It takes a village to raise a child
Adoption UK survey on adoption support
by Erika Pennington
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It takes a village to raise a child

Introduction
Research has shown that adoption from care offers the following advantages: far more stability than other forms of care, a lifetime perspective and good outcomes across a range of measures. However, for adoptions to be successful, it is important that the placements be supported by high quality and timely support services, including therapeutic support. Support means different things to different people; what works for one person or family will not work for another, all of which makes understanding and providing adoption support services difficult.

Yet what is not in doubt is that healthy child development is the foundation for positive social, educational, community, physical, mental and economic development. Similarly, relationships are at the core of our society, whether between children and their parents, or among children or adults. Nowhere is this more relevant than in relation to the adoption of children from care, who will have experienced more than most of us will ever care to imagine.

For most children adopted from care their child development will have been compromised by their experiences of abuse and neglect, leaving them with a long-term legacy of emotional, behavioural and developmental difficulties. Those difficulties will, in turn, have an effect on their ability to build and maintain positive attachment and relationships, including with their new adoptive parents who will represent their best opportunity of overcoming the impact of their early trauma.

The fractured and disrupted lives many of these children experienced prior to adoption, and the trauma of that neglect or abuse, creates many challenges for them and their new families. While adoption offers a positive alternative to a childhood spent in the care system, it is not an easy option – for the child or the family.
For the child, forming attachments with their new family is not an easy or natural process. Why should they trust their new parents? How do they cope with the loss of their birth family and essentially everything they knew up to that point, however harmful it may have been? Every day, there are tiny triggers that make life an enormous challenge for these special children. Emotionally they are on permanent red alert. As a result, the behaviours many of these children present are often difficult, challenging and unrelenting for their new families.

For families longing for a child, who have been through a long and arduous process to be approved as adoptive parents, being rejected and constantly challenged by their new child’s behaviour places enormous stress on the family. Parenting an adoptive child can a rewarding and satisfying experience for the family and offers the child real hope of a better future. However, to succeed both the child and the adoptive family may need a wide range of therapeutic and support services. And while support may be available from local authorities, there is no duty on authorities to provide support to adoptive families.

In its widest sense, therapeutic support covers a whole range of services and support that provide therapy to an individual or family. For adoptive families, effective therapeutic support services would entail a holistic and family-focused approach to supporting those families. By taking a multi-disciplinary, therapeutic approach to support, which may include services such as child and adolescent psychotherapy, attachment-forming therapies and theraplay, children can be helped to build and maintain positive relationships with their adoptive parents, and with other children and adults in their lives.

Without support, many families either struggle in isolation or become one of the adoptions that disrupt or break down before the child reaches adulthood, resulting in the child being returned to the care of the local authority – creating further trauma for the child and for the family who so wanted to love and care for that child.

Finding appropriate support can mean the difference between a child thriving in a secure and loving family and a child potentially living their childhood in the care system, which while it does its best for the child, doesn’t offer the individual therapeutic family care these children need.
As a national membership and support charity for adoptive parents, Adoption UK provides parent-led support services to families and acts as a source of advice for families who are trying to access other types of support, particularly in relation to therapeutic support and educational support. Through our Helpline, support groups, training programmes and other support services, we are aware of the disparities and variations within adoption support around what is available, to whom, when and why.

Accordingly, Adoption UK undertook a survey to find out more about adopters’ understanding of and need for adoption support services and to gain a better picture of the actual provision of adoption support services across the UK. This was an online survey available to adopters via Adoption UK’s website from October 2011 to January 2012, to which we received 455 responses, representing more than 700 children.

As an adopter-led charity, we’re also acutely aware of the importance of adoptive families’ support networks, whether that is friends and family, including other adoptive families, social workers and adoption agencies, professional therapeutic, health and mental support, teachers and schools, information and advice resources, and so on – all of which have a crucial role in ensuring the success of adoptions.

Those support networks are, and should be, wide and diverse, but can also be short-lived and fragile at times, particularly when different agencies and organisations need to work together. That’s why we called this survey “It takes a village to raise a child”, supposedly after an African proverb, although this provenance is disputed. Whatever the source of the phrase, the meaning that it conveys of the wider community’s involvement in the upbringing of a child pertains directly to the adoption of children from care.

The community comes in the form of social workers, and courts, employed by the State, who have intervened in these children’s lives and decided to place them with new families, where a whole host of new relationships, support and networks will be needed to help them overcome their early traumatic start to life. That community or village will be needed throughout those children’s lives to help their immediate families succeed in their reparenting and therapeutic parenting roles.
Of the approximately 3,700 children adopted from the UK care system in the year ending 31 March 2011, more than 70 per cent had been removed from their families due to “abuse or neglect”, while the reasons for the placement of many of the other children included “family dysfunction”, “family in acute stress” and “absent parenting”\(^1\).

It is easy to see how the early childhood experiences behind these categories or labels will have major long-term consequences for not only the children but also the families who have to parent or care for these children. Adoptive parents, along with foster carers, special guardians and kinship carers are caring for and parenting some of the most traumatised children placed from the care system. They need all the support they can get.

