

Yorkshire Adoption Agency



**DOMESTIC ADOPTION
INFORMATION**

Thank you for requesting this information leaflet about Domestic Adoption. The purpose of the leaflet is to answer frequently asked questions about adoption and to provide enough information to help you make a decision about adopting a child. After reading the booklet if you wish to discuss any issues raised please do not hesitate to contact the Agency on 01302 638337 or Email: info@yorkshireadoptionagency.org.uk.

YORKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY

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STATEMENT OF INTENT:

Yorkshire Adoption Agency is committed to making its services accessible as far as possible to all members of the community. If, as a potential user of Yorkshire Adoption Agency you have a disability or other specific need, for example English is not your first language, please let us know and we will make every effort to ensure that you are not disadvantaged from making use of our Adoption Services.

WHAT PROSPECTIVE AND APPROVED ADOPTERS CAN EXPECT FROM YORKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY

- To act at all times in the best interests of children and achieve good outcomes for children who have been previously Looked After by Local Authorities.
- We will be welcoming, respectful and helpful at all times and accept enquiries about adoption in accordance with the Agency's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policies
- Swiftly provide information requested by our Prospective Adopters.
- Meet Central Governments' timescales for completing adoption assessments, if possible.
- Provide Ongoing Preparation and Training for prospective and Approved Adopters.
- Seek support for our Adoptive Families, if we cannot provide this ourselves.
- Be as flexible as possible so that the needs of our Adoptive families can be met.
- Be honest if, for some reason we cannot meet a prospective Adopter's expectations and try to find an acceptable solution.
- Listen to the "Voice" of our Prospective and Approved adopters, as this can help us improve our services and shape the future of adoption.
- Be efficient and fair in investigating and attempting to resolve any complaints which we receive about our service.
- Keep Prospective Adopters and Adoptive Parents informed regularly of events or actions of the Agency which will affect them as individuals. This includes Prospective Adopters regularly being kept informed of the progress of their enquiry to adopt and assessment.
- Be proactive in finding a child for you when you have been approved by the Agency as suitable to adopt.

- Ensure that any information the Agency has about you is securely stored and not shared with unauthorised persons or organisations.
- Maintain accurate up to date information. If a Service User wishes to have information we hold to be updated we will do so upon request.
- Not pass information to a Third Party unless we have your written permission or are required to do so by law.
- Provide a copy of personal information held about a Service User that the Agency has itself collected. There will be a charge for this information. In these circumstances the Agency will not provide Information provided by a Third Party about the Service User. We will acknowledge requests for information in writing within 5 working days and will provide a full response to information access within 40 working days of our receiving the request.
- Retain records about Service Users who have adopted a child through the Agency for 100 years from the date of the Adoption Order.
- Retain records about Service Users who have not made a formal application to the Agency for three years from the date of their first enquiry. This is in recognition that a Service User may wish to later make an application to this or another Adoption Agency. If a Service User does not wish for his/her details to be retained by this Agency, the Agency will destroy these as confidential waste upon request.
- Try to protect personal information in all circumstances, however, we cannot guarantee the security of information provided by a Service User via the Agency's Website. This is in recognition that a transmission over the Internet is never fully secure. Yorkshire Adoption Agency's Website may contain links to other Websites related to adoption. If a Service User uses these links he/she should be aware that the Agency has no control over these so cannot guarantee the privacy of anyone visiting these websites. It would therefore be advisable for a Service User to consider the privacy statement of the relevant Website.

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF PROSPECTIVE AND APPROVED ADOPTERS

We expect our Potential Prospective, and Approved Adopters :-

- To be honest with the Agency at all times. If you are not, the Agency may not be able to continue working with you.
- To inform the Agency of any change in your circumstances, which could affect your ability to parent a child through adoption.
- To participate in the Agency's Preparation and Training for Adoption.

- To let us know your views on our Service and to tell us quickly if you have any concerns.
- To be respectful and not to discriminate against any Agency staff or Volunteer of the Agency.
- To help us meet Central Government Timescales for completing Prospective Adopter's Assessments by making yourself available at reasonable times
- To work in Partnership with us and to speedily provide information required by the Agency so that delay can be minimised.
- To maintain confidentiality about any child under discussion for possible placement with you. This includes ensuring that all electronic communication between you, this Agency or a Local Authority remains secure and is confidentially destroyed when it is no longer needed.
- To not share confidential information provided by the Agency with a Third Party without the Agency's written permission. This includes your copy of the Prospective Adopter's Report which remains the property of Yorkshire Adoption Agency.
- You will have signed your copy of this report which includes your undertaking that this form is the property of the Agency and agree not to copy this document (other than for your own personal record) or disclose its contents in full or in part, to any other person, Agency or Authority without the Agency's written permission.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ADOPTION?

Adoption is a legal means of providing a permanent family for a child who is not able to remain with his/her own birth family.

Adoption Agencies are legally permitted to place children for adoption with suitable approved families, however, only a Court can legally formalise the arrangement through the granting of an Adoption Order. An Adoption Order means that all legal responsibilities for a child are transferred to the child's adoptive parent(s). When an Adoption Order has been granted the child's legal relationship with his/her former family ends and he/she becomes a full member of his/her adoptive family. Adoption Orders cannot be reversed and following the granting of an Adoption Order, his/her adoptive parent(s) will assume all responsibility for the child as though he/she had been born to the adoptive parent(s).

It is, therefore important to place a child for adoption with a family who is able to meet his/her individual needs.

