

# WHAT WE DID WITH YOU AND FOR YOU IN

# 2017

## REPORT FOR MEMBERS

# 2017–18

Welcome to this report of what we did for you, with you and on your behalf in 2017.

Our agenda has been dominated by the formation of regional adoption agencies, the adequacy of the model for adoption support, the development of a strategy for the delivery of foster care services, the use of special guardianship, and the new data protection regulation.

Our role and expertise in adoption are well recognised and well established but fostering is also core to what we do, as we demonstrated in a recent report. This has been further evidenced by the submissions we made to the Fostering Stocktake and the acknowledgement of our contribution by Sir Martin Narey. We also contributed to other national initiatives, including the Education Select Committee's Inquiry on Fostering, and continue to be members of the Adoption Leadership Board and the Kinship Care Alliance, amongst others.

We have continued to deliver our core services, representing you and advocating on your behalf, disseminating practice guidance, and influencing policy and practice where possible. Our experts have been quoted in the media nearly every week in 2017 and have been interviewed on high profile programmes such as BBC's *Newsnight*. We have delivered briefings and practice guides to our members, answered a record number of queries, kept you up to date with key developments in the field, and have run over 200 learning events. Thousands of you have engaged with us and valued our contribution, as the testimonials in the following pages demonstrate. However, all has not been smooth sailing. Austerity measures have taken their toll – book sales have fallen for the first time in more than a decade and some of our events have had to be cancelled or postponed due to low take-up. Still, 95 per cent of local authorities and Trusts (in Northern Ireland) have retained their membership and we have welcomed new members too.

The following pages will tell you more about the areas we focused on and give you a glimpse of our future plans. Thank you for your much valued membership and support.

# 'We benefit from the learning and developmental opportunities'

*CoramBAAF draws together agencies and individuals to form a collaborative community with a shared aim – working to secure the best outcomes for children in care. We are the largest such network in the UK, engaging with thousands of social work practitioners, health and legal professionals, adopters and foster carers, and others.*

## A strong network

We are pleased that members continued to show confidence in us, with 95 per cent of local authorities in England and Wales and all Trusts in Northern Ireland renewing their membership. Although we saw some losses, owing to financial pressures and closures, we also welcomed 16 agencies into membership, including five independent fostering providers, one voluntary adoption agency and ten new Associate members.

Individual membership remains strong. Members come from a variety of backgrounds and include independent social work professionals, legal and health professionals, trainers and academics, and adopters and foster carers.

Our collaborations with Wales and Scotland continued: whereas in Scotland we partnered with Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland, with membership being held by AFA Scotland, in Wales membership was held by ourselves with a service delivered in collaboration with the Association for Fostering & Adoption (AFA) Cymru. Northern Ireland Trusts renewed their membership and we were pleased to be able to offer an enhanced service, which included workshops and the introduction of a Practice Forum.

## Remaining relevant

Membership offers a sense of belonging to a network with shared aims, a context for collaboration. In these challenging times, we are even more acutely aware of the need to:

- remain relevant and responsive to your needs
- work with you in improving standards of practice delivery
- support you in meeting new regulatory requirements
- provide value for money

This commitment informs the services and benefits we deliver. Many of you engage with us frequently – attending events, including the Members' Free Conference, purchasing publications, consulting our Advice Line, and attending our groups and forums. We want to increase your engagement with us and to hear from you how best we can do this.

Our commitment to improving your online experience was realised in mid-2017 when we relaunched our website with enhanced content in the exclusive online members' area. This includes a number of free practice guides, a selection of Advice Notes and pamphlets for panels, Briefing Notes and Practice Notes; samples of our social and health assessment forms; and more besides. Booking for events was streamlined, as was the purchase of publications, and we recruited a part-time digital content editor to ensure that the website is regularly updated and remains a rich resource.

Members also continued to receive copies of our renowned peer-reviewed quarterly journal, *Adoption & Fostering*; a selection of topical and informative guides written by our expert consultants and others; and new Briefing and Practice Notes.

Your use of our professional advice service soared and attendance at our committee meetings and special interest groups increased. Attendance at conferences and paid-for workshops decreased but our free conference for members attracted over 70 delegates. Several local practice forums provided a space for practitioners and managers to explore and debate current issues and were attended by CoramBAAF consultants, with a new practice forum set up in Belfast for Northern Ireland members.

## AGENCY MEMBERSHIP TAKE-UP

144  
155

Local authorities in England  
and Crown Dependencies

22  
22

Local authorities  
in Wales

5  
5

Health and Social Care Trusts  
in  
Northern Ireland

31  
32

Local authorities  
in Scotland



(above) Double the number of members attended the Members' Reception compared to last year. Andrew Christie of the Adoption Leadership Board presented a paper titled *Adoption – securing permanence for children in care: The Adoption Leadership Board's developing agenda*. Dr John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development, provided a talk on the Fostering Stocktake titled *What do we need from the Fostering Stocktake: Opportunity and risk*. Chairs of our Advisory Committees also addressed the meeting on areas under discussion in their respective groups.

*We value our membership as it provides our social workers with information and training that allows them to support our families and young people with the most up to date research and writings on the task of fostering. Our social workers provide CoramBAAF books and information to all our families.*

**Brian Dignam**, Director, Five Rivers Fostering, Ireland

*CoramBAAF has extensive professional expertise and holds a wealth of experience: my colleagues and I benefit from the chance to participate in both learning and developmental opportunities through its active networks.*

**Shirley Elliott**, Head of Adoption, Parents and Children Together, England

*I welcome being kept informed of developments and research in the field of fostering and adoption, and find it reassuring to know that there is specialist advice there if I need it. I particularly look forward to receiving the monthly Digest and welcome having a choice in receiving publications of particular interest as part of my membership.*

**Lois Highton**, Health and Social Care Consultant

# Shaping policy and practice

*CoramBAAF's Policy, Research and Development Team drives our programme of projects, consultation responses, Government lobbying, national advisory groups and practice forums. This multi-disciplinary staff group includes experts in social work, law, health and research. We provide advice and guidance on complex policy and practice issues and ensure that Government and decision-makers across the sector hear members' views and take them into account in future sector development.*

## Responding to the national agenda

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 received Royal Assent in April. We were delighted that our work to campaign against certain parts of the Bill that we feel would have been damaging to the sector was successful, when these parts were struck out. Our focus over the year has been on the rest of the Act and exploring the implications for policy and practice – particularly the amendments to section 31 of the Children Act 1989 when making a plan for the child, and the clause that defined prospective adopters as “relatives” once a child had been placed with them.

