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).

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).

- *National Standards* 1, 9 and 11 for out-of-home care that relate to stability and permanence of relationships, and thereby may impact on adoption (FaHCSIA, 2011).

- 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).
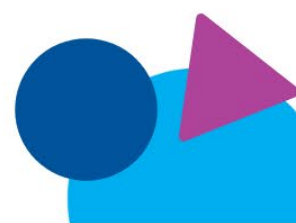
Actions

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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