WHO ARE YORKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY?

Yorkshire Adoption Agency has been an Independent Adoption Agency since 1946 and offers a comprehensive adoption service.

Yorkshire Adoption Agency:

- Finds suitable adoptive families for children who cannot live with their birth families and where a decision has been made by a Local Authority or Court that they should be placed for adoption.
- Provides counselling and access to information for adults who were adopted through Yorkshire Adoption Agency as children. This may include providing them with details of their origins and liaising with intermediary services should the adopted adult and his/her birth relatives wish to make contact.
- Provides an Inter Country Adoption service for applicants who wish to adopt a child from overseas, where the applicant's Local Authority has a Service Level Agreement with Yorkshire Adoption Agency to provide this service.

All Local Authority Adoption Services are Adoption Agencies. Independent Adoption Agencies like Yorkshire Adoption Agency are also able to offer adoption services in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Agency is inspected and regulated by Ofsted.

Yorkshire Adoption Agency is a Registered Charity and Private Limited Company. Although some of the services offered by the Agency will be similar to those provided by Local Authorities, the management and organisation of the Agency is different.

The overall management of Yorkshire Adoption Agency is the responsibility of the Council of Management. The Council of Management ensures that adoption work undertaken complies with the Agency's constitution, Adoption Legislation, the National Minimum Adoption Standards and the terms of Registration by Ofsted. In accordance with National Minimum Adoption Standards the Agency has a nominated Responsible Person who is the Chairperson of Yorkshire Adoption Agency and is contactable through the Agency.

The Executive Sub Committee is a small group of Council of Management members who are delegated to regularly review and monitor the Adoption Agency's work.

The Agency Director is responsible for the day to day management of the Agency. The Director has Social Work and Management qualifications as are specified within the National Minimum Adoption Standards.

The Agency employs an Adoption Manager, Deputy Adoption Manager, two Senior Social Workers, 4.5 full time equivalent Social Worker and an Information and Adoption Support Officer. The Agency also has a Business Manager and two Administrators. Social Workers are

all suitably qualified and are involved in the recruitment, preparation, training, assessment and support of prospective and adoptive parents. They also undertake the counselling for adults who were adopted as children through the Agency. The Agency also employs suitably qualified Sessional Social Workers when necessary.

All Social Workers are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

WHAT WE DO

WE FIND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

We provide information about adopting a child/children in the United Kingdom. When you request information about adoption, a member of the social work team will speak to you the same day, or if the office is closed, on the next working day. The team member will provide you with information and advice. Written information will be sent to you or if you prefer, you can download this from the Agency's website.

Full details of the assessment process is included later in the Information Booklet.

A child who needs an adoptive family is 'Looked After' by a Local Authority, and the Local Authority or the Courts has made a decision that he/she should be placed for adoption. Children who need adoptive families are both pre-school and of school age. At any one time over 4000 children in England may need adoptive families. Approximately half of them need to be placed for adoption with at least one brother or sister. Research and our experience tells us that if brothers and sisters join the same adoptive family, where possible, this is of great benefit to the children and to the whole family.

Children referred to the Agency for adoption, originate from diverse backgrounds and may be of different ethnic origin. A decision will have been made that a child should be placed for adoption for many reasons. A child may have experienced physical injury, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect or birth parents may have decided that it will be in their child's best interests for him/her to be placed for adoption. Some children may have specific medical conditions, special educational, developmental needs or disabilities. As a result of their earlier life experiences, some children may have behavioural difficulties and will experience problems in forming relationships with others. They may therefore take sometime and need additional professional help to settle with their adoptive families. Children may also be referred for adoption where their birth parents' physical or mental ill health means that they are not able to care for their children. Alcohol and drugs misuse by birth parents is one of the main reasons for children currently being unable to remain with their birth families. Although, many children when placed for adoption do not present as having difficulties, it is not possible to predict if they will do so in the future. One reason for this is because experience and research tells us that any child who is placed for adoption will have experienced loss and early life trauma which can adversely affect a child's developing brain.

The Agency, therefore, needs to recruit, train and prepare prospective adopters to parent children where there may be uncertainties regarding their future development. This is one of

the reasons that the Agency needs to have detailed information about prospective adopters. The other main reason is that given the past experiences of adopted children, it is important that their adoptive parents have the capacity to provide a safe, stable and loving family where children are able to receive help and commitment to address their past experiences and develop resilience so they are able to meet their full potential.

The Agency is committed to identifying suitable prospective adoptive families who can meet children's needs in terms of their physical and emotional well being, education, health, race, religion, language, and culture. It is accepted that some adoptive parents who do not share children's ethnicity, can nevertheless promote their racial and cultural needs, therefore adoption applications are welcome from potential adoptive parents who feel that they could parent a child who is of different ethnic origin or dual heritage.

Whilst adoption is a challenge, it is also rewarding in that it provides opportunities for children to grow up in loving, stable and secure families which otherwise might not be available to them. Research tells us that children who grow up in committed loving families can achieve as well as many who live within their birth families.

