

# Rising to the challenge

What we did in 2016



## **Our mission**

We are dedicated to improving the life chances for children and young people separated from their birth parents, by promoting the need for timely, high quality placements; informing, educating and supporting those who work with and care for them; and working to ensure that children and young people who cannot live with their birth families receive the support they need throughout their lives.

## **Our vision**

Our vision is for every child to have a safe, secure and loving placement that will help them thrive, achieve their potential, and grow to be the happy and productive citizens of tomorrow.

## **Our statement of purpose**

- To promote and encourage the highest standards of practice in adoption, fostering and social work with children and families through support to social workers, health professionals, legal practitioners and researchers.
- To promote public and professional understanding of adoption and fostering and other forms of family placement, and the resulting life-long implications for children separated from their birth families, including their needs for safety, security and a positive identity.
- To act as an independent voice in the field of family placement, to inform and influence policy makers and legislators, and all those responsible for the welfare of children and young people.
- To be an umbrella body that provides overall co-ordination and a concerted voice for all member agencies and all those working with children.

Dear members,

Welcome to this report in which we highlight some of the work we have done in 2016 for you, with you and on your behalf to secure the best outcomes and life chances for looked after children.

On the following pages, you will find summaries of our principal areas of work – shaping policy and practice, advocating on behalf of our members, keeping our members well informed and up to date through our learning events and publications, providing platforms to explore and debate key issues via thought-provoking presentations at our conferences and papers in our journal, *Adoption & Fostering*, and a glimpse of how we have responded to your requests for advice.

We also provide an outline of what you can expect from your membership of CoramBAAF in 2017. Many of you contributed to our agency membership survey conducted at the end of 2016. This has given us useful pointers about what you need from us. A fast-moving, external agenda has also proposed radical reforms to the way that services will be delivered, including the regionalisation of adoption agencies. We will be paying close attention to and responding to these developments, and will engage with you to ensure that we develop guidance and services that meet your needs.

We are strengthening our capacity to better deliver our services to you and will be recruiting new staff at senior levels to assist with this. *CoramBAAF News*, our monthly newsletter, will give you information about what we're doing on your behalf. In the meantime, we hope you value reading this report of what we have done and what we have in store.

Thank you for your continued support.

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page features two overlapping circles. The left circle is a vibrant pink and contains the year '2016' in large, white, sans-serif font. The right circle is a muted purple and contains the year '2017' in the same white, sans-serif font. The circles overlap in the center, creating a darker shade of purple.

2016

2017

# You're in good company

Our members make up the largest community of agencies and individuals involved in securing the best outcomes for children separated from their birth parents. Membership of CoramBAAF not only delivers a variety of benefits but equally importantly, offers a sense of belonging to a network with shared aims. Together we are a strong voice advocating for the best life chances for children in care.

We started off 2016 somewhat unsure about the level of membership that the newly-formed CoramBAAF would attract. We maintained our membership fees at the previous year's levels and offered agencies an "early-bird" discount for prompt renewal. Most of you took advantage of this offer and we were pleased that the vast majority of local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and independent fostering providers joined us.

Membership was offered to agencies in Wales in collaboration with the also newly-formed Association for Fostering & Adoption (AFA) Cymru. In Scotland we partnered with Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland, with membership being held by AFA Scotland.

Individual membership was also strong. Although we lost some members, we gained others, and had almost 900 during the year, including independent social work professionals, trainers and academics, legal and health professionals, and adopters and foster carers.

## Membership benefits

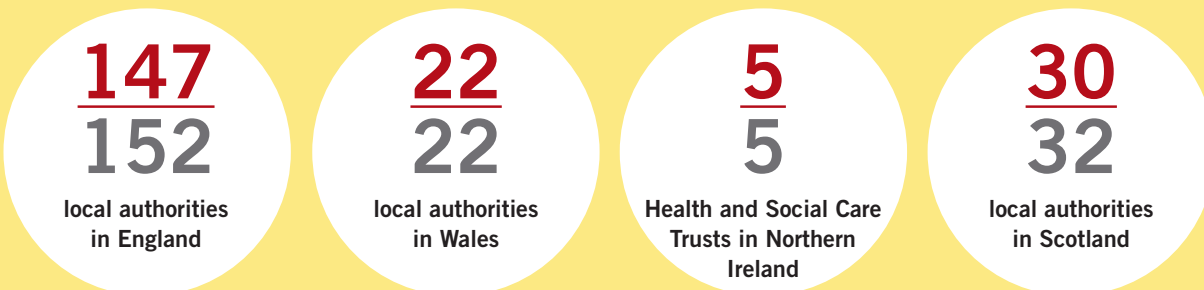
Along with our partners across the UK, we were able to offer you not only most of the benefits you previously enjoyed from BAAF, but also some new ones.

Membership enabled opportunities to contribute to setting standards and shaping policy and practice through our network of multidisciplinary advisory committees, special interest groups and forums, which continued to meet regularly. We also sat on key Government committees, including the Adoption Leadership Board, and other networks, including the Kinship Care Alliance; the Alliance for Children in Care; and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In these and several others, we represented the needs and views of our members.

Members received copies of our renowned peer-reviewed quarterly journal, *Adoption & Fostering*, covering new developments in childcare policy, practice and research UK-wide and globally. Online access to the complete

## Agency membership take-up

Membership take-up was as below:



In addition, 24 voluntary adoption agencies (29 including Scotland) became members, as did 108 independent fostering providers (115 including Scotland).





backlist is also available. Members were sent authoritative and informative publications and guides of topical interest, written by experts, with multiple copies for your staff, depending on agency size.

Many of you used our professional advice service, including specialist advice on health and legal matters, as well as our high quality information service. Our social work and health forms were offered on the licensing scheme, with discounts for members, and many of the child health forms were updated. Members also received attractive discounts on bespoke training, workshops, conferences and books and *CoramBAAF News* was delivered to inboxes every month.

AFA Cymru (see p 14) and AFA Scotland offered workshops and training events as well as the opportunity to network in special groups in Wales and Scotland.

Although we weren't able to run the numbers of local and regional groups that BAAF previously hosted, by December we had set up and facilitated CoramBAAF Practice Forums in Yorkshire and Humberside, North East England and the Eastern Counties, and there are plans to set up more.

