

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Improving Stability for  
Adopted Children

September 2021



ADOPTION &  
PERMANENCE



# About the APPG

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The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Adoption and Permanence (APPGAP) was established in February 2019 with the following purpose:

*To amplify the voices and experiences of children and families engaged in adoption and other forms of permanence, to inform parliamentarians and promote the development and implementation of effective policy and practice.  
To provide an opportunity for the ambitious exploration of innovative solutions to enable adopted children and families to thrive.*

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**This report follows a three-month inquiry chaired by Rachael Maskell MP and is based on the evidence received as part of this inquiry.**

It has been compiled by representatives from the secretariat to the group, including Rebecca Patterson and Natalie Mills from Home for Good, and Alison Woodhead from Adoption UK.



**Please note:** Children and young people have been anonymised throughout this report for confidentiality purposes.

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# Terminology

## Adoption

The legal process through which one of the following occurs:

- A Local Authority identifies that a child reaches the legal threshold for care proceedings and the care plan for the child is that they should be placed for adoption. If authorised by the court through the making of a Placement Order, the child is matched and placed with suitable, approved adopters. They later apply to the court for an Adoption Order that legally severs the child's relationship with their birth parent(s).
- A child is relinquished by their birth parent(s) and the adoption agency places the child with approved adopters who make an application to the court for an Adoption Order that legally severs the child's relationship with their birth parent(s).
- A child is identified for adoption in another country and after due legal process is placed with adopters approved as intercountry adopters with the child's legal relationship with their birth parents subject to relevant domestic and international protocols.
- A child who has lived in the care of an adult or adults other than their birth family for more than 12 months applies directly to the court for adoption.

## Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF), available since 2015, provides funds to Local Authorities (LAs) and Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to pay for the provision of therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship (SGO) families living in England.

## Adoptive parent(s)

An individual or couple who become the child's legal parents when an adoption order is made by the court. They then hold parental responsibility for the child, as any other parent would do. If the child was in care prior to the making of the Order, they leave care on the making of the Order.

## Ethnic matching

An approach to matching where a child is matched with adoptive parents of the same or very similar ethnic heritage.

## Inter-agency fee

The inter-agency fee is the amount payable by Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies for placements made with external adoption agencies (this could be another LA, RAA or VAA).

## Matching

The process through which a child or children are matched with an adoptive parent or parents who can best meet the needs of the child(ren). Matching, often referred to as family finding, usually begins after approval at Adoption Panel. Once a potential match has been identified, adopters will then go on to Matching Panel where a final decision will be made about the appropriateness of the match.

## Transracial adoption

When a child has a different ethnicity to their adoptive parents. Also known as interracial adoption.

## Acronyms

<b>ACE</b>	Adverse Childhood Experience
<b>ASF</b>	Adoption Support Fund
<b>ASGLB</b>	Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board
<b>CP</b>	Concurrent Planning
<b>EP</b>	Early Permanence
<b>FASD</b>	Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
<b>FfA</b>	Fostering for Adoption
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>OE</b>	Oral Evidence
<b>RAA</b>	Regional Adoption Agency
<b>VAA</b>	Voluntary Adoption Agency

# Foreword from the Chair

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The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Adoption and Permanence sees that ‘strengthening families’ must be placed at the heart of the adoption process. With the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care examining a child’s place in the system, we have sought to focus on one aspect, adoption, and to look at this from multiple perspectives, including adoptees and their lived experiences, adoptive parents and birth parents, a broad range of advocacy organisations and agencies, and so many more.

Our inquiry recognised the complex and often fragile network of relationships surrounding adopted children and young people, and how the right interventions at the right time can strengthen them, giving a young person greater security and confidence. However, conversely, without the integrated support needed by all involved in the adoption process, trauma could result, and this could lead to multiple challenges.

For this reason, we not only looked at the whole adoption process and the interplay between all those involved in this, but we also focused on where the greatest challenges reside. Through our recommendations, we seek to be ambitious in ensuring that not only the funding, but also the services are there to get things right from the start.

At the centre of our findings, we identified the need to move from ‘family finding’, the initial stage of the adoption process, to ‘family building’, recognising that adoption needs to be a lifelong commitment, not just for adoptive families, but the whole system. Through greater focus on working with adopted children and their families, there must be recognition that investment in the support needs of the family is a lifelong commitment, not just in its initial stages.

The APPGAP inquiry listened to all; not least young people who are care experienced. In seeking stability, they expressed how everyone has an

active role to play in making the right provision. Just as the Review’s *The Case for Change* calls for a society-wide effort to secure better outcomes for children in and around the social care system, so too this same call must apply for adopted children. We welcome the opportunities provided by the Review for adoptive families to feed in their perspectives and are optimistic that the outcome of the Review will be a holistic, system-wide take on children’s social care, in which the needs of adopted children are firmly part of the analysis and recommendations. **From the national to the local, from the community to the individual, stability will only be achieved for adopted children and their families when it is everyone’s focus.**

To build the right support requires investment. Making the right funding available at the right time saves time, money, and trauma from occurring. There can be no greater investment than in securing the future of children and young people, by enabling them to grow into confident adults with the security and support needed. There can be no short cuts and therefore we recognise that the benefits gained by the right investment can only bring far more positive outcomes.

The recently published national Adoption Strategy is welcomed by the APPGAP. It sets out a series of proposals which span right across the adoption system. We welcome that children and families are at the heart of its vision. This report on

# Contents



‘strengthening families’ seeks to complement the high-level approach of the strategy by focusing on practice, grounded in lived experiences.

There is scope for some significant and specific areas of development, which the APPGAP has highlighted through a series of tangible and actionable recommendations. Throughout this report, we have kept the views, perspectives, and opinions of children, young people, and families front and centre recognising that their voices must be listened to. We hope that the Review of Children’s Social Care and the Government will listen to their experiences and act on the evidence as conveyed through this report.

## Rachael Maskell MP

Chair of the APPG for Adoption and Permanence

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# Executive Summary

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The APPGAP's *Strengthening Families* inquiry was conducted to feed into the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England, to ensure that the experiences and needs of adopted children and their families are taken into consideration as part of this 'once-in-a-generation' Review.

The inquiry focused on **stability** as its main theme, with the aim of exploring how to ensure greater stability for adopted children and their families, particularly at **key points of transition**. Throughout the report, the term 'stability' is used to signify both the short- and long-term experiences of consistency and continuity that enable children and young people to feel safe and to heal from the impact that trauma has had on their lives.

One of the central conclusions of the inquiry is that the adoption sector needs a paradigm shift from '**family finding**' to '**family building**'. While it is crucial that there is continued investment in recruiting adopters, ensuring children do not wait too long and making good matches, this must be seen as the start of the journey, not the end. Adopted children and their families need to be supported throughout their journey in order to thrive and flourish.

This report outlines **four interconnected principles** for stability that emerged during the inquiry.

**These are:**

1. **Laying Strong Foundations**
2. **Acting Early**
3. **Cultivating Relationships**
4. **Recognising Evolving Needs**

The inquiry heard about the vital importance of **Laying Strong Foundations** for adopted children and their families firstly through good matching. **87%** of adoptive parents identified that matching plays a crucial role in enabling future stability for adoptive families. However, matching practices are all too often inconsistent, with adopters feeling ill-prepared for the process. To make a strong match, it is imperative that a child's needs are comprehensively assessed by a multi-disciplinary team and that adopters are provided with all available information. This should then form the basis of a robust and deliverable support plan, which is put in place from the start. The inquiry also heard that more needs to be done for children who wait the longest for adoption, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds who face additional barriers to finding an adoptive family.

The second principle for stability, **Acting Early**, recognises that support for families should be proactively embedded and responsively provided to meet their needs from the earliest days all the way through childhood, in recognition that the legacy of adverse experiences does not disappear once an adoptive family is established. The long-term retention of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), as well as improvements in access and its operation, is crucial to enabling this to happen. Acting early also means investing in and improving the practice of approaches that seek to provide stability earlier on, such as Early Permanence. The inquiry heard compelling evidence about the merits and challenges of such approaches and recommends further consideration as to whether such routes could be used for other groups of children, including older children.

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Throughout the inquiry, the APPGAP heard about the importance of **Cultivating Relationships**. For adopted children, a continuity of relationship with former foster carers, social workers, birth family members, and their local community, can be critical to their experience of stability. These important relationships should be prioritised and nurtured wherever possible and appropriate.

The fourth principle, **Recognising Evolving Needs**, examines some of the key points in an adoptive family's journey where support is particularly needed. This includes education and the need for trauma-informed teachers and schools that are fully trained and equipped to help care experienced children thrive. We heard that many challenges faced by adoptive families are particularly heightened and intensified during the teenage years. Adopted teenagers can often be overlooked by support services and more needs to be done to ensure that they receive the support they need. Without the right support at the right time, a small number of families face the devastating prospect of their child being unable to remain living with them and re-entering the care system. It is crucial that these families are supported, and the APPGAP recommends that funding from

the ASF is made available to all adopted children who have re-entered care and that those parenting at a distance are fully supported in maintaining a relationship with their child, where possible.

There are two additional themes that are woven through this report. Firstly, our technological age brings significant opportunities as well as challenges, and the inquiry heard about the potential of **digital tools** in enabling innovative practice in areas such as matching, support, and contact. Secondly, the vital importance of **agency** was repeatedly emphasised. More needs to be done to allow the voices of adopted children and young people, adoptive parents, and birth family members to be heard in meaningful ways, particularly when they are reaching out for support. We welcome the inclusion of this aspect in the Government's recently published Adoption Strategy for England.

The report makes **four headline recommendations**, with specific supplementary recommendations under each, all of which are aimed at improving stability for adopted children and their families. The full list of recommendations can be found on Page 61 of this report.

*'More needs to be done to allow the voices of adopted children and young people, adoptive parents, and birth family members to be heard in meaningful ways, particularly when they are reaching out for support.'*

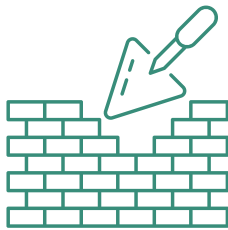


# Summary for Children and Young People

**What does stability mean? Feeling safe, secure, and supported, knowing what to expect, and experiencing consistent love.**

## What we found:

Stability is very important for adopted children and young people, as they need to feel safe and supported to be able to reach their potential. We heard from lots of adopted children and young people, adoptive parents, social workers, and many others about the things that need to change so that adopted children and their families can feel safe and stable throughout their lives. These areas are like building blocks that when put together, help to make a building stable. They are:



### Laying strong foundations:

Adoptive families need to be well set up and supported from the start. Children must be matched with a family who can meet their needs and we must make sure that no child waits too long to be adopted due to the colour of their skin, their age, or any other factor.



### Acting early:

Sometimes it takes adoptive families a long time to get the support they need, and this isn't good. When families go through tricky times, they should get the support they need right away.



### Cultivating relationships:

It is really important that adopted children are able to keep in touch with adults who have played important roles in their lives, if they want to. This could be a former foster carer, a social worker, or someone from their birth family or community.



### Recognising evolving needs:

The challenges faced by adopted children change over time. Many adopted children find school to be a difficult place, so we want to see teachers trained to better help and support adopted children. Support must be there for children throughout their childhood, including when they are teenagers, as this can be a tricky time for some young people.



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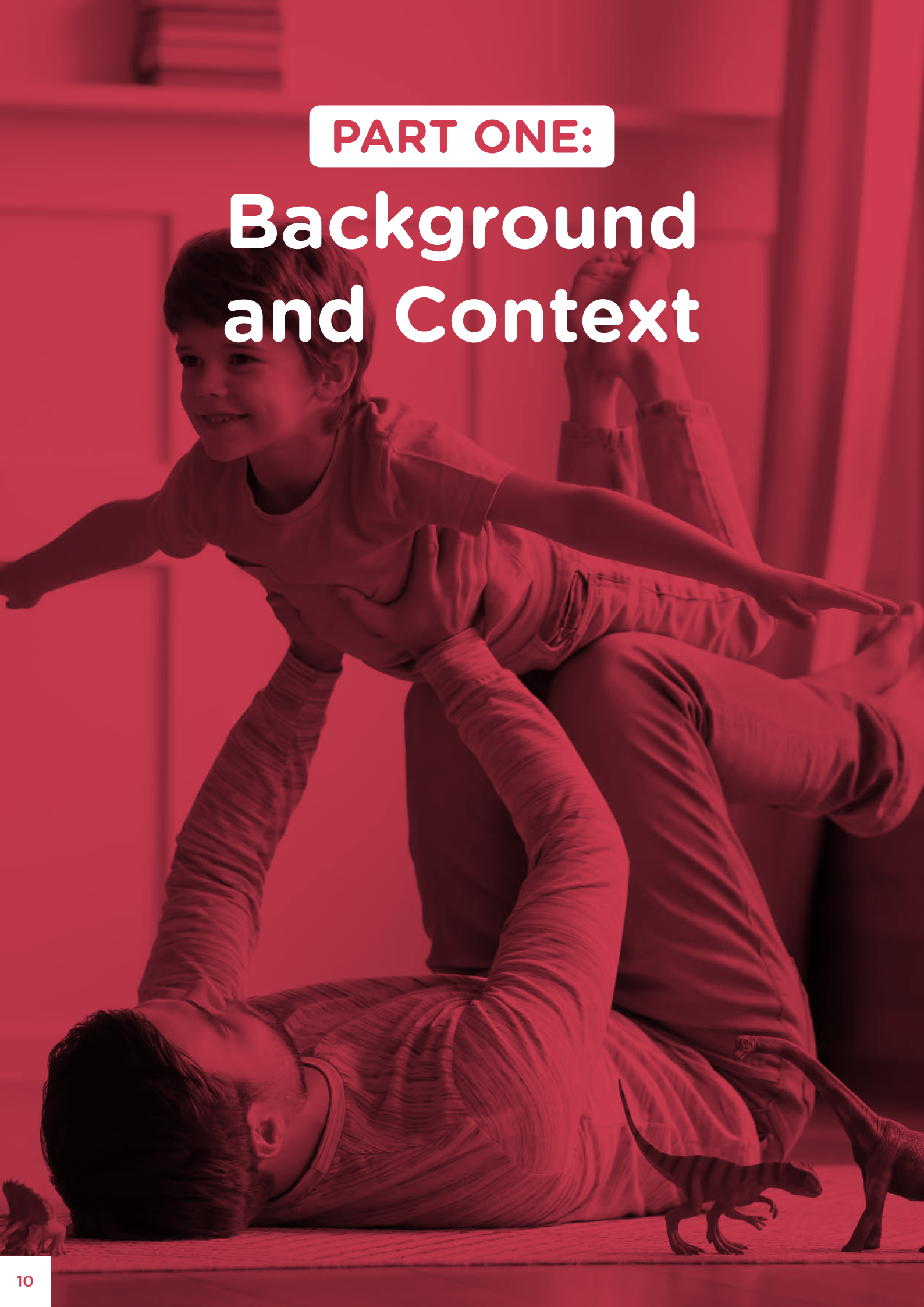
## These are some of the big changes that we want to see:

- 1** Every adopted child and young person should have a great support plan, so that families know how and where to get support when they need it.
- 2** The Adoption Support Fund, which enables adopted children and their families to get help from the right people, must carry on for at least ten years.
- 3** Adopted children should be supported to stay in touch with important adults in their lives if they want to, including their foster carer(s), birth family members, or a previous social worker.
- 4** Schools and teachers must be better trained so that they can help adopted children who have gone through challenging experiences.