Our representation on the Adoption Leadership Board enabled us to inform, influence and represent the views of our members – particularly on discussions about regional adoption agencies (RAAs), the fall in the numbers of children with adoption as their plan, and the evolving concern over the shortfall in the number of adopters being approved.

The report from the Fostering Stocktake and the Inquiry by the Education Select Committee have raised a number of significant issues about the future of fostering, many of which we have been campaigning on for some time. Much of what is suggested – including the idea of having one social worker for both the child and foster carer, and significantly enhancing foster carers' status – is largely in line with the Family Life Fostering model that we have been developing, and which we shared with the authors of the Stocktake report. We made submissions to the Stocktake and will continue to be fully engaged with the Department for Education and the sector in improving fostering services.

Special guardianship continued to be a focus, and our Special Interest Group discussed a number of concerning areas. These included the ongoing disquiet about short timescales for undertaking assessments,

the lessons to be learned from Serious Case Reviews, and the vexed question of the number of placements that may be disrupting. The very low number of special guardians receiving help from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was also a worry. We have continued to present on special guardianship at the Judicial College, along with Jim Wade and Andy Elvin.

Our representation on the Adoption Support Expert Advisory Group enabled us to discuss emerging issues from the further development of the ASF, including the fair access limit, the high number of service providers coming from the independent sector, and the lack of evidence-based interventions being commissioned. The availability of the resources to provide services is welcomed and highly significant, but there need to be robust answers to some of these challenging questions.

This year, we welcomed the emergence of mental health as a key area of interest and concern for children on the edge of care, in care or placed in permanent family arrangements. The involvement of NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) is important but the applicability to the sector is a question that causes us concern and we have made representations about the importance of addressing this. The SCIE-published review will make a difference but there is some way to go to translate this into a meaningful, evidence-informed and deliverable strategy and practice framework.

We have continued to be represented on a number of research advisory groups, including the English and Romanian Adoptees Study, a study on siblings, and an exploration of the use of supervision orders. We have also been part of the research team at Lancaster University that is exploring the scope for a Family Justice Observatory, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.



## Committees, special interest groups and forums

Our multi-disciplinary committees, special interest groups and practice forums provide opportunities for members to engage with each other and us, discuss and debate new developments and practice dilemmas, and contribute to shaping policy and practice. After creating new practice forums last year, we have continued to review our offer, refining the terms of reference of each group to sharpen their focus. We have provided a flavour of the work of the groups below.

### UK Social Work Practice Advisory Committee

**Chair: Carole Sykes, East Sussex County Council**

**Deputy Chair: Stephanie Bishop, Essex County Council**

The UKSWPAC continues to make a key contribution to our policy and practice engagement and development. The ongoing evolution of regional adoption agencies (RAAs) remained a focus, as did the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The committee also considered several national reviews, including: the House of Commons Education Select Committee report on fostering; *Fostering in England*, the report following the Fostering Stocktake; *The Role of the Social Worker in Adoption: Ethics and human rights*; and the Care Crisis Review, and will continue to advise CoramBAAF during consultation on these reviews. At a practice level, the committee consulted on various topics for Practice Notes, including on gender identity expression in fostering and adoption.

### Legal Group Advisory Committee

**Chair: Helen Benson, Solicitor, Leeds City Council**

The breadth of legal expertise on the committee enables us to present authoritative views on a wide range of legal issues related to family placement and social work practice.

The committee examined the potential consequences of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 for adoption and continued to work on proposals to improve the quality of the assessment process for special guardianship orders. It also explored a wide range of issues, including the variation in DBS check requirements between adopters and foster carers; the EU General Data Protection Regulation; Fostering for Adoption; and care orders for child refugees. The group supported CoramBAAF's work on a scoping study to inform the potential development of a National Family Justice Observatory. The committee's views will inform our response to the Care Crisis Review.

### Health Group Advisory Committee

**Chair: Dr Lynn Snow, Designated Doctor LAC, Leicestershire**

The HGAC continued to focus on maintaining standards of health provision for looked after and adopted children in the face of recent developments in adoption and fostering, the rise in numbers of children in care, and economic restraints.

The annual conference remained a key aspect of the committee's work, and the event in Birmingham, *Adverse childhood experiences and outcomes – considering*

### PRACTICE NOTES AND BRIEFING NOTES PUBLISHED IN 2017

- PN *Best Practice in Meetings between Prospective Adopters and Children prior to Matching*, Sally Beaumont and Elaine Dibben
- PN *Decisions about the Assessment of Couples and Other Partnerships in Foster Care*, Paul Adams
- PN *Local Authorities' Duty of Fairness Towards a Parent Seeking to Revoke a Placement Order*, Noel Arnold
- PN *The Health of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking and Other Separated Children*, Emma Filmore and Ann Lorek
- PN *The Impact of the Decision in the European Referendum*, Alexandra Conroy Harris
- PN *Restraint and Physical Intervention in Foster Care*, Paul Adams
- BN *A Return to the Bridge: Ten new views on the development of regional adoption agencies*, John Simmonds
- BN *Adoption Support: The evidence base for interventions – video-feedback intervention to promote positive parenting*, Paul Dugmore and Rachel James
- BN *Adoption Support: Integrating social work and therapeutic services – the AdCAMHS model*, Alison Roy with Caroline Thomas and John Simmonds
- BN *Containment for Adoption Support Social Workers*, Caroline Thomas and John Simmonds

*the neuroscience relevant to looked after and adopted children, was well received.*

The HGAC continued to work in partnership with other organisations, including the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the National Network of Designated Health Professionals (NNDHP), and highlighted the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' (RCSLT) recommendation on the communication needs of looked after children.

