



LIVES CHANGED FOR GOOD

A STRATEGY FOR BAAF 2008-2011

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to BAAF's strategy for the period 2008-2011.

This strategy describes the key priorities that BAAF will focus on over this period and the key actions that we will take to implement those priorities. It is the product of a great deal of discussion both internally within BAAF and externally with our members and its purpose is simple – to show how BAAF will help to change the lives of some of the most disadvantaged, yet special and important children and young people in the UK today:

- ∇ Children looked after by the state including children living in foster care and in residential care;
- ∇ Adopted children and young people;
- ∇ Children and young people on the edge of care;
- ∇ Children and young people in kinship care;
- ∇ Care leavers;
- ∇ Privately fostered children and young people;
- ∇ Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.

In making a difference to these children and young people (our “target groups”) we will also pay very close attention to the needs of their parents (including birth parents), carers and all those who work with or otherwise support these extraordinary children and young people.

ABOUT BAAF

BAAF is a membership organisation of statutory agencies and other organisations and individuals working with or concerned about children and young people in our target groups. BAAF has been supporting, advising and campaigning to improve the lives of children and young people in care since 1980 - finding new, permanent families for children in care and ensuring that children and young people who cannot live safely with their birth families receive the best possible support. We have offices across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

BAAF believes that....

- ∇ Each child and young person has a right to the loving and secure family relationships that we know are essential to children and young people's mental health and psychological development, a right to be heard and rights as a citizen;
- ∇ Every effort should be made to enable children and young people to live in their own birth families and kinship network, providing this is consistent with the child or young person's welfare;
- ∇ All children and young people separated from their birth parents and birth families have both a right and a need to be reunited with them when it is safe and in their best interests to do so;
- ∇ When this is not possible, it is the responsibility of the State through exercising its powers and committing its resources to create a personal and social environment for children and young people where they can develop to their full potential and make use of all opportunities available to them;
- ∇ For the greater majority of children and young people this will mean ensuring that they become a part of family where they feel they belong, which is secure and stable and committed to them and where they are valued as an individual;
- ∇ Where children or young people have learnt to distrust family life, then an alternative living environment must be provided such as residential care or a boarding school where they also can develop a sense of belonging, which is also stable and secure and where they are equally valued as an individual;
- ∇ Throughout any of the processes of creating a new family or other living arrangements, the wishes and feelings of children and young people must be taken into account alongside those of their birth parents and families;

- ∇ Services for our target groups of children and young people should meet their emotional and developmental needs, including needs relating to their religion, ethnicity and cultural and linguistic background and any special needs.

BAAF values and respects the commitment made by all those who care for our target groups of children and young people, including kinship carers, foster carers and adoptive parents, and believes that a wide range of support services is essential to enable families to parent children separated from their birth families.

BAAF will work in a child-centred, multidisciplinary and anti-discriminatory framework, with individuals and with statutory, independent and voluntary organisations.

BAAF will work in partnership with its members and with others to achieve common goals, believing in the values of openness and honesty and that a powerful voice for children and young people will best be heard by working together.

WHAT WE DO

BAAF has four main roles. This section outlines these roles and highlights some of our work in each area:-

- ∇ **Family finding:** providing services to our member agencies that increases the likelihood of finding families through adoption and permanent fostering. We make a significant contribution to finding families for hundreds of children every year through the Be My Parent newspaper and online service; the Adoption Register for England and Wales; Scotland's Children; the West of Scotland and North East Scotland Adoption Consortia; and the South Wales Adoption Consortium;
- ∇ **Improving professional practice:** through a range of innovative project work and the development of policy and practice guidelines for family placement; guides, research studies, training materials and practice notes; a professional journal - *Adoption & Fostering*; training and consultancy; seminars and conferences; multidisciplinary forums for health professionals, researchers, lawyers, social workers and black and minority ethnic professionals; health and social report forms for use in family placement and through the provision of an Independent Review Mechanism to prospective adopters whose panel has minded not to approve them as adoptive parents;
- ∇ **Advice:** telephone and (written letters and e-mail) advice for both professionals and the public; leaflets; booklets; and a wide range of publications directed towards the needs of our target groups of children and young people and all those who care for or support them;
- ∇ **Campaigning:** nationally and locally, for changes to policy and practice to improve the lives of our target groups of children and young people.

