



INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION RESOURCE NETWORK (Aust) Inc.

A.B.N. 61 349 732 249

Box 12238 P.O. A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, 8006

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE ADOPTION OF CHILDREN FROM OVERSEAS: made by Gail Scowcroft on behalf of ICARN (Aust) Inc one of the parent support groups involved in the Victorian joint submission into the above inquiry.

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to be heard today.

Intercountry Adoption has increased dramatically in the last 7 years.

In the year ending June 1996 there were 96 registrations of interest and 75 applicants for intercountry adoption.

In the year ending June 2004 there were 246 registrations of interests (+156) and 144 applicants (+96%).

In June 1996 the department, ICAS, had 6.5 staff.

Victoria ICA	1995/1996	2003/2004	Increase %
Registration of Interest	96	246	+156%
Applicants	75	144	+92%
Approvals	55	108	+96%
Placements	57	102	+79%
ICAS staff	6.5	8.2	+26%

In 2004 ICAS had only 8.2 staff

ICAS is working hard to meet demand with only 8.2 staff.



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There are more information sessions, more education groups and longer waiting times for most couples. It is not unusual to wait 9 months from registration of interest until an education group is available. Waiting times from registration till approval have increased by up to 50%.

Whilst the Victorian department compares well to other state departments there is still a high level of dissatisfaction from families, which may be the result of the volumes of applicants or with the process. The process has changed little. The timeframes have extended. There is no independent body for complaints. Currently any complaints are referred to the head of the department for resolution.

While the resources within ICAS have not grown exponentially with demand, parent support groups have grown in number and membership and take on a large chunk of responsibility.

We offer:

- Depth of information for couples and families-before and after families are formed
- Real experiences-from babies to adult adoptees
- Expectations in the country of adoption
- Expectations on arrival home
- Educational events for children
- Cultural activities for families
- Annual camps
- A voice at a departmental level
- Speakers at departmental gatherings

Currently ICARN (Intercountry Adoption Resource Network) has a membership base of 208 families. The membership is made up of families with children from India, the Philippines, Korea, Sri Lanka China and Guatemala.

In the last few years, as well as the list just mentioned ICARN has been instrumental in:

- Improving information flows from overseas countries: encouraging overseas agencies to include more information about birth families and medical histories.



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- Initiating early intervention programs: facilitating adoption playshops for children with a play therapist expert from USA.
- Improving communication between groups: opening the play shops to all support groups in Victoria and co ordination of her tour to interstate for the benefit of all.
- Developing on going programs: initiating training for our own adoption playtherapist here in Australia.

All of this is done on a volunteer basis.

There is no formalized or funded body in Victoria to speak or act on behalf of intercountry adoptive families. We are growing in number and complexity. We do have unique issues. We are a diverse group with common goals. The wellbeing of our children and our families.

We need a recognized voice to speak on behalf of our community.

There is no formalized support for adoptive families that is available for all families to access as required.

The Victorian community would benefit from the establishment of an umbrella body or council that is funded to work on behalf of all adoptive families to counter bias, provide information, and educational services and support for adoptive families. A referral service for the individual needs of children born in overseas countries.

This organization would be representative and provide expert advice and opinion to the government in matters relating to ICA.

Further, our community needs an independent body to hear complaints-an ombudsman perhaps to ensure that the government department is continuing to provide the right opportunities and service for families who are created through ICA.



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Expanding on the high cost of Intercountry Adoption:

The costs for intercountry adoption are very high and can be as high as \$30,000. In Victoria approval costs are currently set at a 70% recovery of actual costs.

The cost for adopting a child from overseas can be broken down into the following sections: -

- Costs in Victoria : from registration of interest to approval to adopt is currently \$6250 plus medical, notary and courier costs: approx. \$500
- *Costs overseas: vary by country but include medical, legal and overseas adoption agency fees; range: US \$2500-9000
- Travel costs: international airfares, in country travel, accommodation, food, taxes: vary by country: range \$3500- \$10000
- Australian Government costs: DIME \$1865 and Entry Visa \$1305= \$3170
- **Legalization costs, court fees and birth certificate costs: Vary depending on whether a solicitor is used: range \$500-2500

We urge the committee to look at ways to ease the financial burden on families.

- A straight tax break "to the value of approach" which can be applied to the total cost of the adoption
- A portion of the costs might be tax deductible e.g. the Costs Overseas portion
- The Federal Government charges- these costs are an additional financial burden on adoptive families and do not apply to domestic adoptions.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.



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*From the time a child is "allocated" to a family until they physically pick up that child (time frame can be up to 18 months) the family is responsible for the child's upkeep whether the child has been in an orphanage or in foster care. The legal costs in the overseas country include court costs and travel costs to get to court. Plus all costs relating to medical and legal requirements by the Australian government.

**Apart from children from China, legalization of a child's adoption is formalized 12 months after arrival home. This is another cost to adoptive families through either a solicitor or other means of preparing court documentation.

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GLOSSARY:

ICAS	Intercountry Adoption Service. The state government department responsible for intercountry adoptions.
ICA	Intercountry Adoption
ICARN	Intercountry Adoption Resource Network (Australia) Inc
Allocation	Agreement to adopt the child described in the "Child Study" that is given to a family