

3.1 Addressing the needs of those who use the ICAFSS

- Does the ICAFSS meet the needs of the intercountry adoption community, as identified in the evaluation? See Annex A for detail on the ICAFSS.
- If not, what changes to the ICAFSS would you recommend?

ICAFSS meets only the tip of the iceberg of needs in the intercountry adoption community. I can only speak for intercountry adoptees like myself but we have spoken up for years about the need for ongoing counselling. The budgeted 10 sessions of therapy a year is simply not enough for most adoptees. As an idea, personally I spent over \$25k in ongoing therapy across 5-10 years for the traumas involved in my relinquishment and adoption. The current budgeted amount of \$900k per year, if all the budget was spent on counselling alone, only equates to \$90 per adoptee given we have over 10,000 intercountry adoptees recorded in our AIHW statistics. That's not including those who are here as expatriate adoptions or the private adoptions that were done prior to the statistics being captured which only began in 1979. Many of us Vietnamese adoptees arrived prior to this, approx 500 of us. So the hugest change I recommend would be a substantial uplift to the budget so that counselling can be unlimited and the service adequately resourced to administer it, and provide ongoing education and training to the community and professionals providing the service, and to best utilise the resources trained up in this area.

There needs to be more than 1 administrator of the service at head office. If training of those counsellors is to be done properly, the budget needs to also include accessing the experts from other countries to upskill our therapists and create an Adoption Competency Training which includes speciality components on Race, Culture, Return to Birthland, Searching/Reunion, as these are aspects not covered adequately from a local adoption perspective because our situations are so much more complex covering other countries, languages, races, customs, values, expectations.

The service needs to be provided so that there are more face to face points in major areas of Australia not just 1 - Melbourne. The current advertising of ICAFSS makes it falsely appear to be a Melbourne only service. I have had many adoptees who tell me they didn't make contact because as soon as they saw the flyer, they thought they would not be serviced as they were not located in Melbourne.

The service needs to be provided by a broader range of therapist. Currently it appears there are 1-3 counsellors per state who are providers of the service. That is not enough as there is a wait list to speak to one. Also, there is not enough diversity represented in those counsellors - most are white females who, to many adult intercountry adoptees, feel they are sitting there facing their adoptive mother. We want to see people who understand our racial and cultural issues. We want people of colour, people of diversity (LGBTQ+), we want more males for the male adoptees. We also want different modes of therapy not just talking cognitive therapy. Eg constellation, emdr, psychosomatic, gestalt, etc.

The advertising of the service needs to connect into the first ports of call of other major services eg. Lifeline, Suicide hotlines, mental health services, GPs, schools. Many adoptees share how they had no clue about there being a service so that means, so far, the service is hugely under utilised because people don't know it exists. Unless they contact ICAV, adult intercountry adoptees don't know. More needs to be done to become visible on Social media platforms and advertise to targeted groups eg adolescents, young adults.

The service needs to really engage with the impacted community. So far, ICAFSS has had the service for 4-5 years (?) but they don't have an Advisory to the service, nor do they engage well with the community of impacted people. This could be because of the lack of funds to resource up enough to engage with us? We live it and breath it, we know what our community needs but yet ICAFSS has poorly engaged with us from a consultative perspective. This could also be because initially the service was not inclusive of adult intercountry adoptees and hence, they didn't see us as an important stakeholder but they forget, we are those children who grow up.

The service in education space is hugely lacking. Training to other professionals from a trauma and racially informed foundation for teachers, doctors, mental health and emergency workers needs to be done so they can approach adoptees with sensitivity and understanding of the traumas they've lived. Education to adoptees could be provided to help us better understand our challenges in areas like suicide ideation, divorce of adoptive parents, adoption breakdown and crisis services, struggling to individuate from adoptive parents in the early 20s and navigating that stage, relationship struggles, how to embrace the adoptive & birth cultures, death of loved ones and what that triggers, dealing with impending reunion, etc.

There is also a huge need for the Commonwealth-State Agreement to be sorted out. Why can't States hand over their role in Post adoption space for ICA? They barely do anything except for SA with PASS. The rest do next to nothing except to provide us with our adoption documents if and when we write, pay and ask. Apart from this, the States do NOTHING to support us long term in our journey as intercountry adoptees. Why not give that responsibility to Fed Govt who could ensure a better national service that accomodates our life long journey and who so far, have done a much better job at engaging and listening to us than any of the states ever have. Have we ever been asked to attend the Post Adoption meeting with State CAs? No. Our needs get ignored by States. They appear to have no interest in providing post adoption services that last for the duration of our lifetime. If the Commonwealth bears its responsibility properly as per the Hague Convention, we should be ensuring adequate Post Adoption Support for our lifelong journey.

There needs to be specific support for those who have experienced an illegal or illicit adoption. Currently the Trafficking Protocol is very high level but gives no guidance to impacted people for where to turn for emotional, financial, legal or practical support. The way in which ISS Australia helped 1 Taiwanese adoptee who had been trafficked during the search n reunion service could be replicated for others. It was practical and financial but it was missing the emotional counselling component.

