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RESEARCH & EVALUATION



Post-Adoption Support Needs of International Adoptive Families

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Summary

In October 2010, some 6 months after it commenced operations, The Benevolent Society's Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) undertook a survey of inter-country families to identify the support needs of parents and their perceptions regarding the support needs of their adoptive children. At this time, PASQ recognised that there was limited locally available data regarding the needs of these families. This report documents these research findings.

The subsequent development of PASQ support services was informed by the findings from this survey.

The results revealed that families most commonly identify their children's behaviour as the most important issue for them.

Other commonly identified challenges and issues included:

- children's developmental stages
- attachment
- support networks
- family adjustment
- cultural factors.

The majority of families that responded to the survey said that they had previously accessed support from family and friends, support groups, the Internet and books. However, most indicated that they would also have appreciated access to other forms of support, especially during the first two years following the placement of their adopted child. In particular, they recommended that following the adoption of a child, families be provided with access to:

- counselling services
- support groups
- family therapy
- resources, education and workshops.

Respondents most commonly indicated their future needs would be for:

- support groups for both parents and children
- individual counselling for both parents and children
- family therapy
- relationship counselling for parents
- advocacy to other professionals, especially teachers.

In relation to service access, survey respondents identified a number of barriers that had prevented or could prevent access. In particular, these related to:

- lack of knowledge about available services
- the accessibility and availability (including cost and proximity), of those services

- the lack of appropriate and skilled professionals providing those services
- negative service perceptions (including the formality of service provision and perceptions that access could have negative consequences for them).

Survey respondents advocated that PASQ could play an important role in overcoming these barriers – particularly in terms of:

- providing inter-country families with information, education and referrals
- developing and coordinating specialised services
- advocating for inter-country families and networks
- providing a less formal and more readily accessible alternative to existing services, such as home visits, play groups, telephone advice and information.

Introduction

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) is a service of The Benevolent Society, Australia's first charity. The Benevolent Society help people change their lives through support and education and speak out for a just society where everyone thrives. It is a not for profit and non-religious organisation that has helped people, families and communities achieve positive change for 200 years.

PASQ commenced operation in February 2010, following the introduction of the *Adoption Act 2009 (Qld)*. PASQ provides Queenslanders affected by adoption with access to a range of professional services, including counselling, assistance with searching for and contacting relatives, family therapy, therapeutic groups, and other specialist information and resources. PASQ complements existing Queensland government services and peer support groups. A list of those services and groups is provided in Appendix A.

Since its inception, the range of services provided by PASQ and the way those services are provided, has continuously evolved in response to emerging post adoption support needs. To identify those needs and ensure that service development effectively meets them, PASQ has undertaken ongoing research in collaboration with existing peer support networks such as International Adoptive Families of Queensland (IAFQ)¹; Local Adoption Support Group Queensland (LASG)² and Jigsaw.

In late 2010, during its first year of operation, PASQ commenced a research project aimed at identifying the support needs of adoptive parents and their perceptions regarding the needs of their adoptive children. PASQ intended to use the results of that research to inform its service delivery planning. This report documents that research project's findings regarding the needs of inter-country adoptive families.

In undertaking this project, PASQ worked closely with peer support networks (listed at Appendix B). This early collaboration contributed to the development of positive relationships with local support networks and to ongoing collaborative service delivery. Representatives from these support networks are members of the PASQ Advisory Group and PASQ attends and delivers workshops at the annual IAFQ weekend retreat, coordinates meetings in regional areas and facilitates therapeutic programs.

¹ IAFQ is a support network of that encourages adoptive families to engage in multicultural activities and events and provides an avenue for people travelling the adoption path to make informed and educated decisions about their future family life (www.iafq.org.au).

² LASG is an informal friendship and support for Queensland families who have adopted locally (www.localadoptionqld.org.au).

Background

Queensland's involvement in overseas adoption commenced in response to the evacuation of children from Vietnam in the early 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Queensland government negotiated several Government to Government agreements and the number of overseas country agreements increased as did the number of children from overseas being adopted by Queensland parents. In 1994-95, Queensland had active inter-country programs with 10 countries and this increased to 12 by 2000-01.³ In 2006, the management of programs with overseas adoption authorities shifted from state governments to the Commonwealth Attorney General Department, who currently oversee 13 overseas country programs (www.ag.gov.au).

Over the past 25 years, since 1988-89, almost 1000 children from overseas have been adopted in Queensland, with the majority being adopted in the decade between 1998 and 2008.⁴ The majority of these are from Asian countries, including Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Philippines and China with a significant minority from African countries, including Ethiopia. Despite the significant numbers of overseas adoptions in Queensland, there is a dearth of local research regarding the needs of inter-country families. This report begins the process of addressing that issue.

Method

PASQ consulted with and worked in close partnership with representatives from both IAFQ and LASQ from the outset to conceptualise and undertake this research project.

Survey

The research used a survey, delivered by way of questionnaire, to access adoptive parents' perceptions about:

- the parenting issues they faced
- the challenges faced by children
- the source and types of support accessed
- the types of support that they would have to access
- the types of support that they believed their children could have benefited from
- likely future support needs
- children's likely future support needs
- how PASQ could best support them and their children, and
- what barriers have or could prevent them from accessing support for themselves or their children.

³ Adoption Legislation Review Consultation Paper, 2002, Department of Families p. 61

⁴ Adoptions Australia 2000-01 & 2011-2012, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Adoption Legislation Review Consultation Paper, 2002, Department of Families p.62

The survey questionnaire comprised 9 multiple choice questions with space for comments and 2 open ended questions. PASQ drew on the knowledge and experience of local peer support networks and worked together with them to develop and distribute the survey questionnaire. A list of the individuals and agencies involved in developing the survey is provided in Appendix B.

Participants

The International Adoptive Families of Queensland (IAFQ) network emailed and posted the questionnaire to all of the members on its membership list. 302 surveys were distributed and total of 78 responses were received, comprising a response rate of 26%.

The comments in responses indicated that the majority of respondents had children who were under 5 years of age.

Results

Issues identified by respondents as important for them and their children

When asked what parenting issues had been most important for them as adoptive parents, survey respondents most commonly (18%) identified concerns about their children's behaviour (Figure 1). Other commonly identified issues included concerns about their children's developmental stages (14%), attachment (13%), support networks (12%), family adjustment (11%), and cultural factors (12%).

Relatively few respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties with schools. However, this may be due to the fact that at the time of this research, most of the respondents' children were aged less than 5 years old.

