



Statement of Purpose



0121 779 0891

www.adoption-focus.org.uk

Adoption Focus is the registered adoption agency of Family Society, a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England & Wales Company No: 6869556 Registered Charity No: 1129095 OFSTED Reg No: SC394569



ADOPTION FOCUS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Adoption Focus is a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) registered with Ofsted (SC394569) to provide adoption placements for children assessed to need an adoptive family.

Adoption Focus is operated by Family Society, a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales under company number 06869556 which is also a charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales under charity number 1129095.

The Trustees of Family Society are responsible for the operation of Adoption Focus.

Family Society also provides the Independent Fostering Agency – Triangle Project - which is registered with Ofsted (2731149) to provide Early Permanence (fostering for adoption; and concurrency) placements with carers who are dual-approved as foster carers (by Triangle Project) and adopters (by Adoption Focus).

Adoption Focus approved adopters can also provide Fostering for Adoption Placements through their temporary approval by a specific child's Local Authority, as foster carers under Regulation 25a of the Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

This Statement of Purpose covers the following areas:

- Values and aims of the Agency.
- Services provided by the Agency.
- Information about the Registered Provider.
- Name, qualifications and experience of the Manager of the service.
- Information about the organisation and staffing of the service.
- Systems for monitoring and evaluating the service.
- Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.
- Intended outcomes.
- Information about the Complaints Procedure.
- Address and telephone number of OFSTED.

Mission Statement

Adoption Focus aims to provide permanent and positive family life experience for children in need of adoptive homes, through the careful preparation and continuing support of adoptive parents.

Vision

Every child who needs a new family is provided with a permanent secure home with loving adopters who will parent them with care and understanding. Through this the child will achieve their potential, knowing that their unique identity which links them

to their history and connected people, is valued, enabled, and celebrated; that they are loved; and they are supported to establish life-long connections to sustain them in adult life.

Values and aims of Adoption Focus

Adoption Focus is Family Society's Registered Voluntary Adoption Agency which provides adoption placements to children in need.

Children referred by Local Authority Children's Services are placed with Adoption Focus approved adopters under adoption regulations; or through Early Permanence when children are initially placed under fostering regulations.

Adoption Focus provides a comprehensive range of services to support all stages of the adoption process to children and adults – recruitment; assessment; approval; matching; adoptive placement support; and post adoption support services.

Adoption Focus:

- believes that the needs of the child are at the forefront of what we do and therefore concern for the child's healthy development, welfare and safety is the focus of the adoption process.
- firmly believes that the family provides the best environment in which children should be cared for and enables them to achieve a permanent sense of belonging. For those children who cannot safely remain in their family of birth, a permanent alternative family should be secured through adoption.
- aims to provide a high-quality adoption service to people regardless of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, marital status, social background, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.
- strives to respect and value this diversity in providing services judged to be in the best interests of the children referred.
- believes that we should seek to empower everyone to whom we provide a service to reach their full potential and will work in collaboration with them in an open and honest manner to achieve this. Adoption Focus has respect for their rights, views and values.
- will ensure that all staff are well informed of the aims and objectives of the Agency and will be provided with suitable opportunity for development of skills and responsibilities in keeping with those aims and objectives.

Aims of the Adoption Service

Adoption Focus:

- places the child at the centre of the adoption service.
- aims to secure a permanent adoptive family home which effectively meets the child's assessed needs, and which will provide them with life-long supportive connections and stability.
- aims to provide adopters with the knowledge, skills and continuing accessible and responsive support to enable them to parent their children with care and understanding.
- aims to ensure that all parties involved in an adoption placement feel properly supported, involved, and heard during the process.

Objectives of Adoption Focus

To:

- work in partnership with adopters, children, young people, and Local Authorities, and Regional Adoption Agencies to provide high quality family-based care.
- recruit, assess, train and support people who want to provide adoption placements, enabling them (subject to the assessment outcome) to become approved as adopters.
- support approved adopters to provide placements for children in need.
- also provide Early Permanence placements either through Fostering for Adoption – when adopters are either temporarily approved as foster carers for a specific child, or dual-approved through Family Society’s Registered Fostering Agency – Triangle Project, in which case they can also provide Concurrency placements.
- offer a high-quality professional service to all our service users.
- work with Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies to provide a range of adoption and Early Permanence placements that match the identified needs of children referred to the service, with the aim of securing permanent family life.

Description of the Adoption Service

Adoption Focus, part of FAMILY SOCIETY Registered Charity, is a Voluntary Adoption Agency operating in England.