Publications in 2017 supported by the HGAC included *Undertaking a Health Assessment*, and the Practice Note, *The Health of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking and Other Separated Children*.

In addition to responding to consultations such as the Fostering Stocktake, the HGAC discussed the recommendations of the Expert Working Group co-ordinated by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) on the mental health of children who cannot be looked after by their birth families; the health contribution to RAAs; and standards of adoption medical reports. The management and safety of the health records of adopted children continue to be a major concern for members and the group's Chair is now working with NHS England on this.

## Research Group Advisory Committee

**Chair: Barry Luckock, Sussex University**

**Deputy Chair: David Berridge, Bristol University**

The RGAC includes many of the leading researchers in the UK who are studying adoption, fostering and children in care.

During the year, members discussed the national reviews of fostering and different aspects of social work practice (see UKSWPAC above). The committee also considered research on longitudinal data on children in the care system; the views of birth children of foster carers; the significance of placement options in relation to the impact of abuse and neglect on children; and work on the scoping study on the development of a National Family Justice Observatory (see LGAC above).

## Black and Minority Ethnic Perspectives Advisory Committee

**Chair: Steve O'Loughlin, Independent Practice Teacher**  
**Vice Chair: Aminah Sumpton, Children's Guardian**

The BMEPAC covers fostering and adoption and explores the specific issues arising for black and minority ethnic (BME) children, their families and carers, and related policy and practice developments.

The group considered early permanence; developments in foster care including the recommendations following the Fostering Stocktake; Muslim communities and adoption and fostering; and the national reviews considering ethics and human rights and the role of the social worker in adoption.

## Special Interest Groups

### Special Guardianship Special Interest Group

**Chair: Elaine Dibben, CoramBAAF**

Regular items at this group included briefings on relevant case law or serious case reviews involving children in special guardianship arrangements,



(above) Barry Luckock, Chair of the RGAC, and Steve O'Loughlin, Chair of the BMEPAC, addressing the Members' Reception about the work of their respective committees.

*I was interested in promoting positive outcomes for black and minority ethnic children and young people who are unable to live with their birth families, so I joined the Committee and find membership is an opportunity to learn about what's happening in the sector; share knowledge and expertise and influence policy at the highest levels due to CoramBAAF's connections with central Government. Membership of the group is diverse and by contributing time, passion and expertise members have made a real difference in ensuring that issues important and relevant to BME children have remained part of the discussions taking place in CoramBAAF, Government and their workplaces.*

**Satwinder Sandhu**, Chief Operating Officer, The Homefinding & Fostering Agency

## CORAMBAAF PRACTICE FORUMS

We facilitate a number of regional practice forums for members across England, co-ordinated by our consultants, including in the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, Newcastle and Eastern Counties, and one in Belfast, Northern Ireland. They provide a valued opportunity to share expertise, knowledge, good practice, and local issues, and enable members to contribute to local and national policy development. Forums bring together lead consultants, senior practitioners, team managers and service managers in fostering and permanency teams.

The forums have had in-depth discussions about the Fostering Inquiry and Fostering Stocktake, and the progress of adoption regionalisation in England. Topics also included local issues arising from austerity measures across children's services, the implications for practice following the passing of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and the need for new recruitment strategies for adopters and foster carers. In Northern Ireland, the group discussed research on child sexual exploitation, the Care Pathways study, and recruitment strategies to increase the numbers of foster carers.

**The Black Workers' Practice Forum** provides black practitioners with the opportunity to develop and focus on specific practice strategies

and initiatives for working with and promoting the placement needs of BME children. It also provides an opportunity for practitioners to access advice and support on other matters affecting their practice. Recently, the group explored practice relating to the placement needs of BME children, refugee and trafficked young people, child sexual exploitation and promoting anti-racist practice in social work. The group also considered management, mentoring and leadership.

**The Adoption Panel Chairs' Forum** welcomed the Chair of the Adoption Leadership Board to a meeting, had a wide-ranging discussion about the national picture, and fed back observations from a local level on adopter recruitment and children being placed. CoramBAAF's Legal Consultant attended a meeting to explore the impact of Brexit on adopter recruitment and placing children with families in the EU. The inaugural joint meeting for panel chairs and panel advisers was a great success and covered the respective responsibilities of the different roles, the quality assurance role of panels and various practice issues. The forum continues to monitor the development of RAAs and their impact on arrangements for panels.

updates on the incidence of special guardianship order disruptions, and discussions on the impact of regulations and guidance.

Presentations to the group explored overseas placements, the use of the Adoption Support Fund, and new research on the use of supervision orders and special guardianship orders and the implications for practice. The group is open to all regions and includes input from colleagues in the Midlands, South West and Wales, as well as continued interest from the DfE.

### Independent Fostering Providers (IFP) Special Interest Group

**Co-chairs: Felicity Lacey, Excel Fostering & Ken Mackness, Supported Fostering Services**

The group includes members across the independent fostering sector who have responsibility for the way that their agencies operate. The group provides the opportunity to influence, learn and innovate in order to strengthen the sector. Topics in 2017 included the Fostering Stocktake, the Fostering Inquiry and the single inspection framework. Group members also collaborate

outside the meetings and worked together to develop a format for Regulation 35 visits. Several leading researchers have also made presentations to the group.