**PART ONE:**

# Background and Context



# The Children's Social Care Review

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The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England was announced on 15 January 2021, with Josh MacAlister, the former CEO of Frontline, appointed as Chair. Hailed as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to reform services and systems end-to-end, the Review set out to conduct a broad and bold examination of the entirety of children's social care services, encompassing any child with a social worker.

Alongside the launch of the Review and its [Terms of Reference](#), a Call for Advice was issued, receiving over 900 responses that helped shape the early work of the Review. Individuals with lived experience of children's social care were invited to apply to become part of the Experts by Experience Board, with 16 members from a broad range of backgrounds appointed as a result.

The Review commenced in March 2021, with the Chair publishing a preliminary document that built on the Terms of Reference and set out his '[Early Plans](#)' for the Review, including greater detail on specific aspects within the system that the Review would consider.

Importantly, this document outlined one central question that the Review would seek to answer:

***How do we ensure that children grow up in loving, stable and safe families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations?***

Since then, the Review has been listening to families, young people, professionals, and practitioners in order to understand how the children's social care system is working across England and where investment and change are needed.

The findings of their consultation so far are summarised within '[The Case for Change](#)', a 100-page document published in June 2021. Following the publication of this document, the Review is seeking feedback on their assessment of the system and will now begin to consider the solutions that could effectively tackle the challenges outlined in *The Case for Change*.

The Review is set to publish its final report, making clear and tangible recommendations, in Spring 2022.

# About the APPG Inquiry

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**With the launch of the Children’s Social Care Review in England, the APPGAP recognised a significant opportunity for the Review to hear about the experiences of adopted children and their families.**

While the Terms of Reference of the Review are predominantly focused on children on the edges of care and those within the care system, we recognise that adopted children share many of the same early experiences as these groups of children, with many continuing to have social worker involvement throughout their childhood. Therefore, it was deemed imperative that the inquiry raise the profile of adopted children and their families so that they were not inadvertently overlooked by the Review. Adoption is a significant and life-changing experience for children and has wide-reaching implications on many individuals, including birth family members. We recognise that adoption is just one of several outcomes for children in the care system and yet, for those for whom it is decided that adoption is the right decision, becoming part of their new adoptive family is not the end of the story.

Despite historical perceptions of adoption as a ‘happy ending’, the early childhood experiences of abuse or neglect faced by many adopted children mean that adoptive families often face an ongoing battle with the legacy of trauma and other issues that persist well beyond the making of the Adoption Order. We must recognise that adoption, in seeking to create a family for life for children, will not provide the lifelong permanence that children need unless the family are supported in this journey on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, research shows that more than a quarter of birth mothers who have had children placed for adoption were care leavers themselves,<sup>1</sup> which highlights the intergenerational impact that can result when we are not providing the right support on a lifetime basis to children who are care-experienced, which includes adopted children.

Recent research estimates that adopted children are 20 times more likely to be permanently

excluded from school than their peers<sup>2</sup> and more than a quarter of adopted young adults aged 16 – 25 were not in education, employment, or training in 2020.<sup>3</sup> In addition, close to half of this cohort also needed help from a mental health professional in 2020, which is significantly higher than their peers.<sup>4</sup> These statistics are consistent year on year. If we can predict them, we should be acting to mitigate against them and yet more than 70% of adoptive families say they face a continual struggle for support.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore vital that the views and experiences of adopted children and their families are heard and contribute to the Review’s consideration of how we can ensure safety, stability, and love for all children who have had the involvement of social services in their lives.

This inquiry has focused on **stability**, one of the three aspects of the Review’s central question of how to ensure that children grow up in loving, stable, and safe families. We have considered “stability” in its broadest sense, including both the short- and long-term experiences of consistency and continuity that enable children and young people to feel safe and to heal from the impact that trauma has had on their lives. We recognise the wide-ranging factors, practice, and relationships that can affect a child’s experience of stability. Thus, the inquiry has sought to consider how a child or children placed for adoption can experience a loving, stable, and permanent family life as they move from care into their adoptive family as well as over their lifetime. This includes ensuring that adoptive families are supported and strengthened over the long term to address whatever challenges present themselves along the way. In particular, this inquiry has considered some of the key points of vulnerability in a child and family’s adoption journey and what best practice

tells us about that which enables adopted children and their families to be better supported and strengthened.

We recognise that stability is vital for children right across the care system, including other forms of permanence such as kinship care and long-term fostering. We welcome the work of other All-Party Parliamentary Groups that focus on these other permanence routes. In order to avoid replication of activities, the APPGAP have chosen to focus solely on stability for adopted children. Despite this, we recognise that the broad principles for stability outlined within this report may have

relevance across many other parts of the system and we therefore commend them to the Review for broader application, where applicable.

The inquiry was launched on 26 March 2021 with its [Terms of Reference](#) and a Call for Evidence, which invited a broad range of stakeholders, including adopted adults, adoptive families, social workers, agencies, and authorities, to submit their views through an online survey. In addition, a separate survey was launched to gather the views of adopted children and young people, whose perspectives the APPGAP particularly welcomes.

The Call for Evidence received more than **800 responses** in total across the two surveys, including:

**80**

children and  
young people

**125**

adopted  
adults

**442**

parents

**66**

social workers

This was followed by five oral evidence sessions that took place between April and June 2021, where the APPGAP heard directly from a wide range of professionals and those with lived experience. The APPGAP is grateful to everyone who took part and shared their valuable expertise and experience.



# Principles for Stability

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As previously outlined, this inquiry has considered “stability” in its broadest sense, as it signifies both the short- and long-term experiences of consistency and continuity that enable children and young people to feel safe and begin to heal from the impact that trauma has had on their lives.

Many factors, including relationships and social work practice, can significantly impact a child’s experience of stability.

This report sets out **four overarching principles** that have emerged from the evidence gathered for this inquiry, which the APPGAP believes are essential for the stability of adopted children and their families:

1. **Laying Strong Foundations**
2. **Acting Early**
3. **Cultivating Relationships**
4. **Recognising Evolving Needs**

The importance of stability in enabling adopted children to thrive cannot be overstated. All adopted children have experienced the trauma of separation from their birth family, and most have endured additional adverse childhood experiences. The legacy and impact of that trauma is not

limited to a single event or stage of life, but instead plays out in different ways across a lifetime. For many children, the trauma experienced prior to their adoption is compounded by multiple moves whilst in care, with each move involving the breaking of an attachment to the foster carer(s) or other caregiver(s).

The four principles outlined in this report highlight some of the key moments in a child’s adoption journey where stability is most at risk, and therefore where action and attention are most needed. We also consider some of the short-term and long-term outcomes for children and families when stability is not achieved or maintained.

While the principles of this report have been specifically applied to adoption, these principles for stability can also be applied to care-experienced children more broadly. The APPGAP urges that the findings and recommendations of this report be viewed in this light.





## Key Concept: A Stable Building

*“Our children’s social care system is a 30-year-old tower of Jenga held together with Sellotape: simultaneously rigid and yet shaky.”*

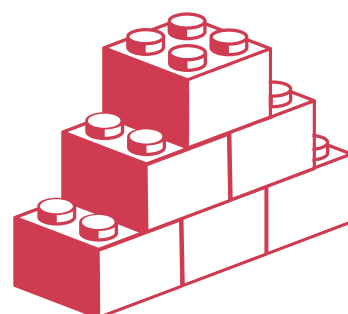
**Josh MacAlister, The Case for Change, Independent Review of Children’s Social Services in England <sup>6</sup>**

Josh MacAlister, the Chair of the Children’s Social Care Review, recently likened the children’s social care system to a precarious tower of Jenga, and the APPGAP heard similar descriptions from those with experience of the adoption sector. We believe that adopted children and their families deserve so much more than this. Like a well-built, sturdy, and enduring building, adoptive families should be enabled to provide stability, safety, and love

to their children in an ongoing way. This report considers how adoption services might work together, using the four principles outlined, to enable greater stability for adopted children and their families. Each principle serves as an interlocking building block that together forms a structure that families can rely on for as long as they need to, with scaffolding (support) provided when necessary along the way.

*“[We have] never felt stable, just moments of ups and downs, but never settled, secure, or stable. ALWAYS like a Jenga game like it is at the end, just before it falls - a constant state of that.”*

**Adoptive parent**



# What Children and Young People told us

One of the core aims of the APPGAP is to amplify the voices of adopted children and young people, as all too often their perspectives are overlooked.

Thus, as part of the inquiry, the APPGAP sought the views of adopted children and young people on matching, times of transition, and support.

This is what they had to say.

## Matching:

Adopted children and young people stressed to the APPGAP the importance of getting matching right, including some of the aspects they felt were most important:

*"They need to feel like 'your people', like they really are 'your' parents."*

The Adoptables

*"Love their child no matter what."*

The Adoptables

Young people felt that cultural background and ethnicity should be factored in during matching. However, they also felt there should be more education for the wider public to try and avoid difficult questions being asked of them about their family and identity.

*"It doesn't matter what people look like. It matters that they love you. My mummy and daddy love me and I love them. We're a family. Families come in all shapes, colours and sizes. They are made in lots of different ways. Love is the most important thing."*

H, 10 years old

*"I was asked why I don't look like my mum - it is upsetting and can make me angry."*

The Adoptables

## Times of Transition:

**58%** said that they felt well-supported when they have experienced changes in life.

My experience of the move to living with my adoptive family was:



Good  
39%



Okay  
30.5%



Bad  
30.5%

## COULD ANYTHING HAVE BEEN DONE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER?

*"I had so many different carers when I arrived with my mum. I had 4 carers/moves/homes. Maybe I could have been adopted straight from my birth mum."*

T, 10 years old

*"Social worker could have told us more about our new home and parents and explained adoption better. My brothers and I thought it was temporary."*

S, 16 years old, adopted aged 8

*"It was hard to say goodbye to my foster parents after so long living with them."*

J, 9 years old



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## Support:

We asked young people about the support they have received and which kinds of support have been particularly helpful to them when navigating tricky times in their lives:

*"I saw my social worker on a regular basis - she gave me the support I needed at the time."*

**The Adoptables**

*"I attended a 6-week course - it gave me the chance to open up and talk about my adoption."*

**The Adoptables**

Some young people told us that they were sometimes unsure about who to go to for support at school and that their teachers didn't always understand the issues they experienced as adopted children:

*"I don't think other people understand what it's like to be adopted. I don't think teachers understand. People think if you've been adopted as a baby it doesn't affect you. My mummy and daddy have to try so hard to get help for me and my sisters and that makes me very sad. I feel we don't matter to the world as much because we're just adopted kids."*

**H, 10 years old**

However, some had positive stories:

*"I have support from a learning assistant; she comes into my lessons, and I can talk to her if I am worried about something."*

**The Adoptables**

*"My designated teacher really helped me when I had issues that impacted on my schooling. He acted as a go between with my teachers."*

**The Adoptables**

**93%**

felt that more should be done to make sure every adopted child feels loved, safe, and secure.

We are very grateful to all the children and young people who shared their views with us. A special thanks goes to members of The Adoptables, a network of adopted young people, for their very helpful input into the inquiry.

**PART TWO:**

# Findings and Recommendations



## Principle 1:

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# Laying Strong Foundations

“Finding the right family [for each individual child] is crucial. It is life-changing and feels like people are ‘playing god’ with your life [...] if they get it right then great, you are set for a good life; if they get it wrong then it affects your whole life adversely.”

**Adopted adult**

“Matching a child with an adoptive family requires good, careful planning at the child’s pace. You need to share all information and develop a robust support plan for the child and their family. Without this, there may well be challenges for the child and their family in the future, which is what we all want to avoid.”

**Lorna Hunt, PACT, Oral Evidence [OE]**

## Principle 1a: Experiences of Matching

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Matching is widely recognised as one of the most significant decisions made for children who are placed for adoption. It forms an integral part of the foundations laid at the start of a child’s adoption journey upon which the adoptive family grows and develops.

