

## **Building Bridges Meeting Adoption Organisations Mumbai - 30/10/2012**

“Building Bridges between Belgium & India for Adoptees - A final call”

### Attendees:

#### **Organizations :**

St. Catherine's Home

Sisters of The Good Shepherd

Family Service Center

Triobla vzw

Pia and Adinda started the meeting welcoming the attendees and showing the powerpoint presentation.

Pia introduced herself, emphasizing her link with her biological family, and the fact that this part of her roots has always been taken for granted. Of course this is not such an obvious matter when you are adopted. Pia opened the debate: can people see the importance of their roots?

Adinda told her personal story, her goal to participate in the Building Bridges project. You can find her story, together with stories of other adoptees in the booklet that was handed out during the meeting (more copies can be sent on request).

Yes, these days so many efforts are being done to help adoptees gather as much information as possible about their roots. Pia and I listened very attentive to the vision and approach of the adoption organisations.

- The organisations find it their task to facilitate and support the roots searches of adoptees. They wish to be there for adoptees and want them to know that adoptees can come there with their questions. They find it important that adoptees can keep in touch with the organisation, if this is their desire.
- As from the age of 18, adoptees have full access rights to their file. We hear the remark that rights of the child are considered of a higher level than the rights of the birth mother.
- The organisations see it as their task to search the birth mothers if the adoptees request this. The search is carried out in a very discrete way (e.g. they present themselves as a social worker of a project, nothing to do with adoption. As there are many social workers, this doesn't rise any suspicion). Sometimes contact can be established.
- These days, pictures are begin kept of the child and the birth mother (before there were descriptions of the birth mothers kept in the file). If children were left behind, pictures are taking from the place they were found. If they were brought by the Police, a picture is taken from the police officer and the child, his name is registered and also the place of the local police station and the place where the child was found.
- Mothers who come to the organisation to give up their child for adoption have 2 months to reconsider. The organisations ask the mothers if they want to leave something personal (a gift, a personal item,...) in case the child would come and search later.
- If there is no starting point for the search, local media can be a help. Sometimes it is decided to write an article in a local newspaper or to broadcast on the local television.
- It is possible that the birth mother does not want any contact with the child. Sometimes that social circumstances can be very imperative. The organisations also are there for the adoptees in that case: to help them cope with this decision and support them further.

- In adoptions now, everything has to be officially taken care of through Court. The mother needs to sign a document stating she wishes to surrender the child. It is possible to include a clause that the birth mother wishes that her identity will never be revealed.
- Up to now, St-Catherine's Home chooses to communicate only circumstantial and not identifiable information to adoptees.
- Two organisations had experience with birth mothers who came and ask how their children were doing. Only general information can be given in this case (how the child is doing, but not identifiable information), as long as there is no roots search request from the child.
- We asked where the fathers are in the adoption stories. We receive the unanimous answer that fathers are always completely out of the picture. Usually the social circumstances are very poor for women. In any case, it's usually unrealistic to start a search for the father.
- Some homes have been closed and mostly it's impossible to find files older than 10 years.
- It is considered important to inform yourself as adoptee about the social-cultural situation in India, to better understand the position of women.
- Files are kept in local police stations, without time limit. They can be an important starting point.
- The three organisations had a negative experience with the organisation ACT ("Against Child Trafficking"). The organisations will take the information acquired in this meeting to the level of "Federation of Adoption Agencies".

***For future action:***

- The attendees agreed to keep each other posted on any issue that might be helpful.
- Pia and Adinda will send the attendees the final report of the Building Bridges project for adoptees from India and from Korea, which will also be sent to the Belgian authorities.
- A list will be sent of possible places to stay so adoptees that plan to go on a roots search know which accommodations offer a decent price and good location.
- The organisations will take the issue with ACT up to the Federation of Adoption Agencies and will keep us posted on the outcome.
- In St-Catherine's Home it be checked with what is stated in the CARA guidelines about giving identifiable information to adoptees.
- Information about the social and cultural situation in India can be made available for adoptees so they are better prepared when starting the roots search, as this is a determining aspect with major influence.

Adinda Petillion, Pia Dejonckheere,  
Lisbon, 21/12/2012