

**England full member agencies
membership survey
2016/17**

Our Response

What we did and why

In order to improve our services to our members and to understand what you would like us to provide in the coming year, in December 2016 we invited the employees of our full member agencies in England to complete a membership survey.

We were very pleased that 186 respondents from at least 70 local authorities, independent fostering providers and voluntary adoption agencies completed the survey¹, providing a valuable insight into the needs and views of our members. Respondents came from all regions of England and included practitioners, managers, panel members and directors, whose professional focus covers adoption and permanence, fostering, adoption support, panels, looked after children, special guardianship and child protection.

We would like to share a summary of the results and some of the comments you made, and explain what we plan to do for our members, based on your feedback.

What we learnt

Our focus

You told us:

The activities relevant to your area of work that respondents most wanted to see us develop further were:

- More guidance on best practice
- Advice (especially on complex matters)
- Workshops on emerging areas
- Briefing notes

We will:

- Produce good practice guidance on fostering for adoption; managing allegations; assessing adoption support; foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; and the role of the supervising social worker
- Recruit a dedicated adviser to respond to queries alongside our specialist consultants, and develop FAQs and other information we have available in the members' area
- Offer new workshops, including: undertaking adoption support assessments; managing transitions from foster care; and achieving placement stability in fostering and adoption
- Continue to provide briefing notes on contemporary issues

¹ Not all respondents answered every question in the survey so the total number of respondents varies by question.

Membership benefits

You told us:

92% would recommend CoramBAAF membership.

It is indispensable to the development and maintenance of professional standards, provides a voice for the sector, and is a powerful lobbying group to influence policy and advise Ministers and the Department.

You rated the following highest on a list of products and services that CoramBAAF provides you/ your organisation with:

- Up to date information on all the latest policy and legislative developments
- High quality publications that are useful to your work
- Support to improve your agency's practice and service delivery

In addition to all existing membership benefits, you were interested in more discounts on books, greater accessibility to the advice line and conferences, and free conference spaces; 7 out of 10 of you were interested in attending a reception to meet CoramBAAF staff and fellow members.

Several comments about CoramBAAF membership were focused on a feeling of geographical imbalance and the need for more events away from London and the South East.

We will:

- Continue to provide our monthly bulletin, *Adoption & Fostering Digest*, which contains up to date information on latest policy and legislative developments, free to members who subscribe
- Continue our flash sales that offer very attractive discounts on our publications
- Strengthen the delivery of our Advice Line by recruiting a dedicated adviser
- Offer members a free conference, as well as a members' reception at CoramBAAF's London office – more information will be available in *CoramBAAF News*
- Reach more members by establishing and running practice forums
- Offer workshops in more locations, including Stockport, Plymouth and Cambridge

Advocating on your behalf, contributing to policy development

You told us:

9 out of 10 of you felt that we have represented your views in our consultation responses, but only a quarter had ever contributed to our consultation responses. We asked what more we can do to represent your views. You told us:

- Continue to conduct surveys, keep those surveys short
- Make direct contact/"keep asking us"
- Give advance warning
- Share the information and brief members well
- Seek input from members at events
- Ensure the CoramBAAF linkperson disseminates information

Most of you felt that it was important that our consultants continue to participate and represent the sector's views in a wide range of external groups and committees.

Some members felt that our policy and advocacy work were not always timely and sometimes

too divorced from reality of practice, or that members didn't receive enough evidence about this area of our work.

This is early days for CoramBAAF and as yet I have seen some evidence of advocacy of the views of local authority adoption agencies but expect and hope this is developing and will be further evidenced in the near future.

