coram | better chances for children since 1739

Coram Kent Post Adoption Support Service: feedback from adopters

March 2017

Yashi Shah, Dr Jeff Mesie, Hannah Lawrence, Uzma Peeran and Arun Emilion

Coram Kent Post Adoption Support Service: feedback from adopters

Contents

1. Introduction

The Coram Kent post adoption support team has always had an active commitment to obtaining feedback from adoptive parents and adopted children and translating this into ts service improvements and innovation. This report draws upon the current feedback mechanisms and summarises the results.

Feedback is provided through the completion of feedback forms from participants in a varied set of parenting programmes, group support, learning and development workshops as well as through satisfaction questionnaires when service delivery ends.

In addition to these systems we also draw upon other mechanisms. The children and young people's participation group, the Adoption Advisory Board and other service delivery mechanisms (adoption summit, mentoring scheme) are invited to provide feedback and suggestions to the agency in relation to practice, policy and innovative ways of delivering services. A selection of this feedback is included in this report.

2. Learning and Development Workshops

Three hundred and twenty-seven adopters provided feedback about learning and development workshops that they had attended between December 2014 and December 2016. Titles and formats changed over time and the workshops covered:

- Adolescent and identity in adoption
- Extended family
- Life Story Books
- Managing Transitions
- Neglect & Trauma
- Non Verbal communication
- Siblings
- Social and emotional development
- Social Media
- Talking about adoption
- Relating to difference in adoptive families
- Who's in charge part 1
- Who's In Charge part 2

'Who's in charge' (a session exploring control issues) received the most feedback with 75 responses to the questionnaire (although for a time this event operated in two parts with the same adopters, so the number of people who responded may be slightly lower than 75).

Figure 1: Number of responses
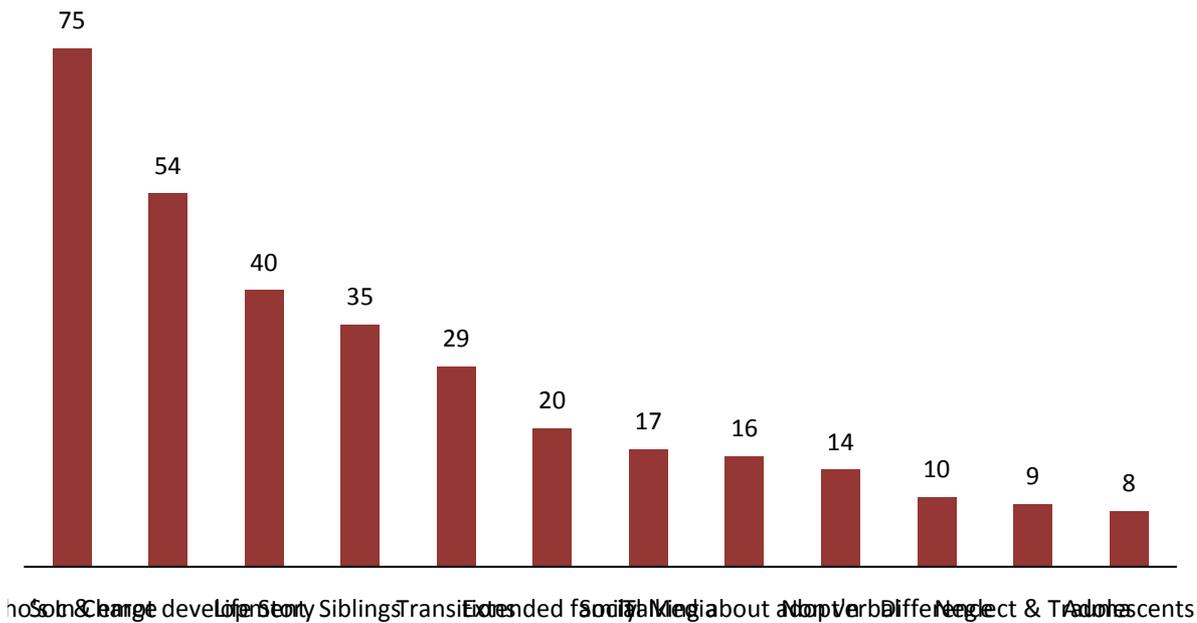
Overall adopters benefitted from the workshops and had a very positive experience.

