EDITORIAL

Child protection up against new technologies?

The number of digital tools is ever increasing and transforming the daily life of professionals, children and families. At the start of this year, the SSI/IRC is looking into whether professionals and users have the appropriate training and education in the use of these new technologies, and of the risks involved.

Over and above the debate on the advantages and risks linked to the use of 'new' technologies, the time has come to accept this 'digital reality' and to adapt the reactions of professionals. The child protection community has, for several years, emphasised and reiterated the need to provide digital training to professionals, in order to guarantee a suitable framework for the use of digital tools. To what degree can professionals master these tools when faced with the rapidity and explosion of technological innovation? As for general users, such as children and young adults, are they sufficiently educated and informed as to the potential repercussions of the instantaneous access to information? Do young people really participate in the development of new tools and trainings for professionals?

More efficient and adapted tools for placed children and young people?

The multiplication of digital tools has resulted in serious improvements in the field of child protection, especially in terms of resources and efficiency. These improvements are encouraging, but not without risk, which pinpoints the importance of training professionals in the management and use of these tools, and of data protection (see p. 4). It is also necessary to have some measure of hindsight and also feedback from users, in order to establish the real advantages and challenges involved in the use of these tools.

At this point in time, a greater participation of children, who have grown up in the digital era can be observed, thanks to tools, which are more interactive, attractive and accessible, such as the mobile life story application developed in the framework of the ISS project *A better future is possible* (see p. 2).

On a wider scale, tools are available to evaluate whether a system of child protection is compliant with international standards (see the Tracking Progress Initiative in Monthly Review No. 216, October-November 2017), as well as the quality of child care, such as in institutions (see p. 7).

Tools to support continuous communication?

In the field of adoption, the 'new' technologies make it easier to have access to, and to share, information. However some caution is required because of a possible lack of anticipation and analysis when using these tools, particularly when respect for the private life of the child is concerned.

Among these new technologies there are many blogs and social networks used by the (prospective) adoptive parents to talk about their experience of adoption. Their experiences are often enriching, but can sometimes be to the detriment of the child (see p. 4). To facilitate access to the information, a mobile application has been developed by a NGO in New Zealand. The objective is to offer a list of resources, including the references of competent

professionals (see p. 6), for potential adopters and professionals.

Essential tools for searches of origins?

Interactive platforms, such as Facebook or YouTube, are increasingly used by adoptees to search for and maybe meet their biological families, and biological families also use these platforms for the same reason. Although Facebook and YouTube offer a certain freedom and assistance to the people researching their origins, they can also be risky. Why consult a professional if all the information is so easily accessible on the Internet? Is the private life of the other person respected if direct contact is so simple?

When confronted with these questions, it is of prime importance to listen to some adoptees, who have undertaken research alone, using social networks, and to understand the emotional impact caused by their research, as shared in their recommendations and advice (see p. 11). What better training than real life experience?

In addition to the above-mentioned platforms, DNA databases are developing rapidly, and reach beyond the field of adoption, raising the problem of their quality and reliability. In the present issue of the Monthly Review, ISS-The Netherlands presents its experience of establishing and managing a DNA database of donor-conceived children (see p. 15). It shares the positive results and issues involved in this type of tool, which will no doubt have to face yet more challenges in the future, such as the access to origins of those children born through surrogacy (see p. 9).

Whatever the forms of these 'new' technologies, there is a need to further legally frame their use, and professionals, children and families need to be made aware of them and trained in their use, so as to meet ever more challenges. Efforts to adjust to this reality must be pursued, whilst not neglecting more traditional forms of communication, such as the cinema (see p. 14) and written works (see p. 8), as they also continue to result in positive outcomes.

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