We will:

- Continue with our active membership of:
 - The Adoption Leadership Board
 - The Adoption Support Advisory Group
 - The Recruitment and Matching Forum
 - The Kinship Care Alliance, which we also chair
- Actively gather information on the use of special guardianship from our Special Interest Group
- Make representations to the DfE and Judiciary on special guardianship
- Monitor the development of Regional Adoption Agencies and contribute to their implementation
- Monitor the development of the adoption support framework, including the Adoption Support Fund and Centres of Excellence in Adoption Support
- Contribute actively to the Fostering Stocktake through our wide experience in fostering issues
- Continue to be active in the general and professional press (including a regular column in Nursery World) and on social media
- Continue to support our Independent Fostering Providers' Forum and link the group to local authority fostering services whenever possible
- Respond to public consultations, publish briefings and directly engage with politicians on key areas of policy and practice development

Joining/Networking/Participating

You told us:

Very few respondents were existing members of any of our Advisory Committees, Practice Forums and Special Interest Groups, although there was considerable interest in finding out more about them, especially the research, legal and special guardianship special interest groups. There was also significant interest in joining more local CoramBAAF Practice Forums.

The independent chairs' meeting is invaluable.

Nearly 80% of respondents said that if we developed an online community that allowed members to exchange ideas, they would join. Some said this would help when unable to attend meetings, although others expressed a preference for face-to-face contact. Finding the time to participate online was an issue for several respondents. It was suggested that separate online communities for fostering, adoption and related issues would be useful.

We will:

- Continue to operate our long-standing Advisory Groups in Social work, law, health, research and black and minority ethnic issues
- Consider establishing Practice Forums in other areas and contribute to those already functioning
- Explore more accessible forms of communicating with members on key areas of policy and practice development
- Ensure that the minutes of Advisory Committee meetings are made available in the members' area of the website

Workshops

You told us:

Satisfaction levels were very high for those who have attended our workshops:

- 94% would recommend workshops to colleagues
- 92% felt that they addressed the issues that are relevant and most important to them

However, 40% of respondents had not attended a CoramBAAF workshop; the main reasons were that they were not aware of them or that the location was unsuitable

Other issues mentioned were that it was not possible to attend due to dates or the time available, that they were not a priority, the themes were not relevant or that they were expensive.

What limits attendance is cost as we have budget limitations due to government council cuts and we do have an in-house training department. Location limits attendance as lots of courses/conferences are held too far...

We will:

- Provide excellent quality learning events in a range of easily accessible venues and in new locations, including Stockport, Plymouth and Cambridge
- Maintain competitive pricing of our workshops and value for money
- Continue to develop our workshop content and delivery on the basis of service user feedback
- Ensure easy access to workshop information and bookings through our new website

Commissioned training

You told us:

93% of those who had commissioned CoramBAAF training would recommend it to colleagues. Most of these respondents rated the quality, content and standard of the training delivery and materials as good. For those who do commission training but haven't done so from CoramBAAF, the main reasons were limited training budgets and internally supplied training.

Awareness of our commissioned consultancy services was relatively low.

We will:

- Work in collaboration with service users to identify training needs and provide the highest quality bespoke training and consultancy services
- Continue to draw on the expertise within CoramBAAF to support training programme content and delivery

Conferences

You told us:

97% of respondents who had attended one of our conferences would recommend them to colleagues. For those who had not attended one of our conferences (55%), the most significant factors for non-attendance were high prices, distance to location, no relevant theme, or simply being unaware of them.

The most important factor when deciding whether to attend a conference was the theme.

There was positive interest in CoramBAAF introducing a "question time" panel or debate element to conferences – the former being the more popular of these options.

We will:

- Do more to promote awareness of our conferences, via our membership networks, groups and committees
- Continue to listen to members in considering themes, topics and interesting formats for future conferences

Conferences planned for summer 2017:

- The future of special guardianship, 14 June in Leeds
- Adverse childhood experiences and outcomes – considering the neuroscience relevant to looked after and adopted children, 3 July in Birmingham
- Aggression and violence in foster care and adoption, 12 July in London

Advice Line

You told us:

Disappointingly, only 33% of respondents had contacted the Advice Line either by telephone or email in the last year. Of those who did contact us, 75% felt that their query was resolved, 73% felt the response was timely and 87% would recommend the Advice Line to colleagues. There were comments about extending the Advice Line to an all-day service and ensuring it is more responsive. A couple of respondents did not know how to contact the Advice Line.

