



## Voice and Influence of Adopters, Children & Young People report Card April 2018 to March 2019

**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?

## Virtual Reality

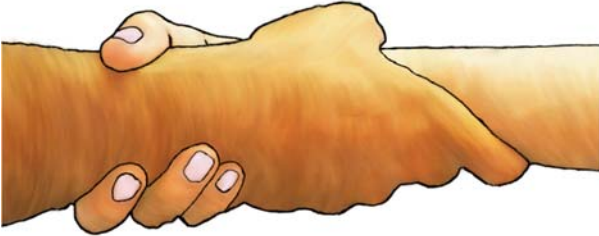
Working with Cornerstone, an agency run by adopters for adopters, we introduced Virtual reality (VR) to adopter preparation training in January 2019. The purpose of VR is to accelerate prospective adopters learning and understanding of the needs of children. The initial feedback to VR from prospective adopters has been positive with 15/17 rating it as good or excellent. Here are some comments:



- *...a very good experience;*
- *Really powerful;*
- *...it really helped with putting yourself in the child's shoes;*
- *Very impactful;*
- *...the content was very insightful;*
- *Emotional but again makes everything seem real*

This will be provided for all preparation training next year and we will also start to think about extending the use of the VR with adopters and professionals working with our families.

## Peer Mentoring Scheme



OAWY have delivered the Peer Mentoring Scheme, adopters having developed and delivering the service. The Peer Mentoring scheme provides trained volunteer mentors to help others through the process of adopting and being an adoptive parent – given how challenging and stressful it can be.

We now have 31 trained mentors who are providing support to 51 families. The feedback from those who have a peer mentor has been really positive:

- *Very informative mentor with great listening skills;*
- *Our mentor has been a life-line to us during this difficult process;*
- *At a time when we faced so many different challenges and concerns our mentor listened, shared their experiences and made us feel not so alone;*
- *Good to know someone who has adopted and I can ask for advice. Someone who will talk about "real life" rather than theory;*
- *Having somebody outside the process to talk to, who understands;*
- *Helps me to feel I do a good job and that however challenging life is it's not insurmountable;*
- *It so nice having someone who understands;*
- *It's nice to have someone to talk to or drop a quick message if a question pops into your head. I feel well supported;*
- *My mentor is always there for me we meet every month and I know she is only a phone call away if I need her.*

## Profiling Events

Adoptive parents wanted more opportunities to see children who were waiting adoption to make early links. The 5 profiling events held in 2018/19 have resulted in 16 matches so far. 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 further profiling events to be held in 2019/20.

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

- *The event was excellent. The family finders and all the staff were amazing;*
- *All extremely informative – really good to have a social worker with me;*
- *It was a really good event and I enjoyed it;*
- *We don't feel you could do more.*

## Bump Into Meetings

Bump into meetings happen following the decision to proceed with the adoptive placement and before adoption panel. Prior to the child being given information about their new family, the foster carer and adopters arrange to meet in a park or another location familiar to the child. The adults say hello and spend some time engaging. Any organic interaction between the adopter and child is encouraged.

The meetings are short and planned with the support of the adoption Social Worker. It is hoped that when the child meets the prospective adopters and has a positive experience of being with these real people it will be easier for the child to associate these new people with positive feelings and experiences; in turn supporting the introduction period and placement.

When asking approved adopters what went well at the bump into meeting they said...

- *Relaxed atmosphere and calming influence of foster carer;*
- *It was great to see the twins for the first time but it was also great to meet their foster carer who was fab!*
- *We could see boys playing care free, and see their personalities rather than just their pictures;*
- *We were able to interact with the child and vice versa;*
- *We got to see him in the flesh, and start to hear from the foster carer about him.*



2 OAWY newsletters were sent to our adopters in 2018/19 (October and January). Please see the feedback we received from one of our adopters:

*...thank you for a fantastic and varied newsletter. I really enjoyed reading it, especially the articles and also the resources information. I appreciate all of the help and support we receive which is so much more valuable than anything we received as new adopters in 2005. Everything has moved at such a pace and I like to keep up to date...*

Adopter newsletters will be sent quarterly in 2019/20.

# 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. A new contract was put in place in January 2019 with Family Action to and Adoption UK are sub- contracted to deliver this service for the next three years, employing an adopter co-ordinator to continue to develop this work.

