



Consultation for CYP Committee on: Inquiry into adoption

BASW Cymru would like to comment from the position of supporting and being a voice for the social workers that are involved in the adoption process.

The issue of adoption for the child and the delays that are incurred throughout the process are a matter of balance. The balance is between the rights of the child to family life, (article 9) and protection from harm (article 19) U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

It must also be considered that adoption is only one means of securing a permanent placement for a child. The other options are Residence Orders, Guardianship Orders and Long Term Foster Placements.

Much of the delay for children comes from the problems faced by the LAs and the courts in balancing the above rights of the child. For example, many of the children requiring permanent placements come into the care system as a result of neglect or abuse. The LA is then faced with considering rehabilitation of the child with their family as a primary resort. The court when requested by the LA finally to make a Care Order or Placement Order is then faced very often with family and interested parties applying at a late stage for leave of the court to be made party to the proceedings and be assessed as permanent carer/s for the child.

This can be a very lengthy process with many assessments either from the LA or independent expert assessments; sometimes this also involves further rehabilitation plans for the child.

The majority of children that are requiring permanent homes tend to be over 2 years of age. They have many issues resulting from difficult starts in life and this is then compounded by possible changes of carers, and lengthy delays throughout the assessment process of family and the subsequent court process as described above. For their emotional well being, most children when they are ready for a permanent home are in need of support, the right carers and in some cases specialist input.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 refers to the need for children to have support post adoption. It states that this requires cooperation and joint working from all of the professional interested parties, e.g. health and education. It appears that this is not happening as successfully as the Act would have liked with money and resources being cited as the reason for not providing regular ongoing support for those children placed for adoption or for their adopters. This lack of committed support post placement is then cited in placement breakdowns either initially or for many others further down the line during teenage and these latter figures are unrecorded. When

issues and the need of the child are identified early and support provided, children and their adopters have the opportunity to develop appropriately.

The majority of people who apply to become adopters want this to meet their needs primarily to have their own family. Therefore they are requiring children to be as young as possible, not sibling groups and without any issues disabilities or problems.

As stated above the more delays and the older the child, the more difficulties there are likely to be. So as a starting point the adopters are not getting all that they require of their ideal child. To overcome this and encourage adopters to look beyond the ideal takes careful and skilled social work over a period of time to help people realise what adoption is today and to help them to explore their skills, abilities and emotional flexibility to take on a child that they had not first considered.

Issues that need consideration for change

- Designated recruitment of adopters to take on the older child, sibling groups and children with issues and disabilities.
- Social workers being given the skills, training, time and resources to help adoptive applicants explore their capacity and flexibility for adoption.
- Clearer guidelines for social workers and courts on the content and number of assessments and rehabilitation carried out on family members both for the LA and the courts.
- Tighter timescales for courts.
- Regulations and guidelines that stipulate co-working between agencies.
- Resources, training, the commitment to assessing the child's needs and to providing appropriate professional support from all agencies when permanency is agreed for the child.