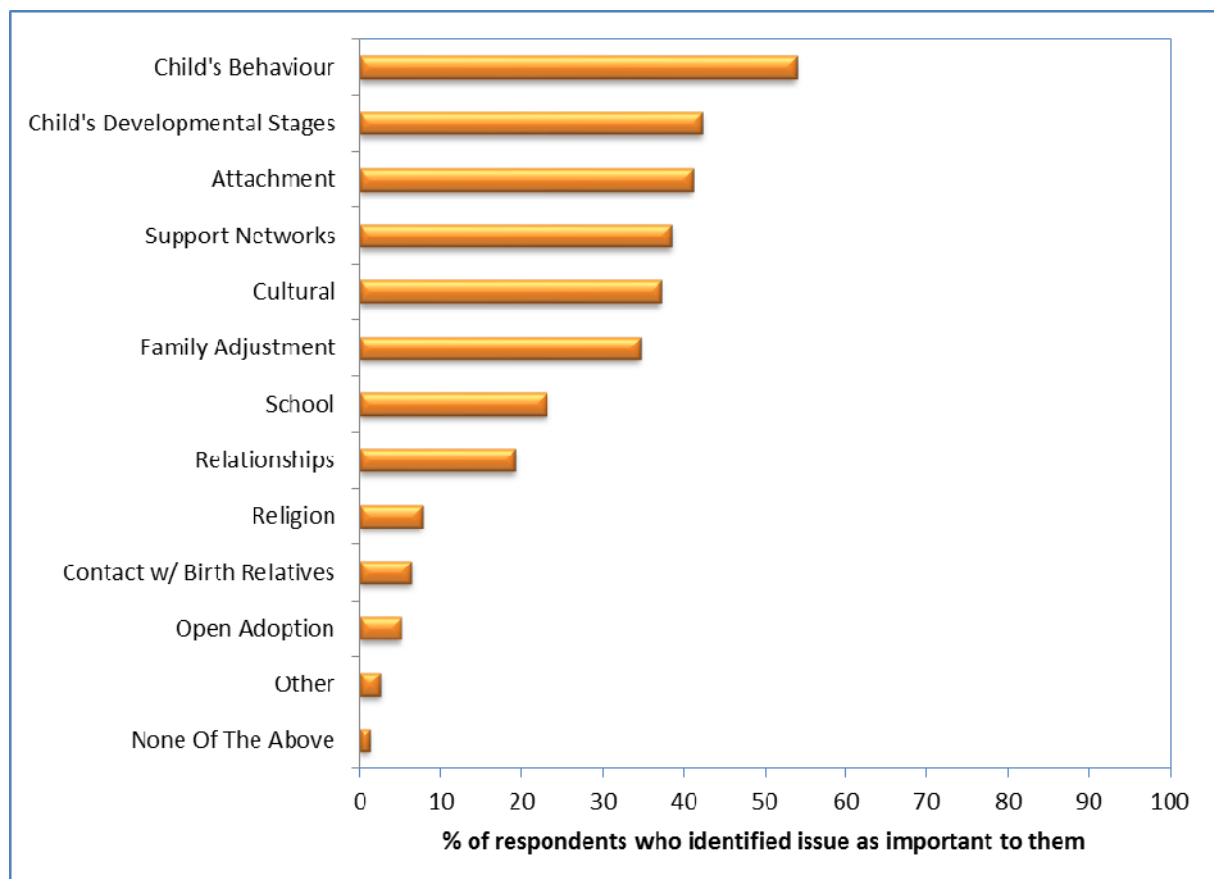


Figure 1: Parenting issues that survey respondents identified as most important to them

As documented in Figure 2, respondents differed more in terms of their perceptions of what their adoptive children found challenging than in terms of what they found challenging about being an adoptive parent. The most common issues identified for their children included: identity development (15%), other developmental issues (8%), behavioural issues (14%), family adjustment (9%) self-esteem (9%), and attachment (9%).

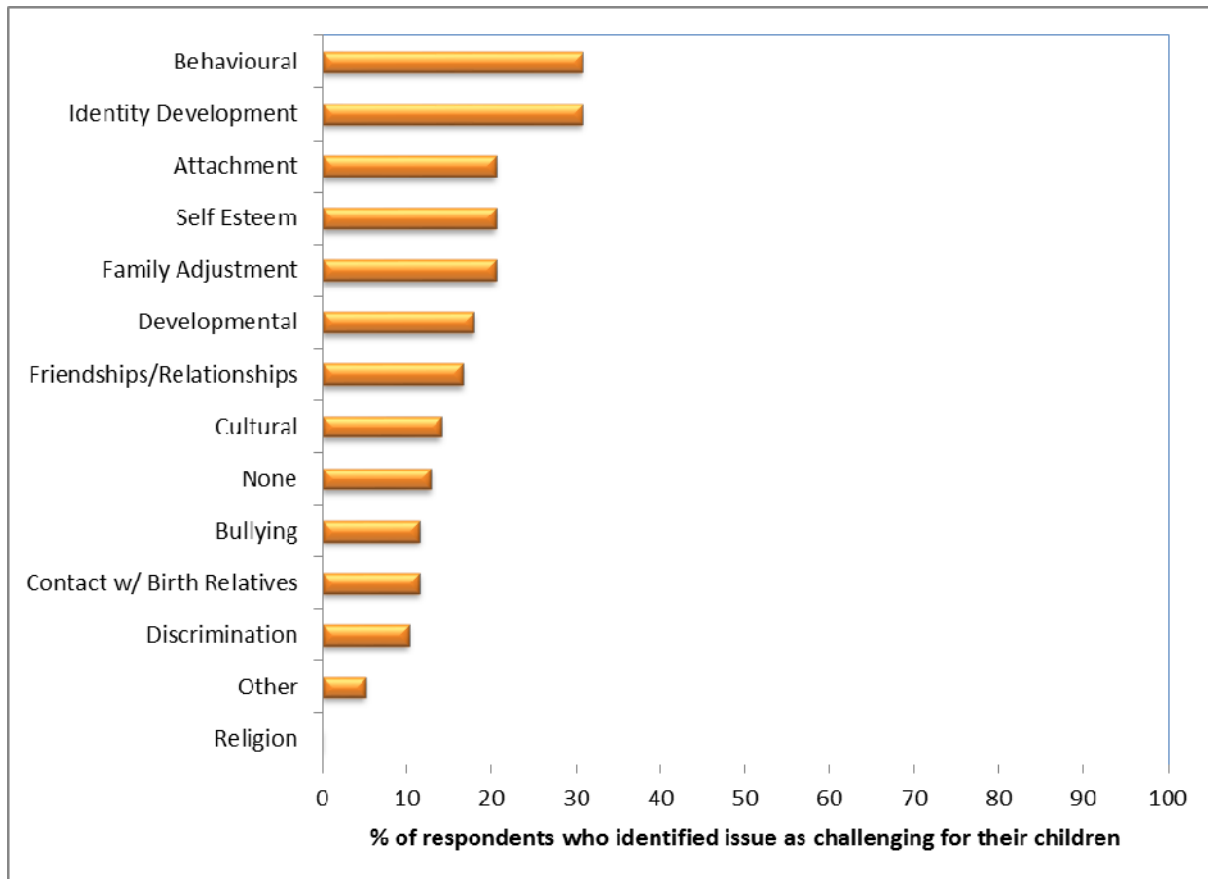


Figure 2: Issues that survey respondents perceived as most challenging for their children

Respondents’ comments regarding the issues faced by them and their children are discussed below.

Child’s behaviour, development stages, attachment and family adjustment

Survey respondent’s comments about their children’s behaviour, developmental stages, attachment and family adjustment were frequently related. Indeed, a number of respondents reported that the issues they experienced in response to their children’s behaviours were often due to the fact that they didn’t know whether those behaviours were the result of adoption or normal developmental processes. In turn, they also found it difficult to know how to respond to them.

