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# Educare



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**"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture."** Dave Pollock

## Parents of children with special educational needs serving overseas?

Aspergers Syndrome, ADHD, dyslexia....there are TCKs from all countries in just about every international school and thousands of home educating families who have these learning disabilities. As well as these disabilities many agencies have children with speech and language difficulties or dyspraxia (developmental coordination disorder in US English, sometimes commonly called "clumsy child syndrome") amongst the "mild" or "moderate" conditions.

It is 6 years since the last Educare edition on this theme. A recent TCK Forum event at Birmingham in England underlined that it is a good time to look again. So many of our families and just about all sending agencies have to face huge decisions with far-reaching consequences when it comes to placements when the children have these challenging care and educational needs. The questions families and agencies need to consider are varied and include:

- Can NGO agencies, especially smaller ones without specialist support staff, accept families where one or more of the children has special needs?
- If the agency accept the family where can they be placed?
- How is the placement worked out if the parents are convinced they should go somewhere the agency thinks is unsuitable?
- If the parents' first choice is unworkable should the alternative be a home country post or offers of an alternative overseas placement?
- If an agency sends such families overseas what support and conditions should the agency give and what is it reasonable for parents to expect?

These questions become even more difficult when severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties are involved such as those encountered with Downs Syndrome, autism, and visual or hearing impairment. These conditions go beyond learning disabilities into medical conditions that often require costly specialist intervention and support from several sources.

This is illustrated for example in many children with Downs Syndrome who have visual, hearing, cognitive, language, social and motor skill impairments - in summary every area of special educational need caused by the one root problem. We can also add to that the medical needs arising from them being prone to breathing problems, infections and accidents. All this means that there are many parts of the world where no family or agency could responsibly take such a child. Having said this most of these conditions are on a spectrum where some who have them can go on to lead near typical lives.

Most agencies tend to work in a similar way when considering how to place a family who have children with special needs. The general principle behind any decision is that they will not send a child into a situation where their educational and/or medical needs cannot be properly met.

The principle may be written into a policy or be an unwritten understanding.

This basic idea allows for flexibility and does not just mean that the family cannot work in a small African bush town. It may be that doing home education in a bush town like that would be a good placement for some with more moderate disabilities if the parents can cope with it. Many of these children are able to have educational provision if the family, school and/or agency can consistently provide a teaching assistant to give one on one support. This usually cannot be guaranteed beyond the period of service



for the teaching assistant working with the child at the time - most often on a one-year contract or similar voluntary agreement. In this case the family may well have to accept that their placement is on a yearly-renewable basis that depends on the availability of one to one help for their child.

In many sending countries agencies have to balance anti-discrimination law against the duty of care. It would be illegal in most Western countries to block entry to the agency because of a child's disability, but it would be extremely irresponsible, if not severe neglect of duty, to approve a placement where a child's medical needs could not be met. From the parents' viewpoint there should be no sense of organisational pressure or coercion to take up any placement that would break that principle of meeting the medical and educational needs of their vulnerable children.

When considering the placement therefore these are a few of the factors that parents, agencies and any other support groups need to consider:

1. All learning disabilities have a wide spectrum of severity. That means that we have to deal with each family on a case by case basis. For instance a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder should not necessarily prevent us from placing that child overseas. A significant number on the more moderate end can and do cope and go on to lead independent adult lives - many mathematics, IT and physics students would be in this group. However on the more severe end with Kanner-type autism this does have a huge impact on possible placements, as such children place extreme demands on the parents. Their needs would stretch any international school beyond its limits and would require frequent professional intervention.

2. What medical support can be placements being considered? The lack of medical facilities in many developing countries away from the major cities make a lot of small town and village situations totally unworkable. In some cases whole countries would be off limits because of the collapse or lack of medical infrastructure - e.g. after a civil war. With more severe needs even well-developed countries may be unsuitable because of the expense of medical and educational provision outside of the home country.



provided in the

Children with these severe needs would be all but uninsurable for medical conditions where the treatment may well cost more than the rest of the family's budget put together if the parents have to pay.

