

## Welcome to our Newsletter!

As a service, we have been trying to improve our Post Adoption Support and have held a number of events which some of you may have taken part in. Thank you for your suggestions for activities or supports that you think would be of value. If you have any other ideas, please email me at the address given below.

The City of Edinburgh Council has provided funding for the whole team to be trained in Theraplay. This will significantly widen access to this support for adoptive families and we hope you can access it at various stages in your journey.

You will also read in the newsletter about new groups that are being set up and I encourage you to use these.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and can find time to follow up on the many links and suggestions found throughout. As always, it would be good to know what you find useful and what you would find helpful to read about in future newsletters.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

**Team Manager**

## Adoption News

You may be aware that there is a national focus about the importance of educational attainment. Getting the right support for children at school is crucial if they are going to fulfil their potential. The article on adoption and education has a number of helpful suggestions for doing this including making contact with the Post Adoption Support service. This comes at a time when the Pupil Equity Funding is coming into schools. Our schools are being encouraged to be creative as to how the funding is used. We would encourage you to make contact with your school to find out how they are making use of this, and whether it may benefit your child.

The City of Edinburgh Council is also becoming involved in the Government initiative referred to as PACE. This is the Permanence and Care Excellence programme. The aim of this programme is to reduce drift and delay in achieving permanence for looked after children. It seeks to identify delays, blockages and difficulties in planning for children and to test changes to address these issues. We are at the very beginnings of this change management programme and more information can be read at

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/lac/pace>.

If you wish to share your experiences or views relating to this issue, please email the team manager.



The whole team have now completed their level one Theraplay training with the Theraplay Institute. We look forward to being able to reach more parents and children, and to support children's transitions with Theraplay.

Theraplay mornings for parents & prospective parents have proved popular and feedback has been excellent. The morning introduces parents to the concepts of Theraplay as well as providing an opportunity to practice the activities together. Playing with bubbles, balloons and feathers together probably isn't your usual Saturday morning activity. However, feedback from parents tells us that practising is the best part of the morning!

So far, we have run three Parent and Child Theraplay groups with groups of four parent and child pairs. These are aimed at families with a recently placed child. The gentle introduction to Theraplay activities and the opportunity to make links with other parents in those tentative early days has been well received.

These events will run throughout the year so watch this space for invitations to future events!

# Adoption and Education

## Why it matters

Education affects all children and they spend a significant part of their childhood in a school environment. As such, issues at school have a major impact on their lives and those close to them. Adoption UK, having looked at government statistics and information from their helpline, suggest that adopted children's attainment in school is, on average, lower than their peers and they have a higher rate of exclusion. However, this is not inevitable and there is a growing awareness of what can be done to support adopted children, helping them to have a positive experience at school.

## Why it can be difficult

All adopted children will have experienced loss and attachment trauma and may, due to their early life experiences, find everyday situations as more of a challenge. These situations might include; separating from primary carer(s), being in a restricted space with many others, sharing the attention of someone important, trusting the motives and intentions of the adults and following the lead of an adult by relinquishing some control.

Difficult emotions and stressful situations can lead to a stress response, and behaviour which is found challenging by their peers and teachers. Some children may be carrying strong emotions with them all the time, whilst others can have them triggered by certain situations or events. Like their feelings inside, their behaviour can be confusing and difficult. Rather than receiving the understanding and support that they would benefit from, they may feel criticised and rejected within the school environment.

## What can be done?

There are many things that, as parents, you can do to help your child at school. Adoption UK has a helpful fact sheet with a number of suggestions. A link to this has been provided below. You are likely to be doing a lot of these already!

One of the keys things is ensuring good communication between yourself and the school. It is helpful if the school shares any concerns that they have with you, sooner rather than later. You know your child best and can share with the school any strategies that work at home. You may be able to provide some insight in to what might lie behind a confusing behaviour. Behaviour can be reframed as "attachment needing" rather than "attention seeking", and strategies can be identified to help children feel safe in the class room.