The adoption service is provided by Adoption Managers; qualified and registered Social Workers; Therapeutic Support Workers; Counsellors; Trainers; and a Linking & Matching Officer. They are supported by a team of Administrators; a Business Development Team; and a Finance Team.

The Adoption Focus staff group is located throughout Central England. Our use of a combination of in-person and virtual training and support means that our service provision extends across the whole Midlands region and into Oxfordshire in the South.

Adoption Focus operates within current adoption legislation and regulations.

Adoption Focus as a registered Adoption Agency, provides a comprehensive range of services, both pre- and post-adoption, to children and families.

Adopters

Adoption Focus is engaged in the recruitment, preparation and assessment of adopters for presentation to the Agency’s Permanence Panel, which considers their suitability to be approved as adopters. Additional training and support is also provided to enable the provision of Early Permanence placements, and the Permanence Panel will consider dual-approval applications. Once approved, Adoption Focus works with adopters to achieve placements of children in need and provides post approval and post placement support.

Adoption Focus will respond to all people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents. They will be welcomed and responded to promptly and given clear information about the Agency's policy and procedures relating to recruitment, assessment and approval. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Birth Parents and Persons with Parental Responsibility

Adoption Focus will offer support and ongoing assistance for birth parents when considering adoption; and in support of agreed contact arrangements.

Children and Young People

Adoption Focus is committed to working in partnership with Local Authorities, Regional Adoption Agencies and other agencies in identifying appropriate adoptive families for children in need and developing our service provision in line with their requirements.

Adoption Focus assists Local Authorities to meet their statutory obligations in respect of children who cannot remain in the care of their birth families by providing and supporting adoption placements.

Involvement in the Regional Adoption Leadership Group; the Midlands Together Collaboration – comprising the Midlands based RAAs and VAAs; a partnership with Birmingham Children's Trust; and a continuing awareness of national trends relating to adoption placement need, informs recruitment activity and assessment priorities.

Children are matched with approved adopters who can offer them a stable and permanent home, and this includes Early Permanence placements. Full consideration is given to the ability of the adopters to meet the child's cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic needs to positively develop their sense of identity and belonging and enhance their self-esteem. Help and support will be provided to achieve a successful and lasting placement.

The views of children and young people are actively sought to inform service development.

Post Adoption Support

Adoption Focus recognises the life-long nature of adoption and is registered to provide Adoption Support Services via our Family Support Team to adopted children and their families, as well as to adopted adults. Adoption Focus is committed to supporting adoptive families, both in the early stages of placement, and also in response to post-adoption referrals from families who have adopted through Adoption Focus and Faith in Families (former VAA) in the past.

The Family Support Team provides individual direct work with children and their families including:

- Life-story work with children and young people.
- Therapeutic Life Story Work.
- Theraplay informed training and techniques.
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).
- A range of post-approval and post-placement training and workshops including SafeBase; and the Adoption Focus modular programme: Nurture the Journey.
- Support groups and social events.

Adoption Focus also provides Family Support Services to adoptive families referred by Local Authorities.

Self-referring adoptive families with no prior involvement with Adoption Focus, will be signposted to the relevant agency, unless it is evident that a child or young person is at risk of harm - e.g., a child contacts the service seeking assistance - in which case steps will be taken to secure the child's safety. In all cases, care will be taken to ensure that an appropriate response is given.

Services for Adopted Adults

Eligibility for service

Adoption Focus will offer support, advice and guidance to those adopted adults who were placed by another agency, with adopters provided by Adoption Focus. This is to enable adoptees to identify the placing agency, and thereby access their records, and to assist if difficulties arise.

For those whose adoptions had no prior involvement with Adoption Focus or Faith in Families, we will offer support and signpost enquirers to a more appropriate agency.

Report Preparation and Presentation

Adoption Focus will prepare reports for Adoption Panel and the Courts on all aspects of adoption work. Local Authority and Regional Adoption Agency Panels and Court Hearings will be attended as required.

Additional Services offered to Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies

Adoption Focus supports the work of Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies through the provision of Adoption and Early Permanence Placements and Family Support Services. We are pro-active in working collaboratively and forming partnerships to influence better outcomes for children by working with RAAs.

Adoption Focus is connected to regional and national groups, including PermanenceWestMids; the regional Adoption Leadership Group; the Midlands Family Placement Group; the Midlands Together Collaboration; and the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Through this involvement, the Agency has a thorough understanding of need and priorities, which enables strategic planning of service development and delivery. Membership of these groups also supports staff training and development.

