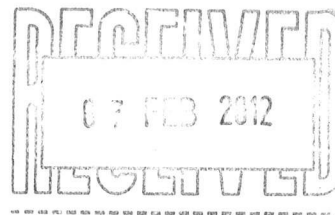


Inquiry into Adoption

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2 February 2012

Christine Chapman AM
Chair, Children & Young People Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Wales
CF99 1NA



Dear Christine

Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action Response to inform the proposed inquiry into Adoption

I am writing on behalf of After Adoption, a voluntary adoption agency, working across England and Wales. We currently have contractual partnerships with 14 Welsh local authorities to provide an extensive range of adoption support services. We are committed to working more widely across the whole of Wales and have secured resources from 3 external funders to assist in this, as well as receiving further support through the recently awarded CFOG grant. We have an exciting TALKadoption project bringing young adopted people together to undertake creative expression of their unique perspective and to contribute to the voice of the Child in Wales. We also plan to work in partnership to deliver our very successful parenting programme, SafeBase, across Wales to support adoptive families, increase resilience in adoptive parents and improve the life chances for adopted children who have had a particularly difficult start in life.

This response addresses three key areas:

1. Timing of enquiry
2. What is working
3. What is not working

Timing of Enquiry

Given the high level of volatility in local authority structures and plans for adoption provision at this time, our view is that it would be preferable to delay the timing of the proposed enquiry into adoption to allow for the current collaborative initiatives to be developed. A delay of 6 months would offer a clearer picture of the intended way forward for adoption provision across Wales. The proposed enquiry could then serve to affirm and strengthen the overall position and propose further means of achieving positive outcomes for children.

What is Working

We are encouraged by the commitment of all concerned to improve adoption services across Wales and would highlight the following aspects of what is working for our services:

- Progress in collaboration across the Third Sector.
- Our agency's positioning to develop an all Wales adoption support provision.

after
adoption

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After Adoption is a Voluntary
Adoption Agency regulated by
OFSTED

Evidence from After Adoption

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- The awarding of the two year CFOG grant to support an all Wales provision.
- The securing of additional inward investment over the coming 2-3 years, value of £100k plus.
- Our readiness to roll out SafeBase – a fully-developed preventative and remedial parenting programme for adopters, which has been externally evaluated to evidence lasting benefit.
- Our TALKadoption project to provide a forum for the voice of adoptive children in Wales.
- Our sixth annual Adoption Conference taking place in Cardiff on 24 April 2012.

What is not Working

We have grave concerns about the following aspects of the present situation impacting on our ability to support a better service for adopted children waiting in the care system for a 'forever' family.

- Lack of clarity about our contractual base - Adoption managers in local authorities are, in the vast majority, still unclear about contract renewals for adoption support services for the coming financial year starting in 8 weeks' time.
- Uncertainty – The uncertainty arising from the above situation imperils current service users and risks dismantling the expert and experienced staff teams employed by our agency.
- Economic constraints – these are impacting heavily on adoption support services which are nevertheless key to securing the future of the children still waiting in foster care as well as those placed with adoptive families.
- Local political initiatives – in the short-term these appear to be compounding the levels of uncertainty in forward planning, resulting in a lack of commitment to continuing existing contracts.
- Planning overload – local authorities' engagement in strategic change have resulted in a continuing focus on the inter-authority structure which could result in freezing out the Third Sector as commitment to ongoing contracts and funding stalls.
- Impact on workforce – this uncertainty makes carrying skilled staff and training on others increasingly difficult, impacting on future planning and delivery.

Conclusion

Whilst welcoming many of the long-term aims of the current proposals, we are extremely concerned about the effect of the short-term instability jeopardising existing partnerships and provision and impacting negatively on long-term gains for the children, their birth families and the adoptive families in whom their future health and happiness depend.

Yours sincerely



Lynn Charlton
Chief Executive