

Review of 2020



We value your membership

Thank you for your continued membership of CoramBAAF and for being part of the UK-wide network of agencies and individuals working together to secure the best outcomes for children in care.

This year marked 40 years since the organisation was formally launched and five years as part of Coram. We celebrated with a range of anniversary events exploring key issues and enabling members to hear from and engage with experts. We also published a special supplement of *Adoption & Fostering*, our highly-regarded peer-reviewed journal, featuring 12 articles exploring significant themes over the past four decades.

CoramBAAF continues to be a cornerstone of the family placement landscape. With nearly all family placement organisations in England and Northern Ireland in membership, and partnership arrangements with AFA Scotland and AFA Cymru, we are a leading voice for the sector.

During the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic, we responded quickly to the needs of our members by producing practical, authoritative guidance to help fostering and adoption agencies navigate the complex issues they faced, including how to interpret the “flexibilities” introduced under the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 and the use of technological solutions to carry out meetings with children, foster carers, adopters and social workers and continue the vital task of recruiting new families.

We are proud of our history, including successful campaigns to introduce new legislation such as national adoption standards, early care planning, monitoring of permanency plans, a national adoption register, mandatory assessment for adoption support, parental leave for adoptive parents, and the acceptance of unmarried and same-sex adopters. We have also led anti-racist initiatives – an area that we will address with renewed vigour in the coming months and years. Our publications, forms and training are at the heart of family placement practice, and our network meetings attract more members than ever before.

In the coming year, we will bring new emphasis to care planning, with a new consultant post focusing on this aspect, and our aim is for children’s social work to have a more prominent role in the development of family placement services. We will also work to make sure your perspectives are heard in the Care Review (England).

Since I joined the organisation at the beginning of 2021, I have been hugely impressed by the insight, expertise, commitment and resilience of the workforce and how it continues to meet the needs of children and families under extremely challenging circumstances. We are grateful for all your contributions, suggestions, thoughts and feedback – they enable us to do our very best for you and the children we all work for. I look forward to meeting many of you over the coming months but if you would like to speak to me, please don’t hesitate to get in touch at ellen.broome@corambaaf.org.uk

Ellen Broomé, Managing Director

The year

We want every child to have a safe, secure and loving placement that helps them thrive, achieve their potential, and grow up to be happy and productive citizens.

Informing, educating and influencing

Members received copies of a range of books for social workers, adopters and foster carers, with **easy to read, practical advice**. New guides published during the year explored the outcomes of case reviews in the context of safeguarding children, the child’s legal journey through care, sleeping issues in looked after and adopted children, and fostering unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We revised and disseminated a number of our bestselling guides for social workers, making sure members have access to the most **up-to-date information and guidance**. These included updates to *Making Good Assessments*, *Undertaking an Adoption Assessment*, *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment*, *Wales*, *Writing a Later Life Letter*, and *Parent and Child Fostering*.

Very organised and readable...I would strongly encourage parents and professionals who want to aid troubled children to sleep better, to read this book.

Dan Hughes PhD, clinical psychologist and founder of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy



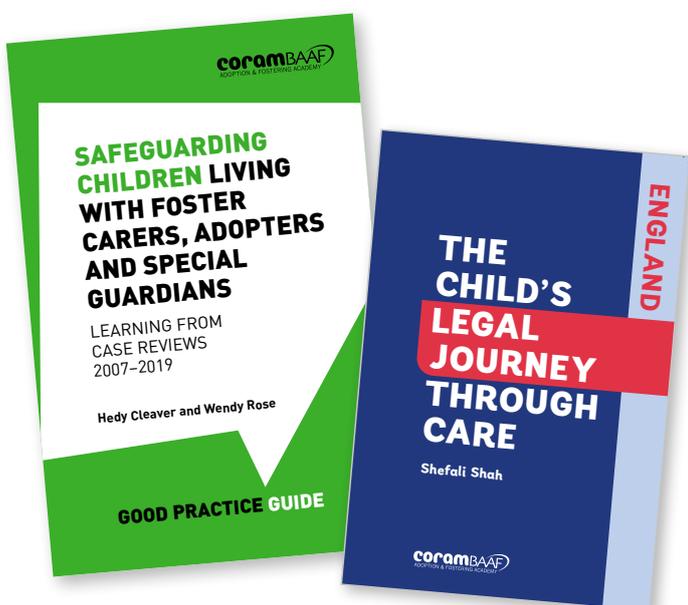
at a glance

Members received **Practice Notes** on assessing a carer's new partner, assessing and supporting disabled foster carers, supporting special guardians to make family arrangements, and the implications for the family placement sector of Black Lives Matter, along with a **Briefing** on the future of the social work workforce.

