

Report on

Initiative to Establish Networking Forum for the
Promotion of Family-Based Care for Children

March 2017

International Social Service Japan

Initiative Overview: Establishing Networking Forum for the Promotion of Family-Based Care for Children

(1) Objective of the Initiative

This year, as a result of amendments to the Child Welfare Act and to adoption laws enacted to enhance the protection of children, the need to promote family-based care is garnering more and more attention. However, adoptions continue to be carried out in a fragmented manner with little or no coordination between child guidance centers on one hand and individuals or private agencies handling adoption on the other.

To enable access to family-based care for even just one more child in the future by increasing the level of coordination between relevant parties, we launched this initiative by looking into two areas of concern. First, we asked what types of limitations private adoption agencies currently face in making their activities or responsibilities known to the public. The second area of our inquiry focused on the lack of opportunities for child guidance centers, baby homes, child care facilities and private adoption agencies to share their experiences with one another.

Our primary objectives in launching this initiative were (1) to study the role of private adoption agencies, and (2) to create a networking forum for child guidance centers, other public child-welfare institutions and private adoption agencies in order to enhance coordination between all such entities. We believe that this type of networking is crucial for promoting family-based care for children and our implementation plan for this initiative includes publicizing the capabilities and responsibilities of private adoption agencies as well as finding ways to provide information regarding the benefits of family-based care to public child welfare institutions.

(2) Details of Implementation

① Meeting with Advisory Panel (held once this past year)

In August 2016, we held a special meeting with our advisory panel comprised of Mieko Iwasaki, Director of the Osaka office of the Public Interest Corporation Association and Kiyoshi Miyajima, Associate Professor of Japan College of Social Work, Professional Graduate School and the representative director of an NPO for children called “Project At Home”.

The main topics included identifying entities to target for inclusion in the initiative [Establishing Networking Form for the Promotion of Family-Based Care for Children] (hereinafter Networking Conference), researching into target regions, and how to take into consideration regional differences in the level of understanding of family-based care as the implementation of the initiative gets underway.

With regards to the target entities, in order to facilitate lively discussion and to allow for meaningful support and coordination among members, it was decided to limit the number of participants to 30. The question and answer session was led by experts in many diverse areas, which made it possible to have a discussion on a broad spectrum of ideas and issues. It was also decided that three networking conferences would be held during the upcoming year and that the first two conferences would focus on discussing in detail the needs of public institutions, baby homes, and child care centers as well as what ISSJ should communicate and obtain from them, all of which would then be comprehensively reviewed at the third conference.

② Networking Conferences (held three times this past year) ※Agenda and

handouts can be found below

Three networking conferences were held this past year: October 2016 in Tokyo; December 2016 in Osaka; and February 2017 in Tokyo. The first two conferences featured discussions on the status of cooperation among child guidance centers and private adoption agencies as well as presentations on the roles and activities of the following three associations: (i) an association with a long history of promoting family-based care in Osaka City, (ii) a support group called “Wanokai” that facilitates contact between biological and adoptive parents, and (iii) ISSJ in terms of our work on intercountry adoptions. Using the comments from the participants in the first two conferences and the advisory panel, the third conference focused on deepening the understanding of the respective roles of various adoption-related entities with an emphasis on the importance of “teamwork”, particularly in the areas of home investigations and matching. In that regard, we shared our own experience in working successfully in three-way coordination with a child guidance center and a baby home.

To facilitate a healthy exchange of diverse perspectives and experiences, we invited representatives from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, prefectural governments, child consultation centers, as well as academic researchers in the field,

child care facility operators, private adoption agencies, and other experts (who served as designated facilitators for the question and answer sessions) to each networking conference. As a result, these conferences provided valuable opportunities for the participants to deepen their comprehensive understanding of the adoption process and issues.

③ Preparation and Distribution of Outcome Report

Based on the discussions at the advisory panel meeting and the subsequent networking conferences mentioned above, the advisory panel, experts in the field, and ISSJ will prepare a comprehensive report on the outcome of this networking initiative which will include promotional information on the benefits of “permanent family-based care” to be disseminated to relevant organizations and the public. For the general public, excerpts from the outcome report will be posted on ISSJ website, including an English translation thereof to be posted on the English version of the website. We will also distribute 250 copies of the outcome report to relevant organizations such as child guidance centers, child care facilities, baby homes and ISSJ members.

(3) Findings from the Initiative

Through this initiative, we identified two main areas for further consideration: (1) the general lack of opportunities to share information among entities and parties directly involved in the adoption process; and (2) a barrier to promoting family-based care caused by discrepancies in the level of knowledge of adoption among relevant organizations.

With respect to item (1), according to the feedback received from the conference attendees (representatives and staff from child guidance centers and child welfare facilities), it was clear that our initiative provided a valuable opportunity for sharing information and deepening understanding on adoption. At the same time, concerns were raised about the general lack of opportunities to learn about the role and capabilities of private adoption agencies, particularly when it comes to information exchange on a consistent basis. Our initiative also highlighted the severity of limitations placed on the ability to promote the practice of adoption in Japanese society.

As for item (2), the network conferences made it possible for the participants to be introduced to and learn about each other’s roles and capabilities. In fact, many of them expressed interest in participating in future opportunities to deepen their knowledge of

adoption practices (for example, how the children are selected for adoption, how to match children with adoptive parents, post-adoption support, searching for birth roots, and placing siblings together or older children in family-based care). We also learned about the extent of gaps in knowledge among relevant child welfare entities that need to be addressed in the future.

In summary, this initiative highlighted the need to facilitate continuous information exchange and to promote awareness and understanding of adoption practices among all relevant child-welfare entities. To achieve this, it is imperative for private adoption agencies to continue their outreach efforts.