CHOOSING OUR PRIORITIES

Choosing the priorities to include in our new strategy has not been easy. We have needed to think carefully about where and how BAAF can make the most difference to the children and young people, families, carers and professionals that we serve.

Conscious of the need not to replicate what already exists, we have sought to complement the services provided by statutory agencies and other organisations and to innovate and add value wherever we can.

An important difference from our previous 5 year strategy *Placing Children First* is the recognition that we need to have separate priorities for each individual country within the UK. Although we are a UK-wide organisation and some of the issues we deal with may always be UK-wide issues, we recognise that all four countries of the UK have separate governments, separate policy priorities and separate issues for our target groups that require tailored and individual attention. We are determined for BAAF to be an authoritative and effective presence in each country of the UK so we can make the greatest difference for our target groups wherever they live.

In choosing our priorities, we have consulted extensively with our members and Advisory Groups as well as with the BAAF staff group and our Board of Trustees. We are determined to make significant progress against all of the priorities described in this strategy. However, we are equally determined to remain responsive to the changing landscape in children's services across the UK and we will keep the priorities in this strategy under annual review – see section on “What Happens Next?” for further information.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY ONE

Improve outcomes for and secure the well-being and rights of our target groups of children and young people in England

BAAF will change lives for good in England by:

- ∇ Influencing and shaping the development and implementation of key Government policy in children's services in England. To include Every Child Matters, Care Matters, the Children's Plan and other relevant strategies and initiatives;
- ∇ Influencing, shaping and helping to implement the new Children and Young Persons Bill and the regulations and guidance that will support that new legislation;
- ∇ Targeting our project work to address the needs of our target groups of children and young people and to develop the skills and resources available to all those working with them;
- ∇ Delivering high quality training and consultancy to agencies to meet the needs of our target groups of children and young people in England. This training to include comprehensive multi-agency training wherever possible;
- ∇ Improving services and introducing innovative new resources for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people in England;
- ∇ Raising awareness of the particular vulnerability of privately fostered children and supporting agencies to meet their needs;
- ∇ Working through our Advisory, Regional and Special Interest Groups in England to help influence policy and practice issues for our target groups of children and young people and our members;
- ∇ Providing high quality services to our target groups of children and young people and all those who care for them through our functions as a regulated adoption agency and adoption support agency;
- ∇ Sharing our expertise with our members for example through the provision of high quality independent chairs to Adoption, Fostering and Permanence Panels across England, through the sensitive chairing of disruption meetings or through focused advice and consultancy on complex cases.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY TWO

Improve outcomes for and secure the well-being and rights of our target groups of children and young people in Northern Ireland

BAAF will change lives for good in Northern Ireland by:

- ∇ Working to achieve the shared vision outlined in the 10 Year Strategy “Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge” for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016 in relation to :
 - Being healthy;
 - Enjoying, learning and achieving;
 - Living in safety and with stability;
 - Experiencing economic and environmental well-being;
 - Contributing positively to community and society; and
 - Living in a society which respects their rights.

- ∇ Close involvement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People in relation to the Commissioner’s 5 identified areas for progress :
 - Play and leisure;
 - Having your say;
 - Well-being and mental health;
 - Protection; and
 - Equal treatment.

- ∇ Continued close involvement with and influencing the development of adoption legislation and reform including regulations, guidance and timescales that would support such reform;

- ∇ Influencing and shaping the development and implementation of key Government policy in children’s services including “Care Matters – A Bridge To A Better Future”, particularly in relation to foster care, including the issues around kinship care;

- ∇ Working through BAAF Northern Ireland Advisory Groups to help influence policy and practice issues for our target groups of children and young people and our members;

- ∇ Targeted training and seminars to increase expertise, best practice, skills and confidence in relation to looked after children and young people and so promoting their welfare. This will include further development of Post-Qualifying training for social workers under the new framework;

- ∇ Providing good advice and information on childcare issues to member agencies and members of the public, including political and governmental representatives in Northern Ireland;
- ∇ Developing an awareness raising and campaigning strategy about the particular needs of our target groups of children and young people in Northern Ireland for public representatives, government departments and the media;

EXTERNAL PRIORITY THREE

Improve outcomes for and secure the well-being and rights of our target groups of children and young people in Scotland

