



## Working with you every step of the way

David Holmes

Happy New Year to all our members. 2011 saw a sustained political and media spotlight on adoption in England throughout the year and I am quite sure that 2012 will be just the same. As evidence of this, just before Christmas the Government in England announced a range of new work to reduce the time that looked after children in need of adoption have to wait before being placed with a suitable family. The first step will be a review of the current recruitment, training and assessment process for prospective adopters. This review, which is working under a clear mandate to produce fully worked up proposals to help to redesign the current process, is already underway and is working to a very tight timescale with initial proposals due to go to Ministers in a matter of weeks. I am pleased to say that BAAF, along with ADCS, Adoption UK, CVAA and a range of other organisations and individuals, is closely involved in this review. You can take it as given that we will ensure that any proposals coming out of the review are informed by the research and evidence base and by existing best practice. We expect this first review to be followed by further streams of Government-led policy work later in the year, focusing on other aspects of adoption such as adoption support.

2012 will be notable for a number of other reasons: we await with interest the Government's much-anticipated response to the recommendations of the Family Justice Review and for a timetable showing how and when those crucial recommendations will be implemented. Later this year, we will also see the publication of the important Overview from the Adoption Research Initiative. We will also inevitably see the publication of a new version of BAAF's Prospective Adopter's Report to tie in with the outcome of the assessment review described above. As the year progresses, we are also expecting the Government in England to outline its strategic priorities and vision for children in care, possibly through a Green Paper. It's going to be a busy year, and across the UK the pace of change is expected to be similarly fast, not least in Wales, where we are anticipating a significant legislative agenda as well as adoption reform.

Whatever happens this year, BAAF will be beside you every step of the way, ensuring that policy change is informed by your views, by the evidence base and by best practice. We will be there at all times to guide you through any changes via our advice and information lines, publications, training and other services. If we can help you in any way, please do not hesitate to call your local BAAF office, our advice and information lines or just get in touch with me direct at david.holmes@baaf.org.uk. Best wishes from us all at BAAF for a happy, healthy and successful 2012.

## Focusing on the positives

Erica Amende

Welcome to 2012: for children's social workers, the amount of work means the Olympics have already begun! Adoption continues to be very high profile. The often critical coverage contrasts with the reality of some good work I and other BAAF colleagues see when we are working around the country. For example, one council recently matched a child within 20 days of a placement order being granted; many adopters are being approved within eight months of their application; and thanks to adoption consortia and the Adoption Register, many adopters are being matched within a few months of being approved. Most adoption is carried out by local authorities: cuts to council budgets in England, at the same time as larger numbers of children in care, inevitably means resource problems. Rhetoric and blame don't help. What will help is supporting and enabling staff to do the work, and recognising good, child-focused practice.

I welcome the Government's review of the adopter assessment and approval process, six years on from the implementation of the current English adoption legal framework. Let's make sure we contribute (directly or through BAAF) some current "best practice" examples, instead of looking only at cases where things have gone wrong.

Three-quarters of children in care are fostered: we are working with many service providers to implement the 2011 Fostering Standards and Regulations. Their subtle shift in emphasis from caring to parenting has the potential to empower foster carers and to concentrate on outcomes for the children involved.

BAAF Northern England's programme of workshops and conferences during 2012 is excellent: please see our website!

## Making the most of your referral to Be My Parent

Isabelle Rameau

Referrals to Be My Parent continued to grow steadily throughout 2011. We have seen record numbers of children featured on the website, and with short film clips. A referral to Be My Parent widens placement opportunities for children waiting for a permanent placement. However, there are ways to make this even more effective.

Many agencies still choose to feature children for just one month, whereas a two- or three-month referral, which is comparatively more cost effective, means the profile is likely to be seen by more families: we have new subscribers all the time.

Some children are only referred to the Be My Parent newspaper. For an additional £97 + VAT, they can also be featured on our website for the same length of time, considerably increasing their chances of being seen by different families – some families only subscribe to the web service – as well as giving the option of having a longer profile, photo gallery and a video clip.

Finally, it is important to prepare for enquiries. Make sure you are available and have clear time to respond to the telephone or email enquiries that come in, and that a

colleague is briefed and can take calls if you are away from your desk. Log in to your Be My Parent account frequently to view details of enquiries received via our online system. Keep a log of enquiries and make sure you respond to all of them, even if some families may not at first appear to be who you are looking for. If you are overwhelmed with responses, do, at least, send a short acknowledgement. We hear from families all the time who feel frustrated and discouraged when their interest in a child is not acknowledged. For more tips, read *Getting the Best Results*, our guidance on managing enquiries and making profiles work, which can be found at [www.bemyparent.org.uk](http://www.bemyparent.org.uk).

After investing significant care and effort to profile a child in Be My Parent, the above actions will help you make the most of that opportunity to find the right family for them.