\(^1\) *Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2011 (Statistical First Release 21/2011, Department for Education, September 2011)*
Executive summary

There is a lack of understanding among adopters as to entitlements to support services:

- 62% did not understand the importance of adoption support as a prospective adopter
- 50% rated their current understanding of entitlements as non-existent or poor

Accessing support was difficult for many adopters:

- 30% requested an assessment for adoptive support, of which
  - 63% had an assessment carried out
- 81% had support needs identified, of which only
  - 31% received the needed services identified in full, yet
    - 60% of those receiving support confirmed it helped their family
    - 63% rated the quality of the services as good to excellent

Furthermore

- 64% were not informed by their agency of their right to request an assessment
- 6% were refused an assessment
- 13% had their request ignored

Different adoption agencies being involved exacerbated adopters difficulties:

- 57% described the working relationship between agencies, such as health, social services and education, as poor.

There is a mismatch between the adoptive families’ support needs, identified by respondents, and the services offered by their adoption agencies:

- 61% of respondents stated the need for therapeutic services and only 28% of their agencies provide this support.
- 30% of respondents said respite care would help them to support their children, while only 7% of agencies provide this service.

Often the financial cost of support falls on the adoptive parents as local authorities are under-funded or cannot provide the level of expertise needed:

- 116 out of 411 respondents receive an adoption allowance for their first child
Respondents highlighted the following barriers to accessing adoption support services:

- 27% cited the level of understanding and experience of adoption among professionals
- 19% identified money/finances
- 19% stated that their agency didn’t see their problems
- 17% identified the working relationships between different agencies
- 15% were worried about being seen as a failure by their agencies

Education is an area where support is needed:

- 64% expressed a view that educational support at school is needed, of which
  - 47% said their children received support
  - 29% had assistance in accessing support

Because of their chaotic and disrupted early childhoods, educational support for adopted children is crucial to their long-term development. An adopted or fostered child may not make the expected academic progress for his/her age for a long time. Furthermore, adopted children who may appear to be settled can have periods of distress and difficulty at different stages of their school career.

Most respondents stated that their children’s educational needs were not being met. Many commented that within schools, there is a lack of understanding of how trauma and attachment issues affect adopted children’s ability to learn.
**Adoption: the current picture**

In March 2012, the Government published an *Action Plan on Adoption: tackling delay.*\(^2\) The plan outlined aims to overhaul the adoption system in England for children and adopters, including plans to reform the recruitment, preparation and assessment, and training processes for prospective adopters. The Action Plan also proposed the introduction of performance measures for local authority adoption services (which came into operation in May 2012) and included plans for a new national gateway for adoption that will provide a first point of contact for anyone interested in adopting. Furthermore, the Plan gave an "in principle" backing of the need to improve the system of adoption support.

Adoption UK has welcomed the publication of the Government’s Adoption Action Plan and its focus on improving the adoption system for children in care and their future adoptive families. However, Adoption UK has argued that the Action Plan should be strengthened in relation to the development of adoption support services. The aim of recruiting more adopters and placing more children for adoption will not be realised unless support is put in place to help ensure the success of adoptive placements.

Alongside the work in England, the Welsh Government is also pursuing a reforming agenda for its adoption services, in particular considering the creation of a single National Adoption Agency, part of which could encourage stronger partnership work around the provision of adoption support.

Both the government in Westminster and the Welsh Government have the opportunity to transform fundamentally the adoption system if they understand the importance of adoption support to the success of adoption. The early traumatic experiences of the majority of adopted children mean that adoptive placements need to be backed up with high quality and timely therapeutic support for those children and their carers, guardians or adoptive parents.

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\(^2\) *An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling delay (2012).* Department for Education.
**Why support?**

All children who are adopted will have been through the care system. Many will have entered and re-entered the care system many times before a court decision is made to permanently remove the child from its birth family. A number of adopted children will have had multiple foster placements before being placed with a family for adoption.

In the year ending 31 March 2011, there were 65,520 looked after children in England, with the main reason (54 per cent) for them entering care being abuse or neglect. The second most frequent reason (18 per cent) was family dysfunction. In the same year, 3,050 children were adopted, 70 per cent of whom had been removed from their birth family due to abuse or neglect.

When properly supported, adoption offers a positive and stable outcome for children from the care system, providing children with a permanent family that many might not have had if they had remained in the care system.

Research shows that adoption offers far more stability than other forms of care, a lifetime perspective (in contrast to placement in children’s homes or in foster care) and good outcomes across a range of measures. According to Government statistics from 2011, only 13 per cent of children in care in England achieved five A* - C GCSEs (including English and maths) compared to 58 per cent of all children and 27 per cent of the UK prison population has been taken into care as a child.

Moreover, 17 per cent of children in England aged 13 to 17 years old who had been looked after continuously for at least one year, had been identified as having a substance misuse

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3 Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2011 (Statistical First Release 21/2011, Department for Education, September 2011)

4 Outcomes for Children Looked After as at 31 March 2011, (Statistical First Release 30/2011, Department for Education, December 2011)

problem in the year ending 31 March 2011. Only six per cent of care leavers were in higher education at age 19, and only 25 per cent were in training or employment.

When considering the statistics, all of those working in adoption must value the role of adoptive parents in taking some of society’s most vulnerable children into their homes.

About trauma

The dictionary definition of the word “trauma” is that of “wound” or “injury”, but it also means “an emotional shock producing a lasting effect”. In practice, the two meanings can be separate, but for children who have experienced abuse and neglect, the two meanings go hand-in-hand. According to Family Futures (2003) trauma can mean an overwhelming experience that does not allow the individual to return to a “normal”, comfortable state of being. Developmentally, the earlier the trauma the greater its adverse impact.

