

31/07/15

Special Projects
Safe Home For Life
Department of Family and Community Services
Locked Bag 4028
Ashfield NSW 2131



Dear Michael Coutts Trotter,

CREATE Foundation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Issue Paper- Establishing an Institute of Open Adoption.

CREATE advocates for measures facilitating stability of placements in out-of-home care and permanence in the relationships experienced by children and young people who are not able to live with their birth parents. Permanence can be achieved by reunification with family, legal guardianship, and adoption (Akin, 2011). If adoption is chosen as the most appropriate course of action in an individual case, CREATE supports the view that the decision must be based on what would be in the best interests of the child or young person (Cuthbert & Quartly, 2010). (For further information and a list of references see the CREATE Position Paper: Adoption (2014) –attached.)

Based on our consultations with children and young people with a care experience and strong academic research we recommend the following areas to be considered in the development of the tender document for the Institute.

CREATE Foundation recommends that the Institute for Open Adoption:

1. Ensures that organisations involved have a proven record of consultation and research with children and young people, and understands the rights of children and young people;
2. Protects and respects our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, acknowledging our past histories;
3. Demonstrates a commitment to diversity. For example, maintaining open and non-discriminatory views to ensure that the Institute is culturally literate and appropriate in all aspects of its work, regardless of the race, religion, culture, and sexual and gender diversity of the children and young people who are adopted, their biological families, and those seeking to become, or becoming, adoptive parents;
4. Is a point of contact for children and young people who are being, or have been adopted, where they can receive child friendly information that relates to the legislation, policy and decision making process required of open adoption;
5. Is a point of contact for children and young people who are being, or have been adopted, and require additional support around the short and long term outcomes of open adoption. This institute may be able to provide this support, or able to refer to a reputable organisations that could provide this specific support;

6. Is a point of contact for children and young people who are being, or have been adopted, and have made the decision that they would like to maintain contact with biological family and are having challenges seeing their biological siblings, parents or extended family and require intervention or support;
7. Ensures that there is support available for young people who have been adopted and wish to access their files and information prior to adoption if they are having challenges with the process;
8. Supplies child friendly information about how to maintain an 'open' relationship with biological family if they choose to, as well as provide therapeutic workshops, support groups, and a safe space for children and young people to be able to address their needs and rights to maintain a supportive and safe relationship with both their biological and adoptive families, to ensure their culture and history is not forgotten;
9. Provides education/training and support to adoptive families to make sure they are aware of the process that is required to ensure the 'open' part of open adoption is adhered to in consultation with the child or young person;
10. Develops strategies to address the stigma of adoption and open adoption to the broader communities of NSW, including education within schools;
11. Has the opportunity to access information or data, though ensuring that this process is strict and safe for all parties involved;
12. Reports to an identified body that governs their performance and outcomes to ensure that this institute is performing and supporting the people that this affects most; the children and young people;
13. Supports and reflects all aspects of family inclusion to ensure that they best meet the needs and rights of the child or young person;
14. Is an independent body, which could allow for the institute to provide individual advocacy, if needed, to support children and young people who are being, or have been adopted.

CREATE supports research as being part of the process and recognises and reinforces the importance to develop a rigorous evidence base that should include the voices of children and young people as a cornerstone of good practice. Research that occurs within the Institute should have input from children and young people where appropriate. ***CREATE proposes the following areas of research for the Institute to consider:***

1. A child or young person's perspective on what open adoption means to them, and the differences of out-of-home care to open adoption;
2. How organisations that process adoptions come to the decision that open adoption is in the best interests for the child or young person;
3. Does open adoption improve placement stability;
4. A young person's perspective of what the 'open' means in open adoption. Potentially a longitudinal study of biological family contact, or qualitative study that explores the relationships that young people have or have not had with their biological family;
5. The effects on sibling contact, especially if not all siblings are adopted, and there are siblings still placed with biological family, or in out-of-home care;

6. A young person's perspective on the meaning of belonging, and belonging to a family;
7. Acknowledging the assumption that when a young person has been removed from biological family there has been significant trauma for the child or young person. What interventions and support are required during the adoption process to ensure the young person's recovery from trauma? What are the impacts for the child or young person who has been adopted to ensure that their trauma is appropriately dealt with, and what impact does this have on the relationship with adoptive and biological family relationships.

CREATE Foundation encourages these recommendations to be considered in the tender for the Institute of Open Adoption.

Yours Sincerely,

Danielle Schmid
NSW State Coordinator
CREATE Foundation