



Interesting times for adoption and fostering

David Holmes

By the time I write my next column for *BAAF News*, we are likely to have had a general election and the Westminster parliament may look quite different. Whatever happens in the general election, I hope that all parliamentarians, whether they are new or continuing in post, will continue to see supporting and investing in looked after children and young people, care leavers and adoption as cross-party priorities. Is there any greater test of a civilised society than how it cares for those children who are looked after by the state? BAAF recently co-organised a debate with senior representatives of the three largest parties in the Westminster parliament to explore their policies for looked after children and adoption – see the report of the debate below.

There has been a huge amount of policy activity across the UK in recent months in relation to looked after children and adoption. In Scotland, agencies are continuing to implement the new adoption and fostering legislation. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government has established a new high-level adoption and fostering policy group. In Northern Ireland, BAAF is now getting ready to launch in June the Adoption Regional Information Service – an equivalent of the Adoption Register for England and Wales. In England, we have seen a raft of consultations on new national minimum standards for adoption and fostering services, new care planning regulations and guidance on placement “sufficiency”, with a long-awaited consultation on a new framework for family and friends and the publication of the Conservative Party’s Adoption Review expected very soon.

At the same time, other new policy issues continue to bubble up. Nick Dunster, Director of BAAF Central England, gives a good example – parent and child placements – in his guest column below. Another new issue is the impact of social networking on adoption and fostering. We are hearing of increasing concerns from adopters, foster carers and social workers about websites such as Facebook being used to facilitate unplanned contact between adopted and fostered children and their birth parents and other relatives. BAAF is responding to this new development by publishing guidance for adopters, foster carers and social workers on contact and social networking (look out for our first guides on this topic in June). We are also holding a major national conference on contact and social networking in London on 24 June – see elsewhere in *BAAF News* for more information about booking your place at this vital event.

Are we stretching foster care too far?

Nick Dunster

Foster care has undergone something of a quiet revolution in recent years. The *number* of children in foster care has been steadily rising over the last decade. The *tasks* expected of foster carers are also changing. Contributing towards the assessment of children who have experienced significant trauma is demanding enough, but carers are increasingly expected to take on the assessment of birth parents as well.

In BAAF Central England, for example, we have recently run two workshops related to parent and child placements. Over recent months, most local authorities and independent fostering providers have seen a significant increase in placements of this sort. Foster carers are being asked to contribute towards the assessment of an adult parent’s ability to care for their child, and then to intervene if the quality of that parenting falls below an acceptable level.

This is a complex and demanding role for any foster carer. Domestic abuse, substance misuse and neglect are all common themes lying behind many parent and child placements, and bring with them risks that require careful consideration and management. To be successful, this new type of fostering requires bespoke preparation, planning and support. The underpinning regulatory framework related to the placement of an adult parent within a fostering setting also requires urgent clarification.

At our recent workshops, we heard many examples of excellent fostering practice in relation to parent and child placements. We also heard many fostering agencies grappling in isolation with complex practice issues and dilemmas. Over the years, foster care has proved itself to be extremely robust and versatile. But we should be careful not to stretch it beyond breaking point. We urgently need to clarify, regulate and support this important area of fostering. Failure to do so will leave many children, their birth parents and foster carers vulnerable.



Somebody Else’s Child campaign boosts private fostering awareness

Esther Freeman

Monday 22 February saw the launch of BAAF’s second national private fostering campaign, Somebody Else’s Child.

Awareness-raising posters ran across England and Wales on over 1,000 bus stops. The campaign was also featured widely in the media, including in *The Independent on Sunday*, *Teaching Today*, *Children & Young People Now* and *Community Care*, as well as in nearly a hundred regional newspapers. Our media spokespeople gave interviews to regional media which were syndicated to nearly 50 stations across England and Wales.

As part of the campaign, we held a reception at the House of Lords which was hosted by Lord Listowel and attended by

senior staff in local authorities, faith leaders, Ofsted, representatives from the police, health and education professionals and senior members of NGOs. Speakers included Baroness Morgan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families; David Holmes, BAAF Chief Executive; and Keeley Cooper, a privately fostered young person.

Our campaign website has also been updated with new information for teachers and nurses, podcasts and films. Visit www.somebodyelseschild.org.uk for more details.

Lord Listowel and David Holmes at the House of Lords reception



BAAF Cymru to operate Independent Review of Determinations

Jenny McMillan

BAAF Cymru is delighted to have been awarded the contract to operate the Independent Review of Determinations (IRD) on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government. The contract will run from 1 April 2010. Until now, the Welsh Assembly Government has been convening panels to review adoption recommendations.

With the new contract, there will be the opportunity to ask for the review of both adoption and fostering recommendations. There are also some changes to the review panel composition, and all adoption and fostering agencies have received a circular from the Welsh Assembly Government outlining these.

BAAF Cymru looks forward to working with agencies regarding the development of this contract. We will shortly be appointing a two-day per week manager of the service, and a two-day per week administrator. For those of

you whose name is on the list of people who are eligible for and prepared to be members of panels, we will be in touch shortly to see if you would like to remain on the list. We would welcome hearing from anyone who would like to be considered as a panel member. There will be training to support people in this role in the near future. We are also currently working on the development of a bilingual website which will contain information about the IRD, and literature which can be made available to applicants will be produced in the near future.