Some odd behaviours at times. Still under 4 adjusted to us well but is worried to see us go. Has some moments when he shuts down and stares at nothing.

Survey respondents reported that disagreement and uncertainty regarding the causes of and appropriate responses to their children’s behaviours often led to familial tension and stress, particularly between spouses. They also reported worrying about whether their child would “catch up” developmentally; being distressed by their children’s night terrors and difficulty attaching to them; and feeling torn between the needs of their adoptive children, the needs of other family members, and the usual demands of ‘busy family life’.

Additional familial stressors were reported when adoptive children had experienced early trauma, neglect, or medical problems, leading to special health and psychological needs that contributed to developmental delays.

Medical issues that result when child has resided in an orphanage for a prolonged period of time. Also developmental delays that are a consequence of these medical issues.

Due to special needs and developmental delays. Child 1 Autism and Child 2 Speech and language impairment and cognitive delay. Hearing needs-requires learning support at school, struggles with reading and writing.

Other respondents cited the developmental stage at which certain behaviour emerged as the main cause of their concerns. Their responses suggested that they were either unprepared for those behaviours or worried that they might affect their child's achievement of developmental milestones.

Respondents whose children had already started school, frequently identified this transition as a very difficult time. They commented on their own and their children's difficulties dealing with 'intrusive' questions (including school assignments about family history), and with experiences of bullying adoptive children about teasing them about their adoptive status. One respondent noted that behavioural issues only emerged when their child commenced school.

Concerns with bullying because of his intelligence level exceeding his age. Friendships /relationships with children his own age. Our child already clearly prefers older children and adults to kids his own age (no matter how many play dates I arrange!)

Other respondents reported that the teenage years are particularly difficult. In one case a respondent reported grappling with their child's desire for independence. However, that respondent's comment appeared to suggest that they were aware that their children's behaviours conformed to others at his/her developmental stage.

From straight A student to an obnoxious student due to being advised about leaving home at a tender age 15 to 16 years of age they're feeding off one another. Re Centre Link Payments for living away kids

One respondent also described difficulties dealing with government communication about inter-country adoptions.

Identity development and self esteem

Survey respondents comments about the identity development and self esteem challenges faced by their children commonly related to their those children's negative school experiences and to their efforts to 'seek connections and explanations about parent figures from [their] past'. A number of these respondents expressed strong feelings of uncertainty

and powerlessness created by not being able to have contact with or information about their children's birth families.

International adoption with no contact with birth relatives is an issue. Just not knowing.

Contact with birth relatives overseas but only have photo and information on birth mother, nothing on birth father.

Support networks and cultural issues

Respondents frequently commented on their need to develop support networks that included other inter-country families. They argued that only individuals who had experience with inter-country adoption could understand the type of support they needed. They also reported that being with other inter-country families helped them to better understand and respond to the developmental, cultural and adoption related needs of their children, and helped their children to develop healthy identities and self esteem. Where those families also involved children from the same culture as theirs, respondents also said that inter-country support networks were critical in helping children to develop and maintain their cultural identities and pride.

Support groups have assisted families to maintain and develop the cultural identities of their children and to assist them to be proud of their heritage.

Support that respondents had already accessed

As shown in Figure 3, almost all survey respondents reported that they had accessed some form of post-adoption support, with only 1% not accessing any support. Respondents had most commonly accessed support from family and friends (29%), support groups (29%) and the Internet and books (22%). A minority of respondents had accessed support from counsellors (7%) or general practitioners (7%).

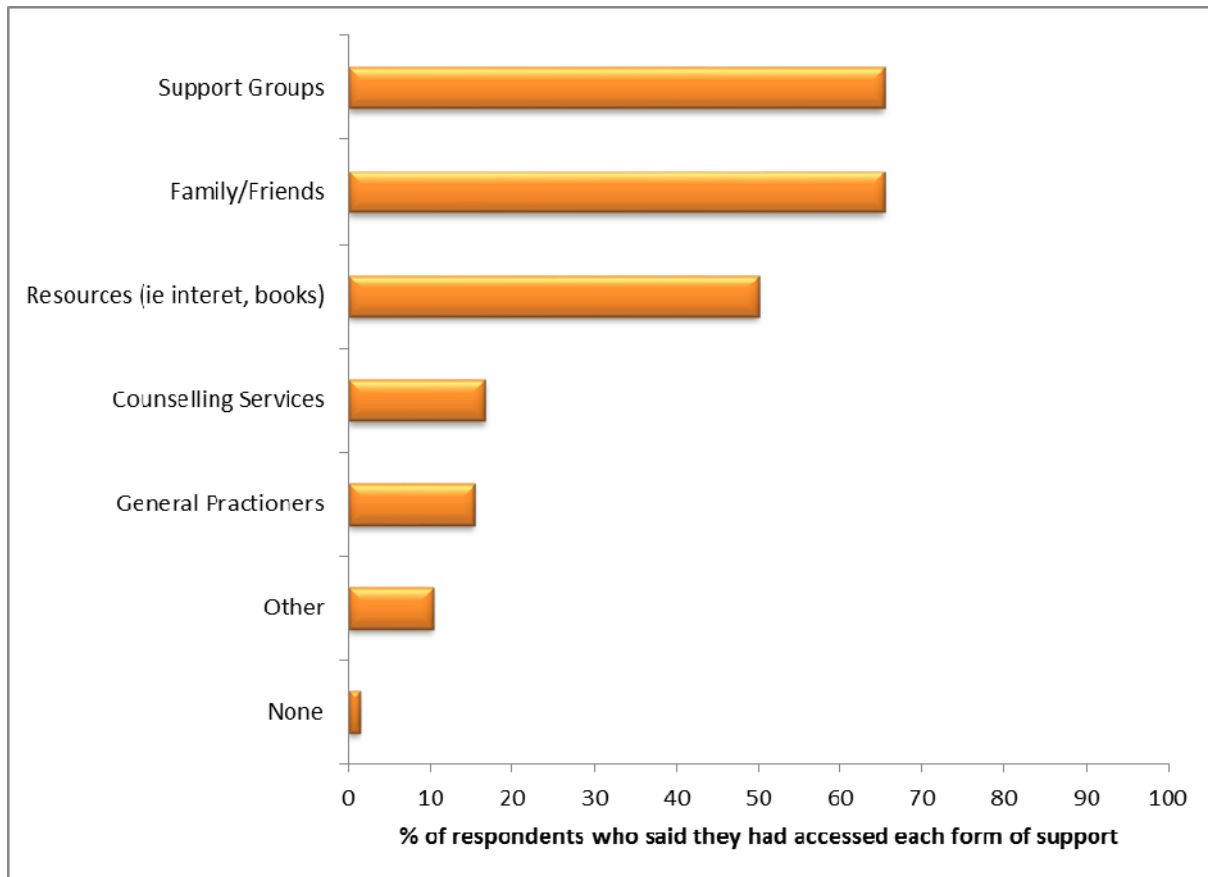


Figure 3: Supports that respondents said they had already accessed

Family and friends and support groups

Although family and friends were often the first and most available form of support that respondents accessed, as documented above, respondents particularly valued support provided by others who were familiar with inter-country adoption. Consequently, most respondents who had accessed support groups, reported that they had benefited from the experience. However, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the groups they had attended, arguing that they operated more like adoption “social groups”. These respondents said that members seemed unwilling to discuss/share problems they were experiencing, perhaps because they feared being judged or that doing so would be perceived as a negative reflection of their parenting skills.