3. Is it realistic to ask international schools to cope with a child with learning disabilities? School authorities in developed countries are legally required to accept children and to provide suitable education for them. Most countries now have the large majority of such children in mainstream school with support and have moved away from special schools for all but the most severely disabled. This is only possible though because of significant spending of taxpayer money to provide specialist assessment and one to one support. Low-fee international schools do not have access to that kind of money, rely largely on volunteers or staff working for a basic living allowance and therefore can't guarantee expertise or personnel. They are increasingly overstretched coping with staff shortages and growing numbers of EAL/ESL students who also need a lot of teacher support for different reasons. All of them have a policy of class size limits and some (correctly) allocate extra points to children with special needs counting them as double or triple demand compared to a typical child. That means that there is a very limited quota of special needs places. Very few of the staff there are special needs trained. This effect is exaggerated by the rapid turnover where a teacher becomes familiar with the child's needs during the year or two they work there only to be

replaced by another teacher going through his or her own transition to the host country and school environment.

4. Is home education a realistic option? It is not unusual for parents in developed countries to take their children out of mainstream school because they believe that it is failing their children. They may well be correct as they are the ones who best understand their own children and can experience great frustration with the slow-moving support given to them. In this case the home education option may well be better, and this can be done just as well in the host country placement. Other factors such as the supply of resources, uninterrupted lesson time, and opportunities for socialisation in the foreign context all need to be in place.
5. What access is there to special needs support? It is unrealistic to expect this in all but the biggest low-cost international schools, so there needs to be an alternative for most children. This could be special needs staff in support agencies such as AERC or the Senior Volunteers' Network, or it could be someone in the home office of the sending agency or other sponsoring group. Ensuring that support from some source is available is the responsibility of both the parents and the agency working together. In terms of decision making, a family with a child who has special needs should not be sent to a placement where there is no meaningful support.

6. How is the child likely to react to stress factors in the TCK children on the autistic spectrum faced with constant internationally. It adds to the difficulties children who make more with painful these children can they struggle to of times. It may be maximum stability is example is that of children with ADHD with a constant stream make some placements unless a radically solution is found.



lifestyle? It is very difficult for changes and moving when friends - often older allowances for them - leave regularity. All too often become very isolated as make friends at the best that a placement with required. Another highly distractible trying to learn at home of visitors. This can all but impossible different educational

7. It is very difficult to to assume that where are already under considerable pressure. Many conditions mean that the child's sleep pattern is disrupted, therefore so is that of the parents. Often the family copes because of considerable care input from friends and relatives. Removing that support and adding in extra burdens from multiple transitions could cause real problems. Serious questions need to be answered about placement suitability with possible blocking of some routes - however strong the parents' desire or the external pressure to go there. predict how the parents will cope, but it is realistic children have moderate to severe special needs, the parents
8. What is the reaction of the local community? This is particularly important with more severe conditions in 'shame and honour' cultures. Children with serious disabilities often experience hostility and fear. Local children in such societies with these serious conditions are normally shut away from public view because of the shame. The children learn the message that they should feel ashamed. More often than not they experience poor care linked to the lack of medical facilities and parental shame leading to higher mortality rates. Parents can be blamed for their child's Downs Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism or other disability, sometimes with extraordinary force and accusations. In these communities there is no exception for expatriate parents. On the other hand there are other settings where acceptance levels are high: a family showing the same love and honour to all of their children, including any with disabilities, may be seen as vulnerable yet earning admiration. That

demonstration through the family of unconditional love for all, not just the fit and strong, is a great example in such societies.

Is it possible to take on children with special needs, even the more severe ones, into NGO agencies? Yes.....but we need to place them very carefully based on the factors listed above and any others that are relevant. It may well be the best for all concerned that the family accept a placement in the home country, but that is no disaster considering the bigger picture. NGOs all need home staff. Also so many countries now have significant migrant groups from all over the world meaning that the Ethiopians or Thai among whom the parents dream of working are right there in London or Sydney or dozens of other cities. The dream doesn't need to end, parents and agencies may just need to adapt to fulfil it.

*Steve Bryant October 2012 (With thanks to Julie Ashman for leading our recent seminar on this theme and to the other delegates for their contributions)*

## Travel Stories

In the last edition we asked if there were any stories from globe-trotting travels with children. A couple of the responses are here

*This one from a mother who made frequent very long car journeys to go to school with her children....*

### **The African School Run**

The long journeys....ahhh! Sometimes I would pack a little bag of surprises (very small games, puzzles and the odd sweet treat or crispy things) which the girls would only receive after the journey had been under way for a while and all previously chosen games, books etc were exhausted (and before we all became too exhausted). Trusting for interesting journeys was helpful - e.g. seeing animals en route. We used to do word and observation games together. We were very thankful that we never had a really long plane journey as a family!