Extremely useful service.

Workers value the Advice Line.

We will:

- Strengthen capacity and expertise by recruiting a dedicated Adviser
- Provide an initial response within 1–2 working days. Complex enquiries and those that need further research and legal or other specialist input will always take a little longer, and we will keep you informed if an enquiry is going to take more time
- Keep our opening hours under review, but your feedback suggests that the current hours suit the majority of users
- Develop a comprehensive FAQ section on our website to address common queries

CoramBAAF Library

You told us:

There was a high level of interest in the library and in having access to our library catalogue online as a tool for finding resources relevant to your work (92%).

We will:

- Consider upgrading our library catalogue to enable online access via the members' area. We have provided information to those respondents who wanted to know more about the library

Adoption and Fostering Digest

You told us:

Of the respondents who already receive our monthly *Adoption & Fostering Digest*, 78% forward it to a number of colleagues, sometimes more than 15. Further, 85% of those respondents receiving the Digest would like access to it in the members' area of our website.

We will:

- Make available back issues of the *Digest* in the members' area of our website
- Implement a campaign, via each agency's linkperson, to encourage more members to subscribe to the *Digest*. If you would like to subscribe, email infodesk@corambaaf.org.uk

Publications

You told us:

100% of respondents who have purchased our books said they were appropriate for their needs.

98% of the respondents who have seen our Good Practice Guides said the themes are relevant to their practice. And 97% said the guides met their personal professional development needs.

You also told us you wanted more guidance on good practice, including on Fostering for Adoption, adoption support, special guardianship, mental health, managing allegations, and more on fostering policy and practice.

We will:

- Publish good practice guides on Fostering for Adoption, undertaking an adoption support assessment, mental health in children, managing allegations, special guardianship, and many more
- Ensure that our best-selling guides are revised and refreshed
- Publish handbooks for carers on supporting children's education and caring for sexually exploited children and young people

Adoption & Fostering Journal

You told us:

86% of professionals found *Adoption & Fostering* useful or very useful for their work. While 73% of respondents wanted the academic, research-based content in the journal to remain at the same level, 21% were keen to see more academic content. The articles and legal notes were the most valued sections of the journal. Articles from overseas were rated as less useful.

A very important resource in social work.

I like the journal and some good articles recently that were different in style and fresh.

We will:

- Bear in mind members' preference for articles from within the UK (in fact, in the last six months we have been including slightly fewer overseas submissions)
- Continue to prioritise articles and legal and health notes. We also plan to make the most recent notes available on the forthcoming new CoramBAAF website, together with the Commissioning Editor's editorial
- Publish a special edition on the contribution of neuroscience to family placement policy and practice in March 2018

What can CoramBAAF do better?

You told us:

- Be less London-centric, have more of a regional focus and run more local events like training, workshops and conferences – “communicate with workers on the ground”
- Have more of a presence and voice at a national level, and be more responsive to current issues
- Place greater emphasis on fostering issues – retain and further promote their expertise in fostering
- Extend the Advice Line hours
- Increase information provision – providing guidance on specific themes (e.g. looked after children in schools, administration for foster carers and looked after children, creative assessments) and regular briefing notes from specialist advisers
- Develop key resources – a compendium of practice issues; have an online database of publications, research articles, etc.
- Improve communication about membership and benefits – better communication about who works for CoramBAAF and who to contact; celebrate the dedication of the staff
- Extend forums, e.g. set up a chairs’ forum, an IFP managers’ forum

...Being a voice and pro-active. More innovation – less reacting...

Maintain its overarching approach to professional guidance

We will:

- Consider the suggestions made above, some of which have already been addressed elsewhere in this report
- Strengthen our focus on fostering by increasing expertise internally and participation in the Fostering Stocktake
- Develop the members’ area of the CoramBAAF website, providing more information and guidance to members
- Strengthen our links with members through improved communications, increasing visibility of our services and encouraging better take-up of member benefits

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