BAAF will change lives for good in Scotland by:

- ∇ Providing training and consultancy services to members to equip them with the skills, information and support needed to promote the welfare of looked after children and young people in Scotland;
- ∇ As a registered adoption and fostering agency, we will continue to develop innovative family finding services to reduce the numbers of children waiting for new permanent families;
- ∇ Developing an adoption strategy for Scotland to enable the new legislation in Scotland to maximise its impact;
- ∇ Supporting the implementation of Scotland's kinship care and fostering strategy;
- ∇ Providing training, advice and consultancy to meet the particular needs of black and minority ethnic children needing or in placement;
- ∇ Developing the confidence and skills of the workforce in Scotland in working with children with disabilities;
- ∇ Supporting agencies to meet the needs of privately fostered children and young people in Scotland.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY FOUR

Improve outcomes for and secure the well-being and rights of our target groups of children and young people in Wales

In Wales, there are seven clearly articulated priorities for children and we have framed the priorities for BAAF Cymru accordingly.

BAAF will change lives for good in Wales by:

- ∇ **Helping to ensure that all children have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development:** BAAF Cymru promotes best practice in fostering and adoption. Children who have been separated from their birth families need care and parenting that helps them cope with these separations and losses. BAAF Cymru will support those children through the provision of family placement services, training & consultancy;
- ∇ **Helping to ensure that all children and young people have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including the acquisition of essential personal and social skills:** BAAF Cymru gives prominence to the issue of educational achievement in the widest sense for looked after children and young people. We will also provide advice and training services and relevant publications;
- ∇ **Helping to ensure that all children and young people enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation:** As BAAF Cymru's focus is on children who are separated from their families, our work in this area is often in the context of children who have been removed from circumstances in which they were at risk of significant harm. Removing children provides them with physical safety but this does not in itself ensure good emotional health. Therefore BAAF Cymru will campaign on neglect, providing timely services for children, re-parenting traumatised children and meeting the needs of asylum seeking refugee children and young people;
- ∇ **Helping to ensure that all children and young people have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities:** Many children who have had neglectful or abusive early experiences come into foster care or adoptive families with few abilities to play. BAAF Cymru will provide specific training workshops in this field and publish a range of materials on “play with a purpose”;

- v **Helping to ensure that all children and young people are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race, language and cultural identity recognised:** BAAF Cymru works to the principle that all children and young people being looked after or being adopted have a right to have full age – appropriate information about their circumstances and to have their wishes and feelings taken into account when plans for their futures are being made. BAAF Cymru will provide training and publications giving guidance and help to carers, adoptive parents and professionals. BAAF Cymru will also provide specialist advice to help meet the needs of Black, minority ethnic children and young people in care and being adopted;

- v **Helping to ensure provision of a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional well being.** BAAF Cymru will provide family finding services and training for foster carers, adoptive parents and professionals on safeguarding children and young people;

- v **Helping to ensure that all children and young people are not disadvantaged by child poverty:** Research demonstrates consistently that children from more deprived families and communities are at higher risk of coming into care. BAAF Cymru will work to improve the quality of care services through all our service provision and by campaigning on timely decision making about services for children in need and those coming into care.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY FIVE

BAAF leading the way – innovating and sharing best practice

This is an area where we can and do make a difference. It is where we can really add value.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Developing demonstration projects in order to transform outcomes for our target groups of children and young people and those who care for and work with them;
- ∇ Disseminating the findings of our research projects and those of others through our publications, training and conferences;
- ∇ Using all our special interest groups such as those for private fostering, special guardianship and health professionals working with children in care to share best practice and improve outcomes;
- ∇ Using our publications to lead best practice in key areas and our conferences and Journal as platforms for debate;
- ∇ Continuing to develop secure family finding services that keep pace with need and technology;
- ∇ Addressing delay and all other relevant issues in the court system for children in care by working proactively through our legal advisory groups with the judiciary, guardians and all other relevant stakeholders to identify, share and promote best practice.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY SIX

Awareness-raising and campaigning

We have worked hard to establish a strong public profile. We have a responsibility to use that profile to raise awareness of the needs of our target groups and the work of our members.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Using our profile to engage effectively with governments across all four countries of the United Kingdom in order to highlight and prioritise the needs of our target groups of children and young people;
- ∇ Raising public awareness of the unacceptable delays experienced by older children, black and minority ethnic children, children with disabilities

and special needs and children in large sibling groups in finding permanent families;

