

Kent/Coram Partnership Report – Post Adoption Support Team

Corporate Parenting Panel – 9 November 2016

1. Introduction

This partnership report from Coram provides an overview of the work undertaken by Coram, based on the specification set out in the one-year contract (from April 2016 to March 2017) agreed between Coram and Kent in January 2016 and additional activities that were not part of the original specification. The specification set out key deliverables with regard to the development of the multi-disciplinary post adoption support team. The Coram progress report has been written by Yashi Shah, now in the role of the Coram/Kent Partnership Project Manager. The report will be supplemented by young people attending the panel to share their adoption experiences and launch the school kit.

2. Staffing

The Post Adoption Support Team provides short term therapeutic and social work support to adopters, children and young people following the granting of the Adoption Order. As at 18th October 2016, the team was supporting 156 children – 127 supported by clinicians and 29 by social workers.

As part of the contract agreement it was agreed that Coram will continue to employ the clinicians and the clinical lead. The team consists of a part-time social work team manager, a full-time child psychotherapist, a full-time family therapist, a full-time adult psychotherapist, a part-time music therapist, two full-time social workers and an administrator. Two systemic practitioners have recently been appointed and hope to join the team within the next couple of months. One of the systemic practitioners is undertaking a two-year training course, starting from September 2016 at the Tavistock, that will lead to a qualification of an MSc in Psychotherapy.

All the clinical staff, except the child psychotherapist, are supervised by an experienced systemic family therapist (clinical lead) who has been seconded from CAMHS on one day a week basis. This arrangement will

increase to two days per week between January and March 2017. The child psychotherapist receives supervision from an external clinician to meet his registration requirements – however, this will finish at the end of December 2016 and he will then be supervised by the clinical lead. The clinical lead reports to a clinical lead in Coram.

Despite best efforts by the partnership to recruit a permanent clinical lead, this has proved challenging. In order to attract applicants who will not lose out on their NHS pension and other conditions of service, an agreement was reached between Tavistock NHS Trust and the partnership that the clinical lead would be appointed by Tavistock NHS Trust on a three day a week basis on a two-year fixed-term contract. A candidate was recently offered a post on such an arrangement, however they did not accept the post, citing the commute as a key challenge.

The social workers and the administrator report to the social work team manager. One social worker left in September 2016 for personal reasons. Their post has been offered to another social worker and she will be starting within the next couple of months. An experienced permanent social work team manager managed the team from January to August 2016 on 3 day a week basis. However, this manager was promoted to a service manager post within Kent on a secondment basis for 9 months and started her new post in September 2016. The previous interim manager will be managing the team from November 2016 on 3 day a week basis.

The work has involved Yashi writing job descriptions for the various disciplines, co-ordinating the advertisement and recruitment of the posts and negotiating secondment arrangements with CAMHS. As both the team manager and the clinical lead are part time, Yashi has also been providing support to the overall team.

3. Parenting Programmes

3.1 The **Incredible Years**, 12-week Parenting Programme (two hour sessions), is a programme specifically developed by Coram for adopters parenting children aged 8 years old and under. When Coram was directly managing the service, three Incredible Years Parenting Programmes were delivered by Coram Associates co-facilitating with a

trained social worker from the Post Adoption Support Team. However, this social worker left due to personal reasons quite suddenly, and therefore two Coram Associates are delivering the fourth programme, which started in September 2016. The team's music therapist and two adopters have now been trained to deliver the programme and it is hoped that they will deliver the next programme in January 2017. One of the adopters who has been trained will be observing a couple of sessions from the current programme. It is hoped that this parenting programme, which has been received well by Kent adopters, would be offered on a rolling programme to all new adoptive parents from January 2017. The future plan is to train more adopters to deliver the training.

3.2 The **STOP**, 12-week (two and half hour sessions) Parenting Programme, is a programme specifically developed by Coram for adopters parenting adolescent children. An adult psychotherapist and a social worker have been trained, and they are currently co-facilitating the first programme in Kent (started in September 2016) with the support of an experienced Coram associate. Currently 8 families are attending, with children aged from 12 to 17 years old. Again it is hoped that this programme will be delivered to adopters on a rolling programme from January 2017. As with Incredible Years Parenting Programme, the plan for the future is to train more adopters to deliver the programme.