### Private Fostering Special Interest Groups

**Chair: Savita De Sousa, CoramBAAF**

The groups in four regions – London, South West, Midlands and North – enable practitioners to share expertise on working with children in private fostering arrangements. This opportunity is particularly valued by members, as social workers focusing on this issue can be isolated. In 2017, members shared their knowledge and concerns about the lack of robust data on privately fostered children. The groups also shared strategies for responding to children who are undocumented unaccompanied migrants, "sofa-surfers", and/or at risk of harm. DfE representatives took a keen interest in the groups' work and we were able to extend our input on this issue to support local events, including Hertfordshire County Council's conference, *Invisible Children – whose responsibility?*



# 'A welcome addition to any social work library'

*Comprehensive and robust assessments are vital to improving practice delivery and making the best plan for the child. Members have always rated highly the good practice guidance that you receive from us, and with this in mind, we published a number of guides to help you make high quality assessments.*

## Making good assessments

Our assessment guides set out the legislative and policy contexts, and help assessors gather and analyse relevant information, comply with the regulatory framework, and make sound judgements. We added to our very popular series with some new, and one revised, titles:

- *Undertaking Checks and References in Fostering and Adoption Assessments*
- *Undertaking a Connected Person/Family and Friends Assessment*
- *Undertaking a Health Assessment*
- *Undertaking an Adoption Assessment* (revised edition)

## Other titles and new catalogues

A large percentage of looked after and adopted children are affected by Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, but this is often poorly understood. *Dealing with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder* provides authoritative information about the condition along with advice for social workers on taking FASD into account when working with, placing and supporting children.

It is five years since the Government introduced Fostering for Adoption (FfA) as another viable permanence option, and *The Role of Fostering for Adoption* outlines how FfA can reduce the number of moves a child may experience as well as enable significantly earlier attachments between children and their permanent carers.

We also published *Caring for a Child who has been Sexually Exploited*, which provides foster carers and social workers with information about child sexual exploitation, the risk factors, how to recognise signs of CSE and how best to support those who have been affected.

We produced new catalogues for fostering social workers and for foster carers as well as a revised edition of our popular *Read about Adoption*, for those embarking on the adoption journey. We continued making an impact internationally with the sale of translation rights to Germany (for a number of children's picture books), Sweden (for our fostering assessment materials), and Estonia (for three titles in our Parenting Matters series).



(above) Some of our children's picture books, displayed at a bookstall. Designed to be used therapeutically by the adult carer with their child, the picture books remain popular with practitioners and carers alike.



(above) At the launch of *New Beginnings and Other Writings on Being in Care*, a moving collection with a preface by actor Peter Capaldi, that brings together poetry and prose from the Coram Voices writing competition for young people with experience of being in care.

Undertaking Checks and References in Fostering and Adoption Assessments *makes a valuable contribution to helping those undertaking fostering and adoption assessments...It should make a welcome addition to any social work library, or just for those working in the field of adoption and fostering.*

**Eddie O'Hara**, Consultant Independent Social Worker, in *Seen and Heard*, 27:3

### TOP SELLERS

*We sold over 32,000 books in 2017. Top sellers were:*

- *Parenting a Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*
- *Carer-held Health Record*
- *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment in England*
- *Fostering Now*
- *The Primal Wound*

[www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop)

### ADOPTION & FOSTERING CoramBAAF's JOURNAL

- Four editions of the journal were published with 23 peer-reviewed articles, editorials, health notes and legal notes for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland; book reviews were reintroduced in December.
- Papers on a broad range of topics were published: young people's views on the impact of care experiences on their ability to form positive intimate relationships; the social implications of further education; adult adoptees' attitudes regarding the potential use of genetic information to fill the gap in their family health history; regionalisation in Wales; non-kinship foster care in Egypt; and more.
- Readership increased and the total circulation for 2017 rose slightly to 11,580; full-text downloads numbered 63,846, a 1.2% increase; and we have 4,055 followers on the SAGE Social Work & Social Policy platform. The top 10 countries accessing the journal (in order of usage) were: UK, USA, Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, China and South Africa.

# 'Informative, relevant and practice focused'

*2017 saw an enhanced programme of learning events, including the introduction of new workshops, devised in response to what you told us in the members' survey. However, take up was variable and, as in previous years, courses on fundamental topics proved to be the most popular. Many of you expressed a preference for customised training for your staff.*

## Training solutions

We continued our established relationships as training providers to a number of local authorities and developed new ones that we hope to build on, including with Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cumbria. Popular bespoke courses continue to be those dealing with making good assessments, life story work, and panels. Hertfordshire County Council commissioned us to deliver training on life story work and direct work with children, over four days for 40 people, and Bracknell Forest Borough Council requested a course on attachment, trauma and recovery for 45 people over three days. We also trained 70 staff from London Borough of Bromley on care planning, and we chaired five disruption meetings for different authorities.

We developed our workshop programme to include topics that members had requested through the Membership Survey, including child development, Fostering for Adoption, and undertaking a foster carer review, in a wider number of locations, including Newcastle, Portsmouth and Cambridge. Regrettably, there was low take up and some of these were cancelled. It is an increasingly competitive market and funds may be the deciding factor in the consideration of training options – feedback on our learning events attests to the sustained high quality of training delivered but does not overcome this difficulty. As in previous years, the popular courses included making good assessments, roles and responsibilities of different panel members, and using the Secure Base model.

CoramBAAF has a legacy of strong partnerships and practice development outside of the UK and with the EU in particular. This year we adapted our Making Good Fostering Assessments/Form F training course for visiting practitioners from Sweden to assist in the development of their fostering service. We have received similar approaches from Croatia and developed and

delivered a second three-day training package on panel development, life story work and planning for permanence for Gibraltar.

## A platform for debate

Our conference programme covered a wide range of subjects including transitions into adoption, special guardianship, health and neuroscience, aggression and violence in foster care, the role of Fostering for Adoption, and adoption support – learning from adoptive families' experiences. We held six conferences across England and one in Northern Ireland. Two conferences were postponed and rerun later. We received very positive feedback from delegates, confirming that our conferences are "informative, relevant and practice focused".

*The course (on Adopter Assessments and the PAR) enabled us to have a full and open discussion about our practice within the new RAA, which benefitted from having an external facilitator and especially someone as knowledgeable as Elaine Dibben. It really hit the spot well – thank you.*

**Heather Freeman**, Aspire Adoption Services

*Really pleasant trainer [Chris Atkins] with lots of real life examples and experiences both personal and professional. (Safeguarding in a Digital World)*

**Patsy Scolah**, Adoption Social Worker, Sheffield City Council



## IMPROVING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

In January 2017, and as a result of a generous donation, we ran a variation of the STOP programme, tailored specifically for foster carers.