We asked adoptive parents and social workers about the impact of matching on stability and the feeling was unequivocal:

**87%** of adoptive parents and **88%** of social workers stated that matching plays either a significant or very large role in enabling future stability for adoptive families.

Our inquiry has assessed that the foundations of a stable adoption lie partly in matching a child with a family who have the best chance of helping them to thrive. Where high-quality, evidence-informed matching occurs, with thorough preparation and support of the adopter(s) and child(ren), the likelihood of the family experiencing stability for the long-term is greater, as the child’s needs are matched with the adopters’ skills, circumstances, and strengths.

“

*“The evidence points clearly to the need to ensure that the seeds of future success are sown at that early stage, when the families are created.”*

Sue Armstrong Brown, Adoption UK [OE]

”

*“Matching is a complex process and is life-changing for both the child and the prospective adopters.”*

Lorna Hunt, PACT [OE]

To explore this further, we asked adoptive parents to share their experiences of the matching process. While many spoke positively of their experiences, the varied responses indicate large discrepancies in matching practices.

**52%**

of adoptive parents described their matching process as a **positive experience.**

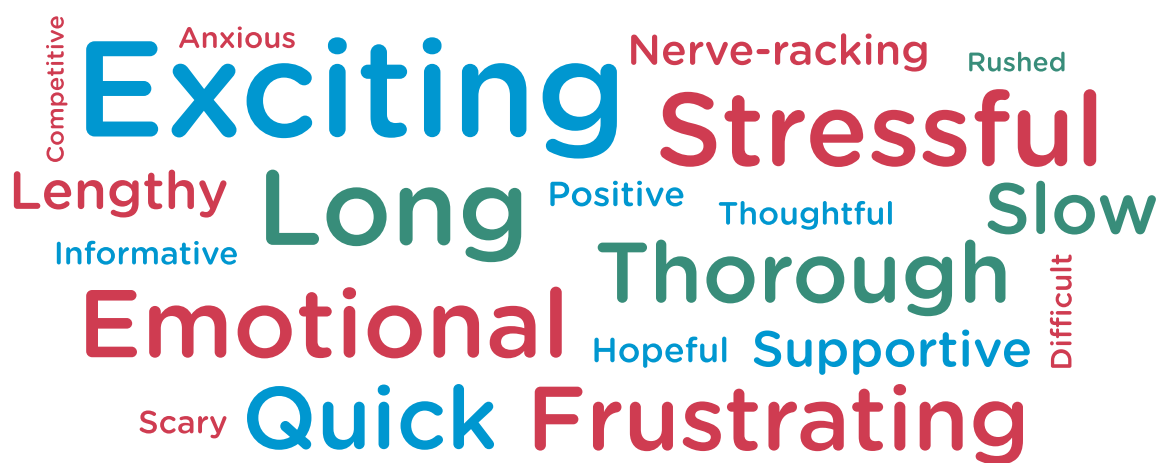
**20%**  
described it as negative.

**45%**

of adoptive parents agreed that their matching process was **conducted in a timely way.**

**39%**  
disagreed.

This varied experience is further illustrated by the graphic overleaf, which showcases the top 20 words used by adopters to describe their experience of the matching process.



● Positive words    ● Neutral words    ● Negative words

In recognition of the varied practice at play, the APPGAP was eager to understand what best practice looks like within matching. Lorna Hunt, Service Director at PACT, emphasised that matching should be a “well-planned process and not a one-off event.” Social workers and family finders need to find a good balance between placing a child in a timely way and going at the child’s pace during their transition to their adoptive family. The timeframe of introductions therefore needs to take into account the child’s age, experiences, and the individual needs of sibling groups. It is of the utmost importance that children are thoroughly prepared for this transition, and the APPGAP heard numerous accounts of instances where children were not told or prepared for their move to their adoptive home.

“I was very young when I was first placed in adoptive placement at age 3 and a half but I was very confused as I wasn’t told this was an adoptive family and I was very scared.”  
**Adopted adult**

Evidence to this inquiry shows that matching should be child-focused, with clear and frequent communication between everyone involved (foster carers, adoptive parents, birth family, social workers, family finders, etc.), which includes communicating with the child in an age and developmentally appropriate way.

“Open-minded and very experienced practitioners. Good working together, communication, development of trusting working relationships [...] Lots of skilled preparation work undertaken by children’s social worker with the children and their foster carer [and the birth family].”  
**Example of best practice from a social worker**

The APPGAP heard from both the oral and written evidence that many adopters felt they had received no preparation or training about what to expect from the matching process itself. As a result, some adopters felt abandoned when they received little communication from their agency or LA, while others felt overwhelmed by the number of profiles that were successively sent to them that often did not match the children they had been approved to adopt.

## Principle 1a:

# Experiences of Matching (continued)

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*“It would have been good to have some training re: how to cope with this change of pace, remaining resilient and getting ready for placement.”*

Victoria, adoptive parent [OE]

The APPGAP contends that this gap in training and support be addressed, so that prospective adopters fully understand what is happening, why it is happening, and what it might mean for them as the process evolves. This requires emotional resilience and support as this stage precedes a decision being made and then introductions and placement. The training on matching during the assessment process should include: what to expect in terms of the regularity of communication; how to conduct difficult conversations about whether or not a child is a good match; how to navigate the competitive element of matching; how to remain emotionally resilient; and how to support any birth or other children in the family during the matching process. The APPGAP acknowledges that there are some Local Authorities and agencies who are already doing this, however, this must become standard rather than exceptional practice.

## A SPOTLIGHT ON: DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

### **Link Maker is an online family finding platform used by almost every LA and independent adoption agency in England.**

During 2020, 1,029 children were matched through Link Maker, with 42% of matches identified within 1 month.<sup>7</sup> The inquiry heard evidence of its capability and capacity to facilitate strong and timely matches, particularly for children who typically wait longer to be adopted. We support the development of digital tools such as Link Maker that enable good matches to be made for children in time-effective ways. The APPGAP heard about other digital platforms that are being used around the world,<sup>8</sup> which have gleaned from compatibility platforms developed within other industries that use predictive analytics and algorithms, in recognition of the role that chemistry plays in identifying a strong match between children and families. We identify that there is the potential for Link Maker to be further developed along these lines as a matching tool.

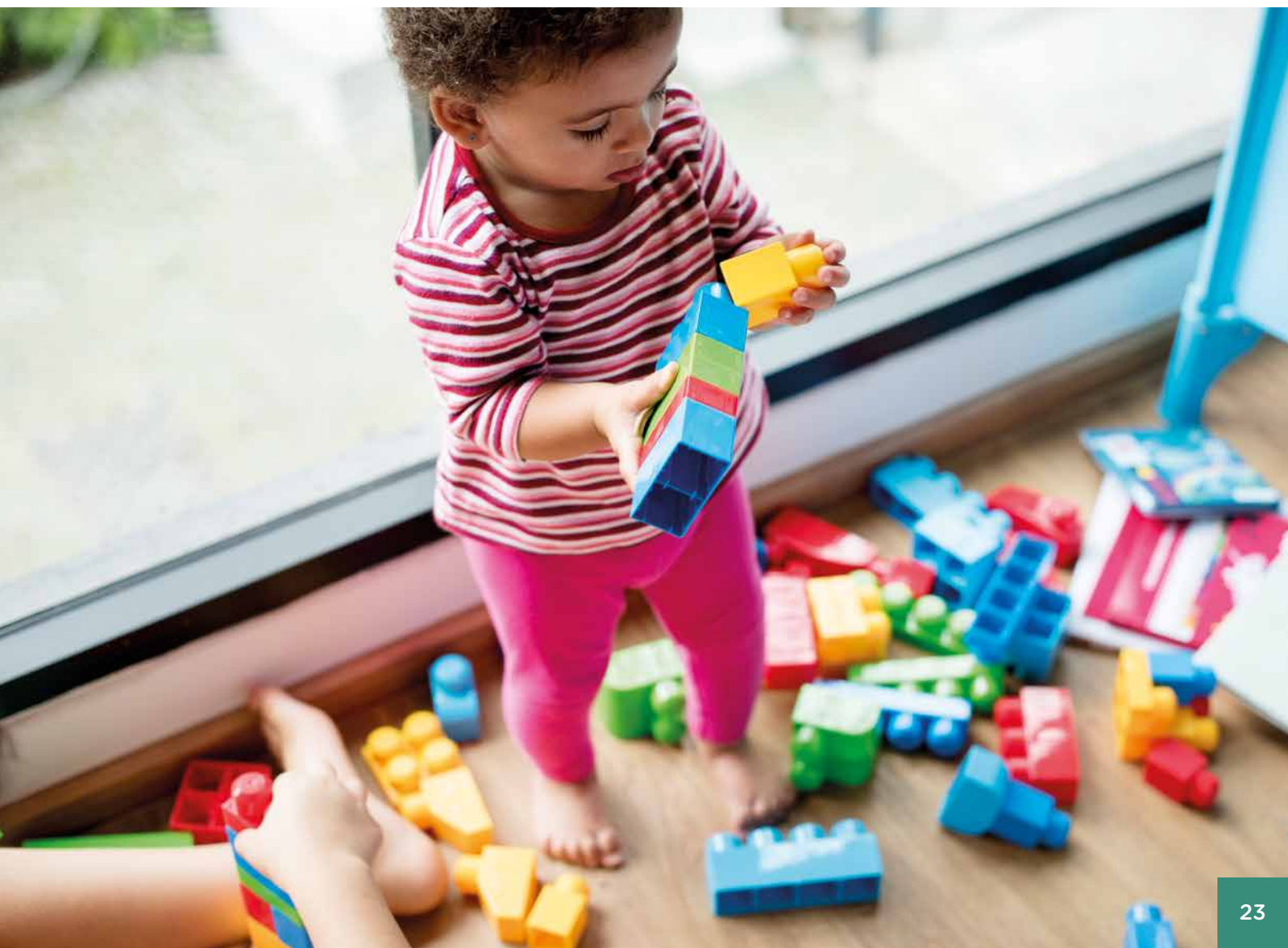
In addition, the APPGAP heard that the effectiveness of tools such as Link Maker remain dependent on social work practice. For example, the onus is on social workers to provide up-to-date and accurate information as part of children’s profiles and thus the quality of the information on Link Marker can be inconsistent. In addition, geographical remits are often set by social workers who are limited by the restrictions set by their Local Authority. Adoptive parents spoke about the challenges of dealing with the lack of responses to Expressions of Interest, or of being declined with no reason given. Consideration needs to be given as to how social workers and adoptive parents can be upskilled in navigating and maximising the capabilities of Link Maker.

Finally, the APPGAP heard about the lack of real-time data available at a national level on the numbers and characteristics of children waiting to be adopted, as well as adopters who are waiting to be matched. We believe that Link Maker is well placed to be part of the solution to this challenge, and we encourage greater collaboration between Link Maker and the Department for Education.

## Recommendations



- **The assessment and training process for prospective adopters should provide thorough preparation for the matching stage.** This should include: what to expect in terms of the regularity of communication; how to conduct difficult conversations about whether or not a child is a good match; how to remain emotionally resilient; and how to support any birth or other children in the family during the matching process.
- Digital tools hold the potential to significantly improve matching between children and families. **The capabilities of digital tools such as Link Maker should be built upon and developed to enhance efficiency and quality of matching.** This could include the generation of live data at a national level of children waiting and being placed for adoption in order to aid real-time decision-making, at both the national and local levels (i.e. in terms of recruitment, matching, and policy).



## Principle 1b:

# From ‘Family Finding’ to ‘Family Building’

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In seeking to lay foundations that enable adoptive families to develop in a stable way, it is important to take a long-term view from the start.

We thus believe that the adoption sector needs a paradigm shift:



*“We need to stop ‘family finding’ and begin thinking about ‘family building’. This requires a great deal of investment but not as much as it would if an adoption breaks down.”*

Carol Green, adoptive parent, TESSA programme [OE]

The placement of a child into their adoptive family once a family is ‘found’ should not and cannot be seen as the end point or final goal, but rather as the next step in their ongoing journey. Given that adoption is a ‘permanence’ route for children, we must ensure that families are set up in the early stages to thrive over a lifetime. This **firstly** includes ensuring that a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary assessment of the child is carried out, in order to paint as full a picture as possible of the child’s current and anticipated needs. This multi-disciplinary assessment must encompass the physical, emotional, social, mental, and developmental needs of the child.



*“We need to move away from social workers being the only professionals involved in a child’s assessment to a multi-disciplinary team that can holistically assess and support adoptive families, as the children adopted today are highly complex traumatised children with an array of complex interrelated needs.”*

Jay Vaughan, Family Futures

*“I don’t feel as though matching takes into account the child’s developmental and identity needs in the future. It focuses on the here and now rather than the anticipated need in the future.”*

Social worker



**Secondly**, as has already been discussed, strong adoptive families start with good matching, and good matching starts with good information. In response to our consultation survey, **55%** of adoptive parents said they did not have all the information they needed about their newly placed adopted child. In some instances, this was due to professionals themselves not having the information. However, the inquiry heard about a few instances where professionals had glossed over complex aspects of a child’s background or experiences due to time pressures and the desire to make a quick match. This vital information-sharing part of the process should not be rushed, and adoptive parents should feel empowered to ask for further clarity and conversations when they feel there is inadequate attention being given to a child’s needs and history.



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### A mental health organisation told the inquiry:

*“The biggest barrier to strong matching is when there is a lack of good enough information about the child’s experiences, especially related to trauma and attachment. Or when incomplete information is shared with adoptive parents/supporting social workers even when information is held in social care files. This leads to an unrealistic framing of the needs of the child – setting the family up to fail.”*

When information about the child’s background, history, and needs is well-communicated and shared, adoptive parents feel much more supported and prepared for the journey ahead.

