



Meeting Communiqué – 29 April 2013

Introductions

Members welcomed the two new members to join NICAAG who attended the meeting, Mr Damon Martin, the new NSW Representative, and Ms Robyn Gepp, the new NT Representative, and congratulated Ms Joanne Schell on her reappointment as ACT Representative. Members noted apologies from Ms Soo Yin Wiegeler, the new WA Representative, as well as apologies from Ms Aileen Berry and Ms Jasmine Temple-Smith.

Members discussed the importance of members from all states and territories attending each meeting, and ways in which members communicated issues to and from the broader adoption community.

General discussion

Members provided reports from their individual states, territories and areas of expertise. Issues discussed included the upcoming review of Queensland's adoption legislation, the impact of recent changes in South Korea's exit permit processes, updates on various intercountry adoption support group meetings and events, China's Online Special Needs Program, the need to increase awareness in schools of the needs of children adopted through intercountry adoption and the harmonisation of media laws in respect to adoption.

Members discussed how intercountry adoption is changing, with the increase of children in need of adoption having special needs, and how Australia needs to recognise this in planning for the future strategic direction of intercountry adoption. Members noted that for the intercountry adoption community the consideration of service delivery models is linked with the desire for cultural change. Attorney-General's Department (AGD) explained that Australia's system will continue to be structured in a way that minimises the risks of intercountry adoption as much as possible.

AGD provided a written report to members detailing its key priorities from November 2012 to April 2013. The report also included country program and domestic policy updates.

Post adoption

AGD noted that a key theme of the Philippines Inter-Country Adoption Board's 12th Global Consultation on 14-16 August 2013 is post adoption issues.

Dr Patricia Fronck and Ms Sue-Yen Bylund updated members on their post adoption research project, noting they envisage a draft paper will be available for the next meeting.

AGD noted its commitment to strengthening the post adoption information available on its website.

Members discussed post adoption search and reunion services, recognising that there are differences in what services are offered in Australia, and the support adoptees and their families receive in countries of origin. Dr Trevor Jordan highlighted some of the positives of post adoption support and services in Australia, including access to records. Members recognised the disparity in services offered by different countries of origin, and acknowledged that the Australian Government has limited influence on processes and services delivered in countries of origin. Members identified the need for increased sharing and referrals between organisations and government agencies involved in post adoption services in Australia.

Members also discussed how to improve knowledge about adoption across professional disciplines. AGD noted the funding made available for those affected by forced adoption policies and practices, and that the measures and results this funding will produce may also benefit the intercountry adoption community, such as the work by the Department of Health and Ageing work to develop clinical guidelines on the needs of people affected by forced adoption.

Upcoming meetings

Members discussed upcoming meetings on adoption, including the Central Authorities Meeting on 6-7 May 2013, the Harmonisation Working Group Meeting on 7 May 2013 and the National Post Adoption Meeting to be held in Perth on 14-15 November 2013.

AGD indicated that the biannual meetings with the states and territories are one of many ways in which it communicates with state and territory central authorities. AGD noted that there is informal and formal consultation and discussion between AGD and state and territory central authorities on a day-to-day basis.

Members noted that Dr Trevor Jordan will be attending the upcoming Harmonisation Working Group Meeting and post adoption session of the Central Authorities Meeting. Members also noted that a number of NICAAG members will be attending the National Post Adoption Meeting, including Dr Trevor Jordan, Mr Damon Martin and Ms Sue-Yen Bylund.

Government response to Forced Adoptions Report

AGD noted its coordination role in the development of the national apology to those affected by forced adoptions practices and was the secretariat for the Reference Group established to assist with the development and delivery of the apology. AGD confirmed that it is now in the process of handing over responsibility for the implementation of relevant parts of the Government's response to the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the National Archives of Australia.

Guest speaker, Fiona Cameron, Post Adoption Resource Centre

Ms Fiona Cameron from the NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) gave a presentation about the work and services offered by PARC. Members discussed PARC's resource materials, with particular interest in the post adoption materials. Members agreed that Ms Cameron's presentation and PARC's materials were very informative and useful.

Delegation visits to and by Australia

China – AGD noted the success of the visit by a China Centre for Children’s Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA) delegation in November 2012. AGD met with the delegation on 26 November in Canberra, and organised an adoptive family event as part of the day’s activities.

Ethiopia – AGD noted that the Ethiopian Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs still intends to visit Australia, but has not yet proposed dates for the visit.

Country Programs

China – AGD noted that it is working with the Victorian Central Authority on the issues identified with the China Online Special Needs Program. AGD indicated the importance of having clear information on children’s needs, so that matches are made appropriately and the child and family receive appropriate support in Australia. Members asked that AGD discuss a number of issues with CCCWA, including the criteria relating to basal cell carcinoma, and China homeland visits.

India – AGD noted that India’s hold on accepting new applications for general adoptions is still in place, but has been lifted for applications to adopt children with special needs. Damon Martin asked AGD to look into a post adoption searching issue identified by International Social Service.

Ethiopia – AGD noted that the adoption files previously in Ethiopia are currently being held in Canberra. AGD indicated it is working with states and territories to finalise a process for families to access these files, as well as discussing post adoption searching options with its counterparts in other countries and key non-government organisations. Members discussed the revocation of an Ethiopian adoption by an adult Dutch-Ethiopian adoptee, and the availability of Ethiopia’s Yellow Card program to adoptees.

Philippines – AGD noted that it is working to implement a consistent national practice with respect to providing the results of psychological tests to the Inter-Country Adoption Board.

South Korea – Members discussed the increasing delays in children being granted exit visas, and noted that this is ongoing. Members also noted the impact the delay on exit visas is having on the resources of adoption agencies in South Korea more generally. Mr Stephen Finkel discussed issues arising from his recent trip to South Korea, including post adoption services and the low utilisation of the guesthouse for adoptees visiting South Korea. Mr Finkel asked that AGD and state and territory central authorities encourage adoptees and families to use the guesthouse.

Investigation of Potential Programs

AGD discussed its investigations into potential new programs. AGD advised that discussions are continuing with the South Africa Central Authority about next steps in Australia towards a potential program.

Additional members’ items

Members raised a number of issues including intercountry adoption and the education system, and noted the Victorian Post Placement Support Services’ work in this area, including the publication of

Let's talk: Helping educators understand the implications of adoption and permanent care. Other issues discussed included media laws in South Australia and access to electoral rolls.