



Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters Report Card April 2017 to March 2018

Outcome: Children and adoptive families to have an influence over decisions affecting their families' lives and the services we provide.

Best ideas - what has worked?

adoptervoice

We provide a range of different opportunities and levels of involvement to enable adoptive parents to have a voice and influence in OAWY. Opportunities range from a paid role in the organisation to volunteering at events. We also pay an hourly rate for adoptive parents to deliver training. We have established an Adopter Voice Forum and work with Adoption UK to employ an Adopter coordinator.

The Adopter coordinator is an adopter themselves and their role is to capture the voice of adopters and use them to influence the development of adoption services. So far they have helped shape:

- information events – we now co deliver;
- assessment – peer mentoring will be introduced;
- prep training – co delivery and content influenced;
- support – development of a website, support menu.

An Adoption Charter has been produced by Adopter Voice. This outlines partnership working with One Adoption to ensure 'the best possible future for families across the region'. The aims of this charter have been added to the OAWY 2018/19 Service Improvement Plan to ensure a partnership approach to delivering service improvements.

Members of Adopter Voice have been involved in the recruitment of all managers, staff and panel chairs within OAWY.

AT-iD



AT-iD (Adopted Teens Identity) is a project set up by the Yorkshire & Humber adoption consortium with a vision of offering adopted teenagers a space they can call their own. West Yorkshire teens are well represented in this group we have; 33/ 61 project members, 9/ 22 chat forum members and 7/ 14 Youth Council members. 7 activity days have been held with 46 young people attending from our region.

A 20 minute short film 'Voices' which talks about young people's experiences and feelings on adoption was created by AT-iD. This film is used by OAWY when training prospective adopters.

Young people from this group have also been involved in the recruitment process for staff at OAWY.

Feedback following an activity day from AT-ID members:

How has AT-iD made a difference to you?

- *Attending AT-iD activity days has made me more confident;*
- *AT-iD activity day made me feel stronger;*
- *I like meeting different people at AT-iD activity days;*
- *I have made friends with new people;*
- *I had fun;*
- *I pushed myself;*
- *I had fun and met new people;*
- *I made 2 new friends;*
- *It was fun and got me out of the house.*

Feedback from Youth Council Members

- *AT-iD has been life changing and it has changed my life for the better;*
- *AT-iD has made me a lot happier and I now have long term friends;*
- *I felt such a sense of belonging after going to my first AT-iD activity day. I carried on attending them and I met one of my best friends there, we have developed a special bond;*
- *I really enjoy AT-iD, I have done since it started. I find talking to others online stress relieving too and I enjoy the fact that everyone understands what it feels like to be adopted and that they can relate;*
- *AT-iD is my family;*
- *AT ID has been important to me and I have loved meeting other adopted people with similar experiences and I have found it very helpful. Also the fun days doing stuff. Also sharing my thoughts and opinions;*
- *My life has been transformed. AT-iD is my family. It's like soaring through happiness. Express yourself and let go;*
- *AT-iD is very important as it gives me somewhere that I belong and other people understand me in a way that others don't.*

Young people have also been involved in recruitment of all managers in OAWY.

A Survey of Adoptive Families: Following up Children Adopted in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region

The above mentioned survey was delivered in our region by a project team from the University of East Anglia and the University Loughborough. Information was gathered from a range of Adopters via an anonymous, on-line survey about how they and their child were getting on. 319 adoptive parents filled in the survey but only 2017 completed it all. 79% of parents stated that their adoption was 'going really well' or they were 'managing', with 21% were experiencing difficulties or struggling to manage.



Parents of older children experienced more problems: 70% with a child under 6 years old stated the adoption was going really well compared to 31% with a 6-9 years old and 24% of adopters with children aged 12-17. Key recommendations from the findings included; the need for ongoing support, preparing adoptive parents with full and detailed information, careful planning of the transition from foster to adoptive families and a proactive approach to birth family contact.



Foundations for Attachment

Written by Kim S. Golding: Foundations for Attachment 8 week course is a programme to help adopters to nurture attachments with their child. The course is aimed at adoptive families who are experiencing difficulties due to their child's early life experiences.

This course has been delivered by OAWY to 15 adoptive families. Feedback from the programme has been very positive, see comments from adopters below:

- *Didn't really understand any alternative to traditional parenting but after this course appreciate the benefits of PACE and putting myself in my child's shoes;*
- *Really makes me think about why some behaviours are present & that issues are common, good to feel not alone;*
- *This course has made me realise I am not going 'Bonkers';*
- *Really useful & some life changing moments for me as a parent;*
- *Should be part of the Adoption Process;*
- *It's got to be a way of life and not just a technique.*

The next Foundations for Attachment programme will be run again in the Autumn.

OAWY Non-Violent Resistance (NVR)

Child (or adolescent) to parent violence is becoming an increasing concern within the adoption community. OAWY ran a 12 week course with adoptive parents to address violent, destructive and harmful behaviours. NVR helps parents to break the silence, regain their parental presence and make positive changes to their family life.