The service needs to include Searching & Reunion support for paper and DNA searching that includes genealogical professional advice.

3.2 Ideas for different forms of support

- How could the ICAFSS facilitate different forms of support, like those listed above, for the intercountry adoption community?
- What is the best way to ensure that the available funding is accessed equitably?

We need different types of emotional support .. this could be in the form of different types of therapy like Constellation therapy, EMDR, psycho-somatic, to cognitive. People respond to different types of therapy .. maybe its more useful to devise a model of incorporating therapists who are already known to be effective and have like a portal where adoptees can access who they are and what style of therapy they provide, then access a fund that allows them to see the counsellor and therapy of their choice?

We need better Peer Mentor support, funded, guided by professionals, and trained. We are the ones who live it, we are passionate about giving back to our community, we are here for the long haul and don't disappear if a contract ends. You should be upskilling us so that despite the longevity or not of a contract, we can still provide better support to our community. Currently SA PASS has a great tried and tested model of Peer Mentoring, why can't this be rolled out across the nation? We should not reinvent the wheel if we already have tried and tested models that have been successful. Leverage the NGO organisations who have the skills and knowledge and expand upon their success. We have a few adult intercountry adoptees who have been providing great peer mentoring to young adoptees, they do this at their own cost; we really should be leveraging off their talents and passion and allow some sort of project funding to build upon what they do and recognise their valuable contribution and provide much needed funding to expand upon the work they are doing. How many other adoptees would willingly be involved if only some sort of funding was made available?!

ICAFSS could manage project funding so that things like adoptee art events, adoptee face to face yearly conference gathering, adoptee multi media projects could be done. These could all add to the resources avail for our community and need to sit within our community, not just with the org who DSS funds and then disappears when their contract expires.

We need specific education and support forums that guide us in our journey and helps us resolve the many issues we are faced with. Currently ICAFSS only provides 1:1 counselling but what would be valuable is group therapy type programs ie retreat format like the local adoption program or to have say a live online forum on a specific topic where adoptees can join in and connect plus learn and share from one another with guidance from a professional.

There are plenty of ways in which ICAFSS could develop more resources for the community eg utilise technology/ multimedia on topics to help educate the wider public, aimed at schools, or GPs to help educate them about the basics in intercountry adoption and at the access points where most families and adoptees would find the service.

ICAFSS could lead a research project on the longitudinal journey of intercountry adoption, what makes for better success, what hasn't worked so well. The book *The Colour of Time* was a collection of stories but how much more would research by psychologists be for government to inform policy more adequately?

ICAFSS currently only provides support during business hours but there are many adoptees who need crisis help. So unless ICAFSS provides training to the crisis helplines, it needs to develop its own but I suggest like a SMS version - every adoptee has a mobile phone and they much prefer to sms and chat instantly in moments of crisis.

Another option is to provide adoptees access to therapists of their choice that allows continuity for those who have already built up the relationship.

3.3 Search for origins

- Noting the items described at 2. Key principles for redesign, what type of:

a) practical support

b) emotional support

would you like from a service if you were thinking about searching for your origins or supporting someone to do so?

Practical support would include

- helping deal with the bureaucracy of our birth countries whether that be translation to read and understand forms to fill out

- help refer adoptees to search orgs/ individuals who have been checked as providing a respectable service (there are so many out there taking advantage of vulnerable adoptees desperate to find families); a database of service providers with ratings from users like TripAdvisor

- fund already established adoptee led search orgs

- guidance and funding for DNA testing and guidance on results from a professional genealogist

- guidance on searching options esp if we don't have a useful paper trail

- diplomatic support, guidance when we have been trafficked to deal with the birth country and find our truth and help with searching when this has been the case

- ensure any search n reunion resources is freely given to the adoptee community once the service ends to allow us access to these resources lifelong eg the Search video and The Colour of Time book funded by ISS Aust isn't accessible for the adoptees who contributed to it, it sits with ISS Aust even tho they no longer provide in this space. These resources should be allowed to be reprinted or displayed in the future given they are made from our knowledge, experience and input. Otherwise we contribute but lose these resources over the years because they remain the property of the org who was funded but might have disappeared. A bit like the issue we adoptees have with access to our data/info from agencies or entities when they disappear. DSS should house the resources and make them freely avail to us for our lifetime.

- help us access cultural knowledge so that return to country visits are beneficial

- help us find neutral professional supports and orgs ie we shouldn't be in situations where we only deal with those who facilitated our adoption esp if questions of irregularity exists

Emotional support would include

- counselling from a professional who understands the journey and complexities

- peer support and learning from peers in constructive ways eg seminars, presentations, discussion nights

- resources that help us deal with the many ups and downs of this including what to do when we don't find or we find a deceased parent/family

- specific support for those who have been trafficked, how to deal with the issues, what these issues are, how it complicates the search process, and the role govt/family/ has played and how it impacts our sense of trust

3.4 National accessibility

- What alternative service delivery models can you suggest that would support national delivery of the ICAFSS and ensure equitable access for people living in regional and remote areas?