The IRD website will be www.irdcymru.org.uk, the IRD email ird@irdcymru.org.uk and the phone number 0845 873 1305 – these will be operational shortly. In the meantime, if you have any queries about the IRD please don’t hesitate to contact the BAAF Cymru Cardiff office at cardiff@baaf.org.uk, or on 029 2076 1155.

Send your health forms to your medical adviser

Florence Merredew

BAAF has become increasingly concerned that some agencies are breaching confidentiality through inadequate completion of health assessment forms. As a result, these completed forms are often posted to BAAF Head Office, also causing delay. It is best practice for the agency commissioning either a child or adult health assessment to complete all of Part A for each BAAF health form, including the section which states ‘Form to be returned to agency medical/health adviser’, to indicate where the completed form should be returned. The information in Part A is crucial as it establishes context and provides important information about the child’s social situation and legal status, which assists the physician in carrying out a high quality health assessment. In most instances, the agency medical adviser will send a commissioning letter to the physician undertaking the health assessment, reinforcing that **the form should be returned to the agency medical adviser.**

Question Time for politicians on children in care

Jane Elston



The Question Time panel: Baroness Delyth Morgan, David Akinsanya, Nicky Campbell, Annette Brooke MP and Tim Loughton MP

An innovative “Question Time” style event gave an audience of young people in care, care leavers, practitioners and experts the opportunity to question senior Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians about their individual party’s policies for looked after children and adoption. With a general election approaching, this was a unique occasion where a frank discussion could take place between those who are affected most by these issues and those in a

position to do something positive about them.

The panel included the lead spokespeople for children in care and adoption from the three main political parties: Baroness Delyth Morgan (The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families), Tim Loughton (Conservative MP) and Annette Brooke (Liberal Democrat MP), and was chaired by journalist and BAAF

Patron Nicky Campbell. They were joined by journalist and presenter David Akinsanya, whose personal experiences of being both in care and a respite foster carer gave a unique perspective.

A lively and thought-provoking debate ensued, with the panel facing questions ranging from the age young people are made to leave the care system and post-adoption support, to the roles both voluntary and private organisations should have within the care system.

The event, held at the atmospheric Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, was co-hosted by TACT, BAAF, The Fostering Network, The Who Cares? Trust and Voice and was followed by a reception which enabled attendees to continue discussing the issues raised in a more informal atmosphere.

Get into gear for BAAF's 30th year

Daisy Powling

Do you want to set yourself a goal for 2010? Do you want to give yourself a fitness challenge and take home some amazing memories from your next trip abroad? Lower your carbon footprint and support BAAF by signing up to Cycle for Children – cycling from London to Paris. Enjoy the trip of a lifetime by joining us on this very special bike ride, taking place from 17 to 20 September 2010.

Admire stunning countryside and make longlasting friendships as you cycle through southern England and Normandy. Help us celebrate our anniversary with a long weekend to remember...

For your free information pack, contact the Fundraising team on 020 7421 2630, or at fundraising@baaf.org.uk.

BAAF's website needs you!

Dawn Steele

We are currently in the process of improving the design and layout of our website at www.baaf.org.uk. This will affect the design of the pages and some changes in how users will navigate through the site.

Our goal is to make it easier for you to find what you are looking for on our site. To place the user at the centre of the website, we are looking for willing volunteers to help test out some new designs. You don't need to be a web expert to participate and the testing won't take up more than an hour of your time. The testing will be conducted online or at our head office in London. If you are able to help, please register your interest today by calling Dawn Steele on 020 7421 2634 or emailing dawn.steele@baaf.org.uk.

Pushing the Boundaries launch



The *Pushing the Boundaries* training pack with DVD was launched at Channel 4 on 11 February – pictured are Shaila Shah, BAAF Publications, and Jennifer Cousins, author of the training pack. Each adoption and fostering agency in the UK has been sent a free copy, thanks to the generosity of Channel 4 and BAAF, which sponsored the pack. Additional copies can be ordered from BAAF Publications at www.baaf.org.uk, or on 020 7421 2604.

Tracing birth relatives

Alexandra Conroy-Harris

The General Register Office (GRO) has a duty to collect copies of all registrations of births in England and Wales, and these are an invaluable source of information for people who have been adopted, grown up in care or otherwise lost track of their birth families. In recent years, the GRO has introduced measures to restrict the misuse of birth certificates in "identity theft" and has asked applicants for birth certificates in the last 50 years to supply further information, such as the full date of birth and parents' names, before supplying the birth certificate. This has created problems for adopted people and others who usually want the birth certificate in order to discover this information.