The Internet and books

Many respondents reported that they had undertaken their own research and used books and the Internet to educate themselves about inter-country adoption and ways to support their family through it. In addition, one family commented that their educational background and undergraduate and postgraduate studies in psychology, together with access to associated resources, had helped.

Although families who had accessed educational resources regarding inter-country adoption acknowledged this had helped them, most agreed that accessing those resources took

significant time and energy, that the content of the resources sometimes conflicted, and that they would have appreciated additional forms of specialist support.

It is difficult to parent and have to learn as you go through research and books at the same time, to address these issues. Guidance from a post-adoption specialist would be far better! (Even if it could only be accessed once a month!).

Counselling

As stated above, a minority of respondents had accessed or attempted to access counselling support. However, most of those lamented the lack of counselling professionals who specialised in adoption issues.

What types of support services would respondents have appreciated and when would they have liked to have been able to access them?

When asked what types of support services they would have appreciated respondents most commonly identified individual counselling (26%), support groups (19%) family therapy (14%), and education (9%) (Figure 4).

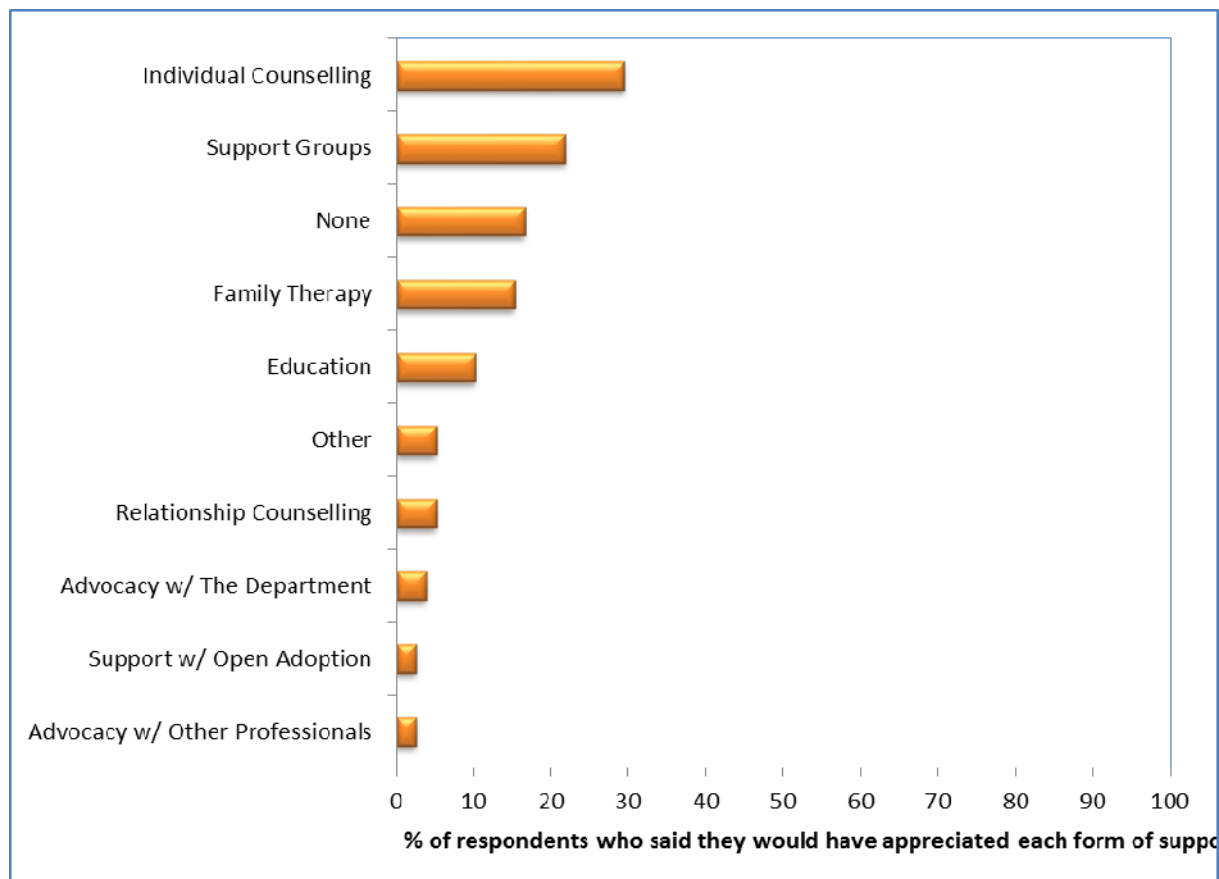


Figure 4: Types of support that respondents said they would have appreciated being able to access

As documented in Figure 5, 47% of respondents said that they would have particularly appreciated additional support during the first two years following the adoption of their child. Generally, respondents’ need for support was greatest immediately after adoption,

peaking during the first 6 months and then gradually declining from two years after adoption onwards. In terms of their children's ages, 38 % of respondents would have liked to have access to additional support when their child was aged less than two years old⁵.

