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## **“A Home for Maisie” - joint media statement from the adoption sector**

### **“Understand the impact and act”, warns leading adoption organisations**

“A Home for Maisie” (BBC 2, 9.00pm, 11 April 2011) highlights the difficulties, challenges and rewards of adopting older children, who have a significant history of abuse and neglect.

It demonstrates clearly the need for a stronger and more robust approach towards supporting adoptive families who are parenting traumatised children placed from the care system.

While most adopted children will not have the same level of need as seven-year-old Maisie, and many will be younger (the average age at adoption is just under four years old), more than 70 per cent of them will have experienced abuse and neglect in their early lives within their birth families.

The documentary’s challenge to government and society that “Adoptions of children over five face the toughest problems ... one in three will struggle, one in three will fail”, reflects current research findings for older children, but should not be read as a sign of failure.

Rather it should be seen as an acknowledgement of the additional needs of adopted children and the extra support that should be provided to all adoptive families in order to increase further the chances of successful outcomes for adopted children, and avoid their return to care. It’s what we owe to children who have had the worst of possible starts in life.

The documentary also emphasises the need for child protection teams to intervene far earlier and with much more focus and decisiveness where children are in abusive and neglectful family situations, and for the courts to reduce decision-making delays. Failure to intervene early increases the level of harm experienced by children at a key stage in their development and impacts directly on their future parents or carers and also on the support that will be needed to address the children’s needs.

Adoptive parents, and indeed long-term foster carers, deal directly with the consequences of this early harm or damage – often referred to as developmental trauma because of its timing and effect – and need to acquire new knowledge and different parenting styles to help their children heal and deal with the consequences of what has happened to them. The terms sometimes used to describe the parents’ role and work – re-parenting, therapeutic parenting or developmental re-parenting – illustrate how adoptive parenting differs from traditional parenting. Equipping all parents with both understanding and techniques will enable many families to avoid prolonged difficulty. For more traumatised children, however, additional intensive support is needed and the documentary gives an insight to this work and the therapeutic support that is required to help it succeed.

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Given all this, while we know that there is good practice within adoption support services, there is a pressing need to invest further in developing evidence-based approaches and services, and understanding more about what works for children and families. For many families, the adoption support system fails to offer the enhanced practical support that they need. Effective adoption support services are crucial to improved outcomes for abused and neglected children. However, the current system for adoption support focuses on assessment rather than delivery, struggles to develop cross-boundary partnerships between social care, health and educational services, and is severely under-funded.

Aside from the benefits that adoption brings personally and socially, two recent reports have illustrated the economic benefit of adoption: the Social Return on Investment (SROI) Evaluation carried out by Baker Tilly and Cass Business School into PACT's adoption service, and the Coram report on its partnership with Harrow London Borough Council. When considered alongside the documentary, the financial case for supporting adoption further is overwhelming.

The PACT SROI economic evaluation concluded that for every adoption from care, where the adopter is able to provide informed support to the child in resolving the issues from their past, there is a social return of over £1m. This is comprised of direct savings to the State from taking a child out of the care system, and through the financial benefits to society of a child avoiding certain paths in life that might be the result of remaining in care without effective therapeutic parental support. Even this very substantial figure does not take into account the wider benefits of the child's improved prospects of forming meaningful adult relationships, and breaking the cycle of abuse.

The BBC documentary points out the big difference that a small investment of just £5,000 per new adoptive family for support and training would make in enhancing successful adoptions, and attaining these benefits. The PACT SROI report indicates the large potential return on that small, but essential, investment.

Similarly, the Coram report shows an annual saving to Harrow Council of £440,000, as a direct result of the partnership between the two organisations focusing on improved care management decision-making and placing children earlier, quicker and in greater numbers.

We have welcomed the government's focus on adoption since coming to power in 2010, but adoption support is conspicuous by its absence from the government's current agenda and funding.

From seeing Maisie's story, we can see how this could transform children's lives, and from the PACT SROI and Coram reports, we see the economic impact of this and the financial common sense of doing so. It's now time for the government to understand the impact of adoption support and act.

