



Adoption Research & Counselling Service Inc.

## Overview of Service Model

### ARCS service provided:

#### ARCS Stats:

For your information we have detailed ARCS main stats for the past two years and as you can see we are maintaining and increasing client and session numbers.

	<i>July – June 2009</i>	<i>July – June 2010</i>
Clients	374	421
Counselling Sessions	1077	1226
Contacts	2622	3046

Please note that contacts include: Calls for information from professionals, prospective clients, current and previous clients. These calls can at times be quite lengthy as we may be dealing with someone who is in distress. All ARCS staff are trained to take these calls.

### ARCS Funding

No funding increase since 1989/90 apart from C.P.I.

Funding level in 1989/90 **\$83,000** for **18 hours per week** of service provision.

#### **Current funding:**

- The total annual funding from DCP in 2009/2010 was \$151,950.89 - for three days funded per week.

The total wages and superannuation budget based on our contract of two FTE equivalents is a total annual cost of **\$133,257.88** – leaving an annual total of **\$18,693.01** to run the agency on. Therefore **86%** of the funding is for wages & superannuation.

- As we need to accommodate after hours appointments for clients the reality is that staff work more than 7.50 hours per day - in fact the service is open from 9am to 6pm. This is not catered for in our funding budget.
- Counsellors are seeing up to six clients per day – when the recommended industry standard is five clients per day.

➤ **Fee for service:**

Our fees are based on a sliding scale according to the client's income. Many of our clients are Health Care card holders and pay anywhere from \$15 to \$45 per session. Our normal fee is \$85 per session but approximately only 30% of clients would pay the maximum fee.

**Background:**

For the past 27 years ARCS has provided therapeutic counselling services for those separated from their biological family – adoptees, birth parents, those from foster care, family separation etc.

We offer an inclusive model of service delivery i.e. for all parties of the family and based on the assumption of the lifelong nature of the impact of separation at developmental stages and life changes.

Our therapeutic model of intervention is based on Attachment Theory, Trauma and Integrative Psychotherapy and Developmental Theory.

Our clients have all experienced loss – loss of parents, loss of a child or the ability to have a child biologically. Many have also experienced trauma in the form of abuse/neglect or powerlessness in a life changing event.

## **Therapeutic Counselling Services:**

### **Birth Parents**

ARCS has been involved in providing services for birth parents since 1983. Our research on the impact of relinquishing '*The Effect on the Mother of Relinquishing a Child for Adoption*' and '*Relinquishing Mothers in Adoption, Their long-term adjustment*' was ground breaking and is still recognised today.

Relinquishment is often experienced as unresolved trauma. Those involved felt shamed, powerless and were denied the opportunity to see or hold their babies. Most were told to get on with their lives and forget. Silence surrounded their loss. Psychologically they have split from the experience and have been unable to integrate this loss into their lives.

When working with birth parents we have found that reunion or the possibility of reunion can trigger shame, fear and guilt. It takes them back to the time of their loss.

Our work is based on models of trauma therapy that enhance integration and incorporate knowledge from neuropsychology of how trauma is held in the body. For those relinquishing now we work towards assisting them with contact with their child and new family. This is an ongoing process as the child's needs with contact change over time.

As with other major losses and traumas the impact of relinquishment can impact on the parenting of subsequent children. Increasingly adult children of birth parents are seeking

assistance in understanding the meaning of their parent's loss to their own lives and relationships.

## **Adoptive Parents**

ARCS provides services for adoptive parents prior to adoption and post adoption. Our clients range from those with children to those with adult children.

Our premise is that parents want to do the best for their children and come with good intentions.

Many adoptive parents have their own story of loss and pain – lost pregnancy, failed IVF. We assist them with their own loss and grief issues so that they can be emotionally available to parent a child.

The past experiences of older adoptive parents have often been one of isolation and fear (of loss of their child). When adult children embark on search and reunion with birth parents, feelings of not being an authentic parent, fear of loss of the relationship with their child and feelings of past loss and sadness can emerge.

Adoptive parents can be marginalized from the reunion process. However reunion also has a great potential for building integration between the birth family and the adoptive family rather than compartmentalisation or fragmentation.

Many adopted people cope with the complexity of adoption by keeping these aspects of their lives separate. Research indicates that those who can be with complexity have a far healthier psychological outcome.