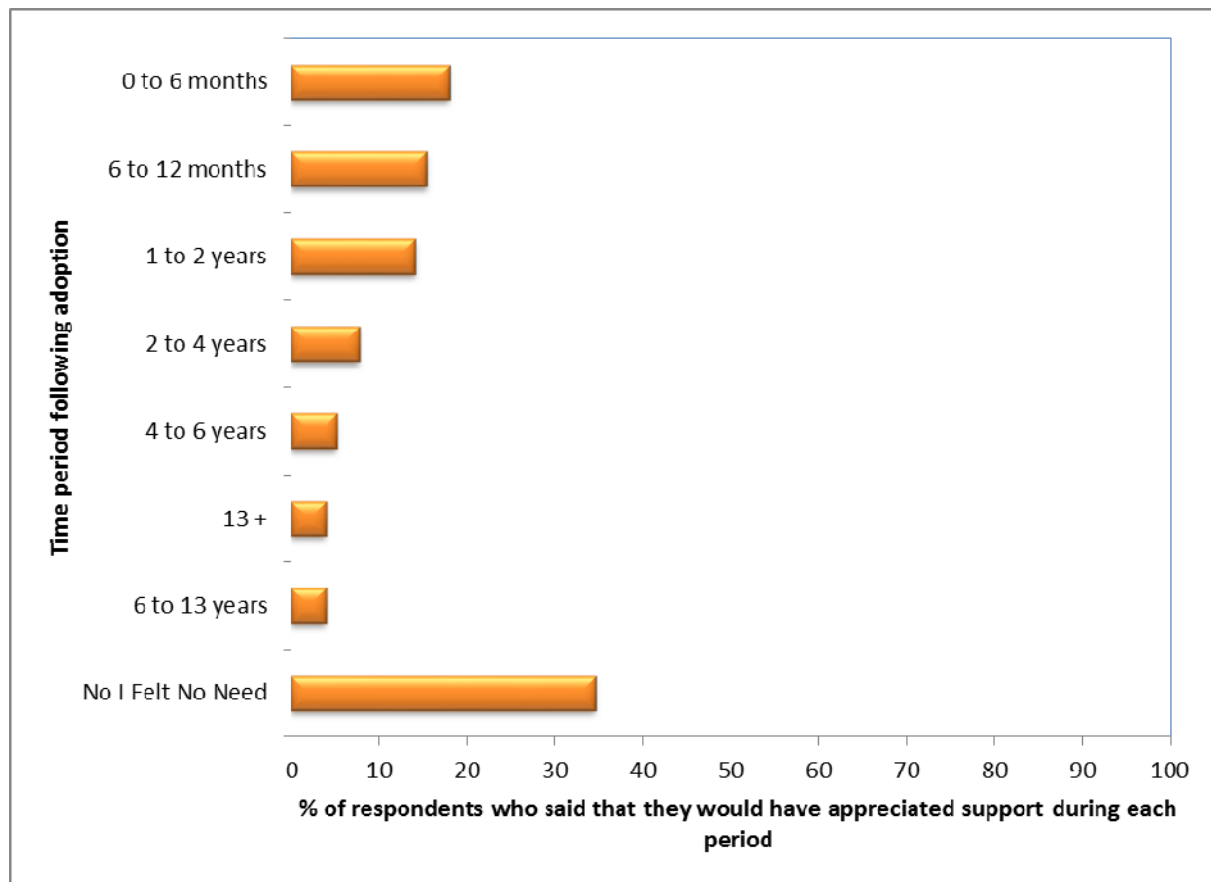


Figure 5: Period following adoption that respondents said that they would have most liked support

Individual counselling and family therapy

The majority of respondents regarded individual counselling as a very important form of inter-country adoption support. However, they also believed that for counselling to be effective, it needed to be provided by a counsellor who was experienced in adoption issues. A number also commented on the need for counselling to be completely confidential and non-judgemental to ensure that accessing it did not jeopardise future adoptive placements.

Respondents said that they would have liked to have accessed counselling to:

- assist their children to understand the limitations of access to their birth families
- address attachment issues and ease family adjustment (especially in the initial period)
- help them better manage their children's behavioural issues
- help them deal with post-adoption depression
- help them understand and manage their children's developmental issues (such as autism)

⁵ However, it is noted that as most of the survey respondents children were aged less than 5 at the time they completed the survey, their ability to anticipate support needs in the later years is limited.

- assist their adopted children to adjust to siblings
- help them understand and effectively respond to their children's post-traumatic stress reactions
- deal with the stress of the transition to becoming a family
- deal with the stress of Departmental post-placement visits (during which times some parents felt they had to be 'perfect parents' as their parenting skills were being assessed).

Education

Adoptive parents who responded to the survey commonly reported that they would have benefited from increased educational experiences during the first few years of their adoption experience. They advocated for seminars and workshops on topics including:

- resilience training
- peer attitudes to adoption
- answering personal questions
- relationship education and parenting techniques
- post adoption issues relevant to attachment and bonding
- child grieving and anger issues
- abandonment and attachment issues
- parenting children with special development and other needs.
- ways to distinguish between adoption issues and related behaviours and age appropriate developmental behaviours (e.g. night terrors, feeding disinterest, eye contact).

These respondents said that such experiences would assist inter-country adoptive parents to recognize and respond appropriately to their children's behaviours.

A number of respondents also believed that their children could have benefited from attending workshops that helped them to identify and address their adoption related feelings, including multi-age workshops where younger children could have contact with teenage adoptees.

Support groups

Although many of the adoptive parents who completed the survey had attended support groups, others had not. For some, that lack of attendance was due to geographic location. Adoptive parents in rural and regional Queensland said that they had limited access to support groups and would have appreciated more. Other respondents said that they felt that the support groups were not always approachable and/or that they were not comfortable with the focus being on talking about all of their issues. One of those said they would have welcomed a playgroup type group, combining education with a casual chat that enabled new parents to be able to come together and learn.

What did respondents identify as their families' future support needs?

Consistent with the type of support they said they would have appreciated, when respondents were asked about the types of future supports they believed they would need, most identified support groups (37%), individual counselling (29%), and family therapy (19%). In addition, a number of them foresaw that as their children aged, they would also benefit from advocacy to other professionals (23%), especially teachers (Figure 6).