STOP (A Supportive Programme for Parents of Teenagers) is a step-by-step course for parents with pre-teen or teenage children (10–16 years old) that aims to improve family communication by teaching foster carers how to listen to and decode what their pre-teen or teenager is really saying or needing. It also aims to help foster carers increase their knowledge of effective behaviour management skills as well as providing information on key parental concerns for this age group such as drugs, alcohol, sexual health and aggression in young people.

Thirteen foster carers attended the programme and 11 completed the full course. The programme was evaluated and appeared to have 'generated improvements in parental competence, capability and problem-solving skills to a group that already had relatively high levels in these areas. The strongest effect was seen in relation to parenting efficacy, particularly the statement that "Being a foster carer is manageable, and any problems are easily solved".'



(above) On completion of the STOP course, with Jacqui Lawrence, trainer (second from left).



(above) Over 70 delegates signed up for our free conference for members, *Aggression and Violence in Foster Care and Adoption*. The audience heard from a range of speakers including adoptive and foster families, family therapists, trainers, social workers and academics about managing the aggression and violence of troubled children. There were presentations on the extent of the problem and the causes; the impact of violence on foster carers, adopters and those who support them; physical intervention and restraint; and to what extent does nonviolent resistance offer a solution to these challenges.

*A very topical and relevant conference with a good range of speakers. I learnt a lot and have been highlighting the issues raised in the training and panel work I undertake.*

*(Aggression and Violence in Foster Care and Adoption conference)*

**Sarah Borthwick**, Independent Trainer and Panel Chair

*An excellent opportunity to reflect on practice issues from different perspectives, a great learning resource when implementing or enhancing Fostering for Adoption services in your industry. (The Role of Fostering for Adoption conference)*

**Ana Parr**, Group Manager, Adoption, London Borough of Bromley

# 'The service provided by the CoramBAAF advice line has been invaluable to me'

*In response to the steady increase of enquiries to our advice service, we appointed a dedicated adviser and created an integrated Advice and Information Team. Strengthening the service resulted in a further rise in enquiries and we responded to around 1,800 queries in total, a 50 per cent increase over the previous year.*

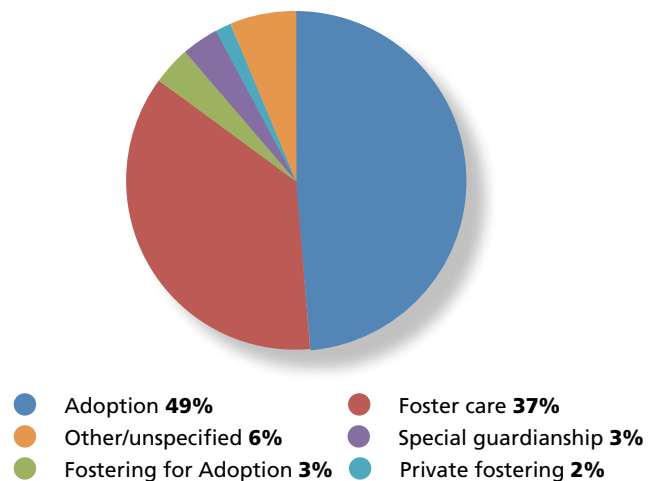
## Specialist advice

The newly-formed Advice and Information Team, headed by an adviser, means that we have been able to deal with your queries promptly. These have included the assessment of foster carers, adopters, connected persons and special guardians; health confidentiality and disclosure of information; panel procedures and decision-making; Fostering for Adoption; placing siblings together or apart; implementing the right checks and references; residence and domicile of adoption and fostering applicants; retention storage and access to care records; varying foster carers' terms of approval, and exemptions to the usual fostering limit. Many of these have been complex and some of them unusual.

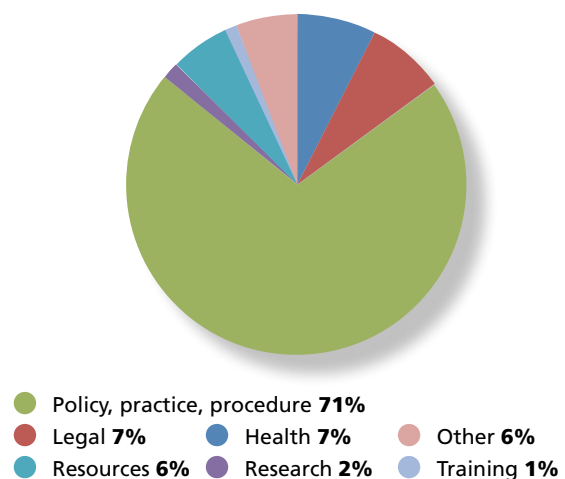
What makes our service unique is the access we have to our own in-house specialists and experts, enabling us to reply with confidence and professional expertise to the most complex enquiries (see box). These include our consultants from the Policy, Research and Development Team with expertise across fostering, adoption, care planning, special guardianship, BME issues, private fostering and more. Further, members have access to our legal and health consultants.

Our Information Officers draw on our library collection and online resources to provide responses to queries from members, Government departments and news media services. They gather statistical information, identify relevant literature and provide access to resources and guidance, and have helped members prepare for court with the relevant research and case precedents. The service is also an important internal resource, helping consultants, trainers and authors to ensure that they have the latest and most accurate information for the guides we publish and the training courses and workshops we offer.

ENQUIRY SERVICE AREA 2017–2018



TYPES OF ENQUIRIES TO OUR ADVICE SERVICE





## SOME CASES WE HAVE ADVISED ON

- A child with a plan for adoption had a sibling who had previously been adopted. The adoptive family had moved and lived outside the UK, in one of the British Islands. The local authority now had a placement order and wished to place the child with the family that had adopted their sibling, but were unclear how to go about this as a placement outside the UK.

*Our Legal Consultant was able to confirm that in adoption legislation this is permissible as a placement within the British Isles, despite being outside the UK, and offered advice about the specific legislation covering this and how the placement might be managed.*

- We were contacted about a child with complex needs who was faced with a change of residential home following a hospital stay, which resulted in the child needing a regular medical treatment/procedure. The residential home declined to do this without a qualified nurse, as they deemed the risk too high. Could the child continue to be placed with their long-term regular short break foster carers, who could be trained in the procedure, and how should the agencies involved manage the risk?