*We have been pleased to see the legacy of BAAF maintained within CoramBAAF. The specialist forms and publications remain the most widely recognised and respected within the sector. The information and discussion facilitated within the Independent Fostering Providers forum is also of significant value. The quality of research and advice continues to ensure that CoramBAAF is at the centre of policy and practice development as well as maintaining its position in providing Government with an independent, honest and well-informed adviser.*

**Ian Brazier, Executive Director, The Foster Care Co-operative**

## Members' Reception

We held our first ever Members' Reception in September and were very pleased that, despite the bad weather and transport disruptions, there was an impressive turnout, with people travelling across England and Wales. We discussed issues that members wanted us to address, including mental health, special guardianship assessments and regionalisation of adoption agencies. And John Simmonds gave a presentation entitled *Family Placement – have we established a secure base for children in state care?* The Reception was very well received and is set to become a regular feature in our calendar.

## New benefits

- Timely specialist briefings from our experts on a variety of topics, including the Children and Social Work Bill, regionalisation of adoption agencies and adoption support
- A free conference for members – *The Future of Family Placement* – was held in January 2017
- A richer members' area of the CoramBAAF website, including Practice and Advice Notes, sample health and social report forms and 15 previously out of print books available as pdf files
- *Adoption & Fostering Digest*, the only comprehensive monthly information bulletin, covering news on policy, legislation, research and parliamentary affairs UK-wide, delivered to your inbox (requires sign up)

To enquire about membership, visit: [www.corambaaf.org.uk/join](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/join), email: [membership@corambaaf.org.uk](mailto:membership@corambaaf.org.uk) or telephone: 020 7520 7514 or 020 7520 7518.



# Shaping policy and practice

CoramBAAF's Policy, Research and Development team is at the heart of the organisation. This multidisciplinary staff group contains experts from a range of fields who drive CoramBAAF's programme of projects, consultation responses, Government lobbying, national advisory groups and practice forums. We engage with members and ensure that your views are heard in Government and across the sector, provide advice on difficult policy and practice issues, and recommend best practice.

## Advocating and lobbying

### Public consultations

Over the past year, we have responded to a number of public consultations. These included the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's focus on attachment. NICE protocols take a "gold standard" approach to reviewing research evidence, and this demonstrated the relatively poor evidence base for attachment-based interventions. Subsequent developments have resulted in a Quality Standards publication. On a related matter, we responded to the Social Care Institute for Excellence's call for evidence about care pathways that drive approaches to looked after children's mental health.

We responded to the Department for Education's consultation on Knowledge and Skills Statement for Achieving Permanence, addressing a number of key issues in our submission. The final document is now available and will form the basis of a forthcoming curriculum and training framework for practitioners.

We also responded to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry into Fostering, as part of their fostering review. Our extensive submission will be taken into account by the Committee in their further planning.

### Representing your views

We ensure that your concerns are fully represented to Government by actively participating in and contributing to discussions with various departments – the Department for Education, Department of Health, Department of Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice. Membership of the Adoption Leadership Board, the All-Parliamentary Group on Looked After Children and Care Leavers, the Advisory Group on Adoption Support and the Fostering Stocktake are just some of the high-level groups where we have an active interest in representing your views.

Special guardianship is an issue of current concern to our members, and our presentations to the Judicial College and discussions with the DfE have continued to raise the profile of this issue, informed by our members' experiences in practice.

### Bills before Parliament

In recent months, we have focused on exploring the implications of the Children and Social Work Bill, along with many other organisations in the sector. The clauses, "Testing new ways of working", have been a particular concern to our members, and our sustained lobbying against these proved influential when the House of Lords deleted the clauses. However, this is still very much a live issue, and members can rely on us to continue ensuring that your voices are heard as the Bill continues its progression in the Commons.

## Research advisory groups

We are at the forefront of current child care research, through our position on a number of university research advisory groups. These include:

- King's College London's analysis of outcomes from adoption from the 1958 and 1970 NCDS population cohorts
- The English Romanian Adoption Study at Southampton University
- Queen's University Belfast's Care Pathway follow-up study
- The University of Strathclyde's study of sibling relationships in family placement





## Committees, special interest groups and forums

Our multidisciplinary committees, special interest groups and practice forums provide opportunities for members to engage with us and each other, discuss and debate new developments and practice dilemmas, and contribute to shaping policy and practice. In response to members, new practice forums have been established to allow for more regional networking opportunities. Below, in brief, is a glimpse of the topics discussed

### **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. Topics under continuous discussion have included regional adoption agencies (RAAs), the continuing uncertainty about the place of adoption including recent case law, the Children and Social Work Bill, and the emerging developments in the DfE's Fostering Stocktake. At a practice level, feedback has been given on the current issues in special guardianship, the drafting of good practice guidance on checks and references and Fostering for Adoption. Forms development is also a key concern.

The UKSWPAC is also significant for its representation of members from across England. While there is an England-wide framework for family placement, it is important

to address local concerns. One example is the impact on Kent over the past year of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving from Europe and particularly via Calais. However, other local authorities are also involved, whether this is with children arriving via other routes or being found outside of Kent, and will be addressing the issues through the "dispersal arrangements". It is vital that we continue to recognise local experience even when the issues are national.

### **Legal Group Advisory Committee**

**Chair: Peter Baldwin, Independent Solicitor**

The LGAC meets quarterly and responds quickly to issues arising between meetings. Of concern and focus over the last year has been the making of special guardianship orders after hurried and sometimes inadequate assessments. Committee members gave "on the ground" accounts of the effects of the 26-week time limit on care cases affecting the quality of assessments. This has resulted in poor application of the enhanced requirements for assessment as set out in the Special Guardianship Amendment Regulations 2016. The Committee's views have supported John Simmonds's work with the Judicial College on special guardianship, with a briefing paper published as a result. The Committee continues to work on additional proposals to improve the quality of the assessment process for special guardianship orders, including the consideration of special guardianship placement orders and alternative amendments to the current statutory framework.

