

Chair Report, AFS AGM Nov 7 2017

As a Charitable Trust, the objective of Adoption First Steps is to meet the requests of couples and singles wanting to start the process of adopting children from overseas, acknowledging that the needs of the adopted child are the paramount consideration. Rather than creating a demand for services, we exist to meet an already-established need in the community. As such it has been extremely gratifying to see increasing numbers of Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) choosing AFS to begin the education and assessment part of the overseas adoption process. This, we believe, to be a reflection on increased awareness of our services as well as improvements in the way we deliver them.

In the recent financial year 20 new PAPs opted to use AFS; a 33% increase over the 15 the previous year. This brings to 64 (55 couples and 9 singles) the total number of PAPs who have used AFS since its establishment in April 2014. Of these, nearly half have now completed the full education and assessment process with AFS while others are still actively in the process. Some have opted not to proceed with adoption and a very small number have elected to swap provider for a variety of reasons.

Strategically we made a conscious decision to continue to provide the same services that we have offered from inception and to concentrate on delivering them in the best and most useful way possible. The journey of every Prospective Adoptive Parent who comes to us is unique and we use the knowledge we gain from working with them, along with their feedback, to guide our operations and how we work. We value this enormously and thank our PAPs for sharing it with us. The opportunities for New Zealand Residents to adopt from overseas can change from time to time as countries review or change their policies. However, we have been fortunate this past year that this has been stable and AFS remains accredited to provide education and assessment services for five countries: The Philippines, Thailand, Chile, Lithuania and India.

Operationally this year we continued to place a great deal of effort into refining our systems and processes, including governance. This has been a two year focus because, as we continue to get busier, we need to be confident that we have clear and efficient procedures in place that will stand us in good stead for years to come. We also need to be supported by adequate information technology and communication and systems. This investment of time and some capital means we will be able to concentrate more this coming year on continuous review and improvement to our programs.

Financially, AFS continues to be in a strong position which means we can continue to deliver our services to our PAPs with no cost increase and we have been able to absorb the rising costs of our operations. One of our challenges has been to try to make our services readily accessible to people living away from major centres – particularly without a substantially increased cost burden – and we have structured ourselves better now to do this. We are extremely fortunate to have worked alongside a team of external professionals who have given of their time and expertise very economically or freely to help us; from designing our new branding and our new website to our auditors and legal support.

We have had two changes to the Board of Trustees. It was great to welcome Boris Girard de Soucanton, a business man and father of an adopted child from Thailand who brings practical experience and professional expertise to the Board. However, we were sad to see the departure of Trustee Sarah Morton, one of the founders of AFS. Our sincere thanks to her for the years of hard work in helping to bring AFS to fruition.

We continue to work closely with NZCA and we value their guidance and expertise in the very complex area of intercountry adoption. We also work collaboratively with ICANZ and CFO who work with PAPS who have successfully completed their education and assessment to be matched with a child or children from overseas.

It has been a good year for AFS and this is largely attributable to its people who work hard and conscientiously to fulfil the goals of AFS and help PAPS work towards overseas adoption. My sincere thanks to the Board of Trustees, our Treasurer, Secretary, Director and Social Workers. And of course, to our PAPS who have chosen to use our services, thank you for choosing AFS to work towards creating your family.

The way forward for AFS will continue to evolve as the landscape around international adoption changes. However, at the root of our services will be a drive to provide the best quality and up to date education and assessment services so that our PAPS can move into international adoption being very well prepared for the road ahead.

Thank you.

Marian Hudson
AFS Chair