When adopted children’s early experiences have involved separation, loss, emotional and physical neglect, abuse and multiple carers they may find it hard to trust. They may have acquired a set of behaviours that helped them to survive in their chaotic past, but are not appropriate in their adoptive families. This often presents a considerable challenge for adopters who are seeking to understand, contain, nurture and help their troubled child recover from their early experiences, and to form positive attachments. Such children carry the trauma etched in their systems. According to Dan Hughes (clinical psychologist and author of Building the Bonds of Attachment (2nd ed, 2006) and Attachment-Focused Family Therapy (2007)), children who have been exposed to chronic harm by primary caregivers are more likely to perceive themselves as helpless, unlovable, hopeless, and deficient and are often full of shame.

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6 Outcomes for Children Looked After as at 31 March 2011, (Statistical First Release 30/2011, Department for Education, December 2011)
7 idib
8 Trauma, attachment and family permanence: fear can stop you loving. Edited by Caroline Archer and Alan Burnell for Family Futures (2003)
Secondary trauma

Anyone who spends time with a traumatised child may experience secondary trauma. The empathy needed to parent such a child produces psychological changes as though the parents/carers themselves have been exposed to the trauma, e.g., brain function changes, parents can become less articulate, less emotionally literate, more angry and despairing.

People who live with traumatised children experience high levels of stress and need appropriate support to enable them to care for their children. These parents/carers need to survive, but not at such a high cost to their own health. They need help to make sense of their children’s behaviour. For the traumatised child, the world is a frightening and dangerous place and they need help to make sense of it, something their previous primary caregivers failed to do.

All adopted children, at the very least, will have suffered the trauma of loss and separation, even when adopted shortly after birth. Many adopted children will have experienced further loss and trauma through their early experiences of abuse or neglect within the birth family, which may have been compounded by numerous moves within the public care system. For many children, this trauma may lead to emotional, behavioural, and educational or development difficulties, which may also affect the children’s abilities to form secure attachments with their new parents. Traditional parenting techniques may not work and adoptive parents may need to develop alternative parenting strategies in their role as “therapeutic parents” for traumatised children.

What is adoption support?

The average age of children who are adopted is around four years old. When considering the rate of development in their crucial first three years, where a child may have experienced the trauma of abuse and/or neglect and, at the very least, the profound loss of their primary caregiver, it is no surprise that their ability to attach to their new family in a positive, secure
way is compromised. Their brains will have learnt to relate in the way that they were related to during their early years⁹.

A child who is traumatised by their past will need to be helped to work through their trauma. Many adopted children will continue to experience the neurological, developmental and psychological impact from their early histories even when they are in a supportive and loving adoptive family.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (in England and Wales), and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, place a duty on local authorities to maintain an appropriate service for adoption support. However, service provision is at the discretion of the local authority. The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (SI no 691) requires authorities to conduct assessments of adoption services (although not automatically provide them) when requested by an adoptive parent, adoptive child, birth parent and former guardian. The 2002 Act defines adoption support services in England as:

- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians of an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child
- Therapeutic services for the adoptive children
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruption
- Counselling, advice and information

In Scotland, section 1(5) takes a more general approach to defining support services as counselling, guidance or other "appropriate" assistance.

⁹ Guiding you through the adoption process. Adoption UK (2010)
Adoption UK commonly uses the terms “therapeutic parenting” and “therapeutic services”. Therapeutic parenting differs from “normal” parenting because it incorporates elements of filling in developmental gaps and repairing damage.

“I had no idea that my son was going to have the problems he has. I thought our main worry was going to be his ongoing medical condition, not the huge effects developmental trauma has had on him and his social, emotional and physical development.”

“Helping a traumatised child is not a short term thing, which can be solved by a few weeks of therapy - it is going to takes years for our son to be able to function in a similar way to his peers (and it’s possible he may never get there).”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
It takes a village ... - survey report

Understanding support

Question: During your time as a prospective adopter, do you feel that you understood the importance of adoption support?

- No: 62%
- Yes: 38%

The majority of respondents, 308 out of 455 (62 per cent), felt they did not understand the importance of adoption support until further into their adoption “journey”. To some extent, this is hardly surprising, given the difficulty of preparing those without children (i.e. the majority of prospective adopters) for a future life of being parents. This is difficult enough for traditional families, without having to factor in the additional complexities brought about by adoption, e.g. older children, sometimes in sibling groups, sometimes with specific conditions, and often with emotional, development and behavioural difficulties caused by abuse and/or neglect.

Irrespective of this, the response still suggests that the importance of adoption support should be highlighted much earlier in the process, for example, from as early as initial enquiry and certainly during adoption preparation. It is vital that adopters understand the importance of support, so that they fully appreciate that it is expected they will need support and help. Furthermore, adopters should not feel stigmatised when they ask for that support and help. Similarly, it is important for social workers to reiterate these messages early on, and make clear to adopters that they would expect families to need help and
support and be prepared to ask for it. If adoption support is not covered early on in the process, then it makes it more difficult for it to be considered carefully enough at the time of matching/placing.

"We did not understand that we would need it 10 years later."

"I see it as essential and chose to adopt through Families for Children rather than the local authority because they offered support services post adoption and I knew that this would be important.”

"If I had known now what I do now I would have asked very specific questions regarding adoption support.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

When asked about current understanding, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) said that they did not know about their entitlements to adoption support services (in general terms), mirroring the response to the earlier question.