The Committee has considered the legal implications of aspects of the Children and Social Work Bill, which were fed into CoramBAAF's response to the Bill. There has been concern about the proposal to allow the disapplication of statutory and regulatory requirements 'to test new ways of working'. We were delighted that the clauses were struck out by the House of Lords but concerned that the Government has reintroduced the clauses into the Bill before the Commons. The Committee has been instrumental in reflecting the needs of practitioners in developing a guide to the management of the increasing number of child care and adoption cases with a European dimension. This will be published shortly, including an appendix considering the potential impact of the referendum vote to leave the EU.

There have been concerns about the different approaches courts have taken in adoption cases involving relinquished babies. We are planning to re-draft the BAAF guidance on relinquishment, which we hope will lead to a more consistent approach across the country.

Dissemination of case law has drawn attention to the court's approach to the rights of birth families coming forward after a child has been placed for adoption; the developing case law on the use of section 20 accommodation, and the emerging legal difficulties of placing children across the English/Scottish border for adoption or in secure accommodation.

### **Health Group Advisory Committee**

**Chair: Dr Carolyn Sampeys, Designated Doctor, Public Health, Wales**

The HGAC focused on maintaining standards of health provision for looked after and adopted children in light of economic restraints, reforms in adoption and fostering including regional adoption agencies (RAAs), and significantly increased numbers of refugee children, all of which have had a major impact on service delivery and the roles of medical advisers and specialist nurses throughout the UK. The annual conference, *Out of place: recognising, understanding and responding to the health needs of looked after refugee and trafficked children and young people*, held in Birmingham in June, was well received. The Committee published revised children's health assessment forms in August.

In addition to responding to multiple consultations, the HGAC discussed the Adoption Support Fund, the health contribution to RAAs, health assessments for adoption when children are not looked after, national dispersal of refugee children, professional information sharing and safeguarding in out-of-area placements, competencies for clinical child psychologists working in fostering and adoption, and practice developments in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and regions of England. It also considered how best to work in partnership with NHS England, the National Network of Designated Health Professionals (NNDHP) and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), and shared concerns with the DfE about health issues in family placement.

### **Research Group Advisory Committee**

**Chair: Barry Luckock, Sussex University**

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

Recent discussions have included an exploration of the challenge to the ethical position of adoption policy highlighted in the *Guardian* and by Professor Andy Bilson. The evidence used is challenging and the RGAC was concerned about its validity and interpretation. A letter to the *Guardian* was subsequently published and the discussion and debate continue among advisory group members. Other issues have included the consequences and the evidence base of the clauses in the Children and Social Work Bill that "enable" testing new ways of working, and the sector's concerns about the adequacy of the delivery of special guardianship and the evidence for this.

We continue to submit responses to public consultations and the advice of the RGAC is crucial in helping us to formulate these.

### **Black and Minority Ethnic Perspectives Advisory Committee**

**Chair: Steve O'Loughlin, Independent Practice Teacher**

**Vice Chair: Aminah Sumpton, Children's Guardian**

The group focuses on the specific issues arising for black and minority ethnic children, their families and their carers. At the same time, the developments in policy and practice generally and their potential impact on the diverse communities that may be affected by any change remain of concern. Specific topics have included the continuing uncertainty over the impact of the deletion of 'due consideration being given to the child's race, culture, religion and language' in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Other discussions have included the place of adoption in Muslim communities and appropriate matching for children from a Muslim background. The group has also advised on the project to draft practice guidance on matching and BAME issues, commissioned by Coram as part of a DfE project.

### **Independent Fostering Providers (IFP) Forum**

**Chair: Jacqui Lawrence, CoramBAAF**

The Forum exists to improve the relationship between independent fostering providers and local authorities to ensure that a high standard of care is provided to children and young people, despite austerity measures in the public sector. There has been particular focus on the future of children's services and what this means for the independent sector in increasing the range of services for children and young people. Other topics discussed in the Forum have included the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, increasing the participation of children and listening actively to what they have to say, and addressing the emotional well-being of children in foster care.

The IFP Forum also contributed to CoramBAAF's response to the Education Committee's Fostering Inquiry.



## CoramBAAF Practice Forums (CBPFs)

CoramBAAF facilitates a number of regional Practice Forums for members across England. Co-ordinated by CoramBAAF consultants, they provide an opportunity to share expertise, knowledge, good practice, and issues that have arisen locally and also enable members to contribute to local and national policy development.

New practice forums were recently set up in Yorkshire and Humberside, North East England and the Eastern Counties. In the main, each Forum meets quarterly and brings together lead consultants, senior practitioners, team managers and service managers in fostering and permanency teams in the regions.

The Forums have recently had in-depth discussions about the regionalisation of adoption, the Government's Fostering Inquiry and Fostering Stocktake, as well as the changes to social work practice laid out in the Government's paper, *Putting Children First*, and austerity measures across children's services.

**CBPF: Fostering – North West** has looked at policy and practice developments as well as news from CoramBAAF and the Fostering Network. Additionally, it has explored recruitment, training of foster carers, OFSTED, matching, and checks and references in fostering assessments.

**Black Workers' Practice Forum** provides black practitioners in adoption and fostering with the opportunity to develop and focus on specific practice strategies and initiatives for working with and promoting the placement needs of black and minority ethnic children. It also provides an opportunity for practitioners to access advice and support on other matters affecting their practice.

The Forum meets bi-monthly in London with a regular attendance of around 20 practitioners and managers. Recent sessions have enabled the group to share and develop adoption and fostering practice relating to refugee and trafficked young people, child sexual exploitation, management, mentoring and leadership, placement needs of black and minority ethnic children and promoting anti-racist practice in social work.

**Adoption Panel Chairs Group** – the main focus of discussion is policy and practice developments and how they are impacting on the work of agencies and adoption panels. These discussions have also contributed to the work of CoramBAAF, e.g. discussions on transitions led to the development of a successful conference in October 2016 on transitions into adoption. Members of the group also contributed to a response paper on the implications of the proposed Clause 29 in the Children and Social Work Bill, which was published by CoramBAAF.

Other discussions have focused on the findings of the CoramBAAF survey on matching panels, the development of RAAs and the likely arrangements for panels in these new structures. In addition, chairs have sought clarification on different aspects around the conduct of panel business to inform the practice in their agencies. This has included discussions on panel minutes,

deferring cases, foster carers' attendance at matches, panel appraisals, relinquished children and transracial placements.