All but one adopter found the workshops they attended useful and 91% (n=296) found the seminars 'very useful'. Adopters were asked what aspect of the training they found most helpful. Comments included:

"listening to other peoples experiences, learning how to adjust way you think about situations that may arise"

"helped to think about the bonding between birth son and adoptive son. how this can be facilitated"

"ideas and theories about behaviour, attachment, grief, resilience and transitions"

"understanding what neglect and trauma has as an effect on children and what they mean."

"knowing my struggles are not unique, reassurance i am going in the right direction"

"excellent structure that allowed natural free flow debates and conversations."

"discussions around different aspects of social media and listening to others, discussion about contact."

The information was presented and taught in a clear way, 97% (n=318) thought the content was 'very clear'. No adopters thought the information was unclear. Comments included:

"[facilitator] was approachable and talked sensibly giving both negative and positive sides"

"succinct, made sure everything was understood"

"ideas and theories were explained in a concise way"

"I liked it when the facilitator linked it to personal experiences"

"good presentation but a little bit theoretical"

"liked the mix of theory and role play".

A hundred and twenty-one (37%) of the adopters left comments about how the workshops could be improved. Sixty two per cent of those that commented (n=75) wanted the sessions to be longer. Twenty-nine suggested practical improvements eg the room being difficult to find or a desire for handouts to be available at the start and 10 wanted to be taught more strategies about parenting adopted children or wanted more time and specific teaching about certain topics, for example on attachment.

Three adopters (one from *taking about adoption*, one from *adolescence and identity* and one from *who's in charge*) suggested that the facilitation of the sessions could have been better, particularly with managing more dominant members of the group. Two adopters wished that the session had come at a different point in their adoption journey (one from *social and emotional development,* one from the *siblings* group) .

The vast majority (95%, n=311), of adopters felt more confident to respond to the needs of their child as a result of the sessions. Adopters commented:

"[I have an] increased awareness of the ongoing support around resilience."

"[I] will try relinquishing control on certain tasks."

"[I] feel much better equipped."

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

"lots of practical advice- have already seen huge improvements in my child's behaviour."
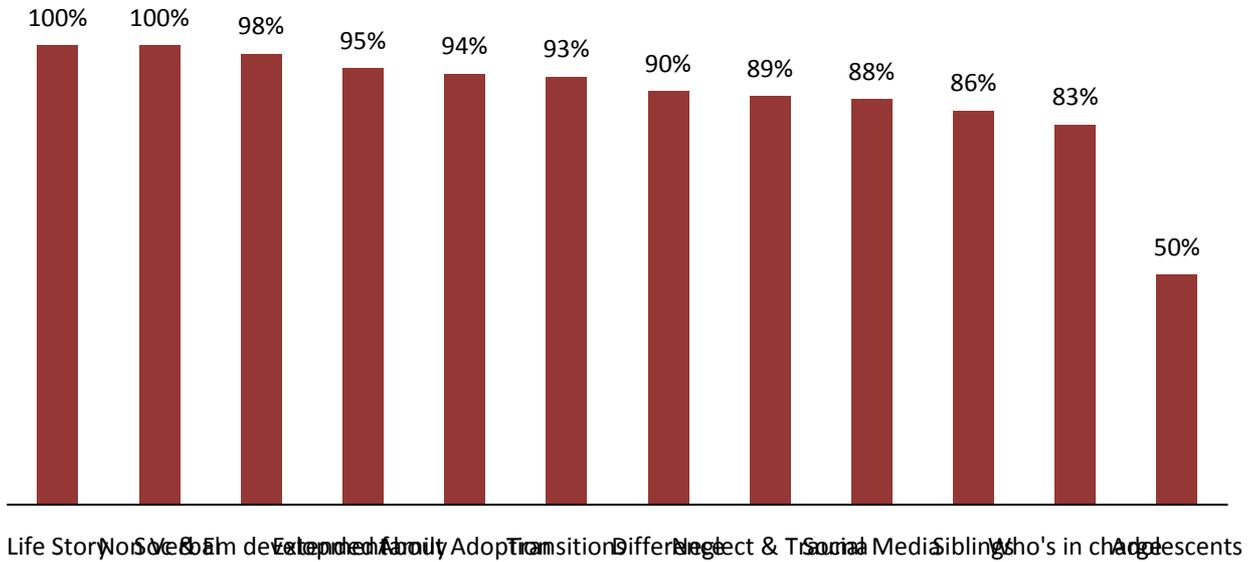
"some new ideas to try"

"given me confidence to continue with my style of parenting along with useful tips and guidance"

"slightly more confident – let's see if that works in the real world".