![Question: Do you understand or know about your entitlements to adoption support services?](image)

Even though more than one-third (38 per cent) said that they understood or knew about their entitlements, half of those (i.e. 19 per cent of the whole sample of responses) rated that understanding as ‘non-existent’ or ‘poor’ and the other half (i.e. a further 19 per cent of the whole sample of responses) rated their understanding as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. This clearly suggests that there is much more work to be done to improve the general understanding of entitlements around adoption support services.
In individual comments to the questions, respondents cited a lack of information in preparation training as the main reason impeding a better understanding. A number of respondents said their knowledge came from other adopters and contact with Adoption UK. Others said their local authority had not been “proactive in providing information” and one respondent said receiving a booklet outlining support services would be helpful.

“I feel very isolated from any specific official adoption support service. My support comes from the other adopters I have got to know in the area, however even this is to a certain degree restricted as if it really came to it and I had a direct problem would I really offload to them?”

“I know about most of the support services now, but it took me a good couple of years to find them out.”

“Have learnt the hard way. We were only told when we hit a crisis.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
Receipt of support services

Nearly half the respondents (47 per cent in relation to the families’ first child; with similar levels of response in relation to second and third children) said that they were in receipt of adoption support services for their children. From the table below it can be seen that a significant number of families are accessing support via:

- local support groups (62 per cent of those who said they were currently receiving services);
- assistance in relation to contact (49 per cent);
- training (45 per cent);
- financial support (45 per cent).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that of those currently in receipt of support services, 21 per cent were accessing therapeutic support services for their children, 39 per cent were accessing educational support services, and 9 per cent were accessing mental health services, such as CAMHS. This provides useful information and evidence about the degree and category of support required by families who in the main will have adopted abused and neglected children from the care system.

The high proportion of families receiving educational support services reinforces regular feedback to Adoption UK and other agencies about the educational issues for adopted...
children that can often be overlooked and are said to be widely misunderstood within the schools system.

This explains why there was such a positive response from adoptive families to the Government’s announcement in 2011 that in future children adopted from the care system would be given priority in the school admissions system in England. It is to be hoped that the Government’s current plans on reforming the adoption system will build on this positive development through helping adopted children’s educational needs be more easily recognised and addressed in the special educational needs system. Similarly, it is to be hoped that the other Governments and executives in the four nations of the UK will be able to take similar policy initiatives in relation to education.

The table on the following page outlines what services respondents were receiving at the time of completing the survey and from where they accessed those services.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Local Authority (response count)</th>
<th>Local Education Authority</th>
<th>Voluntary sector/charity</th>
<th>NHS/GP</th>
<th>Unable to answer/don’t know</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services to enable discussion of matters relation to adoption (e.g. support groups)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance and support in relation to contact arrangements</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic services</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services to assist in cases of disruption</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling, advice and information</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support (including cash payments)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational support services (e.g. via schools or an educational psychologist)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services (e.g. CAMHS)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer/don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B: The above responses are in relation to families’ first child only; however, the responses reflect answers for subsequent children.
The following questions were asked to find out whether agencies have been proactive in informing adopters of their entitlements to adoption support services, with around two-thirds of respondents answering positively. While it is positive that the majority of agencies are providing information about the support services it provides, it is a concern that it appears not all agencies are providing this information. It may be that more agencies are informing their adopters about the services they provide, but that this information is not understood, or that adopters are not aware that they have been provided with this information. Either way, it is vital that all adopters are provided with information about the services that are available and how to access them.

Interestingly, the responses to this question could be seen to be in conflict with the earlier question around understanding of entitlements to support (where nearly two-thirds said that they did not understand their entitlement). If the answers to that earlier question are correct, and there is no particular reason to disbelieve them, then the answers to the current question would suggest that information is provided in the majority of cases, but that it is not widely understood.

In relation to the specific services being provided or being made available by agencies, it is reassuring to see the range of services that are on offer. However, given the statutory requirements around the availability of services (irrespective of whether or not particular families access or receive those services), one would expect that most of the services would be more widely offered by the agencies covered by the responses. Of course, if one-third of respondents are saying that their agency has not informed them about the services they provide, then it is to be expected that the responses on particular services will be lower. Similarly, it is inevitable that some families will not be aware of some services, particularly where they do not perceive themselves as in need of those services.
What support services does your agency provide?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services to enable discussion of matters relation to adoption (e.g. support groups)</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance and support in relation to contact arrangements</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic services</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite care</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services to assist in cases of disruption</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling, advice and information</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support (including cash payments)</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational support services (e.g. via schools or an educational psychologist)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services (e.g. CAMHS)</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer/don’t know</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In England and Wales, all local authorities are required to appoint an Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA), whose role is to give advice and information to people affected by adoption. However, the majority (70 per cent; 352 respondents) did not know or could not remember if their local authority has an adviser. This suggests that the role of the ASSA is either not understood, not used or not promoted effectively enough. The responses do not, of course, mean that local authorities do not appoint ASSAs, and it may well be that adoptive families are dealing with ASSAs, but are just not aware of it. However, the responses do make it clear that if the role is to be seen to have an impact, then there needs to be clearer communication and promotion about the role and its function.
Requesting assessments

As part of its campaigning and lobbying work, Adoption UK has called for legislative change, so that adopters have a statutory entitlement to receive adoption support services, rather than merely an entitlement to request an assessment of need. Currently, local authorities are required to undertake an assessment of needs for the adoptive child, the adoptive parent(s) and any child of the prospective adoptive parent where they are considering placing a child/ren with an adoptive parent(s); or alternatively where the family requests an assessment. However, this survey has revealed that nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents were not informed about their right to request an assessment.