We continued our ***In the Spotlight*** series of documents written by and for members. This provides a platform to showcase and share innovations in practice across the sector. So far, four documents have explored the couple relationship in adoption, placing children with connected carers overseas, a specialised life story work service, and using digital tools to recruit adopters.

Members had access to our growing online **library** of over 35 books and guides free of charge, along with several Advice Notes and all Practice Notes, Briefings and *In the Spotlight* documents. You also told us you need and value our good practice guides, assessment guides and legal guides such as *Fostering Now*.

The reach of our monthly information bulletin, CoramBAAF's ***Adoption & Fostering Digest***, continues to grow as members learn about and make use of their membership benefits – in 2020 it reached 7,500 CoramBAAF members each month. The *Digest* is a highly-valued monthly UK-wide briefing for everyone working in adoption, fostering and child welfare, with coverage of the latest developments in legislation, parliamentary activity, policy, consultations, research, statistics and online sources. If you don't already receive the *Digest*, you can sign up by contacting infodesk@corambaaf.org.uk, or log in to the members' area of our website to **read a year's worth of back issues**.



Identifying priorities

We committed to maintaining our multi-disciplinary Advisory Committees, Special Interest Groups and Practice Forums during the Coronavirus pandemic, with virtual meetings enabling members to continue to engage with each other and our consultants, and inform our **policy work**. We were also pleased to welcome our first Kinship Care Consultant. With more children than ever being placed with family and friends carers, this new post enables us to offer you further support in developing best practice and influencing policy.

The Advisory Committees cover issues related to social work practice, health, law, BME perspectives, and research. Key topics explored included:

- Issues relating to changes to regulations and the impact of the pandemic
- Black Lives Matter
- The state of the social work workforce
- Review of children's social care
- Evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies
- Language in foster care
- Blood-borne infections practice
- Data from family court statistics
- Definitions of 'allegations', 'complaints', and 'standards of care issues' in fostering
- Unregulated placements
- Deprivation of liberty
- Continuation of NHS number for adopted children

In 2021, we will establish a new Foster Carer Advisory Committee.

Our **special interest groups** focus on special guardianship and the perspectives of independent fostering providers. In 2020, we also re-established our Private Fostering Special Interest Group.

Our consultants facilitated and led **regional adoption and fostering practice forums** in Southern England, Yorkshire and Humberside, North East England, North West England, and Northern Ireland. There were additional forums for Adoption Panel Chairs, Panel Advisers, health professionals in London and Southern England, and black workers in Northern and Southern England.

We represented **members' perspectives** on the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign, the North West Regional Adoption Board, the Kinship Care Alliance, the UK Trauma Council, the Family Justice Board, and the Public Law Working Group.

We responded to consultations, spoke out in the media and contributed to over 20 conferences. We also continued to create and update good practice guides, forms and practice notes, and assist external authors.

Focus on special guardianship

- As a result of carrying out the **Special Guardianship Rapid Evidence Review** with Lancaster University on behalf of the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, we were invited to join the **Public Law Working Group** and help draft its Best Practice Guidance, 'Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems: Special guardianship orders'.
- In partnership with Lancaster University and Grandparents Plus, two films were made, the first focusing on the experiences of special guardians, and the second exploring the views of sector leaders in establishing an agenda for change.

