

Global Trends in Adoption Services

A Report to the Auckland Medical Aid Trust.

By Michelle Brewerton

Introduction:

The New Zealand Government introduced the Intercountry Adoption Act in 1997 and this was implemented on January 1st 1999. The purpose of the Act is: -

- (a) To implement in the law of New Zealand the Convention in Respect of Intercountry Adoption; and
- (b) To provide for the approval of organisations as accredited bodies to whom functions may be delegated under the Convention; and
- (c) To make other provision for intercountry adoption and other matters related to adoption.

The law change potentially allows non-Government Organisations to:

- (a) To provide services of assessment of adoptive applicants and the associated reporting; or
- (b) To provide placement and post placement services to approved prospective adoptive parents.

It is important to note that an organisation may undertake only one of the two tasks.

These changes in New Zealand law mean that AMAT and its Adoption Resource Centre has the potential to offer a significant resource to people affected by adoption in New Zealand.

The Research Project

It was on this basis that AMAT approved a research project to investigate the following:

- how other countries have managed and developed their adoption practices, both pre and post adoption.
- how those practices have been funded.
- to use this information to fulfil section 1(ii) of the Trust Deed:

Upon trust to arrange and conduct lectures meetings and classes and to publish and disseminate literature and to do all other things to educate the public in the facts of human reproduction and the human reproductive process and of all matters concerning reproductive health and well-being physical and mental.

Ann Weaver (as a Trustee) and Michelle Brewerton (as a past Trustee, now policy advisor) were funded to attend the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) Conference in Pasadena, California. The following are the key points from the workshops.

Parent Education:

Ann and I attended the pre-conference workshop for professionals on Parent Preparation Courses for those considering a transracial adoption. This was a two day course (16 hour) designed for potential adopting parents, and could easily be translated for the New Zealand context. Presented by two people, one of whom was an adopted person, it was child focused using the experiences of the presenter who had been adopted to bring home the reality of the experience.

They demonstrated how they used parent support groups to gain access to their client base and used adoptive parents as volunteers for panels, co-facilitators and presenters. There are 7 modules beginning with assessing ones personal motivations for adopting or fostering to what to expect long term developmentally, interpersonally, both within and outside of the family.

US adoptive parents are required to attend yearly training that moves with the developmental stages of the child. The State provides financial assistance for this.

Several points arose out of this that are pertinent to the Trust.

Is the ARC going to cater to just those who have been formally adopted? Or will it extend its services to those that have been fostered, who are under guardianship, or who have become involved in an informal adoption such as Whangai arrangements?

Do we begin lobbying government for the financing of these services which may/will put us in competition with government departments? What do these departments provide already and where are the gaps? How do we begin making productive links with these related services?

How connected is the ARC to other community organisations and their members? What do they want from the ARC?

Fundraising 101.

A workshop run by two people who are involved with organisations that place older children with permanent families by adoption. These people had begun as a grassroots organisation, short of money and long on good intentions. They have developed themselves into a financially successful organisation by marketing their good intentions. They emphasised the need for a well-connected board. Theirs consisted of between 12 and 15 members that make a donation to become board members. Currently the make-up consists of the vice president of Hasbro toys, a manager of a TV station, a lawyer, 2 management staff from Wendy's (burgers) which has a well known interest in adoption, a fundraising consultant, a politician, a

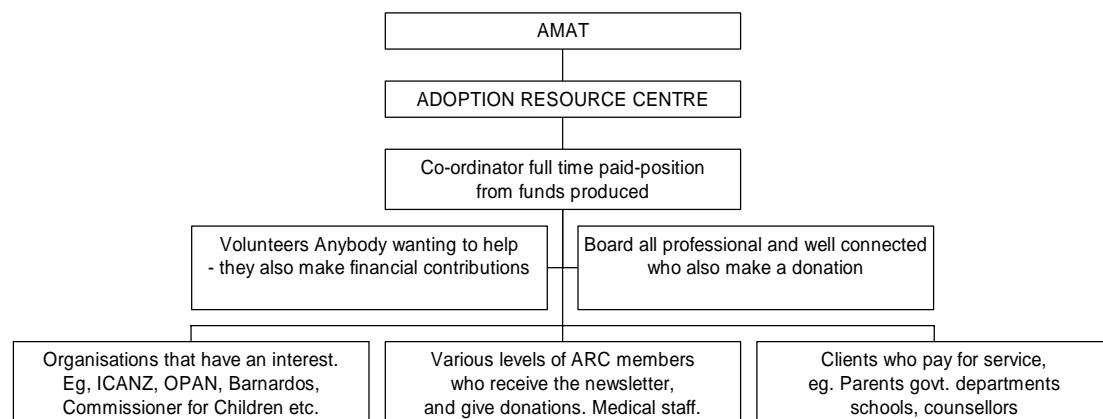
personnel consultant and a Dean of Social Work. There is a waiting list of people wanting to join the board. These people meet only 3-4 times a year for a couple of hours. The resources that they are connected to become available to the post adoption organisations.