WE COUNSEL ADOPTED PEOPLE

Yorkshire Adoption Agency offers counselling to adults who were adopted as children through the Agency. If adopted adults choose to have access to information regarding their origins and birth family, we will provide this. If an adopted adult wishes to have contact with his/her family of origin, we will give information about this process and other Agencies who can help. We will also provide information to relatives of adopted adults about the Contact Register and Intermediary Services through which an adopted adult and his/her birth family may be able to re establish contact, if the adopted adult so wishes.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE CHILDREN WHO NEED ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

We receive requests from Local Authorities throughout the country seeking adoptive families for children who are in their care. Many of the children have been referred to the National Adoption Register now known as Adoption Match or Link Maker. These organisations liaise with the Agency if they feel that one of our families referred might be suitable to adopt a specific child. Whilst a Local Authority will retain legal responsibility for the child when he/she initially joins his/her new family, we provide support to an adoptive family at least until an Adoption Order is granted by a Court in respect of their child. We therefore work closely with the Local Authority responsible for the child to ensure that all possible assistance is provided to our adoptive families and their children.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND PROCEDURES IN ADOPTION

The effect of an Adoption Order is that a child ceases to be legally the child of his/her birth parents and becomes your child and you assume all rights and responsibility as though the child has been born to you. The birth parent and the Local Authority have no further rights in respect of your child, but in certain circumstances may keep in contact (either voluntarily or by Court Order) to receive information about his/her progress. Following the granting of an

Adoption Order you as adoptive parent(s) make all decisions and have full responsibility for your child. Your adopted child's rights of inheritance are the same as those of a birth child.

When the Court grants an Adoption Order in respect of your child, your child's original birth certificate will be replaced by a Certificate of Entry in The Adoption Register of adopted children. This shows your name as being your child's parent(s) and the Certificate you are given when your child is adopted is the one used in the future when he/she needs to present a Birth Certificate.

WHO CAN ADOPT?

Under current UK law single people, those in a partnership or a married couple can adopt. Prospective Adopters need to be at least 21 years of age, although there is no legal upper age limit for adoption. We welcome enquiries from people interested in adoption regardless of their race, religion, age, disability, language, sexuality or political orientation.

We cannot accept an adoption application from people who have been convicted of offences against children or where the Courts have removed children from their care as the result of Child Safeguarding concerns.

Some other convictions or cautions for serious offences may prevent a person from being considered as suitable to adopt. It is therefore important that you discuss any past offences, even spent or as a juvenile with us at the beginning of your contact with Yorkshire Adoption Agency.

Serious medical conditions may prevent a person from being considered suitable to adopt. It is therefore essential for you to discuss any existing or previous medical conditions when you first make contact with us at the Agency.

We are very conscious that your circumstances can change, perhaps quite suddenly, at any time during your contact with the Agency. It is important that you tell us about any such changes as soon as possible, as this could have implications for you as a Prospective parent and the child whom you hope to adopt in the future.

Pregnancy is one example of a major change in your life, which will have a far reaching effect on your family. If you find that you are expecting a birth child, we at the Agency, will be delighted for you, however, would encourage you to enjoy becoming a parent to your own child and to withdraw your interest in adoption, at least until your child is two years of age. This is because experience has taught us that both birth children and adopted children need at least this time to form a secure attachment and there should be a least this age gap between the youngest birth child and an adopted child in a family. This is important, as it helps your child to retain his/her position in the family and lessens the risk of the two children competing for your attention and affection. The difference in the children's ages also allows both them and you to learn about and meet his/her/their own individual needs. If you already have birth children you will need to adapt your parenting to meet your adopted child's needs.

An adopted child has ongoing feelings given his/her experience of separation, loss and trauma and these may be expressed through his/her behaviour. Therefore the way that you have managed the behaviour of a birth child in the past may not be appropriate for a child who is placed for adoption with you. Adoptive parents sometimes worry about this and need to be assured that help is available to help with these and other challenges.

To adopt, you will need a great deal of emotional energy and commitment. Practice and experience leads us to believe that to be a successful adoptive parent, you need to have come to terms with infertility before being approved as suitable to adopt. This is particularly important, as preparing to adopt can cause some people to have feelings about their past experiences, which they felt had been resolved.

IS ADOPTION TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL?

Information about adoption is confidential unless the protection of a child becomes a concern. Adoption today means 'openness' rather than 'secrecy' which surrounded adoption in the past. Children are placed for adoption with an expectation that they will be brought up in the full knowledge of their adoption. Your adopted child will bring with him/her a Life Story Book, information and memories of his/her past. Some of the children placed for adoption will remember their birth family members. Your child may have had ongoing face to face contact with parents and relatives until the decision was made to find an adoptive family for him/her. It is important for your child to be allowed to keep these memories alive, as this will help him/her to develop a secure identity, as he/she grows older. Your adopted child will probably have some form of contact in the future with members of his/her birth family. This may be anything from a yearly exchange of information between the birth and adoptive family through the Post Box System, to occasional face to face contact. The form and level of contact will depend on your child's needs. You may be concerned about having direct contact with your child's birth family members however, this can benefit many children and can be managed safely to ensure the confidentiality of the adoptive family. Sometimes when a child is placed for adoption the Courts may make a Contact Order outlining the contact which should take place between a child, his/her birth family or any other significant person after adoption.

There are a few other instances where an Adoption Agency will need to share information about you with authorised people. These relate to the investigation of complaints, the investigation of Child Safeguarding matters, information required by Courts or by the Secretary of State. When you have been approved as Suitable to Adopt the Agency will obviously need to share information with a Local Authority who is considering placing a child for adoption with you. When we are trying to find a child who you may be suitable to parent we will need to send your details to over 60 Local Authorities, the Yorkshire & Humber Adoption Register and Adoption Match. We will, however, obtain your written consent to share information with others for these purposes.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN AN ADOPTION ASSESSMENT?