3.3 The first Parenting Programme **specifically aimed at adoptive parents of autistic children and young people** will be delivered as a pilot programme in February 2017 by an education colleague from Kent with an adult psychotherapist from the team. The education colleague is experienced in delivering this programme to the general population. However, the pilot programme will be for adopters only.

4. Support Groups

Structured support groups for adopters are facilitated by the clinical lead with a social worker mainly in the observation role. The purpose of the group is to support and strengthen parenting skills to help adoptive parents make sense of their children's behaviours and, most importantly, give voice and understanding to their underlying unvoiced emotional experiences. Three such groups have been facilitated to-date, with two further groups (one in the East and the other in the West) to be provided

from November 2016. The aim is to train the adult psychotherapist to facilitate future groups. The feedback from the previous groups has included:

“The experience of meeting fellow adopters and realising the extent of our shared problems and experiences was very valuable”

Most valuable the facilitator had the experience of being an adoptive parent”

“Felt more equipped to deal with difficult situation and aware of potential future difficulties”

5. Learning and Development Programme

This is a new programme that was developed in the summer and is constantly reviewed so that feedback from the Adoption Advisory Board is taken on board. In addition, the plan is for the young people’s participation group to contribute to preparation group training and learning and development seminars – for example, the seminar on impact of social media, life story book and work etc.

Yashi and the clinical lead are also meeting on the 21st of October to review the programme so that new ideas from adopters are incorporated.

The feedback from the different courses included:

“Group exercises regarding control were good to see. Also discussing and hearing different strategies on how to cope with tantrums or meltdowns”

“Learning to relinquish control myself – ideas about ways of responding to my daughter’s need to control – techniques, word, etc.”

“It is ideal that this course is run by an adopter with first-hand experience”

“I am less worried about the impact of my daughter searching for her birth mother”

Further improvements include:

“I would have liked a rough guide to current social media platforms, specifically, what they can do i.e. geo-mapping”

“More examples of putting strategies in place”

“Bibliography/resources attached to handouts”

6. Education Conference

A full day conference took place on the 7th of October. The conference was aimed at adopters, professionals, elected members and primary and secondary school representatives: 72 adopters, 27 school representatives and 30 professionals (included three elected members) attended. The conference had two main external speakers followed by an adopter and a school representative speaking about their experiences of working in partnership with their children’s schools. In addition two young people shared their educational experiences and the school kit developed by Coram Adoptables was launched. The feedback has been positive – comments included:

“So valuable, hopefully going forward our schools will automatically be adoption aware”

“It was essential to hear the Adoptables”

“Mind blowing information provided in the morning session, followed up by excellent speakers in the afternoon”

“A real excellent balance of professionals, adopters and organisations”

“I felt inspired by each speaker”

“Conference was excellent - the content was so relevant and well-presented. It was really worthwhile to attend - felt I learnt a great deal. Plus fantastic to have an event of this kind focussed on such an important concern for adoptive families - has made me feel empowered to ask more questions of my daughter's school”

“It was brilliant to hear parents and the Adoptables young people speak about their experience - incredible of them to share this and so good to hear positive outcomes, even if it has been a struggle to get there”.

Improvements suggested were mainly in relation to better information about parking facilities and joining instructions and ensuring that follow up work was undertaken with schools. Some adopters were disappointed, understandably that their children's schools did not attend.

A meeting took place with Coram/Cambridgeshire to learn from the excellent work they have undertaken with schools to support them in becoming 'adoption-friendly schools'. As stated earlier the plan is to consider how their work and learning can be translated into work with Kent schools. A meeting has been organised for the 20th of October to discuss this further with Yashi and the Adult Psychotherapist. This work will be co-ordinated with the Virtual School to avoid any duplication.

Following a discussion with the key stakeholders, it was agreed that the team would benefit from a part-time staff member with education expertise. This was on the basis that the Virtual School is currently not resourced to totally support adopters and adopted children. One applicant was interviewed who was not appointed. One of the recently appointed systemic practitioners will lead on building relationships with schools and developing educational expertise as she has considerable knowledge of working with schools. Yashi and Lesley Hanney, the clinical lead in the team, would also like to recruit adopters as educational champions to support schools in becoming more adoption friendly and aware.

7. Mentoring Scheme

The purpose of the pilot scheme is to provide new adoptive parents with a mentor following a match being recommended at the matching meeting. The mentor will provide peer support and practical advice from their own experience. The support will be provided through telephone conversations - half an hour's telephone support for the first 6 weeks, followed by fortnightly support for another 6 weeks, with a review telephone call a month later.