For more information or to feature a child in Be My Parent, phone 020 7421 2666, email [bmp@baaf.org.uk](mailto:bmp@baaf.org.uk), or visit [www.bemyparent.org.uk](http://www.bemyparent.org.uk).



## New Year book discounts!

Michelle Bell



To get your New Year off to a good start, BAAF Publications is offering exclusive member discounts on sets of some of our most popular titles!

Until 31 March, we are offering savings of up to 50 per cent on a wide variety of books, including the Ten Top Tips series, children's guides, the Adoption Research Initiative (ARI) series and the latest guides to social networking and assessment.

Look out for the special New Year discounts flyer in the January BAAF mailing and place your order soon to take advantage of these great offers. (Please note that discounts are not available on the BAAF website.)

## Undertaking a Child's Permanence Report

We had anticipated the publication *Undertaking a Child's Permanence Report* being ready by March 2012, but have now taken the decision to delay updating the CPR and this accompanying guidance until we are aware of the implications of any decisions taken following the Family Justice Review and the Adoption Reform programme.

If you have any thoughts about this area of work, please contact Elaine Dibben on [elaine.dibben@baaf.org.uk](mailto:elaine.dibben@baaf.org.uk).

## Update on BAAF Cymru Ofsted inspection

Wendy Keidan

I am delighted to inform readers that as a result of discussions with Ofsted, they are satisfied that the work undertaken by BAAF Cymru is covered by the existing adoption agency and adoption support agency registration of BAAF. The registration certificate has now been amended to encompass both England and Wales.

## BAAF presentation at Asian family placement conference



Barbara Hudson, Director, BAAF Scotland (pictured third from left, next to June Thoburn), gave a presentation on family placement at the Asia Family Placement Conference, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in November 2011. This pioneering event shared international best practice in local family placement for orphans in Asia, as a positive alternative to institutional care. The conference, organised by Care for Children, was attended by over 160 delegates, from a wide range of countries.

Lastly, I will be retiring from BAAF on 31 March, so would like to say goodbye and thank you for the privilege of working with so many people across Northern England who are dedicated to creating better life

chances for vulnerable children: social workers, adoptive parents, foster carers, health, education and legal professionals – you know who you are. Please keep up the good work!

## Jennifer Cousins retires but BAAF's disability work continues

Jennifer Cousins retired this Christmas after over 14 years with BAAF. Jennifer joined BAAF as a child placement consultant and trainer in the Midlands, but for the past eight years, in collaboration with John Simmonds, BAAF's Director of Policy, Research and Development, she has been the organisation's Opening Doors disability consultant.

The aim of the Opening Doors project was to help agencies to place more disabled children in permanent families. It was soon obvious that disabled children were viewed in a different light from not-disabled children, and that methods of family-finding were needed which would help potential families to see beyond the diagnostic label. Jennifer's controversial article in *Adoption & Fostering*, 'Are we missing the match?' (2003, 27:4), which recommended adopter-led linking, stirred this debate. Following through the idea of giving families a more immediate sense of each child as a whole person, which she dubbed the "falling in love" method, Jennifer helped spread the idea of video evenings, and promoted professional film clips to encourage linking (now standard practice on Be My Parent online). Finally, with John Simmonds, she initiated adoption parties – where "children waiting" actually meet prospective adopters – a project which held its first, very successful, party last October.

On retiring, Jennifer comments that there is still a great deal to do for disabled children who wait so long for families, but she is delighted that BAAF is committed to continuing its disability specialism. She says that she looks back on her career at BAAF with affection, and great admiration for her colleagues. She will be much missed.

## Read about adoption!

Michelle Bell



The latest edition of our eight-page mini-catalogue is now available. *Read about adoption!* is packed with a diverse range of practical handbooks, studies, true accounts and other resources for prospective adopters and adoptive parents. From beginner's guides and parenting advice to real-life stories and children's picture books, the titles included in *Read about adoption!* provide essential information, insight, advice and support, perfect for anyone thinking about adoption, attending preparation groups or living in an adoptive family.

Visit [www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/cat](http://www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/cat) to download an interactive copy of *Read about adoption!* Alternatively, you can order printed copies, free of charge, by calling the Publications department on 020 7421 2604 or emailing [pubs.sales@baaf.org.uk](mailto:pubs.sales@baaf.org.uk).

### New children's catalogue

Our new online catalogue of books and resources for children and young people is now available at [www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/cat](http://www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/cat). Full of colourful picture books, information guides, interactive resources, CD-ROMS, DVDs, practical handbooks and more, the catalogue includes an exciting range of titles for family placement workers, child and family therapists, adopters and foster carers to use with looked after children, children moving into permanence, those who have been adopted and children in birth families who are welcoming a new child into their home.

Download a copy, search the catalogue and click on book titles to link to the BAAF bookshop, find out further details and place an order.