All respondents thought the thinking about adoption as a family, life story books and emotional development sessions were very good (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2: percentage of participants who found session 'very useful' by session type

The bar chart shows the following values by session type:
- Life Story: 100%
- Non Verbal: 100%
- Sandbox Film development: 98%
- Extended Family: 95%
- Adoption: 94%
- Transitions: 93%
- Difference: 90%
- Neglect & Trauma: 89%
- Social Media: 88%
- Siblings: 86%
- Who's in charge: 83%
- Adolescents: 50%

The rest rated the workshops as 'somewhat useful' apart form one person who thought that the siblings workshop was 'not useful' to their situation because she had a teenage son and a five year old so the games were not relevant.

There were only eight forms received from *adolescence and identity* workshop participants. Half of them scored the workshop as 'somewhat useful'. The suggested areas for improvement were to have longer session an one thought that it was difficult to manage the group dynamic and that more time was needed to do this and to manage extreme cases.

3. Intensive therapeutic parenting support groups

Adoptive parents also supplied observations about the Intensive therapeutic parenting support groups. We have data from three samples from adoptive parents that used different forms to provide feedback.

Sample 1

All of the six parents that completed the feedback form in March 2016 thought that the group was 'very useful' and 'very clear' and said that they felt more confident in responding to the needs of their child. A commonly-cited value of the group was meeting fellow adopters and exploring shared problems and strategies.

"Lots of practical advice … have already seen huge improvements in my child's behaviour"

Sample 2

Of these 11 adoptive parents who completed a feedback form in March 2016, three parents thought that they understood their child 'very well' and eight said that they understood their child 'moderately well'.

However one of the parents still felt that their child's behaviour concerned them 'a great deal'. Two parents felt very confident/ competent as an adoptive parent, seven said that they felt 'moderately confident/ competent', while two remained 'not very confident/ competent'

Six out of the11 said that their child felt 'very happy' and the others described their child as 'moderately happy' - both at home and at school. Three said that they felt very well supported as adoptive parents in the community and six felt 'moderately supported'.

*"Please more groups, weekly, monthly, bimonthly!"*

Sample 3

More detailed feedback was obtained from a different cohort of 11 households at the end of their programme. This form asked about progress in more depth. Fifty-five percent (6) described themselves as 'very satisfied'. Two (18%) said that they were 'very unsatisfied with the group overall, however all of the responses from these two respondents were very positive or positive so it is likely that it is a miscoding by the respondents.

All respondents agreed (36%) or strongly agreed (64%) that "the group helped me better understand my child"; while 73% agreed or strongly agreed that the group helped them "to be less concerned about my child's behaviour". All but one (91%) agreed or strongly agreed that the group made them "better able to interact with

my child". The same proportion said that the group made them be more confident/ competent as an adopter and feel better supported.

