



# **IMPROVING PRACTICE ON THE PLACEMENT OF SIBLINGS FOR ADOPTION**

Stephanie Bishop, Elaine Dibben, Chris Smith  
National Recruitment Forum  
March 2014

# INTRODUCTION



This call to action is a response to the stark fact that **49%** of the children waiting for adoption are part of a sibling group. The majority of these are sibling groups of two. If we were able to achieve more success in placing siblings this would also lead to an increase in the overall numbers of children being placed.

# AIMS OF THIS PRESENTATION



- To build on ideas shared by agencies in response to the call for views on the placement of sibling groups for adoption by DfE which was published in February 2013 and NICE guidance.
- To highlight the areas that agencies need to consider in thinking about their strategy and agency policy that will support more siblings being placed together for adoption where the local authority is satisfied that it is in the best interests of each sibling to be placed together.
- To reinforce the best practice which already exists and support the work of children's and adoption social workers and adoption panels in local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies
- To provide a checklist to be discussed in agencies' management groups or adoption teams to identify any areas of policy and practice where changes could be made to improve opportunities for placing siblings.

## Statistics



- LA voluntary survey data scaled to a national level published in July 2013 showed that 3300 of the 6600 children waiting for adoption were part of a sibling group.
- In 2012/13, CVAA reported that 46% of the children placed by VAAs were placed as part of a sibling group. This figure had reduced from 56% of children in 2011/2012, whereas the number of children placed singly had increased significantly.
- The Adoption Register reported in 2012/13 that 49% of children referred were in sibling groups but 61% of adopters would only consider 1 child, only 36% are prepared to adopt 2 children, and 3% to adopt 3 or more children.
- The majority of sibling groups were White British, more than half included a child over the age of 5 and there were only a small number of disabled children in sibling groups

# Legislation on Siblings



- **Children Act 1989 (23)** - The local authority must ensure that the placement is such that...if the child has a sibling for whom the local authority are also providing accommodation, it enables the child and the sibling to live together;
- **AAR - Regulation 12A(2)** - Adoption Agencies Regulations require the agency, where it is considering adoption for two or more siblings, to consider whether they should be placed separately or together, depending on the needs of each sibling.
- *Where the adoption agency is considering adoption for two or more siblings it must, in carrying out the duties in paragraph (1), consider whether to seek to identify prospective adopters who may be suitable to adopt two or more of the siblings together, having regard to the best interests of each sibling determined in accordance with section 1(2), (3) and (4) of the Act*

# Proposed Statutory Guidance

## Published March 2014 for implementation in July 2014.



- Clear decision making process with supporting information and evidence
- Balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child.
- Agencies may wish to have a formal assessment process in place to assist with the analysis and decision making.
- Factors to be considered to enable robust, evidenced decisions on whether it is in the interests of each child to be placed separately or together
- the nature of the sibling group – for example, do the siblings know each other; how are they related;
- whether the children have formed an attachment, and if so the nature of that attachment (secure, insecure or otherwise);
- the health needs of each child;
- each child's view (noting that a child's views and perceptions will change over time);
- other relevant factors.

## IS YOUR AGENCY DOING ALL IT CAN?



- Do you have a policy on placing siblings?
- Does your recruitment policy address recruiting adopters for siblings?
- Does your website and all published adoption information reflect the need for sibling placements?
- Does your Fostering Service have an active policy for recruiting foster carers who can accommodate siblings and contribute to assessments of their longer term placement needs?
- Do you know from your management information i) how many sibling groups are placed separately at the point of coming into care and ii) where the care plan indicates placement together, how many remain separated when being placed for adoption?

# CHILDCARE MANAGERS AND WORKERS



- When siblings come into care would they always have the same social worker and IRO?
- Where there is a larger sibling group which necessitates more than one worker, is there a clear communication plan?
- Where siblings are placed in separate foster homes when they first come into care, is there routinely a plan established for informal sibling contact arranged by their respective foster carers and monitored by social workers?
- Are foster carers given all relevant details of the child's siblings – photographs, date of birthdays, contact details of other carers?



