

Proposal to Increase Special Needs Adoptions under CARA

DATE: 25/04/2018

TO:

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)
Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD)

OBJECTIVE: Make programmatic, technical, and sensitization changes to increase special needs adoption by at least 25% compared to the current numbers.

As per the latest March 2018 data, out of 1717 children currently available for adoption through CARA, more than 50% of children fall under the special needs category. Yet domestic adoptions of special needs children are extreme low in India, with barely 46 special needs adoptions in 2017-2018. This has as much to do with people's mindsets as it has to do with lack of a creative adoption tools and sensitisation material to help guide prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) towards special needs adoption. Special needs children are currently relegated to a catch-all list and no focused effort is made to highlight the children or to educate the PAPs about them. All children deserve a family and the ideas we are proposing fall within CARA's domain to help these children find their forever home.

Below are the key changes needed to increase special need adoptions domestically and internationally. We are willing to provide any and all support required to implement these changes.

I. Sub-categorize and standardize the special needs category

- 1) The special needs list has no sub-categorization of the special needs (besides physical and mental), making it difficult to identify what special need a PAP may be willing to support. Build out special needs subcategories such that it's possible for PAPs to identify the types of special needs they can support.

Example: Sub-categorization can be seen in these two special needs adoption websites:

<http://www.adoptspecialneeds.org/>

<https://www.rainbowkids.com/special-needs>

- 2) The special needs list is difficult to go through and read. It's a data dump, with no sorting and no tools to make it convenient for the user to browse the list. Provide sorting and other UI design elements to make the special needs list easier to browse.

- 3) "Remarks" field in the special needs list is the PAPs first insight into the special needs requirements of a child. Currently there is no standardization of "remarks" making it confusing and difficult to understand the children's needs. "Remarks" should be broken down into two parts: standardized and open-form field.

The standardized part should provide the SAAs an existing set of options that describe the nature of support the child requires, such as

- Child requires family support (Examples include: missing toe, squint, transgender child, etc)
- Child may require some medical intervention (Examples include: cleft upper lip, correctable blindness, hearing loss, mixed genitalia, etc)
- Child may require some external resources (Examples include: cerebral palsy, developmental delays, blindness, etc)

The open-form field can be for notes from the SAA to further describe the child and the special need.

- 4) Depending on the SAA, there is a huge variation in how the child's information is entered is the "remarks", "CSR", and "MER". Many SAA's do not provide useful information, which is specifically hurtful for special needs children since it further reduces their chance of getting adopted. A periodic review of the profiles should be done to guide and support the SAAs to ensure that each child's profile is complete and informative for PAPs.

The changes required to sub-categorize and standardize the special needs category would require additional resources including medical professionals for reviewing the profiles at a central level. We are willing to volunteer these resources and do the needed work.

II. Highlight special needs children and sensitize the PAPs about special needs adoption

- 1) When a PAP's profile becomes active in the system after the home study, actively notify the PAP about the special needs list.

Send sensitisation material to help the PAP understand special needs adoption, as well as provide educational and sensitization material along the special needs list within the Carings portal

Example: As adoption counselors, we have talked to PAPs who have waited months and years for a normal referral without realizing that they had the option of looking at the special needs list.

- 2) For thousands of PAPs waiting in queue for a normal referral, send periodic notifications reminding them to look at the special needs list. Share guidance, stories and other relevant material to encourage the PAPs to learn more about special needs adoption.

Example: It takes one story of how an adoptive parent raised a special needs child for it to become a possibility for another PAP.

- 3) While PAPs wait for their normal referrals, highlight 10 special needs children on a monthly basis via the PAPs' Carings login and via email communication. Refresh this list for each PAP monthly and pop-up a reminder every time a PAP logs into the Carings system.

Example: PAPs frequently log into the Carings system to check their waiting list number. Use this space to also highlight 10 special needs children which makes it easier to understand and connect with the children compared to a long catch-all list.

- 4) For international PAPs, auto-highlight one special need child at a time (to meet the criteria of one referral at a time) via the PAP's Carings login. The referral can be updated at a daily or weekly frequency, thus rotating through multiple profiles (one at a time) and enabling international PAPs to connect with a child without waiting on their adoption agency or Indian embassy to find a child for them.
- 5) During the Carings registration process, the health selection criteria shuts out special needs kids. PAPs will only select 'normal' given a choice between 'normal' and 'special needs'. Instead, build out a more comprehensive health selection criteria that includes the special needs sub-categories and standardised remarks proposed in Section I of this document, and allow PAPs to make multiple selections. This will allow PAPs to consider a range of children with various needs based on PAP's capability to support those needs.

III. Provide necessary law coverage to highlight special needs children for international adoptions

- 1) Special needs children available for adoption from countries such as China get highlighted in international adoption agency websites, thus making it easier to find families for these children. But JJ Act prohibits identifying adoptable special needs children from India, thus hiding these children from prospective families. Necessary edits need to be made in Indian law to ensure that special needs children can be highlighted for international adoptions, while maintaining their dignity and right to privacy.

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