Adoption Focus is committed to providing high quality specialist adoption work which includes:

- The provision of adoption placements, particularly for older children, children in sibling groups; and children from ethnic minorities.
- Life-story work with children and young people.
- Therapeutic Life Story Work.
- Theraplay informed training and techniques.
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).
- Early Permanence Placements – both Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency (through Triangle Project).
- Specialist training in respect of Non-Violent Resistance.
- SafeBase.
- Assessment of Need.
- Independent assessments (foster-carers wishing to adopt; adoptive applicants; relative assessments; specific assessments).
- Independent chairing of meetings including Panels and Disruption meetings.
- Independent service for birth parents.
- Permanency training for foster-carers.
- Consultancy services (including new regulations; practice issues).
- Support to schools in respect of the educational needs of adopted children.

Name and Address of the Registered Provider

FAMILY SOCIETY - Adoption Focus
TS3 Pinewood Business Park
Coleshill Road
Birmingham
B37 7HG

Tel: 0121 779 0891

E-mail: info@adoption-focus.org.uk

Our adoption service is provided by staff located across Central England and extending into Oxfordshire in the South.

Name and Address of the Responsible Individual

Benjamin James
Trustee (FAMILY SOCIETY - Adoption Focus & Triangle Project)
TS3 Pinewood Business Park
Coleshill Road
Birmingham
B37 7HG

Tel: 0207 467 8721

E-mail: benjaminjames@adoption-focus.org.uk

Name and Address of the Manager

Anna Sharkey
Chief Executive (FAMILY SOCIETY - Adoption Focus & Triangle Project)
TS3 Pinewood Business Park
Coleshill Road
Birmingham
B37 7HG

Tel: 0121 779 0891

E-mail: annasharkey@adoption-focus.org.uk

Registration

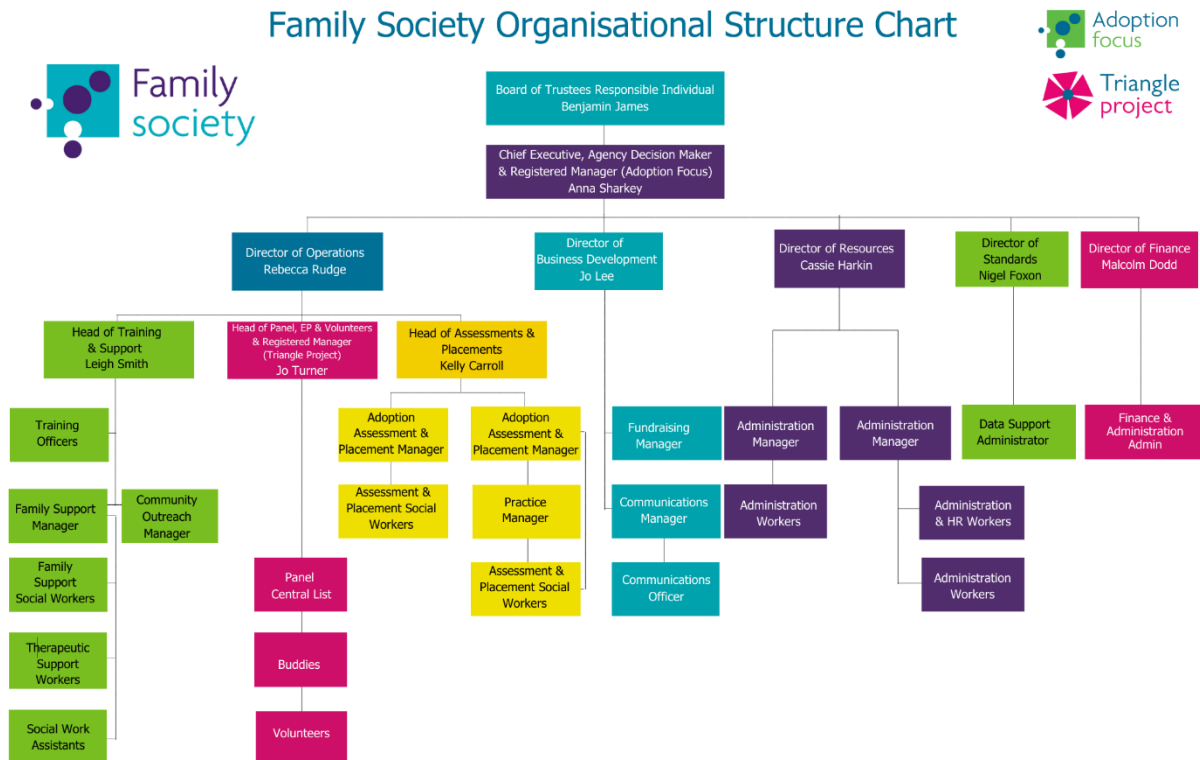
Adoption Focus is a Registered Adoption Agency for domestic adoption and is also registered to provide post-adoption services. Ofsted number SC394569.