Figure 3: Benefits from Intensive therapeutic parenting support groups (from the more detailed sample 3 feedback)
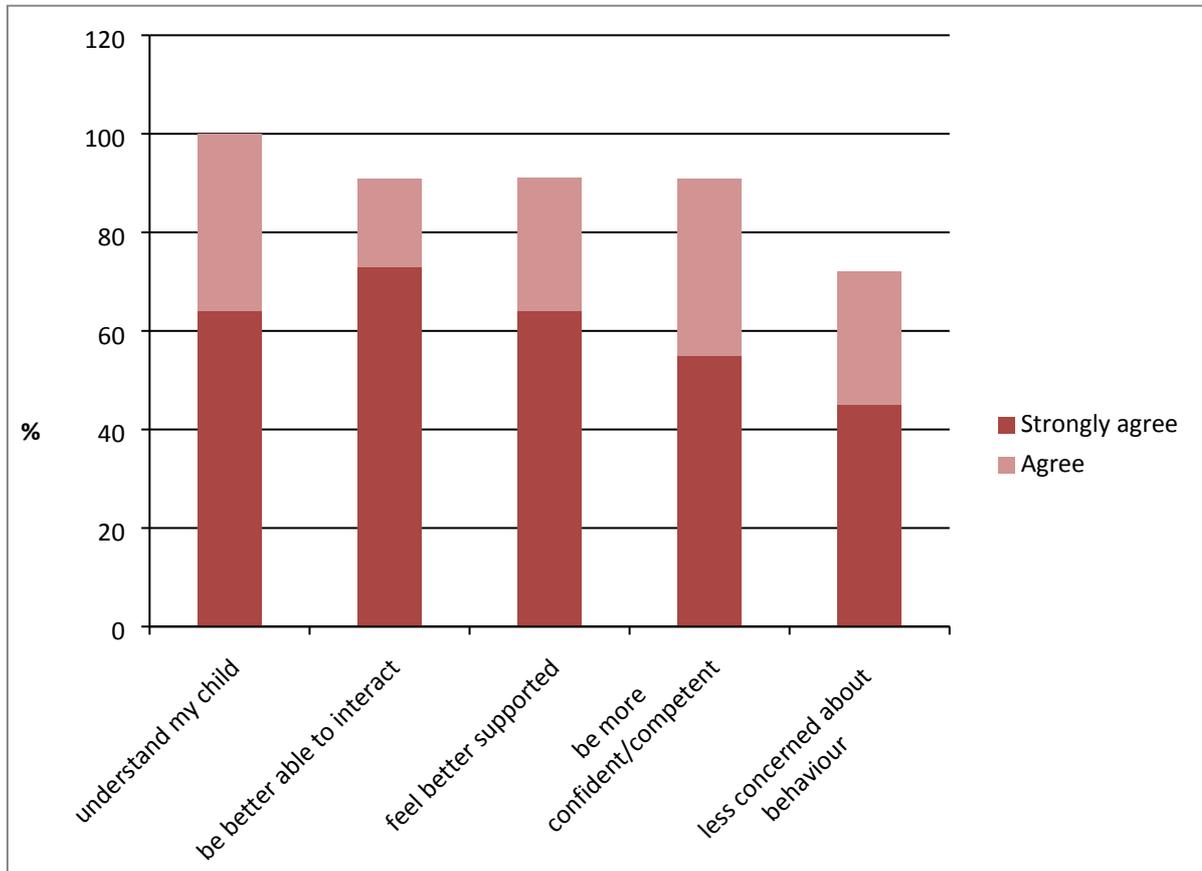
All participants said that they would recommend the group to a fellow adopter.

"I didn't fully know what to expect until the initial interview but I can say that all expectations have been exceeded"

4. Incredible Years Parenting Programme

To date Kent has run three programmes', we only received data relating to the most recent of these.

We received feedback forms from fourteen people who attended at least one of the twelve Incredible Years Parenting Programme sessions that ran from 10th September 2016 to 3rd December 2016. On average eleven

participants completed a feedback form for each session (in some session there were 8 forms and for others there were 14. Participants were overwhelming positive about the content and delivery of all the sessions, over 90% felt that the content to be 'helpful' or 'very helpful'. Interestingly, participants appeared to be less satisfied with the video examples used the sessions, only 65% found this technique 'helpful' or 'very helpful'; 11% were undecided about the usefulness of the video examples (see figure 3).

Figure 4: Percentage attitudes towards content and delivery of sessions
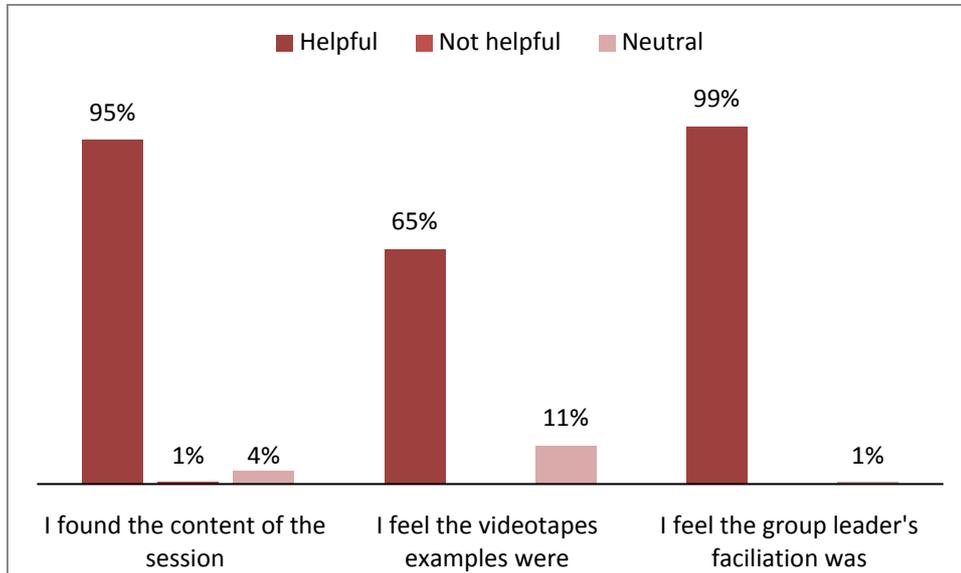
Results showed that participants reported very high levels of satisfaction with the content and delivery of the sessions from the start of the programme, nonetheless participants continued to be impressed during the course of the programme by reporting even higher levels of satisfaction at the end of the last session than they did at the start.

