



**BOOK REVIEW**

## Helping birth families. Services, costs and outcomes

Neil, E., Cossar, J., Lorgelly, P., & Young J. (2010). Publisher: British Association for Adoption and Fostering, London. Paperback ISBN 978 905554 95 5 \$20.18.

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This book is a product of the Adoption Research Initiative (ARi) that was funded by the former Department of Children, Schools and Families in England. It reports on a study of 73 birth relatives of children who had been removed from parental care and who were compulsorily adopted. Given the current Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry into the 'Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policy and Practice' (2010) it is a most timely publication.

The book builds on an earlier survey that mapped services to support birth relatives (Cossar & Neil, 2010; Sellick, 2007) and seeks to answer five key questions. These are:

- How many birth relatives are referred for support services and how many take up these services?
- What are birth relatives' experiences of adoption and how are they affected by the experience?
- What types of support do birth relatives report using and what are their experiences of these?
- How much do these support services cost?
- What is the impact of support services on birth relatives?

At the core of the book in Chapter 6 is the data about birth relatives' experiences of compulsory adoption. The chapter allows birth relatives to talk in their own words about the emotional impact and the emotional distress, often long-term, they experienced as a consequence of the compulsory adoption. There are also other chapters that detail birth relatives' use of support services and their evaluation of these services. Other chapters examine how birth parents cope with adoption and the mental health of birth relatives.

The final chapters of the book focus on the costs of providing support services and the important arguments that establish the case for providing a range of services to birth relatives post adoption.

What is most interesting about this book is that while the focus is on adoption, the emotional distress reported here is

exactly what birth relatives express at the very first stage of a child protection intervention when a child is removed from their care (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2011; O'Neill, 2005). If, as these authors argue, there is a case for extensive services to birth relatives post adoption then there has to be a similar case for services to birth relatives while they endure the early stages of a child protection intervention. Yet the hard evidence is that Australian child protection authorities choose to focus on the child alone and increasingly ignore birth relatives (Clary, Klease, Thomson, Thorpe, & Walsh, 2007; Harries, 2008, Holmes, 2009). Hopefully this book may help to reverse this unkind trend.

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