Adoption Focus is operated by the Registered Charity (1129095) and Registered (in England) Company (06869556) Family Society.

Status and Constitution of Family Society

Family Society is a company limited by guarantee which is also registered as a charity in England and Wales. Family Society is governed by its Articles of Association which are available from Companies House or on request.

Family Society Organisational Structure Chart



Qualifications and Experience of the Adoption Focus Manager

Anna Sharkey

C.Q.S.W.

B.A. (Hons) Applied Social Science

ILM Level 3 Certificate in First Line Management

NVQ 4 Management

Anna Sharkey is the Chief Executive Officer of Family Society and Registered Manager of Adoption Focus.

Anna Sharkey grew up in a family which fostered and adopted. She qualified as a social worker in 1984 and started her social work career in a Local Authority, working as a generic social worker in Coventry. She specialised in adoption and family placement work in 1988 (Adoption Specialist in Warwickshire SSD from 1988 - 1991; Family Placement Senior Caseworker in Coventry SSD from 1991 - 1998) and has in the past (from 1993 – 2000) combined her social work practice with lecturing and tutoring social work students. Anna Sharkey moved to Father Hudson's Society in 1998, as an Adoption Social Worker and was appointed Adoption Team Leader in 2001 before moving into the Family Placement Manager role in 2007 and gaining her NVQ 4 in Management in November of the same year. Anna Sharkey became the CEO of Adoption Focus on the 1st June 2009 and continued to combine this role with that of Registered Manager for the Father Hudson's Society Fostering Service and Adoption Support Agency. The CEO role became a full-time appointment in April 2013.

Number, Relevant Qualifications and Experience of the Staff Working for the Purposes of the Agency.

Family Society employs the staff required to provide both the Adoption and Adoption Support Services through Adoption Focus, and the Early Permanence -Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency - service through Triangle Project.

Family Society employs 22 qualified social workers (including the Service Managers, and the Registered Manager) to provide the adoption and the fostering services. Their qualifications include the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, the Diploma in Social Work; BA Hons in Social Work; BSC in Psychology, BSC Hons in Counselling Psychology and Therapeutic Studies; MA Social Work.

In addition, the service employs 11 staff members with expertise in:

- training;
- therapeutic parenting support;
- counselling;
- linking and matching.

The staff group has a range of additional relevant qualifications including:

- counselling and adult learning;
- Theraplay levels 1 and 2;
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Levels 1 and 2;
- CBT Diploma;
- Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work;
- British Sign Language;
- Attachment Style Interview accreditation;
- Management (NVQ 5; MA);
- student supervision accreditation;
- Law Degree.

The staff group has many combined years' experience of working with children and families, and in fostering and adoption services within Local Authority Social Services Departments, Independent Fostering Providers, and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

This work experience encompasses:

- child-protection and safeguarding;
- assessment;
- court work;
- preventative work;
- inter-agency working;
- education;
- residential childcare.

Family Society can also commission assessment and placement work with qualified and experienced adoption and fostering specialist Social Workers, as the demand for service provision requires.

All Social Workers are qualified and registered with Social Work England. All Social Workers undertaking assessments of people seeking dual approval, either have a minimum of three post-qualifying years of social work practice, which includes adoption work; or they are supervised by a Manager who has considerable experience of adoption and fostering.

Social Workers in the team, have previous relevant experience both as unqualified and qualified Social Workers, before joining Family Society (as qualified Social Workers).

Other staff members providing support and training to adopters and dual-approved carers have experience of working with children and young people, and a range of qualifications particularly in respect of therapeutically informed interventions including therapy; DDP; Therapeutic Life Story Work.

All those engaged in service provision are formally supervised by Managers with experience of and expertise in adoption and fostering work.

Their work is supported by a team of 9 Administrators (including 4 Panel Administrators) and a Senior Manager, as well as a Business Development Team which supports recruitment, fundraising and communication with our growing Early Permanence and Adopter community, and a finance team which manages invoices, payments, and accounts.

All staff members are provided with significant opportunities for further career development (through formal supervision – including clinical supervision for those providing therapeutic interventions; training; and continuing practice progression) which enhances service provision for adopters, dual-approved carers and their children.