## Special interest groups

### **Special Guardianship Special Interest Group** **Chair: Elaine Dibben, CoramBAAF**

The group explored the practice implications of the Amendment to the Special Guardianship Regulations and Statutory Guidance 2016 and also considered the proposal to amend the Children and Social Work Bill to introduce the equivalent of a placement order, to be used when there is no pre-existing relationship between the special guardian and child. In April, members welcomed the news of an extension to access to the Adoption Support Fund for children under special guardianship order arrangements. Meetings also received input from CoramBAAF's legal adviser on relevant case law. DfE representatives are members and attend when possible to share updates and benefit from the group's experiences. A successful conference, *The Future of Special Guardianship*, was held in London in May 2016.

### **Private Fostering Special Interest Groups** **Chair: Savita De Sousa, CoramBAAF**

These groups run in London, the South West, the Midlands and Northern regions, and offer practitioners the opportunity to share knowledge, skills, experience, strategies for problem-solving, case work and legal interpretations. In 2016, agenda items included cases of children in private fostering arrangements, undocumented migrant children, hidden homelessness and children who are "sofa surfers", Ofsted reports, trends from annual reports, prohibitions, DBS checks, medicals and language school protocols. We continue to respond to individual requests for information and advice on this complex subject.

# Did our publications help you?

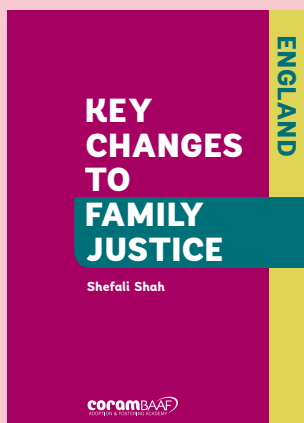
CoramBAAF is a major publisher of books on fostering, adoption and related issues. We publish a range of titles that primarily address the needs of professionals working with and placing children, but also those of foster carers and adopters, and looked after and adopted children.

In 2016, we published 17 new titles, including revisions of bestselling guides that members value the most.

- *Adoption by Foster Carers* by Elaine Dibben and Viv Howorth. In response to the increasing numbers of foster carers wishing to adopt their foster child, this practice guide lays out the factors to be considered and seeks to dispel the myth that adoption by foster carers is a back door route to adoption.
- *Access to Information for Adult Care Leavers* by Julia Feast and Leonie Jordan. This revised edition offers practice guidance and recommendations in cases where adults request access to their care records.
- *Group Work with Adopted Children* by Henrietta Bond explores the benefits of group work for adopted children, and provides advice and information on how agencies can set up and successfully run such groups.
- *Effective Fostering Panels* by Sarah Borthwick and Jenifer Lord. A must for members of fostering panels in England, this revised edition ensures that panel members have up-to-date and accurate information about their roles and responsibilities.

- *Undertaking a Child Assessment (Scotland)* by Marjorie Morrison. This comprehensive guide sets out the issues that the assessing social worker must take into account when completing the CAPR, including useful guidance on completing an assessment of an infant.
- We also published revised editions of *Life Story Work* by Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker, *The Adoption Process* by Jenifer Lord (revised by Mary Lucking), and the bestselling *Attachment, Trauma and Resilience* by Kate Cairns and Brian Cairns.

We added two titles to our Parenting Matters series, principally aimed at adopters and foster carers, but also widely read by social workers! This series invites the reader to look “behind the label” of a child, say, with developmental delay or mental health issues, and explores a range of conditions that a looked after child or a child needing adoption may present with. The titles offer a combination of expert information about the condition, followed by a personal account from adopters or foster carers who have parented such a child. The two new titles were *Parenting a Child Affected by Sexual Abuse*, by Bidy Youell, a child and adult psychotherapist at



*One of my ambitions has always been to write a book and this materialised in 2016 with the publication of Key Changes in Family Justice, a legal guide. I really could not have done it without the support of the Publications team at CoramBAAF. Like all first-time authors, I was nervous at every stage of the process, beginning with putting forward the proposal, then the writing, and finally the editorial process. Each step of the way Shaila Shah and Jo Francis offered supportive guidance and professional expertise, resulting in an excellently designed publication. One university course has already put my book on the recommended reading list! The book's success has given me the encouragement to write another book, and a proposal for another legal guide has been accepted.*

**Shefali Shah, Solicitor, CoramBAAF Legal Group member**

the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, and *Parenting a Child who has Experienced Trauma*, by the renowned US clinical psychologist, Dan Hughes, founder of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).

Our bestselling guide for prospective adopters, *Adopting a Child*, by Jenifer Lord, was also revised and we published a companion guide for those considering fostering, *Thinking about Fostering?* by Henrietta Bond. Also for adopters, we published *The Adopter's Handbook on Therapy*, by Eileen Fursland, and for those considering adoption, *Our Adoption Journey*, by Jayne Lilley.

## Special offers and books for members

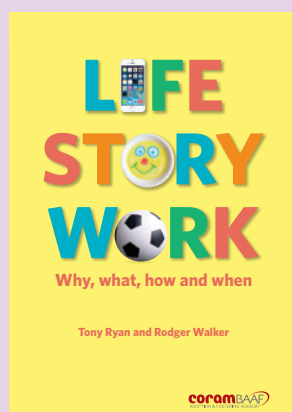
Agency members are sent four books as part of their membership package while individual members can select three. But members also buy our books to distribute to their workforce. All in all, we have almost 300 titles in print. In 2016, we sold 33,866 books and 6,628 Advice Notes. Members are frequently offered discounts and in September and then January we ran very successful flash sales that many of you took advantage of. We also offered a "Book of the Month", featuring different titles at considerably reduced rates.

A new membership benefit is the availability of some of our out of print titles in PDF format in the members' area of our website, with 15 made available during 2016. Also included are our complete series of Practice Notes, and nine titles in our Advice Notes series – short pamphlets on a range of topics that are helpful for you to offer to your clients – as well as pamphlets for panel members. This year, we also launched our Briefing Note series of short papers on issues of particular immediate significance to our members (five published so far); these can also be accessed online in the members' area.

