

Inter-Country Adoptee Perspectives: Post Adoption Support Services

What Post Adoption Support Services are Needed and Why do you think this is Important?

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Firstly, being an adoptee I had a personal narrative that use to tell me constantly that I wasn't good enough, there was something wrong with me because my parents didn't want me, and I wasn't worthy enough to be loved. I carried around these thoughts for a long time. It wasn't until I spoke to counselors that I realized these were false beliefs.

I think parents need to realize the children they adopt come with a whole set of extra issues of having to assimilate into a foreign culture, not looking like your parents is a big deal, and no matter how hard they try - children are always going to feel different.

I think that having parent seminars tackling these issues would assist parents in better understanding their children. I also think that children should be made aware from an early age there are people they can talk to - possibly like some kind of mentor program with older adoptees who come from a similar culture and can talk with them about their experiences of alienation and inferiority. This would help both the children and the older adoptees to use their experiences to help each other.

Most importantly I think a free government funded counseling service should be offered to teenage and adoptees in their 20's as this is a critical time in our lives where we need the most support so we can attempt to fill the jigsaw puzzle of our lives with meaningful and factual information, that no longer tells us they we are unlovable human beings, instead will can be filled with hope and closure to know how we came to be where we are and that God has a grand plan for our lives but we may sometimes forget that, it can be lost in the confusion of life that can consume us....

This has been the most important lesson in my life.... realizing that i am truly deserving of all the good things that come my way and knowing that God is working miracles in my life because today i am proud of where i have come from and the path that my life is taking. It has only taken me 26 years to realize this fact. I have long doubted my sanity at times, however now after meeting my birth family, talking with counselors and my adoptive mum things some how seem a lot clearer.

I am a 26 year old Sri Lankan adoptee, currently undertaking university internship in Arusha, Tanzania, East Africa. (I will live in Sydney NSW Australia from February 2008.)

Gabbie

I think it is vital we find ways to connect teenage adoptees with adult adoptees. The teenage years in Western countries is difficult enough, let alone being an adoptee. We seem to do a decent job (although it could also be improved) with early adolescence and adolescent years, but when the teenage years hit, counseling, culture camps, play dates, and so on are no longer effective. Parents seem to "give up" and just to try to get through the teenage years, but it is this time of searching, loss, and identity formation where post adoption support is, in my opinion, most needed.

I recognize that teenagers are loathe to participate in anything "deep," but I think it is imperative that we provide more support for this age group. What is important is to allow teenager adoptees to talk with older adoptees who can serve as role models. By this I mean have adoptees with

whom the teenagers can relate to and talk with. Discussions about racism, dating, sex, drugs, anger, rebellion, parents, school, teachers, career, identity, fashion, friends, and so on can occur in a safe and informal ways. Teenagers (in general) have an aversion to counseling or therapy because it is "forced," but if we can create social situations where informal mentoring and spontaneous conversation where they can feel free to discuss their experiences and feelings with someone they can relate to (i.e., another racially different adoptee) without pressure. Teenagers will say things to someone they feel listened to and will often disclose to someone other than their parents.

And if we are all honest, the teenage years were probably the hardest for most of us. Most adult adoptees I talk with or hear from talk about how being a teenager was hard and it would have been nice to have someone there at that time. We loved our parents, but they couldn't feel the void.

So if we can find fun and creative ways to connect adults and teens, whether face-to-face or even virtually, that would seem to be the most important post adoption support that is needed.

Bert Ballard
Denver, CO
Adopted from Vietnam, 1975
Age 32

Queensland could do more with Post Adoption Support Services.

Queensland requires several Post Adoption Support Services to assist adoptees and people affected by adoption in search, reunion, counselling, support, identity & cultural issues, and grief & abandonment.

As the practice of inter-country adoption continues there is serious disregard for the adoptee and their need for continuing support.

Jen
Vietnamese Adoptee
27 years old

Post adoptive Support Services should have lots of communicational and cultural tools to aid the child and the adoptive parents.