*And this one from John Barclay who wrote for us back in Sept 2007 about Indian TCKs. A lighter fun article this time about the adventure of a lifetime riding the full circuit of India on motor bikes!*

### **Monsoon Motorbike Madness, India – Nepal Tour: 2002**

“You’re mad” was one of a variety of responses from people who heard about our proposed trip: around India by motorbike, in 5 weeks, in the monsoon! As the epic journey progressed there were times when Nicholas, my 18 year old son, and I agreed fully with that sentiment. The lack of rain was painfully evident in North India, but by the time we finally ran into the monsoon in all its fury in Nepal we decided to rename our venture **“Monsoon Motorbike Madness”** – with T-shirts embroidered accordingly.

Our journey, of 7100kms on the road and 2400kms by rail, took us from Ootacamund, Tamil Nadu, South India in a clockwise direction around the sub-continent - across 19 states, union territories and Nepal, 5 hill stations, 2 capital cities, 10 state capitals and several major cities of India. We experienced the rich diversity of this vast land, seen in its people and the breathtaking beauty of its varied landscapes. Our bikes had to cope with every conceivable riding condition - from crowded city streets to high-speed expressways;

rugged mountain paths and potholed "national highways" in Bihar, landslides and river crossings in Nepal...and much more.

The idea was conceived on one of my many train journeys in India where we had been working for 6 years. As we were planning to leave India in July-August (after our son Nicholas completed his final exams at Hebron School in June) I shipped in my Yamaha XT from Melbourne to use it on a 'carnet de passage' and then shipped it back again. The second bike came from India. We needed something robust, powerful and reliable. We eventually negotiated a deal whereby I paid for a new Royal Enfield Thunderbird with the understanding that I could sell it back at the end of the journey - if it was still in one piece!

Four of us (my wife Janine and me on the Thunderbird, and Nicholas and our second son Aidan on the Yamaha) started from Hebron School, Ootacamund (henceforth referred to as 'Ooty') on the 4th of July, heading south to return via Chennai and Bangalore on the final two days arriving back on the 8th August.

We were prepared for punctures and minor repairs on route, but we only had one puncture which we were able to fix on the side of the road using a spare 18" tube for the Yamaha and our small 12v compressor, which we attached to the battery - to the amazement of the large crowd of onlookers. We had two main problems on the Thunderbird - with a noisy inlet pushrod, which was replaced, followed by a small oil leak, which was rectified at the Agra Motorcycle House, whose prize exhibit is a 1928 750cc Harley Davidson in working order!

Patience, knowledge and observance of road rules, and road etiquette are largely non-existent, and it seems that the bigger the vehicle, the more absent and unnecessary they are. The bus drivers were the worst - it's unnerving being a passenger in an Indian bus, but riding your motorbike towards an oncoming Ashok Leyland bus passing another vehicle at 80kph and leaving you with a thin sliver of bitumen to cling to as you slow down to a 'safe' 5-10kph, is the stuff of nightmares and horror movies. We had to contend with this scenario numerous times each day. At the other end of the spectrum were the boy racers on their motorbikes who saw us as a challenge and who would draw alongside us and then race past in dangerous displays of bravado.



Traffic lights are at best ignored, if not defied, especially those which have a timing display which indicates how many seconds until the cycle changes. 10 seconds before red changes to green is usually the time to blast the horn, rev the engine and drop the clutch. This is in spite of clear warning signs to "HEED TRAFFIC SIGNALS".

Then there is the bewildering diversity of vehicles on all roads: buses and trucks (large and small but all overcrowded and overloaded) predominate and dominate all else. Overcrowded jeeps that sway at break-neck speeds come next in the pecking order. The new breed of fast cars which are determined and able to pass everything, but which fare very badly in a head-on encounter with anything bigger. The ubiquitous lumbering Ambassadors; auto rickshaws; tractors with laden trailers; motorbikes, scooters, bicycles, tongas, bullock carts, cattle, pedestrians...the list goes on. And all drivers have an equal fascination and avaricious desire for territory in the middle of the road: your size determines your position in the pecking order and thus your claim to space on the road. The concept of keeping to the left, or even moving to the left when another vehicle is passing, is quite foreign (literally). As part of our riding policy we learnt to 'go with the flow', it was simply a matter of survival.