- ∇ Campaigning in key areas where we believe change is needed - our priorities will include the information needs of former care adults, the realities of social work with children, addressing delay in planning for children, supporting foster carers, the health needs of looked after children and raising awareness of the needs of privately fostered children.;
- ∇ Continuing to run National Adoption Week on an annual basis to raise awareness of the numbers and needs of children waiting for permanent families;
- ∇ Launching a similar campaign targeted at raising awareness of private fostering and increasing safeguards for children living in such arrangements;
- ∇ Raising awareness about the reality and complexity of children's social work with the general public and the media.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY SEVEN

Making our contribution count - increasing expertise through our service provision for those working to ensure the welfare and rights of our target groups of children and young people

Supporting professionals in the child care workforce is fundamental to our work. It has a direct impact on the lives of the children they work with.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Providing relevant, authoritative and targeted training, consultancy and conferences in order to increase expertise and best practice in relation to our target groups of children and young people;
- ∇ Providing high quality advice and information on fostering and adoption issues to member agencies and members of the public;
- ∇ Further developing post-qualifying training for social workers under the new framework operating in each of the four countries of the UK;
- ∇ Using our Journal, conferences and publications to debate the most difficult practice issues and dilemmas and to highlight the latest messages from research thus encouraging more confident and evidence-based practice.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY EIGHT

Increasing our impact internationally

There is much that we can learn from other countries and much that we can share of our work in order to support the development of child care systems in other countries. For example, in 2007, we undertook a major project in Romania to help support the development of the domestic adoption system there. We want to do more of this type of work.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Situating ourselves within the European and global child care community in order to learn from best practice in other countries and to share our knowledge and expertise with countries with less developed child care systems;
- ∇ Seeking opportunities to collaborate with international organisations working with children and families in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in other countries;

- ∇ Alerting other countries to and making available to them appropriate and relevant BAAF publications and content on our website;
- ∇ Identifying relevant material from overseas for reproduction and dissemination in this country.

EXTERNAL PRIORITY NINE

Areas for special focus

i) Reducing delay and increasing stability for black and minority ethnic children separated from their birth families

We know that children from some black minority ethnic backgrounds wait longer for permanent placements than white children.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Highlighting the unacceptable delay that many black and minority ethnic children face in finding permanent families through adoption and fostering;
- ∇ Expanding the services we provide to black and minority ethnic adopters and permanent foster carers to increase stability of placements;
- ∇ Ensuring that every BAAF training and conference programme can demonstrate how it meets the needs of black and minority ethnic children;
- ∇ Ensuring that in our press and publicity work we are actively highlighting the experiences of black and minority ethnic adopters and carers.

ii) Provision of adoption support as a UK wide issue

This is an issue which is of relevance in all four countries of the UK.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Influencing national and local government in all four countries to ensure that high quality of adoption support is available as required;
- ∇ Sharing best practice about the provision of adoption support;
- ∇ Sharing information about what works effectively for adoptive families;
- ∇ Highlighting the lifelong consequences of adoption for all parties involved in adoption in our campaigning work.

INTERNAL PRIORITY ONE

Ensuring that the welfare and rights of our target groups of children and young people are at the centre of all that we do

These are the children and young people who need to be at the centre of all our services. We need to hold them and their best interests in mind in everything we do.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Finding more permanent, loving families for children and young people who need them through adoption and fostering;
- ∇ Working towards greater representation on BAAF's Board of Trustees from people with experience of the foster care system and of adoption;
- ∇ Reflecting the voices and experiences of our target groups of children and young people in our media work, conferences, training and publications;
- ∇ Forming alliances across the UK with child care organisations to promote the needs of our target groups.