# CHILDCARE MANAGERS AND WORKERS



- Where formal contact is established, usually including birth parents, does the supervision and recording of those contacts focus on reporting on the sibling relationships as well as the parent – child relationships?
- Is there an expectation that all children in sibling groups would have an assessment done to inform placement planning?
- What support or resources are available to foster carers to enable them to promote healthy sibling relationships before an assessment is completed?
- Is there clarity for social workers on what tools are available and who would complete [sibling assessments](#)?

# ADOPTION MANAGERS AND WORKERS



- Do **all** your recruitment and training materials reflect the fact that half the children waiting for adoption need to be placed with their siblings and reflect the benefits and rewards of adopting siblings, both for the children and the adopters, and the availability of support packages?
- Do you make use of positive messages from [research](#) in your recruitment and training materials?
- Is this message reinforced during assessment and training for adopters and their wider family members? Does your training include input on parenting siblings?
- In your early contact with prospective adopters do they have the opportunity to hear from adopters of siblings and see real examples of children waiting in sibling groups?

# ADOPTION MANAGERS AND WORKERS



- Within your adoption team how do you ensure that workers have a ‘risk sensible’ approach rather than a ‘risk averse’ approach to placing siblings together?
- What discussion is there within teams about workers’ own value base in relation to the importance of sibling relationships?
- How is this approach shared and endorsed by your adoption panel and decision maker?
- Do adopters get opportunities throughout the assessment and approval process to learn about all the children waiting for adoption within your agency or being featured nationally?

# ADOPTION MANAGERS AND WORKERS



- When considering matches for adopters approved in your agencies with the potential to take more than 1 child, how mindful are you of the number of children (locally and nationally) waiting as part of a sibling group?
- When placing siblings for adoption, are you proactive in identifying support packages, prior to matching, offering both practical and emotional support?
- Do you offer short term packages to relieve the initial impact of a sibling group placement, as well as realistic on-going financial support where needed, and which can reviewed to take account of the children's on-going needs.

# SUGGESTED MESSAGES TO ADOPTERS



- “For most people their relationships with their brothers and sisters are the longest lasting relationship they will have. Could you help to safeguard that for children awaiting adoption?”
- “Did you know almost half the children waiting for adoption need to be placed with their brothers and sisters?”
- “The majority of sibling groups are 2 children who want to stay together”
- “Did you know that practical and financial help can be available? This could include help with buying a larger car, help with housework or furniture.”
- “Being placed with a brother or sister can help a child settle into a new family and have a positive sense of who they are.”
- Use real life quotes from adopters of siblings and adopted children in publicity material.

# FURTHER READING



- Rushton, A., Dance, C., Quinton, D. And Mayes, D. (2001) Siblings in late permanent placements: BAAF.
- Lord, J. & Borthwick, S. (2008). Together or Apart: Assessing Siblings for Permanent Placement (2nd edition). BAAF.
- Ten Top Tips for Placing Siblings (2008) Hedi Argent, BAAF.
- Saunders, H. and Selwyn, J. (2011) Adopting large sibling groups: The experiences of adopters and adoption agencies. London: BAAF.
- Saunders H., Selwyn J. and Fursland E. (2013) Placing large sibling groups for adoption. BAAF

## FURTHER READING



- Hegar - Children and Youth Services Review 27 (2005)717–739  
Sibling placement in foster care and adoption: An overview of international research
- Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: Traumatic Separations and Honoured Connections (2008) Edited by Deborah Silverstein and Susan Livingston Smith Praeger Publishers Inc
- NICE guidance on Looked After Children and Young people – (October 2010). Recommendation 15 - Support to sibling placements - <http://publications.nice.org.uk/looked-after-children-and-young-people-ph28/recommendations#sibling-placements-and-contact>
- Heather Claire Ottaway: Sibling Connections: An Exploration of Adopted People's Birth and Adoptive Sibling Relationships Across the Life-Span (2012) Cardiff University
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). Sibling issues in foster care and adoption. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

## Why is it important for brothers and sisters to go to the same adoptive family?

Claire (age 12)

