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The ISS/IRC team wishes you Happy Holidays and joy, peace and love for 2018!

EDITORIAL

Learning from the experience of adoption breakdowns in order to improve the success rate of intercountry adoptions

In this end-of-year period, the SSI/CIR is proud to present a new publication relating to intercountry adoption breakdowns, aimed at offering support to adoptees, adoptive parents, professionals from Central Authorities and other competent authorities, and accredited adoption bodies, in order to prevent and manage crisis, and even breakdowns, faced by adoptive families.

Thanks to the wonderful cooperation from experts worldwide, and to the support from many of you, the handbook *Vers une plus grande compétence: Apprendre des échecs de l'adoption internationale* [Towards improved competence: Learning from intercountry adoption breakdowns]¹ has seen the light of day. To date only available in French, the English and Spanish versions are being finalised and will be available in the first quarter of 2018. Two clear messages, among others, are clearly set out in this handbook: 1. Benevolent, professional, quality support can transform a crisis into an opportunity to reinforce relationships, which have suffered from a series of personal and interpersonal factors; and 2. An adoption breakdown is a painful process, requiring very careful support, but it never means that a person's life is a failure. In order for these messages to become a reality,

the handbook encourages us to address several challenges...

Lifting the taboo without stigmatising

Adoptees themselves urge us to have the courage to talk about intercountry adoption breakdowns, but to do so in an appropriate manner. The constructive approach, which the ISS/IRC's handbook suggests, is not helped if one only focuses on the often sordid stories publicised in the media about adoptions, which sometimes fail dramatically. Without forgetting the suffering involved, breakdowns are, in fact, an opportunity to raise questions as to why the adoption and child protection system fails, and to find concrete ways to solve these problems.

An in-depth analysis of each stage in the adoption process, and of the environment, in which intercountry adoptions occur, is essential in order to diminish the risks of breakdown, and

to reinforce protection. This analysis is based on the promotion of innovative methods and tools, so as to aim for the maximum possible success for an adoption project. This approach pinpoints the importance, both in the receiving country and in the country of origin, of taking time to adapt the adoption procedure to the constantly evolving needs of the children proposed for adoption. These needs are sometimes complex, and require families to be well prepared with tools and support on the long term.

Support and cooperation without judgement

Talking about intercountry adoption breakdowns also implies being able to define these breakdowns, so as to determine the scope of analysis, and to be able to compile the necessary statistics and data (see p. 5). Information, such as the age of the child when adopted, the year when the breakdown occurred, and the professional interventions involved, help to identify where energy should be concentrated in order to avoid these situations. The ISS/IRC has decided on a wide definition in order to include, within the search for solutions, the largest number of problematic situations.

Furthermore, the establishment of a legal framework at international and national level for the management of breakdowns is of prime importance, so as to define the role of each actor involved in these situations, and to ensure that they will fulfil their responsibilities. The numerous concrete examples throughout the publication are very indicative of the need for close cooperation, open dialogue and awareness of the inter-cultural issues. These are human

beings and their lives and their future are at stake.

Innovate and believe without ever losing hope

Professionals must be prepared to face challenges, such as understanding the crisis, which can rock an adoptive family, listening to the stories of the children and of the parents, and taking the risk of a temporary separation. Creativity and innovation are essential to try and avoid total severance. To quote the words of an adoptee, who accepted to share their story: '(...) this breakdown could have been avoided (...) the situation was dealt with in haste, without taking the time to realise that the decisions taken then were going to have an impact on my whole life'.

'The crisis or breakdown can even be an opportunity to ask questions, to step back and assess the problem, to give priority to both adoption practices and to the support to families as appropriately as possible'.

Sitara Chamot, who was adopted in India by Swiss parents, has been working in adoption for many years. Her point of view appears throughout the publication as a guiding theme.

The handbook also shows us that professional support, which is adapted through innovative methods, especially for adopted teenagers, can help to re-establish family bonds. Crises and breakdowns cause strong emotions. We need to offer a benevolent space to adoptees and adoptive parents, where each person can express his/her suffering, and where a new life after the breakdown can be built.

Yes, the time has come to approach intercountry adoption breakdowns in a constructive way. Many adoptions are successful and transform the lives of children in need of a family. At this end of the year, let us make a wish that many more adoptions succeed, and that we strengthen our contribution to this resolution.

The ISS/IRC team
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