Number and Experience of the Board of Trustees

The Family Society Board of Trustees comprises six members, who must be committed to children and the provision of family-based care (in Fostering for Adoption, Concurrency and Adoption placements) and have professional, ministerial and/or practical experience which will contribute to the effective management and operation of the Agency.

The Board of Trustees elects one member as Chair, and another as Vice Chair. It aims to meet at least six times/year. The Trustees keep in contact with the CEO and each other between meetings with email updates, informal telephone conversations and ensure they are responsive and available should additional contact be required.

The Board includes members with:

- professional Social Work experience (at senior and managerial levels, in both Local Authority and the charity sectors);
- safeguarding children expertise;
- financial and accounting experience and expertise;
- fundraising experience and qualifications;
- charity law expertise;
- marketing and business management expertise.

The Trustees engage with consultants where required and ensure that the management process of the Agency engages the expertise of the senior management team and the Trustees. The Trustees provide training for each other and the management team on their areas of expertise.

The Trustees operate within the guidance from the Charity Commission and the Charity Governance Code with appropriate amendments in respect of the regulated activities as appropriate.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Service

A variety of systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the services provided:

- Family Society has a Director of Collaborations Performance and Standards who as part of the Senior Management Team has responsibility for ensuring consistency of service delivery through the monitoring of staff supervision, appraisal process and observations of practice; audit of case records; resolution of complaints and monitoring of complaints register; and service response to recommendations made by service users and Panel Members.
- All Social Work qualified staff are registered with Social Work England.
- All staff have regular formal supervision, formal observation of their practice and an annual performance review.
- All staff, Panel Members, Trustees and Volunteers have Disclosure & Barring Service clearance; references are obtained and verified.
- All staff have access to relevant training opportunities to update and develop practice.
- Joint working opportunities exist throughout the adoption and Early Permanence work which enables peer and management monitoring of performance.
- All prospective adopters and dual-approved carers are encouraged to make a written contribution to their assessment report.
- All service users are invited to comment on the services provided, both informally and formally.
- Input and suggestions from adopters, dual-approved carers and their children regarding service development is encouraged, through surveys, feedback forms and questionnaires after the following:
 - attendance at Information Events;
 - training;
 - panel attendance;
 - social events – including parties; stay and play;

- adopter and adoptee support groups;
- adoption support service.
- The adopter and dual-approved carers committee are supported to meet regularly to feedback on service provision and development.
- All staff are fully involved in the evaluation and ongoing development of the service.
- All staff are involved in the annual evaluation of service user feedback which enables the staff group to make adjustments to service provision as indicated.
- Children and young people are encouraged to contribute to the training of prospective adopters and dual-approved carers.
- Service users are advised of the Society's Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure.
- All prospective adopters and dual-approved carers are informed of the role of the Independent Review Mechanism.
- All approved prospective adoptive parents and dual-approved carers who do not have placements will have an annual review to identify their progress and plan additional training and support as indicated.
- The Panel Central List includes people who have relevant experience and knowledge of adoption, fostering and other related matters, including education; health; disability; personal and professional experience of adoption and fostering.
- Members of the Panel Central List have an induction into their role and have continuing access to training which supports their role.
- Members of the Panel Central List are formally appraised on an annual basis.
- Panels are convened to include members representative of those attending for consideration of their application for approval.
- Panel Members complete feedback forms in respect of the quality of reports submitted to the Panel. These are collated by the Panel Advisor and Independent Panel Chair, who prepares a six-monthly report for presentation to the Agency. Any matters arising are discussed with the Operational Managers and Director of Operations for the purpose of informing supervision and training decisions in respect of assessing Social Workers. The Board of Trustees is provided with copies of the Independent Panel Chair's reports.
- The Panel receives an annual report about its activity and performance.
- The Panel receives a report of placements made.
- The Trustees receive a report six times/year regarding the work of Triangle Project.
- The Trustees receive an annual report about the Adoption Focus and Triangle Project service activities and performance.
- The service is benchmarked through its involvement in several professional, practice-based groups including the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies; Coram BAAF; the Midlands Family Placement Group (MFPG); the Medical Advisors' regional group; the regional ASSA group; the regional Panel Advisor group; and the regional Adoption Leadership Group.
- Practice has been audited against the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and Guidance; Adoption Guidance – First Revision: February 2011; Statutory Adoption Guidance – chapter 3: July 2013; The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005; Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports

Regulations 2005; Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005; The Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption & Fostering) Regulations 2009; The Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011; The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013; Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2011; Care Planning Placement & Case Review Regulations 2010.

- All policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary.
- The service is inspected by OFSTED.

