

CVAA Practice Workshops: Adoption Support; determining the most effective interventions with reference to individual, family and group work, September/October 2018.

Please find below a summary of discussions at CVAA's Practice Workshops held in London on 17th September and Leeds on 3rd October 2018, to help you reflect on the day, share the learning and have similar discussions within your own teams.

CVAA are grateful to Coram's Adoption Support team, Annie Moser, Val Payman, Alice Noon, Eliot Afnan Holmes and Heather Atkinson, and Andy Stott and Barnardo's for hosting these workshops and sharing their approaches to adoption support. We were also lucky to be joined in Leeds by Jo Mitchell, PAC-UK, who spoke to us about their CPV project.

If you are a CVAA member please take a look at the members area of our website which holds a wealth of resources to support your CPD needs, including our speakers' slides from these workshops. Register for our website by [clicking here](#).

Background: a research & data briefing

- We have seen an evolving picture of Adoption Support since the 1980's, bringing recognition of the lifelong impact of adoption, even for those placed as infants, and the increasing numbers of older children being placed.
- VAAs are specialist in placing children who wait longer and are likely to have high support needs. Adoption Support has therefore been central to the development of VAA services.
 - Older children: Of all children placed from Q1-Q4 2016-17: VAA Average age at placement: 3 years 7.5 months (1,320 days), VAA & LA Average age at placement 2 years 6 months (917 days).
 - Sibling groups: Of all children placed from Q1-Q4 2016-17: VAAs placed 480 of 1645 sibling groups and 282 of 2328 single children.
 - Adoption Support to minimise disruptions: Of recorded disruptions from Q1-Q4 2016-17: Total VAA disruptions = 37, Total VAA & LA disruptions = 99
- [Selwyn J, Meakings S and Wijedasa D \(2015\) Beyond the adoption order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption](#)
This study sought to establish the rate of adoption disruption. The administrative challenges were acknowledged but the study concluded that between 2000-2012 the rate of adoption disruption was 3.2% and that disruption post order lies between 2% and 9%. One third of parents reported no or few difficulties; a similar number felt family life was generally good with some challenges; 25% reported major challenges.
 - Note: Comments from *Adopters for Adoption* were that they find many placements get into difficulty earlier than this study found, with children being younger than 14. This has implications for when and what support we provide.
- [Moving to adoption, a Practice Programme for adoption and fostering social workers Beek, Neil and Schofield UEA 2017](#)

A 3 stage framework for thinking about a child's move to adoption, with Stage 3 being from the 4 month post placement review. This work emphasises the need for a secure base and states that *'For many children the process of building trust in the adoptive family will be an ongoing process... Adoptive parents may need professional help to support and enjoy their child, to build secure base relationships, and to meet the full range of their child's needs.'*

- [The joys and challenges of adoptive family life: a survey of adoptive parents in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Neil, Young and Hartley \(UEA\) May 2018 \(see Ch 11\)](#)

This survey established the need for *'a balanced approach that acknowledges the child's background but without a blinkered focus upon a set adoption pathway'*. Most frequently used services by respondents were social events, education advice, parenting support, play therapies and life story work. The most desired and not received services included; life story work, therapeutic parenting training, children's activities, conduct problem therapies, cognitive and behaviour therapies, therapeutic camps or respite and family therapy.

Key points

Listed below are the key points identified by practitioners at CVAA practice workshops, to be considered carefully when working in adoption support.

1. Adoption support needs to be pre-emptive, empowering parents and building resilience in families.
2. A variable quality of Adoption Support Plans are being presented to panels at time of matching. The Adoption Support needs of children should be very evident in a CPR, needs of adopters should be evident in a PAR, and this should all be brought together in the APR.
3. Delegates discussed how to improve and better advertise post adoption events, recognising that potential safety issues mean they must be advertised with care.
 - Some agencies use twitter and other social media forms to advertise events, without giving venue details.
 - Take up of group events fluctuates and it is difficult to know what to offer and where. Agencies co-hosting events and pooling resources would be more efficient – *CVAA are looking into hosting a calendar of members' adoption support events and training for adopters, to enable agencies to share resources and events more readily.*
4. A challenge raised by attendees was the difficulty in knowing which therapists are working where, and of what quality they are. *There is support for CVAA to host a directory of therapists in the website members area, listing their contact details, and contact details of VAA staff who have used them. Please look out for an update from CVAA on this.*
5. Education issues are one of the most commonly raised issues by parents. Where schools are not being forthcoming about what support they can provide, a good tactic is to recognise their limits but ask, 'but what can you do?'. The table in the [Designated Teacher Guidance](#) sets out what Premium Plus (as distinct from Pupil Premium) can be used for, downloadable [here](#), see the table on page 23. Note, [PAC-UK run an Education Advice line](#) with their education advisors twice weekly during term time. Calls are welcomed from parents, guardians and carers, school staff and other education and care professionals.

Child on Parent Violence

Jo Mitchell spoke to the group in Leeds specifically about Child on Parent Violence. Some of the key points Jo raised are listed below.

1. 'Violence' is only one component of CPV.
2. Often we become preoccupied with who needs what therapy, but it is the relational aspect which is at the core of supporting families.
3. Social workers ask parents involved in PAC-UK's Child on Parent violence programme some challenging and hard hitting questions, including whether, had they known what they know now, they would have adopted their particular child.
4. The co-delivery of the programme by social workers, therapists and parent consultants is crucial to its success; the parent consultants will have all been through the group themselves and can relate to what participants are going through.
5. Jo argued that an adoption assessment for prospective adopters should not only consist of stages 1 and 2, but that parts 3 and 4 should also be mandatory. These would be focussed on developing therapeutic parenting skills once adopters have been matched or at least linked and would 'tool people up'. *Look out for a future CVAA workshop to consider this.*
6. Jo spoke of the CPV model having a *restorative approach* and being much more about hearing what children are trying to communicate as compared with the Enhanced Adoptive Parenting programme which they also deliver, but which is much more consequence led. Jo would promote the CPV model as being more effective.

PAC-UK's CPV course is widely available to LAs and VAAs and can be delivered in various locations, including in adopters' homes. PAC-UK can help with applications for ASF funding. [See their website for more details.](#)

Other Adoption Support tools and services recommended by participants

- The *Adopters for Adoption* team referenced '[My Star](#)', a scoring model involving Das 21 and Triple P, used to capture the voice of the child, their needs and perspective, and to check that changes made by parents are making a positive difference. My Star covers physical health, the home, safety, relationships, behaviour, friends, self-esteem and education.
- [Relax Kids](#) was been promoted as a very popular, easily accessible initiative which takes children through 7 steps to relaxation. It promotes social interaction, emotional literacy and relaxation, and involves fun, games and massage.
- [Lego therapy](#) was recommended, particularly for children with autism and related social communication disorders. The highly structured, systematic and predictable nature of brick building helps children communicate with others, express their feelings, change their behaviour and develop problem-solving skills, within a fun and familiar game of Lego.
- Adopters for Adoption run a programme entitled '[Safer Stronger Adoptive Families](#)' – an evidence based approach to post adoption support, available to VAAs and LAs.