*Our Health Consultant advised on who had responsibility for agreeing whether medical procedures could be carried out by medical staff or carers (with appropriate training), and the management of risk within relevant policies and procedures.*

- We were asked by a local authority how to proceed with a special guardianship order application made by two people who did not live together – was this legally possible?

*We advised that this was unusual, but not unlawful. The restriction on the number of special guardians relates to the requirement for the child to have lived with the applicant before applying, but with leave of the court this is possible. We also advised on the challenges in carrying out the assessment, in the particular circumstances described.*

The *Adoption & Fostering Digest* is a highly valued service, free to members, offering a UK-wide monthly update on the latest research, policy and practice developments, Government initiatives, consultations and statistics, and parliamentary activity. In 2017 this service was opened out to all members, increasing the circulation from around 1,000 to around 5,500 each month.

*The service provided by the CoramBAAF Advice Line has been invaluable to me. I sometimes have queries about slightly unusual matters which I find difficult to find the answers to simply by reading legislation, statutory guidance and regulations directly. The workers on the Advice Line have been so helpful in looking into these queries for me. I feel confident in the advice that I am given... I would feel lost without this service.*

**Louise Bell**, Manager, One Adoption, North and Humber

*I have used the Advice Line on several occasions over the last year when I have needed legal and policy guidance. The replies I have received have been prompt, thorough and clear and have helped inform our adoption and fostering practice. It's a really useful service and a real benefit to CoramBAAF members.*

**Liz Pickering**, Agency Adviser (Adoption and Fostering), Gloucestershire Council



### Advice and Information Line

Open Monday–Friday, 9am to 1pm

Telephone: 0300 222 5775

Email: [advice@corambaaf.org.uk](mailto:advice@corambaaf.org.uk)

# 'A means of sharing good practice'

*We collaborate with AFA Cymru (Association for Fostering and Adoption) to offer a membership service in Wales. Whilst the membership benefits detailed elsewhere in this report are available to our members in Wales, the report below focuses on what AFA Cymru has provided to members to address national issues and concerns.*

- We delivered 128 commissioned training days by the end of March 2018, plus 27 workshop days.
- We hosted three conferences.
- We responded to 177 enquiries up to the end of February 2018 (31 from members of the public, and 146 from professionals).

## Consultancy

We are often involved in high-level consultancy for Government departments, in which we utilise our expertise and the cumulative experience of our members to influence future developments in the sector. The following are some of the projects we have undertaken.

### **New Practice Standards for IROs**

Having won the tender to write practice standards for independent reviewing officers in Wales, we worked with stakeholders nationwide to develop a framework, also involving young people, professionals and birth parents. This work was fed back to the Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Ministerial Advisory Group.

### **The National Adoption Service Life Journey Work project**

The Wales National Adoption Service (NAS) has developed a Life Journey Work Framework, with the aim of improving this work with children being adopted. As part of this, we developed a good practice guide for life journey work. We were also commissioned to provide three days of consultancy/training to each region and to VAAs, which took place in the autumn.

### **Improving outcomes for looked after children in Wales**

Additional funding for social care in Wales is providing new opportunities to improve outcomes for looked after children. AFA Cymru remains actively involved, developing an action plan to take forward the recommendations from our Year 2 report on kinship care, and working in partnership with others to develop national training standards for foster carers. We held workshops during the autumn to explore improving practice when children move from foster carers to adopters.

## Conferences

In February, we delivered a successful national event to consult on the work undertaken for the National Fostering Framework (NFF) on kinship care. Around 70 practitioners gathered in Llandrindod Wells for a day of focused thinking about the critical practice issues preoccupying kinship practitioners.

Our second strand of work with the NFF involves corporate parenting. We held a series of regional events in conjunction with Voices from Care, and a national event, *Corporate Parenting, Co-Production and Kitemarks*, in March in Wrexham. John Drew (Prison Reform Trust) discussed Lord Laming's review of looked after children in the criminal justice system. Ways of evaluating services were presented by the Family Justice Young People's Board and Flintshire County Council to stimulate thinking about how we can more effectively use the voices of young people in service evaluations.

We delivered our medical conference, *Nature, Nurture and Destiny* (23 March, Cardiff), which focused on managing various long-term health conditions.

Our conference, *Allegations in Foster Care: Assessing the risks* (May, Cardiff), explored current practice and the prevalence of safeguarding issues for children in

care. It also considered the impact of disruption on children and young people, as well as their foster carers.

## Representing your views

AFA Cymru ensures that members' voices are heard at the highest level of decision-making, through involvement with Welsh Government reviews and active membership of a range of influential groups. This year, we represented members' interests at the following high-level advisory groups:

- Ministerial Advisory Group Improving Outcomes for Children
- Welsh Government Technical Groups for SGOs
- Fostering and Adoption Regulation Changes
- National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Adoption Support Sub-group
- National Fostering Framework Strategic Steering Group and Grant Monitoring Group
- Strategic Voluntary Adoption Agencies (SVAP) Group

## Networking opportunities

Our group meetings were well attended and offered opportunities to share and shape best practice, consult with members, and enable valuable networking. Groups include:

- Medical group
- Legal group
- Special guardianship and kinship care group
- Panel chairs group (North Wales)
- Independent reviewing officers group
- Experts group

*Membership is useful as it is a means of sharing good practice and having the opportunity to seek guidance and advice. The publications we receive are informative and used in developing/improving practice and service delivery.*

**Val Jones**, Regional Adoption Manager, Western Bay Adoption Service

## Northern Ireland

***2017 saw the extension of our offer to members in Northern Ireland to include opportunities for practice development. Responses to a survey of Northern Ireland members were invaluable in giving us useful pointers to what you wanted.***

We launched a CoramBAAF Practice Forum in Belfast to provide a network in which to discuss practice development, similar to forums established in England. Two meetings were held, and, although not as well attended as we had hoped, delegates discussed recent research, disruption, foster carer recruitment strategies, and the Care Pathways study. We also embarked on a workshop programme, selecting topics that members told us about in the survey. Again, unfortunately not all of the workshops ran but *Using the Secure Base Model* was well received. Our associate, Catherine Mullin, also ran a commissioned workshop for Barnardo's fostering service.