We had an Indian Road Atlas, but the maps were not detailed and served to show us little more than where our next destination was. Road signs, if they exist, are varied and generally not very reliable or helpful, although it did help to be able to read Hindi, especially in the northern states. Amazingly we never really got lost, even in the big cities. There are several tricks:

- i) stick to the main road and follow your nose;
- ii) follow the general flow of traffic;
- iii) keep asking for directions. If we asked for directions 100 times during our journey, 98 of the replies were simply: "Go straight". We managed to find our way through the crowded streets of Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, and circumnavigate India in a clockwise direction, by following the simple directive, "Go straight"!

Despite the tailboards of many trucks and buses advising drivers to "USE DIPPER AT NIGHT" this advice is universally ignored. Headlights, once switched on, are usually kept on high beam. More worrying were the vehicles that had their lights misaligned and which pointed straight at the oncoming vehicle. Or, worse still, the vehicle that has only one headlight - on the left, and which looks like a motorbike keeping to the left of the road until it's within a few metres and you suddenly realize that it's a truck or bus in the middle of the road.

The most spectacular and challenging day of the tour was the journey from Shimla to Mussoorie via Chakrata. It took us 12 hours to cover 320kms, climbing over 2500m passes twice and finally up to 3000m before dropping into Chakrata (where my parents had their honeymoon in 1953) at dusk. Our arrival in Chakrata caused quite a stir as we had entered, quite innocently, a restricted military zone (we wondered why there was so little traffic on the road!). We had planned to stay the night there, but we were told in no uncertain terms that we should keep going to Mussoorie - 80kms of winding mountain roads and 3 hours further on in the dark. We arrived at 10.00pm relieved and exhausted.

The 3 days from Kathmandu to Kolkata were the most demanding. The torrential monsoon rains had devastated the roads in Nepal and we left Kathmandu not knowing how or where we would exit into India. Our decision to negotiate the landslides and washouts of the highway towards Raxaul tested the limits of both bikes, and our endurance, but enabled us to be the first vehicles to arrive at the Raxaul border since the floods in Kathmandu a week earlier. When we finally stepped into the cool serenity of the foyer at the TAJ Bengal in Kolkata, after 3 days on 1215kms of the roughest and most crowded roads imaginable, it's not surprising that the Duty Manager asked, ever so politely, if we were colliery workers from the Bengal coalmines!

India is a truly beautiful country. Its amazing geographical diversity contributes to that beauty - we never tired of the changing scenery. We moved from the high country of the Nilgiris and Palani Hills to the tropical coast of Kerala and on to the rain forests of Goa. Across the sweeping plains of northern India and over the rugged Himalayan ranges into Nepal, then back down to the vast Gangetic plains. The final climb back up the Sigur Ghat to Ooty (36 hairpin bends in 18kms) was a great way to finish our adventure. Ooty was cold and wet, but the welcome was warm and we were glad to be 'home' safe and sound. We accomplished what we wanted to, and we raised about 60,000 Rupees towards the Hebron School Centenary project through sponsorship and donations.

*John & Nicholas Barclay.*



## Resources

### 1. TCK Education & Welfare, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed Jean Barnicoat, Revised by Steve Bryant (2010)

A complete guide to welfare issues from transition to family life with many personal stories included. The educational section considers the many options missionary families use with their pros and cons, plus long-term planning, special needs and comparisons of international schools. The revised edition has a new section on child protection.

### 2. Preparing Children to go Overseas; 4 books on one CD

Into All the World.....With Children - an easy to use resource book of ideas, games and activities to use to prepare children going to a new location. New edition 2011

Off We Go from Hong Kong (2003) activity book for 4 - 7 year olds getting ready to leave

My Adventure in ..... 1 by Claudia Smith (2007) activity book similar to "Off We Go" but designed for very young children going overseas

My Adventure in ..... 2 by Claudia Smith (2010) - the same idea as the first one, but geared to home leave preparation and time

### 3. The Next Chapter by Carole Steedman (Revised Ed 2010)

A re-entry guide for parents and workbook for younger children. Originally written in 2002 by Carole Steedman the Elementary Principal at Grace International School in Chiang Mai and now updated, this is the only resource of its kind for children up to 12.

The CDs cost £3 or €4 including P&P, with discount for multiple orders. Orders are taken by e-mail on [SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk](mailto:SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk) or [mk\\_tck@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk)



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