At the start of the programme (end of session one) all participants found the content of the sessions helpful, 64% reported that content was 'very helpful' and 36% thought it was 'helpful'. When the programme finished (end of session twelve), results showed a bigger proportion of parents reported to find the content of the sessions 'very helpful' compared to the start, 82% vs 64%. This was also true for the participant's views on group leader's facilitation and group discussions. Although all participants found this useful from the start of the programme, parents were more satisfied by the end of the programme than the start; 73% said it was 'very helpful' and 27% 'helpful' after session one. This compares to 82% finding it 'very helpful' and 18% 'helpful' at the end of session twelve.

Participants were more divided about the usefulness of the video examples used in the sessions and whether they were appropriate for all the twelve sessions. When video examples were introduced (session two) participants were generally very pleased, 80% found the examples either 'helpful' or 'very helpful' and by session seven all participants considered them to be 'very helpful'. However beyond session seven participants appeared to be less happy with the video sessions, at the end of programme (session twelve), only half of participants considered the videos to be 'very helpful' the other half thought they were neither helpful nor unhelpful.

Among the parents who left additional comments about the programme, nearly half commented on the benefits of having other families present and sharing experiences:

"Great [to know] that we are not on our own and others are going through the same"

"Really nice to hear other people in the same boat and that we're all hoping to work on similar issues together"

"Always great to hear how the other parents have dealt with situations and what has or hasn't worked"

"Sharing ideas of reward charts and reward grab bags was really useful"

Other noted how the strategies covered in the session had helped adapt their parenting skills:

"We changed our reward system months ago and made an emotions chart as all of Darren's behaviour is clearly due to his emotional regulation and this works very well"

"The activity really helped me to think about and process which behaviours to ignore and which to react to"

"Made me remember it's important to give them something to do in time out, to distract themselves and to be able to start to regulate themselves next time"

Some parents provided suggestions on how the programme can be improved or made available at a different point in the adoption journey:

"sessions could be longer "

"it was more useful this week feeding back on our own experience of special play"

"Videos were almost irrelevant as we we'd covered ideas so thoroughly during discussion"

"I feel it would be nice to have examples of consequences as we find it difficult to determine at what level to act them"

"A similar course would be helpful for parents in the adoption process before it has gone through" [ie pre-approval].

5. STOP Parenting Programme for Adolescents

This first pilot ten week programme ran from September to December 2016. Ten adoptive parents attended the programme and we have feedback forms from nine of these individuals as one of the fathers was not present at the final evaluation session. In future such individuals should be followed up with an emailed questionnaire.

The feedback from the sessions was extremely positive

Half of the adopters found the content presented 'useful' while the other half found the content 'very useful'. On the timing of the course a third felt the course came "a bit late" in the adoption process for them, while three quarters felt it came at the right time. It is noteworthy that only 64% felt the role play during the sessions was 'useful' or 'very useful'; 22% felt neutral about the effectiveness of role playing in the group.

For the weekly reading materials and hand outs, the feedback was much more positive as with 88% reporting the hand outs as 'useful' and the rest as 'very useful'.

The participants were equally impressed with the various group leaders. A total of 78% felt that the group leader's preparation was excellent for each session. The group leaders were all scored positively in the categories of preparation, facilitation and general effectiveness. In each session at least five participants rated the group leader as 'excellent'.