***A joint statement signed by:***

Adoption UK ([www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org))

Parents And Children Together (PACT) ([www.pactcharity.org](http://www.pactcharity.org))

BAAF ([www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk))

Barnardo's ([www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk))

Coram ([www.coram.org.uk](http://www.coram.org.uk))

CVAA ([www.cvaa.org.uk](http://www.cvaa.org.uk))

Family Futures Consortium ([www.familyfutures.co.uk](http://www.familyfutures.co.uk))

Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, Bristol University ([www.bristol.ac.uk/hadley](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/hadley))

## Quotes from organisational representatives

**Jonathan Pearce, Adoption UK Chief Executive**, said: "A Home for Maisie' reflects the reality for many families of parenting traumatised children adopted from the care system – a reality that as a membership organisation for adoptive parents we see on a daily basis, highlighting both the challenges and the rewards of adoption. We need to do more to improve how we support those families and increase further the number of successful adoptions."

**Jan Fishwick, Chief Executive of Parents and Children Together (PACT)**, said: "A home for Maisie' illustrates that a particular parenting style for some children with extreme challenges is required for them to develop and grow as they need to. Developmental re-parenting embodies varying degrees of re-visiting the missed experiences of the past, combined with sound boundary setting and consistent attention. The PACT SROI study demonstrates the striking effects that we are achieving by this approach. Not only is the economic effect evidenced in this report but also the life-changing experiences for the children and families we work with. PACT are developing the developmental re-parenting methodology to run throughout the Preparation and Assessment Process for all prospective adopters and through their support services delivered through FACTS (Fostering & Adoption Consultation and Therapeutic Support)."

**John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development, British Association for Adoption and Fostering**, said: "A Home for Maisie' demonstrates that what lies at the heart of adoption is highly motivated, committed and determined people who can offer a family life for a child who has often had the worst of possible starts to life. But as the documentary demonstrates this can be family life of an exceptional kind and families cannot be left to fend for themselves once the adoption order is made. There are thousands of adoption professionals who know this only too well and they need the time, support and resources to ensure that their skill and knowledge are available to any adoptive family when they need it."

**Jeanne Kaniuk, Head of Adoption for children's charity Coram**, said: "Providing support to adoptive families and their children has always been integral to Coram's way of working. As 'A Home for Maisie' shows, most children who are adopted today have had difficult experiences in their formative years, and need parents who are resilient and resourceful. It is essential that people who are willing to take on this challenge can access expert, professional support at time of need, to enable the children to meet their potential."

**Chris Smith, CVAA Interim Director**, said: "CVAA believes that the documentary reflects the need for the thorough assessment and preparation which voluntary agencies undertake with adopters, and most importantly on the lifelong support they provide to families. *'They are always there for us, and are supportive, professional and approachable'* is typical of the feedback from many who have adopted through one of CVAA's member agencies. However, such skilled and long term support is costly and CVAA welcomes 'A Home for Maisie' as a means of highlighting both the need for, and the indisputably positive impact of, adoption support."



## Notes for Editors

**Adoption UK** is a national membership organisation for prospective adopters, adoptive parents and long-term foster carers, providing information, advice, support and training.

**PACT** exists to build and strengthen families and increase the life chances of children and young people especially those from more vulnerable backgrounds.

**BAAF** supports, advises and campaigns for better outcomes for children in care, working with everyone involved with adoption and fostering across the UK.

**Barnardo's** is a leading children's charity, which works with more than 100,000 children, young people and their families in 415 specialised projects in communities across the UK.

The **Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies** (CVAA) represents 32 agencies in the UK who, over the past five years, have placed almost 3,000 children for adoption. The good news is that over 94% of those placements have been successful.

**Coram** provides practical and emotional support to more than 15,000 children, young people and families each year, and is one of the UK's largest voluntary adoption agencies. Coram is the UK's first ever children's charity launched in 1739 by Thomas Coram.

**Family Futures** is a specialist therapeutic service for children in adoptive families, foster families and families living with children who have experienced separation, loss or early trauma.

The **Hadley Centre** was established in 2000 with funding from the Hadley Trust and aims to promote best practice in adoption and foster care by linking research, practice and training in order to provide children with stable and predictable family experiences.

## Further information

For further information on this joint statement, in the first instance please contact:

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