readings, conferences, group therapies, meetings, etc. The objective is to avoid leaving the prospective adopters alone during these years, in which everything is suspended, during which it is difficult to anticipate the future beyond this adoption, in which the relatives and persons close to them only understand with difficulty, and turn away from, their project.

4. Could you give us some examples of new forms of parenthood?

In France, like elsewhere, not all the children, who are state orphans, are adoptable from a psycho-emotional perspective; for other children placed during all their childhood and adolescence, their family remains absent. They may be called children 'distanced from their parentage', thereby raising the following issue: who will be a family at the age of 25? The head of the GC of the Ain department wishes for each young person to have one or several families in order to understand what a family is, and in order for him to, one day, be able to build one himself. With this objective in mind, work is undertaken with children and families, who may respond to their needs.

Amongst the concrete examples developed by this GC, it is worth mentioning the case of two 11-year-old sisters, whose mother had died and in relation to whom, none of the potential fathers expressed a wish to commit. The children did not want to be placed in a foster family, nor in a children's homes. The department therefore identified grandparents for them, who had given up on their adoption project, given their older age. Another interesting situation is the adoption of a child whilst maintaining the bonds with his grandmother, whom the professionals asked the following question: are you able to adopt this couple as the parents of your grandchild? These



new options entail abandoning the classic scheme and giving priority to a feeling of belonging that enables the child to place himself in a story.

Another example: that of children, whose parents have an intellectual disability, and whose parental responsibility cannot be fully delegated (Law of 2007). The partial delegation of parental responsibility to a trustworthy third party is another form of parenthood to adoption: joint or shared parenthood.

5. Do you believe that the professionals, who support the prospective adopters, are sufficiently trained and informed?

Differences are noticeable depending on the GC. Some are certainly trained and provide very precise information relating to the profile of adoptable children, their characteristics, their living conditions in countries of origin or the most common illnesses in a specific country. In other GCs, the information is almost nonexistent, given that there is no department focusing on adoption.

The applicants' preparation for adoptive parenthood must become a rule. One of the questions currently raised is: Why are adopters going abroad to adopt children with special needs when these same children in France are waiting for parents, whom we are struggling to find? Adoption actors are numerous; in a context of lack of legal reform – which is currently not on the table – it is only through training, by sharing the knowledge and resources, each in its function and at its level, that the applicants will be prepared to become the parents of these children, whom they are entrusted with in France and internationally.

SPECIAL SERIES: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND ADOPTION

Finding permanent alternative families for children with disabilities: Linking and matching

'In family-finding, a match is a relationship constructed artificially out of necessity. It is a social experiment'. Jennifer Cousins, a Consultant and Trainer in Fostering, Adoption and Disabled Children kindly shares her many years of experience in this brief article.

In a previous article in Monthly Review N° 190 of April 2015, the focus was on creating a pool of suitable families for a whole range of children, including disabled children: the recruitment stage. Here, the next step is explored, namely, matching the right family with each individual child¹. All of this complex process can usefully be divided into two phases: **linking** and then **matching**. A match cannot be made without first creating a link.

Linking phase

Linking is where a potential connection between *this* family and *this* child is identified. Links can be achieved through one of two different methods:

a) The social workers cross-match data about the child and potential families. Here, the family is helped to build a hypothetical profile of the 'kind of child' they wish to consider (age, gender, etc),

including a range of disability features. Each child's needs are similarly documented and the profiles and wishes of families are assessed against these. Or:

b) Families themselves respond to information about children, using profiles, photographs, videos, 'adoption parties'² – and then suggest a connection. Here, the prospective family, rather than the social worker, drives the process, and 'chemistry' plays a vital part. For further information on all these methods, see www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop.

Matching phase

The process does not end with the linking. In many respects, a good match is where the needs of the child and the needs of the adults are mutually met to a significant extent³. Assessing this is complex, especially where there are ethnic



sensitivities. But the research-evidence base for this process is lacking⁴, and social workers must rely on highly-developed practice skills, guided largely by the lessons from adoption placement disruptions. We have to accept that to a large extent, matching remains a social experiment, and there is no such thing as the perfect match.

Disabled children and ‘matching’

In line with an anti-discriminatory and inclusive approach to family-finding, it is the author’s contention that matching on behalf of a disabled child is the same as matching for all children. However, some specific suggestions are offered:

- If a prospective family responds (either through photographs, videos or ‘real life’) to a disabled child, who was not the ‘kind of child’ they had hypothetically envisaged, it is important to take this possibility of a link seriously. Falling in love happens in surprising ways. But to turn this into a sound ‘match’, more information-sharing and assessment is required.

- Not only those people with ‘disability experience’ can successfully parent a disabled child: many people can do this if they are well-informed and supported.

- Similarly, younger people without parenting experience can do well: they tend to be more flexible; but support systems are important.

- There is some evidence that disabled children are not proposed for adoption or permanent fostering to the same degree as their not-disabled counterparts; that they are placed disproportionately with single carers; and that

black disabled children tend to be placed with white families; thus, professional vigilance is needed.

- Approving a disabled child simultaneously for adoption and permanent fostering avoids delay, and outcomes are equally good. Foster placements can turn into very successful adoptions.

Lessons from disruptions: Understanding the risks

It is well known that children, who have had the following experiences, are more at risk of placement breakdown: a history of neglect, poor attachment, sexual abuse, exposure *in utero* to drugs and alcohol, ‘preferential rejection’ by a parent, prior disruption. A child’s disability itself does not create a risky placement, but there are associated risk factors, such as being separated from a non-disabled sibling; inadequate information being given to the prospective family about the child’s condition and prognosis; lack of support systems, especially where the child’s disability brings increased stresses and demands; the presence of a single birth child in the prospective family – especially where close in age. These issues all need to be taken into consideration when assessing a potential match. To sustain a complex placement, it is even more essential when placing a child with disabilities that substantial ongoing support is provided by the agency. Matching is a risky business. But without risk there would be no placements.

References:

¹ Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, para. 118.

² Adoption Parties or Activity Days are fun events where prospective adopters meet a range of children who need families.

³ Cousins, J., *Ten Top Tips for Making Matches*, BAAF, London, 2001 (see the matrix on pp. 106 – 109).

⁴ Quinton, D., *Rethinking matching in adoptions from care: a conceptual and research review*, BAAF, London, 2012 .



FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **United Kingdom:** **a)** *Preparation Course for prospective adopters interested in concurrent care*, BAAF, Belfast, 31 July and 27 August 2015; **b)** *2, 3, or 4? Could I? Should I? Adopters Considering Sibling Groups*, BAAF, London, 18 August 2015 and Belfast, 22 August 2015. For further information, see: <http://www.baaf.org.uk/training/events?page=3>.
- **United States of America:** **a)** *Changing the Picture of foster care and adoption*, 41st Annual Conference, North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), 29 July – 1 August 2015. For further information, see: http://www.nacac.org/conference/NACAC_conf_flyer.pdf; **b)** *FFTA 29th Annual Conference on Treatment Foster Care*, Foster Family-based Treatment Association (FFTA), Denver (Colorado), 2-5 August 2015. For further information, see: http://www.imis100us2.com/ffta/FFTA/Conference/New_FFTA_Content/Conference/Conference.aspx?hkey=9543eb6f-dd64-48b3-bb47-dd0f1258e077.

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