Following discussions with BAAF, the GRO has introduced a button on its certificate-ordering website which allows an adopted person who knows their birth name to order their own birth certificate online without entering further details. However, this does not help adopted people or others trying to find siblings or other relatives. Without full details, certificates cannot be ordered online from the GRO, but they can be ordered by phone on 0845 603 7788. BAAF has had reports that some of the GRO's operators have declined requests for certificates without further information. Such operators (or their supervisors) should be reminded that the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 gives a statutory right to any birth certificate on payment of the appropriate fee (£9.25 from April 2010); we have found that such a reminder is usually effective in producing the required certificate. Before a certificate can be requested in this way, the GRO reference number must be found in the GRO Index (held at various archive sites and available online through several commercial providers – most public libraries subscribe to www.ancestry.co.uk, which allows free access to the Index).

Intermediary agencies are able to help with tracing birth relatives and can be the safest way of making contact if an adopted person decides to trace birth family. Details of agencies and more information are available on www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk.

30th anniversary supporters' event



Rupert Hambro, BAAF President, speaking at the event

Tessa Murray, Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, BAAF Patron, and Anthony Douglas, Chair of BAAF's Trustee Board, at our January supporters' event



Nimmy March, BAAF Patron, and David Holmes, BAAF Chief Executive

30th anniversary members' event 29 September 2010

2010 is BAAF's anniversary year. We started the celebrations by inviting some of our donors and supporters to a fundraising reception at Goldsmith's Hall in January. Guests heard from Rupert Hambro, David Holmes and Nimmy March about how so many people have made a difference to our work over the past three decades.

We are proud of our achievements and are particularly grateful to our members, who are such an integral part of our work, for all your support. We are planning a special evening reception for our members to be held on 29 September to mark our 30th year. We hope to welcome a wide range of our members to that event. Details on timing and venue will be announced soon – keep reading *BAAF News* for further information!

BAAF conference: Can we face up to Facebook concerns?

Kay Mirza

Openness and well managed contact arrangements can be core to a child's development, helping them make sense of their past and their identity, maintain significant relationships and face the future with confidence.

While the growth in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook has generally been an exciting and positive development in helping people of all ages keep in touch, the unthinking and poorly informed use of social networking can produce a range of unforeseen consequences. In adoptive and foster care placements, social networking can challenge and threaten the delicate balancing act of preserving the benefits of contact and minimising the risks.

This conference will explore the impact of social networking on adopted children and young people and those in care. It will provide an opportunity to discuss and debate the dilemmas and issues for practice, while exploring the latest developments in relation to social networking. BAAF's forthcoming publications for social workers and adopters on these issues will also be launched at the conference.

The conference will be held on 24 June in London; for more details contact the Conferences team on 020 7421 2637, email conferences@baaf.org.uk or visit www.baaf.org.uk

New from BAAF

Dale's Tale

Helen Jayne

£7.95 plus £2 postage + packing

Ten Top Tips for Supporting Adopters

Jeanne Kaniuk with Eileen Fursland

£7.95 plus £2 postage + packing

Pathways to Permanence for Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnicity Children

Julie Selwyn et al

£12.95 plus £4 postage + packing

Advice Notes: The Preparation and Assessment Process (Adoption) and The Preparation and Assessment Process (Fostering)

Jenifer Lord

£1.00 per copy

Attractive discounts available for bulk purchases

£1.00 per copy

Attractive discounts available for bulk purchases

£1.00 per copy

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To order any of the above books visit www.baaf.org.uk or contact BAAF Publications on 020 7421 2604.

Disability: breaking down the barriers to child placement

Florence Merredew

Be sure to reserve Monday 11 October 2010 to attend the Health Group annual conference. In response to conference evaluations and the results of our recent online survey, this popular conference will once again be a single day event held in central London.

Disability is the main category of need for six per cent of children entering care, as well as a significant factor contributing to care entry for many more. This fascinating conference will examine the impact of different kinds of disabilities on the lives of looked after and adopted children and their carers, explore support needs in placement, and examine ways to improve placement choice for these vulnerable children.

Join with colleagues from health, social care and education to explore issues including safeguarding; physical, social and communication difficulties; and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, as well as the impact of disability on parenting capacity, and new ways to recruit more carers for children with a wide range of disabilities.

If you work with children, you're in good company

If you work or volunteer with children or young people, you are in good company. For each individual child you support, just imagine how many other professionals and volunteers work with them. From teachers to sports coaches, youth group leaders to healthcare professionals, more than six million people make up the children and young people's workforce.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) believes that better integration within the workforce is vital if we are to give children and young people the best possible start in life. CWDC has introduced tools and guidance to help you identify each child or young person's needs and assess which practitioners and volunteers might provide support. There is also guidance on working with other parties to ensure those needs are met.

For more information, visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/alltogetherbetter.

Staff News

Goodbye to

Jenny Coombes, Administrative Assistant, BAAF Scotland

Ann McLaren, Co-ordinator, North East Scotland Consortium

Jenny McMillan, Director, BAAF Cymru

Andrea Warman, Foster Care Development Consultant, Head Office

A warm welcome to

Deborah Adams, Receptionist, Head Office

Helen Flynn, Administrator (maternity cover), Independent Review Mechanism

Emma Grant, Adoption Register Administrator

Monique Rutty, Co-ordinator, North East Scotland Consortium

Baiba Skujevska, Administrative Assistant, Independent Review Mechanism

Helen Watkinson, Adoption Register Social Worker