*“We felt well-supported with our match. We felt we were given all the information we needed to make the best decision.”*

Victoria, adoptive parent [OE]



It is equally important to help prospective adopters understand and interpret the information in real-life terms. It should be the norm for adopters to be provided with access to health professionals, including psychologists, who are able to offer professional advice about the needs of a child.

*“I found it very difficult to get a real sense of the child’s abilities and problems from the medical reports, but I was grateful for a doctor who had a talk with me having examined the child.”*

Adoptive parent



The **third step** in successful family building is turning a child’s multi-disciplinary assessment into a robust, specific, and forward-looking support plan that is shared with their family-to-be. This should be put in place from the very start when a child is placed and should be accessible throughout a child’s life. Witnesses informed the APPGAP that in many instances a support plan was in place, but adoptive parents were unaware of where this information was held and therefore were not informed about the support they were likely to need or how to access it. For adopted children, many of whom have complex needs (including physical and developmental needs), a robust and costed therapeutic support plan is vital for giving prospective adopters greater assurance that ongoing, long-term support will be there when they need it. This would go a long way in removing the ongoing stress and challenges many adopters face in securing post-adoption support.



*“Support should follow a child to be available where needed. Adopters would be more willing to be placed with harder to place children if they were confident that support would be in place. Support isn’t cheap but still costs less than ongoing foster care if a match isn’t found. If adopters are being asked to consider older children or siblings, they should expect a package of readily-available support to be guaranteed as part of that. This would save money in the long run, reduce the widespread struggle for support and help more children to find adoptive families in the first place.”*

Andy Leary-May, Link Maker [OE]

## Principle 1b:

# From ‘Family Finding’ to ‘Family Building’

(continued)

*“Our experience is, if you put high quality support in at the beginning, you really prevent a lot of problems down the road. And so, we need to think about how we can allow some of the specialist provision to go in at the front end, rather than waiting till you’ve got a crisis.”*

Viv Norris, The Family Place [OE]

“

The inquiry heard about good practice conducted by Adoption Now, a Regional Adoption Agency in the North West of England, who facilitate specialist consultations where information is shared between adopters matched with a child and the adoption support team. These consultations establish early links between the adopters and the support team, and also allow families to access training and support pre-placement.

“

*“So, what have the benefits been for us in doing [these consultations]? Adopters know where to go to for support and they don’t feel like a failure for needing help. So it’s normalized adoption support that has been there for families right at the beginning of the process.”*

Karen Barrick, Adoption Now [OE]

Such practice should be more widely replicated to ensure that communication is open and honest, and that information about a child’s history, current needs, and anticipated needs is up to date. This practice is vital for enabling families to make a confident decision about whether they can meet the needs of a child into the future.

The APPGAP heard clear evidence that support plans need to be ‘live’ documents that are reviewed on a regular basis as the child grows and new challenges emerge.

“

*“An adoption support plan needs to become a reality and a live working tool, that is reviewed and actioned on a regular basis and not just a tick box to demonstrate in matching and to get through Matching Panel.”*

Adoption agency

When an agreed and actionable support plan was not in place, many families described delaying their application for an Adoption Order because they were not certain of ongoing support.

*“Our health visitor said to me, “make sure you access any support you need for your son now because once the Adoption Order has been made, we all disappear.”*

Vivian, adoptive parent [OE]

“

The key to strong family building is multi-disciplinary assessments that lead to robust, future-facing support plans, with the full involvement of the family being matched. This is not only an issue of best practice as set out by regulation, but also of integrity. If people are being urged to consider adopting some of our nation's most vulnerable children, it is crucial that they are well-supported in their journey. Anything less is unacceptable.

## Recommendation



- **It should be mandatory for every adopted child to have a long-term, costed, and deliverable support plan in place from the start, which is updated on an ongoing basis.** The Department for Education should update statutory guidance on support planning, providing best practice examples of such plans, along with a clear expectation that families should be centrally involved in the development of support plans in partnership with multi-disciplinary professionals. Families should have easy access to the expertise provided by these professionals in order to further support them in understanding the needs of their child(ren). We commend the good practice of Adoption Now in their facilitation of specialist consultations between adopters and the adoption support team, which have been vital in the development of long-term and robust support plans.



## Principle 1c:

# Children from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds

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With this inquiry considering stability for all children journeying into and through adoption, it is vital that particular attention is paid to children who face additional barriers when it comes to matching and therefore often wait the longest for an adoptive family.

This includes sibling groups, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children over the age of five. For this inquiry, the APPGAP focused specifically on children from ethnic minority backgrounds, as statistics highlight that:

- White children wait 19 months on average, whereas children from ethnic minority groups wait 22 months on average.<sup>9</sup>
- Black children wait the longest and are the least likely to be adopted at all.<sup>10</sup>

When there is **intersectionality** of characteristics, the disadvantage faced by children from ethnic minority backgrounds is further compounded:

- Single children aged over 5 years old, who are from a ethnic minority background and have a disability, wait on average 38 months to be placed. This is 10 months longer than children from a White background with the same characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the removal in 2014 of the statutory requirement for “the adoption agency [to] give due consideration to the child’s religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background”<sup>12</sup> during matching, the underrepresentation of adopters from some ethnic minority backgrounds has been identified as an ongoing contributing factor to certain groups of ethnic minority children not being matched and placed in a timely way. Witnesses to the inquiry shone a light on a number of factors that contribute to this pattern, one of which is a mistrust and concern among these communities about interacting with the social care system and how they might be treated.<sup>13</sup>

In order to overcome this barrier, further steps need to be taken to build relationships and trust through community engagement and outreach, which is beginning to take place through initiatives such as the **#YouCanAdopt** national adopter recruitment campaign. But there is much more to be done. Urgent attention also needs to be given to ensuring that there is racial diversity and representation amongst the social work workforce and on adoption and matching panels to ensure that unconscious bias is not disadvantaging prospective adopters.

## #YouCanAdopt

is a national adopter recruitment campaign that aims to raise awareness of the number of children waiting for adoption, particularly children from ethnic minority backgrounds and those in sibling groups. The campaign is being delivered by The National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group and is supported by the Department for Education.



*“As we walked into the room that morning, I couldn’t help but notice this – here we were, a Black couple, sitting in front of a majority White panel, waiting to hear if they thought we were fit enough to adopt, based on a report. Thankfully they did, but there is that lack of diversity in a lot of adoption panels that I think needs to be addressed to make it more inclusive.”*

**Vivian, adoptive parent [OE]**

Social workers reflected in their evidence to the APPGAP that despite the legal change around ethnic matching where a child is matched with adoptive parents of the same or very similar ethnicity, practice has not followed suit and that strict adherence to ethnic and cultural matching can often remain. This is a huge barrier for children from ethnic minority backgrounds, causing those from backgrounds where there is an underrepresentation of adopters to often wait longer for matches. We recognise this as a challenging area for policy to address, as some adopted young people shared with the group through the Call for Evidence their experience of wrestling with their cultural identity due to growing up in a transracial adoptive family. In reflecting on his own experience as both an adopted person and an adopter, one witness spoke movingly about the need to hold in tension the significant role that ethnicity can play in a child’s identity, with the recognition that a ‘perfect’ ethnic match is not sufficient in and of itself.

*“For me, [...] there is a concern about idolising and idealising the idea of an ethnic match because I think you can have an ethnic match but not a good placement, but at the same time you can have a non-ethnic match and have a wonderful placement, and that’s been my own experience of life so far.”*

**Luke, adopted person and adoptive parent [OE]**



The APPGAP heard that alongside removing the barriers to encourage a greater diversity of prospective adopters to step forward, good practice involves working with adopters to support them in positively promoting the ethnic or cultural heritage of a child when it is different to theirs.



*“Our social worker looked at the diversity of the neighbourhood we live in for instance. And asked extra questions about how we would integrate our kid’s ethnic background into our life.”*

**Adoptive parent**

The APPGAP was encouraged to hear about some of the proactive approaches being taken to find families for children who typically wait longer. These include Adoption Activity Days,<sup>14</sup> such as those delivered by Coram, which have proven particularly effective in enabling prospective adopters to informally meet children who are waiting. The APPGAP also received numerous evidence submissions on the benefits of starting the family finding process earlier for children who are likely to wait longer for an adoptive family, even considering adopters who are in the process but not yet approved.

## Principle 1c:

# Children from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds (continued)

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*“My experience of being matched was really good and pretty amazing. The social worker throughout the assessment of my mums from the beginning was thinking of who might be a match for them. This meant when they did the disability form, I wasn't written off as she could hint that low level autism would be maybe okay. I think that's something that could be better - the disability form and helping realise a lot of things are spectrums. So an appropriate match doesn't get stopped just because a kid has a worry of slight autism.”*

Tiegan, adopted young person [OE]

In her evidence to the APPGAP, Dr Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor from Coventry University stressed the need to train social workers to be curious and self-reflective when it comes to matching children from ethnic minority backgrounds. As such, social workers should receive comprehensive cultural literacy training, so that they are equipped to facilitate strong matches for children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The APPGAP heard about IAC – The Centre for Adoption's good practice in this regard, as they work to creatively help their adopters “positively promote the ethnic, cultural and religious heritage of a child that is different to theirs.” All of the children they serve and 85% of those seeking to adopt through IAC are from ethnic minority backgrounds, thus this awareness and training is vital to their work and has resulted in adopters being better able to meaningfully tap into the diversity of their support networks.

Finally, some social workers identified the inter-agency fee as a barrier to high-quality matching, as it incentivises agencies to match sequentially, looking first within their own pool of adopters before widening their search geographically.

*“[Barriers to matching include:] Sequential searching for adoptive families - this causes delay, with agencies focused on internal resources before looking for the best match; looking for the best internal agency match rather than looking for the best match for the child amongst the whole pool of adopters; and paying inter-agency fees - financial constraints may dictate the “best match” due to the inter-agency fee.”*

Adoption agency

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Some social workers felt that sequential matching added unnecessary delays to the process for children who are likely to wait longer to find an adoptive family. Despite this, we recognise the benefits of placing some children with a family who live closer to the child's home as it means that the child's social workers are nearby and can aid the family in accessing local support and navigating contact. Through the Call for Evidence, the APPGAP heard about a RAG (Red-Amber-Green) rating framework that has been developed and piloted in the North West to identify children from the outset who are likely to wait longer for adoption, and who therefore might benefit from a wider pool of adopters being considered early on. We recognise the merits that a tool such as this could provide in enabling children, especially those who might wait longer, to be matched more quickly if utilised on a larger scale. In addition, we recognise that much more work needs to be done on the impact of other characteristics, including disabilities, that often mean children wait longer for adoption, to explore and develop solutions that will prevent them from waiting too long.

*“We are excited to see who our son becomes. We are excited that he is no longer one of the stats but sadly there are many Black boys, particularly for whom the system has stopped trying to find a home because they have reached a certain age, so the system gives up on them, [...] leaving them in the foster care system. I believe that we need advocates who really see our Black boys and girls and won't give up on them until they've found their home for good.”*

Vivian, adoptive parent [OE]

## Recommendations



- **We must ensure that there is racial diversity and representation amongst the social work workforce and on adoption and matching panels.** Research should be conducted to ascertain current levels of diversity and an action plan developed, based on the findings.
- To ensure that individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds have a positive experience of exploring and pursuing adoption, **social workers should be supported and trained to take a culturally literate approach in their work.** The feedback and experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds who have previously engaged with the adoption process should be incorporated into the development of this training.
- **Every Local Authority should have a published strategy on how they identify, at the earliest stages, those children who are likely to wait longer for adoption, accompanied by a clear process for seeking to match these children with a family in a timely way.** Existing frameworks such as the RAG rating tool developed by a group of agencies in the North West could be utilised in the development of these strategies.



## Principle 2:

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# Acting Early

### In the APPGAP's Call for Evidence, adopted adults told us:

When we needed it, my adoptive family and I were able to access the right support at the right time when I was growing up.

**15%**  
Agree

**24%**  
Not sure

**61%**  
Disagree

### Adoptive families told us:

It felt like there was a significant change in support for us as a family once the Adoption Order had been made.

**52%**  
Agree

**26%**  
Neither agree  
or disagree

**22%**  
Disagree



## Principle 2a: Early Support

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As previously highlighted, it is essential that adoptive families feel confident in the availability and accessibility of support over the long term, particularly for children with complex needs. As Principle 1b lays out, a thorough, comprehensive support plan is essential from the start.

When this is not in place, or when adopters are unaware of the existence of a support plan, many newly-placed adoptive families experience the overnight disappearance of support once the Adoption Order has been made.

“After our son came to live with us, we felt deserted. It was like the council had handed him over and then left us with this tiny, traumatised child and we had no idea how to be parents, let alone having to be therapists as well. It felt like we were stumbling round in the dark feeling our way and at the centre of the storm was this little person, this little stranger who needed our help so badly and we felt inadequate to cope with the level of need he had.”

Adoptive parent

However, even when a support plan of some sort had been written prior to the Adoption Order, adoptive families frequently reported facing challenges in accessing support. This was either because the plan was not specific enough, or a greater level of need emerged than the support plan had anticipated, or because of a reluctance from some agencies or authorities to seek support on an adoptive family's behalf so early on in their journey.

Although rare, some social workers identified that occasionally the reluctance came from families themselves, as they did not want to ask for help due to fears of being perceived as unable to cope, or simply being unaware of the support available to them.

“I believe the support is there, but many families also want to be left to be a family and don't always see the importance of the support on offer.”

Social worker

These examples highlight the need to ensure that agencies and LAs are offering support on a proactive basis to families, which starts by normalising the need for support during the training and assessment process.

Although early support is provided in some parts of the system, the evidence heard by the inquiry suggests that there remains a high number of families who have sought help in the early stages of their journey and yet were met with very little response or action. The system must be consistent in its message to adoptive families; if we want adopters to approach adoption fully informed of the legacy and implications of trauma and if we want adoptive families to create stable, solid, and loving environments for children, then families must be listened to when they step forward and ask for help.