We commission new titles but also consider proposals that are sent to us. Many of our authors are recognised experts in their field, including those from CoramBAAF. In the box opposite, Shefali Shah, author of *Key Changes to Family Justice (England)* (also published in 2016), recounts her experience of having her first book published.

## Our five best-selling titles in 2016

- Carer-held Health Record
- Parenting a Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- Effective Fostering Panels
- The Primal Wound
- Fostering Now



*This is a well thought-out text you can read from cover to cover, or dip into... This is the book to read if you want to know the why, what, how and when of life story work, and a lot more besides about communicating successfully with children and teenagers.*

**Jill Seeney**, Senior Supervising Social Worker (Fostering), Trainer, Writer – *Professional Social Work*

*CoramBAAF has for many years played an outstanding role nationally in promoting the success of fostering and adoption by providing a wide range of excellent books, first class practice guides, essential updates on the law and also moving and inspiring real life stories from foster and adoptive parents and young people. The Adoption & Fostering Journal is essential reading for all those involved in adoption and fostering, and is read and valued right around the world.*

*CoramBAAF publications draw on the very best internationally renowned research on what works best for children and families, but also offer a range of invaluable practice guides that translate what we know is helpful into the daily lives of families to help children recover from trauma and fulfil their potential.*

**Professor Gillian Schofield**, Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia

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# Did you attend our learning events?

The external environment in which child care workers operate is constantly changing – new legislation, policy initiatives, practice guidance and standards require to be understood, learnt and implemented. The scope, range and structure of CoramBAAF's learning events are designed to meet the needs of the children's workforce, and keep workers well informed.

We worked hard during the early part of 2016 to offer events in different locations. As the year drew to a close, we witnessed a marked increase in training requests, with a pronounced rise in requests for fostering-related workshops and training. To help us cast our net wider, we recruited a number of associate trainers, and this will help increase the range and reach of our offer.

Our experienced team of trainer consultants bring specialist expertise, underpinned by a sound knowledge base, and many are published authors. We are well supported by the work of our policy consultants and the enquiries to our advice line have helped us shape our workshop programme. This included popular topics such as making good fostering/adoption assessments, the roles and responsibilities of supervising social workers, the roles and responsibilities of agency decision makers, and effective adoption/fostering panels. New topics included health assessments, the Secure Base and robust analysis in fostering and adoption assessments, quality assurance of fostering and adoption reports, charring with confidence, and monitoring standards of care. We also devised a new seven-week modular training programme for foster carers and their supervising social workers, Strengthening the Secure Base. Evaluations show that our events helped participants to enhance their skills, be better informed about key developments and legislative changes, and learn about evidence-based research and its implications for practice.

We offered events in different formats to meet your needs. Our workshop programme was circulated widely to members and we ran a total of 38 workshops. We also responded to a number of requests for bespoke training courses and action learning sets, focusing on specific topics or strengthening the skills base in a particular area – we ran a total of 93 training courses and undertook 27 pieces of consultancy. Conferences on key issues were held throughout the year and offered a platform for debate and a chance to hear what the experts have to say.

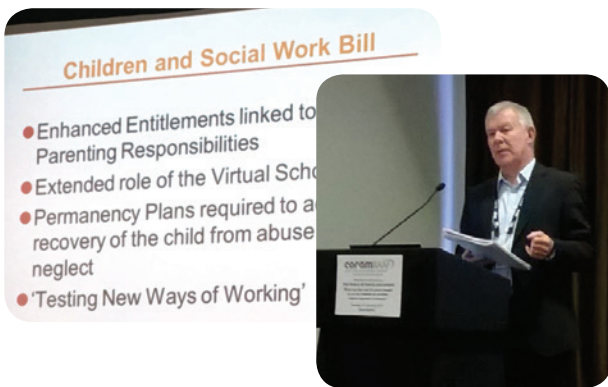
## Some of the bespoke training courses we delivered

We developed a **training programme for foster carers for the London Borough of Barnet** with eight courses commissioned from July 2016 to February 2017, including helping carers manage stress; teenagers in foster care: promoting positive relationships; men who foster; positive behaviour management; supporting birth children; promoting the identity of young people and children in care; delegated authority; and managing stress.

**A programme for the London Borough of Lewisham** included courses on outcomes for children in care planning; assessment for wider family members; the Secure Base Model for practitioners; and sibling assessments. These were delivered to foster carers, family social workers and other practitioners, from February to November 2016.

**SCOPE Fostering commissioned courses** covering attachment and trauma as experienced by fostered disabled children, and safe social networking. Training was delivered to foster carers, family social workers and other fostering workers from spring through to the autumn.





## Our conference programme

We offered a stimulating conference programme featuring cutting-edge topics. Varied in scope and subjects, our events presented an opportunity to learn about new developments, hear from and interact with expert speakers, and network with others with shared interests. Conferences were held in London, Birmingham, Cardiff (jointly organised with AFA Cymru) and Belfast. All of them were well attended and received very positive evaluations.

Themes addressed included:

- Attachment in adoptive families
- The future of special guardianship
- Are we getting it right for children? The future of permanency planning in England and Wales
- Out of place – recognising, understanding and responding to the health needs of looked after refugee and trafficked children and young people
- Kinship foster care in Northern Ireland
- Ensuring good transitions into adoption – preparing and supporting children, their foster carers and prospective adopters
- The neuroscience of adoption and fostering – a day with Dr Margot Sunderland



*Out of Place was a really pertinent conference which covered all aspects of the issues experienced by both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people and also considered the needs of trafficked young people within the UK. The speakers were well informed and the presentations good. It was particularly relevant to the work of the LAC team in Hillingdon and it was good to learn from the experience of other areas having presented our protocol. The overall organisation was, as usual, excellent and the venue well chosen and accessible.*

**Dr Deborah Price Williams, Associate Specialist with responsibility as Medical Adviser for Adoption and Fostering/Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, Hillingdon Community Health – North West London NHS Foundation Trust /Hillingdon Clinical Commissioning Group**

