

RAISING EXPECTATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL ON INFERTILITY AND ADOPTION

(August 27, 2009). In 2008, the Government of Ontario established the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption to provide advice on how to improve Ontario's adoption system and improve access to fertility monitoring and assisted reproduction services. Yesterday, the Expert Panel released their report: "Raising Expectations: Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption".

The following news item is divided into two sections:

Section 1: Statement from the Adoption Council of Canada (ACC)

Section 2: News Release retrieved from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services Website

SECTION 1

Statement from the Adoption Council of Canada (ACC)

The ACC is grateful to the Expert Panel for taking such care in addressing the adoption needs of Ontario. The thorough report released by the Panel demonstrates a clear understanding of the barriers that must be overcome to ensure permanency for the thousands of waiting children across the province.

As per our letters sent to the expert panel which underscore the need to put the primary focus on the child's right to a family, we are also pleased that the panel's first goal is "to help more children find permanent homes and more Ontarians build families through adoption."

Moreover, the ACC is encouraged by the recommendations of the panel, which include:

- 1. Create a Provincial Adoption Agency**
- 2. Develop Tools to Manage the Adoption System**
- 3. Provide Adequate Funding that Supports the Realities of Adoption**

Sandra Scarth, ACC President, notes: "I am particularly pleased that the panel has recognized the critical need for post adoption assistance for families that adopt children with special needs, specifically those with FASD."

The ACC hopes the province acts swiftly in implementing the recommendations of the Expert Panel. Ontario has the opportunity to improve the realities of thousands of children and families and to be seen as a leader in child welfare practice in Canada.

Relevant Links

<http://www.adoption.ca/Expert%20Panel.htm>

Sample letter sent to panel from the ACC



Adoption Council of Canada
Conseil d'adoption du Canada

March 19, 2009

Cheryl Appell, Co-Chair
Will Falk, Co-Chair
Adoption and Permanency Working Group of the Minister's Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption
C/o Infertility and Adoption Secretariat
880 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2B6

Dear Ms. Appell and Mr. Falk:

The Adoption Council of Canada (ACC) sent a letter to the Minister's Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption on July 21, 2008, expressing our concern that the committee's stated purpose is to "help find solutions for people who are trying to start or expand a family." As we previously noted, this seems to suggest that the interests of the child fall into second place behind those of adults struggling with infertility.

Adoption is, and always has been, a means of finding a home for a child in need. It has not been considered a service of family-building for individuals unable to conceive. While many of our members know firsthand the pain and heartbreak associated with infertility, we are troubled by the suggestion that children must be made available for adoption in order to ease this pain. Children's rights and needs must remain central to any discussion of adoption.

We have not had any recent communication from the panel, and would like to re-iterate some of our concerns about the current situation of children in care awaiting adoption in Ontario.

Our first concern is the high number of children in foster care, and the low numbers of those children placed in permanent families, whether this is through adoption, guardianship or supported kinship care. Other jurisdictions, particularly in the US, have done much better. Adoption has traditionally been a very poorly funded, low priority service and additional funds are needed to support services and grant subsidies to adoptive families until the child becomes an adult. Prospective adoptive families should also be able to go through the public child welfare system without cost. This would promote public adoption and decrease the number of children who move around the system, waiting for parents willing to support them.

Secondly, we are concerned with the lack of public awareness of the need for adoptive and other forms of permanent families for these children. We are particularly concerned about the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care and believe that it is important for work on this issue to be done in a collaborative way with the Aboriginal communities involved.

Our third major concern is the lack of post placement supports for families taking on the permanent care of children who come with many challenges.

We recommend that you consider the following in your deliberations and recommendations:

(NOTE: Overall, we would like re-assurance that the public adoption system is child-centred. It should focus on the needs of the child and provide adequate resources to ensure they achieve stability and connections for life with family and culture.)

Public Awareness

- Need for an annual, ongoing public awareness campaign that is adequately funded and ideally done in concert with other jurisdictions and nationally with the Adoption Council of Canada to maintain momentum;
- Support for the joint efforts of the Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO) and the ACC to maintain their photolisting websites and newspaper coverage; and,
- Support for the Adoption Resource Exchange, including the educational components for both social workers and families.

Addressing Barriers

- Ensure adequate resources for CASs' to recruit, assess, and educate potential families in a timelier manner. One of the biggest complaints of adoptive families that come to the ACC in despair is the length of time it takes to get through the public adoption system. They lose faith and move to inter-country adoption as a faster, more responsive service; and,
- Look at developing closer partnerships with the private system to support public adoptions through joint work on education, family assessments, and post-adoption support.

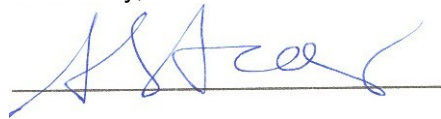
Post Placement Supports

- Support services, including adoption subsidies, should be available until the child becomes an adult, and should be based on the child's needs. The original intent of the model subsidy, envisioned when Ontario first established them, was that the funds were to follow the child out of foster care, so that there would never be a "capped" fund and children and their families would then not have the support required to make the adoption successful. There is good research to show that supported adoptions are less likely to disrupt, even if the family experiences difficulties.

In addition to the major concerns expressed above, we are aware that there are some difficulties with the recent legislation on open adoptions that may be counterproductive for increasing adoptions of older children. This is another area that needs early attention.

Thank you for receiving our comments. We will be interested to work with Ontario in any way possible to ensure more children in foster care are connected for life with permanent families.

