

Adoption & Fostering Journal Spring 1999

Volume 23 Number 1

Spring 1999

Editorial

Donal Giltinan

Newspoints

Transforming adoption in the ‘new’ South Africa in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

Mary Harber

Key words: South Africa, HIV/AIDS, adoption, fostering, social policy

South African child welfare organisations are faced with a huge task. Not only must they find strategies to tackle poverty and redress the inequalities created by Apartheid, but they must also develop effective models of care to support children and families affected by the rapidly spreading HIV/AIDS epidemic. This paper looks at the implications of HIV/AIDS for the mainly black South African children and families affected by the epidemic and considers the consequences for child welfare organisations. It looks in particular at the role of adoption in South Africa and its potential to become a viable model of care for children touched by HIV/AIDS. It presents the results of research undertaken by the author which examined the achievements of and dilemmas faced by one child welfare agency as it attempted to adapt the ‘Wester’ model of adoption, which is prevalent in South Africa, in order to create a more appropriate service for black South African children.

Parenting children with attachment difficulties: views of adoptive parents and implications for post-adoption services

Mary Beek

Key words: adoptive parents, attachment difficulties, post-adoption support

A growing number of children placed for adoption are found to have attachment difficulties. Such difficulties can be profound, leading to disruptive behaviour which adoptive parents often find hard to cope with and understand. As Beek contends in this article, one of the challenges for adoption agencies is to offer such families appropriate support. In examining a project carried out by the Norfolk-based Adoption and Family Finding Unit’s post-adoption service, she demonstrates how specialised help involving parents and post-adoption social workers can dramatically improve the quality of care for adopted children – and indeed the quality of life for all the family. She also underlines the value of attachment theory as a tool for helping adoptive parents understand their children’s behaviour.

Adoption information exchange: evaluation of a letterbox system in a local authority

Veronica Carter, Sally Magee and Rosalind Thoday

Key words: adoption, contact, adoption exchange, information exchange, postbox/letterbox systems, post adoption

This article describes the results of a survey of the Adoption Information Exchange, a 'postbox system' between adoptive and birth families which operates within Hampshire Social Services. The system, set up in 1993, provides a third-party confidential means by which adoptive and birth families can share updating information. The survey sought the views of the adoptive and birth families involved, as well as social work colleagues who had set up exchange agreements.

Permanency planning for children with Down's Syndrome

Kathy Mason, Peter Selman and Mike Hughes

Key words: adoption, Down's Syndrome, permanency planning

The recognition that 'no child is unadoptable' (Churchill *et al*, 1979) has been one of the most successful features of special needs adoption. This has led to a growing number of placements involving mentally disabled children (BAAF, 1983). The authors report on the third stage of a longitudinal study of 12 children with Down's Syndrome placed for adoption by Barnardo's North East (Mason *et al*, 1998). The children are now aged 12 to 16 years and this article focuses on new issues arising for the children and their families, including the onset of puberty and the dilemmas over what to tell the children about their adoption. Overall, the placements continue to prove successful with no breakdowns and a majority of the adoptive parents have subsequently adopted at least one more child with Down's Syndrome.

Improving the health of children and young people leaving care

Bob Broad

Key words: care leavers, health needs, holistic health, involvement of users in research

Bob Broad identifies the health of care leavers as an emerging and significant issue in child care and, based on empirical findings, argues that improvements to their health is needed as a matter of some urgency. His article summarises recent health literature in the leaving care and looked after fields leading to the presentation of the main findings of a research project about the health needs of young people leaving care. It is argued that good health, however defined, needs to be seen from a holistic standpoint whereby the social, personal and emotional elements combine and are inter-related. Located within Quality Protects programmes, and other arrangements, properly funded, more flexible and accessible responses by professionals, as well as fuller involvement of the young people in decision-making processes, are seen as central to improved evidence-based health outputs. Broad concludes that the research findings indicate that a much higher priority for health assessments is necessary, as are preventive and supportive strategies, at both personal and interagency levels, to alleviate some of the underlying and unhealthy causes of stress.

Secrets and lies: barriers to the exchange of genetic origins information following donor-assisted conception

Eric Blythe

Key words: donor-assisted conception, genetic origins information, children's rights

Until the Warnock Report of 1984, the veil of secrecy surrounding donor-assisted conception in the UK went more or less unchallenged. Starting with a look at the Report and subsequent legislation, this article explores the main arguments for and against releasing information about their genetic origins to donor-assisted offspring. Factors contributing to the debate include increasing public awareness of the importance of genetics in defining identity, the significant shift in attitudes towards openness in adoption which has taken place in England and Wales since the early 1990s and reluctance on the part of semen donors to be known to their offspring. Different attitudes in different parts of the world are also examined, as are the limitations of human rights legislation at both national and international levels.

Legal notes: England and Wales

Deborah Cullen

Legal notes: Scotland

Alexandra Plumtree

Legal notes: Northern Ireland

Ruth Lavery

Medical notes: The health care needs of looked after children

Melissa Gladstone and Eugenia Ngwane

Book reviews

Diary