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EDITORIAL

The child's waiting for a family: Between hope and reality

Let us pursue our reflection on the waiting period by focusing on the child. Many factors must be considered when supporting him during this period, in which ambivalent feelings, the deep hope of being cared for by loving parents whilst also fearing what is unknown get mixed up.

To reflect on the waiting from the child's perspective raises several issues, the first one being whether the latter should be placed in a position of waiting for a family available to care for him forever, at the risk of disappointing this hope as a result of life or procedural obstacles. Thus, the Central Authority of the Philippines has decided to take this risk and to prepare the child for this encounter even prior to the matching phase (see p. 3). Several external factors may also have an impact on this waiting, either by extending its length, or, on the contrary, by speeding up its outcome. As has already been mentioned in the previous Editorial on the waiting from the perspective of the prospective adopters, sudden decisions or events, such as the establishment of a moratorium, legal or procedural amendments, a political crisis or a natural disaster, may result in longer delays, or even in the impossible conclusion of adoption projects. Furthermore, the child protection system in the country of origin also has a major impact on this waiting, in particular when it ignores family-type child protection measures and gives priority to long-term institutionalisation. All these are difficult situations, which jeopardise the waiting and the hope of a child deprived of a family of being cared for by loving parents; all these diverse situations require that those persons in charge of the child do have considerable adaptation skills and adapted tools.

To know the child well

The child's age, background, the conditions of his abandonment as well as his specific needs have an impact on how he will experience the waiting for a family. As stated by Dr Fanny Cohen Herlem, the concept of time is not approached in the same way by a child, who is three, six or eight years old (see Monthly Review Nº 02/2010). Furthermore, when a child has special needs, it is important to raise his awareness as to the fact that his situation is different, in particular in comparison to that of very young and healthy children, who will have adopters coming to get them sooner. In these cases, it is worth considering other perspectives together with the child, such as access to independent living, when the child is older for example, or the establishment of more individualised support or tutelage (see Monthly Review Nº 09/2011, 11-12/2012 and 02/2013). All these are data that the person in charge of the child must know in order to support him to his best.

Several tools, such as the 'later life letter' (see p. 4) or life story books for children, have been developed in this regard in order to support the work of professionals. On this point, ISS is currently finalising a life notebook, aimed more specifically at disabled children. This notebook will soon be presented in the Monthly Review (see also our online bibliographical database for access to other models). These tools will allow to adjust the child's waiting, to involve him in



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the progressive development of his family project and to offer him the possibility of expressing his emotions and feelings.

A favourable environment

The creation of a climate of trust, in which the child will be able to communicate to those adults around him his fears, doubts and hopes is therefore essential. Thus, it is worth giving priority to the child's temporary placement in a family-type environment, which is far more suitable to create a favourable environment for the child's waiting. As far as possible, foster care should be given priority over institutional placement, where the child's individual care is much more uncertain. Indeed, even though family-type measures may also raise issues, in particular that of attachment between the child and the foster family prior to an adoption procedure, these are an alternative to the harmful effects of institutionalisation on the good development of children, in particular among children between the ages of 0 and three years. On this point, regional initiatives have been launched in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (see p. 5), as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean through the project 'Let's stop the internment of babies'¹, which RELAF, ISS's key partner, has actively contributed to.

When does the waiting end?

The waiting does not end when a family has been matched with a child. The meetings may be numerous and spaced out over time before a child permanently joins his new parents. At this stage of the process, the prospective adopters have an important role to play in order to feed the child's waiting with trust and to reassure him of their presence despite the distance that still separates them. Thanks to tools, such as the 'welcome package' suggested by the Central Authority of the Philippines (see p. 3), the prospective adopters will be able, in particular, to support the child and to already place the first stones of their future relationship. For that matter, the waiting will only end when the parents and the child will have managed, thanks to tools such as those suggested by Johanne Lemieux (see p. 7) to accept each other as they are and to create this attachment bond that is so fundamental to the development of the family that has been so hoped for by the child and his new parents.

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