21 experienced adopters applied to be mentors – 20 were interviewed and 14 have been offered the role. Training took place on the 23rd of September and 1st of October. Yashi and Lesley Hanney provided the training, which had to be developed by Coram as there is no blue print

which could be completely adapted. Feedback from the training included:

“Really positive, well thought through, feel able to be confident in role”

“Very good and user friendly – good mix of theory and application to our roles as mentors – this project really has the capacity to make a difference to the lives of future adoptive parents and their children”

“Very clear understand, presented in a good format”

“Very clear with good explanations of complicated subjects”

A few mentors could not attend the training. Therefore an additional session has been organised for the 11th of November.

All the mentors will be supported through group supervision, which will be facilitated by Yashi and Lesley – the first two sessions have been organised for 18th of November and 16th of December. It is hoped that a representative from the safeguarding team will provide training on the 18th of November on safeguarding issues.

In addition the scheme has been presented to both the adoption management meeting and the service meeting – who have all been very supportive and positive of the scheme. Lesley will also be meeting with the adoption social workers from the recruitment and family finding teams on the 17th of October to take them through the referral, and matching process. Yashi will be presenting the scheme to the children in care service managers on the 21st of October. The scheme is now in operation and to-date one new adoptive parent-to-be has been referred to the scheme. A reminder has been sent to all the adoption managers about referring to the scheme.

8. Strengthening the adopters’ voices: Adoption Advisory Board

The Board continues to meet on a quarterly basis. The Board consists of adopters as members who act as a critical friend in relation to continuous learning and service development. The Board agreed the mentoring scheme in June 2016, and were very pleased that the scheme was finally being operationalised.

The Board is well attended and adopters continue to work in partnership – this has included developing an information leaflet for new adopters, an information leaflet for the team, supporting the education conference etc. The information leaflet is now ready to be circulated to adopters and professionals. The Board members are keen to support with the other priorities too, for example the development of a newsletter for adopters, refreshing the post adoption support website, recruiting adopters as educational champions to support schools, etc.

A recent development has included an adopter being part of an interview panel to recruit staff for the team. This worked really well. The plan is for an adopter to be involved in future recruitment.

A couple of adopters who have been selected as mentors have also expressed an interest in being a member of the adoption panel – this is being progressed by the panel advisor.

9. Quality Assurance

A Coram associate undertook 72 clinical case work audits between November 2015 and February 2016 in relation to the clinical work. 40 audits had been signed off when she left in March 2016 as all the actions had been completed. A detailed report was provided to the team manager and the then head of adoption, setting out the findings both in relation to individual work and overall themes so that the actions could be followed up in conjunction with the clinical lead. In addition the associate also provided a flowchart and narrative to support further development of the post adoption support pathway on Liberi. Prior to this audit, written guidance was provided to all the clinicians in relation to expectations around case recording in November 2015.

Coram's Head of Quality and Safeguarding has also been undertaking audits from July 2016 (some jointly with the clinical lead) and she has shared her findings with the team manager and the clinical lead so that the actions can be followed up immediately. The Coram clinical lead and the safeguarding head recently attended a team meeting to share their findings, to reiterate the recording expectations and the continuation of monitoring through further thematic and individual audits. In addition a

further recording workshop is being organised for November by the clinical lead.

Coram's overall findings and the grading tool (provided by Kent) will be discussed at the next Contract monitoring meeting on the 26th of October.

Coram will be putting forward a proposal at the contract meeting to evaluate the impact of the service model, which if agreed would be undertaken in the new year. This will include discussions with adopters and young people. In addition Coram is reviewing the current feedback form and will also be collating all the feedback into a single report so that achievements can be celebrated and improvements made. This specific report will be ready by the end of December 2016.

Within the next couple of months, an outcomes measure framework will be developed and implemented to measure the impact of therapeutic intervention – Coram/Cambridgeshire have developed robust outcome measures and a meeting or a teleconference is being organised to learn from their work.

10. Preparation for OFSTED and Recording expectations

The Coram associate who undertook the audits last year also attended a number of team meetings to support the team in understanding the OFSTED methodology, and preparing for an impending inspection. In addition, she also discussed recording expectations.

