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Submitted by Alexa Matthews

Belonging and Identity: Considerations for Children in Alternative Care

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Abstract:

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Arise has observed through interactions with adoptees and families who had been and were in the child protection system or were formed through alternative care that there were key themes emerging. This led to the development of a workshop to explore the psychosocial implications for children, many of whom have been in the alternative care system for extended periods, as a consequence of the pandemic.

Reading studies, engagement with and taking note of what was being voiced by adopted persons and people who had aged out of the foster care system provided key insights into the need to focus on attachment, trauma as well as identity, heritage and roots as well as how information was being made available to adoptees and others. This knowledge and understanding have underpinned the psychosocial education programme offerings developed by Arise. Challenges to this in the South African context include the fact that the cohort of transracial adult adoptees is still relatively young and so their experiences or needs have historically been dismissed or

pathologized as being adoptee related as opposed to the way in which practices impact them.

There are 4 key objectives in the workshop: Understanding the impact of personal beliefs, with regards to identity, cultural heritage, and roots as well as attachment, and values on professional (including and not limited to social workers, child and youth care workers as well as care givers), decision making; understanding the ethical guidelines for case planning and intervention development; a focus on competence, honesty, accountability, and social justice with respect to ethical challenges in adoption and alternative care and lastly to be aware of system or organizational biases.

The workshop utilizes dialogical engagement regarding the children's act, facilitated groups and case study discussion and self-reflection exercises. The peer-to-peer work allows for growth and mutual accountability in this sphere of work.

A primary take-away of this workshop is the increased understanding and awareness of the need to prioritize attachment, identity as well as heritage and belonging within the alternative care space, with regards to biological families. The secondary take-away is that professionals are able to identify areas of further professional development and growth for themselves.

The advocacy for all children to be in thriving families, regardless of how they are formed, requires conscious thought and deliberate action – this workshop seeks to equip social workers with a framework to advocate for this practically.