
NZ Adoption Authority

ICAV Group Presentation

Prepared by Lynelle Long

Panelists

ICAV

Lynelle Long (Vietnam - Australia, Founder of ICAV)

Alex Kuch (Romanian - Germany, grew up in NZ)

Alex Gilbert (Russian - NZ, Founder of I'm Adopted)

Bev Reweti (Maori - NZ transracial)

Gabby Malpas (Chinese - NZ transracial)

Mike Tsang (Hong Kong - NZ)

Jovie Chau (Hong Kong - NZ)

NZ Adoption Authority

Peter McGurk

60 professional attendees covering domestic and intercountry adoption including social workers, supervisors, national manager, general manager, department Chief Exec

Date: Mon 26 June

Time: 08:30am AEST / 10:30am NZT / 06:30am HKT / 00:30am Berlin

Duration: 2 hours

Delivery: Zoom

Time: Jun 26, 2023 10:30 Auckland, Wellington

Introduction

Each to prepare an intro:

who you are, your country of birth, how your adoption was facilitated (thru' NZ govt or agency or other means), a little about your journey as an adoptee, any role you play in the

wider adoptee community, where you reside now, your adoptive family structure, whether you've been back to birth country, whether you've searched / reunited.

Discussion

What is ICAV? What is the ICAV vision? What are the main achievements over the last 5 (or more) years? What are the ICAV current priorities?

Lynelle

- ICAV
 - a global network that brings together the most outspoken and critical thinking of ic adoptees who advocate, educate, and empower our community and provide much needed peer support;
 - prevent the reinvention of the wheel and act as a 1 stop shop for any ic adoptee to refer adoptees to much needed supports given many of our governments (birth & adoptive) do fail to provide what is needed
 - volunteer network, most of us unfunded, doing this because we know how important it is, knowing what it's like to feel so isolated and unsupported
- Vision - A world where existing intercountry adoptees are not isolated or ignored, but supported by community, government, organisations and family throughout their entire adoption journey. A world in the future, where intercountry adoption is rarely necessary.
- Main achievements
 - Observer at the Hague and giving input;
 - presenting to and giving input on the UN Joint Statement on Illegal and Illicit Intercountry adoption, been invited to present again in Sept on lived experience, we aim to bring in also our birth family representation because their voices are largely ignored;
 - provide consultation by various CAs around the world (Philippines, Quebec, USA, Australia) and bring adoptee voices / leaders to the table where they can be actively consulted and engaged;
 - in Australia our suite of Post Adoption Support Services led by adoptee input and consultation which includes free national counselling, small grants & bursaries, and for a time, our Search and Reunion service which was seed funded;
 - giving real input into Govt decisions leading to much needed research / work eg the Suicide and Adoption report by Aust Govt DSS.
 - essentially we bridge that gap for governments who make high level policy and practice but we bring in real life outcomes of how that plays out and where the gaps are, what's working, what's not working, how to make things better for everyone in the long run
- Current priorities
 - to engage with CAs and work with them collaboratively so they can take seriously the responsibility they hold in upholding their Hague commitments;
 - to elevate the adoptee voice and ensure it is being included at the highest levels for

consultation and input;

- build up a community of leaders in adoptee spaces, to mentor / encourage them to think critically so we can improve the future practice, policy and legislation;
- give government and adoption workers truthful feedback because often there's a disengagement between policy and what happens on the ground for those who live it; let's lead by example: by inviting adoptees to participate and contribute and truly listen to and engage with their lived experience; it's a win-win: it helps them heal by turning their experiences into something constructive for future gens, and gives Govt way forwards in legislation, policy and practice to learn the lessons of the past
- provide education, resources and a safe space committed to the ica community that addresses the known and unmet needs

What does ICAV consider to be the distinctive developmental stages experienced by ICA children / adolescents and their adoptive families?

Lynelle

- The stages and struggles we adoptees go thru' can be lifelong:
 - grief and loss is the baseline - relinquishment trauma and adoption trauma;
 - struggle to maintain meaningful cultural connections;
 - transition is traumatic esp if older;
 - dealing with racism and having no family to turn to who understands nor is equipped to help us deal with;
 - the extra challenges if we live with additional needs / disabilities
 - the extra challenges if we are struggling with our sexuality
 - finding our authentic self between our adoptive vs our birth identity;
 - separating from our adoptive families to think of adoption for ourselves and how it truly impacts us;
 - searching;
 - returning;
 - establishing our careers and families of our own;
 - our adoptive parents passing;
 - our adoptive parents divorcing;
 - coming to terms with if our adoptive family relationship has formally / informally broken down
 - reunion when it's possible or living with never knowing bio family;
 - the 2nd generation impacts and the rights our children have to their heritage and adoption records;
 - accessing our records and histories;
 - becoming aware of our human and child's rights, advocating for our rights;
 - when gross injustices have occurred finding a legal pathway to hold parties accountable;
 - working in our community of peers and the challenges that poses
- It is a lifelong journey as adoptees, our main task is to integrate our birth and adoptive identities and to figure out how to build a positive sense of self

- We can only do this if we have visibility to others like us who role model and mentor for us
- This journey is complicated and made more difficult if our society we are adopted into fails to understand the significance of our journey and provide the much needed supports to facilitate positive outcomes
- I always say to countries and governments, if you can't commit to doing this properly, then you shouldn't be doing it at all as it is not truly in the interests of the child to actively displace them and expect them to thrive without the supports we know they need

Jovie C

Older Aged Adoption, Preparation, Transition and Impacts

- Loving home to abusive chaos
- Transition
- Formal adoption
- Abuse
- Suicide Attempt

[What does the experience of ICA adults tell us about the need for post adoption supports and services?](#)

Currently a Royal Commission Enquiry into Abuse in State Care - which has adoption in its terms of reference. This enquiry will be making findings and recommendations on redress and post adoption support / services. So there is awareness / interest in what redress and the funding of future services could involve.