This tallies with Adoption UK’s own experiences and feedback from the families it supports via its Helpline, support groups and training and other support services. All too often families are unaware that they can request an assessment of their need for support services. Although this request may not lead to the provision of services, it is a necessary first step in being able to assess and access available services. While it may be that some families are informed about their rights, but may not understand them, the fact that nearly two-thirds of respondents say they have not been informed of their right to request an assessment must be cause for concern. At the very least, it means that there needs to be an improvement in the way that vital information on support entitlements is communicated to adoptive families.

Question: Has your agency informed you about your right to request an assessment for adoption support needs? *[QUESTION NOT APPLICABLE TO PARENTS/FAMILIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND WHERE LEGISLATION DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR SUCH A RIGHT]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Has your agency informed you about your right to request an assessment for adoption support needs? *[QUESTION NOT APPLICABLE TO PARENTS/FAMILIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND WHERE LEGISLATION DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR SUCH A RIGHT]</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents gave varying feedback as to when and how they were informed of this right, and how it was put into practice. For many of the respondents, the assessment was not carried out until the family was experiencing difficulties.

“It came about because we were struggling (5 years post placement) and they carried out an assessment then.”

“Our post adoption social worker told us when we reached a very difficult stage, three years after adoption.”

“I contacted AUK when we first had problems and they told me.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

It is clear, however, that there is also good practice taking place.

“We were informed during initial adoption discussions, once we had started the approval process, during preparation groups, training and once approved and all the stages since.”

“Right at the start and we were constantly reminded.”

“At the preparation for adoption course and reminded on a regular basis.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

Some respondents proactively requested to have their needs assessed. In relation to families’ first or only child, nearly one-third (30 per cent) had requested an assessment of need for adoption support services. Given the low level of understanding around this entitlement (as evidenced by the response to earlier questions), the number of actual requests is indicative of the high level of perceived need for support (whether or not that led to needs being assessed and services being delivered). This supports the case for improving and widening access to support services for adoptive families.
Of those that had requested an assessment, 63 per cent had an assessment carried out while 6 per cent were refused an assessment and a further 13 per cent of respondents were simply ignored (no response was received).

If this reflects nationwide experiences, then it is a matter of real concern that over one-third of adoptive families are being denied their legal entitlement to an assessment of need for support services, especially given the backgrounds of their children and the long-term consequences of abuse and neglect on children’s healthy development. Adoption UK would even go so far as to suggest that it is a national scandal that such a proportion of families are not able to be assessed for support, let alone receive any support services.
When asked about whether or not any assessment for support needs had been carried out (irrespective of whether requested or not), nearly one-third (31 per cent) said that their family had been the subject of an assessment. Given that support needs should be assessed at the time of placement, the responses either indicate that this isn’t happening in the majority of cases, or that adopters aren’t fully aware of those assessments, or, as is more likely, that assessments at the time of placement have limited value, unless there are very clearly identifiable support needs at the time of placement which are met with the provision of particular services.

However, where assessments have been carried out, there is clearly a need for support services.
Although a minority of families reported that assessments had taken place, where they had taken place, then this led to support needs being identified in over three-quarters (81 per cent) of cases. The table below also highlights the wide range of services that were put in place to meet the identified needs. It is reassuring to see the diversity of services, particular in relation to therapeutic support (identified by 52 per cent of those who had assessed needs met), educational support (31 per cent) and mental health services/CAMHS (32 per cent).

Some comments from respondents who answered ‘other’:

"The support was not there. Could only support if adoption was breaking down."

"It's in progress - support needs have been identified, it's a question of what kind, when and who funds it...”

“Support needs were identified but private therapist which is the only person that has been able to offer any help at all was deemed to be expensive and not able to be funded, despite fact that no other service has been able to help him.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

The most identifiable need was for therapeutic services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If support needs were identified, please list what they were (tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services to enable discussion of matters relation to adoption (e.g. support groups)</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance and support in relation to contact arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic services</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite care</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services to assist in cases of disruption</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling, advice and information</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support (including cash payments)</td>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational support services (e.g. via schools or an educational psychologist)</td>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services (e.g. CAMHS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer/don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Service delivery**

What is more disappointing, is that of those respondents who had support needs identified, only 56 per cent said their agency agreed to meet their needs, 22 per cent said the agency did not agree while 6 per cent said they did not know or could not remember and 16 per cent answered ‘other’. Respondents in this category were asked to specify.

“**Some needs are being met, others are not.**”

“**Long waiting list. Not started yet.**”

“**We would not have proceeded to adoption without a plan in place, the “discussions” to make this happen took 3 years and were very complex.**”

“**Yes but only after a fight and our refusal to sign the adoption order until support was guaranteed and written agreements signed by the local authority.**”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
Furthermore:

**Question:** If your adoption support needs were assessed, did you receive the services that were identified?

- Yes - in full: 31%
- Yes - in part: 41%
- No: 17%
- Other: 9%

"No therapeutic services were offered for our child, just services to us."

"Still waiting."

"Eventually and only after a protracted series of discussions and a need to be a 'nuisance'."

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

Government guidelines prescribe the persons to whom the local authority must extend adoption support services and for what services they are entitled to be assessed. In terms of this survey, as expected, it was mainly the adopted child(ren) and/or adoptive parent(s) that were in receipt of the service. Adoption UK believes that the effects of trauma and loss on the emotional, physical, behavioural and educational development of adopted children and children in care must be acknowledged and reflected in appropriate service provision. Moreover, the effects of secondary trauma on adoptive parents and their wider families as a consequence of parenting traumatised children must be recognised, acknowledged and addressed by all those who work in adoption.
It is clear that when families are able to access adoption support, the services are helpful, with nearly two-thirds (60 per cent) of families stating this.
“...helping a traumatised child is not a short term thing, which can be solved by a few weeks of therapy - it is going to takes years for our son to be able to function in a similar way to his peers (and it's possible he may never get there).”

