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Irish American Adoptions : A discussion of certain backdrop issues

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Paper Presented to Adoption Conference Cape Cod, USA. 2011

Outline of Presentation

- Story telling
- Research : a particular type of story telling
- Spheres of influence : over time
- Snap shot of Ireland
- Comparing historical time lines USA and Ireland
- Past and present : the threads that connect over time and place

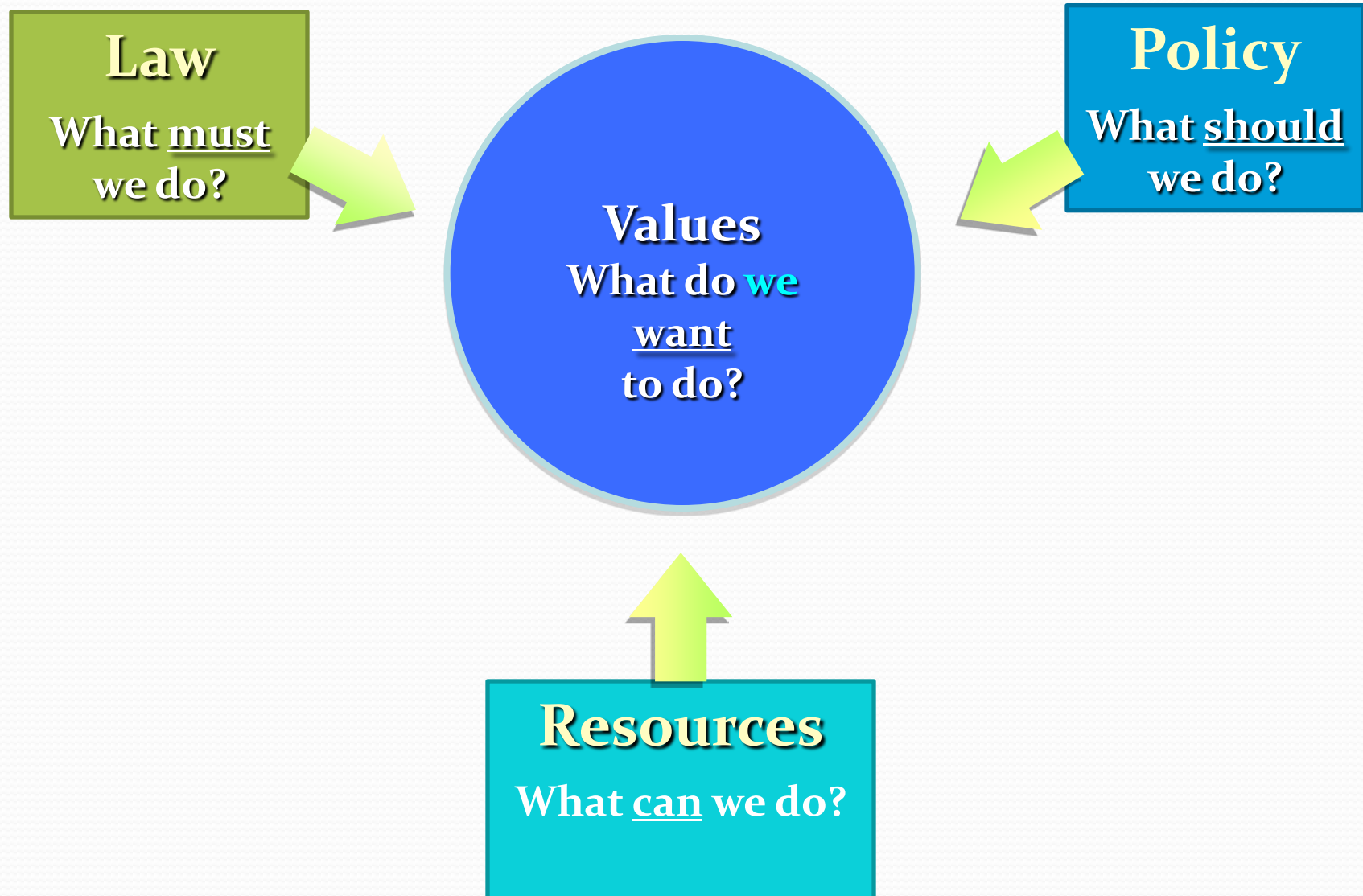


Stories and narrative

What is the story? : Not singular but multiple stories

- Stories lived
- Stories told
- Stories untold
- Stories imagined
- Stories unlived
- Stories written

Intersection of Context Markers : Change



Placement of Children in Care in the Republic of Ireland

Year	Adoption	Foster Care	Kinship Care	Residential Care
2009	220 (30)	3380	1678	327
2007	200 (42)	3141	1552	390