Since these parents have to go pick up the child, they know what province or area the child is from. Just knowing this should be helpful in aiding the Adoption Support Services of both adoptee and parent in order to keep the child's cultural heritage. The mother country can offer videos or give web addresses to view the village or town the child's origin, artifacts, traditional foods and cultural items of the adoptees origin.

I think when intercontinental adoption occurs, the adopting parents should heavily engage in educational cultural and social norms by the mother country. Education should consist of videos, websites, text, studies, and educational programs for the child such as writing, poetry, the arts, history, geography and basic text for the child to keep the language from the country of origin.

For the adoptive parents, educational aids for possible issues that may arise from adopting a child from an orphanage or another country. For example abandonment issues, food hoarding, physical and mental issues. The mother country should aid the post adoption service articles by providing the traditional dress, food, beddings, anything that will help connect the child self worth

to their country. However, I would like to state that when educational tools are not the panacea to aid both adoptees and parents be very careful to educate parents concerning the child country origin, don't just educate on "generic" cultures but that geared towards where the child cultural origin.

Lisa J Coddington :0)

I feel that support is necessary to make sure that adoptees know that there are people out there that are in similar situations and there is a community ready and willing to help elevate any thoughts that they are alone. Adoptions in the international arena can be very challenging since there is culture, language and psychological issues that might have never been addresses and it can be intimidating if you are doing it alone. Many of the people who contact me who are interested in exploring their heritage and finding lost family might delay action once they see that it's real and it touches a core area that takes them out of their comfort zone. They might decide to hold off in their journey of exploring adoption issues until they can accumulate more courage. Courage is the facture that will get you past the point of just living in the moment but support is the element that can lift the whole Adoption Community onto another level. Search Support, Psychological Support, and Community Support are needed in our efforts to be human.

Trista Goldberg
Founder of Operation Reunite
www.operationreunite.com
United States of America
New Jersey
Age 37
Found Vietnamese birth family in 2001

Presentation: 'Supporting Children After Adoption - The Need for Post Adoption Services', *The Ethics and Accountability in Adoption Conference*, hosted by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and Ethica Inc, Washington DC, 15 – 16 October, 2007.

Panelists - Carrie Kent, Joyce Maguire Pavao, Debbie Riley and Indigo Willing
<http://ethicsconference.net>

Transcript (Indigo Willing):

Firstly, it's a real honour to be a part of this workshop. I'd like to thank Ethica for making it possible, and to both them and The Adoption Institute for bringing so many important professionals together for the next two days of sessions and workshops. I'd also like to acknowledge the country's indigenous history and hope to hear more about both indigenous and non-indigenous approaches to their adoption practices.

My contribution today is to share some insights from an Australian perspective. My reflections draw from my academic work, adoption community involvement and personal biography of being adopted.

It might also be useful to know that Australia is currently undergoing several adoption legislation reviews at the state level, and has just had a federal inquiry into adoption processes. Put simply, people are speaking up, saying things need to change – but the critical issue that I wish to raise is who is *not* being heard? Adult adoptees are highly experienced educators and run a number of excellent support groups BUT are rarely funded and rarely heard.

I realise I only have a brief amount of time here so I think it's good to raise the most common

issues that adopted people are focusing on in terms of post adoption needs so that some of the messages from these voices can further enrich the workshop today. These are:

1. Representation – the need for adoption institutions, agencies and groups etc to allow for adult adoptee perspectives to illuminate both the strengths and weaknesses of the practice. Also the need to push for adoptee’s inclusion on more boards, committees and forums such as these.
2. Administration – the need for tighter record keeping, inclusive fees planning for services such as searching for birth parents assistance, return visits and counseling support.
3. Transnational Planning – providing guidance and services related to assisting adoptees when they actually embark on return trips and search for birth parents, and more funding opportunities or scholarships for adoptees to visit birth countries.
4. Cultural Strategies – the offering of programs dedicated to issues such as language and cross-cultural competency for both clients and professionals in the area of adoption.
5. Emotional and Psychological Capital – this final point relates to making sure there are suitable programs and appropriately educated counselors etc. who can assist adopted people and their families (birth and adoptive) manage adoption issues that can have an impact on their emotional and mental well being.