Adoption is a life-long commitment. To assess if you are suitable to adopt the Agency is therefore legally required to obtain certain information. It is our policy to obtain information in

excess of legal requirements, as we believe it is good practice to have as much information as possible about our adopters who will in the future parent vulnerable and traumatised children.

We need to make enquiries to the Local Authority where you live and if necessary any previous area where you have lived. Enhanced disclosures are obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service and these will be updated every two years until your child adopted. If you have lived, travelled or worked overseas for more than one month we will need to obtain information about you from the relevant overseas authorities.

The Agency is required to make enquiries about your health. You will need to have a full medical examination completed by your GP, a report of which will be forwarded to the Agency's Medical Adviser. The Agency Medical Adviser then gives the Agency advice about the likelihood of you maintaining satisfactory health until the child is able to live independently. In order to do so the Agency Medical Adviser may need to make further contact with your GP or Hospital Consultant where necessary. We need to have Health Reports and statutory references up dated every two years until a child is placed with you for adoption. When undergoing an assessment by this Agency your GP will charge you to complete medical examinations or Health Reports.

Legally we are required to obtain three personal references in writing from persons nominated by yourself. These referees will be personally interviewed regarding your suitability to become a prospective adoptive parent. Not more than one of these referees may be a family member. At least one referee needs to have known you for a minimum of 5 years. If you are applying as a couple then at least two of the referees should have knowledge of you both. Whilst this Agency does not accept neighbours as referees if it is your wish we will be pleased to receive an additional reference from a neighbour.

We will also need a reference from your employer.

It is Yorkshire Adoption Agency's Policy to also seek references from the NSPCC, CAFCASS, Probation Services, and where applicable, Department of Education, Child Health and SSAFA if you have been in the Forces. We will also need to interview your birth children if applicable, whether or not the child is living in your home. A Disclosure and Barring Service check will need to be undertaken in respect of your children who are over age 16 years old and any adult members of your household. We will also need to approach your former spouse(s) or significant partner(s) to ascertain their views on your suitability to adopt a child if you have cared for a child together in the past.

Yorkshire Adoption Agency will also need to have information about your financial security and confirmation of housing rent/mortgage payments.

Yorkshire Adoption Agency **will not** seek information without your written permission. If any of the information we need is problematic for you, please discuss this with an Adoption Social Worker from the Agency.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BE APPROVED AS AN ADOPTER?

Given the number of children who need adoptive families we are committed to preventing delay in approving Prospective Adopters as suitable to adopt. We therefore work with Potential Adopters within defined timescales which meet Central Governments expectations of all Adoption Agencies. If there is no unavoidable delay from Registration of Interest, Approval should be completed in 6 months.

The Agency offers a 'Fast Track' process to some Prospective Adopters who wish to consider adopting 'Harder to Place' children. 'Harder to Place' children are:

- sibling groups
- children over 7 years of age
- children who are not of White British ethnicity
- children who have specific needs or a disability

The Agency aims to complete the 'Fast Track' process in 4 months between Registration of Interest and Approval if there is no unavoidable delay. We accept that 'Fast Track' is not suitable for all Prospective Adopters as some people need more time to complete the process, or do not feel able to consider 'Harder to Place' children or need to gain more child care experience before approval.

Please tell us if you may be interested in 'Fast Tracking' but be assured you will not be disadvantaged if you choose to follow the usual 6 months process.

The following information describes the timescales involved in the 6 month process but are obviously shortened for 'Fast Tracking'.

What you can therefore expect from Yorkshire Adoption Agency is:

- If you are available to receive a response to your initial enquiry about adoption on the same or next working day. To have had a written Information Leaflet sent to you within 2 working days. If you prefer you can download this from our Website. When we contact you we will invite you to attend our next Information Meeting or Open Day. If this is not convenient we will give you dates of future meetings. These can also be found on our Website. We have two Information Meetings per month at the Agency and numerous Open Days throughout the year.
- If we have not arranged with you to attend an Information Meeting we will contact you 7 working days to discuss your feelings about proceeding with the Adoption process and to answer any further questions you may have.
- Having attended an Information Meeting if you wish to proceed with the process we will contact you within 5 working days to arrange at your convenience a Pre Registration visit to your home.

- The Pre Registration visit will be lengthy and will give you a further opportunity to ask questions about adoption and the process. It will also enable you to share information with the Agency which will help us and you to gauge if adoption is right for you at this time in your life. If you and the Agency agree that it is, we will offer you an appointment to formally Register your Interest in Adoption and to begin the Stage I Pre Assessment process.

If however you or the Agency feels that it is not the right time for you to proceed we will discuss with you action you need to take before a Registration of Interest can be accepted by the Agency. If the Agency cannot offer you a service at that time we will signpost you to other Agencies who may and also advise you to contact First 4 Adoption.

- In all cases if you subsequently Register your Interest in Adoption and this cannot be accepted the Agency will give you reasons for this in writing within 5 working days.
- The Agency will aim for the Social Worker who visits you to undertake the Pre Registration Interview to complete both Stage I and Stage II of the adoption process. If for any reason this may not be possible you will be advised of this immediately.

If you do not wish for the Social Worker who initially visits you to complete the process with you please tell us and we will do our best to reallocate your case. Your views are important to us and we want you to have a positive experience of working with the Agency. If at any stage you request a change of Social Worker you will not be disadvantaged because you have done so.