Our agency members

134/155 local authorities and Crown dependencies in England

22/22 local authorities in Wales

5/5 Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland

32/32 local authorities in Scotland (membership held by AFA Scotland)

AND **106** independent fostering providers

23 voluntary adoption agencies

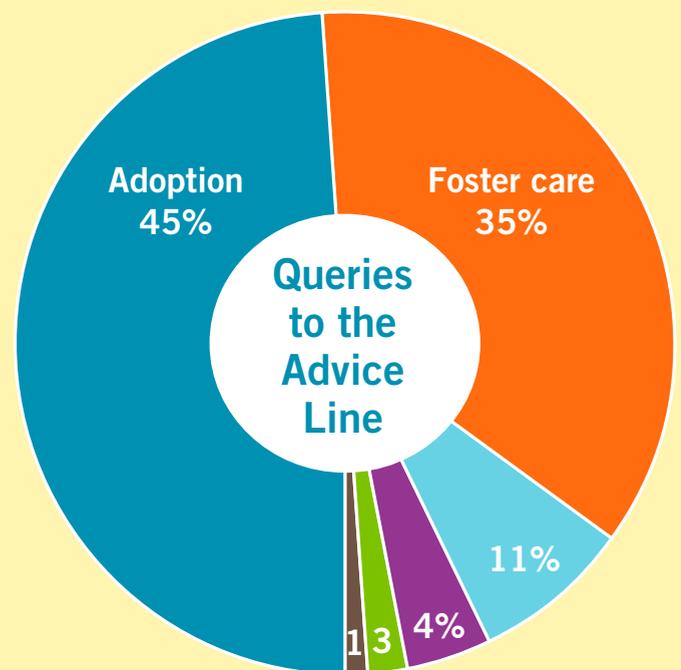
47 associate members

Responding to your enquiries

The Advice Line continues to be a popular membership benefit. With nearly 2,500 enquiries this year, we have continued to prioritise speed and quality of service. A key feature is our access to in-house Legal and Health Consultants and specialists in fostering, adoption, kinship care, special guardianship, and other areas of children's social care. Advice is also supported by up-to-date research, resources and statistics provided by our Information Service.

Enquiries cover a very wide variety of topics, but some recent themes include:

- Virtual working during the Coronavirus pandemic – contact, assessments, panels, introductions
- Connected persons assessments, expiry of temporary approval, impact on child's placement
- Health assessments, temporary changes to regulations, difficulties obtaining GP reports
- Immigration status, right to remain and impact on applications to foster, adopt and care for children by relatives and friends



Adoption 49%
 Foster care 36%
 Connected persons 11%
 Fostering for Adoption 5%
 Special guardianship 3%
 Private fostering 1%

I think CoramBAAF's advice service to its members is outstanding. You always provide comprehensive, reliable responses in a timely manner and this is a great support to us practitioners.

Local Authority Assistant Team Manager/Panel Adviser Fostering

Celebrating 40 years of working together

2020 marked the 40th anniversary of BAAF/ CoramBAAF – four decades of working with and on behalf of our members. To mark the occasion we held a series of events and delivered new resources.

We produced a special anniversary supplement of our journal, *Adoption & Fostering* – free copies were sent to all members. This featured 12 key articles reprinted from the period 1980–2019, introduced by a personal review from Dr John Simmonds, CoramBAAF's Director of Policy, Research and Development, which explores the experience of the social work sector over the last 40 years, and how this should influence future trends. The supplement received acclaim from a number of notable journals and organisations.

We delivered a webinar, free for all members. **Kinship Care and Story Work: Learning from each other** explored the direct use of story work with kinship families and young people. It considered the key concepts underpinning approaches, as well as the

challenges and opportunities that arise when using story work.

In December we held an online anniversary reception – **What do we want from the Children's Care Review?** – and were delighted that over 240 people attended. The focus was on looking forward and coming together to consider what changes are needed to make sure children can thrive. Speakers included Jenny Coles, Director of Children's Services in Hertfordshire and the President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Linda Briheim-Crookall, CoramVoice Head of Policy and Practice, Shabnam Karmizada, a Coram Voice care-experienced consultant, and Vicky Ford MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families.

Children & Young People Now published a series of articles celebrating our achievements over the last 40 years. With contributions from key figures, it also highlighted the priorities for the year ahead.

