

Children and Young People Committee

AD18

Inquiry into Adoption

Consultation responses from adopters in West Wales

Prospective parents:

- How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?

My partner and I have been fully supported throughout our adoption process, we both started the home assessment in feb 2011, our assessment took 5 months in total, our adoption social worker provided all the relevant information and documentation we required to enable us to gain more knowledge and understanding regarding adoption, she provided us with excellent books to expand our knowledge and also to allow us to understand the adoption process through other adopters experiences, She was very understanding and worked in partnership with us, she was very flexible with regards to our working hours, she was always available for support and advice, we regularly kept in contact via email, We were also provided with beneficial information to allow us to complete the home work given to us, and was very supportive throughout.

We were also prepared well in advance for panel, X and myself were very apprehensive before panel, we were extremely nervous and our social worker provided full support to ourselves, she provided visits to allow us to prepare for panel, we found that with this support we were reassured and able to attend panel feeling positive, enthusiastic and fully prepared.

We have been approved for 5 months now and are currently awaiting a match for our child.

- What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?

We feel that more action is required to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route, Although our adoption journey has been fairly quick so far, we do understand this is not the case for all prospective adopters, we also feel the matching process for many adopters takes a long period of time, which results in children being placed in care for longer than needed, we fully understand that this is not due to the adoption agency, it is entirely due to the lack of government funding. We also feel that adoption should be fully

promoted more than once a year, not just during national adoption week, this could fully promoted throughout the media, eg, local and national newspapers, tv and magazines. There are thousands of children who need a loving, safe and secure environment, every measure should be taken to ensure that this happens, adoption needs to be promoted more positively, to encourage prospective parents to Make that call to begin their journey and to provide children with the care, love and stability that they deserve.

Prospective parents:

- How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?

Very well supported and encouraged through the process.

- What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?

Run the pre-adoption courses in smaller groups in own towns.

Adoptive parents and families:

- In terms of the support provided for adoptive families, what has been most important in helping to secure the permanence of adoptions and to help ensure the success of the placement?

No Support was needed in our case, maybe because they were young. More explanation is needed about postbox contact.

- What improvements could be made to the support given to adoptive parents?
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We think that boarding out allowance should be reinstated, to ease the financial worry when trying to bond with the child.

Prospective parents

- Throughout the process we have found social workers and all associated staff very helpful, supportive and informative and we have no complaints at all with their role during the process, however although we appreciate the need for the system to be thorough and careful we feel that every stage of the process takes longer than necessary as after over 2 years since our first enquiry, we have not been matched.

- To make the process quicker, from the 1st day of enquiry to the day you

become parents takes far too long which we feel is the main reason more prospective parents do not apply or decide to not continue with the process.

Prospective parents:

- How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?

Our thoughts:

We think the question shouldn't be about support, which we felt was adequate in the sense that we could always call our then social worker and once the Form F process started we saw her about once a fortnight/three weeks, sometimes longer. However, in our view the assessment and approval process was longwinded, drawn out (we understand because of a shortage of staff) and our initial contact with Carmarthenshire county council's adoption team was unenthusiastic. Throughout the process we did not feel valued, perhaps because we were not valued until we became approved adopters whereupon our details were closely guarded because of the cost of getting us through the adoption process!.

- What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?

Adopters need to be greeted with enthusiasm and brought through the approval system more quickly. Adoption, for most people/couples, is the position of last resort for having a family. They have often been through years of fertility treatment. We were only too happy to throw off the burdens of IVF knowing that we could love, cherish and parent a child with whom we had no blood relation. We are totally delighted with our wonderful children and regard ourselves as incredibly lucky. The profile and positive aspects of adoption needs to be raised sometimes there is too much emphasis on the negative aspects of adoption

Adoptive parents and families:

- In terms of the support provided for adoptive families, what has been most important in helping to secure the permanence of adoptions and to help ensure the success of the placement?

We have great admiration for the social workers which we have been contact and worked with. They have in most cases carried out their job efficiently and with the utmost speed. This is all we expect from them, although they have been supportive, particularly in understanding the vagaries of being self employed and supporting a request for financial assistance, which has been most gratefully received and has made life easier over the past few months of recession. However, we would have gone ahead with the placements with or without financial support.

We are fortunate in that our three children who are in various stages of the adoption process, are still very young and we have not found any specific problems which they may have had as a result of being in the care system. However, we understand that support from local authorities is negligible once the adoption process has been finalized. If this is the case, then this may be an area for further attention.

- What improvements could be made to the support given to adoptive parents?

- The system could be improved by cutting out unnecessary duplication of paperwork i.e.: reports to panel and court are we understand separate reports which add to the burden of the social worker.
 - Our children are birth siblings. The duplication of areas such as family history is unnecessary. The system should be more practical and files of previous associated adoptions should be available to them in order for them to make appropriate decisions.
 - The rights of birth parents, who are often vulnerable people, are important. However, I wonder sometimes if birth parents are told (by their social workers perhaps due to political correctness) and do not understand the implications to their child's welfare and the reality of their child's situation when they persist in exercising their own rights?
 - Our approval as second and third time adopters was carried out by a retired social worker who was able to visit every week and the process as a result was much quicker – is the employment of retired social workers on a case by case basis, and idea for relieving the hard pressed full time social workers carrying out approvals of adopters?
 - We were amazed at the lack of knowledge of adoption law by some of the courts in particular magistrate's court. Surely every court should be aware of the legal requirements of the court?
 - When you are told you can proceed with the application for adoption of your child you to some extent left to get on with it. Ironically the addition of three children to our family means that getting down to filling in forms and getting all the necessary data together means that we still haven't got around to completing the forms. In an ideal world it would be great to have a social worker turn up at your door with the form completed with all the legal stuff and you/we just had to take it to court with marriage certificates etc!!
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Prospective parents:

- How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?

We feel that we have had good guidance and support throughout the assessment process and we have been lucky enough to complete this in a relatively short time in comparison with the stories we have heard of in the news recently.

Examples of the points we feel have been particularly good:

- * The relationship that has built up between us and our social worker – she has been willing to get to know us as a couple and to listen and in some cases adapt her pre-conceptions.
- * That the process has been monitored by the manager of the Adoption Service.
- * Our Social Worker has supported us through each step, and has explained clearly and honestly what each step will entail and mean to the whole process.
- * Meeting adoptive parents was invaluable – so positive and encouraging that the whole experience is worthwhile.
- * At panel she was very supportive at what is quite a daunting experience!

Points we feel could improve:

- * Preparation training could include more information of what the assessment process entails in more detail, and could cover how to complete the tasks given e.g eco map/family tree in terms of the format required.

- What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?

- Quicken the process!
- Make opportunities early on to talk to positive adoptive parents – right at the start and maybe link prospective adopters with adoptive parents. We have friends who have adopted and this has been invaluable.
- Make the adoption process countrywide – if you are on the list/part way through assessment in one area that you don't go to the bottom of the list if you move area.