

**Annual collation of statistical information: April 2010-March 2011**

**1. Context:**

- The need to ensure that an appropriate adoptive family can be found for every child for whom that is the plan, cannot be overstated; nor can the need to ensure that such a family can be identified within a timescale which is right for the child and prevents further undue delay; similarly nor can one overstate the importance of providing the lifelong resources to such children and their adoptive families in order to sustain the placement and its ability to meet a young person's complex needs.
- The Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) represents 32 agencies undertaking domestic and inter country adoption placement and adoption support activity throughout then UK and the Isle of Man. Those organisations have over recent years recruited, assessed, prepared and supported adoptive families for more than 600 children annually, including a high percentage of the children with the most challenging needs, for whom Local Authorities have themselves been unable to recruit adopters.
- In order to inform the work of member agencies, and highlight key themes and issues in adoption practice across the statutory and voluntary sectors, CVAA collates statistical returns annually from all members undertaking placement activity and retains a record of such returns over several years. This robust data collection encapsulates children placed for adoption, adopters, adoption support activity, and other matters relating to the work of the sector. Far more information is held than detailed in even the full report and may be able to be made available on application to CVAA.
- The report for 2010-11 also includes limited information relating specifically to inter country adoption, and the plan is to expand this section in future years.

**2. Children placed:**

- During 2010-11, CVAA member agencies placed 618 children for adoption, representing a slight increase on the previous year but remaining well below the peak of 701 in 2007-2008.
- The numbers of children placed at age 1-4 remained almost the same but there was an increase in those placed aged 5-9 and aged 10 plus. Of significant concern is the decrease in the number of children placed aged under 1 year, down from 36 in 2009-10 to just 18 in 2010-11. This raises serious questions when set within the context of research findings on the negative impact of delay.

- Also of potential concern is the fact that fewer children were placed as part of a sibling group, and it would be interesting to compare this with placement plans for children to determine whether the Local Authority changed the original plan due to lack of available adopters.
- The Voluntary Adoption Agencies have continued to focus on the needs of children for whom Local Authorities find greatest difficulty in achieving placements . Again during this year over 20% of children placed came from a Black Minority Ethnic background.
- Whilst it is difficult to collect evidence on the complex and often overlapping additional needs of children placed, an increased number are reported as having a Statement of Educational Needs.

### **3. Adopters:**

- Despite the continued focus of the VAAs on recruiting adoptive families, the year on year increase in the number of enquiries from prospective adopters has not been maintained, with a serious reduction from 8502 enquiries in 2009-10 to 7581 this last year. Informal reports from Local Authority Adoption Agencies indicate that this is a trend across both sectors. It is likely to be partially related to the general economic situation; it may have been influenced by recent publicity which although keeping adoption in the public eye, has not always focussed on the positives of becoming an adoptive parent; some of those who contemplate adoption may be ‘put off’ by the apparent decline in much needed adoption support services; finally the closure over recent years of a small but significant number of VAAs who could not sustain the deficit between the inter agency fee and the real costs of adoption placement activity, will have impacted negatively on adopter recruitment.
- The number of adopter assessments commenced has however increased, denoting an improved ‘conversion rate’ from enquiry to assessment, which may well reflect on more targeted recruitment within the sector. This is important given the cost to VAAs of assessing adoptive parents
- Overall however the returns demonstrate that for the second successive year fewer families were actually approved for domestic adoption.
- Far fewer families did however withdraw after approval, again possibly indicating the robustness and appropriateness of those assessments which were completed.
- Regrettably, within the number of adopters approved, the percentage approved for placement of a sibling group also decreased, potentially therefore further impacting on placement numbers for coming years. This may of course be similarly resultant from the current economic situation, and again related to concerns regarding the availability of adoption support services.

### **4. Inter country adoption activity**

- 8 member agencies of CVAA undertake inter country adoption work, including 1 agency focussing solely on this area and the remainder also undertaking domestic adoption. Only limited comparative data for previous years is available at this point in time.

- 11% of all enquiries across the sector received from prospective adopters related to inter country adoption (895) with 88 assessments being undertaken
- 58 children were placed with the age profile differing from domestic adoption; 20 of the children placed inter country were aged under 1, 34 children were aged 1-4 years, and only 4 aged over 5 years on placement.

## **5. Adoption support and placement sustainability**

- The VAAs have historically provided a comprehensive range of adoption support services. They have pioneered innovative developments in work with young adoptees; they have for decades provided counselling and intermediary services to adult adopted people and to birth relatives of children placed formerly for adoption. CVAA members continue to provide a core menu of adoption support services which are seen to be significant in sustaining placements of some of the most challenging children. During the year over 600 children were being supported prior to being formally adopted
- During 2010-11 member placing agencies responded to over 4000 new referrals for adoption support from all parties ( adoptive families, adult adopted people and birth relatives). This included a significant proportion from families where children had already been formally adopted.
- Whilst VAAs will generally seek to access Local Authority Adoption Support and Child and Adolescent Mental Health services for children and families, such resources are frequently limited or inaccessible, and the VAA remains the first source of support for the majority of its adopters and continues to provide services for them long into the future.
- This year's statistical return details a continuing high success rate in terms of placement sustainability; the placements of 33 children disrupted prior to the making of an Adoption Order, indicating a success rate of over 94%
- It is not however surprising to find that the disruption rate pre an Adoption Order increases with the age of the child at placement, with a rate of 5.8% for children placed at age 5-9, and 3.9% for children placed at age 1-4 years.
- Whilst it is difficult to collect reliable data relating to children post adoption, many VAAs do maintain ongoing contact with adoptive families for several years, and within this context members this year reported knowing of only 2 children/young people whose adoptions had disrupted post formal adoption.

## **6. Additional matters**

- The membership of CVAA is diverse; some agencies have national coverage, others work within a prescribed geographical area; some undertake a range of work with children and families, others focus solely on adoption. The contribution they make as agencies and individual staff members to achieving permanency for children is well evidenced in the full report.
- The sector employs over 300 staff in the delivery of adoption services, although this number has been decreasing year on year.

- Financial returns indicate that the sector expended over £23million on delivering domestic adoption services during 2010-11

## **7. Implications and recommendations**

- There is an urgent need for the voluntary sector, in collaboration with other key stakeholders, to recruit increased numbers of prospective adopters able to meet the complex needs of children awaiting placement.
- Such adopter recruitment activity must be informed by a detailed, up to date, transparent analysis of the children for whom Local Authorities would require VAAs to find families
- It is well recognised that delay in achieving permanence impacts adversely on a child's emotional wellbeing; we must therefore seek to find adoptive families for children whose needs are already complex, whilst at the same time ensuring that younger children for whom adoption is the plan are placed quickly, before delay disadvantages and damages them further.
- There must be increased recognition of the support needs of adoptive families and commitment to resourcing provision to meet those needs. without that we will fail to attract more prospective adopters and we will fail to achieve real permanence for children.
- Overall there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the real costs of providing quality adoption services, whether within the public or voluntary sectors
- Similarly there needs to be a greater appreciation of the financial benefit which adoption provides, in both the short term when fostering costs are reduced and in the long term when broader costs to society are reduced.
- The voluntary adoption sector remains a key player in the provision of quality adoption placement and adoption support services. CVAA seeks to support members in sustaining that quality of provision, whilst operating with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

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September 2011