I look forward to some rich and energetic exchanges on your own strategies, thoughts and experiences. Thank you.

From : Hilbrand W.S. Westra a.k.a. Jung Woon Seok
Country : The Netherlands

The topic itself carries within the question a direction which could lead towards numerous approaches and ideas. Therefore it's too difficult to get a clear view by answering this question by a simple directive or a complex academic conclusion.

As most of the time, I always try to choose the approach of the contextual situation and to oversee the horizon of a current understanding which changes every moment by understanding the layers and shades of its colors.

This approach is in my opinion necessary by trying to answer such a complex question regarding post adoption services. Like adoption itself, the post adoption service concept, basically exists on the actual adoption itself and does besides providing extensive or minimal assistance towards post adoption questions, lingers in many circumstances to continue adoption as such. With this in mind the question gets a very sensitive and dependable connotation. And because of this, it all becomes more political and does appear on broad society level were it is no longer an issue of the direct people involved, the Adoptees, but becomes it part of a game of power in the arena of financial, political and governmental interests.

For example within the Netherlands, several organizations claim that they are providing post adoption services. Like agencies, care organizations and welfare organizations etc. But not one of them placed the adoptee as the centre court of their services. Many of them are developing, tendering or handling projects and serving mostly the Dutch Adoption Parents community instead of listening to the Adoptees and the long term policy which should be developed. Analyzing the latest development in the Netherlands we see a high stakes game about subsidies and marketing related brand awareness of adoption organizations. The same happens at the European level.

None of them has ever been thinking about implementing a long term strategy regarding adoption as such to connect post adoption services as a POST position and not a post PLACEMENT activity grown out of the earlier adoptions.

One of the bottlenecks in this process is the lack of or short term involvement of adult Adoptees in the field of (Inter-country) Adoption. For the organizations involved, they merely use the Adoptees (if they are employed) as a distraction to cover eventual questions about their real interests in Adoption and involvement of Adoptees in their deployment of projects.

It urges Adoptees like us to be aware and to get structurally involved, creating awareness but also at a professional level of acting towards the growing necessity of structural post adoption services world wide. This is not a very simple answer on a quite complex question but also a call upon us to be available to get into the deep regarding the issues around ICA in general and the problem fields of fellow Adoptees. Besides a professional approach, this needs from us to entangle our own personal themes and issues as far as possible and to see the interest and (in)dependence of our own position and involvement in these situations.

But the necessity is out there. As long we want to receive, have and see the necessity of tailor made programs for Adoptees, we should be involved from the first step from the drawing board till the execution of the services needed. This takes a long stamina and endurance to accomplish. But I can tell by own experience, knowledge and development, that this is the only way to grow into the field of Adoption and Post Adoption Services.

Few people around the world tried to establish post adoption services providing by their own associations in Europe, Australia and the United States but just a handful Adoptees are involved in the professional field of adoption collapsed or distressed by finding out and understanding the political arena they entered. But with long term lobby work and standing out with a clear message we can reach goals and serve our fellow Adoptees.

To give an actual example which the UAI in the Netherlands accomplished cooperating with the best organized Adoption Agency within the Netherlands 'Wereldkinderen' is; to open the personal files and to give the Adoptees copies of all pages belonging to their personal adoption files. Besides this, the discussion of payment for these services has been terminated by their management board after our consultation to them. And all costs paid in the past will be refunded to the Adoptees. We help Adoptees with their search and files when something appears to be wrong, something which happens more often as less unfortunately. We help the agency with information resources we have internationally and planning to assist them with difficult searches by providing personal assistance in countries of origin for and by Adoptees. We also planned to work together to inform employees of the agency by 'training' their staff regarding country developments on ICA. These are just a few minor things we can do for each other instead of getting involved in financial related clashes of subsidies etc.

I believe that we can do a lot, but not alone. The necessity grows to understand the international cooperation between local and international solutions. If we want to be served than we should be serviceful to others, starting by understanding our own adoption and the awareness that Intercountry Adoption cannot be served by claim of exclusivity but to create a community of Adoptees like ICASN is providing.

Warm Regards,

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