## Principle 2a: Early Support (continued)

### CASE STUDY: FAMILY FUTURES

Family Futures is a voluntary support agency who provide intensive intervention to families.

A peer-reviewed evaluation of their model compared the outcomes of families who had accessed their model of therapy over a minimum of three years with those who had not.<sup>15</sup> Those in the intervention group had on average 7 ACEs, while those in the comparison group had on average 4 ACEs. However, the outcomes further down the line between the two groups were stark in demonstrating the impact of the intervention on children and the whole family unit (shown right).

This case study demonstrates the fall-out from a failure to act early, even for those children who have not been identified as having complex needs at the point of the Adoption Order. Furthermore, it is not just families who recognise the benefits of acting early; adopted individuals and agency leaders have also communicated a shared ambition of wanting more families to receive the targeted support they need earlier on:

*“People can ask for help before they get themselves into a crisis situation. And that’s absolutely what we want families to be able to do. We want them to come in those early stages of having some difficulties and dilemmas so that we can support them and get the right services in for them. We know that the right sort of support and training can prevent crisis points ever being reached. And that has got to be a positive place for families to be.”*

**Karen Barrick, Adoption Now [OE]**

*“I really feel that if therapy had been more accessible in those early stages [...] I do think some of the individual issues that cropped up several years later and some of the fears I had when I was much younger, could have been addressed better.”*

**Lucy, adopted young person [OE]**

% of children who received an additional mental health diagnosis

18%

Intervention Group

76%

Control Group

% of families who didn’t stay together further down the line

9%

Intervention Group

33%

Control Group

% of children excluded from school

9%

Intervention Group

55%

Control Group

% of children who achieved the national curriculum

79%

Intervention Group

22%

Control Group

% of families where the parents separated

0%

Intervention Group

32%

Control Group

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There has been an increasing recognition over the past decade of the acute challenges faced by many adopted children and their families, which led to the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund in 2015. Our 2019 report, *Investing in Families*,<sup>16</sup> highlighted the crucial role that the Adoption Support Fund has played in providing a dedicated mechanism for adoptive and some special guardianship families to access vital therapeutic support. Since 2015, the ASF has provided over £200m in funding for therapeutic support for over 36,000 individual children. In 2021-22, funding for the ASF will be £46m, which is more than double the initial budget of £19m in 2015.<sup>17</sup> This demonstrates both the increase in demand and the necessity of the Fund going forward.

However, evidence to this inquiry highlighted that there is a reluctance among some social workers and practitioners to access the fund on families' behalf early on in their journey, as there is a tendency to perceive it as only being appropriate for instances of crisis further down the line.

“Some RAAs recognise the value in front-loading support, getting it in place in those initial weeks and months. Others are much more reluctant to access the ASF and ask families to put that off until further down the road.”

Social worker

Such evidence suggests the existence of an informal threshold among some practitioners for accessing the ASF. The ASF is a welcome and invaluable route for families to be able to access vital therapeutic support. Its flexibility and geographical consistency mean that it is well-placed to be used at any stage during an adoptive family's journey and this should be made clear within guidance issued to Local Authorities and agencies to eliminate perceptions that it should only be used as a last resort. Inevitably, acting early comes with a financial cost but, as with so many parts of the system, we also know that we pay a higher price further down the line both financially and, most importantly, in terms of the wellbeing and outcomes for children and their families, if we fail to act fast enough.

We welcome the short-term extensions that the Adoption Support Fund has received since our previous report, but we urge decision-makers to provide certainty and confidence to families and practitioners across the sector by guaranteeing its long-term retention.

Another important ingredient in providing early stability to adoptive placements is peer support. It should be standard practice to signpost new adopters to adoption communities and peer-support groups, both locally and nationally. Some agencies fund memberships of peer support networks for all their new adopters, which the APPGAP welcomes. Several RAAs, such as One Adoption North and Humber, also offer services such as peer mentoring. We do not underestimate the value of such connections, where new adopters can find encouragement, reassurance, and understanding from others in navigating challenges and questions. Peer support is a vital part of the wraparound support that adoptive families need and the APPGAP recognises that there is great potential in the ability of digital tools and platforms to further facilitate peer support networking opportunities. The advances made in this regard as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (for example, the increase in online support groups and networks, which are easily accessible and are not limited by geography) should continue to be both utilised and developed.

## Principle 2a: Early Support (continued)

*“During our challenging times, what was most beneficial was having other adoptive parents to call or message with for advice and reassurance. This was priceless for us and our family, without this it would have been a harder time. It would be incredibly beneficial, I think, for all adoptive parents to have that network set up in advance of children being placed?”*

Adoptive parent

“

### Recommendations

- **The Government must guarantee the long-term retention of the Adoption Support Fund for a further ten years** with accompanying guidance reinforcing that the ASF can be used at any stage in an adoptive family's journey (to mitigate against any informal thresholds).
- **Newly adoptive families should be able to access an additional pot of funding through the ASF** during the first 12 months after the Adoption Order has been granted.
- **All new adopters should be signposted to local and national peer-support networks** and services as standard practice.



## Principle 2b: Early Permanence

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Efforts to promote stability for children should begin at the earliest opportunity. While two-thirds of children entering care have experienced abuse or neglect,<sup>18</sup> all children in care, including those who go on to be adopted, have experienced trauma and loss through separation from their birth family as well as other early adverse childhood experiences.

We need to enable stability for every child, in recognition of the significant instability that arises as a result of no longer living with their birth family. In the desire for adoptive families to be stable over the long term, we must lay strong and deep foundations (see Principle 1), but we must also act early to maximise the stability they experience from the point of entering care through to adoption, when it is decided that this is in their best interests.

“

*“In order to support successful adoptions in the best way possible, we must first ensure that pre-adoption, where a child is spending time in care, is taken into serious consideration. Because the time they spend there needs to be as stable, supportive and individualized as possible.”*

Lucy, adopted young person [OE]

The APPGAP heard powerful evidence about the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, which is referred to as the brain’s “window of opportunity.” Events that happen during this period can significantly impact a child’s development and wellbeing, either positively or negatively, with lifelong implications. In addition to this period, there is another window of opportunity during adolescence, which will be discussed in Principle 4b of this report.

*“The problem we’ve faced over many years is that where a child cannot be looked after by their birth family and the state is responsible for care planning, one of the challenges in those first 1000 days is that the child has to wait until the adults get their act together. That can take at least 1,000 days [...] Time is not on the side of the child.”*

John Simmonds, CoramBAAF [OE]

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The limited window at the beginning of a child’s life where crucial development occurs should create a genuine sense of urgency in ensuring that children entering care during this age bracket are provided with stability, in recognition of the long-term implications for a child’s life when this is not facilitated. International research shared with the inquiry highlights that multiple home moves prior to being adopted were a consistent factor among families who experienced crisis or an adoption disruption later on.<sup>19</sup> Placement changes can exacerbate trauma as relational attachments are formed and then broken with every move.

## Principle 2b: Early Permanence (continued)

*“Before I was adopted, I’d moved back and forth more times than my age at the time of my adoption [...] when you’ve never stayed somewhere long enough to create secure attachments, there comes such a long-term impact and struggle to create those attachments in an adoptive family.”*

Lucy, adopted young person [OE]



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*“I had so many different carers when I arrived with my mum. I had 4 carers/moves/homes. Maybe I could have been adopted straight from my birth mum.”*

T, 10 years old

As one solution in seeking to address the number of moves that children experience, the APPGAP heard compelling evidence as to the merits of Early Permanence approaches that enable children to be fostered by carers already approved as adopters and then, depending on the outcome of care proceedings, adopted by the foster carer or reunified with their birth family. This allows them to experience a consistency in those providing care to them and limits the number of attachments that are broken. As a relatively under-developed provision, witnesses outlined the crucial differences between the **two forms of placement which fall under the umbrella term of ‘Early Permanence’**:

### Concurrent Planning (CP)

A model through which family reunification (Plan A) and an alternative permanence plan, usually adoption (Plan B), are pursued in parallel (i.e., concurrently). In this model, carers are dually and fully approved as foster carers and adopters.

### Fostering for Adoption (FfA)

In this model, there is no active plan for family reunification, with a Local Authority only pursuing the option of adoption. In this model, a child is placed with adopters who are temporarily approved as foster carers. They will go on to adopt the child should a placement order be granted at the end of care proceedings.

During 2019-20, the number of children placed through EP routes represented around 11% of children adopted in England.<sup>20</sup> A recent study by the University of Lancaster shows promising signs of the stability enabled by Early Permanence placements.<sup>21</sup>

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*“There was no evidence of placement disruption. Rather, there were very high adoption rates and children spent less time in impermanent care, moved less often and experienced fewer placement changes.”*

Claire Mason and Rebecca Brown, Centre for Child and Family Justice Research [OE]

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These findings were supported by witnesses who identified the first-hand benefits for their children's attachment and stability, having joined their family through Early Permanence routes:

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*“In terms of the stability for our boys, they have settled brilliantly and attached to us really quickly. One was placed with us at 6 weeks old and the other at 2 weeks old and I think having the boys from such a young age has been really helpful for my birth children as well to just bond as a family.”*

**Karen, adoptive parent (FfA) [OE]**

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*“The boys came straight to us from hospital at 19 days old. Concurrent Planning has been invaluable because we've formed an attachment with the boys at the earliest possible stage [...] If this was a normal placement, they would have had 6 months in a different foster placement before then being moved again to us so that would have been 3 placements at 6 months old. For us, that was exactly what we were trying to avoid.”*

**Natalie and Amy, adoptive parents (CP) [OE]**

The inquiry heard of the important benefits that Early Permanence routes can provide, including the way in which many Early Permanence carers were often able to form a stronger relationship with a child's birth parents than they otherwise might through traditional adoption routes, due to the fostering role they play at the start. Social workers identified that with a high number of birth parents being care-experienced themselves, they often felt anxious about their child entering care given their own, often negative, experiences. Having regular contact with the birth family in the fostering phase allowed many Early Permanence carers to develop empathy with the birth parents, which facilitated a positive relationship. This not only enabled greater reassurance for the birth family about those caring for their children, either temporarily or permanently, but it also allowed Early Permanence carers to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the child's history, background, and the individuals involved in their life. This was recognised as invaluable for Life Story work further down the line and in navigating contact between the child and their birth family.

Furthermore, the APPGAP heard that Early Permanence placements can enable some children who might ordinarily wait longer for an adoptive home than others to find permanence more quickly.

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*“We've had some carers who have gone on to adopt some children who have had particular medical problems or ongoing health issues that at the point they were asked in their assessment they probably would have said “no, we can't manage that.” But because the child has been in placement and they've been caring for them, they've fallen in love with this little one, and are taking on additional needs that otherwise they might not have done, which is great for children.”*

**– Julie Hogan and Kate Knowles, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care [OE]**

## Principle 2b: Early Permanence (continued)

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Witnesses also highlighted that with national delays in Care Proceedings exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions around permanence for children have been significantly affected. However, for children placed through Early Permanence, their experience of stability has been less impacted by these delays, as they have been able to remain with the same family while decisions are being made.

Within both CP and FfA, there is uncertainty as to whether the child will be reunified with their birth family or will be adopted by the EP carers, but witnesses spoke movingly of their decision to carry the uncertainty and risk on behalf of the child, deeming this to be a more appropriate approach:

*“We were risking breaking our hearts rather than risking the little boy to be in a placement that wasn’t permanent or where he might have been fostered by a few different people before finding that permanent placement.”*

Karen, adoptive parent [OE]



Witnesses were eager to stress that where reunification with the birth family was the final outcome, this was seen as hugely positive for the child and that training for prospective Early Permanence carers should do more to emphasise this.

*“Whenever FfA was mentioned, it was the scare stories – I think I found that quite sad because for that child, the best place for them to be, if it’s safe and appropriate, is with the birth parent and for us as potential adopters, foster carers, we did understand that and felt comfortable with it and we felt that the risk was right [...] I would have loved for it to be shown to us in its positive light of how good it is for the child. Even if the child does end up going back to the birth parent, that’s a good outcome for the child.”*

Karen, adoptive parent [OE]



Despite the benefits to the child, there is a high emotional cost for the adults involved. When reunification is not the outcome, the emotional toll on birth families is immense. Witnesses identified that very little research has been conducted among birth families to gather their perspectives on EP routes and to uncover the level of support they are provided with throughout the process. Conversely, prospective adopters were honest about the emotional resilience required for EP and the group heard that some EP carers, particularly Fostering for Adoption carers, felt ill-prepared when reunification had unexpectedly been the outcome.



*“We originally had a foster to adopt placement but the child was returned to the birth family. It was heart breaking and I feel really poorly handled by the child’s social workers.”*

Early Permanence carer



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Early Permanence carers also reported feeling far less prepared for their role as foster carers, compared to the training they received for adoption. Recognising the cruciality of the fostering period and the not insignificant duration of this period for many, this should be addressed.

Furthermore, there was a lack of confidence in the consistency of practice around Early Permanence routes across the country, with little data regularly collected and a lack of outcomes measurement over the longer term. Data collected by the ASGLB evidences that 390 children were placed via Early Permanence in 2019-20,<sup>22</sup> but this data does not distinguish between the two EP routes, thereby making it difficult to ascertain the scale of use of each of the routes.

Alongside this, the inquiry also heard that there is significant variation in pre-proceedings work with birth parents and their wider families, including pre-birth work with expectant parents. Effective and just EP routes require pre-proceedings work to be robust, with birth parents understanding their legal rights and options, and due exploration given to placing the child within the wider birth family.