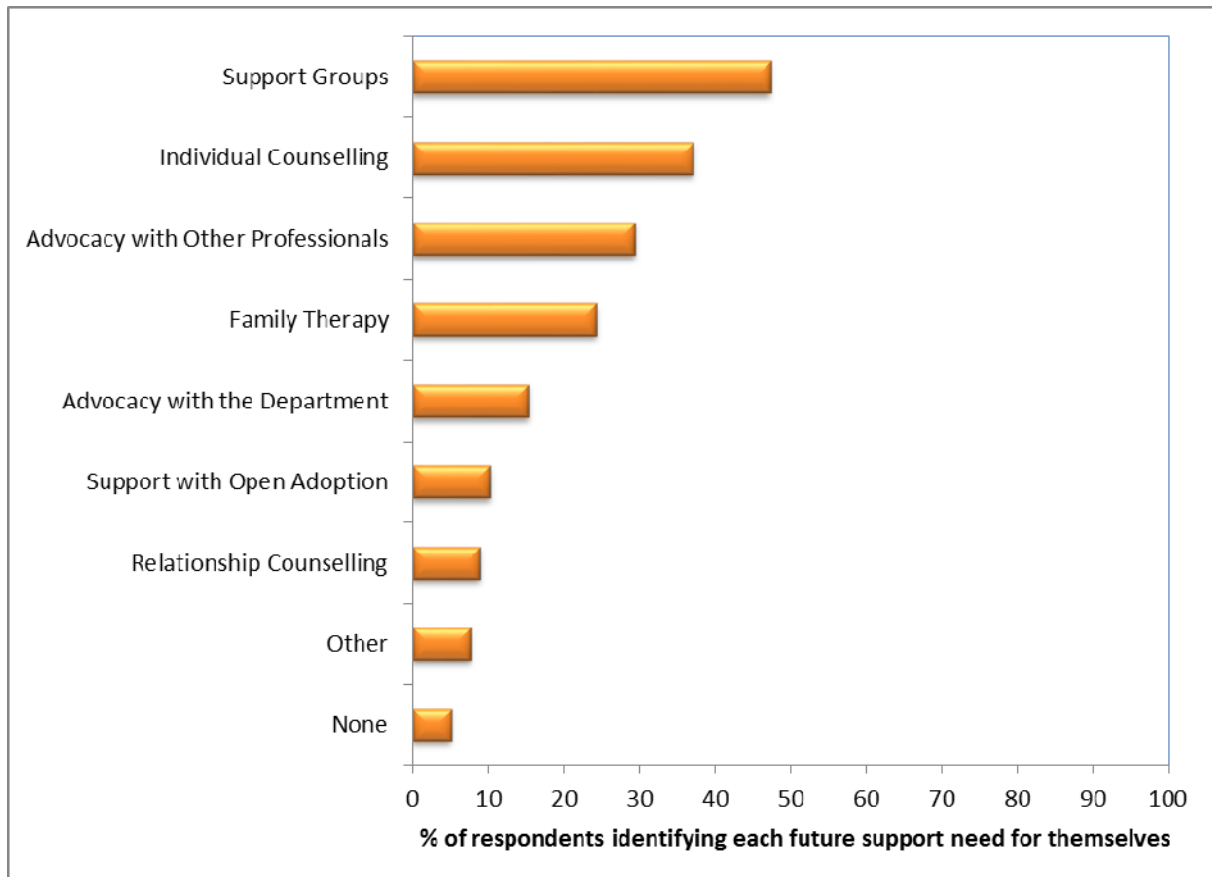


Figure 6: Respondents self reported personal future support needs

Similar trends were identified regarding the types of future support needs that respondents identified for their children (Figure 7). In particular, they believed that their children would benefit from involvement in support groups (32%), individual counselling (28%), relationship counselling (11%), and advocacy with other professionals (10%).

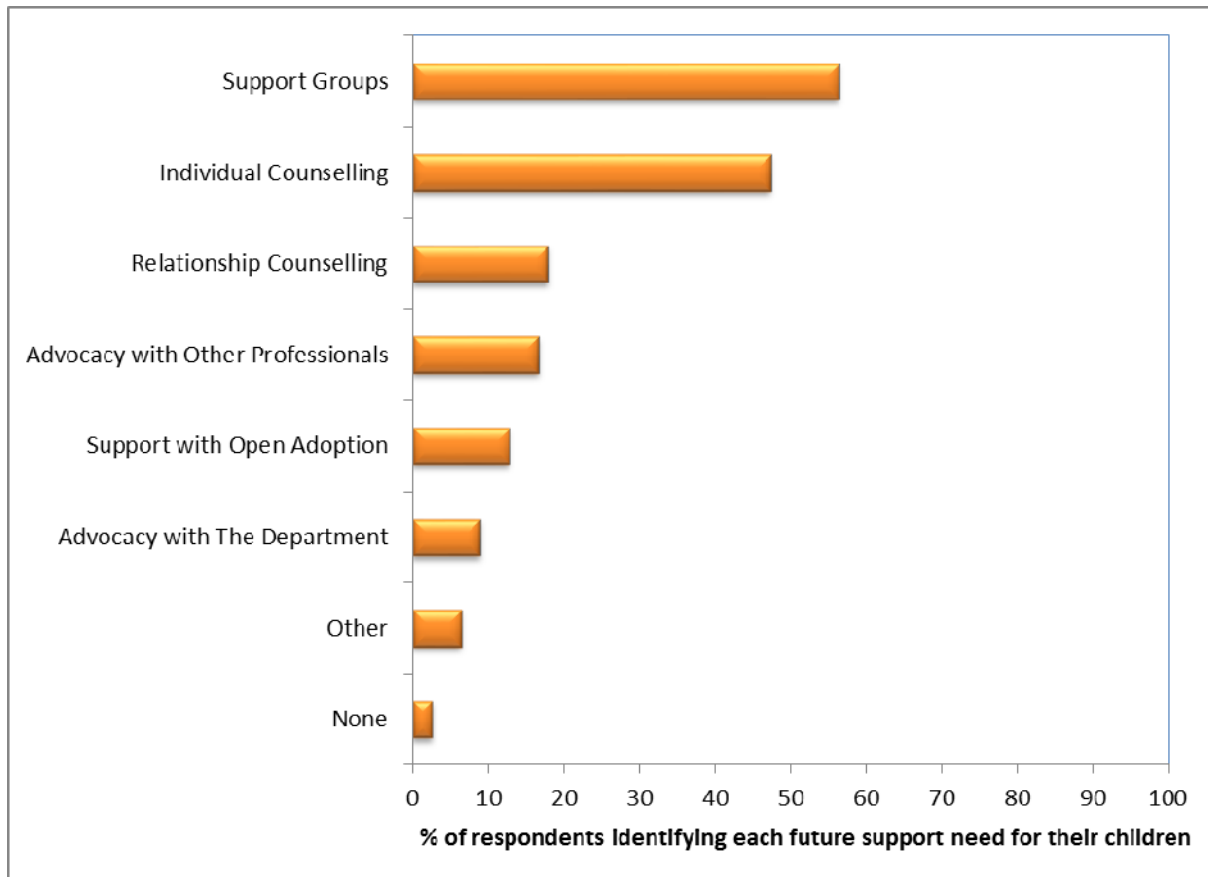


Figure 7: Children's future support needs reported by respondents

Counselling

Survey respondents perceived access to counselling, provided at reasonable rates by counsellors who were experienced in inter-country adoptions, as particularly important for their future development as an inter-country family. They also advocated the availability of these services during weekends; so that counselling could take place without interruption and families could arrange baby sitters/child care.

Need people who are knowledgeable with adoption.

Future demand for counselling support was identified as most likely during key transitions, such as when children began school or pre-school, during adolescence, and during teenage years. For their children, respondents advocated counselling that focused on identity formation and helping young people as they sought to understand their adoption status and history. Some respondents also recognised that children may need counselling support related to their future contact with their birth family.

When/if they want contact with birth family and issues around this.

Counselling through decision to meet birth family.

I am expecting that as our adopted child reaches teenage hood and further towards independence she will seek answers and may struggle as a result.

Working with a private family therapist due to kids being educated on how easy it is to live away from home at 15-16 years of age.

A number of respondents also commented that they had found the experience of dealing with the state government adoption authorities to be very stressful. One respondent identified the need for future counselling support for themselves and their children as a result of this.

Actions of Department of Child Safety will have far reaching affects on the family and at least one child will need counselling into adulthood.

Support groups

As documented in preceding sections, inter-country adoptive parents who responded to the survey consistently valued the benefits of networking and sharing with others who had similar experiences and issues to their own. As their children aged, they also believed that it was increasingly important that they developed their own inter-country social support networks.

It would be lovely to see activities for teens (12 to 18) to help them cope with community attitudes dealing with lack of contact from birth relatives. Also meeting others would be good.

Respondents also advocated using support groups to identify and facilitate the development of workshops to provide continuing education around new and emerging inter-country adoption issues and how to deal with them.

Advocacy

Respondents frequently commented on the need for advocacy support, particularly in relation to pre-schools, schools and state government adoption authorities.

They also suggested that future support could include educating school and pre-school teachers to help them better understand and be sensitive to issues affecting adopted children; such as family structure, grief and loss, confusion and learning difficulties. They also argued that schools should take a more pro-active approach to preventing and managing the teasing and bullying that their children experience as a result of their adoptive status.

What are the barriers that prevent access to support services

In terms of both the services they would have appreciated and those they thought they might need in the future, survey respondents identified a number of barriers that had prevented or could prevent access. In particular, these related to lack of knowledge about available services, the accessibility and availability (including cost and proximity), of those services that they were aware of, the lack of appropriate and skilled professionals providing those services, and negative service perceptions (including the formality of service provision and perceptions that access could have negative consequences for them).