## Fancy a challenge in 2012?

Every weekend across the UK, people are choosing to throw themselves out of a plane for charity...attached to a professional and a parachute! In return for raising a minimum amount of sponsorship money for BAAF, you

can feel the ultimate freedom as you freefall from around 8,000 feet. You only need a short amount of training on the day and then you can venture up into the clouds, ready for one of the most amazing



Daisy Powling

experiences you've ever had! What a way to start the new year...

Perhaps you'd rather stay *inside* a plane as you make your way to an exciting destination such as China, Peru or Sicily for one of our amazing overseas challenges. If you're looking to do something a bit more memorable with your annual leave in 2012, then how about doing a trek or bike ride for BAAF? We provide excellent support from the minute you sign up – whatever you choose to do, we can guarantee an amazing experience while you support our work with children in care.

If you'd like more information about any of our events, contact the Fundraising Team on 020 7421 2630 or email [fundraising@baaf.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@baaf.org.uk).

## New study of adoption breakdown

Julie Selwyn

The Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned Julie Selwyn and Dinithi Wijedasa from the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, University of Bristol, to investigate adoption breakdown. The research will investigate the rate of, and reasons for, breakdown after an adoption order has been granted. Phase 1 is a feasibility study which, if successful, will be followed by interviews with adopters, children and professionals.

The researchers will be writing to every adoption manager in England to ask them to identify the number of children (from their local authority) who were legally adopted between 1 April 2000–31 March 2011 and where the placement broke down post-order. We encourage everyone to respond, as this will provide much better information than is currently available on adoption breakdown. The researchers can be contacted at [j.selwyn@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:j.selwyn@bristol.ac.uk).

## Adoption – a case for radical reform?

Kay Mirza

Is the adopter assessment a bureaucratic nightmare with the unintended consequence of putting off swathes of potential adopters? Have we allowed ourselves to lose focus on the urgency for the child in securing them a family for life? Is the Prime Minister's announcement that there is to be a fundamental change in the adoption system a "wake-up call", or a misunderstanding of the complexity of the adoption system?

BAAF's conference, 'Adoption – a case for radical reform?', will be held on 27 March in London. Key stakeholders will address fundamental questions about the different

parts of the adoption system. The conference will explore the adopter assessment process; early identification and delivery of adoption plans; the role of the courts and identifying the scope for change; and the effectiveness of the relationship between local authorities and the voluntary sector. It will also look at the nature of the evidence for a further round of adoption reforms following the Prime Minister's Review of Adoption in 2000.

For more information or to book, contact the BAAF Conference team at [conferences@baaf.org.uk](mailto:conferences@baaf.org.uk) or on 020 7421 2636/7.

## New from BAAF



### Enhancing Adoptive Parenting: A parenting programme for use with new adopters of challenging children

Alan Rushton and Helen Upright

Many adopted children exhibit challenging behaviours, linked to their early experiences, which can be difficult for adopters to understand or to manage. In these situations, targeted support and training can make a huge difference to placement outcomes.

*Enhancing Adoptive Parenting* is a parenting programme for use by adoption support workers, which provides practical advice to adopters struggling with such behaviour. Based on a "real world" randomised controlled trial (RCT) – the first undertaken on an adoptive parenting programme – this is an authoritative, dependable resource.

Designed to be carried out on a one-to-one basis in the adopters' own home, this ten-session course provides great flexibility for practitioners. The programme covers:

- understanding attachment and how children develop new relationships;
- using positive attention, praise and rewards;
- effective discipline, clear commands and boundaries;
- problem solving with children.

Optional extra sessions cover a range of particular behaviours, including wetting and soiling, sexualised behaviour, managing difficulties in sibling and peer relationships; fears and anxieties; and eating and sleeping problems.

This is a highly useful resource – book and CD-ROM – for all practitioners concerned with supporting adoptive placements, enhancing parental skills and reducing challenging child behaviour.

**£19.95 plus £4 postage + packing**

To order the above title visit [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk) or contact BAAF Publications on 020 7421 2604

## Electronic forms reminder

Charlie Hore

In early January, we sent out reminder letters about the renewal of the electronic licence for BAAF forms. The letter lists the current details that we have about your agency's licence, and asks you to let us know about any changes you may have. If you haven't received the letter, or if you are unsure who the letter was sent to, please email me at [pubs.sales@baaf.org.uk](mailto:pubs.sales@baaf.org.uk).

## Staff News

### Goodbye to

Julie Cooke, Trainer Consultant, Southern England

Jennifer Cousins, Disability Consultant, Policy, Research and Development, Midlands

Nick Dunster, Director, Central England

Nicola McGuinness, Trainer Consultant, Southern England

Karen Wilkins, Executive Assistant, Chief Executive's Office, Head Office (adoption leave)

### A warm welcome to

Leonie Baldwin, Trainer Consultant, Southern England

Saminara Begum, Administrator, Chief Executive's Office, Head Office

Priscilla McLoughlin, Director, Northern Ireland

Alan Wood, Director, Central England