

THE ADOPTION PROCESS AND ITS DIFFICULTIES. THE CASE OF CATALONIA

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Abstract

When we were invited to participate in this Congress, in Genus we considered that we could supply what could complement the analyses that would be presented from different disciplines. And so we decided to try and transmit short descriptions of what our work as mediators is and the difficulties we find in the daily practice.

Throughout the nine years as mediators in international adoption between the Catalan families and the R P. China, in Genus we have observed an evolution of the characteristics of the adoption process, in the volume of applications, in the profile of the families and in the motivations for adoption. All that has conditioned the interventions of the ECAI which has adapted to the new situations.

Some questions to be born in mind in this evolution is the increase in adoption applications, the increase in couples with adopted children and the motivations for adoption: infertility, reconstituted couples, more personal reasons and solidarity.

In the case of China, two special motives due to the profile sociological characteristics of the abandoned minors in that country: the gender of the adoptable minors and the lack of information about the biological family, and the length of stay in the country.

In relation to the country of origin, we point out the following characteristics:

- The high number of minors in a situation to be adopted.
- The age of the minors susceptible to be adopted (between six months and two years)
- The transparency of the process and its development via strictly defined phases.
- The length of stay in the country.
- The waiting time, up to a certain point controlled by the families via the format of the referral of the minor, following a rigorous order of application registry.

Because of these aspects, the mediation task of the ECAI is directed towards the intervention in the adoption process, adapting to the change both in the profile of the applicant families and the origin country. We will describe our objectives in the different phases of the adoption process, relating them to the difficulties that, in relation of the listed aspects, we have found.

In the first information phase our objective is to asses and inform the applicants about the characteristics of the adoption process in the R.P. China and to strengthen what the adoption of a minor proceeding from this country implies, trying to work and clarify the "myths" that a high number of adoptions, and also, their initial success have contributed to, such as the ease of the adaptation of the child and the guarantees in state of health.

Another difficult aspect to work on is when the profile of the applicants does not conform to the profile laid out by the country. The right to adopt appears at that moment in the discourse of the family in a non explicit way.

When the family has obtained the certificate of aptitude the phase of preparation of the dossier starts. Our objective in this phase is to inform and assess the families in the documentation they must supply and to prepare the dossier how the country

demands. This at times involves some conflicts with the families who rebel about the type of documents, their difficulty and their need.

The waiting time is a complicated phase of the process because of the variability of the time that the families must wait for the arrival of the referral.

Our objectives are contention, information during the process and training. It is a good moment to work with the families on different aspects of international adoption.

In the first place the cultural factor and everything it involves for the understanding of the situation of the child. To know about the motivations for the abandon and the difficulty of all the variables that intervene plus the respect for the culture of the child's origin is fundamental for the good development of the child and the formation of his/her identity and the future treatment of his/her origins.

Health, is another of the topics we approach. The belief that on being a child that has already been born, the doctor can see and diagnose, creates in the families, erroneously, the surety about the state of health, forgetting that the genetic origins are unknown, family illnesses that can be hereditary, it is important to work the unconditional aspect of adoption.

The psychological aspects of adoption, especially the child's reaction and those of the parents, at the moment of the first encounter and what it means to the child to find himself/herself in this situation.

With respect to these two topics, one that exists is the belief that the adoption of one year old children is easier because "the child is not aware of anything and adapts easily". We point out the different situations which a family may encounter, removing the myth of this belief and the need to respect the child's age.

The second one, totally related to the previous point, is how the encounter between the parents and child is organized in China. Different from other countries, where a progressive process of meetings between children and parents can be favoured and normally in the child's surroundings, in China the encounter takes place in a completely different surrounding, new for the child.

It is very important that the parents know these realities and situations to be able to understand the child, because of what is happening, give it the importance it deserves and to have more resources to face the situation.

The arrival of a brother or sister is one of the aspects that has to be worked on because of the increase in number of applicant families who already have children. The arrival of a sibling and the restructuring of the new family situation, on the one hand the families have biological children with whom they must explain the situation of an adoption, and on the other hand, those families who carry out a second adoption.

As well as training during the waiting time, formulas have to be created to support and contain the families due to the increase in the waiting time.

In the referral phase to work with the acceptance of the child, particularly when the profile of the child appointed does not correspond with the family's expectations and that of the "imagined" child, and the rejection of the proposed referral.

With regards to the journey to the country as we have already commented, we find the need to work and remind explicitly the motive. The convinced idea that "everything will be alright" makes some families lose sight of the meaning of this trip.

During the families' stay a control and accompaniment from Genus' headquarters is carried out. This gesture is appreciated by the families who feel more accompanied and secure as during the stay in China any small difficulty acquires disproportionate dimensions.

Finally, the post-adoptive phase is very important. In some families the doubts appear. Am I doing it right? Others need support when the adaptation process is being more complex than they thought and in many cases need to know that they can count on us. This occurs when the family has just arrived from China or taking advantage of the first official post adoptive follow-up but as the children start to grow up, the consultations have increased derived from questions and anxieties of those children related to their adoption and that, we are sure, will increase more in the future.