Most (78%) respondents 'felt confident' or 'very confident' in forming a bond with their adopted child following attendance at the group.

Figure 5: Confidence in bonding/forming an attachment with your adopted child
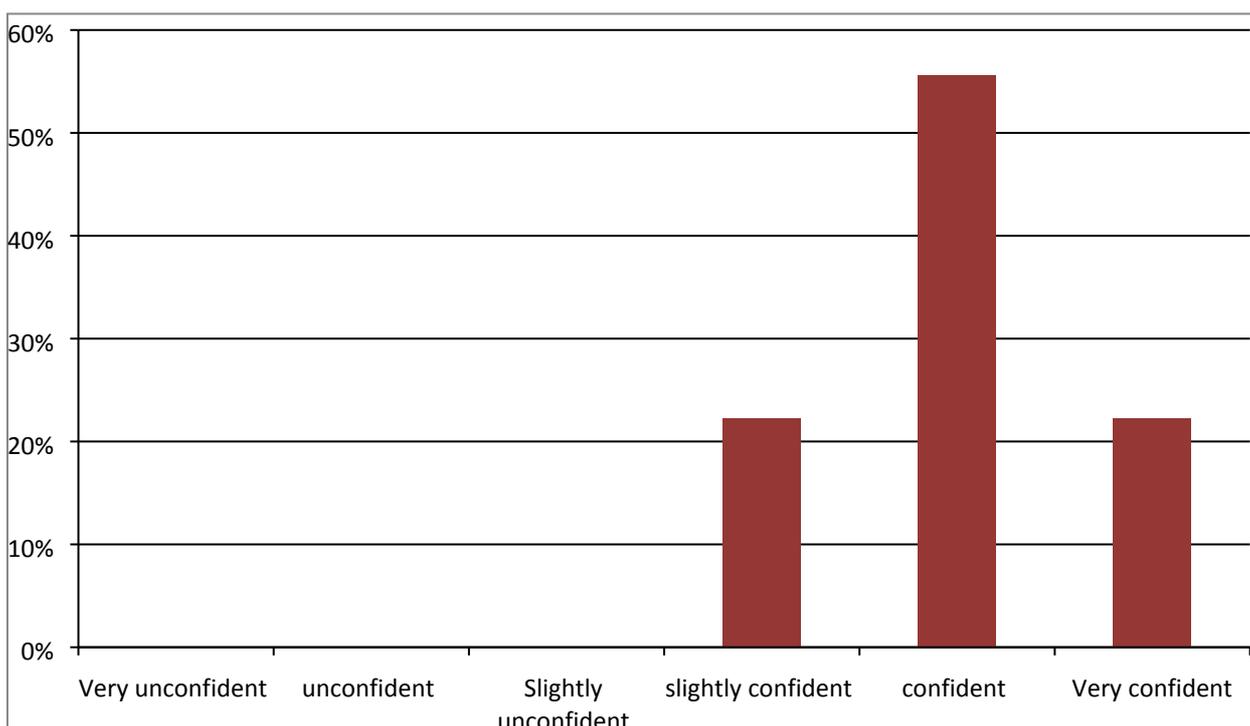
The behavioural techniques which were introduced in the groups were positively received. Everyone attending the group felt at least slightly confident to very confident in dealing with future behavioural problems after the sessions. No-one stated that they did not feel confident

Three quarters of respondents would 'strongly recommend' the programme to another adoptive parent although half mentioned that the travel was too far and it was difficult to get to the venue.

Almost half of the adopters left additional comments about the programme, as follows:

"it was nice to be with people who have the same issues"

"meeting parents in similar situations and listen to how they have dealt with it."

"the course was a truly a lifeline and came just in time"

"the feeling of support and understanding from everyone"

"a good ten weeks, great people."

"I get the "I" statement now and like using the positive language".

Some adopters provided suggestions on how the future programme could be improved:

"to spend more time on specific issues and more depth"

"more time"

"a bit more time for free group discussions"

"more time to expand on peoples personal experiences"

"some people dominated at times, possibly control this a little more"

"listening to how the other parents are copying and to what they had put in place".

6. Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire

Satisfaction questionnaires were not administered at the time that service delivery ended. As a result Kent has sought feedback retrospectively from 50 adoptive households.

The new process is that the administrator will send out a satisfaction questionnaire at the point at which a case is closed.