As a team, we would like to raise awareness of attachment in schools. Recently, one of our team members delivered a

training session, "Attachment Matters", to a secondary school in Edinburgh. When asked, none of the staff had received training on attachment before, despite it affecting all children. Even for securely attached children, events such as bereavement, divorce and illness can rock their sense of safety at school. The training was well received, and an awareness of attachment issues will help staff to recognise the emotions behind the behaviours. Part of the session focussed on the needs of insecurely attached children and young adults. They require:

- ✓ *Reliable adults, who can show understanding, connection and offer help.*
- ✓ *Predictable interactions and routines.*
- ✓ *Clear and consistent, developmentally appropriate boundaries.*
- ✓ *Experiences of emotional containment.*
- ✓ *Consistent experiences to challenge their negative internal working model.*

These things are low cost but have a high impact. However, for many schools, this requires a significant shift in thinking.

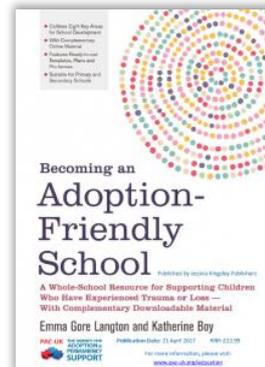
## The Adoption Friendly Schools' Charter

*As an adoption friendly school, we work hard to...*

- 1. Identify children's needs*
- 2. Prioritize relationships*
- 3. Respond empathically to behaviour*
- 4. Work in true partnership with parents*
- 5. Share information sensitively and effectively*
- 6. Reflect and protect adoptive families*
- 7. Support our staff*
- 8. Use our resources wisely*
- 9. We don't always get it right, so we try again.*

PAC-UK (the Agency for Adoption and Permanency Support) conducted an online consultation about what it means to be an adoption friendly school. The result of this research is their Adoption Friendly Schools Charter, which is accompanied by a book, "Becoming an Adoption Friendly School". This is a useful read for parents, social workers and teachers alike.

If we can support you in any way to promote a positive experience for your child at school, please get in touch with your social worker or contact our Post Adoption Support Service directly. Initially, your worker can give you advice on how to approach a class teacher (or other relevant staff) to discuss issues further.



*"A useful read for parents, social workers and teachers alike."*

## Links to resources

### Factsheets and Books

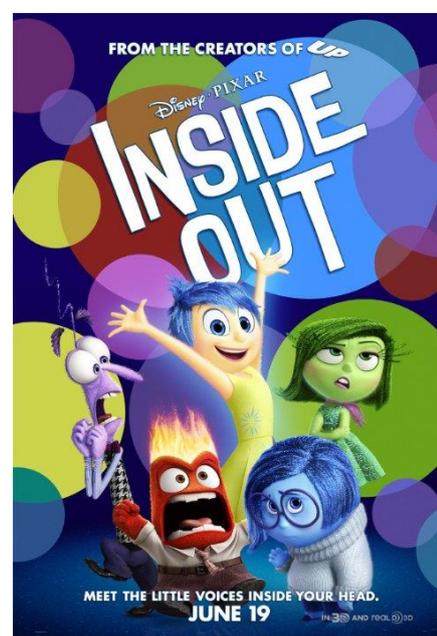
- "Let's Learn Together" by Sheila Lavery, produced by Adoption UK. This helpful booklet has been written to give adoptive parents and teachers an insight into how early relational trauma affects brain development, why school can be challenging for adopted children, and how we can help to improve the experience for all children by paying attention to the needs of the most vulnerable. The original version – commissioned by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care boards - is available to download from Adoption UK.  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/sites/default/files/documents/LetsLearnTogetherNIMarch2013.pdf>  
An updated version is available to buy from Adoption UK, reflecting the current policies and legislation relevant to Scotland.  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/shop/lets-learn-together-scotland>
- "Adopted Children and Education"; free factsheet produced by Adoption UK  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/factsheets-scotland>
- "Adoption, attachment issues and your school"; produced by Post Adoption Support Central Service  
<https://www.postadoptioncentralsupport.org/publications>
- "Becoming an Adoption-Friendly School", by Dr Emma Gore Langton and Katherine. Available to purchase online, RRP £22.99.
- Understanding Attachment Difficulties; Joint Advice from the National Association of Head Teachers and Adoption UK.  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/sites/default/files/UnderstandingAttachmentDifficultiesFlyerOct16.pdf>

### Websites

- PAC-UK <http://www.pac-uk.org/education/>
- Adoption UK  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/resources/education-resources>

### Other Media

- "Inside Out" by Disney Pixar. Although the terms don't feature in the film, "Inside Out" is all about attachment and developmental psychology. It is a wonderful film to watch!