The CoramBAAF conference, *Supporting Children in Adoption and Long-term Placements*, attracted over 60 delegates, who heard presentations from academics, therapists and others, both from Northern Ireland as well as elsewhere in the UK.

*This year's CoramBAAF Northern Ireland conference was a great opportunity to share information on innovative practice in the North and South of Ireland and gain insight from colleagues across the water in relation to the Adoption Support Fund and new research on the sibling relationships of children placed permanently away from home. Practitioners commented on how relevant and varied the contributions from speakers were, and how much they valued learning techniques for working with children who had experienced trauma, separation and loss.*

**Sarah Johnston**, ARIS Manager, Directorate of Social Care and Children, Health and Social Care Board

# An independent voice

*Throughout the year, we have continued to raise the profile of CoramBAAF as the independent voice in the field of family placement. We have aimed to speak out, without influence or bias, to correct misrepresentations where they occur, represent the interests of our members and looked after children, and speak for the sector.*

## In person, in print and online

Working in partnership with the Coram media team, we have spoken out on behalf of our members and contributed to debates on topics including the importance of children's mental health; contact after adoption; special guardianship assessments and legislation; the Fostering Stocktake; the launch of regional adoption agencies; the use of Fostering for Adoption; the challenges of finding the best placement for sibling groups; adoption by same-sex couples; and the professionalisation of foster care.

We featured in a wide range of print titles, including *The Guardian*, *Children & Young People Now*, *Nursery World*, *The Lancet*, *Prima* and *Church Times*. And we were pleased to be represented on sites ranging from *Community Care* to *Family Law Week* to *The Times* and the *Huffington Post*. Our online profile was also significantly boosted by our engagement through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (see box).

## Fostering in the news

During 2017, several news stories focusing on fostering dominated the headlines. Our media activity aimed to position CoramBAAF as an authoritative voice, providing facts and balanced argument amidst misinformation and some scaremongering.

- Following a controversial article in *The Times* about a cross-cultural fostering case in London involving Muslim foster carers, we were asked to provide expert comment on the legislation, practice and decision-making process in foster care. Our Adoption Consultant, Elaine Dibben, took part in three broadcast interviews on Radio 4, Radio 2 and BBC's *Newsnight* (see photo) and provided comments for two national newspapers.
- A suspected terrorist attack on a London tube train prompted news reports that a young man accused of carrying it out had a background in foster care. We were contacted and asked to provide comment on

the support and training given to foster carers when unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are placed with them. As a result, we featured in five pieces of media coverage, with our Director of Policy, Research and Development, John Simmonds, taking part in a live interview on Sky News and commenting in *The Sunday Telegraph* and several sector publications.



### Social media

- Over 900 tweets and more than 12,900 Twitter followers
- Over 6,500 Facebook followers



### Print media

- 24 articles in eight different titles
- 950,000 readers reached



### Web media

- Coverage achieved on more than 15 different sites
- 11 million readers reached



### Broadcast media

- Interviewed on eight different national television and radio programmes including *Newsnight*, *Sky News*, BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* and BBC Radio 2's *Jeremy Vine Show*.



# Engaging with you online

*In July 2017, we were pleased to launch the new CoramBAAF website, with enhanced content, a fresh, clean design, improved search and navigation facilities, exclusive resources for members and much more. The site contains valuable information and advice, all the latest news and updates, and access to the full range of CoramBAAF products and services, including membership, workshops and conferences (now available to book online) and publications.*

## Content tailor-made for members

For CoramBAAF members, the exclusive members' area of the site contains a wealth of invaluable resources, including our *Adoption & Fostering* journal, *Adoption & Fostering Digest*, Advice Notes, Practice Notes and Briefing Notes, free downloads of a growing number of CoramBAAF publications, guidance for panel members, the latest statistics, and more. A range of key services are also available via the members' area, including the Advice Line, the Library and Information Service and the jobs listing service.



## Online offers

The new site enables us to run a range of online promotions and special offers, helping you to make your budgets go further and get more for your money! We have had three successful sales in our online bookshop, have offered "buy one place get 50% off a second place" deals on training events, and offered early bird discounts for workshop and conference bookings. We will be launching more deals and special offers throughout 2018, so keep checking [www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk) for details.

## Increase in traffic

Since its launch the site has received a growing number of visitors month on month. More people than ever before have signed up online to receive our newsletters and information bulletins, with an average of 50 people per month choosing to keep in touch with our latest news, products and services in this way. Data analysis also reveals that visitors spend longer on the site and visit more pages, which suggests that the re-focused content of the new site is better meeting the needs of our users and members.

## FREE ONLINE RESOURCES\* – EXCLUSIVE FOR MEMBERS

- 9 Briefing Notes
- 26 books, guides and research studies
- 34 Practice Notes
- 11 Advice Notes
- 12 issues of the *Adoption and Fostering Digest*
- The latest *Adoption & Fostering* journal editorial as well as health and legal notes

[\*Up to January 2018]



# A glimpse of what to expect in 2018

*Several issues will dominate the agenda in 2018. Below, we give you a flavour of some of the work we will do with you and on your behalf. Also listed are new benefits for members, new projects, and other areas we will focus on. Membership of CoramBAAF will give you the opportunity to be involved in and to benefit from these.*

## The future of fostering

The publication of *Foster Care in England*, the **Fostering Stocktake report**, and the Inquiry by the Education Select Committee have raised a number of significant issues about the future of fostering. Above all, the focus must be even more firmly on the child or young person and the role of the foster carer in establishing a secure, safe and meaningful relationship with them. CoramBAAF will continue to be fully engaged with the Department for Education and the sector in improving the focus of fostering services in the way that they are resourced, supported and valued for the critical part they play in the lives of children and young people in care.

