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In response to the SBS programme 'Insight' on 4/3/2014 entitled 'Making Adoption Easier', the Family Inclusion Network of Australia Inc. (FINA) recognises there are times when children need to be removed permanently from the care of their families.

The decision not to restore children to their families must be made within highly skilled, collaborative practice; the decisions will most often be amidst complexity and all options to return the child must be exhausted.

As highlighted in the episode the outcomes for children in long term foster care are often poor placing a significant burden on the broader community and government in areas of justice, housing, drugs and alcohol, mental health etc.

Permanency policies have been introduced across the world to address the issue of drift in care. Clearly, stable and nurturing homes are essential to better outcomes for children. In order to achieve this, the NSW's government suggestion that adoption of children in care be made easier to ensure greater stability for children raises concerns. There are a few key issues not addressed:

- What does research tell us about outcomes for adopted children?
- As was evidenced in the screening, there is a mixed response for children's experiences of care whether that is adoption (open or not) or permanency in foster care. It is clear not one solution can address every child's needs.
- There was no discussion about the implications of Aboriginal children in care who are over represented in the care system.
- Reduced timeframes for parents to demonstrate suitability to have their child returned home may render many (if not most) parents into hopelessness; perhaps exacerbating the issues that led to their children going into care.
- Locating permanent placements whether that be in foster care or adoption is short-sighted by not placing emphasis on permanency within the family. By looking outside of the family as an option we lose sight of the possibilities that lie within the family unit.

We are too narrow in our thinking; we need to think more rigorously and look closely at other jurisdictions around the world. If we seriously want to address the issue of reducing the numbers of children going into care, firstly we need to invest significantly in front end support (and look at non-traditional ways) both prevention and intervention. Secondly, serious investment in services that address violence, drug and alcohol and other issues which support whole families' long term to work through their problems is critical; including supporting at times of reunification.

Finally, parents need to be encouraged, inspired and supported to be the best parents possible. Having the fear of adoption of their child as a possibility is counter-productive in achieving this.



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