The Procedures for Recruiting, Preparing, Assessing, Approving and Supporting Prospective Adopters

Adoption Focus aims to provide stable secure adoptive families for children who are unable, for whatever reason, to remain with their family of origin and for whom adoption is judged to provide the best alternative to secure their long-term well-being.

Working in partnership with referring Local Authorities, and Regional Adoption Agencies, Adoption Focus aims to prepare adoptive families to meet the long-term needs of the children referred.

Adoption Focus is committed to ensuring the provision of an informative, sympathetic and helpful service to all who enquire about adoption, whether or not they meet the criteria for acceptance for assessment.

Recruitment

Family Society's Recruitment Strategy aims to inform and encourage potential adopters to consider both Early Permanence and Adoption as potential routes into starting or expanding their family life. The strategy is reviewed on an annual basis. A budget for recruitment activity is agreed by Trustees.

Adoption Focus predominantly recruits adoptive families through its website. This aims to provide information and guidance for people considering adoption, and to invite contact with the Agency (they can also find information about Triangle Project which provides Early Permanence – Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency placements). The website is linked to others including CVAA; New Family Social; First4Adoption; Coram BAAF; GOV.UK and it is significantly augmented through social media.

Adoption Focus holds weekly virtual Information Events; monthly in-person Information Events; and one-to-one Information Meetings for those considering adopting. These meetings provide opportunities for prospective adopters to learn more about the process and the children for whom placements are needed. Additional events are held to provide more detailed information about Early Permanence options. Adoption Focus also participates in national and regional recruitment campaigns.

Adoption Focus' recruitment activity reflects the placement needs of children referred, particularly those who wait the longest for new families. We need to encourage prospective adopters to consider parenting children who are:

- Pre-school aged children
- Older children (aged 5 years +)
- Sibling groups
- Mixed-parentage and black and Asian children
- Children with disabilities

A member of the team, acting as the duty worker, is available (during office hours) to take enquiries from prospective adoptive parents and to provide information about the training and assessment process and about the children the Agency places.

Written information is sent to enquirers, usually electronically, but, if requested, as hard copies.

An opportunity to speak to approved adopters is available.

Further opportunities for information exchange between the prospective adopter and the Agency are provided to enable the prospective adopter to make an informed decision about whether they should proceed with a Register of Interest.

Prospective adoptive parents who wish to be approved as adopters will be given equal consideration regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, disability, marital status or sexual orientation, provided that they can meet the needs of children who need adoption.

Preparation and Assessment

If the prospective adopter(s) want to proceed following attendance at an Information Event and/or discussion with a Duty Worker, receipt of the Adoption Focus Information Pack and they meet the recruitment criteria (as stated in the Information Pack), they will be invited to submit a Register of Interest, and to commence Stage One of the process.

On receipt of the Register of Interest, Adoption Focus will undertake an Initial Visit with prospective adopters, so that a preliminary assessment of suitability may be undertaken. If, following the Initial Visit, the Agency decides that the application cannot proceed further, the prospective adopter(s) will be informed of the reasons in writing.

If the application proceeds, the consents given in the Register of Interest enable Adoption Focus to undertake a range of standard checks (including DBS) and to contact referees.

Referees are given information about adoption and Early Permanence and are required to provide a written reference and are interviewed. They may be contacted

again during Stage Two. Verification that the written report of the referee interview accurately reflects the information given, is sought from the referee, who signs the report to confirm this.

Prospective adopter(s) will arrange and have their medicals, and they will attend preliminary training.

Adoption Focus may seek additional legal and/or medical advice from its Legal and Medical Advisors concerning matters of relevance to the application, arising from information disclosed and/or references received.

All prospective adopters will participate in pre-approval preparation groups led by an adoption social worker/trainer and including input from adoptive parents and/or Early Permanence carers. In addition to the general adoption preparation training, they may also elect to attend training in respect of parenting brother and sisters placed together, and managing the support of existing children in the household – i.e. second time adopters, or families with birth children. In cases where an interpreter or a signer (for hearing impaired prospective adopters) is required an interpreter or signer will be commissioned.

The training aims to provide prospective adoptive parents with opportunities to consider the placement needs of children and to consider their ability to meet these needs. For those considering dual-approval, additional training relating to the fostering task is provided.

Adoption Focus aims to run ten training groups/year.

The specific training needs of prospective adoptive parents applying to adopt for a second (or more) time will be considered at the time of their enquiry.

Stage One should be completed in eight weeks, at the end of which Adoption Focus will advise the prospective adopters whether they may proceed to Stage Two.

The prospective adopters must advise Adoption Focus of their intention to proceed to Stage Two within six months of successfully completing Stage One.