“Financial support has enabled me to be at home to meet the children's needs and give them security.”

“Still struggling to get help, not adoption specific, I believe son's issues are to do with his past but the people helping have no idea how to deal with an adopted child and those issues.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

*answers have been reweighted to remove “not applicable” response.

It is reassuring to see that of those who received services, 63 per cent rated them as either good or excellent, with another 17 per cent saying they were acceptable. Only 14 per cent described the services as poor.
From where did you receive these adoption support services? (please tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority adoption agency</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary adoption agency</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent adoption organisation</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapist</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education service</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health service</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable/did not receive support services</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working relationships

Question: How would you describe your relationship with your current adoption agency?

"I would have put good if they were more readily available. It can take days if not longer to get in contact with our social worker."

My relationship with the social worker who assessed me during the home study was excellent. However, the inefficiency of the adoption agency when I needed its support was distressing and added to the emotional fallout from the trauma...

"The agency that I was approved with were fantastic. The placing agency has been very poor and have not supported me in any way."

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
The 2002 Act enables local authorities to arrange for adoption support services to be provided by another body, such as a third party providing services on behalf of the local authority. The Act also allows for a voluntary adoption agency to provide services on a local authority’s behalf. Local authorities can also contract with a neighbouring authority and/or with an independent registered provider to ensure that the service is provided.

Question: Have your requests for, or the provision of, adoption support services required joint work or collaboration between different adoption agencies?*

![Pie chart showing percentages of responses: Yes 22%, No 36%, Don't know/not applicable 43%]

*(e.g. due to the agency that approved you as an adopter being different to the one from which your child(ren) was/were placed, or due to your subsequent move from one local authority to another, or because of the need for services from social care, education and mental health services etc)

The survey reveals that in reality, this joint working or collaboration between agencies does not always work well, with over one-half (57 per cent) of responses describing such working relationships as poor. This is a real concern, given the number of adoptions that either happen out-of-area, or where cooperation or collaboration is required between different agencies, e.g., across social care, health and education services.
Furthermore, it can result in a lack of continuity in service delivery, with 52 per cent of respondents saying that there was no continuity of services.

Educational needs

Most respondents felt that their child (ren)’s educational needs are not being met, with three-quarters (75 per cent) of respondents saying that they believed their first or only child had educational support needs at school. Despite this, only 43 per cent said that they received assistance with accessing educational support for their first or only child, but 62 per cent of respondents said the first or only child received educational support at school.

Because of the chaotic and disrupted early childhoods that many adopted or fostered children will have had, they will often require greater support in the education environment. Currently, adopted children do not receive the same entitlements or support as looked after children within schools – even though adopted children come from the same population as fostered children. In December 2011, the Government announced it would amend
legislation to give adopted children the same priority in the Schools Admission Code. A number of adoptive parents subsequently contacted Adoption UK to state what a positive difference this would make to their child’s education experience when it comes into force in 2013.

Many respondents also felt that school staff and education professionals should be trained in issues of trauma and attachment, and that there needs to be a better understanding of the needs of adopted children.

“We were very careful about the school we chose. All three boys are thriving.”

“Both children were so damaged by their early experiences that it affected their ability to learn.”

“Much more information about the needs of adopted children needed in schools – very little understanding of attachment disorder or the effects of trauma, and the levels of anxiety experienced by children.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

Question: In your view, do or did you believe that your child(ren) need/needed educational support at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child 1</th>
<th>Child 2</th>
<th>Child 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“We got help from the school in applying for and getting a statement of special educational needs for our son. But we had to provide all the specialist adoption knowledge, as no-one in the education setting knew about developmental trauma.”

“This was our biggest battle!”

“Neither the school or the local authority supported us in any way in getting the statement - we had to push for it ourselves. The secondary school for both our children has been very supportive though and have identified where extra help is needed and have provided this.”

Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
Question: Does or did your child(ren) receive any educational support in school?

- Don't know
- No: 190 (Child 1), 94 (Child 2), 15 (Child 3)
- Yes: 116 (Child 1), 69 (Child 2), 12 (Child 3)

“*Our son got help with transition to reception. It was amazing. Without it, he may have had to be home schooled.*”

“*He doesn't now but in his primary school he had very supportive teachers who were prepared to understand his difficulties and worked closely with us to help him overcome these particularly at stressful times e.g. contact.*”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey

**Financial support**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 sets out the circumstances in which financial support may be paid to an adoptive parent. At present, there is no consistent national approach to adoption allowances, with local authorities entitled to set their own policies. As part of its campaigning work, Adoption UK calls for a national minimum adoption allowance to be set for all families who adopt children from the care system.
The regular day-to-day costs for adoptive families can be higher, due to the additional complexities of adoption, whether that is due to the particular needs of children, including sibling groups, dealing with the cost and expense of contact arrangements, or the additional expense caused by the damage that can be caused by children with emotional, behavioural and developmental difficulties.

Many families require support services that local authorities are too under-funded to carry out or that require greater expertise. The financial cost of this support often falls to the adoptive parents, for many families the cost of independent support services is simply unaffordable. Adoption UK believes that funding for support should travel with the child, from care, and into the adoptive placement, creating a more efficient use of public funding and therefore budget savings.

