



FOSTERING

Fostering is core to what we do and who we are

CoramBAAF's role in UK adoption has been central over the past 40 years. But this may have served to divert attention from the vital, parallel contribution that we have made to other forms of family placement. Our work in foster care, in particular, has perhaps had a lower profile than it deserves. Given that fostering is currently subject to a number of reviews, it is timely to set the record straight by highlighting the variety of ways in which we support our organisational and individual members in the fostering sector.

Representing our members, rooted in the sector

Our work is grounded in practice. We have five England-wide advisory committees – social work, health, legal, research, and black and minority ethnic – that explore fostering policy and practice. All the committees include local authority representatives. It is our national scope and inter-disciplinary approach that make us unique. The strength of these committees is evident in the fact that representatives from the Department for Education (DfE) attend many of them.

[CoramBAAF membership] is indispensable to the development and maintenance of professional standards, provides a voice for the sector, and is a powerful lobbying group.

(Local authority member)

A national voice

Our network of regional practice forums and national special interest advisory committees allows us to disseminate practice knowledge informed by our members' views and experiences. This ensures that professionals and organisations that deliver fostering services are informing and contributing to the development of practice, policy and legislation. Our information team at CoramBAAF ensures that forum attendees receive a tailored briefing that highlights fostering policy, research and development.

Promoting a multidisciplinary approach

Our strong multidisciplinary approach helps to counter the danger of falling into professional silos. Our Legal Advisory Committee includes local authority lawyers and those in private practice. Similarly, our UK Social Work Practice Advisory Committee has members from independent fostering providers (IFPs) as well as from local authorities. Our Health Advisory Committee includes looked after children health professionals, GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists.

We also have strong links with academia. The UK's leading social work and family placement researchers attend our Research Advisory Committee

meetings, ensuring that we are up-to-date on the latest research findings, and are also able to influence new and ongoing research. Committee members also give regular presentations that are open to all CoramBAAF members.

Influencing policy

Since we began, initially as ABAFA (1973), then BAAF (1980) and now CoramBAAF (2015), we have been strong advocates for the sector and have influenced the content of legislation, guidance and regulations from the Children Act 1975 through to the Children and Social Work Act 2017. In that time, we have ensured that our members' perspectives are at the heart of our contributions to national consultations. More recently, we surveyed members' views and consulted with our national advisory committees in order to inform our three separate submissions to the DfE's Fostering Stocktake in 2017. Similarly, we provided an in-depth written response to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry on Fostering as well as giving oral evidence, highlighting the issues that we know are important to our members.

A measured voice in the media

Fostering is frequently in the media and the stories are often controversial. We play a very active role nationally to ensure that debates around issues such as historical abuse, the relevance of "race" and culture, and who gets approved to become a foster carer are informed by a deep knowledge of practice, policy and law. We challenge misinformation and always keep children at the centre of the discussions. We champion high quality fostering and take every opportunity to emphasise the benefits to children of having well-supported foster carers.

CoramBAAF staff were quoted in the media nearly every week in 2017, including being interviewed on high profile programmes such as BBC's *Newsnight*.

Stronger together – collaborating with other stakeholder organisations

We have represented the interests of fostering services and fostered children on a number of forums, including the Ofsted fostering stakeholder group, the Kinship Care Alliance and the Alliance for Children in Care. We also regularly collaborate with other national bodies.

As a member of the Coram group of charities, we have strong links with sister organisations with significant expertise in fostering, such as Coram Voice and Coram Children's Legal Centre, which includes the Migrant Children's Project. Coram-i Improvement Services and the Impact and Evaluation Team also offer independent consultancy and evaluation input.

Practical tools to promote good practice

When practitioners think of CoramBAAF, one of the first things they refer to is our social and medical assessment forms. We are proud that we have been able to put practical tools into the hands of thousands of social workers over the years, including our Form F for fostering assessments, Form C for family and friends assessments, and Form FR for foster carer reviews. We intend to publish new forms on monitoring and risk assessment in 2018.

A range of resources are free to our members and available on our new website, including Briefing Notes, Practice Notes and a selection of Advice Notes and books. In 2017, new Practice Notes covered key fostering topics such as restraint and physical intervention in foster care, decisions about the assessment of couples and other partnerships in foster care, and the health of unaccompanied, asylum-seeking and other separated children.

The rich experience of the members of our Health Group Advisory Committee has enabled us to produce authoritative materials on health issues, such as guidance that fostering social workers, fostering panels and medical advisers use in the assessment and support of the health of foster carers.