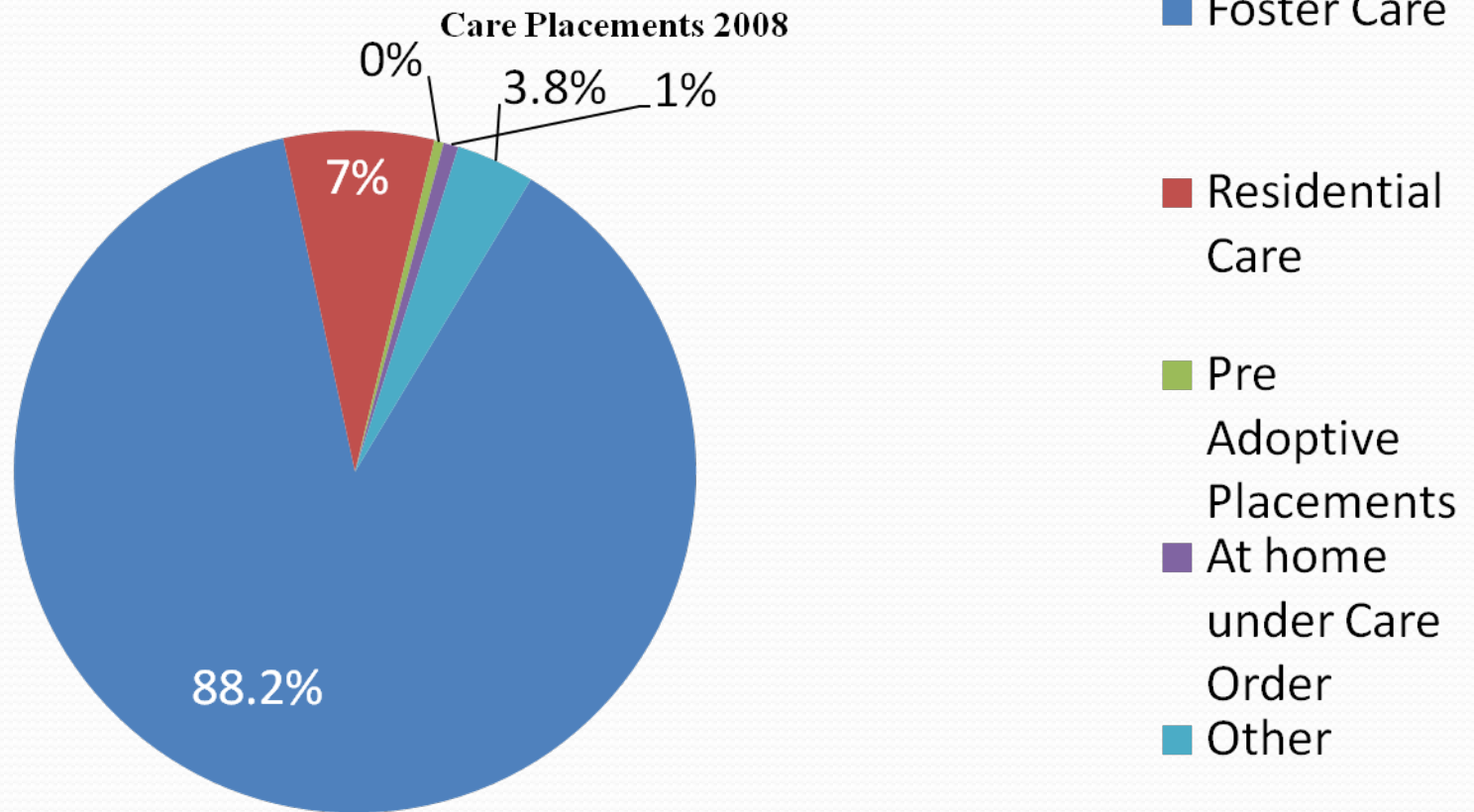
Kinship and Fostering Allowance :

