



adopt compassion for us
finding belonging with each other

Mr Roderick Best
Director, Special Projects
Family & Community Services

Dear Rod,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and Rebecca to discuss the new Institute of Open Adoption. It was very interesting to hear the proposed details in respect to potential services available within the Institute.

We have put together our comments in response to the key issues outlined in the Issues paper and from the perspective of how it would help and assist current and future adopted people. As Adopt Compassion for Us is not acquainted with the foster system, we will not respond to that aspect but will talk in general terms around the lifelong affects of adoption, now known.

We would see the Institute of Open Adoption providing the following services specifically, in the area of adoption for the community:

Search Service

- Provide search service to adopted people to help them access records, without relevant identifying information being withheld.
- Ensure this is a free service, with highly skilled researchers who are empathic and non-bureaucratic.

Research Service

- Evidence-based research into the affects adoption on the adopted child and how these affects, can be minimised, negotiated and navigated throughout the child's young life, in adolescence through to adulthood.
- Subsequent trauma and its' lifelong legacy.
- Research the history of adoption within Australia, particularly relevant how adoption was seen as a means of child labour within families.
- The institute will develop evidence-based resources for children to assist with managing the traumatic fallout from adoption ie; the primal wound.
- Adopt Compassion for Us would be happy to assist with developing these resources.
- Evidence-based research is conducted by people with lived experience for the most pertinent results to be obtained.

EDUCATION SERVICE

Community Awareness

- Raise awareness in the community of the affects of adoption on the child, as a lifelong legacy.
- Raise awareness of PTSD as a possible diagnosis applicable to some adopted children/adults.
- Raise awareness in the community of how being adopted can affect holding down a job, buying a house, having a family, developing strong ongoing relationships and a foundational structure to create life success.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Education to Prepare Adoptive Parents for Adoption

- Foster an attitude of openness within the adoptive family to help the child learn about their biological family and cultural heritage.
- Prepare adoptive parents to better navigate the child's experience, improve skills in validating their adoptive child.
- Educate them about adoption trauma issues that may arise such as, grief, rejection, loss of identity, shame, guilt etc. "Don't force we are your forever family" and "we hearted you on the child."
- Provide them with guidelines on how to talk to their child about adoption.
- Educate them about adoption loyalty, how an adopted child may feel torn/divided between two families.
- Educate them about possible feelings of discomfort, jealousy, feeling they may lose the child if they meet their biological parents and how to deal with such feelings.
- Educate adoptive parents that saying to the adopted child, "we are your forever family", "we hearted you", or "you should be grateful" is not what an adopted child likes to hear.
- Adoptive parents need to be supported in acknowledging the trauma the child has been through.
- Offer education and support to adoptive parents on how to discuss adoption with their child from a younger age.
- Adoptive parents must put the child first, rather than hold an underlying agenda where they are actually threatened by the birth parents involvement and contact with the child.

- They could be undermining the birth parents on a subtle level, which places the adopted child in a difficult situation.

Further Support for Adoptive Parents

- Offer ongoing support to adoptive parents in terms of guidelines, workshops, home visits and counselling sessions

Adopted Children

- Allow the child to know they are adopted from a young age.
- Education from a young age of the meaning of being adopted.
- Assisting the child in understanding what adoption means and providing support for the child in navigating the communication process as they grow and develop.
- Let them be supported in raising issues and how to communicate their 'honest truth', with their adoptive parents.
- Need to be aware how easily the child can be manipulated, by both adoptive and biological parents (based on their personal concerns, fears and their own agenda).
- Support Services increased awareness, this may not be in the best interests of the child.
- Raise awareness through education and dispel myths that it is shameful to be adopted, or the child was not loved.

Adopted Adults

- Recognise the adopted child/adult is a person in their own right, with the ability to make decisions in response to their experience of being adopted.
- Help them to find the words to verbalise their experience safely, to navigate the associated trauma.
- Empower adopted people to find their voice and speak about their personal experience without fear of shame and reprisal from either biological parents, or adoptive parents.
- Raise awareness through education and dispel myths that it is shameful to be adopted, or they were not loved.

Strong Recommendation:

Discontinued use of term, 'adoptee'.

Learn from Past Mistakes

- Avoid making mistakes as in past adoptions ie; no forced adoptions.
- Include the history of adoption, as a key factor requiring community awareness.
- Raising awareness in the community that Cultural & identity loss is applicable to all children, in respect to adoption.
- And, removal from any original family constitutes cultural and familial loss.
- Perhaps having a gallery/museum section to the Institute would be of great assistance, as an educational component that is non-confrontational in getting its' message across.
- Adopt Compassion for Us would be available to consult on the creation of a permanent exhibition space. It should be designed with a view to include the history of adoption, for people to learn from past mistakes.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHO HAVE ADOPTED, OR ARE ADOPTED WITH THE RIGHT SERVICES

Post Adoption Support Service

PARC does an amazing job in terms of counselling, with limited resources. Their model of care is very appropriate in providing support services. They offer the following:

- Ongoing retreats.
- Yearly, for adopted children/adults to come together to discuss and heal from their experiences.

Adopt Compassion for Us

- In my Art Therapy groups people have often stated, this is the first time they have met another adopted person and been able to speak freely about adoption for the first time. Non-adopted people have attended and shown a keen interest in hearing more about the adopted person's experience.