## **Children**

All the children we see have experienced at least one rupture to their attachment relationship with a parent. For many they have endured multiple losses of attachment figures (parents, foster carers, carers in orphanages/institutions).

Central to a child developing a positive internal working model (of how they see and feel about themselves and the world) is a secure attuned and empathetic attachment relationship with a parent (or parent figure). When children do not have this or are subjected to loss of it they need to develop strategies to survive and core beliefs that protect them not receiving what is vital for their development.

These strategies of survival and self protection however can be barriers to them forming an attachment relationship with new parents/carers. They cannot accept the love and closeness offered and try to recreate their old experience of relationship.

The behaviour exhibited by these children is characterised by deep shame, intense rage, pervasive anxiety, extreme isolation and despair. Adoptive parents/carers can feel overwhelmed by their child's rage, rejection and need to control.

Safety is a core issue for these children. Their experience of relationship has not been safe. The ways they try to manage this lack of safety is to try and create their own safety through

avoidance of relationship, silence, denial of their own feelings and thoughts, lying, manipulation and constant vigilant control.

### **Intervention**

The goals of our intervention are to provide the child the opportunity to experience a safe attachment relationship in therapy and thus extend this to the significant relationships in their life. Secondly we strive to enable the parent to be able to be attuned to their child's experience and read the underlying needs beneath their behaviour.

We make use of the parent's commitment and good intention and build on their basic skills and their own capacity for secure attachment in the therapeutic process. The parents are present and actively involved in the therapeutic sessions. The therapist models creating safety attachment sequences, attunement and providing a secure base for the parents.

### **Assessment**

- 1 Interview with the adoptive parents/carers based on Adult Attachment Interview and to establish how they perceive the child and their relationship in terms of attachment.
- 2 We film the interaction between child and parent on tasks that demonstrate how the parent child dyad deal with tasks to challenge, nurture control, intimacy.
  - Strange Situation
  - Analyse film – Circle of Security analysis.
  - Identify film clips that show underutilised capacity, miscuing.
  - Miscuing by the child of their needs. Miscuing by the parent triggers of defenses mechanisms of the child.

Working within the framework of the Circle of Security model for feedback to parents, under which the therapist provides the experience of attunement and secure base for the parent. The parents are shown selected filmed clips of their child's interaction. The goal of the session is for the parent to develop the capacity to look under the child's behavior to what the child needs. While at the same time being aware of their own feelings and responses to the child. Thus we are aiming at developing the parent's reflective function – a high indicator for a successful outcome for parenting.

We have found this model to be very effective in shifting the parents attitude to the child i.e. from seeing the child as being naughty, oppositional defiant, rejecting etc. to one of having empathy for the child and seeing their need. (Comfort, organising feelings, exploration). Once the parent develops curiosity about the child's behavior, empathy and insight into their own subliminal response their ability to respond differently to their child quickly gets results. Once they see a change then parents are able to embrace a new way of being with their child that is rewarding and brings pleasure.

### **Child Therapy:**

For some children the underlying impact of trauma and attachment disruption requires deeper work. We find from the work with parents a base of trust and safety is developed which allows them to see the child's need for further help. We always work with the parent

and child together as the secure long standing attachment relationship with the parent is the desired outcome.

In the past we have found it challenging to engage parents/ carers to seek assistance in parenting their child. One of the big constraints has been the fear in parents of not being perfect and having to get it right on their own. The process of adoption reinforces this belief. The principle of believing in good intention of the parents to do their best and their wish to enjoy their child provides a welcoming and safe base for the parent to engage in change.

### **Search / Reunion:**

The service of search / reunion is provided within our model of service delivery. We do not see search as a separate process but rather an aspect of the individuals search for meaning and personal understanding. Thus we place an emphasis on sound preparation, emotional awareness and developing insight into the experience of the others involved.

Post reunion is a time when those involved can struggle with developing new relationships while sustaining current relationships with family. Sadness and loss and “what if’s” often emerge post reunion. Reunion also impacts on partners and other family members.

We offer services to all involved.

### **Other Associated Services:**

Historically our work has been with those affected by adoption. However the experiences of those who have grown up separated from a biological parent are at core the same as adoption.

Over time our services have been sought out by those affected by foster care, grandparent/family carers and those who have been separated from a child or apart through family conflict.