11. Policy Framework

The clinicians follow Kent's policies and procedures, except for Human Resources processes and policies. A draft escalation policy in relation to safeguarding and operational issues with particular focus on operational issues has been developed by Coram with helpful feedback from Kent. It is hoped that this will be agreed at the next contract meeting on the 26th of October. To date two contract meetings have taken place, and these have been helpful in problem solving and focusing on the work undertaken.

12. Integrated work within the adoption service

A child psychotherapist and a senior social worker facilitated two groups for approved adopters and waiting. At the time this was seen as innovative practice, and a few other local authorities have since adopted this approach. The last group finished in July 2016. The plan is to run another group – the time framework will be decided by Kent.

The child psychotherapist also provided reflective space for adoption social workers as a group to share their case work dilemmas, challenges etc. This was run as a pilot group and currently consideration is being given to supporting adoption managers with reflective space.

13. Adoption Support Fund

The fund was introduced in May 2015 by central government for local authorities to apply for funding to support adopters and children through therapeutic case work intervention, therapeutic parenting programmes, learning and development seminars etc.

A senior representative from the fund met with Kent adopters on two occasions and is coming again on the 20th of October to directly share the funding criteria and the process. This was a useful exercise and in light of the new restrictions on the fund (£5,000 per child until March 2017), this is necessary. In addition the previous team manager and Yashi met with the senior representative in the summer to discuss how the fund could be maximised in Kent – this was a very helpful meeting.

As the fund is likely to become more restrictive in relation to criteria and actual amounts that can be claimed, a partnership meeting consisting of Sarah Skinner, Sarah Jones and Yashi will look at strengthening the current reviewing process and making it more formal so that there is a tighter overview of the work undertaken involving any commissioning arrangement. This meeting will also look at the current assessment template so that it can be made more user-friendly.

14. Strengthening Adopted Children and Young People's voices

A family therapist and a senior social worker have been working closely with Coram Adoptables. The Adoptables are a peer network of young adopted people who share their experiences of being in care and being adopted. The Adoptables ambassadors aim to improve the lives of other

adopted children by speaking on a public platform about their experiences and developing resources such as a school toolkit.

A local children and young people's participation group for children aged 12 to 18 years, facilitated by the family therapist and senior social worker started in September 2015 – attendance has varied from 10 to 12 young people. The Coram Adoptables Manager is promoting the Kent participation model with the other local authorities as she said it was based on “best practice”.

The young people attended a picnic in summer at Coram, which they thoroughly enjoyed, in particular meeting with other adopted children and young people. Two of the Kent adopted young people have been trained to act as ambassadors by Coram Adoptables. Another will be trained in November 2016. One of the Kent ambassadors attended an event in Parliament to launch the school kit with Members of Parliament, Head Teachers and other professionals. The same young person attended an event in a school setting to launch the kit, which was covered in the local press. The Head Teacher of the school said “the inspiring young people who visited us really got our students to think about the complexity of adoption, but more importantly that in the end we are all the same, whatever our backgrounds.

A school kit was launched at the Education Conference and schools will be sent details with an open invite for them to launch it in their schools with all their staff members, with support from Coram Adoptables.

Eight Kent adopted young people will also be taking part in a theatre performance on Friday 21st of October facilitated and organised by Coram Adoptables. The purpose is for young people to share their adoption story including the challenges and achievements. The content will include some of the significant changes and events in an adopted young person's life - meeting new social workers, moving to a new family. Coram Adoptables hopes to use the material for training adoption professionals in the future.

170 adopters attended a summer party with their children, where a number of activities were provided, including face painting and a magic

workshop. Another one is being planned for Xmas, when it is hoped that one of the activities will include a theatre/drama fun workshop.

The vision for the future is as follows:

Develop a participation group for younger children

Develop an apprenticeship scheme for adopted young people – an initial meeting took place between Yashi and Kent key stakeholders. A work placement has been offered to a young person by Sadler's Wells in London and this is currently being considered. One of the Coram ambassadors is currently working in Coram London on an apprenticeship basis.

Following Yashi's discussions with Sadler's Wells in London, discussions are progressing with two representatives from Kent's Art and Regeneration Department to consider specific activities for adopted children and young people in partnership with adopters and children in line with the Kent Art 31 project.

Conclusion: The Coram/Kent partnership has made significant progress and will continue to develop the service in partnership with adopters, children and young people. Adopters are consistently reporting back their overall satisfaction with the service provided and making constructive suggestions for improvements.

Recommendations: The Corporate Parenting Panel is being asked to note the progress made and the future priorities.

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