*We commissioned CoramBAAF – as they have a reputation for being a centre of excellence – to undertake an independent investigation into a serious allegation. The commissioned work was started quickly, and there was good communication with the agency throughout the period of the commissioned work. The investigation itself was carried out sensitively and fairly and the quality of the final report was excellent – it was thorough, made appropriate reference to research and theory, was well-balanced and fully met the criteria set out in the letter of instruction.*

**Laura Williams, Practice Lead, Fostering, London Borough of Southwark**

*CoramBAAF conferences are always excellent and directly relevant to practice and issues that are current. Delighted to have the presence of CoramBAAF in Northern Ireland, it has been sorely missed.*

**Eithne Daly, Adoption Services Manager, Northern Health & Social Care Trust**

To enquire about our workshops, conferences and training programmes, visit [www.corambaaf.org.uk/workshops](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/workshops), [www.corambaaf.org.uk/conferences](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/conferences), [www.corambaaf.org.uk/training](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/training), email [training@corambaaf.org.uk](mailto:training@corambaaf.org.uk) or telephone 020 7520 2043.



# Did we respond to your query?

CoramBAAF's Advice and Information Services are available to agency as well as individual members. Although less well used in the early part of 2016, in the latter half we were receiving up to 40 enquiries per week to our Advice Line, mostly by email. These ranged from the more straightforward questions about resources and statistics to more complex consultancy about particular cases.

## The advice service

We responded to around 1,200 enquiries to our Advice Line. Although some of you chose to telephone us, the majority of enquiries were by email. We have dedicated consultants ready to respond to you, with the more specialist enquiries, for example, on health or legal matters, being referred to our health and legal consultants. It is a service principally for social work professionals but also for members who may be carers, or adopters, or other professionals.

Members have contacted us for advice on a range of issues, and elsewhere in this section we provide a breakdown as well as some examples. Enquiries are recorded on a database – this allows us to identify trends that inform other developments, e.g. training needs and topics to be addressed in our good practice guides. In response to the increased demand, we have recruited a dedicated adviser so that enquiries can be responded to more promptly. The public area of our website also contains information on topics that members could use for their clients. Every attempt is made to ensure that this is regularly updated.

## The information service

Allied to the Advice Service is CoramBAAF's Information Service, which responded to queries from members, Government departments and news services. Queries have ranged from statistical information, research needed in preparation for court, and resources and guidance on various issues.

The service is also a tremendous internal resource and helps consultants, trainers and authors to ensure that they have the latest and most accurate information for the guides we publish as well as the training courses and workshops we offer.

Colleagues scour a variety of relevant publications to produce an invaluable compendium each month, the *Adoption & Fostering Digest*. This contains the latest on research, policy and practice developments, as well as Government initiatives and consultations, throughout the UK. This is available to members free and non-members can receive it for an annual subscription fee of £100.

### Some cases we have advised on

- A child was temporarily sent to members of a support network of a long-term foster carer, without notifying the local authority. Had the authority known, this would not have been agreed as DBS checks had not been completed. It was subsequently revealed that one of the relatives in this network was involved in criminal activity, but had not been convicted. This information could not be shared as it was confidential. Advice was sought on how to deal with this situation.
- Third-time adopters were being assessed with stages one and two running in parallel. Previous adoptions had been successful. However, the medical adviser was not prepared to give clearance owing to obesity issues of one of the couple and was advising a significant weight loss. Advice was sought on the legal position. Were the medical adviser's comments advisory or legally binding?
- A placement order was granted for two young siblings. Although born in England themselves, their parents were from overseas and had no legal status in the UK. Advice was sought on the children's consequent status in the UK. Were they British by virtue of their birth in the UK? And if not, what would be the process for establishing their status?

*Jacqui Lawrence, one of CoramBAAF's consultants, recommended Buttle UK to one of the parents she was advising. We were very happy to help this parent with the education of her child and this help will not only be from ourselves but also the charities we work with. You may know that our founder, the Reverend Frank Buttle, founded the Adoption Society.*

**Sally Ward, Case Work Manager, Buttle UK.**

## TYPES OF ENQUIRIES TO OUR ADVICE SERVICE



90

Health issues



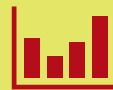
609

Policy, practice and procedures



100

Legal issues



10

Statistics



70

Research evidence



66

Other

Topics have included those related to adoption (domestic and intercountry), foster care, assessments, panels, tracing and reunion, special guardianship, education, transracial placements, fees, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and others.



254

Resources  
(accessing materials)

*The Family Placement Service have contacted the CoramBAAF Advice Line on a fairly regular basis. I have personally found it very helpful. The CoramBAAF service is vital for Guernsey due to the legislative differences to the UK and it helps us seek the expertise and knowledge that we require to keep abreast of developments in policies and practice. The service also provides us with the assurance that we can seek the views of CoramBAAF if we are unsure of any fostering or adoption related matter.*

Jo Ogier, Senior Social Work Practitioner, States of Guernsey

*I look forward to the monthly Adoption & Fostering Digest when it pops into my email. Everything is in one place with links to the key debates, new research, consultations and even links to relevant parliamentary questions and answers. Without the digest I would need to spend hours trawling the internet to find the right document. I often read something of interest that I was unaware of.*

Julie Selwyn, Professor of Child and Family Social Work, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

### ADVICE LINE

Open Monday – Friday, 9am – 1pm.  
Telephone: 0300 222 5775  
or email [advice@corambaaf.org.uk](mailto:advice@corambaaf.org.uk)



# Working together in Wales



Our partnership with AFA Cymru (Association for Fostering and Adoption) has enabled us to work together to offer a membership service in Wales. Below is a report on what AFA Cymru has provided to members to address national issues and concerns.

## Learning events and consultancy

AFA Cymru held two conferences – one for Independent Reviewing Officers, and *Are we getting it right for children?*, presented jointly with CoramBAAF, with over 120 delegates from agencies across Wales attending. We held 17 workshops on a range of subjects, while staff also provided nearly 100 training events for local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and CSSIW, the Welsh social services inspectorate.

As an additional membership benefit, we also provided free training to members, including three workshops for the National Adoption Service (NAS) promoting their guidance on family finding, and a workshop at a regional adoption conference.

The AFA Cymru advice service for practitioners also offers members access to expertise on legal and practice issues, and we responded to over 100 queries this year.