319 Euro per week < 12 years

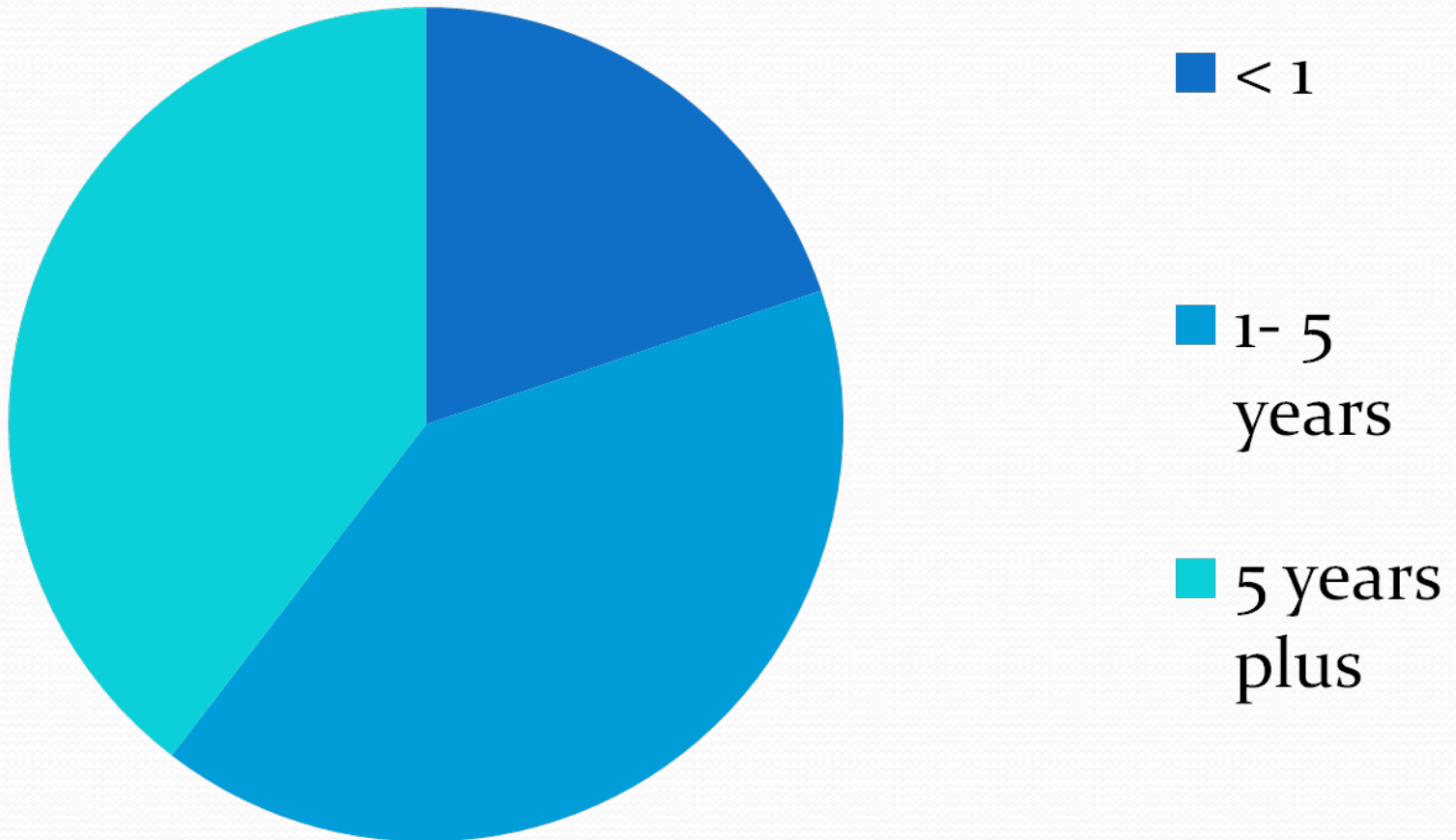
346 Euro > 12 years.

+ Monthly children's allowance

Care Placements 2008



Length of Time Children in Care 2008



Key Aspects of USA Adoption History

- 1900 – 1940
 - Modernisation.....change
 - Professionalization
 - Adoption‘Fit ‘ as if born to family.
- Post War 1945-
 - Alternative family form / Best Option
 - Transracial : ‘as if born to’
 - Lies of omission ‘ tell basis only’
 - Psychoanalysis influence
- 1970-
 - Permanence movement
 - Best option attacked AP /BM
 - Defective process /demand openness
- Now
 - Openness /support/ fed support

The USA & Irish Adoption Story : 30 years Apart?

- 1900 – 1940
 - Modern
 - Professionalization
 - ‘Fit ‘ as if born
- Post War 1945-
 - Alternative family form
 - Best option
 - Transracial : ‘as if born to’
 - Lies of omission ‘tell basis only’
 - Psychoanalysis influence
- 1970-
 - Permanence movement
 - Best option attacked AP /BM
 - Defective process /demand openness
- Now
 - Openness /support/ fed support

- 1900 - - - - - 1952
 - Informal
 - Church dominated
 - Shame illegitimacy/ poverty
 - Residential / boarding out / Sent out
- 1953 - - - - - 1991
 - ‘Fit as if born; sent out....1970
 - It is an option ...change ’70
 - Professionalization 1970
 - Ireland EU
- 1992 - - - - - 2010
 - Constitution
 - Intercountry adoption (Foreign)
 - Openness 1990’s.....not legal
- Now
 - Joining up child welfare
 - Permanence debate beginning
 - Hague regulation

Situating Child Welfare Provision in USA and Ireland

A continuum

USA

**Minimal State Role/ more
Selective & Individual
Focus**

**> Privilege of Private
domain**

**Laissez – Faire /
Bureaucratic?**

Ireland ?