Seven feedback forms were received retrospectively from adopters who had accessed a range of services provided by Kent for example group support, brief intervention, single session- individual/family consultation, learning and development workshops. Results showed that all adopters were very happy with the service and recognized its value for *adopters:*

"After 10 years of no help this service has been a lifeline – finally there is acknowledgement that adopted children have specialised issues and needs and that adopters need help and support to deal with this"

"I have seen a vast improvement in the service over the past 3 years, keep up the good work"

This analysis will be updated as more data is obtained.

Satisfaction

71% (5) of respondents were 'very satisfied' with the service they had received and 29% (2) were 'mostly satisfied'. Respondents were also extremely positive with the quality of the services, 71 % (5) felt the services were 'excellent' and 29% (2) felt the quality was 'good'. In addition, all respondents were happy to recommend these services to someone who required similar help. 86% (6) reported they would *definitely* recommend these services and one respondent (14%) thought they would be likely to recommend these services to someone who needs them.

Impact

All respondents believed that the support they received had helped them manage their relationship with their child. Most indicated that the support helped 'somewhat' (71%, 5) and two felt that the support helped 'a great deal' (29%, 2). Four respondents described how they have noticed changes in their own and child's behaviour since receiving support. Four out of the five recognized that they were able to cope with their emotions better:

"It's made me much more mindful of my responses to behaviours and situations so that I try to be less confrontational and speak in a more measured tone. I also listen a lot more"

"Dad is a little more patient and I believe more work could have been done but our situation has changed"

One respondent described how they have noticed a change in their behaviour to help in developing a trusting behaviour:

"thankful he [child] was given the opportunity to decide for himself and that we trust each other on their decisions".

One respondent felt the programme they received (in this case the family therapeutic intervention) provided them with more insight into their child's behaviour and an opportunity to reflect on their own actions.

"Although we feel we are tuned in our child's sometimes challenging behaviour, the support helped us to view it from a different angle. Gave us more insight to respond in different ways, it also gave us the opportunity to talk through situations and reflect on how they could have been more effectively handled."

"We now reflect a lot more on how situations can be handled and try to think ahead to avoid flashpoints"

Respondents also offered their thoughts to why they believed the support they had received had been helpful. Three respondents noted that the structure and content of the services received had been effective:

"flexible sessions [allowed] all the family to attend…no pressure to discuss things we felt needed to be discussed"

"up to date factual info at l&d events. single session individual consultation…to explore issues and identify needs"

"received appointments in a good time frame, workshops are relevant and cover a range of topics"

"Speaking to people who understood the situation you were in and who could give relevant advice and strategies to help"

One recipient of the family therapeutic intervention felt that the programme had improved their knowledge about their child's behaviour and another appreciated having someone outside of the system to speak to:

 "We have a deeper understanding into our child's feelings and this has helped to improve our relationship with him"

"having a neutral person to talk to".

Suggestions for improvement

Respondents made a few suggestions to how the service could be improved which predominately focused on the timing and structure. Two respondents would have preferred sessions to be offered out of office hours and more locally:

 Despite the fact that L&D workshops are held at weekends we received one comment that *"Learning and development sessions are mostly at an inconvenient time for working people."*

"The service for us would definitely have been better had the sessions been more local as appointment was 3 hours including travel."

7. 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 was chaired by an adopter, with two adopters and adopted young people as speakers. 46 people provided feedback. The feedback was positive and the comments received 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 understandably disappointed that their children's school did not attend.

8. 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 provides peer support and practical advice from their own experience.

Training took place on the 23rd of September and 1st of October. An additional training session was provided for those mentors who were not able to attend the full or part of the two day training.

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 easy to understand, presented in a good format"

"Very clear with good explanations of complicated subjects"

Mentors have contributed significantly to the continuous development of the scheme.

9. 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.

Examples of contributions to service development from the Board include:

- an information leaflet for new adopters
- an information leaflet for the team
- an information leaflet for the advisory board
- supporting the education conference by taking on the chairing and speaking role
- Having adopters on adoption panels and interview panels to recruit staff in the post adoption support team
- adopters co-facilitating the Incredible Years Parenting Programme.

In the past, adopters have also met with Edward Timpson, Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, Department for Education and the then Prime Minister, David Cameron in relation to adoption support fund and services for adopted children and young people.