## Connecting with Prospective Adopters

There will always be Edinburgh children needing a “forever family” and we are continually seeking adopters who can provide the love and stability that they need. You will each have had your individual reasons for starting the path to adoption, and you will all have had different experiences. However, one of peoples’ common reflections about their adoption journey is how much they valued hearing the voice of other adopters. As such, we are seeking adopters who would feel happy to use their experience to help prospective adopters.

### Adopters’ Stories for the Website

Visiting our website is often the first step for people who are enquiring into adoption with the City of Edinburgh Council. We have recently updated our webpage to include examples of people’s experiences of adopting with us. It is these which attract the most interest within our website. When our last input from adopters went live, hits on the website increased by 75%! What you say really connects with prospective adopters. We are so grateful for the adopters who have contributed already, and we would love to include some more insights into the adoption process. This could be in written form or given as a sound-bite, and about any stage of the process. We understand that people may not feel comfortable putting out too many personal details in the public domain and only first names or initials would ever be used with your permission.

### Recruitment Events

Family Based Care holds monthly recruitment events at Waverley Court, where prospective adopters can drop-in to get more information about adoption and the assessment process. In the past, enquirers have really valued the opportunity to speak to adopters who have been through the process. We would try to ensure that your allocated worker is present, along with another member of the Permanence Team. The recruitment events take place on the first

Thursday of each month, from 5pm – 7pm, with occasional lunch time sessions. We never know how many people are going to turn up, but we try to spend half an hour with each enquiry. We recognise that the first tentative steps in the adoption process can be quite nerve wracking, and so we try and keep it as informal and relaxed as possible.

### Speaking at Preparation Groups

The Permanence Team runs various groups throughout the year for prospective adopters. These include the mandatory Preparation Groups, but also a “Post-Approval” session. We invite adopters in to speak at the beginning of the Preparation Group, to focus on their experience of the assessment and approval process, and then at the end, to talk about matching, transitions, and after a child is placed. This includes the highs and lows of peoples’ experiences, delivered in a way that is helpful and supportive to prospective adopters. Prior to talking to a group, the allocated worker and group facilitators will have a chat with contributors, to discuss what they feel comfortable sharing.

### Become an Adoption Panel Member

Our Adoption Panels are drawn from a range of individuals with links to caring for vulnerable children. These panels can be very daunting for prospective adopters and the presence of an adopter, who has been through the same process, can be quite reassuring. To hear more about what being a panel member involves please contact a Team Leader, who would be happy to discuss it with you further.

We recognise that family life is a juggling act, and it can sometimes be hard to find time for these ‘extras’. As such, there is no pressure to get involved. However, we also know how passionate people are about the topic of adoption and how keen adopters have been to offer their knowledge and support to others going through the process.

**If you would like to get involved in any of these opportunities or if you require further information, please contact your allocated worker or a Team Leader. All contact details are on the back page of the newsletter.**

## Post Adoption Support Service (PASS)

The Family Based Care Permanence Team has changed the way we deliver post adoption support. Two levels of support are now available.

The service recognises that caring for adopted children can be rewarding yet, at times, challenging. Each adoptive family is unique, with its own support network. However, there are also benefits in being able to share experiences with families in a similar position. With this in mind, all adoptive families will have access to Level One support. Invitations to events will be sent via e-mail, so please let us know if your contact details change.

Level One support includes:

- Family fun days
- Training Sessions
- Adoption Related Lectures
- Childrens' Groups
- Support Groups
- Newsletters

Some families may feel that they need to explore additional support options. At such times, the PASS team will explore the issues with the family and agree a plan of action to best meet the needs of those affected. In some cases, this may include access to more specialist help.

It is important that the Post Adoption Support Service adapts to meet the changing needs of our adopters and children. Compared to other adoption agencies, the Family Based Care Permanence Team is relatively young and this is reflected in the age of the children that we are connected to. However, this will change as the years pass and our service needs to respond to this. We have recently delivered the "Raising Teens with Confidence" course to some of our adopters with older children. This is a course delivered through schools but, in recognition of how early childhood and adoption can impact upon young people, we felt it would be helpful to bring adoptive parents of teenagers together. The feedback from the course is currently being evaluated, but we would hope to run similar courses in the future.

