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Different on the Inside...Third Culture Kids' Transition Experiences

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

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2018

Abstract

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are children who have spent a significant part of their upbringing in a country or countries different from their passport country. This thesis explored the experiences of TCKs growing up abroad, and how this may have impacted their transition to their passport country, following high school. In particular, this thesis considered: the benefits of the TCK lifestyle; TCKs' unique strengths; their cultural identity development; meaning of home and belonging; acculturation and the TCKs' challenges during transition. It is envisioned that through increasing knowledge and understanding of TCKs, social workers, counselors, tertiary institutions and parents will be better able to address the specific needs of the TCKs during transition to their passport country.

By means of a narrative approach to the research, the participants provided insights into their TCK lifestyle and the specific challenges they experienced during their transition back to their passport country. Consideration was given to the theoretical social work perspectives that can benefit social work practice when supporting TCKs. Subsequently, the implications for social work practice provision were established.

The research findings identified the many benefits but also challenges to the TCK lifestyle. Much of the challenges TCKs experienced during transition to their passport country resulted from their sociocultural adjustment, highlighting the need for both social and cultural support during their transition. In addition to support, the findings revealed that the TCK lifestyle, cultural identity, family relationships, friendships have a significant perceived influence on the TCK's successful transition to their passport country.

Preface

To my most loved, my everything, John, Isaac, Grace and Ruby, who make me a better person and this world a better place. Thank you for all you have taught me and continue to teach me. Special thanks to the participants and to all TCKs, who have the potential to make a difference by showing tolerance, and acceptance of difference. Sincere thanks to both my supervisor's Dr. Kathryn Hay and Dr. Tracie O'Mafileo for your enduring support, patience and encouragement. I would not be here without you all.

From New Zealand to Pakistan to Laos to Sri Lanka to Cambodia to Uganda and Palestine...I finally made it!

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