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EDITORIAL

POST-ADOPTION (III/2): The search for origins

Second part: practical questions

Having presented the different points of view on the right to know one's origins, we address, in this last editorial on post-adoption, some practical aspects of the implementation of the search for origins.

The offer of services in the search for origins is one of the essential historical purposes of the International Social Service. This activity has indeed been offered for many years by several branches of the organisation. These, thanks to the international network of branches and correspondents worldwide, and to the support of professionals, can efficiently supervise this, often difficult, step. It is therefore with the input of ISS branches that we hereby present some important points in the implementation of the search for origins.

Two different situations: children or adults searching for their origins

Today, adopted children more easily have access to their origins than in the past, in particular thanks to a trend (in the doctrine and the case-law, to a certain extent) to recognise a real right to know one's origins (see Editorial 4/2006). In addition, an increasing number of countries keep information on the children's origins. Despite this progress, it is worth noting that a high number of children have little or no information on their origins or on their life before having been adopted.

Regarding adult adoptees, the search for origins is often even more difficult as past practices were different and favoured anonymity. In many cases, information is limited or is no longer available. Adults are usually interested in health heredity issues or in the reasons that led their parents to give their child for adoption.

Implementation of the search for origins

Practices followed in numerous countries show that effectively granting the adoptee access to his/her origins and to his/her walk in life presupposes *a systematic and coherent policy which can ensure the collection and preservation of personal and family data*, from the first contacts of a protagonist with the mother in difficulty or with the child. The keeping of a *« life story diary »* reflecting the evolution of the child throughout his/her placements ; *the sharing of information* between the successive protagonists in charge of the child (including between different countries, in cases of intercountry adoption) and *access to information by the adoptee,* whether he/she be an adult, an adolescent or even a child if necessary, must equally be guaranteed. In cases of intercountry adoption, the adoptee's access to his/her origins can also occur through visits to the country of *origin*; such trips of discovery are already being organised by some adoption protagonists, as well as by some countries of origin.

Guidance in this search

Frequently, the adoptee's access to information, which he/she is looking for, goes

hand in hand with *preparation, counselling and psychological support* provided by professionals, either on a compulsory basis or otherwise. If *contact with the family of origin* is wished, the *intervention of a third-party professional* – a psychosocial body or authority – is often very useful. It must enable the interests of all parties concerned to be taken into consideration, to contact the parents of origin in confidentiality and with the possible support of professionals, and to inform the adoptee in a suitable fashion in relation to their wish for, or refusal of, contact.

In certain countries , *«contact registers »* have also been set up officially. Adoptees and parents, as well as brothers and sisters and other members of the family of origin, can record their wish for contact, so as to inform any other interested party who could consult it. Furthermore, the issue of future contact should be subject to discussion with professionals *as soon as the adoption is concluded,* and the record of the wishes expressed at that time should be registered in the files.

In practice, some adopted persons sometimes contact a specialised agency in the search for families of origin. However, ISS-Germany states that, according to their experience, it is very rare that the adoptee and his/her family of origin express the need to meet in person or to remain in touch on the long term. It seems that the need for information is the most common ground for initiating such proceedings. However, the latter must equally be the subject of adequate framing.

When the parents of origin search for the adoptee

The situation is even more complex when the *biological parents,* or even other members of the family of origin, wish to know the adoptee's new identity (if it has not been communicated to them during the adoption procedure), to receive news or to contact him/her.

A problem of balance between the rights and interests involved also occurs here. However, the interests of the child should prevail in order to preserve the stability which has been built in the adoptive family.

Most legal systems in Europe *do not recognise the right of parents of origin* to impose their wishes to see a child again. Through the psychosocial work of specialised bodies, however, a certain number of States provide support services for parents of origin and *services of professional mediation* or « contact registers » in order to ascertain, as far as possible, whether or not the wishes of the parents of origin meet the current interests of the adoptee, with the respect for the private and family life of the adoptive family.

Relative adoptions

In the case of *relative adoptions which imply that the child has frequently had contacts with the members of his/her family* – even if the adoption severs the original legal ties – the question to potentially continue to maintain contact with some members of the family of origin should preferably be decided upon at the time of the adoption decision.

Policies and services to guarantee the success of an adoption

At the close of this file in four chapters, the ISS/IRC underlines the need for authorities, psychosocial bodies and professionals to envisage and introduce *post-adoption policies and services which foster* respect for the rights of the child, of the adoptive family and the family of origin. Such provisions are particularly indispensable in responding to the explicit requests for support of adoptive families, adopted children and parents of origin. These services also constitute essential tools in terms of prevention of adoption failures.

The ISS/IRC team.

Previous editorials are available at: www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/tronc_di_edi.html.

You can also consult documentation Bulletins nº 3, 5 and 11, which provide a bibliography on this subject.