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. They continue to help shape:

- information events – we now co deliver;
- assessment – peer mentoring has 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 are integrated into the OAWY 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.

## **OAWY Teen Groups**

OAWY have developed 3 new groups for children and young people across the region, in response to the need in the last year, including a new teen group in the Bradford area. The purpose of the group is for children with similar experiences to come together, share their experience and create a positive identity of themselves as adopted children. This has created a good support network for those who attend and gives them confidence outside of the group. There are currently 10 members who meet fortnightly and every third session they go out for an activity such as bowling, cinema or to eat. Here’s some feedback from one of the parents whose son attends:

- *XX is starting to look forward to teen group. He has said several times unprompted he trusts you and feels he can talk to you. You have worked wonders to help him settle into the group and it's helped that he is coming with XX. Now he feels more comfortable he can also see the benefits of having a different group peers to hang out with who aren't in school or at home. I am so glad he is going along to it. Thank you for everything you're doing there.*



## **Brain Based Parenting**

OAWY offer Brain Based Parenting training. This provides adopters with an opportunity to examine the impact of abuse and neglect on children's brain development and explore parenting strategies that best support repair and healthy brain development.

The content of the session covers:

- How brains develop pre-birth and in infancy;
- The stress response system (fight, flight, freeze);
- Facing the realities of children's experiences;
- Shame;
- Distressed behaviour;
- The principles of therapeutic parenting.

Here are some comments from the adopters who have attended:

- *The brain based parenting session last night was really great...;*
- *...it was really helpful to be reminded of how the brain is formed and from what age the various developments take place*
- *'...helpful to chat to other parents about our situations and realise we are all in this together...albeit alone!*

As a result of this positive feedback this training is now provided for prospective adopters during their preparation process to help them think about the need for a therapeutic parenting approach.

## **Adopters Early Permanence Placement (EPP) Training**

Adopters EPP training is an interactive 1 day event designed to enhance adopter's knowledge of EPP. The training is delivered by an experienced OAWY social worker and EPP adopter/ foster carer. 64 households have benefitted from the 7 sessions held during 2018/19.

Here is some of the positive feedback:

- *We had brief understanding of what EPP was going in however we have a clear understating now that we have done the session;*
- *Detailed and honest information;*
- *The training was straightforward and informative, giving a clear understanding of what the benefits and risks associated with EPP;*
- *Great training. Very honest and realistic;*
- *Trainers and adopter delivering training were organised, informative and sensitive to the feelings/questions/information being discussed;*
- *We were pretty sure we wanted to do EPP but the training confirmed we definitely do;*
- *Enhanced general understanding and introduced some specific ideas;*
- *Very balanced and well organised training.*



### **Birth parents workshop**

Adopted teenagers have talked about the importance of identity and lifelong relationships & birth families and adoptive families are key in helping children develop a coherent sense of identity, usually through contact arrangements and being open with children about their history.

Many adoptive families have misconceptions about birth parents and therefore we have introduced workshops in preparation training, delivered by birth parents talking about their experiences of contact. The introduction of this has been very powerful for adopters and has helped dispel myths about birth parents.

Here are some comments from adopters:

*“I was not sure about this before I went to the session but I loved it. The birth parents there spoke to everyone so frankly about their experiences, thoughts and how they have coped with it. They spoke about letterbox contact and how much they depend on it.”*

*“I realised that you do not take a child and then forget about the birth family. They may not be there in person but they will always be part of the child’s life”.*

*“it made me think about the importance of keeping connections and I realised how vulnerable birth parents are”*

# Best ideas - what next?



In developing a more adopter led approach to finding families for children OAWY is holding its first Fun Day in June 2019. The Fun Day is a chance for OAWY and adopters from other agencies to meet some of the children who are waiting to be adopted and allows them to interact with the children in an enjoyable environment. The children attending will be those who typically wait longer to be adopted. There is careful preparation for these events with children, their foster carers and adopters.

## Peer Mentoring Scheme

This year, 2019/20, the Peer Mentoring Scheme will be:

- Running workshops on particular subjects related to adoption e.g. life story work, education, introductions;
- Recruiting more volunteers to help with new community/social events in the west;
- Training up specialist mentors (qualification in mentoring) to help with specific issues.

## Adopter Survey

An on-line survey to all OAWY adopters will be sent out in May/ June 2019. The aim is to capture views on the services we provide so we can identify areas that may require improvement.