Stage Two commences when Adoption Focus accepts the notification from the prospective adopter(s) that they wish to proceed. A Social Worker is allocated to undertake the assessment. Adoption Focus will only use Social Workers (whether directly employed or self-employed and acting on behalf of the Agency) to undertake adopters' assessments who:

- Are registered with Social Work England or are on a Social Work England-approved training course AND
- Have at least three years' post-qualifying experience in childcare Social Work, including direct experience of adoption work OR
- Are supervised by a Social Worker who is employed by the Agency and who has the necessary experience as detailed above.

Where an independent Social Worker completes the assessment, Adoption Focus will ensure that s/he has the necessary experience and is supervised by a Social Worker employed by the Agency who has the necessary experience.

Interpreters and signers will be used in cases which require it, and those providing this service will sign a confidentiality agreement.

An assessment will include a Health and Safety risk assessment and pet-owning applicants will complete a pet questionnaire and declaration.

The assessing Social Worker will prepare a draft Adopters Assessment Report - which will make a recommendation concerning approval (or not) as suitable to adopt. The report will identify the strengths of the application and also highlight any issues of concern. The draft report is submitted to the Adoption Manager. Arrangements will be made for another Team Manager or Senior Social Worker to visit the prospective adopter(s) in cases where issues of concern require further discussion or where clarification is needed. A visit by another Social Worker provides the opportunity for securing a second opinion on the prospective adopter and their assessment before the report to Panel is finalised.

In cases where the assessing Social Worker does not satisfy the regulatory requirements (either because they are an independent Social Worker, or they do not have three years post qualifying experience), the supervising Manager will undertake a joint visit to the applicant(s) with the assessing Social Worker, part way through the assessment. They will also undertake a second opinion visit at the end of the assessment and submit a report to the Panel with the completed Adopters Assessment Report.

Prospective adopters are encouraged to participate in the completion of the Adopters Assessment Report, agree the content of the report and sign it prior to its presentation to Panel. They may also (if they wish) write their own comments for submission to Panel.

Family Society operates a Permanence Panel which considers and makes recommendations in respect of both adoption only applications and dual-approval applications.

The completed assessment and (if applicable) the second opinion report, will be presented to the Family Society Permanence Panel and subsequently to the Agency Decision Maker within 4 months of the prospective adopters commencing Stage Two of the assessment and approval process, unless the particular needs of the assessment demand more time. In such circumstances the Panel is informed of the reasons.

The Medical Advisor advises the Panel on the outcome of the medical report. The Legal Advisor advises the Panel on the significance of any legal issues arising. Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to exercise their right to attend the Permanence Panel.

Attendance is enabled via Zoom or Teams – the Agency ensures that applicants can achieve this with ease and will make alternative arrangements if this is not possible.

Assessing Social Workers may, in some circumstances and in consultation with their Line Manager and the Director of Operations, present a short report to the Permanence Panel.

The Permanence Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Family Society Permanence Panel Decision Makers are the CEO of Family Society, who has considerable experience of adoption; and if she is unavailable, the Agency has two additional Agency Decision Makers: one is the Director of Operations who also has considerable experience of adoption; the other is a named Trustee who has previously undertaken this role in a LA and retains their Social Work registration. The Director of Operations will not act as the Agency Decision Maker in any case where they have had prior direct involvement.

The Decision Maker is responsible for agreeing (or not) the Panel recommendation.

Where prospective adopters are not recommended for approval (on presentation of a full assessment or a short report); or approved adopters are assessed as not being suitable to remain as approved adopters; and, in either case, the Decision Maker makes a qualifying determination, they will be given an opportunity to appeal. Adopters and prospective adopters will have the choice of making a representation to Adoption Focus or applying to the Independent Review Mechanism to have an Independent Panel review their assessment.

In these cases, the Decision Maker writes to the prospective adopters to advise of the reasons for the qualifying determination, and the process by which they may either appeal to the agency or seek a review through the Independent Review Mechanism.

Support

Prior to Panel presentation prospective adopters and dual-approved carers can join Adopterverse through a secure membership portal on the Adoption Focus web-site. This gives them access to our Adoption Focus on-line community of adoptive and dual-approved families, and resources aimed at supporting them. They are also linked with a Buddy to support them through the process.

On approval, adoptive families are supported by their Social Worker and the Agency's Linking and Matching Officer, to achieve a successful placement. To do this, the Linking and Matching Officer works with the adopters to produce a 'profile' of themselves and their placement availability for distribution (with their consent) to Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies seeking placements for children. Similarly, Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies send Adoption Focus profiles of children seeking adoptive families. These are reviewed by the Linking and Matching Officer who checks for potential matches with approved adopters.