STAGE ONE

A Stage I Pre assessment plan will include:

- The arrangements for the Agency obtaining Statutory and Personal References and visiting your Referees.
- Arrangements for you to receive initial Adoption Training and to meet an Experienced Adopter.
- Arrangements for you to receive further Information from the Agency.
- Help and support the Agency can give you when you are considering your capacity to adopt.
- The need for you to have an Adoption Medical Examination completed by your GP, the Report of which will need to be received by the Agency no later than 6 weeks from the date of the Pre Assessment Plan.
- Experience with children you may need to gain or other action you will need to take in preparation for adoption.

This list is not exhaustive and your Pre Assessment Plan will be tailored to meet your individual needs and circumstances.

It is envisaged that the Stage 1 Pre Assessment Process will be completed by you and the Agency in 8 weeks. To monitor progress the Stage 1 Pre Assessment Plan will be formally reviewed with you and your Social Worker by a Senior member of the Social Work Team after 6 weeks. At that stage any outstanding tasks will be discussed and action agreed that you or the Agency needs to take before the end of Stage 1.

If you need more time to complete Stage 1 (for example because of a house move or bereavement) this will be recorded on your Agency Case Record with supporting evidence. You will be asked to sign this Case Record.

When you have successfully completed Stage 1 the Agency will confirm this in writing and invite you to commence Stage 2, or advise you that the Agency feels you are not suitable to do so and give reasons for this decision. In these circumstances the Agency will offer you counselling and advice. We will signpost you to First 4 Adoption if you wish to raise any concern about the Agency and if you wish to make a Complaint about this decision you will be able to do so using the Agency's Complaints Procedure.

STAGE TWO

To begin the Stage 2 Assessment Process it is important for you to be aware that you must to notify the Agency in writing that you wish to proceed to Stage 2 within 6 months of the Agency Decision that you have satisfactorily completed Stage 1. If more than 6 months has elapsed the Agency is unable to accept your notification and we will need to discuss your interest in adoption with you again during a re-entry interview. Stage 2 will take 4 months and will end when the Agency makes the decision that you are or are not suitable to adopt.

As with Stage 1 your Social Worker will agree with you a written Plan for you Assessment. This will include tasks and timescales which you and the Agency will need to complete. Arrangements to provide you with more intense training for adoption will also be included, as will the date which you can expect your Assessment Report to be presented to the Agency's Adoption Panel and the latest date when an Agency Decision will be made about your Suitability to adopt.

The Agency will formally Review the progress of your Assessment 7 weeks after you have commenced Stage 2. You and your Social Worker will need to attend this Review which will be completed by a Senior member of the Social Work Team.

As Stage 2 of the Adoption Process is intense it is important that you will be available to work in partnership to complete your Assessment with 4 months as is expected by Central Government. If, however, during the Assessment you or the Agency feels that you need more time to complete Stage 2, the Agency may delay making a decision about your suitability to adopt. Reasons for this delay and supporting evidence will need to be recorded on your Agency Case File and you will be asked to sign the relevant Case Records.

During your Assessment, if any information comes to light, which may prejudice the eventual outcome of the Agency's Assessment, you will be counselled regarding the Agency's concerns

and will be invited to withdraw your application. Occasionally a partial Assessment (a Brief Report) may be referred to the Agency's Adoption Panel, and a recommendation regarding your suitability will be sought. If this occurs you will be fully informed of any matters being referred to the Adoption Panel given 5 days to comment on the Brief Report and will be invited to attend the Panel meeting. In these circumstances the Adoption Panel can only recommend that you are unsuitable to adopt or that a full assessment is completed. The Adoption Panel's recommendation will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker who will make a decision regarding your non suitability to adopt or continue with a full assessment. Your Social Worker will keep you fully informed of the recommendation by Panel and the Agency Decision. Any decision will be confirmed in writing within five working days of the Agency Decision. Should the Agency Decision Maker decide that you are unsuitable to adopt the Agency will offer you counselling. In these circumstances you will be offered the option of making further representation to the Agency or having your case reviewed by an Independent Review Panel.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE ASSESSMENT IS FINISHED?

When your Home Study Assessment is completed and your Adoption Social Worker has compiled a Prospective Adopter's Report, another Social Worker from the Agency may visit you if necessary to complete a second opinion report. This however is unusual. You will then receive a copy of the Adopters Report and will be invited to make comment on it within 5 days. Having received your response it will be presented to the Adoption Panel by your Social Worker. If you wish to waive your right to have 5 days to consider the Social Work Report you will be asked to confirm this in writing.

A copy of your Adopter's Report will be given to you but will not contain personal references or Medical Reports. The document will be marked 'Not for Adoption Purposes'. Your Adopter's Report remains the property of Yorkshire Adoption Agency and should not be copied or given to a third party without the Agency's written permission.

WHAT IS THE ADOPTION PANEL?

The Adoption Panel is an independent body who make recommendations about applicants' suitability to adopt. The Panel is comprised of people from the Agency's Central List who have the skills and experience to be Adoption Panel Members. These include an Independent Chairperson, Social Workers, the Agency's Medical Adviser and Independent Members many of whom have direct experience of adoption. The Panel must have a quorum of five people. This must include either the Chair or Vice Chairperson and one Social Worker. The Agency's Professional Adviser will be present and the Agency's Legal Adviser and/or Agency Decision maker may attend but these people are not Panel Members. You will always be invited to attend Adoption Panel. If you choose not to do so this will not be viewed in a negative light by the Adoption Panel or the Agency. During your Assessment the Adoption Social Worker will have prepared you for attending the Adoption Panel.

