



CREATE Position Paper

Issue: Adoption

CREATE’s Position

CREATE advocates for measures facilitating stability of placements in out-of-home care and permanence in the relationships experienced by children and young people who are not able to live with their birth parents. Permanence can be achieved by reunification with family, legal guardianship, and adoption (Akin, 2011) If adoption is chosen as the most appropriate course of action in an individual case, CREATE supports the view that the decision must be based on what would be in the best interests of the child or young person (Cuthbert & Quartly, 2010).

National Standards (FaHCSIA, 2011) that relate to stability and permanence of relationships, and thereby may impact on adoption, include:

National Standards	Measures
<p>1. Children and young people will be provided with stability and security during their time in care.</p>	<p>Children and young people are to be matched with the most suitable carers and the care environment according to their assessed needs.</p> <p>1.3 The proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care who report feeling safe and secure in their current placement.</p>
<p>9. Children and young people are supported to safely and appropriately maintain connection with family, be they birth parents, siblings or other family members.</p>	<p>9.3 The proportion of children (as age-appropriate) and young people who report having contact with family members, by the reported frequency of contact, by their reported satisfaction with contact arrangements.</p>
<p>11. Children and young people in care are supported to safely and appropriately identify and stay in touch, with at least one other person who cares about their future, who they can turn to for support and advice.</p>	<p>11.1 The proportion of children and young people who are able to nominate at least one significant adult who cares about them and who they believe they will be able to depend upon throughout their childhood or young adulthood.</p>

Evidence

- In 2011-12, 62% of all adoptions (n = 210) were Australian children. Of these, approximately 40% of the adoptive parents were carers or relatives other than step-parents (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013).
- Decision-making should be individualised, timely and culturally appropriate. Children themselves, their parents and carers all need to be involved in planning (Tilbury & Osmond, 2006).
- Factors likely to lead to positive adoption outcomes include recruiting/approving additional adopters, reducing breakdowns, and reducing delays in placing children for adoption. Bonin, Lushey, Blackmore, & Holmes (2013), in the UK, estimated that following these recommendations may reduce the cost of supporting a child with a plan for adoption by as much as £200,000.
- The experience of stress whether pre-adoption, or during the adoption transition, can impact on the developing neuroendocrine system and can contribute to problems with physical growth, brain development, and sleep, activating consequential effects on social, emotional, and cognitive development (Grotevant & McDermott, 2014).

- Legislation can be introduced, as recently in NSW, to (a) establish a new preferred hierarchy of permanent placement types (with adoption placed above long-term foster care); (b) introduce specific timeframes for making decisions about restoration of the child to their family; (c) create a new long-term guardianship order that would support long-term relative and kinship placements; and (d) make the adoption process more efficient (PeakCare [Qld], 2013; Roth, 2013).

Actions

Adoption may not be the chosen way to achieve permanence for all children and young people in care. However, if it is to be achieved successfully, as Neil (2014) indicated, CREATE urges governments to ensure their adoption policies meet these four challenges:

1. The first relates to achieving adoption within a timescale that meets children's developmental needs (whilst giving birth families fair opportunities to look after the child themselves).
2. The second challenge is how to support birth families through and after the almost inevitable adversarial nature of proceedings.
3. The third challenge is to manage the child's connection to their birth family over time through openness practices, including post-adoption contact.
4. The fourth challenge is to support adopted children and adoptive parents after adoption.

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