Lack of service awareness, availability and accessibility

A number of respondents commented that one of the main barriers to them accessing services was their inability to identify services appropriate to their needs. For those who resided in rural, remote or regional areas, the fact that most relevant services and support groups were city based also prevented access.

Yes, living regionally not much is available. Trying to find someone experienced in adoption issues has been a challenge.

Many support group get togethers are far away too.

The cost of accessing services was also identified as a barrier, with many inter-country families identifying the cost of inter-county adoption having consumed more of their financial reserves.

Lack of appropriate and skilled professionals

Many respondent comments related to the lack of professionals who are qualified, skilled or experienced in working with inter-country families, issues related to adoption, and issues related to early trauma. Others commented that they simply didn't know how to go about searching for or locating professionals who work in those areas:

Have tried several avenues to locate a therapist who specialises in adoption and trauma related issues for pre-verbal trauma. Very difficult..... Have just been given the name of someone but not yet contacted.

Negative service perceptions

Inter-country adoptive parents who responded to the survey also frequently commented on their fear of negative consequences making them reluctant to access those services that they were aware of. Many of those respondents perceived that accessing formal support services could impact on future departmental reviews regarding their parenting capacity, jeopardise existing or future adoption applications, and/or invite unwanted family scrutiny.

Many families are reluctant to access support via ASQ for fear of negative outcomes to the family's application assessment.

Fear of the department getting the wrong idea, i.e. that there are issues rather than being happy that we are accessing support.

Others perceived that formal services were negatively biased and not sufficiently strengths based. These individuals reported favouring informal support groups that they perceived as more empowering.

We have always had lots of support from resources, support group and professional (when needed) as well as setting up our own – dance group etc. I would be very wary of using any government support facility or adoptee (we are all victims) group as I believe there is a

negative bias. Instead of seeing these children as empowered people who happen to be adopted and may happen to need a little extra help due to that or other factors they are seen as broken people who will definitely need help. I believe in and support the post adoption support groups.....

Some respondents also argued that formal services were less responsive to their day to day needs and that although they could access those services when issues emerged, they would prefer less formal support that occurred on a more regular basis and helped them to prevent issues from developing.

What support could PASQ provide to inter-country families?

Respondents advocated that PASQ could play a significant role in overcoming barriers that prevent access to supports, particularly in terms of providing families with information, education and referrals, developing and coordinating specialised services, advocating for inter-country families and networks, and providing a less formal and more readily accessible alternative to existing services.

At the time this research was conducted, PASQ had only operational for 6 months and many respondents would not yet have been familiar with the service. This provides context to some of the comments received, including the need for PASQ to better promote its services.

Information, education and referrals

The most common request for PASQ support made by inter-country parents who responded to the survey was for PASQ to provide them with information, education opportunities and referral lists.

Respondents identified the need for an easily accessible and regularly updated list of specialised services by regional area.

Having a list of various therapist in a range of areas available. Good website that parents and children can use. This type of feedback collection. Updates on any new services that become available including books, seminars, TV shows etc.

...Information [about]... recommended therapists who are experienced in identifying developmental/behavioural and emotional delays and their underlying causes. I have paid a fortune for OT and other medical professionals (GP's and Paediatricians) and alternative therapies (naturopaths etc) that did not identify my children's problems.

Others recommended the development of specialised resources regarding a wide range of issues, some of which were specific to inter-country families and some of which were more generally related to parenting and child development.

More info and organisation regarding birth parent search and medical issues.

More information on developmental delays and how to access help awareness of post adoption depression and how to access services to assist to same.

Assistance for families (newly formed and more established) with attachment issues is a vital service that is offered by very few professionals in QLD.

Its very hard in this day and age! Kids from the best of homes are going through the same issues. Between 10 to 15 of age (kids nowadays will obey you as parent. 15 to 16 of age it's a different kid your looking at (obnoxious and right) depending how you handle the situation. All parents can do is keep the lines of communication open (Suicidal attempts are up for 16 year olds. They are all into cutting wrists etc. I see kids from public as well as private schools with same issues daily.

Several respondents suggested that PASQ could act as a resource centre, including provision of newsletters or other methods of communication regarding the types of resources on offer and the key issues they address.

Monthly newsletter which covers a variety of topics or you could submit an article each quarter in the IAFQ magazine.

Making resources available to adoptive families and adopted children. I suspect all families will need some type of support along this journey even just knowing support is available can sometimes be enough.

Respondents also recommended that PASQ facilitate programs, courses and workshops about issues affecting inter-country families , including workshops that specifically targeted children.

Workshops/sessions for parents [and] children re adoption issues held every couple of years where kids can discuss issues they face at every stage with qualified professionals and other adoptees.

Regular info sessions to contact provide support and education on some adoption issues and management solution is. It is possible these could be run every 2 months in conjunction with play groups and possibly one for older children once or twice a year possibly in conjunction with the yearly weekend away even if activity is created and given to the families to run.

Help us by creating a support where we have compassionate people that understand the difficulties of adoption for all parties. If I knew post adoption stress was common I wouldn't have been so worried- As much education for all- birth parent, adoptive parents, adoptees, educators, counsellors (especially) family members (grand parents, aunts etc) WORKSHOPS! what to look out for, signs, coping strategies – even fun stuff like story books. need to keep learning.

They also identified a role for PASQ in educating other professionals and the broader community about inter-country adoption and associated practice issues.

Educating others what information questions are inappropriate/sensitive to discuss. Educating schools./ library information more books on multiculturalism.

Need to assist and support in bringing practitioners such as Don Siegd, Don Hughes, Bruce Perry out and train local professionals in impact of trauma on developing brain and some effective strategies to overcome impact of this trauma too many families paint rosy picture and some people don't know who to turn to for support.

Advocacy

As part of educating relevant professionals and the broader community about inter-country adoption issues, a number survey respondents recommended PASQ involvement in advocating for the needs of the inter-country families. Many of these report having had particularly negative experiences with the government departments that had been involved in their child's adoption. They requested greater PASQ support dealing with those departments.

..... Educate Department of Child Services to become child and family oriented and then start doing the same for Attorney Generals Department

There has been no contact from the department for over 14 months . An email/phone call or an update on the status of the overseas files would be greatly appreciated.

One respondent's comment also suggested the need to advocate for more pre and post adoption public health services, such as those provided to birth parents by midwives and child health nurses. That respondent also advocated more 'mainstream' or adoption specific parenting courses.

By providing information. we found the assessment to be heavily geared towards cultural and attachment issues. There was no discussion regarding our own adjustment becoming parents, nor was there any discussion regarding normal childhood development. These are essential areas for new parents to be aware of. I tried to access support in my local community; however there is really nothing geared towards adoptive parents ie I rang child health and asked about parenting classes but when I went along it seemed to be geared towards very young or dysfunctional parents. Adoptive parents miss out on ante natal classes and that advice midwives give out while in hospital (which we experienced with our 2nd child who is our biological child) This information was about how to bath, feed hold your baby etc. Adoptive parents need access to this type of education as well.

Another respondent suggested that PASQ take a role in advocating for support group and workshop funding for inter-country families.