INTERNAL PRIORITY TWO

Developing services and resources that our members want and need

We are first and foremost a membership organisation. We must provide services that our members want and need.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Providing high quality, relevant and affordable services and resources;
- ∇ Improving the ways in which we communicate with our members and modernising methods of communication to make the most of technological developments;
- ∇ Working closely with different groupings within our membership e.g. LAs VAAs and IFPs in order to understand their issues and concerns and meet their needs;
- ∇ Actively canvassing the views of our members in order to develop the services and resources that are needed – whether this is training, consultancy, new publications, conferences, special interest groups or anything else that we can help with;

- ∇ Working to ensure that our services and resources are made available in accessible and appropriate formats with an increasing amount of our resources available online;
- ∇ Working effectively with governments, civil servants and professional organisations in all four countries of the UK in order to identify key issues and represent our members' concerns, facilitate debate and provide focused support and solutions wherever possible.

INTERNAL PRIORITY THREE

Valuing and developing our staff

BAAF's impact and influence is far reaching.

The quality and commitment of our staff group is what makes us stand out and what we must have if we are really to make a difference to our target groups of children and young people. We are a surprisingly small and dispersed organisation in some ways (only 120 staff) but through our advice and information services, our publications, training and consultancy and through our conferences, media work and national and regional groups, we have a tremendously wide reach and can impact on practice and outcomes for children and young people across the UK.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Being the very best employer that we can be with progressive HR practices and procedures and first rate HR support;
- ∇ Increasing and celebrating the diversity of our staff and ensuring that BAAF is a positive and welcoming organisation in which to work for all;
- ∇ Continuing to reflect best practice and our commitment to diversity in our recruitment and retention of staff;
- ∇ Ensuring that all our staff are appropriately skilled and trained to carry out their important work;
- ∇ Investing more in the ongoing training and development of our staff to include a focus on cultural competence and wider diversity training and business development skills;
- ∇ Ensuring that staff at all levels within BAAF feel themselves to be an essential part of our joint effort to achieve this strategy;
- ∇ Increasing capacity within the organisation by imaginative use of interns, secondees, volunteers and short-term contracts.

INTERNAL PRIORITY FOUR

Improving internal communication and systems (to incorporate a complementary IT strategy)

We are a dispersed organisation working out of nine offices in four different countries with four governments and with 484 member organisations, over 1500 individual members and many other agencies, organisations and individuals. Effective internal communication is vital if we are to make the most of our combined talents.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Developing new and better systems of internal communication including regular newsletters and internal briefings, and online and telephone conferencing to cut down on unnecessary travel to meetings;
- ∇ Using our intranet more to share learning;
- ∇ Improving our customer and other internal databases;
- ∇ Implementing a new IT strategy for the organisation that supports all of the above.

INTERNAL PRIORITY FIVE

Developing BAAF's corporate social responsibility

We want to take full responsibility for the impact of our activities on our service users, our staff, the communities we work with and the environment.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

Increasingly seeking to reflect a triple bottom line approach in assessing our annual performance. This means we will seek to report not only on

- i) Our **Financial** performance (including our responsible stewardship) but also on
- ii) Our **Social** performance (including fair and equal employment, health and safety; management style; ethical policies) and
- iii) Our **Environmental** performance (including reducing our carbon based travel and other activities and implementing a green policy across BAAF offices to include recycling, waste minimisation and sustainable materials usage).

INTERNAL PRIORITY SIX

Providing financial stability to secure our future work programme

Guaranteeing income and controlling expenditure are essential if we are to meet the work programme identified in this strategy. We need robust financial systems and must continue to identify new sources of funding if we are to achieve all that we want to over the next three years.

BAAF will change lives for good by:

- ∇ Securing core grants and sufficient income generation to secure our work programme over the period of this strategy;
- ∇ Reviewing internal financial and administrative processes and systems to improve efficiency;
- ∇ Continue to apply prudent financial policies and provide clear financial disclosure;
- ∇ Improving our business focus and expertise to include identifying market gaps and opportunities and developing new and useful products to support the achievement of our stated priorities.
- ∇ Focussing strongly on the identification and management of risk;
- ∇ Continuing to work towards our long-term target of financial reserves equivalent to three months' general fund expenditure;

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? – IMPLEMENTING OUR STRATEGY

This strategy will govern the structure and content of BAAF's annual business plans in each of the three financial years between 2008 and 2011. Those business plans will be available to view on BAAF's website in April of each year with the 2008-2009 business plan being available from April 2008.

We will review our progress against the priorities set out in this strategy and the actions set out in annual business plans on a half yearly basis and progress reports will also be posted on BAAF's website.

Thank you for reading this document and for supporting BAAF.

Together we can change lives for good.