We also:

- disseminated Foster to Adopt practice guidance across Wales;
- undertook a literature review of life story work that has formed the basis of a new framework model; and
- led the workstream on the National Fostering Framework approach to kinship foster care, including providing workshops on viability, assessment and support.

## Representing your views

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

- National Fostering Framework Strategic Group
- Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children

- Advisory Group for the National Adoption Service
- CAFCASS Cymru Advisory Committee

## Special interest groups

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

To address members' queries about health issues in adoption and fostering, the Medical Group produced a Practice Note on the latest findings surrounding e-cigarettes, for dissemination throughout Wales.

## Advocating on members' behalf

AFA Cymru also lobbied Welsh Government on aspects of legal and policy context. Sarah Coldrick, AFA Cymru Legal Adviser, worked closely with NAS and Julie Doughty, Cardiff University Law School, to co-ordinate an approach to Welsh Government to consider extending clauses 8 and 9 of the Children and Social Work Bill in England to Wales. These clauses have now been amended to include Wales, ensuring that the lifelong needs of children are considered in court decisions, as well as giving adoptive parents important rights to be considered as primary attachment figures for their children in contested adoption hearings.

AFA Cymru also worked with NAS to provide initial advice to Welsh Government about how the adoption support regulations should be changed to bring them in line with the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.



# Spreading the word

Raising the profile of CoramBAAF and ensuring that our voice, and that of our members and supporters, is heard has been a key strand of our work. We have used the widest range of media to advocate, debate, generate awareness and gather support for children and young people in care and all those who work with and care for them.

With coverage in print titles ranging from *Who do you think you are?* magazine to *Children and Young People Now* to *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*; on websites including the National Union of Teachers, Family Law Week and the Guardian Social Care Network; and through social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, we have ensured that CoramBAAF is recognised as *the* professional, independent voice in the field of adoption, fostering and permanence.

Working closely with the Coram media team, we have made sure that our voice has been heard in debates on topics including changes to special guardianship

legislation; the care of children by their grandparents; the increase in children's care applications; misconceptions about children adopted from care; adoption by foster carers; the effect of Brexit on the UK adoption of Eastern European migrants' children; the Adoption Support Fund; and the controversial proposed changes to the Children and Social Work Bill.

Sometimes we have led the discussion, on other occasions we have commented on the words and actions of others, but whenever we have spoken out we have done so with the authority, expertise and experience that you, our members, provide us with.

## The Children and Social Work Bill

Our media strategy aimed to position CoramBAAF as a key voice in the sector, raise our profile with policy-makers, opinion formers and the media, engage with supporters and ultimately influence the debate. Using print, web and social media, we ensured that our concerns and opinions were clearly expressed, widely communicated and had the greatest possible impact.

- **Seven** articles (in print and online) featuring CoramBAAF reached nearly **8 million** people – coverage was achieved in key sector press including Guardian.com, *Children and Young People Now*, *Community Care* and *Family Law Week*.
- Five of our Facebook posts about the Bill had over **48,000** reactions/readers.
- Twenty tweets achieved over **20,000** impressions (the number of unique Twitter feeds our tweets were posted in). Over **550** people reacted to our tweets, either by clicking a link, “liking” or retweeting.

## OUR MEDIA PRESENCE IN 2016

### Social media



- Over **600** tweets and more than **11,800** Twitter followers



- Over **6,000** Facebook followers and more than **120,000** reactions/readers to Facebook posts

### Print media



- Coverage achieved in 15 different titles
- **850,000** readers reached

### Web media



- Coverage achieved on more than **10** different sites
- **10 million** readers reached

### Broadcast media



- Advised a range of programme makers
- Worked with television and radio channels including BBC News, Muslim TV and BBC Three Counties Radio

# What have we planned for 2017?

Our plans of work are determined by the needs of our members. Much of this is gleaned from your participation in our committees and forums and the complex queries received by our advice service. In late 2016, we also conducted an agency membership survey that has given us further pointers as to what you need from us. Below is a glimpse of what you can expect.

## What you told us

We received an encouraging response to our recent membership survey from 186 colleagues from member agencies, and this has helped confirm for us that adoption support, Fostering for Adoption, the Fostering Stocktake, special guardianship assessments and the regionalisation of adoption agencies (RAAs) are high on your agenda. You also told us that you particularly value our briefings and good practice guides, you want more locally based events, and that you find our books and events very useful. This has helped shape our plans going forwards and below we list some particular pieces of work we are and will be involved in.

## Setting the agenda for 2017

- The Education Select Committee's Inquiry into Fostering heralds a much needed examination of the role of foster care and its need for a coherent, child-centred and well-resourced framework. This is linked to the Department for Education's (DfE) Fostering Stocktake, in which we have already participated, and will continue to respond to as the objectives and form of the Stocktake take shape.
- In November 2016, the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, University of Bristol, produced a report that considers the impact on foster carers of "compassion fatigue" when caring for children who have been abused, neglected and traumatised. This study stresses the importance of foster carers and those who support them understanding the significance of these issues. We are currently exploring a specific service-based course for fostering service managers and practitioners to reflect the findings of this study and embed them in current practice.
- We will re-draft the original guidance on Fostering for Adoption, as commissioned through Coram and

by the DfE. We have completed three focus groups in Doncaster, London and the South West, which has allowed us to learn about how agencies can best recruit, prepare and support fostering for adoption carers, and outline the benefits and challenges of such placements.

- The development of RAAs across England continues to gather pace. This is undoubtedly a challenging agenda with significant and complex questions to answer about governance, legal framework, budgets, workforce and connections to other parts of the family placement system. We continue to be concerned that the children and adopters remain at the core of this radical development and that their needs do not become submerged in the consequences of significant organisational change.
- Discussions with professionals working in health strongly indicate the marginalisation of their contribution in current policy and practice developments – especially in RAAs. We will be lobbying for health services to be recognised for the core contribution they make to children's plans and decision-making when assessments are being made, health concerns being identified, and services being provided. The importance of health and children's services working together could not be more important. We will work jointly with NHS England to create change in allowing specialist nurses to carry out initial health assessments for young people, thus facilitating better use of professional resources.

