

Children and Young People Committee

AD06

Inquiry into Adoption

Dear Committee,

I am an adoptive father of two brothers (aged 3 and 4 years) that came to live with my wife and I six years ago. The first two years were the most challenging, since this time there have been many fantastic times as a family, but there have also been some difficulties, usually around times of change, and we anticipate that adolescence will be an interesting time. Hence, I would appreciate that the committee consider the following points.

The most significant and useful support we had to maintain the children's placement was access to a parent mentor who had experience of adoption and had skills to work in a curious non-judgemental manner with the uncertainty of the adoption process. In stark contrast to this position was advice received from social workers who mostly used a problem solving approach - which was much less useful. To clarify this point: the difficulties we experienced as a couple and as a family could not be 'solved'; but moreover we needed to be heard and given time to adjust to the change in our relationships, and be nurtured to make sense of the ways that both ourselves and our adoptive children were behaving. To this day i believe you cannot 'solve' this 'problem', as it was not a 'problem' but more like a transition - which was full of uncertainty for all of us. Although statutory agencies were no doubt well-meaning in their attempts to normalise and fix the 'problem' confronting them; from their own experiences, training and positions as parents and professionals. This kind of approach left us reeling, disempowered and isolated.

A parent mentor should be available for all families to aid safe exploration of this 'uncertain transition'; from a couple into adoptive parenthood, and from a child Looked After by the Local Authority to an adopted son or daughter of a new family. A parent mentor requires the breadth of systemic therapeutic skill to be able to consider previous experiences of all family members, how they interact together in the present, so that future hopes may be achieved. I believe that a parent mentor is best aided by the experience of being an adoptive parent, so that they may have some insight into this journey. It would have been beneficial to have access to a mentor before the children came to live with us and some time afterwards throughout the first year of family life. Furthermore, I would advocate that a family may also benefit from this type of support, be it brief, at other times in the family life cycle where there may be challenges related to change or transition.

For adoptive children, i am unclear how they may currently receive the right kind of support in Wales if they have complex needs. My understanding is that there are no agencies specialising in delivering the kind of therapeutic support required. Since adopted children with complex needs often warrant the benefit of therapeutic intervention for issues related to attachment trauma because of neglect or abuse. However, i would contend that they should not necessarily be referred to Specialist CAMHS, unless they have a mental illness. Attachment trauma appears to be highly unrecognised or misrecognised as other difficulties; such as mental illness or

perhaps ADHD. Thus this issue warrants specialist attention in its own right, and then a positive outcome for these children may be realised.

I hope these points are useful.