10. Adopted children and young people's voices

A family therapist and a senior social worker have been working closely with *Coram Adoptables.* This is a local children and young people's participation group for children aged 12 to 18. It started in September 2015 and is facilitated by the family therapist and senior social worker. Attendance has varied between 10 to 12 young people. The Coram Adoptables manager is promoting the Kent participation model with other local authorities as an "excellent" model based on best practice.

Examples of adopted children and young people's participation and contribution to service development in included:

- being trained as Ambassadors by Coram Adoptables
- one of the ambassadors working as an apprenticeship in Coram – he contributed to the development of a school kit which was launched at the education conference – the same young person attended a parliamentary event to launch the school kit
- participation in a theatre production in London
- attendance at the corporate parenting panel to share the tool kit and share their adoption journey – please see appendix 1 for the information shared at the panel, including from adoptive parents (one of them attended the panel)
- contributing to the preparation group training and relevant learning and development workshops
- feedback in relation to the children's guide

The participation of adopted children and young people has shaped service development and learning – for example, in relation to social media workshop and preparation group training. In addition, their feedback has led to setting up a group for younger children.

11. Social events

170 adopters attended a summer party with their children, where a number of activities were provided, including face painting and a magic workshop. A Christmas party also took place on the 4th of December 2016 which was attended by 120 adopters and 125 children. Twenty-five adopters and five children provided written feedback which included:

"It was nice that there were older children this year, our daughter made a new friend and enjoyed herself."

"Thank you for a lovely party"

"My daughter had a lovely time. Thank you"

"Thank you for organising another Christmas party. My daughter had a great time. Slightly disappointed by Oakwood's organisation of food and drinks. Not a patch on last year. Entertainers were great".

Suggestions for improvements included: the quality of food and drinks, more food, activities for the older children, better organisation of the room space.

12. Conclusion

This report summarises feedback on a variety of different services provided by Coram Kent post adoption support. In addition, it also sets out adopters and adopted children's contribution to service development. The team has demonstrated that it is listening to adopters and adopted children and young people, and working in partnership with both to develop innovative service delivery approaches.

It is apparent that the learning and development workshops are seen as practically very useful, clear and well-managed. A key learning is that participants would like to sessions to be longer if possible. Intensive therapeutic parenting group equip participants to better understand and to better interact with their child. Some parents, perhaps appropriately retain come concern about their child's behaviour. The incredible years session are experienced as helpful, although we may need to re-examine the videotape examples and make them more relevant. The STOP parenting programme for adolescents I seen as well facilitated and leave participants feeling relatively confident about bonding and managing future behaviour issues.

We have improved our systems for the administration of parent satisfaction questionnaires, but the return that we have indicated that the service received helped adopters to better manage their relationship with their child. We may need to look at making more services available outside of working hours (and to recognise that some people may work at weekends).

The practice in the team has been to make immediate improvements as appropriate following feedback, and use the key themes to develop other service programmes for example, implementation of the parenting programme for adolescents and for autistic children, education conference, attachment workshop for schools, a workshop to discuss choosing of schools and the use of pupil premium, development of an apprenticeship scheme, workshop on autism and attachment. It is essential with changes in personnel, the innovative developments are progressed quickly – for example, the education champion role.

Coram found it challenging to evaluate the feedback in a consistent way as different forms were used. The learning and development and intensive therapeutic parenting support group feedback forms have now both been revised. The administrator has been asked to delete all the previous forms and set up a robust system to log the feedback and chase facilitators if this is not made available quickly.

A system has also now been set up to ensure a satisfaction questionnaire is sent at the point the case is being closed, and a follow up reminder is sent twice. It is essential this system is adhered to and the individual

feedback evaluated immediately both by the team manager and the clinical lead. We would suggest that learning from feedback should be a regular agenda item for the team.

In addition, an outcomes framework which has now been implemented will allow the evaluation to be measured in relation to the different stages of the therapeutic intervention.

As expected under the adoption national minimum standards, the service user feedback should be uploaded on the adopter's liberi file with a case note, recording the date it was uploaded. This requirement was already followed in relation to feedback from the STOP Parenting Programme. Currently the feedback is uploaded either by the administrator or social worker/clinician.

Overall the feedback received was very positive with some constructive suggestions for improvement that are being investigated and acted upon. The team should be very proud of the regard in which their work is held by adopters and adopted children.