

Malcolm & Benita Smith  
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Re Enquiry into adoption of children from overseas

To the Honourable members of the Standing Committee of Family and Human Services,

Our daughter Lynette adopted our beautiful granddaughter – Amanda – from China in September of 2004. Benita accompanied Lynette on her trip to China, to get Amanda, and she is a most loved and treasured member of our family. We also have 2 nephews and a niece adopted from India and have seen the benefits of the intercountry adoption program over many years.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the procedures and discrimination which occurs to families within Australia, when applying to adopt from overseas, and on the receipt of their child. We include the information in point form below.

- Costs involved in adoption – Parents who chose to adopt from overseas are burdened with significant fees within Australia, for an adoption to be processed (in addition to those costs which are applicable in the country that they choose to adopt from). The departments make it very difficult and stressful for families to be approved towards adoption. While we understand that parents have to be carefully screened we believe that they should also be treated with respect. There were many points in Lynette's journey where WE would have just given up. Benita has had the opportunity to meet with many adoptive parents at functions organized by the parent group – Families with Children from China. The parents that she has met are generally well educated and have a burning desire to parent their children. These children receive so much love, that it is just wonderful to see. The fees involved in the processing of applications in Australia are too high and we believe could be reduced without jeopardizing the integrity of the program. This would enable many more families the opportunity to adopt from overseas. We also believe that the payment of the \$1250 Child sponsorship fee to DIMIA upon allocation of a child should be removed, in the case of children adopted by Australian families from overseas. Biological parents do not pay \$1250 to bring their child home from hospital! We also believe that there needs to be a commitment by the state Human Services Departments to be committed to the idea of adoption as an acceptable way of finding families, for those children who would be left in poverty or left languishing in orphanages around the world, and to provide appropriate funds and staffing to facilitate this. The comments that we have heard from a large number of Lynette's acquaintances would tend to say that this is something that is sadly missing, and that people working with the state departments see intercountry adoption as a last resort for children without families. We do not believe that this is the case – the last resort would be to be left in an orphanage with no one to love you!

- Access to the Federal Government maternity payments – There is discrimination toward adoptive parents in relation to their ineligibility to access the Federal Government’s Maternity payment and Maternity immunization allowances. Our federal treasurer Mr. Costello stated in an interview on 12/5/04, with Paul Murray of radio station 6PR, that the maternity payment was designed to help families with the cost associated with the arrival of a child – cot, prams, car seat etc. Our daughter also had to provide and purchase all the required “baby” equipment for her daughter. The adoption of our granddaughter cost her mother approx \$22,000 and she incurred all the costs of biological parents in preparing for the arrival of her child (minus actually pregnancy and hospitalisation costs) and yet received no help from either state or federal governments in any regard. The ability to have access to the Federal governments Maternity payment would have made the preparation for the arrival of her daughter a lot less stressful. Her state department also requires one adoptive parent to take 12 months out of the workforce in order to facilitate attachment. While Lynette is thoroughly enjoying the time she is spending with Amanda, biological parents are not required to take any set amount of time off after the birth of a child. This Requirement also varies between states, and has placed a considerable financial strain on Lynette. In relation to the Maternity immunisation allowance –Lynette had to fight for this also due to the age that her daughter was when she arrived in Australia. All the required immunisations were complete before our granddaughter’s second birthday but she was sent a letter from Centerlink denying her the payment, as they hadn’t been claimed by her second birthday. We believe, in the case of adoptive parents, payment of this Immunisation payment should occur when the children have completed the required immunisations regardless of the age that the child was at arrival.
- **Adoption by Single parents** – Lynette adopted her daughter as a single parent. She was very lucky to reside in a state that allows single parents to be allowed to adopt (Victoria). If she had resided in Tasmania, Queensland or South Australia, our wonderful granddaughter would not be part of our family, as state legislation does not allow single parents to adopt.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to comment on the discrimination faced by families of children adopted from overseas and thank you for taking the time to read our submission.

Yours Sincerely

Malcolm and Benita Smith