

Working Document

Suggestions for Post Adoption Services

According to Article 9(c) of the *Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*

June 2010

By

International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA)

Adopted Koreans' Association (Sweden)

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Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington (USA – Washington)

Forum for Korean Adoptees (Norway)

Korea Klubben (Denmark)

Korean Adoptees of Hawai'i (USA – Hawai'i)

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For the Attendees of the Special Commission of June 2010 on the practical operation of the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption

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Introduction to IKAA

The International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) is the first and only international network of intercountry adoptee associations. The founding members are Korean adoptee associations from Europe and the United States. However, in terms of representation at The Hague Conference and promotion of international Post Adoption Services, IKAA also embraces other intercountry adoptees and adoptee organizations.

The IKAA network was first established in 2004. In 2009, IKAA was incorporated as a non-profit organization in the United States and was granted tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

Common for all of the IKAA associations is that they have demonstrated long-term stability, their organizational structures and membership are comprised overwhelmingly of adult adoptees, they have long experiences working with adoptees, and they organize activities and events for their members on a regular basis. Today, the IKAA associations collectively reach out to more than ten thousand adoptees worldwide, and the IKAA network continues to add new member organizations.

The mission of the IKAA network is to enrich the global adoption community, promote the sharing of information and resources between adult adoptee associations, strengthen cross-cultural relations and innovate Post Adoption Services for the broader international adoptee community. In particular, IKAA is working to identify needs for Post Adoption Services and create strategies to improve these services. It is also our goal to carry out joint projects, reach out to other intercountry adoptee groups, and cooperate with other entities in the adoption field.

Learning from the collective experience of adoptee associations

Korean adoptees constitute the oldest and largest group of intercountry adoptees. An estimated 150,000–200,000 Koreans have been adopted to North America, Europe, and Australia. Today, many of these adoptees are adults and are expressing thoughts about their adoption experiences.

Based on a shared interest in their country of origin, Korean adoptees have established peer groups all around the world. The oldest Korean adoptee association was founded in Sweden in 1986, followed shortly by associations in Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, South Korea and throughout the United States and Canada.

The founding of IKAA was a natural yet unique response to a growing international movement within the adoptee communities. It became clear that, as organizations, we see many of the same types of requests and needs among adoptees. Over the years, the associations have developed similar tools and services to assist adoptees. In many respects, IKAA represents Post Adoption Services in action.

With 10, 20 and 25 years of existence, the IKAA associations have accumulated an abundance of institutional knowledge and experience related to Post Adoption Services. IKAA is using this knowledge and experience to better serve the adoptee community, and would also like to share this expertise with all parties involved in the adoption process.

Post Adoption Services provided by the IKAA associations

IKAA associations offer services such as mentorship; information regarding birth family searches; discussions regarding adoptive family relations; education about race, identity, and adoption issues; and access to birth culture and travel guidance. The associations also facilitate regular contact with a large number of adoptees, as well as peer support (shared experiences/culture/race and shared social context), which help build a stronger community of adoptees. All IKAA member associations are run purely on a volunteer basis.

In addition, the IKAA associations organize regular conferences known as “Gatherings” or “Mini-Gatherings,” where adoptees can connect with each other both locally and globally. Large-scale Gatherings in Korea occur once every three years and bring together 500–600 adoptees from around the world. Mini-Gatherings are shorter and smaller-scale conferences that occur once every six months, drawing up to 200 attendees from a more regional base of adoptees. Gathering programs include Research Symposiums, Business Forums, Art Exhibits, workshops, and sports, as well as various cultural and social activities.

From these Gatherings, IKAA has learned the great importance of providing global networking opportunities for adoptees. Post Adoption Services should not be limited to counseling or birth search only. As adoptees grow older, have families of their own, and more and more make connection with their birth families, many of them also look for assistance in creating cultural, educational and professional bridges to their birth countries. Assistance in these areas is also an essential Post Adoption Service, which has yet to be fully developed.

The need for more Post Adoption Services

IKAA fully supports the *Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* and Article 9(c) of the Convention, according to which all receiving countries are required to provide Post Adoption Services.

Despite this requirement, it is our experience that the services provided by Central Authorities do not meet the present needs of adoptees and adoptive families. The IKAA associations receive an increasing number of inquiries from adult adoptees and adoptive families seeking various Post Adoption Services. However, due to our limited resources, we cannot assist everybody who expresses interest, nor are we able to provide professional counseling.

We also think it should be the responsibility of both the countries of origin as well as the receiving countries to develop adequate Post Adoption Services. Our experience clearly shows that the need for Post Adoption Services is not limited to the receiving countries.

To improve the current situation, it is imperative that Central Authorities and all other parties involved in the adoption process in the sending and receiving countries respond to the needs of adoptees, adoptive families, birth families and children of adoptees by defining and implementing adequate Post Adoption Services. In doing so, the parties involved in the adoption process should collaborate with adult adoptee associations, which throughout the years have collected substantial and unique knowledge about the lifelong experiences of intercountry adoptees.

Suggestions for Post Adoption Services

IKAA's suggestions for necessary Post Adoption Services to be developed are as follows:

- **Collection of knowledge and experiences:**

Adoption-related knowledge and experiences are not systematically collected, so this information is scattered among different groups, authorities, and others. Centralization is needed to improve the accessibility of this information.

- **Research:**

There is a great lack of qualified research on adult adoptees. More and better research about this group could provide a clearer picture of the issues and problems that adoptees may face, as well as their needs, desires, and preferences related to their adoption experiences. The results of this research would be useful for developing more effective Post Adoption Services.

- **Counseling:**

There is a great need for access to appropriate and inexpensive psychological counseling and therapy for adoptees (children as well as adults) and adoptive families. Increased counseling could help to resolve attachment related-problems within the adoptive family, problems with social adaptation, low self-esteem, lack of the possibility for mirroring, issues with identity development, racial issues, dealing with grief and loss, relation to biological roots, problems initiated by birth family reunions, etc. Counseling may also assist adult adoptees with intimacy issues in romantic relationships, as well as issues that arise when adoptees become parents.

- **Education:**

There should be a focus on educating social workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, mental health professionals, and others who are likely to deal with intercountry adoptees about issues related to adoption. Better education for service providers will help to promote higher quality and more appropriate Post Adoption Services for adoptees and their communities.

- **Search for birth family/access to files and personal information:**

The experience of IKAA is that an increasing number of adoptees choose to search for birth family members. Providing assistance to clarify legal matters as well as assistance in establishing contact to the right authorities or organizations that can help facilitate the process are essential Post Adoption Services. It is also important for adoptees to have access to information on their backgrounds from their adoption files, including, but not limited to, official documents, health information, photos, and letters.

- **Post reunion support:**

Adoptees who make connections with birth family members often need continued services after the reunion. Cultural and language differences can complicate post reunion interactions between adoptees and their birth families. Ongoing translation services and cultural guidance can help to assist adoptees in their efforts to build sustainable relationships with their birth families.

- **Access to birth culture and birth country:**

A large number of adoptees are also interested in learning about the people, cultures, and languages of their birth countries. It is important that adoptees have various opportunities to

understand their origins, whether it be through education, connection to other immigrants from the same countries, or travel to their birth countries.

• **Supporting forums/networks for adoptees of the same ethnic background:**

The existing adoptee associations have proven their value for adoptees and adoptive families. However, most adoptee associations are non-profits run by volunteers. The associations need strong support from governments in both sending and receiving countries in order to continue their work providing Post Adoption Services and building community among their members. Financial support will not only allow the adoptee associations to continue their activities, but also to enhance their programs and pursue new initiatives.

Signed by

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