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CatholicCare

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Issues Paper regarding the establishment of the Institute of Open Adoption.

As an accredited adoption service provider, CatholicCare Adoption Services (CAS), welcomes the opportunity to make comment and provide perspective on what an Institute of Open Adoption could look like and be of value to the sector and the wider community. CatholicCare will await any tender that may be offered in relation to the Institute and make consideration at that time.

CAS has contributed to the submission made by the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care Inc. (COAPC) and we therefore fully endorse the COAPC submission and wish to point out the issues that are of particular importance to CatholicCare.

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

One of the key aims of the proposed institute should encompass research, along with sector and community education and development. Partnership with a University would provide a system and framework, ethics committee processes and the like. Such a partnership would establish the Institute with a degree of integrity.

Equally the Institute would benefit from being engaged at a practitioner level and review judgments of the Supreme Court, Practice notes, briefing and sector tools to have a well grounded perspective on adoption practice and Supreme Court expectations.

A strong public/sector presence comprising of advertising, media interviews/campaigns, e-bulletins, webinars, attendance at interagency forums and the like would assist in developing recognition as a leader while concurrently informing the work of the Institute.

It is imperative also that the agenda of the Institute is established clearly – it is not a lobby group for adoption, rather a researcher and promoter of best practice and shining a light on the best ways children can be assisted to achieve permanency. To be a leader in the field, integrity and independence are key.

A member of



Catholic Social Services
Australia

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

CAS believes the adoption community would benefit from the institute undertaking activities such as:

- Research – Ensuring that it clearly links theory to practice
- Education and Training – It is acknowledged that professionals within the child protection and OOHC field need further education and training, as it would appear that not all have sufficient knowledge and understanding about open adoption. It is important that adoption is seen amongst professionals, parents and the wider community as not a failure but a genuinely worthwhile alternative care model for some children. This should also include a discussion round permanency and that that mean restoration, kin, guardianship or adoption – further that it about establishing security for children. Adoption is a service for children, and no adult has the right to adopt a child.
- Expert Advice – Provided to adoption and OOHC agencies to be used in both the Children’s Court and Supreme Court. This could be in the form of independent assessments on children being considered for adoption to be submitted as evidence or in the form of legal experts that could provide advice to agencies.
- Resources – While conducting its own research, the institute could become a hub for a wide range of open adoption resources, which professionals, families and children could freely access and use. The Institute should also be able to direct people affected by adoption at any stage of life (including many years post adoption) to appropriate support, resources and care so as to acknowledge that adoption is a lifelong issue.
- Systematic Reviews, Evaluation of Programs and Individual Interventions – It is important that the institute review both Supreme Court judgements in NSW, and decisions coming out of other states and abroad as well as speak to the professionals and clients involved in open adoption. This is also essential given the dynamic nature of adoption practice and the present law which is constantly being added to with the increasing number of OOHC adoptions. These Supreme Court judgements influence the preparation and content of subsequent applications for adoption.

Institute Models such as the Hadley Centre in the UK and Texas Christian University are holistic in nature and would reflect a model that would contribute

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?

Whilst the idea and seed founding is important, in the current climate of austerity in the NGO sector and limited funds available and high expectation around outcomes for such funding in relation to clients service, it is ambitious to expect that the Institute will

be self funding and that enough philanthropic support will be forthcoming. A different way of looking at funding may increase the likelihood of the Institute being sustainable – that is some recurrent

funding and having a fee for service expert pool, consultation service and a Registered Training Organisation.

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

The Committee would like to see an emphasis on research about the following: -

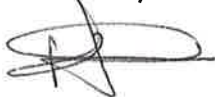
- Appropriate contact arrangements with birth family members and what happens with contact following the adoption,
- Adoptive placement stability and differences in outcomes for those children placed for adoption, in comparison to those restored home or those remaining in the OOHC system.
- The unique needs of adopted children and the associated support needs for adoptive parents. Adoptive families are expected to utilise universal services post adoption, as autonomous parents. For many families this does not meet their needs as many professionals do not understand adoption, let alone Open Adoption. This assumption that universal services will be more than sufficiently belies the significant difference of raising someone else's child and having to build a relationship with the child's birth family, which can be complex and difficult to navigate.
- Research which captures the voices of adopted people, in both childhood and as adults given the Court and professionals seek to act in their best interests both now and in later life. Further that adoption is a service for children, not adults.
- Birth Certificates and Adoption Information Certificates and how adoptees have their identity recorded.

Furthermore it is important that the research on open adoption is retrospective, as open adoption has been occurring in NSW for several decades and there are a lot of examples of good practice to be recognized as well as lessons learnt from past and current cases.

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

CAS believes that the institute should have access to information across the adoption and OOHC sector in order to conduct research. CAS would be supportive of the institute accessing information from our files. The method and checks and balances in viewing adoption files for research purposes would need to be set out via legislation. The appropriate safeguards would be required to remain clearly within the spirit of the Adoption Act 2000 and the Regulations 2003 around the protection of adoption information and de-identifying information. This is pertinent when such small numbers for the purpose of research being done in this jurisdiction.

Yours sincerely



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