

Post Adoption Resource Centre

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Dear Rod and Rebecca

Thank you for consulting PARC and meeting with Jane Adams and myself regarding the Issues Paper on establishing an Institute of Open Adoption. We have tried to summarise our discussion in our response below.

The Benevolent Society's Post Adoption Resource Centre was established in 1991 following the enactment of the NSW Adoption Information Act 1990. PARC has provided specialist services to over 70, 000 people affected by adoption, including adopted people, birth parents, adoptive parents, and other family members, whether the adoption occurred recently or many decades ago. Specifically PARC provides: counselling; post adoption search and reunion and support through an intermediary service; information and resources including research into adoption related issues; groups; training and community education.

In any discussion of adoption, it is important to acknowledge the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child especially Article 9 which states that a child will not be separated from their parents unless it is necessary and in the best interests of the child and, when this occurs, the right of the child to contact with both parents. Following from this, for positive outcomes in open adoption, the needs of the child, parents and other family members must be addressed.

Issue 1: How should the proposed institute become a leader in the development of best practice for open adoption?

- The Institute should be an independent body that is not representing one particular interest group or viewpoint about adoption.
- The Management Group should be diverse and include academics, practitioners and parents (adoptive and birth) & adopted people.
- The Institute should be connected to a leading research facility, most likely a University.
- The focus should be on facilitating local research on adoption and developing a centre of knowledge for the community.

Issue 2: What are the core activities that should be undertaken by the institute?

1. Research Centre

- current and past open adoptions.
- both longitudinal and retrospective studies
- who is adopted
- investigating the needs and outcomes for the child, their parents (adoptive and birth) and other family members

Note: Adoption is a lifelong intervention carried by all across the life span. The impacts of adoption are felt throughout life at various stages and to varying degrees by all parties. Positive relationships require commitment, engagement, trust and access to support.

2. Resource Centre & Clearinghouse

- The Institute should strive to be a Centre that collects and disseminates high quality research, information and resources.

3. Education and Training

- Focussing on accumulated knowledge and best practise for professionals.

4. Expert Resource

- The Institute could be called upon to provide information/ research that may be able to assist the Children's and Supreme Courts in decision making about a child. To remain independent, and so as not to spend all its resources in Court, it should not provide assessment of individual cases.

Issue 3: What is the most appropriate service delivery model for the proposed institute to achieve its objectives and why?

- Independent of FaCS
- Develop a partnership involving a research body (such as a university) and an NGO.

Issue 4: What needs to be included in the tender process so the institute is in a sound position to receive funds from a combination of philanthropy, grants and fee for service?

- A clear statement about ongoing funding.
- Secure funding that reflects that establishing the Institute and relevant research and resources is a long term activity.
- To attract quality tenders, organisations need to be able to offer security and continuity for quality staff.
- Provide incentives and support for Masters and PhD candidates to encourage the long term production of quality publications
- An over reliance on philanthropy will compromise the Institute in practise and longevity.

Issue 5: Should the institute play a role in the evaluation of individual interventions and the provision of expert evidence in individual matters?

- No. The Institute could provide relevant research and information to inform decision makers.
- The Institute should remain independent of assessing individual outcomes so that it can remain impartial in its research activities.
- Additionally, given current experience, this activity would absorb all of the Institute's time and resources.

Issue 6: What priority areas of applied research should be addressed by the tender?

- Longitudinal and retrospective studies regarding past adoptions, particularly addressing outcomes and needs.
- Undertaking literature searches and reaching out to international institutes operating similar programmes in order to not reinvent the wheel.
- Looking particularly at the effects of trauma on these children and best practise to support them.
- Research that considers the needs of adopted people and their parents (birth and adoptive) and family members.
- Open adoption, for many adopted people, means 2 sets of relationships to be managed over their lifespan. It is a complex arrangement which is little researched for all parties.

Issue 7: How broadly should this term 'open adoption' be interpreted?

- Keep a broad interpretation as the way open adoption is implemented in each situation is different. Therefore, it is difficult to be prescriptive.
- Research on who is adopted is important – may identify patterns that can be responded to – either so adoption doesn't occur in the first place or may indicate proceeding to adoption.
- Little is known on how open adoption is being practised (frequency/ type of contact, quality of contact, satisfaction of individuals, types of support needs of individuals) – research is needed.
- Research on what promotes positive relationships in open adoption.

Issue 8: What specific powers to access information and data should the proposed institute have?

- To conduct efficient research, the Institute will need access to information and data within the sector, including to FaCS and NGO data. Even if this requires legislation or regulations in order to do so.

Issue 9: What structural elements should be included in the tender specifications and why?

- Independence and integrity of the Institute
- Diverse Management group

Note: It is important to ensure independence from the funding body, policy makers and interest groups.

Issue 11: What specific matters need to be dealt with to allow the proposed institute access to and maintenance of security of all requisite information and data for the undertaking of the applied research?

All files should be de-identified and clients would need to be informed that the Institute would have access to their records. The purpose of the Institute is compromised if they cannot access FaCs and the Supreme Court records .

Issue 12: What issues need to be considered to ensure a healthy partnership between the researcher and non-government service provider responsible for the institute?

- The Institute would require a Board of its own and governance that is independent of the researcher and the NGO.
- Clear role and guidelines, distinct from the NGO, to enable autonomous function.

Yours sincerely



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