ICAFSS needs to have an Advisory group (paid to provide this ongoing consultation) comprised of those with lived experience and those who are in remote areas to constantly check that the service is meeting the needs of the community. Without this feedback and input, the service is running blind.

The program needs to provide counselling over technology so that those in remote areas still have as much ability to access support as those in metro areas. The program needs to have a far greater pool of avail counsellors as currently it's just not enough to meet demand.

The program needs to be complemented by visiting regional areas, taking with them one or two impacted persons as peers to lead the sessions and have a face to face component so that isolated adoptees, have the chance to connect in. The power of connecting is not to be under estimated. Most adoptees struggle with feelings of isolation whether they are in remote areas or not; but enhanced by being geographically isolated. Let's not also forget the adoptees who have significant mental health issues where they are limited to join in because of lack of self confidence to connect in. How do we reach those adoptees as they suffer the most? We don't train the mental health professionals whom they come into contact with to even flag intercountry adoption as an area of trauma.

We should do what some other NGOs like NSW PARC are doing well in visiting regional areas on a calendar basis.

For those who live in Regional/remote areas, there should be a fund to help them join in with other services like retreats or symposiums or events that are held in city areas. This fund should cover their travel and accomodation costs.

3.5 Capacity building

- Do you have any suggestions on how to:

- a) support or encourage capacity building and improved collaboration in the service sector?
- b) support or encourage peer support and mentorship among adoptees and families?
- c) encourage development of support networks and information resources for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents?

Yes.

a) lived experience should provide basic training to any service provider who is funded to give us services. this should be done on an ongoing basis so that the nuances are learnt and knowledge kept fresh.

the resources created by any NGO funded by DSS should go back to the community after the contract expires. currently the resources and knowledge gained gets lost once the provider loses the contract. this is a waste of resources and does little to build capacity within our community. a great place to house alot of the post adoption service info would be on the DSS website. alot of knowledge is lost because every State and NGO operates in isolation and knowledge is not retained.

we need a portal that allows this sharing and keeps the resources that are really well developed and useful.

b) fund us to develop our own peer support and mentorship or fund NGOs who our community votes as being able to be the most collaborative and successful; some do better than others.

c) yes like a) above, create a national framework for post adoption resources that allows information building, brings collaboration by holding a yearly post adoption symposium where stakeholders and more importantly, the most impacted, get to have a say about how it's working; c) should also include adoptees not just adoptive or prospective adoptive parents.

Why hasn't the website managed by DSS over the past 5 years been built upon to house and list in detail the post adoption supports avail? It currently has a list but it doesn't explain to an adoptee who to contact for what, the costs involved, or what services are provided. We need a centralised repository for post adoption support across the nation.

We need a substantial increase in funding to be able to do any of this better.

3.6 Measuring success

- What are the short-term outcomes that your idea or activity seeks to achieve for people using the ICAFSS?
- What are the long-term outcomes that your idea or activity seeks to achieve?
- What knowledge, attitudes or skill should be developed through the activity?
- What performance indicators or other measures could be used to show the change or benefit that has occurred?
- What evidence or data could be collected to measure the intended outcome of your idea or activity?

Knowledge, skills, attitudes

development and enhancement of resilience to better overcome the challenges we face growing up as intercountry adoptees

Performance indicators

the number of adoptees accessing the service - hopefully it increases to show that knowledge of the service has increased

less adoptees feeling isolated and unsupported, skills increased, better relationships with self and others, more positive feelings towards their country of birth and race,

Evidence

Research funded eg we could provide research to orgs like the NSW Institute of Adoption who currently do nothing in ica space

Other Comments

I would like to know how the government justifies spending \$28m on pre adoption services from the Abbott government commitment when only \$4.47m has been spent on this ICAFSS service. In that 4-5 year period, less than 500 adoptees have arrived in Australia. So this is how the skew from an organisation that focuses only on demanding more adoptions has influence in how our government spends money. The rest of the larger part of the community, of which there are over 10,000 intercountry adoptees and their families was given only a small portion for post adoption spending. One has to wonder about the balance of power here and the focus on demand when really, as a government signing the Hague, you have a commitment to be fair and equitable to the community of intercountry adoptees and the families who adopted them.

Currently there is no “Mediation” service that I am aware of for adult adoptees .. but we could utilise that for help with reunion, those from trafficked backgrounds, or those experiencing adoption breakdowns or crisis in adoptive families. There are some tricky mediation situations that could be enabled with the right professional supports funded.

As founder of ICAV, I have been involved in speaking to Australian government representing adoptee interests since the AGD formed the National InterCountry Adoption Advisory Group (NICAAG). The issue of funding comprehensive post adoption support has been a long standing request from the community.

I have also been writing to the Australian government since 2015, taken groups of adoptees to meet with Advisors and Ministers and named much of what I’ve listed in detail in this consultation, many times already. Here is a list of the meetings to date and a summary of what has been raised. <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/advocacy/>

We also met with AGD then DSS over the years on an ongoing basis via teleconference and sometimes face to face to continue to ask for these same supports. If you need any further evidence and documentation, please let me know.