Our bookshop has over 150 titles available for foster care social workers and managers, foster carers, panel members, and fostered children. Most recently, we added *Undertaking Checks and References in Fostering and Adoption Assessments*, *Undertaking a Connected Person/Family and Friends Assessment*, and *Thinking about Fostering* – a beginner's guide for prospective carers.

We have sold thousands of copies of our popular guides, including *Effective Fostering Panels*, *Dogs and Pets in Adoption and Fostering*, and *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment*, and revise them regularly to ensure that they are up to date. A catalogue of our fostering titles is available in print and online.

Our quarterly journal, *Adoption & Fostering*, regularly features articles on fostering. Forthcoming issues will include research on how the birth children of foster carers experience the relationship with their parents and the impact of stress on foster carers.

The tricky stuff – responding to your enquiries

We provide information and advice through our dedicated member helpline, which answers a wide range of specialist enquiries from fostering practitioners. Our fostering, legal, health consultants and information officers respond to the complex and specialist queries, which have recently covered issues relating to the death of children in foster care and assessing contact between siblings in foster placements.

The legal advice and the questions you raise are very helpful and will give us a focus at our next Permanent Care Planning Meeting.

(Advice Line user from a local authority)

The latest information – direct to your inbox

Our information service scours dozens of sources to produce our monthly free Adoption and Fostering Digest, keeping our members up to date with all the latest UK-wide developments in legislation, parliamentary activity, policy, consultations, research, statistics and online resources across the fields of fostering, adoption and child welfare.

The CoramBAAF library is a unique collection of over 5,000 items, including books, reports, journals and legislation. The collection provides a rich resource for research on fostering, allowing a historical perspective on current debates in the field.

Boosting learning – training and conferences

We run over 200 learning events each year. Our training and conference programme builds on our rich tradition in fostering, and routinely covers core subjects such as assessing foster carers, supervision and support, fostering panels, and managing allegations. We have also been involved in developing, publishing and rolling out major

training resources on topics such as working with children who have been sexually abused; keeping children safe in foster care and kinship care (KEEP); strengthening relationships and managing difficult behaviour (*Fostering Changes*); strategies for supporting teenagers (STOP); caring for unaccompanied asylum seekers; and remand and intensive fostering.

We have been delivering training on the Secure Base Model (Schofield and Beek) since 2010 and have supported several local authorities to implement the strengths-based approach that provides carers with practical tools that enable children to thrive.

In 2018/19, in response to demand, we are expanding our bespoke training provision for agencies by delivering a new model of events built around groups of related subjects (suites). We will first provide a foundation workshop, and then complement the training with a selection of tailor-made options. For example, the Making Good Assessments suite centres on the foundation workshop *Making Good Fostering Assessments*, and is supplemented by tailor-made options, such as *Assessing Connected Persons and Special Guardians*, *Working with Birth Parents* and *Assessing the Quality of Contact*. There are also suites on building permanence, enhancing confidence in direct work with children and supporting children and families.

Our conference and workshop programme regularly covers topics of importance to fostering practitioners, and our annual national health conference provides a unique opportunity for health and social care professionals to update their knowledge together. In 2018/19, we plan to offer a selection of free regional workshops and conferences for members that will support new CoramBAAF publications, Practice Notes and guidance, including the future of fostering following the Stocktake, and matching and identity.

It was one of the best training events I have been on for a long time. Thank you, job well done!

(Participant at Making Good Fostering Assessments course, 2017)

Somebody else's child – private fostering

We continue to recognise the vulnerability of children in private fostering arrangements and co-ordinate regional groups in four locations to share professional practice and advocate for this group of children. We successfully lobbied for amendments to the Children Act 2004 in England and Wales and were commissioned by the Government to develop the minimum standards for private fostering.

The meetings held for private fostering are invaluable...it has felt so important as a worker that CoramBAAF is still supporting professionals around all the issues of private fostering.

(Private fostering social worker, local authority)

What's new?

As well as continuing the work already mentioned, in 2018/19 we will extend our fostering work with an initiative focusing on supporting work with unaccompanied minors and a project that will test a new, more child-centred, model of long-term foster care.

We are determined that fostering continues to provide a child-centred service, so we will continue with our multi-professional focus and, with it, a determination to find solutions to what matters most in both the short- and long-term. Foster care has a lifelong impact on all the children who are cared for, whether for a brief period or for many years, and we aim to ensure that this is recognised and reflected in policy and practice.

coramBAAF
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