We will also identify the importance for health professionals to be involved in the transfer protocols and design of health services for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people so that processes will be effective. We will continue to push for the retention of the original NHS number for adopted children, which will improve outcomes for children and save time for health care professionals.

## Representing your views

We will continue to actively participate in discussions with Government departments – the Department for Education, Department of Health, the Department of Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice. Membership of the Adoption Leadership Board, the Advisory Group on Adoption Support and the Fostering Stocktake are just three groups where we have an active interest in representing our members' views.

## Guides and events

**Good Practice Guides** are the most valued by you and we have planned some more! New titles will offer guidance on undertaking checks and references required in adoption and fostering; managing allegations against foster carers, including how services should react before, during and after the allegation; fostering for adoption; undertaking a connected persons assessment; special guardianship assessments; undertaking an adoption assessment in Scotland; and the role of the supervising social worker. Handbooks for carers and adopters will include guides on how to help their child through the world of school; and caring for a child who has been sexually exploited, including how to support and safeguard such children.

Our **workshop programme** will address new areas including fostering for adoption, undertaking an adoption support assessment, leadership and management, the STOP supporting programme for parenting teenagers, and more. And in response to your concerns about the limited locations of our workshops, we will be offering workshops in Plymouth, Manchester and Stockport. We now have a group of Associate Trainers with a range of specialisms and this promises to enhance our range and delivery.

Our **conferences** in England will address the areas above, and the programme is in its planning stages. A free conference for members will be on offer, as will an Annual Reception for Members. We will also hold a conference in Northern Ireland and one with AFA Cymru in Wales.

**In Wales**, AFA Cymru will be organising further events for the National Fostering Framework, including on kinship care, on feedback and consultation on the work undertaken in Phase 2, and an event on corporate parenting. The forthcoming medical conference, Nature, Nurture and Destiny, will take place in Cardiff on 23 March 2017. Chaired by Dr Carolyn Sampeys, the conference will focus on managing the uncertainties and long-term implications of a variety of factors for children

## Projects

The development of best policy and practice continues to be at the heart of our work, and our range of specialist projects are key to this. We have been actively involved in a number of important projects, many of which are due to continue.

- We are involved in the Nuffield-funded project scoping the framework for a Legal Observatory, led by Professor Karen Broadhurst at Lancaster University. A number of focus groups have provided agency legal practitioners with a chance to discuss how the Observatory could help them.
- Funding from the DfE and a commission from Coram has enabled us to re-work the practice guidance on Fostering for Adoption placements, due to be published as a practice guide later this year.
- We are supporting the University of East Anglia in a two-year project to identify best practice in transitions for children from foster care to adoption.
- We are working with the Tavistock Institute in developing practice and delivering interventions on the couple relationship in adoption, including working with a number of agencies to develop advanced training.
- We are working with the UN-recognised International Organisation for Migration and have submitted an application to work on a project spanning six countries, to develop foster care for migrant children.
- In a culmination of months of work, good practice guidance and a template for viability assessments for kinship care have recently been launched by a sector-wide group of organisations, chaired by CoramBAAF's John Simmonds with Paul Adams having drafted the guidance.

in care and those requiring permanence outside their birth family. The team is also in the process of developing materials for a free course in relation to the assessment of caregivers for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

## Forms

We will revise the adult health forms (AH and AH2) for use by social workers at the annual foster carer reviews. This will assist with identification of situations where further medical information is needed, rather than carrying out routine health assessments, thus providing better use of professional time and resources. We will also provide bilingual (Welsh and English) editions of the children's initial and review health forms.

## Coming soon

### New CoramBAAF website

In April, we will be launching a new CoramBAAF website. With enhanced content, improved search and navigation, and a fresh, clean design, the site will provide visitors with valuable information and advice, all the latest news and updates, and access to the full range of CoramBAAF products and services, including workshops, conferences and publications.

For members, the exclusive members' area of the site will contain a wealth of invaluable resources including the *Adoption & Fostering* journal, the *Adoption & Fostering Digest*, CoramBAAF Advice Notes, Practice Notes and Briefing Notes and the latest statistics, financial data, legislation and guidance. A range of key services will also be available via the members' area including the Advice Line, the Library and Information Service and the jobs listing service.

In the next year, we would like to make our resource bank available to search in the members' area of the website, including the content of all of our Digest posts. This would allow members to use our catalogue to find out about available resources and often link to them online, to have more immediate access to news being shared through the Digest (making it more of a current awareness service), and to have access to an archive of Digest posts.

We are extremely grateful for the significant legacy that we received that has enabled us to develop the website. We are confident that the new site will help us to better meet the needs of our members as well as to reach even more practitioners and all those with both a professional and personal interest in adoption and fostering across the UK and internationally.



### Adoption & Fostering

An interesting and varied selection of articles is planned for 2017/18. Topics include: looked after young people's views on what matters to their well-being; developing mindfulness for adoption; adult adoptees' attitudes towards using genetic information to fill in gaps in their family history; the social implications of further education for children in care; and a qualitative social work study on adopting children with high therapeutic needs.

The next special edition, to be published in early 2018, will focus on the contribution of neuroscience to family placement policy and practice. This complex, often controversial area is both fascinating and important but tends to be overshadowed by a preoccupation with the effects of trauma on attachment.

In commissioning experts from a range of viewpoints and disciplines, guest editors Matt Woolgar and John Simmonds will seek to illuminate readers about the "science" of neuroscience as well as some of the arguments it has provoked among those working in the broad field of adoption and fostering.



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## Board members

CoramBAAF is governed by an independent Board of Directors.

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**Alison Lowton**  
*Former Borough Solicitor in the London Borough of Camden*

**Professor Jonathan Portes**  
*Director of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research*

**Geraldine MacDonald**  
*Professor of Social Work at the University of Bristol*

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Published by  
CoramBAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy  
41 Brunswick Square  
London WC1N 1AZ

Written by Shaila Shah with input from colleagues at CoramBAAF and AFA Cymru  
Designed by Helen Joubert Design  
Printed by The Lavenham Press

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

Coram Academy Limited, registered as a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales number 9697712,  
part of the Coram group, charity number 312278

2017