Of those that do receive an allowance, more than half receive less than £100 per week.
Of the 116 respondents, who receive a regular adoption allowance, the majority (91 respondents) have been in receipt of an adoption allowance (for child one only) for up to five years, 28 respondents for six years or more. Most (73 per cent) did not receive any assistance or help to access other welfare benefits or tax credits to which they were entitled. Only 23 per cent received assistance.

Currently adoptive parents are entitled to minimum statutory entitlements to adoption pay and leave. They are, however, lower than the statutory equivalents for maternity pay and leave (namely, in relation to the 26 weeks’ continuous service qualifying period and in relation to the lower level of pay during the first six weeks of leave). Furthermore, self-employed adopters are not entitled to adoption pay while on adoption leave, although self-employed mothers who have given birth are entitled to claim maternity allowance payments. While some employers will ensure parity between adopters and birth mothers, many do not. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of the respondents who received adoption pay and leave said that their employers operated equal contractual policies in relation to adoption and maternity pay and leave. Therefore, one-third (34 per cent) of families appear to be disadvantaged by the statutory imbalance to adoption and maternity pay and leave provisions.

"It enabled us to work fewer hours so we could be available for our son, so he didn't have to go to breakfast clubs etc - something he would never have coped with."

"We were means tested and a higher award given for child one due to special needs. We did not even ask for this but it has been invaluable."

"This has been hugely important to us. It allowed me to be at home full time when the children were small I think that this is probably partly why things have gone so well so far."

"This has been absolutely crucial to us being able to continue to parent our children. As a result of the children’s needs and the impact on us as parents we have both had to reduce our working hours significantly and I took a 4 year break from work."

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
The discrimination within the law is clear and sends out the message that adopters are “second-class parents” and their children are “second-class children”. For adoptive parents, this discrimination is particularly biting considering they are caring for and parenting some of the most traumatised children placed from the UK care system; families that have in effect been created by the State.

### Did you or, where relevant, your partner/spouse receive adoption pay and leave when your child (ren) was/were placed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options (in no. of respondents)</th>
<th>Child 1</th>
<th>Child 2</th>
<th>Child 3</th>
<th>Child 4</th>
<th>Child 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### If yes, was this equal to you/your spouse’s employer’s policy on maternity pay and leave?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options (in no. of respondents)</th>
<th>Child 1</th>
<th>Child 2</th>
<th>Child 3</th>
<th>Child 4</th>
<th>Child 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Barriers and change

The following table highlights the key barriers perceived by parents to access adoption support services. It is notable that the most commonly identified barrier (by 27 per cent of respondents) was the level of understanding and experience of adoption among the professional staff involved – something to which Adoption UK has regularly drawn attention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography (distance)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money/finance</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with social worker</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with other professionals</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working relationships between different agencies</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of understanding and experience of adoption among professional staff involved</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t like what was offered</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being seen as a failure</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency didn’t understand your problem</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between your needs and your adopted child(ren)’s needs</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“There have definitely been incidences with social workers where they have shown much ignorance regarding attachment issues and more. Occasional statements have been made which illustrate to us how they clearly have not understood the issues we are living with on a daily basis.”

“Lack of communication between different social services departments.”

“Working with a range of professionals who did not always “get” adoption and attachment which meant we were having to educate as we went along and often got labelled as neurotic parents.”

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
The last question revealed the strength of feeling that the system needs to change so that adopters can be supported to therapeutically parent their children and offer them a stable, secure and permanent home.

Question: In your view, does the current adoption system need improving?

- Yes: 93%
- No: 7%

“There needs to be far more professionals capable of working with traumatised children, especially therapists and educational staff.”

“Training should continue after placement when you can link it to your actual experiences.

“Needs to be a system in place which doesn't just let adopters drift out into the big world on their own.”

“All services must be able to work together, they must speak to each other and be open.”

“It is daft that adopters have a right to have their needs assessed, but then no right to have those needs fulfilled.”

“The process of preparing people for adoption needs to be more rigorous. Not longer, but better - social workers do not seem properly equipped. Preparation needs to be more realistic and focus on what it’s really like to take on a child with issues around neglect, abuse etc”
Similarly, respondents identified a wide range of services that would best help their children, most notably local support groups, therapeutic support services, training, counselling, advice and information, financial support, educational support and mental health services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What service(s) would best help you to support your children?</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services to enable discussion of matters relation to adoption (e.g. support groups)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance and support in relation to contact arrangements</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic services</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite care</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services to assist in cases of disruption</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling, advice and information</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support (including cash payments)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational support services (e.g. via schools or an educational psychologist)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services (e.g. CAMHS)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer/don’t know</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"These services can probably be accessed but not without a 'fight' and commitment that adoptive parents don't have the time for. And nobody else will step forward to help them."

"All are needed by someone at some time."

"Any funded services which are available which would be of benefit short and long term. Our children’s issues don't disappear the moment they are placed."

"In an ideal world, all these services would help, but we all know the system is overloaded."

"All of the above - but clear signposting would be good. And the same basic services to be available across the country and delivered in the same way."

"Help for us, as adopters, too - we need professional help and advice at times!"

- Adoptive parents, in evidence to Adoption UK survey
Conclusion

In general, respondents feel that more information about adoption support needs to be provided from the beginning of the adoption process during preparation training and the reasons why it may be necessary.

The survey revealed that nearly two-thirds of respondents were not informed of their right to request an assessment of need for support services. Of those that did make a request, more than 80 per cent had support needs identified. For many, this did not happen until the family was experiencing difficulties. Problems around service delivery were also highlighted with around half of respondents not having their needs met by their agency.