We would love to hear from you if you have any ideas or suggestions on how we could develop our service. Are there aspects of Post Adoption Support that you feel are missing or would like to see more of? If so, please get in touch. If you would like to discuss any aspect of PASS or request an assessment, please contact the team:

Phone: 0131 200 4200

Email: [postadoption.support@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:postadoption.support@edinburgh.gov.uk)

Website: [www.edinburgh.gov/adoption](http://www.edinburgh.gov/adoption)

### Parents Connect – Diary Dates 2018!

The team would like to welcome all parents to drop in to our new monthly event, 'Parents Connect'.

We plan to run this event on the last Wednesday of each month from 7 – 9pm. The venue is 'The Community Room'. Parking is readily available. This is a relaxing room which is used by many community groups and charities. We hope to provide the opportunity for parents to network, reconnect, discuss the highs of parenting as well as some of the challenges. We can all benefit from the experience of others! We hope this will be somewhere to hear about new ideas, strategies and relevant research or events, as well as being a supportive space for parents. A couple of staff members will be available each month. Any special events or topics planned for the evening will be communicated beforehand.

Two workers will be at the first group on 31/1/18. The next dates will be 28/2/18 and 28/3/18. We look forward to seeing you there!

## Information on Information Exchanges!

An Information Exchange is the process where adopters and birth parents exchange cards or letters with news and information about children and birth parents through a third party. This is often referred to as a 'Letter-box' arrangement. Prior to April 2015 this was facilitated by Scottish Adoption on our behalf but, since then, we have managed this service ourselves. These days, most adoptions have an agreement of some kind, usually agreed on a voluntary basis, unless there are very clear reasons not to do so. Agreements can be one- or two-way, most commonly on an annual basis.

The team are planning to run a workshop to offer adopters the opportunity to explore this and other forms of contact. We are keen to involve adopters directly. If you are interested in being involved at the planning stage or have views or questions about this area of adoption, please get in touch.

## Family Events

We held our most recent Family Fun Day on 28<sup>th</sup> October at the Church Hall. It was attended by around 20 families. The children made good use of the bouncy castle, arts and crafts, and enjoyed having their faces painted.

It was great to see families get together to renew friendships and develop new links with other parents and children.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the morning and feedback was positive. Thank you to all who came along and made the day so much fun.

We plan to put on further Fun Days in 2018 and will be in touch to let you know the dates. We are also in the process of planning a session for families with older children, aged 6-11. We are very excited about this and will send out details as soon as we have confirmed the venue and date.

## Dads Group Update

*THE DAD'S GROUP HAD BEEN A LITTLE SLOW TO TAKE ROOT THROUGHOUT 2016 / 2017. AS WE HAVE HAD SEVERAL NEW FAMILIES COMING THROUGH, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE A GOOD TIME TO HAVE ANOTHER SHOT AT BUILDING A DAD'S SUPPORT GROUP. THE MIXTURE OF NEW DADS AND EXPERIENCED DADS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BENEFIT EVERYONE.*

*OCTOBER TOOK OUR DADS GROUP TO A LOCAL PLAY CENTRE. WE MANAGED TO PICK A DAY THAT DIDN'T HAVE A STORM ALERT ON THE HORIZON AND WE ENJOYED SOME AUTUMN SUNSHINE. A BIG THANK YOU TO THE 7 DADS AND 8 CHILDREN WHO GOT UP EARLY ON A SUNDAY MORNING.*

*I AM HOPING TO ORGANISE A GROUP GET TOGETHER EVERY 3 MONTHS. I WOULD WELCOME ANY SUGGESTIONS ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE FROM THE GROUP AND WHAT FORMAT YOU WOULD PREFER. I WOULD ALSO WELCOME ANY SUPPORT FROM DADS WILLING TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE.*

*I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.*

*KIND REGARDS,*

*DAD'S GROUP ORGANISER*

*Get in touch!*

### **Contact the team**

[familybasedcare.permanence@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:familybasedcare.permanence@edinburgh.gov.uk)

### **Post Adoption Support Service**

0131 200 4200; [postadoption.support@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:postadoption.support@edinburgh.gov.uk)