Despite the identification of a number of challenges and areas that need improvement within EP at a local and national level, the recent study by Lancaster University and first-hand accounts heard by the APPGAP indicate the potential for enhanced stability for children through EP routes, whether the outcome is adoption or reunification with birth family. As such, we assess that investment should be made to improve the practice of Early Permanence placements and to consider whether such routes could be used for other groups of children, including older children.

## Recommendation



- In recognition of the benefits of Early Permanence for children, we commend the recent research by Lancaster University and its findings that **EP practice is inconsistent and needs further development to ensure that good practice is disseminated more widely**. In taking this work forward, the following aspects should be addressed:
  - o there should be a parity of training provided to EP carers so that they feel equally equipped in their role as foster carers as well as adopters;
  - o training for FfA carers in particular should include stories of reunification with birth family to ensure carers feel better prepared about the risks involved despite adoption being pursued as the main plan; and
  - o national data gathered by the ASGLB should distinguish between the two types of EP to enable a clearer picture of the use of EP nationally and locally.

## Principle 3:

# Cultivating Relationships

*“Another key way to create stability and help the child know who they are is to know about the people who have been involved and why. This can be key to help us feel more aware of ourselves. These people never leave us as their decisions in our lives have had an impact on who we are now and it is lasting.”*

**Tiegan, adopted young person [OE]**

One of the key ways in which children and young people experience instability is the breaking of relationships with important people in their lives. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care in England recently published its case for change, which highlights how the care system is often better at breaking relationships than building them, and this applies to adoption too.

*“Care too often weakens rather than strengthens relationships [...] Too often children are moved far from where they have grown up, are separated from their brothers or sisters, are forced to move schools, and have a revolving door of social workers. We are failing to build lifelong loving relationships around these children.”*

**The Case for Change, Independent Review of Children’s Social Services in England <sup>23</sup>**

Children and young people repeatedly told the APPGAP about the important roles that various individuals have played in their lives and the impact that is felt when these relationships have not been supported to develop and continue. The APPGAP commends the work of models such as Lifelong Links,<sup>24</sup> an approach that is designed to build and retain positive relationships for children in care (including those who have returned to care from previous permanence arrangements). This is achieved through a lifelong support plan, developed with and for the young person, with the aim of helping them during their time in care and into adulthood. The APPGAP believes that elements of this model could be adapted for children who are adopted, as the current approach only works with children coming into care with no plan for adoption.

This section will consider practice related to cultivating relationships for adopted children with foster carers, birth family members, and social workers. In addition, this section will consider the role that the wider community can play in enabling stability for the whole adoptive family.

*“We are as human beings not just defined as the individual we are, but also through the people we have relationships with. For every child who comes into the world, their first instinct is to reach out to those around them. In the first years of life, a secure, trusting relationship with adults will become absorbed into who they will become.”*

**John Simmonds, CoramBAAF [OE]**

## Principle 3a: Foster Carers

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*“The relationship that is established between foster carers and adopters is fundamental to children experiencing a continuity of love and stability.”*

Social worker

Foster carers play a pivotal role in the journey of many children and young people who go on to be adopted. They have often been the first home and the first people to care for the child or young person after they have been unable to remain living with their birth family. However short or long this period is, the foster carer is an important part of their story and, outside of the birth family, often has the deepest understanding of and relationship with the child prior to them being matched and placed with their adoptive family.

As a result of this, children told the APPGAP about how challenging it was to say goodbye to their foster carer when moving on to their adoptive home. They often felt they were not sufficiently prepared or informed enough to understand why they were leaving their foster home and sometimes did not know whether the move was temporary or permanent.

*“It was hard to say goodbye to my foster parents after so long living with them.”*

J, 9 years old

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*“For my youngest son, he was old enough to have had it explained to him that the decision for him going into care and the decision for him to be adopted was made by a social worker and judge. He spent a lot of years hating us because he felt we took him away from the foster carer he loved.”*

Adoptive parent

Across all stakeholders who contributed to the inquiry, there was a shared recognition of the importance of managing this transition well and finding appropriate ways for the foster carer to remain in contact with the child in instances where a good relationship had been formed. The benefit that this brings to both the child and foster carer was widely acknowledged by witnesses who gave evidence to the inquiry:

*“[One of the things that has helped me feel settled] was connecting with my foster family. We used to have dinner together and she always sends me gifts every single year.”*

Dean, adopted young person [OE]

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Conversely, social workers spoke about the negative impact of rushed transitions and the abrupt severing of the relationship between a child and foster carer.

## Principle 3a: Foster Carers (continued)

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*“Sharp severing of relationships with beloved care givers is not conducive to children developing long-lasting loving relationships in the future.”*

Health and Support organisation

*“We must absolutely stop the practice of contact between foster carers and children ending after adoption [...] children need to know they are still cared for by foster carers [...] Regular and ongoing contact should be the norm, with all the questions and grief that that brings, because it reflects the reality that children will grieve even more if they don't see the foster carers.”*

Support organisation

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Given the broken attachments experienced by many children who go on to be adopted, we recognise the importance of sustaining positive relationships and attachments for children, wherever possible. The APPGAP welcomes practice that enables a continuity of the relationship between an adopted child and their former foster carer and while it may not always be possible or appropriate, we would encourage all preparation and training for adoptive parents to include planning around maintaining this relationship.

### Recommendation



- **The Department for Education should update statutory guidance to further emphasise the importance of children maintaining links with former foster carers.** This should include every child being prepared and supported in an age and developmentally appropriate way for their transition from their foster carer to adoptive family, as well as communicating with the child about how the relationship with their foster carer will be cultivated going forward, as appropriate. Adoptive families should be encouraged and supported to maintain links with the foster carer when in the child's best interests.

## Principle 3b: Social Workers

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Children, young people, and families alike consistently expressed to the APPGAP the pivotal role that social workers play in their story and experience of stability. As gatekeepers to formal forms of support and often the key liaison for contact between adoptive families and birth families, social workers can have significant influence over some of the most delicate parts of an adoptive family's life.

We know that there are many incredible social workers who work tirelessly to support adopted children and their families, often going above and beyond to ensure their needs are being met and decisions are being made in their best interests.

However, social workers are often assigned to cover different parts of the adoption process and system, which is not conducive to families experiencing a continuity of relationship with the same social worker throughout. For example, a child may have a social worker who works with them through care proceedings until the Placement Order goes through and will then most likely have another social worker who helps with navigating support and contact until the Adoption Order goes through. A family may have an assessing social worker up until the Adoption Order has gone through, at which point they are often passed on to post-adoption teams with a new social worker to get to know.

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*“Longer planned interaction with our adoption social worker after the Adoption Order [would have created greater stability for the family]. It was a sudden cut off and that felt sad as our social worker had become part of the family. [We faced] a sudden drop off a cliff of contact!”* Adoptive parent

While the shift towards a regional adoption model has shown promising signs in the sector, adoptive families told the inquiry that post-adoption teams were often covering a huge region, meaning that in some instances, there was no local social worker with a local awareness of schools and support services. This often felt like a hindrance to families being able to access support at the local level.

Added to this, we recognise that the large caseloads held by many social workers across the system and the resulting high turnover within the workforce, means that even within one part of the system, families can experience multiple changes of social workers in quick succession.

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*“We've had 3 social workers in 1 year and the lack of consistent support has been very challenging.”*

**Vivian, adoptive parent [OE]**

*“Poor practice is often seen where children are placed and their social worker ‘disappears’. Their Life Story is often then completed by someone who was not a part of their story.”*

**Social worker**

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## Principle 3b: Social Workers (continued)

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The lack of continuity can not only be detrimental to the quality of important aspects such as Life Story work and the support a family receives, but from the child's perspective, represents another loss of relationship.

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*“Typically, social workers will be around 6 months to 1 year which isn't enough time to develop connection and understanding. Also, adoptees can get very confused and feel abandoned as an experienced social worker can leave with little preparation or warning.”*

**Tiegan, adopted young person [OE]**

*“For children to go through Life Story work with someone they don't know and who isn't directly connected to their story, but is simply picking it up from forms and reports and then trying to make it accessible to children who they have no relational equity with, is crazy. I often hear that Life Story work is more damaging than it is helpful, and it should be completely the reverse as a vital part of an adopted child's journey.”*

**Adoptive parent**

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Conversely, there was a significantly positive impact on children and young people when they had a consistent social worker that they were able to build a strong, positive, and ongoing relationship with:

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*“One of the main areas that commonly causes instability for adoptees is social workers, crucially those who run contact as this is such a vital aspect for adoptees [...] I've been extremely lucky with this as I've had the same person managing help with my contact for 13 years [...] I'm so grateful as I know the benefits this has brought to me [...] Due to her dedication and work I'm in contact with all the main members of my birth family and have a strong sense of me and what I was like as a baby, my origins and my story. I really like having a sense of who I am even if there are still questions.”*

**Tiegan, adopted young person [OE]**

Although this is not possible in all circumstances, enabling social workers to develop ongoing, stable relationships with adopted children and families benefits all parties within the system. For children, they are able to feel known and develop trust through an ongoing relationship with the same individual throughout their journey. This also prevents them from having to re-explain their story whenever a change of social worker occurs, which we recognise can be re-traumatising. For families, working with a social worker who understands their family dynamics and culture would encourage confidence in asking for support where needed. Both of these elements facilitate greater stability for families. For social workers, having an in-depth understanding of a family and their needs over time is beneficial in making good decisions alongside that family when challenges arise.

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We recognise that the churn of social workers is endemic across the children's social care system and are pleased to see this recognised as part of the Review's *The Case for Change*. In thinking about solutions to enable social workers to spend more quality time with families, social workers working with adopted children and adoptive families must be part of this consideration.

## Recommendation



- **Future evaluations of RAAs should include monitoring the consistency of relationships experienced by adoptive families with social workers and professionals, and the impact this has on families' experience of support.**



## Principle 3c: Birth Family

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*“We believe that families are made up of all kinds and they’re complex, but if we all work together, there’s nothing we can’t overcome.”*

Angela Frazer-Wicks, birth parent, Trustee of the Family Rights Group [OE]

**We recognise that in discussions about adoption, birth families are infrequently given the opportunity to have their voices heard and yet they play an essential part in an adopted child’s life. Furthermore, contact arrangements mean that birth family members often play an ongoing role in a child’s life, even if at a distance in many instances.**

In considering the relationships that may be important to a child over their lifetime, the birth family must be part of the conversation. However, we recognise that it will not always be appropriate or safe for children to maintain a relationship with birth family members and in these instances, safeguarding must be the highest priority. The APPGAP is grateful to the birth family members who contributed to our inquiry and spoke so powerfully about their experiences and stories.

In many instances where a child is placed for adoption, particularly where the child has been removed from birth, our inquiry heard that the birth family receives very little support. This is particularly problematic, given the high proportion of these families who are care-experienced themselves and have experienced trauma in their early lives. The inquiry heard examples of best practice where strong relationships between adoptive families and birth parents had been cultivated and the benefits were felt by both parties.

*“We also talk to [Early Permanence carers] about the benefits of meeting [birth] parents, having contact and seeing them in a very different light rather than just reading the court report and a one-off birth family parent meeting [...] they get to see them as people. The long-term benefits if they do go on to adopt is that they’ve got a much rounder and fuller story that they’re able to share with their children.”*

Julie Hogan and Kate Knowles, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care [OE]

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Of course, the building of a positive relationship in this instance is not a universal experience and we recognise the challenges for both birth family and adoptive families in seeking to develop a relationship. We acknowledge that there are wide variations in birth families’ experiences and that too often birth families are not provided with the information they need, and decisions are made unexpectedly and without their input. However, where relationships between birth families and adoptive families are nurtured sensitively and with integrity, we recognise the potential benefits in terms of stability for the child in both the short- and the long-term.

Information gleaned by the adopters and social workers as a result of the relationship built with birth parents can inform the vital Life Story work done with a child to help them understand their journey. Over the longer term too, some adopters described that a good relationship establishes a strong foundation for what is referred to as ‘contact’, which is conducted either by letterbox or otherwise as appropriate. The inquiry heard first-hand about the life-changing difference that well-managed, positive contact can have on birth parents.



*“Letterbox was very successful – the adopters were wonderful – they made every effort to keep me in the boys’ lives and to share their things with me. One of my favourite things to receive was what I called the ‘mum letter’ which would be their Mum telling me their milestones, their development, their education, their health – all the things that a Mum wants to know.”*

**Angela Frazer-Wicks, birth parent, Trustee of the Family Rights Group [OE]**

The APPGAP recognises that the relationship between adoptive families and birth families, facilitated through contact, is highly complex and needs careful and skilled professional management. Advances in technology have changed the landscape of how contact occurs, with social media enabling unsupervised interactions, often without the necessary guidance and support in place for all parties involved. We recognise contact as a crucial part of an adopted child’s journey and that greater scrutiny is needed to ensure that practice is keeping pace with technological developments. Due to this inquiry’s broader focus on stability, we have been unable to give due attention to exploring the complexities and practice around contact, but will consider this area in greater depth through a future inquiry to give it the focus and richness of thought it deserves.

## Recommendation



- The voices and experiences of birth families are not listened to enough, and yet we recognise their important role in an adopted child’s journey. **The adoption sector as a whole must do better in creating safe spaces and mechanisms for listening to and drawing on birth families’ experiences to inform practice.**



## Principle 3d: Community

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The inquiry heard several times about the significant role that communities, in all their varied forms, can play in enabling adopted children and their families to experience stability.

Adoptive parents shared repeatedly about the strength and support that their peer community, facilitated either locally (through adoption agencies) or through national organisations, had enabled them to receive.