**Closer to
Boston than
Berlin?**

Paternalistic?

Nordic Countries

More Universal services

**Greater Focus on
Common Good**

Public domain

More Rights based ?



A Number of Differences Shaping the Systems

- Permanence

- Ireland : Foster care is long-term care option
- Adoption, or return to BF, is cornerstone of US system

Marital family

- Ireland: constitutional bar marital families – 4/ 5 per year under abandonment ruling out of 5060 care pop
- Freeing for Adoption commonplace in USA (permanency hearings)

Independent /Private adoption :

- Ireland: Private placements illegal since 1998
- USA: approx 48% occurs in private domain

Linking the past with present & future

- How the practices from the past of sending children to USA (2500 children 1930- 1970) can inform and influence current and future practice?
- How does this relate to practice between 1850 – 1900 whereby 4000 children sent from workhouses to Australia and 1500 sent to Canada (indentured labour) and not adoption?
- How does this relate to the 4000 children plus that have come from other countries to Ireland since 1990?

Lessons from the past : Themes

- Wide range of people involved : ripple effect
- Loss and perhaps seeing it as 'trauma'
- Past adoption practices drew society's response to illegitimacy, infertility and poverty
- Huge variability in adoption practice
- Role of choice /coercion: secrecy /silence: blame / responsibility and behaviour /attitudes of indiv /organs
- Ongoing impact esp on search and reunion : focus on success...
- Need for services.....

(Please see Higgins 2010 Australian Review of Impact of Past Adoption Practices : Australian Govt Department of Family Affairs)

Rationale for Work of Pavao and O'Brien

In a very short period, Ireland has gone from being a sending country to a receiving country in respect of adoption and

the connections between both processes are important to capture.

The passing of time and aging of the people involved means that it is critical to do this work now before the stories are lost.

Why are exact numbers not known?

Various Practices Involved.

The children were adopted in the USA so the only record is the application for passport (individual files sealed in Ireland) but evidence of some direct registrations (born to one mother and registered to another / USA citizen)

Dependent on obtaining data from State and Church Archives, Religious orders and immigration records.



What are the stories ?

Stories lived

Stories told

Stories untold

Stories imagined

Stories unlived

Stories written

Stories told : Values, theories in adoption

- Families for children : best interests of child
- Self / mutual selection : adults have the capacity to decide
- 'From Normative families to
- Partnership / consumerism / evaluation / quality
- Open adoption : identity :
- Expert position : reflective practice and theoretical coherence
- Collaborative practices / strengths focused
- Social justice / Ethics
- Diversity

Range of Methods Proposed for O'Brien and Pavao Study

- Large scale survey using 'survey monkey'
- In-depth interviews /biographical accounts
- Archival material currently available : state and church records
- Previously unseen case and documentary files

Stories Lived in Ireland re Adoption

- Hague 2010 : 15 years after signing ... last in West
- New Legislation 2010 and left out provision for open adoption /attach conditions and search /reunion
- New Adoption Authority removed post of Director of Social Work
- Legalism driving process (narrow legalism at that)
- Constitutional protection for family based on marriage and adoption (rarely) possible...aftermath of Referendum?
- Economic prosperity dwindling
- Pressure activity of Adoptive parents to open ICA further

Changes In Adoption in Ireland

- Rebalancing among the parties involved in adoption
- Birth parents more involved in placements and level of openness
- Adoptive Parents : advocacy groups
 - Media campaigns : challenged value systems of social workers and organisations
- Standardised frameworks
- Legalism propelling decision making ?

Stories told and lived in USA

- Who is being adopted and who is left behind?
- Ethical practices
- ICA falling numbers and increased regulation
- Place of private adoption in the system
- Campaigns re sealed records and technological advances

Linking the past with present & future

- From sending to receiving country : Ireland
- From receiving to sending country to receiving : USA
- How can these experiences be spoken, heard seen and understood?
 - Who is doing this work in USA?
 - Joyce Maguire Pavao and O'Brien doing the Irish /USA
- What are the implications for search and reunion and identity formation?
- What are the implications for story telling?

Some Readings that may be useful

- O'Brien, V & Richardson, V (1999) *Towards a standardised framework for inter-country adoption assessment procedures : a study of assessment procedures in inter-country adoption*. Dublin. Department of Health and Children available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3401>
- O'Brien, V. (2009) The potential of Ireland's Hague convention legislation to resolve ethical dilemmas in inter-country adoptions. *Irish Social Worker*, Summer 2009. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3221> (this speaks also to domestic adoption)
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