In addition, the Agency subscribes to Link Maker, through which adopters and Adoption Focus identifies children who may match their 'profile'; and adoptive families are encouraged and supported to attend national and local activity and exchange days. These provide opportunities for adopters to meet children's Social Workers so that they can find out more about the children's placement needs; and (at activity days) to meet children.

As members of the Midlands Together Collaboration and as the VAA partner with the Birmingham Children's Trust's RAA, the Agency works with RAA colleagues in support of their sufficiency requirements and with the aim of securing local placements for children in the Midlands region. The provision of adopters in Oxfordshire and other counties neighbouring the Midlands region enables the placement of children who need to move away from the area, with well supported adopters.

In all cases where a potential link is identified, full consultation with the referring Local Authority or Regional Adoption Agency will include an exchange of written information (Children's Permanence Reports and Adopters Assessment Reports, medical reports, education reports etc); full discussion of placement needs and whether or not the adopters have the potential to meet them. The adoptive parents will be included in this consultation at the earliest stage and will have access to all written information relating to the child(ren). Opportunities to meet with foster-carers, teachers and medical advisors (etc) will be made available as part of the decision-making process.

Adoption Focus will support adopters throughout the linking process, ensuring that they have access to all available information to enable them to make an informed decision about adopting a particular child or children. The adoptive family's Social Worker will attend placement planning meetings and adoption placement support discussions and will contribute to the linking report, and adoption support plan for presentation to the child's Adoption Panel. The family's Social Worker and their Manager will attend the inter-agency planning meeting. In cases where a Senior Social Worker is responsible for the adoptive family, they may attend the inter-agency and planning meeting as sole representative of the Agency.

In all cases the Registered Manager or Director if Operations counter-signs the agreement. The family's Social Worker will attend adoption reviews and work with the child's Social Worker to identify any additional support needs.

Regular visits and telephone contact by the family's Social Worker will support them through the placement of the child and through to the court hearing.

In addition to the above, prospective adopters are offered further training – including SafeBase; support group meetings; opportunities to network with other adopters; and regular newsletters.

A post-adoption support service is operated by Adoption Focus, and a representative from the team attends local ASSA (Adoption Services and Support Advisor) meetings.

Intended outcomes

Adoption Focus aims to provide safe, nurturing, and permanent homes to children in need of adoptive placements.

It aims to achieve this through the processes, support and different placement options detailed above; through the retention and supervision of its professional, experienced and competent staff group; and through the careful management of its resources.

In providing the adoption service, Adoption Focus intends to enable children to feel safe, secure, loved, valued and to achieve a sense of belonging.

Through placing children with adoptive families, Adoption Focus aims to enable them to achieve to their full potential (educationally; socially; developing interests and skills) and to enjoy opportunities to participate fully in all that positive family life can offer.

Adoption Focus intends that by achieving adoption for children, they will have much improved opportunities to build meaningful and lasting relationships which will prepare them for adult life.

Adoption Focus aims to ensure that adoptive families feel supported and assisted in their adoptive parenting, thus securing the permanency intended.

Adoption Focus aims to ensure that the service is run efficiently, effectively and ethically, in order that it delivers a good quality service which meets the needs of children and other service users.

A belief in the value of family life informs the service delivery at every stage of the adoption process.

A Summary of the Complaints Procedure

Service users are provided with a Comments, Compliments and Complaints Leaflet which provides guidance about informing the Agency about any comments or compliments or about making a complaint.

In brief, the complaints procedure has two stages – an informal and a formal stage.

It is anticipated that minor complaints will be dealt with at the informal stage by the Social Worker and/or Line Manager. The Registered Manager and the Director of Collaborations Performance and Standards is notified of all complaints.

It is hoped that the matter can be resolved quickly. If this is not possible through the informal stage, the matter can be moved to the formal stages of the complaints procedure. This will be investigated by a Trustee who has been appointed to oversee the Complaints Process. A full response will be provided as detailed in the Agency's procedure.

Contacting Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate Children's Social Care Services which includes Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Ofsted advises anyone who has a concern about a Children's Social Care Service, to contact the service first because it is usually the quickest option to address concerns directly and resolve the complaint either informally or formally (as noted above).

Ofsted should be contacted if the complainant:

- Is not satisfied with the response following the complaints procedure OR
- Feels unable to contact the provider about the particular concern.

Ofsted may be contacted via:

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Anna Sharkey
CEO & Registered Manager
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