Yours truly,



Sandra Scarth
President



Sarah Pedersen
Acting Executive Director

Cc:

Minister Deb Matthews, Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS)
Pat Convery, Executive Director, Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO)

About the Adoption Council of Canada

The Adoption Council of Canada is a federally incorporated charitable body which aims to:

- Inform and educate about all aspects of the adoption of children for Canadians;
- Provide understanding of the benefits and challenges of adoption for children, birth-families and adoptive parents;
- Promote the placement of waiting children in permanent loving families;
- Stress the importance of post-adoption services for families and adoptees; and,
- Facilitate communication among all groups and individuals concerned.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the ACC's views on the Expert Panel report, please contact Sarah Pedersen, Acting Executive Director, 1-888-54-ADOPT or sarah@adoption.ca.

SECTION 2

Expert Panel Releases Report on Infertility and Adoption in Ontario (<http://www.cnw.ca/en/releases/archive/August2009/26/c7687.html>)

TORONTO, Aug. 26 /CNW/ - After a year of multi-disciplinary study, Ontario's Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption today released its report on the current state of Ontario's adoption and assisted reproduction systems. The report, entitled Raising Expectations, makes detailed recommendations to help Ontarians build families by improving the systems.

"Bold changes are needed," says David Johnston, Chair of the Expert Panel. "Ontario's adoption and assisted reproduction systems are not working as well as they could - and should - for children and families. There are many dedicated, courageous, and committed people providing and using services in both systems but the structures, policies, laws and costs are barriers."

The report sets out an ambitious agenda for change, with recommendations that address the current barriers by empowering Ontarians, intervening early, and improving access to services.

The Panel's recommendations include:

1. Create a provincial adoption agency with a local service presence to offer and manage public adoption services from system entry to post-adoption
2. Set consistent policy, standards and oversight for all adoption services
3. Overhaul Ontario's adoption legislation to address gaps and barriers in the public, private domestic and intercountry adoption systems and better support concurrent adoption planning for Crown wards
4. Make Crown wards with court-ordered access to their birth families legally free for adoption
5. Provide funding for adoption subsidies and supports for former Crown wards with special needs
6. Provide fertility education and monitoring at the primary care level to help people make informed family building choices

7. Require all in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinics and fertility centres to be accredited and, as a condition of accreditation, require clinics to reduce their multiple birthrate to 15% within 5 years and 10% within 10 years
8. Provide public funding for three cycles of IVF under certain conditions, including covering the costs of ancillary services that are required
9. Reduce social and legal barriers to assisted reproduction so that Ontarians who could benefit from services are able to do so.

In addition, the Expert Panel calls for the Government to provide more and better information, raise awareness and develop education programs to help Ontarians access adoption and assisted reproduction services more quickly and easily.

"The Panel's recommendations can help Ontario seize the opportunity to become the best jurisdiction in which to build a family, in Canada and the world," says Johnston. "We see the public release of our report as the launch of the necessary awareness campaign. To maintain momentum, the government must move now to put the other necessary components in place."

The full report is available at www.ontario.ca/creatingfamilies.

Interested individuals and organizations are encouraged to link to it with any relevant web site.

Additional Facts

- 1 in 6 - Ontario couples who struggle with infertility in their lifetime
- 1,600 - approximate number of children adopted into Ontario families each year through the province's three adoption services - public, private domestic and Intercountry
- 9,400 - approximate number of Crown wards in 2007-08, but only 822 adopted
- Ontario's current adoption system is fragmented, complex and time-consuming, failing to quickly connect waiting children with potential families
- Children who need families - particularly older children and youth - are often stuck in Ontario's child welfare system. Many of them have court-ordered access to their birth families that prevents them from being adopted
- The single greatest barrier to assisted reproduction services is the cost. Most procedures are not covered by OHIP and are beyond the reach of most Ontarians
- Clinics and fertility centers are not required to be accredited and people don't know where to go for the best care
- The high cost of assisted reproduction services is leading to decisions which result in an unacceptably high rate of multiple births in Ontario - this threatens mothers' and children's health and well-being and results in high hospital and other health costs
- Ontarians face other barriers accessing assisted reproduction services: some live too far from the small number of clinics, others - such as single people and same-sex couples - face social and legal barriers, and the stigma associated with infertility keeps many Ontarians from seeking help

About the Expert Panel

In 2007, the Ontario Government made a commitment to help Ontarians who struggle to build their families. In July 2008, the Government of Ontario appointed the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption to help provide advice on how to improve access to assisted reproduction services and Ontario's adoption system. The report "Raising Expectations" represents the independent views of the Expert Panel and has been presented to the Government for consideration.

The Expert Panel is made up of 11 members including reproductive endocrinologists, specialists in counselling, family medicine, complementary therapies and adoption; lawyers and business executives; people who have experienced infertility and/or used assisted reproduction first hand; and adoptive parents. The Panel was chosen to bring a breadth and depth of expertise and perceptions in the study areas relating to infertility, assisted reproduction and adoption.

The Expert Panel's Methodology

The Panel worked for a period of a year through a multi-disciplinary methodology to understand the challenges that Ontarians face when trying to build families through adoption or assisted reproduction. The study included an online survey of the public and a range of stakeholders, as well as in-person or telephone interviews of users of the adoption and/or assisted reproduction services. The Panel Members also reviewed literature on related subjects; examined policies and programs of other jurisdictions; conducted qualitative surveys of current key service providers; and reviewed presentations from experts and stakeholders in the field.

For further information or to schedule an interview with a representative of the Expert Panel, please contact David Johnston at (416) 212-2208.