These organisations were able to attract this level of support because they had built a solid reputation that was well publicised and acknowledged.

- They emphasised the need to avoid controversy
- Keep detailed and transparent financial statements.
- To expect to spend 10-20% of any money raised on expenses and not to skimp.
- To use video presentations of the success of their work using 3rd person testimonials.
- Document anything that can be regarded as successful.
- Have firm time limits for specified goals and outcome measurements with good evaluation procedures.
- To keep careful records of the demographics of their client group to provide potential sponsors with relevant and persuasive information.
- Detailed records are kept of every person who ever donates money and they are rung each year.
- All donations are followed up with a letter of thanks that is personally signed and that contains the latest newsletter to keep people up to date.
- To plug into National Adoption Awareness week to get maximum publicity.

There is obviously a wealth of ideas here but the issue that stood out after this particular workshop, was the controversy question. How do we deal with the abortion side of AMAT's work, alongside that of the ARC?

Using these ideas I put forward a structure that can be used as a starting point for discussion.



The membership of some of these groups will overlap. Corporate sponsorship was seen as an integral part of major fundraising ventures. Co-incidentally there was an article in the Herald on this topic, which is enclosed. The Trust would need to develop an overview of corporate philanthropy in NZ and Internationally.

The NACAC Conference, Pasadena, California.

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- Is the ARC going to cater to just those who have been formally adopted? Or will it extend to those that have been fostered, who are under guardianship, or who have become involved in an informal adoption?
- Do we begin lobbying government for the financing of these services which may/will put us in competition with government departments? What do these departments provide already and where are the gaps? How do we begin making productive links?
- How connected is the ARC to grass roots organisations and their members? What do they want from the ARC?

The Internet.

One of the highlights of the conference was identifying myself as part of AMAT and having a person leap out of their chair (literally) to congratulate the Trust on its website for the Adoption Resource Centre. They had used it as a blueprint for their own website:

CREATIVE AND AFFORDABLE OPTIONS FOR PROVIDING POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

<http://www.TAPLINK.org> Email pjs@taplink.org

These people were using on-line services to support people affected by adoption by providing:

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- Regular chat rooms hosted by a professional or a volunteer which varied between general conversations and those with a specific theme.
- Listed therapists, doctors, and other useful professionals experienced in the field of adoption.
- Sources of financial help.
- Special education services.
- Related conferences and publications.
- Teach how to apply for grants and respite care.
- Provide a message board for question and information exchange.
- Ask the expert on-line conferencing.
- Help with search information.

I would like to post the information that Ann and I have gathered on our website to kick-start this process. It is the cheapest way to disseminate information to a large number of people, and a way to plug into the discourse.

Asking for money.

There were several workshops on applying for grants. There is, in the USA, a lawyers' fund consisting of interest from money kept in security, while house-buying transactions are being finalised. This money can be given for anything to do with the law. Since returning, I have discovered there is an equivalent fund in New Zealand and Peter has written for an application. The Canadian organisation APABC, applied for and received money for a project to monitor and assess the impact of adoption law change in Canada. This would seem a timely project for NZ, if it is possible to access funds.

Education of Professionals

The final idea I would like to put forward in this report is a programme that has been developed to raise awareness in professionals on adoption. It is a half-hour long, and could be used for in-house teacher training, nursing and medical students, counsellors, social workers etc. Ann has seen the programme presented and believes it to be very good. I envision Jean being able to do this, making one appointment per week with a group. The group would pay for this service at the market rate, and the ARC could begin to pay its own way.

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Recommendations:

- This report be received at the next AMAT meeting.
- To investigate the possibility of a research project that monitors the impact of law change in the adoption area in New Zealand. This would include the Intercountry Adoption Act 1997 and the present re-drafting of the 1955 Adoption Act.
- Develop an umbrella organisation that maintains links with related organisations globally using the Internet.
- Develop the website to incorporate all or some of the features mentioned
- Trial the Adoption Education for Professionals tool and evaluate its usefulness.
- Discuss and decide the structure relating to the ARC and begin implementing changes.