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*“If it wasn’t for [Organisation], I don’t think I’d be here, because the support in their webinars has been invaluable. I have been able to educate myself so quickly, to be able to keep up with my daughter’s needs.”*

Laura, new adoptive parent [OE]

While there may be a tendency to only consider ‘support’ in the form of formal, therapeutic interventions, we do not underestimate the value that communities and community groups bring in facilitating different but equally valuable forms of support for adopted individuals and adoptive families. As previously discussed in Principle 2a, we would encourage all agencies and authorities to ensure that they are signposting adopted children and families to local and national peer networks from an early stage.

*“Drawing on our support network has given us real stability, not only over the last 18 months but also into the future as well.”*

Victoria, adoptive parent [OE]

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Some adoptive families spoke of meeting their children through local community groups, such as faith communities, where they were being cared for by foster families from within that community. Within these contexts they were able to organically develop a relationship with the child, which meant that when the decision was made to look for an adoptive family for that child, their existing relationship with the child prompted them to step forward. Although care and due diligence must always be applied, such routes mean that the child has a familiarity and pre-existing relationship with those who become their permanent family and that the adopters also have an existing knowledge of the child and their needs.

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*“We got to know the needs of our adopted daughter through being in a community on the ground. For us, that community was church, where we got to know the foster family and got to know her needs, but I wonder what other places of community could foster families be drawn into where children might find their forever home and where relationships can be continuous rather than meeting someone brand new who you’re introduced to and then become their family.”*

Luke, adoptive parent [OE]

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Such scenarios also mean that links and connectivity with the foster carer may be more easily maintained as the child remains in the same community.

Just as the wider birth family are considered when a child is no longer able to remain living with their birth parent(s), so too we would encourage agencies and authorities to consider the community groups (including faith communities) around foster carers and the children they care for, to see whether there are families or individuals who could become the permanent family for the child. We recognise that such methods could enable greater ease of key relationships being cultivated and continued for children, which ultimately enables them to experience greater stability.

## Recommendation



- **Professionals and families should take note of the existing positive relationships that a child has with individuals from their wider peer network and local community, and should seek to maintain these links where possible.** In many instances, cultivating these relationships can provide support and continuity for the child, particularly in the transition to their adoptive family.



## Principle 4:

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# Recognising Evolving Needs

“My experience has taught me that we need to see [adoption] services as a revolving door model [...] Early intervention will help but each developmental stage will throw up new challenges - there isn't a forever 'fix' for developmental trauma.”

– **The Child Psychology Service CIC**

Along with laying strong foundations, acting early to embed support and prioritise permanence, and encouraging a continuity of positive relationships for children, we recognise that the needs of adopted children and their families are continually evolving.

For the majority of adopted people, the trauma they experienced in early childhood has lifelong impacts on relationships, learning, and physical and mental health. We need an adoption system that sticks with adopted children and their families over the long term and is flexible and responsive to their changing needs as they face challenges across these areas.

Evidence presented to the APPGAP shows that there are some key times and places in the life of an adopted person when we should be anticipating a high level of need. Although this is not the experience of every child and family, this discussion will now turn to consider three of these moments and how children and their families might be strengthened to experience greater stability during these points of vulnerability. While these identified points constitute times where greater support is needed, we recognise that they are not isolated events but often the product of the evolving legacy of trauma.

## Principle 4a: Navigating School Life

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Given the significant amount of time that young people spend in school, it was unsurprising for the APPGAP to hear that navigating the school environment and the education system was deeply challenging for many adopted children and their families.

The adverse childhood experiences faced by many adopted children can result in difficulties in attachment and in building healthy relationships with both their peers and with school staff. In addition, the effects of trauma or conditions such as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) can impact the development of children, with neurodiversity and learning difficulties common among adopted children. School behaviour policies often fail to consider behaviour that arises from trauma, rather than deliberate intention. These challenges impact their experience of school and, ultimately, their attainment, with only 26% of adopted children achieving 5 GCSE's, compared to 53% of all children.<sup>25</sup> In addition, adopted children are 20 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers.<sup>26</sup>



*“At least 50% of the [adoptive] families we work with, are struggling in education or out of education.”*

Viv Norris, The Family Place [OE]

Adoptive parents told us that the transition between primary and secondary school can be particularly challenging for children and their families to navigate together, with primary schools often providing a more nurturing environment than secondary school settings:

*“The worst transition for all our 4 adopted kids has been the transition to high school. The discrepancy between what a child can manage and what’s expected of them is huge.”*

Adoptive parent



We acknowledge and welcome the existing initiatives aimed at supporting care experienced children in school, including Virtual Schools, Designated Teachers, and Pupil Premium Plus. However, this inquiry heard that the experience of these provisions varies hugely across the country, and for too many families, they are not improving their child’s school experience.

For children who are living with the impact of trauma, they need to feel safe, understood, and accepted before they can learn. Thus, trauma-informed school environments that are welcoming and understanding places for children are not optional, but imperative for both the wellbeing and academic progress of adopted children. In research conducted by Adoption UK in 2019, only half of Designated Teachers had received any training to help them fulfil their role with looked after and previously looked after children.<sup>27</sup> However, to comprehensively improve children’s school experience, we must go beyond just these education professionals and ensure that all teachers and other school staff receive training on trauma and attachment. This training would benefit all children at school, not only care-experienced children.

## Principle 4a:

# Navigating School Life (continued)

*“I think all school staff need to be better practiced and informed of the needs of care experienced young people, especially in regard to trauma. Because no matter how loving your home is, as an adoptive child, trauma doesn’t just go away. It does impact all aspects of your life, which can cause a lot of strain on the adoptive family. Short-term and long-term support being available at school can be the difference between a successful adoption and one that’s much more turbulent.”*

Lucy, adopted young person [OE]

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*“If we focused first and foremost on ensuring that in teacher training, every teacher understands about attachment, and that Ofsted will judge schools on their response to this, we will get the attainment that we need.”*

Sarah Fernihough, adoptive parent, head teacher [OE]

High-quality, thorough training on trauma for school practitioners is an essential step to enabling a school environment that fosters attainment for adopted children. While such training has been developed, greater effort is needed to ensure that this practice is utilised and disseminated widely and consistently, but also integrated into core teacher training programmes. Education leaders themselves expressed a desire for their staff to have a greater level of awareness of the needs of care-experienced children, even suggesting that the implementation of this training could become regulated as part of school inspections to ensure a high degree of quality and intentionality about building in positive, trauma-informed practice.

## Recommendation

- **The Teachers’ Standards<sup>28</sup> should be updated to include specific guidance on the need for trauma-informed practice.** This should outline that “a teacher must: have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the impact of trauma, FASD and attachment disorders. They must demonstrate confidence in implementing strategies and tools to engage with children facing these particular challenges, including children with care experience.” Ofsted should consider how trauma-informed practice might be monitored as part of the inspection process.

## Principle 4b:

# The Teenage Years

Through our Call for Evidence, the inquiry heard that the teenage years can constitute some of the most challenging times in both a young person's and family's journey. While every young person will have particular challenges to navigate in their teenage years, the trauma experienced by many adopted individuals can exacerbate some of these hurdles and lead to instability.

There are also important opportunities for influencing a child's life trajectory. As in the early years of a child's life, brain developments during adolescence provide an important "second window of opportunity."<sup>29</sup> We are encouraged to hear that some adoption agencies are recognising the challenges that occur during the teenage years, but a more consistent approach is needed across the whole country.

### A SPOTLIGHT ON: BEING HEARD

The APPGAP identified through the course of its inquiry that at many points along the journey, families and young people are not consistently heard and listened to. While there is good practice among agencies and authorities where families are able to work closely with professionals, our inquiry demonstrated that such practice is not nearly as widespread as it should be. This is particularly the case for many families parenting adopted children in their teens who are experiencing some of the most severe challenges.

Families told the inquiry that when trying to describe some of the challenges they were facing, they were met with dismissive responses from social workers and from other parents in their local communities. Societal reckoning of the challenges of parenting any young person in their teenage years often means that adoptive families' experiences are disbelieved and dismissed as 'normal' and 'what every family experiences'.

However, as a group of adoptive parents told the inquiry:

*"Not all teenagers are struggling with their identity, trying to understand their place in the world, abuse their parents, trash their homes, self-harm, are exploited both sexually and criminally and become familiar faces to our local constabulary and courts."*

Members of the Parents Of Traumatized Adopted Teens Organisation (POTATO) group [OE]

Another witness told the APPGAP that their family had to resort to filming their morning routine and playing the video to their social workers, in order to be believed. This is unacceptable. The APPGAP contends that at both a local and national level, we must ensure that families who are reaching out to ask for support are listened to and taken seriously. The system at all levels must be a stable and dependable ear to allow families to be heard, thus enabling them to continue providing stability to the children in their care. In seeking to parent their children, adoptive parents often find themselves dealing with significant challenges which have far-reaching ramifications on their own health, relationships, and wellbeing. Parents must be believed and offered support that recognises these challenges and works not to blame, but to understand and support.

## Principle 4b:

# The Teenage Years (continued)

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Families and practitioners shared with the APPGAP some of the challenges that they are contending with on a daily basis with their adopted teenage children, including managing violence and aggression (including Child-to-Parent Violence), children being drawn into exploitation, and mental health challenges across the family as a whole. Such challenges are often the product of previously unaddressed issues, which have evolved and escalated over a number of years to a point of crisis. If there is integrity behind our intention for adoption to provide lifelong permanence for children, then we must ensure that support is available to adoptive families over the long term. Furthermore, support must be underpinned by an awareness and understanding of the trauma that is at the root of so many of the challenges that impact on the family at different stages of a child's life.

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*“Often our traumatised adopted teens need crisis mental health support, but due to a lack of trauma informed mental health provision, our young adults are more often arrested rather than helped in any meaningful way.”*

**Members of the Parents Of Traumatised Adopted Teens Organisation (POTATO) group [OE]**

We are pleased to hear that LAs and agencies are increasingly recognising the vulnerability of these years for families and are developing services and training to address the specific challenges that emerge during the teenage years. We commend initiatives such as ADOPTTEENS, a project supported by PAC-UK and One Adoption, which provides adopted teenagers in Yorkshire and Humber with the opportunity to connect with one another and to engage in advocacy. There is potential for this kind of model to be expanded through the development of a digital platform that provides a one-stop-shop for adopted teenagers across the country, with opportunities to engage with adopted peers, mental health and wellbeing support, educational tools, and advocacy opportunities.

We recognise that the challenges and behaviours reported by adoptive parents during the teenage years do not emerge out of the blue and as such, we must ensure that support is put in place to address these challenges as soon as early signs emerge, rather than waiting for challenges to escalate and become unmanageable.

## Recommendations



- **Adopted young people and their families must be listened to and taken seriously when reaching out to social workers for support**, particularly further down the line during the teenage years, where challenges can be most acute.
- **Best practice guidance for supporting families with adopted adolescents should be disseminated**, including training on Non-Violent Resistance, mental health, and addressing harmful behaviour.
- The Department for Education, along with the Department of Health and Social Care, should commission and fund the development of a **digital platform that provides a one-stop-shop for adopted teenagers across the country, including mental health support, educational tools, ways to engage with adopted peers, wellbeing activities, and advocacy opportunities**. This should be developed in close consultation with adopted teenagers.



## Principle 4c:

# Supporting those Parenting at a Distance

Without the right support at the right time, a small number of families face the devastating prospect of their child being unable to remain living with them and therefore re-entering the care system, with an estimated 3% of adoptive families experiencing this situation.<sup>30</sup> While some deem the reality to be far higher,<sup>31</sup> a figure as low as 3% still represents hundreds of children and families experiencing heartbreak and trauma.

The average age of children adopted in England is three years old. Conversely, research shows that the average age of adopted children re-entering care due to untenable challenges is 12.7 years old.<sup>32</sup> This raises an urgent challenge about the level of support that is accessible over the longer term for families if, ten years on, the challenges become overwhelming. It poses a clear question: are we adequately supporting adoptive families to ensure they last for a decade, or a lifetime?

Carol Green, an adoptive parent, spoke powerfully about her family's experience of her daughter re-entering the care system at 16, and of her work as a parent-mentor with many other families in similar circumstances.

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*“For parents it is completely overwhelming. There’s heartbreak. A sense of failure. A huge sense of bereavement although you know that the child you’re mourning is very much alive somewhere. Alongside that for many parents is a sense of relief that you’re not living 24-7 with the aggression that you have been, but with the relief comes a huge sense of guilt.”*

**Carol Green, adoptive parent, TESSA programme [OE]**

Some families highlighted that once a child had left the home, there was no opportunity for shared reflection among families and social workers. Such multi-disciplinary conversations are essential for improving practice and preventing young people in future from experiencing the trauma of having to leave their home prematurely and/or re-entering care.

The term commonly used to describe such circumstances is ‘disruption’, but families highlighted the insensitivity of this term and the way in which it fails to encapsulate the ongoing relationship that many families maintain with their adopted children, despite the young person no longer living in their home. Recognising the huge emotional toll on all those involved, the APPGAP is full of admiration for those who continue to tirelessly support their children from a distance and seek to make them feel loved and safe, through challenging circumstances.

The APPGAP heard from Molly, a young woman who re-entered the care system at the age of 16, but whose adoptive family demonstrated inspiring love and continual support to her:

*“My parents and sometimes my siblings continued to visit me regularly. Many times I didn’t want to see them but they kept coming. I wasn’t sure why they kept coming. I believed that when I went back into care they had given up on me [...] Over the next few months, I began to realise [...] that my adoptive parents had always been there for me, I just didn’t realise it till then.”*

**Molly, adopted young person [OE]**

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## Principle 4c:

# Supporting those Parenting at a Distance

(continued)

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Families described to the APPGAP that support for them disappeared once a child re-entered care, particularly when there was little prospect of a child returning to live with them. In addition, for young people where there is no plan for them to return to live with their adoptive family, they also become unable to access the ASF at a time where therapeutic support is most needed. We recognise that these families remain a family despite living separately and we must support both the young person as well as the adults to maintain an ongoing relationship, as far as this is possible. The APPGAP were presented with powerful evidence that, with the right support, adoptive families can weather the storm to provide some form of ongoing relationship.