Developing and providing specialised services

In addition to providing information and advocacy about specialised inter-country post-adoption support services, a number of respondents also advocated that PASQ take an active role in developing, providing and coordinating those services. In particular, they advocated PASQ develop specialised inter-country adoption counselling and family therapy services (including appropriately qualified staff and culturally diverse staff) for both parents and children.

By becoming qualified in specific adoption counselling for all ages of adoption specifically with cultural needs for both local and inter-country adoption.

Offer flexible service operation hours (preferably in-home and in the evening). 2) Keep costs reasonable (families can't afford \$200 hour sessions ~ our savings have been spent on forming our inter- country adoptive families!) 3) Offer counsellors with ethnic diversity for inter-country adoptive families (older child adoptees will relate better to someone who has/is experiencing trans-racial family issues and trans-racial adoptee issues). 4) Ensure confidentiality/discretion and independence from ASQ (dept. Communities) or parents will not be open about problems if they are going to be taken out of context and used to report to the department that parents "aren't coping". 5) Ensure counsellors are fully trained and conversant in attachment issues and strategies to help parents/children reach their secure attachment milestones (refer to Deborah Gray "Attachment In Adoption").

Make individual family counselling services available with counsellor services available with counsellor with good knowledge of adoption and inter-country adoption issues. Set up effective mechanism to enable birth family searching for inter-country adoptees.

A number of respondents recommended the provision of developmentally specific support that recognised and anticipated the specialised needs of adoptees (especially in terms of identity formation, peer relationships, and attachment/abandonment issues) and was flexible enough to provide that support through either group or individual sessions.

Counselling for pre-teen children. Resilience training for primary age children. Support through decision making meeting. Birth family meeting- afterwards for both adoptive parents and child, Teenager counselling.

Provide group sessions for older children 8 to 10 and older.

As previously advised we are an international adopted family. Our child was abandoned on the street. Therefore it is unlikely we will ever know much about her birth parents. Support in coming to terms with this action is an important one. Our support is through informal support groups.

Others suggested a role for PASQ in providing or facilitating more consistent, integrated service provision, both between services and support needs and types, and between different locations throughout Queensland. In particular, they highlighted the need for integration of services to ensure continuous support throughout children's developmental stages.

Can you make better connections with the various IAFQ area representatives ie Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Warwick and they can feed the info to the various support groups.

Have a professional service available ...have choices available.

Some respondents also advocated PASQ development of, or work with, peer support groups and networks to increase the capacity of those groups to effectively respond to member issues.

Having support networks and the people involved understanding the issues with adoption and also being parents themselves.

More accessible, less formal approaches

As indicated above, inter-country parent responses to the survey commonly suggested the need for support services to be flexible enough to allow access whenever and however they were needed.

Home visits when support is required. (I notice that telephone support is available.)

By being assessable- video conferencing.

A telephone counselling service offering education, support and appropriate referral. Sometimes it would be great to be able to talk over parenting issues with someone who is trained to understand the complexities of internationally adoptive families.

Many respondents emphasised the need for less formal services that they could simply call or contact as needed, with whom they could just talk things through with (rather than feel like they were being 'treated'), and that they didn't feel assessed or judged by.

Being open, communicative but not judgemental. Allowing access without any comeback. Being more supportive of adoptive parents as well as adopted children.

For all post adoption issues. Help with attachment issues for child and parents. Just to be there to 'listen' when we have a problem or an issue. We need someone we can contact as a lot of us feel we can't contact the Dept. Contact must be private and confidential.

Others suggested that regular post adoption home visits and phone calls by a PASQ staff member could be useful in terms of providing inter-country families with an alternative perspective on their parenting issues, and helping them to effectively contextualise and respond to those issues. Again, these respondents highlighted the importance of being listened to rather than judged.

Provide regular post adoption support (phone calls/visits) to assist where possible families need strategies to cope when they are struggling and an qualified listener with behavioural expertise would be good. I know a lot of families that blame all 'childhood' behaviours on adoption and fail to identify the causes of the behaviours – rather they blame themselves this is not helpful for the child or the family parents need reassurance that most behaviours are 'normal' childhood milestones and transitional phases and that adoption is not the excuse for naughty children as a result parents do not respond to the behaviours appropriately.

PASQ promotion

As indicated above, some comments received reflected the fact that PASQ had only been operational for 6 months at the time of this research. A number of the survey respondents emphasised that in order for PASQ to effectively support inter-cultural families, those families needed to be aware of the services it provided. For some, the survey was the first

time they had heard of PASQ. They recommended increased PASQ promotion and connection with other support groups and services.

I think that there needs to be more advertising of your services as I was not aware of your group until I received this questionnaire from my wife

We are so pleased this service is being funded and offered to adopted families. Well done to all involved what a valuable resource!

Others expressed a negative reaction to the possibility of PASQ support. For some this was because PASQ is affiliated with the Department of Communities. For others, it was because they were reluctant to ask for help regarding family adjustment issues. Both types of responses suggest the potential for improving communication about PASQ's orientation and approach to inter-country adoption issues.

I personally would not use a resource which has affiliation with ASQ or Department of Communities who I see as being anti- adoption.

We did not get real support from PASQ we had our own network of support. And really I don't know if any family is really willing to say if they are having family adjustment problems.

Conclusion

This research project, undertaken in late 2010, provided PASQ with a wealth of valuable information about the support needs of inter-country adoptive families in Queensland and helped to inform the types of supports that PASQ then went on to develop and implement.

In November 2010, the Senate's Community Affairs References Committee commenced its inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices Inquiry. This inquiry was extended and continued until February 2012, receiving many submissions and holding public hearings in most states. The process of this inquiry, its recommendations and subsequent state and federal government apologies impacted on many Australians and Queenslanders and became a significant focus of PASQ work over its first three years of operation.

PASQ has continued to work in partnership with the International Adoptive Families of Queensland, attending the annual Mapleton Camp and running workshops for children who attend this camp. PASQ also attends International Adoption Day to provide raise awareness about their service and provide information and resources.

In 2013, PASQ plans to continue to meet the support needs of inter-country families and will facilitate a therapeutic parenting group, which will support and help parents respond to their children's behaviours and needs that relate to disrupted attachment, adjustment trauma, grief and loss. PASQ is also developing a range of resources and information sheets for parents, children and other professionals such as teachers.

References

AIHW 2012, Adoptions Australia 2011-12 Child welfare series no. 54. Cat. no. CWS 42.

Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2002, Adoptions Australia 2000-01. Child welfare series no. 28. Cat. no. CWS 15.

Canberra: AIHW.

Department of Families 2002, Adoption Legislation Review Consultation Paper

Appendix A – Queensland Adoption Support Groups and Organisations

International Adoptive Families of Queensland (IAFQ)

Local Adoption Support Group (LASG)

Jigsaw

Adoption Services Queensland, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

Origins Inc. SPSA

Adoption Loss Adult Support (ALAS)

Adopted Vietnamese International (AVI)

Salvation Army Family Tracing and Post Adoption Service

Link-up

Appendix B – Acknowledgements

PASQ thanks all those who contributed to this project, especially the families who responded to the survey to share their experiences and help PASQ better understand and respond to the needs of Queensland families.

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