Below are examples of feedback from parents about the programme we ran in the Autumn 2017 for 12 families:

- *As parents we communicate better/work together more, approaching situations from same page. This has created a calmer atmosphere at home. The future is not as daunting even though we will have tough times.”*
- *“NVR made me realise what we had been doing was not working and there are ways to change the way we do parenting which will improve all our lives”*
- *“Our previous parenting approach was making matters worse and not working with our son. We had to do something to break the cycle of his controlling and destructive behaviour. NVR has been a godsend we were told that it is life changing and it certainly is. We have become stronger as a team and NVR is making a big difference to the atmosphere and happiness within our home.”*

How NVR has helped your family?

- *“To become stronger, clearer and more concise. Kids responding brilliantly when we do it well. Calmer, more relaxed, less aggressive.”*
- *“As always, it is very helpful to be able to hear from and talk to others in a similar situation - not only do we learn from each other, we feel comforted that we are not alone in our experiences.”*



Our family is unrecognisable to how it was 12 weeks ago. The changes are remarkable. I still realise we still have a long way to go and we will continue to work hard improving our family life.”

This is a targeted and specific training and was well received and will be run again later in the year.



Safe Base is a therapeutic parenting programme for adoptive parents that One Adoption West Yorkshire commissions from After Adoption.

24 families have attended this course in the last year. It creates a strong foundation for loving and lasting relationships within the family, giving children the confidence to feel safe and secure with their parents or carers.

SafeBase provides a bespoke family session and feedback as part of the programme and is effective in:

- Providing practical strategies tailored to the family
- Strengthening family wellbeing and hope for the future
- Putting attachment and child development into context for the family
- Explaining the impact of early adversity on brain development
- Building secure attachments

Safebase has given us some invaluable information, which has already worked well in many situations and made an immediate, positive difference. Feeling much more positive, reassured and confident. (August 2017)

I feel more confident with techniques to help my children feel secure in our family. I feel more confident of my understanding of my children's behaviours and why they behave in certain ways. I am more accepting of my children's behaviours. (August 2017)

Safebase has made a huge difference in how I regard parenting and the mindset of my child. (October 2017)

Extremely helpful, relevant and useful - giving an easy to understand explanation of early trauma and attachment issues with real strategies in a supportive environment. (November 2017)

Lots of great techniques to use at home, better understanding of issues and attachment relating to my son. (Feb 2018)

Really good course. The teachers were very good and made it enjoyable and fun. A great way to learn for all of us. (May 2017)

Safe base is to be run again in August following positive feedback from adopters

Profiling Events

.The 2 profiling events held in 2017/18 have resulted in 5 matches and 1 still being explored. Approved and stage 2 adopters from OAWY and other agencies across the North of England were invited .The success of these events and the positive feedback from those who attended has resulted in plans for 4 profiling event to be held each year.

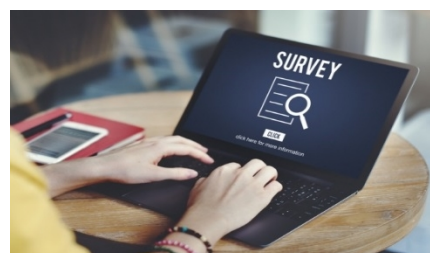
Feedback from those who attended has been positive, see comments below:

- *We were very happy with the event. We had very good discussions with social workers about specific cases and had very good advice and suggestions. As a result of this event we have expressed interest in 2 children;*
- *It has reminded us of what we are doing this for;*
- *We were considering a very young baby but seeing items of a slightly older child has reminded us that they are still very small;*
- *The displays were very informative and having items from the children and letters and paintings they'd made was very engaging;*
- *We did find the morning emotional, but hopefully it's set us on the road to find our child. Everyone was so lovely, we really appreciated it.*
- *Loved it was on a weekend so we could both attend. Staff/S/W all very approachable and shared appropriate info;*
- *Everyone was very welcoming and helped to put me at my ease. Found it emotional but very useful;*

Best ideas - what next?

Adopter Survey

An on-line survey to all OAWY adopters will be sent out in May 2018. The aim is to capture views on the services we provide so we can identify areas that may require improvement. Additional, more specific, on-line surveys will also be produced to gather feedback on areas such as interventions, adopter preparation training and 'bump into' meetings.



adoptervoice

Adopter Voice have created an Adoption Charter. The charter expresses the support benefits of peer mentors. Therefore, working closely with Adopter Voice and Cornerstone (see below) to provide a peer mentoring service that will be launched in 2018/19. This service will offer bespoke mentoring that adopters can access for one to one support at any stage of the adoption journey – 30 peer mentors will be recruited and trained.

Peer Mentoring Scheme

OAWY has partnered with The Cornerstone Partnership to provide a Peer Mentoring Scheme to all OAWY prospective and experienced adopters. We know how challenging and, at times, stressful the process of adopting and being an adoptive parent can be. Our mentoring scheme relies on volunteer mentors who have the experience and desire to help others through what is often a challenging time.



What is the Cornerstone mentoring programme?

The aim of the Cornerstone peer mentoring programme for prospective and experienced adopters is to:

- to provide emotional support and encouragement for families;
- to sign-post to local support;
- to share experiences and successes of parenting adopted children as they deal with transitions, contact issues, challenging behaviours etc.