Discussions are taking place on the future of the **Adoption Leadership Board** and specifically the scope of the Board in relation to other permanency options. This is to be welcomed. There will also be a restructuring of the Board as regional adoption agencies (RAAs) become more established. We expect to play a significant part in the ongoing work of the Board.

The provision of **support to adoptive, special guardianship and other families** continues to be a matter of huge significance, covering the assessment of need, the specification of helpful interventions, and the evidence base for both of these. The current focus on mental health is to be welcomed and is indeed critical, but there is a wider range of other issues that must be addressed such as contact, accessing information and the lifelong concerns, which are a part of the overall picture for a wide range of people whose lives are affected. We will continue to prioritise our contribution to these issues as they develop, through research, policy and practice.

The number of **children with adoption as their long-term plan** has fallen significantly, although recent data suggest this is levelling off. At the same time, the recruitment, preparation and approval of prospective

adopters has fallen to a level where there is again a serious mismatch. This is a deeply troubling issue given the potential lifelong impact on children who need to be placed and adopted. We will focus on the work that needs to be urgently undertaken to resolve this issue in the context of the strategic and operational plans of RAAs.

## The contribution of neuroscience

A special edition of our *Adoption & Fostering* journal **on the contribution of neuroscience** to family placement policy and practice is planned for the end of 2018, guest edited by Dr John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development at CoramBAAF, and Matt Woolgar, Consultant Clinical Psychiatrist at London's Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience.

Leading experts will identify, debate, discuss and evaluate the contribution that neuroscience is making to our understanding of child, adolescent and adult development, especially following maltreatment and other adverse experiences, and its messages about the potential for recovery through appropriate types of intervention, including placement in substitute care.

## Guides and handbooks

We will publish **good practice guides** on a number of topics, including the mental health of looked after children, placing siblings together or apart, dealing with child to parent violence, and the role of the supervising social worker.

**Handbooks** for adopters and foster carers will include titles on education and a revised edition of the popular *The Adopter's Handbook*. We will also launch a new series of **discussion papers**, with in-depth reflections on contemporary issues, kicking off with a title on

*Enabling, Supporting and Creating a Child's Identity in Family Placement.*

## Free events and a varied training programme

Corporate members will be able to attend some **free conferences** to be held in England. Delegates will have the opportunity to explore and debate the future of fostering, the role of Fostering for Adoption, identity and matching, and child sexual exploitation. Other planned events will focus on the contribution of neuroscience, meeting the health needs of children, and the implications of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Members will also be able to sign up for **free workshops** on the Secure Base model, to be held in a range of locations. Our workshop programme will focus on popular topics that practitioners need, as well as introduce some new ones, including caring for teenagers, supervising social workers and compassion fatigue.

Our **bespoke training packages** will include a wider range of subjects, helping agencies to focus on overall practice development. Consultancy services will continue to be on offer, including charring disruption meetings, service audits, charring adoption and fostering panels, and overseeing complex meetings.

## Special projects

**Work in the UK and internationally** will include a substantial EU-funded project with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and agencies in five other European countries, to develop training materials for foster carers and social workers looking after unaccompanied migrant children. The project will also boost the recruitment of carers and will provide a springboard for further work on this important issue with members.

In response to requests from members, we will also be piloting an innovative approach to caring for children in long-term foster care. We will test the viability of our **Family Life Fostering** model to identify whether an approach that emphasises the primary importance of the child's relationship with their day-to-day "parent" will deliver an experience for the child that is as close as possible to "normal family life".

### MEMBERS' RECEPTION 2018

Our members' reception will be held in September, date to be confirmed. This will be a chance to hear from our expert speakers on a range of topical issues, and an opportunity to engage, network and meet staff, and learn more about what we do and how CoramBAAF represents members.

## Online developments

Now that our new website has been successfully launched, and is attracting more visitors, we will be exploring the possibility of developing more content to inform users and members and better present the broad spectrum of work that CoramBAAF undertakes.

**Advice Line** – we will develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section that will address some of the most common queries that our consultants respond to. We will also provide sample answers to a selection of the more complex questions so that you can see how this valuable service can inform and guide members in their work.

**Conferences** – we will provide more detailed information about our conference programme, including reports on each event, interviews with speakers and presentations available as downloads.

**Policy, research and development projects** – we will provide a regular monthly update on the work being undertaken by our consultants across CoramBAAF.

**Media** – we will explore the use of podcasts, videos and webinars to bring members and users closer to our work and hear directly from trainers, speakers, authors and CoramBAAF experts.

Our Adoption, Search and Reunion website and database will be accessible to our corporate members, after a year in which access has been restricted.

## New forms

**New forms** will include one on adoption support, and we will be considering issuing a matching form for long-term fostering and a risk assessment form for fostering, for supervising social workers to use with foster carers. We will also be hoping to publish a revised adult health form as well as a revised Form F (Adoption and Permanence) Northern Ireland.

## Getting ready for GDPR

The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** comes into force on 25 May 2018 and applies to any organisation operating within the EU, or offering goods or services to individuals located in the EU. The new regulation builds on the data protection principles that are already in place to strengthen the individual's legal rights concerning their personal data, and will require data collectors to demonstrate the need to collect and process personal data and to record consent where necessary. We will be putting in place internal processes and systems to ensure compliance with the GDPR, including robust retention and privacy policies, and training staff on what the new regulations will mean.

We also have plans to produce a members' briefing initially, followed by more detailed guidance and training.

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## Board Members

CoramBAAF is governed by an independent Board of Directors

**Paul Curran**, Chair  
*Vice Chair of Coram, former Director of Children's Services for the London Borough of Islington*

**John Jones**, Treasurer  
*Independent Pension Board Chair for the Dyfed and Tower Hamlets Council Pension Funds; Former Director of Finance at two London Boroughs and Former Director at the Mayor of London's Office*

**Maswood Ahmed**  
*Independent Fostering Practitioner, Chief Executive Officer at Inspireamillion.com*

**Ziafat Ali**  
*Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Olive Branch Fostering*

**Jennifer Ginger**  
*Adopter, fostering panel member and management consultant*

**Carol Homden**  
*Group Chief Executive, Coram, and Chair of the National Autistic Society*

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