WHAT DOES THE ADOPTION PANEL DO?

An Adoption Panel makes recommendations regarding your suitability/non suitability to adopt. If Panel does not feel that it has enough information to make a recommendation it will defer

doing so until such information is received. Reasons will be given for any recommendation made by Panel and you will receive these in writing.

The Adoption Panel may also give Advice to the Agency about the number, gender and needs of a child/ren to whom you may be a suitable adoptive parent. The Panel, however, is not obliged to give Advice to the Agency.

WHO APPROVES APPLICANTS AS SUITABLE TO ADOPT?

The Agency Decision Maker makes a decision regarding your suitability/non suitability to adopt. The Agency Decision Maker will take into account Panel's recommendations and all available information before making his/her decision. Before making an Agency Decision the Agency Decision Maker is obliged to receive the Final Minutes of the Adoption Panel Meeting so you may not receive an Agency Decision about your suitability to adopt until approximately ten working days after you attend the Adoption Panel Meeting.

Where the Decision Maker is minded that you are unsuitable to adopt, you will be invited to make representations to the Agency **within 40 days** before a **Final** Decision is made. If you do so the Agency Decision Maker will refer your representations to the Adoption Panel and the Panel will need to make a new recommendation. You will be invited to attend the Panel meeting. Alternatively, you may apply **within 40 days** to have your application considered by an Independent Review Panel known as the IRM. In these circumstances the Independent Review Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who will consider this before making a **Final** Decision about the application. There is no appeals procedure. A leaflet is available about the Independent Review Panel which is totally independent of the Agency.

WHEN WILL I GET TO KNOW ABOUT MY APPROVAL AS SUITABLE TO ADOPT?

If you attend Panel, you will be told by the Panel Chairperson immediately Panel has made its recommendation. You will be given the reasons for the Panel's recommendation.

If you do not attend Panel your Adoption Social Worker will contact you by telephone and tell you of the Adoption Panel's recommendations within 24 hours of the Panel meeting. The Agency Decision will be made within 7 days of he/she receiving the Final Minutes of the Panel Meeting. Again your Adoption Social Worker will inform you by telephone of the Agency Decision within 24 hours. You will also be informed in writing of the Panel's recommendations and Agency Decision within 5 working days of the Agency Decision being made.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I AM APPROVED?

All the information which the Agency has about you will continually be considered alongside the information the Agency receives from Local Authorities about children who need adoptive families.

The Agency cannot guarantee that a child will be placed with you even though you are approved as suitable to adopt, as this will depend on a Local Authority choosing you for a specific child. Adoption Agencies do not have “waiting lists” and some approved adopters may wait sometime before a child is placed with them. After your approval, with your written consent, your details will be forwarded to Adoption Match, which has resources for potentially ‘matching’ children with approved adopters. If you agree we will also send your details to the Yorkshire and Humber One Adoption Consortium of which the Agency is a member. Again, with your consent we will forward your profile to over 60 Local Authorities every month until a child is potentially identified for you. You will be informed of Activity Days in the region, where you may be able to meet children who are awaiting adoption and we will also tell you about Exchange Days which you or Agency Social Workers can attend to consider the profiles of children who need new families. We will give you information about Adoption Link. This action will be included in the written Matching Agreement which the Agency will complete with you after you are approved as suitable to adopt.

We are very aware that following approval some prospective adopters become very anxious if a child has not been identified for them quickly. Your Social Worker will keep in contact with you whilst you are ‘waiting’. You are, however, welcome to contact our Information and Support Assistant for additional support. Your Social Worker will provide you with details of our Support Groups and our ongoing Training which we would like you to attend as waiting for a child to be placed can be a stressful time. Additional training can also help to further raise your profile when children’s Social Workers are choosing adoptive parents for an individual child as this gives them confidence in the adopter’s ability to meet the child’s needs.

When we have identified a child whose needs we feel you may be able to meet through adoption, your Adoption Social Worker will contact you to discuss the child. This will have followed your Adoption Social Worker talking to the child’s Social Worker about you and what you would be able to provide for the child. The child’s Social Worker and your Social Worker will meet you to further discuss the child and his or her needs and you will be given written information regarding the child’s history. It is your decision if you wish to consider the child joining your family. At this stage it will be necessary to remember that the child’s Social Worker having met you, may make the decision that you are not the right family for him/her child and therefore the placement cannot proceed. If you make the decision that the specific child, who is being discussed with you, is not the right child for your family, then you will need to tell us at the Agency. Please be reassured that if you decide not to go ahead with the proposed match you will still be considered for another child.

You need to keep confidential any written or verbal information which you will have been given about a child and you will have consented to this in writing when completing your Matching Agreement with the Agency. If the child does not for any reason come to live with you, all written information which you have received about him/her must be returned to the child’s Local Authority. No information about a specific child or a proposed placement will be sent to you from the Agency by E-mail unless this has been agreed with the child’s Local Authority and is encrypted and password protected.

If you, the child’s Social Worker and the Agency agree that the child should be placed in your family for adoption you will be fully involved in discussions, decisions and introductions to the

child. This will usually include you being invited to a Life Appreciation Day and/or other meetings where professionals and carers will provide you with further information about the child. The Local Authority's Medical Adviser may be present at the meeting or you may be invited to meet with him/her individually. The Adoption Panel in the child's Local Authority will meet to recommend if you are suitable adoptive parent(s) for the child. The Agency Decision Maker of the Local Authority will make a decision if the child should be placed for adoption with you.