The survey suggested that at any one time, around half of adoptive families would be in need of some sort of adoption support service. Nearly half of the respondents were in receipt of adoption support services at the time of completing the survey. Most were accessing support via local support groups, assistance in relation to contact, training and financial support.

The majority of respondents to this survey believe their child has needs requiring greater support services, with education being a particularly problematic area. Around 39 per cent were accessing educational support services at the time of completing the survey.

It was also strongly indicated that professionals – from social workers to school staff – need better training in early childhood development, how trauma can affect this development and about the effects of abuse and neglect. Furthermore, there is a clear need for better collaboration and joint working between agencies to ensure continuity in service delivery.

According to the overall results, it is felt that improvement is needed across the system. Respondents felt access to therapeutic, education and counselling services would best support their children. Overall, most respondents have had an average to positive
experience of adoption support services but there remains a large number who have not had a positive experience, if any at all.

**The respondents**
A total of 455 adopters completed the survey, representing families with more than 700 children. The majority (93 per cent) of respondents were female, married and aged between 41 and 50 years old, 91 per cent were white British. Other ethnicities and minority groups were represented but in smaller percentages and 14 per cent of the respondents were single adopters. The majority of respondents (380) were approved by a local authority agency and 91 by a voluntary adoption agency.

Of the 317 respondents who submitted their postcode,
- 12 were from Wales
- 271 from England
- 13 from Scotland
- 14 from Northern Ireland
- 1 from overseas
- 1 gave a British Forces Posting Overseas (BFPO) postcode
- 3 from the Channel Islands
- 2 were not recognised
Recommendations

This section outlines Adoption UK’s key recommendations for policy and practice within the adoption sector.

Educational issues for adopted children

- Adopted children should have the same status as looked after children in relation to their educational need including entitlements to additional support under the statementing system.

Recruitment of adoptive parents

- Make recruiting adopters a national priority that is implemented nationally, rather than implemented locally, e.g. consider the possibility of a central recruitment agency for potential adopters who are unable to have their interest in adoption considered due to their local agencies exercising “local discretion” because they are only looking for adopters who can meet the needs of local children.
- Positively and continuously, promote adoption as a positive option.

Joint working

- Better joint working between social services, education and health departments, focusing on providing improved adoption support services to families.

Children’s needs to be central – early intervention

- Departmental policy frameworks to put children’s needs (as understood from a trauma perspective) at the centre of the decision-making process.
- Using model of early intervention, based on a “child in need” approach, rather than child protection.
- Early multi agency support/intervention systems to be triggered at 20 weeks’ gestation for “vulnerable parents” where one or more risk factors identified.
- Ongoing multi-agency work support and intervention, both with those children identified in the womb, and those who come to the system’s attention after birth or at a later age.
- Greater use of concurrent planning and fewer moves for children in the care system.

Adoption support

- Statutory duties or directions need to be placed on education and health services in relation to the provision of adoption support.
- Statutory entitlement to adoption support services, not just an assessment.
- Ensure adoptions are fully, properly and adequately supported.
- Legislation needs to be amended to give parity between maternity and adoption pay and leave.
- Introduce a national minimum adoption allowance for all adoptive families.
• Adopted children and adoptive families need the same priority of access to CAMHS as looked after children receive.

**Training and professional development**

• Train social work, education and health professionals on the importance of planning and delivering adoption support.

• Frontline staff in all sectors (social services, education, health, mental health) need training on issues of adoption and trauma.

• Clear evidence-based training about the effects of early trauma, attachment, etc, for all involved in intervention and placement work (including those in the legal system).
Adoption UK

What is Adoption UK?

Adoption UK is primarily a membership organisation for prospective adopters, adoptive parents and long-term foster carers (current membership of 4,900 families). However, many of our services are available to practitioners, as well as other groups of carers/guardians, most notably our general information, training programmes and workshops and Children Who Wait magazine. Our services are unique in that they are informed by a wealth of adoptive parenting experience and are delivered by experienced adoptive parents; they include the following:

- National Telephone Helpline (c3,000 enquiries per year).
- A UK-wide network of local support groups (run by adoptive parent volunteer coordinators).
- Buddy support schemes (linking experienced parents with new parents or parents in difficulty), and other peer support networks.
- Parent Consultants.
- Lending library.
- Adoption Today and Children Who Wait magazines and online service.
- Online Community (c12,000 registered prospective adopters and adoptive parents).
- Publications and other information resources.
- Training programmes and workshops, including It’s A Piece of Cake?

What has Adoption UK done?

Since its founding in 1971 under the name of Parent to Parent Information on Adoption Services (PPIAS), Adoption UK has provided vital support for prospective adopters and adoptive parents and also worked with local authority and voluntary adoption agencies to facilitate the placement for adoption of children from the care system. Among its achievements during that time are:

- setting up a specialist adoption agency (Parents for Children) in the 1970s,
- publishing Caroline Archer’s classic books on adoptive parenting in the 1990s, Parenting the Child Who Hurst: First and Next Steps,
- developing the awarding-winning It’s A Piece of Cake? parent support programme in 2000,
- launching our Online Community in 2003 (which won the Charity Website of the Year award in 2004),
- establishing a national adoptive parents buddy scheme in 2005,
- launching the first national online family finding service (Children Who Wait online) in 2006, and
- receiving an overall rating of “outstanding” in our 2010 Ofsted inspection.

For further information about Adoption UK, visit: www.adoptionuk.org