Learning events

Nearly 2,000 of you attended our training events. More than 1,500 people benefited from the 72 customised training events we provided to over 40 different agencies. Popular topics included: the Secure Base Model; Making Good Assessments; from Planning for Permanency; Black Lives Matters Impact on Panel Members; and Life Story.

Our open course programme included nearly 40 events. We were able to respond quickly to the Coronavirus pandemic and delivered our programme virtually from May onwards. Many of you let us know how much you appreciated the continued CPD opportunities and the convenience offered by our webinars during this challenging time. Popular topics were: Making Good Fostering Assessments; Introduction to the Secure Base Model; Life Story; Understanding Sibling Assessments; and the Role and Responsibilities of Panel Advisers.

This training was an eye opener to my day to day work as a Children's Social Worker

Feedback from Planning for Permanence commissioned training

We offered free masterclasses on Learning from the Law – Adoption and Fostering: Lessons for Social Workers and Managers, which were very positively received. In 2021, we hope to be able to return to

face-to-face training where appropriate, while also continuing to offer training and events online, as this has proved such a good fit for many of your learning needs.

Conferences

In November 2020, we ran a successful Health Group conference, 'A New Decade, Challenges and Opportunities'. Our keynote speaker was Professor Sir Terence Stephenson, Nuffield Professor of Child Health at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, who gave a presentation on the challenges and opportunities in child health. Other speakers included Professor Amanda Sacker from the University College of London UCL, who presented findings from the 'Looked after children grown up study'; Adrienne Katz, Director of Youthworks Consulting Ltd, who spoke about vulnerable children in a digital world; and Professor Andrea Danese from King's College London, whose presentation was titled 'Childhood mental health, and challenges and opportunities for research and practice'.

Consultancy

The Consultancy service has had another busy year. We have supported RAAs with disruption meetings, service reviews and Stage 4 complaints. We advised on responses to Black Lives Matter for RAAs, panels and staff teams and worked with an RAA on developing a toolkit for the placement of BME children.

Annual Members' Day

In October, our Members' Day celebrated 40 years of our work together with the theme of "Looking back – looking forward". For the first time the event was held online, and although the arrangements somewhat limited the lively social and professional engagement we have seen at previous members' receptions, we were delighted that more than 120 people from organisations across the UK were able to join us without the challenge of travel and an early start!

The day was chaired by Paul Curran, Chair of CoramBAAF's Board, and the impressive programme of presentations included: Jenny Coles, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and DCS in Hertfordshire, on the development of children's services over the past 40 years and the challenge involved in continuing those developments in a child- and family-focused way; John Simmonds, our Director of Policy, Research and Development, on what he had learned in drawing together a selection of articles from the 950 published over 40 years of the *Adoption & Fostering* journal, to form CoramBAAF's 40th anniversary journal supplement; Irene Levine, Director of Operations at IAC: The Centre for Adoption, on the current issues raised by Black Lives Matter, from her professional and personal perspective; Louise Sims, our Kinship and Foster Care Consultant, on the challenges that the sector faces in equalising its focus on kinship care with the attention it pays to foster care and adoption; and Professor Beth Neil, from the



University of East Anglia, on the growing understanding of the support needs of people affected by adoption.

If you were unable to attend the event, or if you want to watch any of the presentations again, you can find a recording of the day in the members' area of the website.

Responding to the Coronavirus pandemic

CoramBAAF has been committed to helping the family placement sector deal with the challenges brought by the Coronavirus pandemic. We responded quickly to what you said you needed and produced practical, authoritative guidance to help you navigate the complex issues you faced. A dedicated Coronavirus section of the website was swiftly developed to provide guidance on a range of family placement issues divided into the key areas of practice – adoption, fostering, family placement, health and legal. We have produced more than 30 detailed documents that continue to be revised and updated as the situation evolves.

We also published and disseminated revised versions of several of our health and social care forms to take account of social workers' new working conditions.

The pandemic brought a significant increase in enquiries to our Advice Line, as members sought advice on new ways of working, health, managing risk, and a series of legislative changes.

We introduced a new regular section in the monthly *Adoption & Fostering Digest* to highlight the Coronavirus resources being developed and updated. The *Digest* also included news on relevant guidance, research and statistics relating to the pandemic, and during the year over 650 such resources have been included.

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