Occasionally, an Adoption Panel may recommend that a prospective adoptive family is not suitable for the identified child or the Agency Decision Maker may not approve the proposed placement. In these circumstances there is no appeal, however, your Adoption Social Worker will provide counselling and support to you.

Prior to the Adoption Panel considering if a specific child should be placed with you the Local Authority Social Worker will write a Placement Report, which will be shared with you. You will be invited to make comments regarding the proposed placement, including the Local Authority's proposal regarding future contact between the child and significant persons from his/her past, the Local Authority's plan to provide adoption support to your family in the future and the Local Authority's plan for your exercise of Parental Responsibility before an Adoption Order is granted. The Local Authority will make the decision about the extent to which you and the child's Birth Parents may exercise Paternal Responsibility at this time. You will be given 10 days to comment on this report and you will usually be invited to attend the Local Authority's Adoption Panel. You need to be aware that Parental Responsibility is shared between you, the child's Local Authority and birth parents until an Adoption Order is granted. It may take some time after the Adoption Panel Meeting before an Agency Decision is made that the child will/will not be placed with you for adoption. This is because the Agency Decision cannot be made until the Agency Decision Maker has received the Final Minutes of the Adoption Panel.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD IS PLACED FOR ADOPTION WITH ME?

Following the placement of a child with you for adoption, your Agency Social Worker will support you and the child's Social Worker will visit to supervise the placement until an Adoption Order is granted in Court. You will receive a visit each week for the first four weeks of placement and a Statutory Review will be held four weeks after the child joins your family. Statutory visits and reviews will continue until you adopt your child in Court. Your Agency Social Worker will make support visits to you at least once per month before an Adoption Order is granted. If you would like additional support or have any concerns following your child's placement please let us know. This will enable us to ensure a good outcome for you and your child.

The decision about when it is appropriate for you to make the application to adopt your child will be decided by you and the Social Workers. Your child needs to have lived with you for at least 10 weeks before you can apply for an Adoption Order. The waiting time depends on how quickly the child has settled and whether there are any legal issues which need to be resolved. Where complications exist the Court may appoint a Social Worker called a Children's

Guardian. At this stage legal complexities are rare, however, should they occur your Agency Social Worker will advise support and guide you through any difficulties.

The Agency will help you to prepare your Court application. Court Proceedings are very informal. You and your child will need to attend. When you and your child attend Court this will be an Adoption Celebration Day, which usually takes place a short time after the Court has granted an Adoption Order in respect of your child. You are not usually asked to attend Court on the day when the Order is granted because birth parents must be notified of the Hearing and have the right to attend Court on that day. Your Adoption Social Worker and your child's Social Worker also usually attend the Celebration. Some Courts agree to have a few relatives of the Adoptive family at the Celebration, however, you will need to ask your Agency or Child's Social Worker to check this before the Celebration Hearing.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER AN ADOPTION ORDER IS GRANTED?

When an Adoption Order is granted the Court will provide you with a copy of the Order. The Registrar General will provide you with a Certificate of Entry in the Adoption Register.

Prior to an Adoption Order being granted you will need to give an undertaking that you will share information with your child regarding his or her background, before he/she reaches the age of 18. This information includes making your child aware of the Contact Register.

After you have adopted your child, Adoption Agencies are required to keep adoption case records for 100 years. Adults who have been adopted have the right to obtain from the Registrar General, a copy of their original birth certificate which gives limited information about their birth family. Adoption Agencies provide counselling for adopted persons who are seeking information about their birth family. Adopted adults and their birth families may approach Intermediary Agencies to seek information about an adult's adoption and help where they wish to be reunited. In these circumstances you may be contacted by such an agency to ascertain your views following requests for contact by birth relatives. No contact, however, should be made with an adopted person or his/her adoptive parents until the adopted person is at least 18 years old. The Agency is aware that Social Media Websites can be used by birth family members and others to attempt to make contact with adopted children at an earlier age. If this is ever a concern for you please do not hesitate to contact the Agency for advice.

As mentioned earlier when children are placed for adoption today, a package of information about the child's background is given to the adoptive parent(s). This means that children will grow up already knowing about their origins and family background but they may wish to trace and meet their birth parents or other members of their birth family when they are older.

Although you have complete responsibility for your child when an Adoption Order is granted, adoption support will always be available from this Agency both to you and your child.

We know that Adoption support needs to be available for as long as necessary to all involved and that the need for occasional information, advice and help does not cease after an Adoption Order has been granted.

For example, children themselves may need help in understanding and coming to terms with their past and in grieving for the birth family who were unable to care for them. Whilst adoptive parents will help their child with this, there may be times when professional support is also needed. The circumstances of adoptive families may change in the future and other forms (including financial) of support may be necessary. Adopted children and members of their adoptive families may request an assessment for adoption support following the child joining his/her adoptive family. Local Authorities undertake these assessments, however, the Agency will be happy to provide advice and guidance to you about accessing appropriate support.

The Local Authority which placed your child for adoption is responsible for providing adoption support for the first 3 years, following the granting of an Adoption Order. After this the Local Authority where you live has this responsibility. There are some circumstances where the child's Local Authority continues to provide Adoption Support for longer than 3 years and if this is applicable to you and your child this will be confirmed when your child joins your family.