Alex K

- Provide pre and post adoption support to parents.
- Provide support with documentations i.e. passport renewal, citizenship and or obtainment from birth countries
- Provide special funding and grants that support post adoption services i.e., gathering of adopted people through accredited civil society organisations.

Mike T

- Cultural and identity support services for inter-racial adoptees and a background check on potential adoptive parents.
- A checklist on the basics on how adoptive parents will deal with the various psychological issues adoptees have from identity to behavioural.
- More intensive monthly check in and even group meetings with other adoptive parents and kids to go over similar issues past present and future.
- Even have a Q and A with adult adoptees on how it was like and how prospective parents can be more supportive.

Bev R

- A free service that provides counselling and therapeutic care and peer support.

- Specialised counsellors trained in inter-country adoption and adoption trauma, issues such as grief, loss, identity, cultural displacement.
- Specialised Support services available for adoptees throughout their life span

Understanding the dynamics of racism from the perspective of ICA adults

What key messages would we share on lived experiences of racism?

Mike

- Often you feel alone battling your identity issues and being different from your adoptive parents. Nobody seems to understand how you battle with racism both at home and at school in public when you're walking around with your adoptive parents.
- The way people look at you because of your name and you don't match your name. The shame of being adopted and not wanting anyone to know.
- Being male in an Asian culture and then being given up.

Gabby

- Racism is hard to process when the perpetrators look like members of your own family
- Racism is very hard to take when its a daily occurrence in your home town or the place you were born
- NZ has a real problem with racism in that it prides itself on being a very welcoming and tolerant country and yet, will not even consider it might have a problem. I would like to see NZ actually acknowledge it's issues with racism historical and present.

For further ICAV resources on Race, see our Perspective Paper and Webinar:

<https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2022/05/25/lived-experience-of-racism-in-transracial-intercountry-adoption/>

What key messages would you share on your experiences of Search and Reunion?

Alex G

- Every search is different with individual circumstances, information at the beginning varies, outcomes can be unique and it is often an emotional rollercoaster for adoptees
- Adoptees need to be better prepared and supported for the various outcomes involved
- Support for adoptees and their families needs to come from professionals as well as peer community
- Understanding answers to our basic questions when starting a search can often take a lifetime to find
- Barriers to searching and reunion include language difficulties, incorrect paperwork, finances, lack of emotional support, birth family trauma, etc.

For further ICAV resources on Searching and Reunion, see our Perspective Papers and webinar:

<https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2023/05/20/searching-in-intercountry-adoption-by-adoptee-experts-webinar/>

Our upcoming Webinar is scheduled for July 30, Reunion and Beyond. Registration here: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/661842076467>

What key messages would you want the Central Authority and Social Workers in adoption to understand?

Alex K

- In their operations and policy making decisions they should take a more human-centred approach, gather the perspectives and especially lived experiences of all parties involved
- That its vital to build strategic and long term partnership with countries that have been involved in adoptions, and civil society organisations.

Gabby M

- Are lessons from the past being learnt? We adoptees grow up and we need ongoing and real support from childhood and well into our adulthood because this is a lifelong experience. Most of us do not come to think critically about our adoptions/life experiences or simply do not have the language, until our 40s and 50s.
- Do professionals fully appreciate what it is like to lose your mother, entire family, native language, native culture and be transplanted into a strange environment where you are just expected to fit in, thrive and grow like everyone else? Many of us only come out of the fog much later in life because we have spent a lifetime literally trying to survive, fit in and get by.
- The heavy lifting work is still being done by us adoptees.
- Punam pieces worn by the professional who came to present to us.

Bev

- Social Workers need to know relinquishment and adoption trauma have an impact on an adopted person's mental health. Because of the complexities of being adopted, professionals need to be aware adoptees need a different kind of support than non-adoptees. Because our trauma is our adoption, we lose our whole world, we lose everything, we lose our entire natural world.
- We often have behaviours and feelings over-pathologised, while also being required to integrate the trauma of removal from our family, culture and country without understanding, or any specialist support. Being adopted has a significant and complex impact on adoptees.
- There is emotional trauma and developmental trauma.

Globally there is a very mixed picture of intercountry adoption. What are the main issues for CAs to be thinking about in terms of their responsibility to make sure ICA prioritises the interest of ICA adopted children / adults? (5mins)

Lynelle

- What responses are you going to give for adoptees seeking post adoption supports: the need to find bio family, the need to access records, the need to investigate if an illegal / illicit adoption has occurred, the need to help the 2nd generation requests like access to records, the need for a possible Royal Commission / National Inquiry into Adoption in NZ?
- Who is best suited to support the community? The more you build in lived experience expertise, the better it suits the community need. Try to move away from relying on adoptive parent led responses as your population of adoptees gets older.
- Is ICA going to continue given the practice (domestically and ICA) of Plenary Adoption does not fully uphold and respect our Rights to Origins? What are the options going forwards? Simple Adoption? Kinship Care? Guardianship?
- How does the lessons learnt in ICA reflect into the legislation, policy and practice for other family formation methods eg surrogacy, donor conceived, IVF?
- How do the lessons learnt about the cultural and racial elements of domestic and ICA practices inform each other and reflect best practice from a human rights approach?

90 mins total