

GUIDANCE NOTE ON IMPROVING PRACTICE ON THE PLACEMENT OF SIBLINGS FOR ADOPTION

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.

The paper builds on ideas shared by agencies in response to the call for views on the placement of sibling groups for adoption issued in July 2012 by the Department for Education (DfE) which were then published in February 2013.

It is being re-issued along with a powerpoint presentation which now includes new proposed regulation and guidance on siblings arising from the Children and Families Act 2014.

This paper is intended to reinforce the best practice which already exists and support the work of childcare and adoption social workers and adoption panels in local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in all aspects of the work required to meet the needs of siblings in their care.

It highlights the areas that agencies need to consider in thinking about a strategy and agency policy which will support more siblings being placed together for adoption.

It is acknowledged that there will be some children for whom a comprehensive assessment indicates that they need to be placed separately from one or all of their siblings. This paper is focussing on those children who should be placed together.

A LOOK AT THE RECENT EVIDENCE

Figures from the LA voluntary survey data, scaled to a national level and published in July 2013 show that 3300 of the 6600 children waiting for adoption were part of a sibling group.

For 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 Annual Report 2012/13 showed that whilst 49% of children referred were in sibling groups, 61% of adopters referred to the Register can only consider 1 child and only 36% are prepared to adopt 2 children, and 3% to adopt 3 or more children. Further information from the Register shows that the majority of sibling groups were White British children, more than half of the groups included a child over the age of 5 and that there were only a small number of disabled children in sibling groups

IS YOUR AGENCY DOING ALL THAT IT CAN?

The following checklist poses questions that can be discussed in agencies' management groups or adoption teams to identify any areas of policy and practice where changes could be made to improve the opportunities for placing siblings.

- 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 how many sibling groups are placed separately at the point of coming into care and then, in cases where the care plan indicates placement together, 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 1 worker, is there a clear communication plan?
- Where siblings are placed in separate foster homes 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?
- 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? Do they 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?
- 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?
- When considering matches for adopters approved in your agencies with the potential to take more than 1 child, how mindful are you of the 49% of children 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? This could involve 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.

SOME 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.
- Hegar - Children and Youth Services Review 27 (2005)717-739 Sibling placement in foster care and adoption: An overview of international research
- 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.
- Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: Traumatic Separations and Honoured Connections (2008) Edited by Deborah Silverstein and Susan Livingston Smith Praeger Publishers Inc
- Saunders, H. and Selwyn, J. (2011) Adopting large sibling groups: The experiences of adopters and adoption agencies. London: BAAF.
- 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.
- Saunders H., Selwyn J. and Fursland E. (2013) Placing large sibling groups for adoption. BAAF

WHAT NEXT?

- If you have good practice examples of your agency's work in placing siblings please email them to Patrick Towgood or [Elaine Dibben](#) so these can be featured in future DfE newsletters and shared on the BAAF Recruitment Champions online forum.
- The Recruitment Forum is working on an example of a policy on sibling placements. If you have an existing policy that could be shared with us to inform this work please contact Patrick Towgood or Elaine Dibben.
- ADCS and CVAA are discussing whether any changes should be made to the Interagency Fee for sibling placements - any views on this should be sent to [Steve Miley](#), ADCS and [Chris Smith](#), CVAA.

National Recruitment Forum
September 2013

ABOUT THE NATIONAL RECRUITMENT FORUM

The National Recruitment Forum is working to support LAs and VAAs in addressing the overall shortfall in adopters and the need to recruit adopters for specific groups of children. Senior representatives attend from:

Adoption UK
Association of Directors of Children's Services
British Association for Adoption and Fostering
Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies
Coram
First4Adoption
Head of Fostering and Adoption, Essex
AdoptWestMids Consortium
Head of Adoption, Leeds