REVIEW OF APPROVAL

It is uncommon that our approved adopters will not have had a child placed with them within 12 months. You, however, need to be aware that if a child has not joined your family 12 months after your approval, it is a legal requirement for you to have a review and thereafter annually or more often if the Agency feels that this is necessary.

A review of your suitability to adopt will also be necessary if a child placed for adoption with you leaves your family unexpectedly, before an Adoption Order is granted. Again, this is not common in this Agency, however, we know that when this happens it will be very upsetting for our adopters and the child who leaves their family. The review, therefore, helps an adoptive parent and the Agency to realistically consider the adopter's future. In these circumstances the child's Local authority will invite you to attend a Disruption Meeting to look at the reasons for the placement ending and to plan for the child's future.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR DOMESTIC ADOPTION

The information provided earlier in this leaflet is the usual process for the assessment of Prospective Adopters and the placement for children who have been 'Looked After' by Local Authorities.

In some circumstances Local Authorities may wish to place young children earlier for adoption with Approved Adopters to prevent delay for them in joining new families. This will be through Concurrency Arrangements or where the child is Fostered for Adoption. You may wish to consider a child being placed for adoption through either procedure, however there is no expectation that you would agree to this. Please be assured that if you prefer to follow the procedures for a child placed with you through the process described earlier in this leaflet the Agency will still without delay work hard to find a child for whom you may be a suitable adoptive parent.

Below, we have briefly described Concurrency and Fostering for Adoption and would ask you to contact the Agency to fully discuss what is involved if you are interested in having a child placed for adoption with you in either way.

CONCURRENCY ARRANGEMENTS

Concurrency is used when a young baby is placed with Approved Adopters but the Local Authority continues to assess if the child can be returned to his/her family's care. In these circumstances you would be expected to work with the child's family members, usually parents with a view to the child returning to them if this is possible. Although you would be supported by the child's Local Authority throughout and you may go on to adopt the child there is no guarantee that the child would remain with you. We, therefore, accept that only a small number of Prospective Adopters feel able to agree to Concurrency Arrangements given the level of uncertainty about the child's future with them. At present this Agency is unable to offer Concurrency however will be pleased to provide information about Adoption Agencies who offer this service.

FOSTERING FOR ADOPTION

Some children are placed with Agency Approved Adopters before a Court makes the final decision that the child should be Placed for Adoption. This procedure can be used where a Local Authority is of the view that a Court is likely to agree to the child being placed for adoption. For example where a child's older siblings have been adopted and his/her birth parents or family members have not made changes in their lives which would ensure the child's well being should he/she be returned to their care.

In these circumstances the child's Local Authority would approve you as a Foster Carer until the Court makes its final decision after which the legal status of the child would change and he/she would be Placed for Adoption with you.

Some of our Approved Adopters have had children successfully placed with them through Fostering to Adopt arrangements. We however accept that you may not wish to consider Fostering for Adoption as there is still some uncertainty about the child's future with you.

If you feel able to consider Fostering to Adopt please discuss this with the Agency but we will ensure that you are not disadvantaged if you choose to have a child Placed for Adoption with you in the usual way.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY YORKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY?

The Agency aims to provide a professional service which is of a high standard. However, we accept that occasionally things go wrong. The Agency has a Complaints Procedure which is available upon request and in all cases is given to applicants who Register their Interest in Adoption with the Agency. If a complaint is received from you when you are being assessed as suitable to adopt this work will not be suspended until the matter is resolved. In these

circumstances the Agency will agree with you the most appropriate means of you continuing to receive a service whilst your complaint is being investigated. We aim to have complaints investigated and hopefully resolved within 28 days. If, for any reason, this does not appear to be possible, we will contact you and give you reasons in writing for the delay. We will also give you a timescale within which we hope to conclude our investigations and give you an outcome of your complaint.

Most complaints can be resolved easily and quickly and it might be most helpful for you to contact the Adoption Manager in the first instance. If you do not feel that this is appropriate, please write to the Agency Director. We also like to receive other comments about the Services we provide, so will ask you to complete Feedback forms at various times during your contact with us. Any comments you make will be taken seriously and will be used to help us improve and plan our future services so that we achieve positive outcomes for children and our adopters. So, thank you in advance, for telling us what you think we are doing 'Right' and where we need to make changes.

The Agency is required to provide the details of Ofsted which regulates Adoption Agencies. Ofsted can be contacted at:-

Ofsted, National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404040
Email – info@ofsted.gov.uk and www.Ofsted.gov.uk

USEFUL ADDRESSES - For further information

Yorkshire Adoption Agency
Loversall Court
Clayfields
Tickhill Road
Balby
DN4 8QG
Telephone 01302 638337

Email:- info@yorkshiredoptionagency.org.uk
Website: www.yorkshiredoptionagency.org.uk

PAC UK
Hollyshaw House
2 Hollyshaw Lane
Leeds
LS15 7BD
Telephone 0113 2646837
www.pac-uk.org

First for Adoption
48 Mecklenburgh Square
London
WC1N 2QA
Telephone 0300 222 0022
E mail: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk
www.first4adoption.org.uk

After Adoption
City Gate
5 Blantyre Street
Manchester
M15 4JJ
Telephone: 0161 8394932
www.afteradoption.org.uk

Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies
Caritas Care (CVAA)
218 Tulkeith Road
Ashton on Ribble
Preston
PR2 1ES
Info@cvaa.org.uk

From 3rd April 2017
One Adoption – The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Adoption Agency.
Contact details are not yet available.

February 2017