*“There’s a lot of work that can be done around a family breakdown, which really helps there to be a sustained long-term relationship into the future. So it might be that, say there’s been a lot of violence in the family that a young person needs to move into residential provision for a time, but if you can help facilitate that breakdown without the blame that usually comes with it, then you’ve got a much better chance at sustaining that long-term relationship between the parent and the child.”*

**Viv Norris, The Family Place [OE]**

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*“If my adoptive parents had not continued to be part of my life when I returned to care, I might not now still be alive.”*

**Molly, adopted young person [OE]**

When we asked families about the support that could have prevented their child needing to leave home prematurely, they spoke about needing support with managing violence and aggression; support with managing criminal exploitation of their children (children being drawn into gangs or into county lines activities); needing mental health support for all members of their family; and needing short breaks or respite care. Many of these challenges have been ongoing for the family for a long time before it came to the point where a child left the home. It is at all these points that families need a wraparound multi-disciplinary service to manage the risk and support the whole family to remain as stable as possible.



## Recommendations

- The lack of clarity around how a supportive relationship between adoptive parents and a child who has left home prematurely and/or re-entered the care system should be addressed. Therefore, **social workers, adoptive parents, and other professionals involved in the young person's life should conduct a Reflection and Response meeting to allow for holistic reflection, learning, and the formation of a detailed plan to support the family to remain in relationship moving forward, wherever possible.** It is vital at this critical point that families feel listened to, supported, and involved in decisions made.
- **The ASF should be made available to all adopted children who have re-entered care,** as even when it has been deemed unlikely that they will return to live with their adoptive family, many parents remain parenting at a distance.





# Conclusion

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The *Strengthening Families* inquiry set out to consider how to improve stability for adopted children and their families through the examination of key stages of the adoption journey where stability is most at risk. The *four principles of stability* that have been discussed in this report and the ensuing recommendations encapsulate the inquiry's findings as to where the greatest challenges lie and where policy and practice changes are needed.

The adoption sector urgently needs a paradigm shift from 'family finding' to 'family building', where the focus is not on quick fixes and short-term solutions, but on long-term thinking, strategic solutions, and lifelong support. This is imperative if adoptive families are to be like stable buildings that last a lifetime, rather than shaky Jenga towers at risk of collapsing. We strongly believe that effective implementation of the proposed recommendations in this report is crucial to seeing adoptive families flourish both now and into the future.



# Summary of Recommendations

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**Adopted children share many of the same early experiences as children in care, and the legacy of early trauma does not cease with the making of an Adoption Order. As such, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care in England should ensure that the experiences of adopted children and their families are given due consideration and are reflected in the reforms proposed in their final report.**

Therefore, we urge the Review team to consider the following recommendations:

## **Principle 1: Laying Strong Foundations**

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Prioritise stability for children and instil confidence in prospective and new adopters about the journey ahead by improving the quality and consistency of matching and support planning.*

**This should be achieved in the following ways:**

- **The assessment and training process for prospective adopters should provide thorough preparation for the matching stage.** This should include: what to expect in terms of the regularity of communication; how to conduct difficult conversations about whether or not a child is a good match; how to remain emotionally resilient; and how to support any birth or other children in the family during the matching process.
- Digital tools hold the potential to significantly improve matching between children and families. **The capabilities of digital tools such as Link Maker should be built upon and developed to enhance efficiency and quality of matching.** This could include the generation of live data at a national level of children waiting and being placed for adoption in order to aid real-time decision-making, at both the national and local levels (i.e. in terms of recruitment, matching, and policy).

(CONTINUED OVERLEAF)

# Summary of Recommendations

(continued)

## Principle 1:

### Laying Strong Foundations (continued)

- **It should be mandatory for every adopted child to have a long-term, costed, and deliverable support plan in place from the start, which is updated on an ongoing basis.** The Department for Education should update statutory guidance on support planning, providing best practice examples of such plans, along with a clear expectation that families should be centrally involved in the development of support plans in partnership with multi-disciplinary professionals. Families should have easy access to the expertise provided by these professionals in order to further support them in understanding the needs of their child(ren). We commend the good practice of Adoption Now in their facilitation of specialist consultations between adopters and the adoption support team, which have been vital in the development of long-term and robust support plans.
- **We must ensure that there is racial diversity and representation amongst the social work workforce and on adoption and matching panels.** Research should be conducted to ascertain current levels of diversity and an action plan developed, based on the findings.
- To ensure that individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds have a positive experience of exploring and pursuing adoption, **social workers should be supported and trained to take a culturally literate approach in their work.** The feedback and experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds who have previously engaged with the adoption process should be incorporated into the development of this training.
- **Every Local Authority should have a published strategy on how they identify, at the earliest stages, those children who are likely to wait longer for adoption, accompanied by a clear process for seeking to match these children with a family in a timely way.** Existing frameworks such as the RAG rating tool developed by a group of agencies in the North West could be utilised in the development of these strategies.

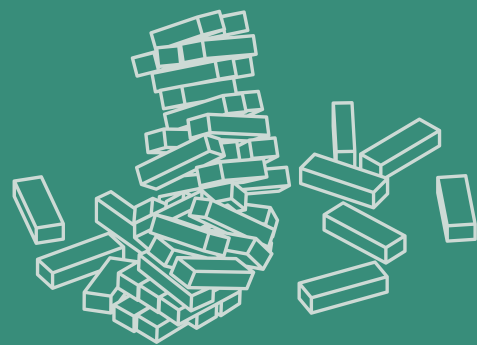


## Principle 2: Acting Early

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Improve the initial stages of a child's journey into adoption by normalising early and ongoing support and further developing Early Permanence practice.*

**This should be achieved in the following ways:**

- **The Government must guarantee the long-term retention of the Adoption Support Fund for a further ten years** with accompanying guidance reinforcing that the ASF can be used at any stage in an adoptive family's journey (to mitigate against any informal thresholds).
- **Newly adoptive families should be able to access an additional pot of funding through the ASF** during the first 12 months after the Adoption Order has been granted.
- **All new adopters should be signposted to local and national peer-support networks** and services as standard practice.
- In recognition of the benefits of Early Permanence for children, we commend the recent research by Lancaster University and its findings that **EP practice is inconsistent and needs further development to ensure that good practice is disseminated more widely.** In taking this work forward, the following aspects should be addressed:
  - there should be a parity of training provided to EP carers so that they feel equally equipped in their role as foster carers as well as adopters;
  - training for FfA carers in particular should include stories of reunification with birth family to ensure carers feel better prepared about the risks involved despite adoption being pursued as the main plan; and
  - national data gathered by the ASGLB should distinguish between the two types of EP to enable a clearer picture of the use of EP nationally and locally.



# Summary of Recommendations

(continued)

## Principle 3: Cultivating Relationships

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Enable children to experience a continuity of relationships with key adults by recognising those who have played a part in their journey.*

**This should be achieved in the following ways:**

- **The Department for Education should update statutory guidance to further emphasise the importance of children maintaining links with former foster carers.** This should include every child being prepared and supported in an age and developmentally appropriate way for their transition from their foster carer to adoptive family, as well as communicating with the child about how the relationship with their foster carer will be cultivated going forward, as appropriate. Adoptive families should be encouraged and supported to maintain links with the foster carer when in the child's best interests.
- **Future evaluations of RAAs should include monitoring the consistency of relationships experienced by adoptive families with social workers and professionals,** and the impact this has on families' experience of support.
- The voices and experiences of birth families are not listened to enough, and yet we recognise their important role in an adopted child's journey. **The adoption sector as a whole must do better in creating safe spaces and mechanisms for listening to and drawing on birth families' experiences to inform practice.**
- **Professionals and families should take note of the existing positive relationships that a child has with individuals from their wider peer network and local community, and should seek to maintain these links where possible.** In many instances, cultivating these relationships can provide support and continuity for the child, particularly in the transition to their adoptive family.





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## Principle 4: Recognising Evolving Needs

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Standardise long-term support that is proactive and responsive to the changing needs of adoptive families by taking a flexible and committed approach.*

**This should be achieved in the following ways:**

- **The Teachers' Standards<sup>33</sup> should be updated to include specific guidance on the need for trauma-informed practice.** This should outline that "a teacher must: have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the impact of trauma, FASD and attachment disorders. They must demonstrate confidence in implementing strategies and tools to engage with children facing these particular challenges, including children with care experience." Ofsted should consider how trauma-informed practice might be monitored as part of the inspection process.
- **Adopted young people and their families must be listened to and taken seriously when reaching out to social workers for support,** particularly further down the line during the teenage years, where challenges can be most acute.
- **Best practice guidance for supporting families with adopted adolescents should be disseminated,** including training on Non-Violent Resistance, mental health, and addressing harmful behaviour.
- The Department for Education, along with the Department of Health and Social Care, should commission and fund the development of a **digital platform that provides a one-stop-shop for adopted teenagers across the country, including mental health support, educational tools, ways to engage with adopted peers, wellbeing activities, and advocacy opportunities.** This should be developed in close consultation with adopted teenagers.
- The lack of clarity around how a supportive relationship between adoptive parents and a child who has left home prematurely and/or re-entered the care system should be addressed. Therefore, **social workers, adoptive parents, and other professionals involved in the young person's life should conduct a Reflection and Response meeting to allow for holistic reflection, learning, and the formation of a detailed plan to support the family to remain in relationship moving forward, wherever possible.** It is vital at this critical point that families feel listened to, supported, and involved in decisions made.
- **The ASF should be made available to all adopted children who have re-entered care,** as even when it has been deemed unlikely that they will return to live with their adoptive family, many parents remain parenting at a distance.

# Appendix 1: Evidence Sessions, *Strengthening Families* Inquiry

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## Oral Evidence Session 1: Introduction and the Importance of Strong Matching

Monday 19 April 2021

- **Josh MacAlister** – Chair, Children’s Social Care Review
- **Sue Armstrong-Brown** – CEO, Adoption UK
- **Tania Bright** – CEO, Home for Good
- **Malini and Dean** – Adoptive mother and son
- **Tiegan** – Adopted young person
- **Lorna Hunt** – Adoption Service Director, PACT
- **Andy Leary-May** – Co-founder and Chief Executive, Link Maker
- **Victoria** – Adoptive parent
- **Thea Ramirez** – Founder and CEO, Adoption-Share (USA)

## Oral Evidence Session 2: Children Waiting the Longest

Monday 26 April 2021

- **Dr Krish Kandiah** – Chair, Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board
- **Dr Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor** – Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University
- **Sue Lowndes** – Managing Director, Coram Ambitious for Adoption
- **Vivian** – Adoptive parent
- **Luke** – Adopted person and adoptive parent

## Oral Evidence Session 3: The Value of Early Permanence

Monday 17 May 2021

- **Dr John Simmonds OBE** – Director of Policy, Research and Development, CoramBAAF
- **Claire Mason and Rebecca Brown** – Centre for Child and Family Justice Research, Lancaster University
- **Julie Hogan and Kate Knowles** – Concurrent Planning Service Team Managers, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care
- **Angela Frazer-Wicks** – Birth parent and Trustee of the Family Rights Group
- **Karen** – Adoptive parent
- **Natalie and Amy** – Adoptive parents

## Oral Evidence Session 4: Sticking with Adoptive Families

Monday 24 May 2021

- **Rebecca Brooks** – Education Policy Advisor, Adoption UK
- **Lucy** – Adopted young person
- **Laura** – Adoptive parent
- **Karen Barrick** – Head, Adoption Now Regional Adoption Agency
- **Sarah Fernihough** – Head, Therapeutic Primary School and adoptive parent
- **Viv Norris** – Clinical Psychologist, The Family Place

## Oral Evidence Session 5: Addressing Crisis and Family Breakdown

Monday 7 June 2021

- **Carol Green** – Adoptive parent and Assistant Coordinator, TESSA programme
- **Testimony read from an adopted young person who re-entered care.**
- **Julie Doughty** – Senior Lecturer in Law, Cardiff University
- **Jay Vaughan** – Co-Founder, Family Futures
- **June Leat** – Adoptive parent and Chair, Parents of Traumatized Adopted Teens Organisation (The POTATO Group)

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4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. 2021. *The Case for Change*. p.3. Available [online](#).
7. Link Maker. 2021. *Data*. Available [online](#).
8. The inquiry heard from Family Match ([www.family-match.org](http://www.family-match.org)) in the USA about their innovative use of compassion-driven technology and compatibility markers to inform family matching.
9. Statistics shared by Dr Krish Kandiah, Chair of the ASGLB, during Oral Evidence presented to the inquiry.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. The Children and Families Act 2014.
13. This is further evidenced through polling conducted by Savanta ComRes on behalf of Home for Good in 2019. A summary of these findings is available [here](#).
14. These are events delivered by specialist staff in order to give prospective adopters the opportunity to interact with children who are waiting for adoption, particularly those who have been waiting the longest, in a safe, supported, and fun environment. For more information about the Activity Days run by Coram, visit [www.coramadoption.org.uk/adoption-process/adoption-activity-days](http://www.coramadoption.org.uk/adoption-process/adoption-activity-days).
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23. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. 2021. *The Case for Change*. Available [online](#). p.12.
24. See <https://frg.org.uk/lifelong-links/> for more information.
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31. There are large discrepancies in the data collected on children who re-enter care from previous permanence arrangements. For example, in 2019-20, 180 children re-entered care from adoption, however, the previous permanence arrangement was 'unknown' for 3,680 children who re-entered care. This calls into question the reliability of the available data. (Department for Education. 2020. Data Table: *National - Children who started to be looked after during the years ending 31 March - Previous Permanence Arrangement*. Available [online](#).)
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