These types of services are invaluable in bridging the gap in services available. However, current funding is insufficient to be able to offer the resources and services required to cater for the ongoing needs required.

RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER

Adoption can be a way of providing a stable, nurturing, safe home for life.

Adopt Compassion for Us is not opposed to adoption per se however, we would like to see improvements to the management of the process and its' impact on future children who are adopted.

Refer 3.6:

Every child should grow up in a harmonious, loving environment. P.21

That the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, [and that as a result] each State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin, [and yet] intercountry adoption.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

Adoption is rarely suitable for any child, but has developed as a consequence of certain issues within the family and society resulting in a need for adoption to take place.

ESSENTIAL:

- All adopted children require regular checks on the child – every six to 12 months – to ensure the child is not being abused.
- Historically, there have been many cases where adopted adults report they experienced terrible abuse happening in their adoptive family.

Page 8:

“It is clear that adoption is rarely suitable for an Aboriginal child.”

- Adoption is rarely suitable for any child, but has developed as a consequence of certain issues within the family and society resulting in a need for adoption to take place.

Issue 2: Core Issues undertaken by the Institute.

- To provide ongoing services to assist the child in understanding its situation until 18 years of age, if and when the child requires help in this way.
- Rosie Batty has endorsed art therapy as a significant tool to assist with domestic violence. And, recommends Emerge ~ Women and Children's Support Network, in Melbourne. (refer: <http://emergesupport.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Annual-review-2014.pdf>)
- Open Adoption will need to consider post adoption resources also.
- This is a critical area requiring care and is currently underfunded.

IMPORTANT:

- Ensure the institute will be independent and not part of FACS.

Issue 3: More information required. What are the objectives of the Institute?

Issue 5: Expert evidence by people with lived experience is required here.

Issue 6: To ascertain what the adopted children of the future need can be obtained by speaking with adopted people with lived experience.

It is also possible to have discussions with young children, they are aware enough to be able to have input in any decision-making that affects their future lives.

Giving them input into the direction their lives take from a young age on “what is helpful? What is most useful? How can they best be supported as a result of not living with their birth parents?” is strongly advised. Some opportunities to discover may include:

- Filming children response to specific question.
- Follow up study, observe and work with them.
- Managing crisis time during adolescence.

Issue 8: Specific powers as an independent body?

- Access to private identifying/non-identifying information.
- There is no privacy. Strangers once again have access to our information that we do not have.
- Privacy, what is it exactly? Why do people have access to our private information when we do not? This needs to be questioned.

Refer Issue 13:

Adopted Adults have great concerns over their Birth Certificates being altered and not having access to who their parents are.

- It is advised that Birth certificates are not amended.
- Option 1: Two birth certificates are issued to the adopted child and the child's name given by the birth parents is to be kept.
- Option 2: Alternatively, and preferred the Original Birth Certificate includes four parents to accurately reflect the nature of adoption.
- While there is a need for legalities to formalize the adoption process, creating an illegal document, by not recognizing the Birth Parents on the original Birth Certificates creates a legacy of mistrust for the Adopted Child.

3.1 What are the key elements of adoption that the institute is to address?

The *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption 1993*, while focussed on intercountry adoption, sets out in Article 26 core elements of any adoption:

- a) the establishment of a legal parent-child relationship between the child and his or her adoptive parents
- b) the legal parent-child relationship is one in which parental responsibility is exercised by the adoptive parents for the child
- c) there is a termination of the pre-existing legal relationship between the child and his or her mother and father.

IMPORTANT

Legalities vs. what the child wants, which is a relationship with the parent, as is most often the case.

- The roots and where a person comes from is critically important to the ongoing development of the child and must be at the forefront of consideration.
- Do not infer the child is born to the parents, this is confusing and negates their heritage, birth cultural and familial.
- Ensure records are accurately maintained, by all workers. There are some appalling inconsistencies, mistakes, judgements made by professional workers in many instances.

3.2 What are the elements of open adoption? P. 15

- Relationships need to be developed based on safety. Professional people who are skilled in communication should be invited to mediate this process.
- High-level mediation skills required.
- Recognition needs to be given to the cultural identity of non-indigenous people also.

We agree with the importance and significance of all points as follows:

Open adoption is where the adoptive arrangements promote both the building of a relationship between the birth and adoptive families through ongoing contact and also the sharing of information and conversations between the birth and adoptive families about the adoption arrangement.

Open adoption provides benefits for the child by providing opportunities to:

- Honestly understand their background.
- Develop relationships with people who are likely to be significant in their life.
- Assist in the development of their identity.
- Remove elements of the unknown and of mythologising about what the child's birth family was like.

Particularly Important and Key:

To provide an atmosphere of non-judgement, towards birth parents.

- Family succession planning.
- Foster open adoption, strong, positive communication rather than, 'Clean break model'.
- Removing illegitimacy stigma.
- Being adopted created a new stigma.
- Welfare and best interest of the child sacrosanct.

Additional Point:

'Studies have indicated that adoption provides stronger attachments to carers, better developmental outcomes and 'higher levels of emotional security, a stronger'.

My research indicates this is not the case, adoption affects belonging, as attachment has been broken at a critical point of contact, between mother and child. In many cases, this breaking of attachment can lead to an inability to form satisfying and fulfilling relationships for many adopted people over their lifespan.

Many thanks for the opportunity to meet with you and respond to the Issues Paper in respect to this critically important topic.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

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Adopt Compassion for Us

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