

Our ref: IES/

15 December 2011

Dear

Thank you for contacting Adoption Matters Northwest about your interest in adoption. It is really important that we find families who are interested in adopting as there are very many children living in this country today who cannot be cared for permanently by their birth families.

At Adoption Matters Northwest we offer a quality professional adoption service. We are pleased to send you our Information Pack which we hope you will find interesting and informative.

Recruitment of new adopters is a top priority and we work with people from all walks of life: married couples, single people and also those in permanent relationships. In the Information Pack there is further information about specific issues which may relate to your own family situation. Every adoption enquiry is given individual consideration and at Adoption Matters Northwest we uphold the highest level of confidentiality in our work.

At Adoption Matters Northwest we encourage families to think carefully about the extent of their adoption offer. Nationally there is a great need for families who can care for children who have medical needs, have a disability, are part of a sibling group, are over six years of age or who are black or of mixed ethnic origin. Families who can take on any of these issues will be given priority.

If you would like to move to the next step, please now complete the yellow initial enquiry form which accompanies the Information Pack to give us some more information about your interest. As soon as we hear from you again we will make arrangements to meet with you for an informal discussion and a chance to answer your questions.

If you would like help in reading or understanding this document, please do not hesitate to contact us and we will arrange for explanations, translation or any other service required.

May we remind you that an advice line social worker is available Monday to Friday 9.30 am – 4.30 pm to answer any telephone queries. Also our website address is **[www.adoptionmattersnw.org](http://www.adoptionmattersnw.org)**.

You may also be interested to know that BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) have a range of publications about all aspects of adoption. They can be contacted at Saffron House, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1N 8TS. Tel: 020 7421 2600. Their website address is **[www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)**.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

on behalf of Adoption Matters Northwest  
Encs

# **INFORMATION PACK**

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### **Enclosures:**

**Initial enquiry form for adoption**  
**Group preparation dates**

**NOTE: If you require this Information Pack in any other format or language, please contact us.**

# ABOUT 'ADOPTION MATTERS NORTHWEST'

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## Who are we?

Adoption Matters Northwest is one of about 30 independent agencies operating in England and Wales. We began our work over 60 years ago as two separate agencies based in Chester and Blackburn. In 2007 we joined together to become Adoption Matters Northwest, and are now able to offer a service to an area across the whole of north west England and north east Wales.

We are a registered charity and are approved by Ofsted, which regulates our activities and provides a certificate of registration every three years. We are proud of our national reputation for expertise and quality of service. You can read our "outstanding" inspection report via the "About Us" section on our website or via [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## Our staff and the area we cover

The agency has a team of qualified and experienced social workers supported by administrative staff with the work overseen by a board of management. We have offices in Chester, Blackburn and Hale, south Manchester, and as a general guide-line we accept applications from prospective adopters who live in the north west of England and north east Wales.

Sometimes we can take forward applications from further afield when there is interest in the placement of primary school-aged children, large sibling groups and those with very special medical and developmental needs.

We are supported by a legal adviser, medical adviser, education adviser and cultural adviser (Islam). We can access other specialist advice as appropriate. Our Adoption Panels are made up of a range of professionals in the field of adoption and of individuals whose lives have been personally affected by adoption.

We are supported financially by service agreements, fees charged to referring authorities, grants and voluntary contributions.

We are proud of our national reputation for recruiting and preparing adoptive parents. We have a significant track record for maintaining and ensuring the success of placements. Over 95% of our placements are successful compared with a national average of around 80%. We acknowledge that adoption is a life-long issue and therefore continue to provide a service into adulthood for adopted people, adopters and for birth parents and other birth relatives.

## Finding families

Our aim is to find families for children who, for a variety of reasons, are no longer able to live with their birth families. The children come from many different backgrounds. We are particularly seeking families for older children, for sibling groups and for children who have medical and developmental needs or a disability. Although the focus of our work began over sixty years ago with the placement of babies who were relinquished by their birth mothers, we no longer place relinquished babies. The very young children that we place are invariably affected by significant medical, background, developmental or ethnic needs.

We have close links with other adoption agencies in the North West and local authorities nationwide who are looking for families for children in their care. Most of the children will have suffered from damaging

experiences within their birth families. The children are all very different, so we need adoptive parents from a wide variety of backgrounds who have a wide variety of skills. They may be married, in a civil partnership, single, divorced, living together or widowed, have a full-time job or be unemployed, have their own home or live in rented accommodation, or be from any ethnic or religious background. What they all have in common is the willingness and commitment to offer a child or children a loving, caring home in which they can thrive.

## **Key Tasks**

The Agency's main focus is to recruit adoptive parents who are able to meet the needs of children that Local Authorities seek to place for adoption. Adopters are prepared for the task, assessed as to their suitability and are recommended for approval by the Adoption Panel. Efforts are made to find a suitable match for the children and the agency supports the adoptive families as they are introduced to the children, and up to the point when the children are legally adopted.

The Agency also provides a service for all parties involved with the Agency in the past who may return to the Agency for information, advice and support. This includes assisting adopted adults who wish to know more about their family of origin and in some cases may progress towards a reunion with their birth parents or birth relatives.

## ADOPTERS' COMMENTS

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“My husband and I wish to express our gratitude to your organisation. From our initial interview at your Chester office, through to the preparation groups, home visits and completion of our Prospective Adopter’s Report, all the members of your team have been a credit to your organisation and have offered us much support and guidance.” *(Mr & Mrs T, prospective adopters)*

*“We were very impressed with the level of support and encouragement given to us by Adoption Matters Northwest and in particular by our social worker.”*

*(Mr & Mrs W, adoptive family)*

*“Thank you for all the hard work that the staff at Adoption Matters Northwest have done. Words cannot describe how happy you have made both of us.”* *(Mr & Mrs H, adoptive family)*

“Many thanks for all your help on our behalf. We are so happy being parents and we shall never forget that you made it possible.”

*(Mr & Mrs G, adoptive family)*

**“You were so supportive and at the same time very professional and your work made my search, contact and eventual meeting much easier.”**

*“Thank you for all you have done for us—we consider that we were fortunate having you to help us through.”*

*(Mr & Mrs M, adoptive family)*

“Thank you for the help you gave our adopted daughter in contacting her birth mother and supporting her with some difficult issues.” *(Mr J M, adoptive parent)*

“Thank you for all the hard work and total support throughout the years for us at Adoption Matters Northwest and for making it possible for us to be proud parents.”

*(Mr & Mrs R, adoptive family)*

*“Please convey our thanks for the helpful, realistic and encouraging advice at our initial interview. It proved to be a very valuable experience. We are now reading about different aspects of adoption.”*

*(Mr & Mrs C, prospective adopters)*

“Our social worker was such a good listener, always being supportive and positive towards us.” *(Mr & Mrs J—adoptive family)*

*“I would just like to say how much I appreciated your guidance and support. I have enjoyed my time with the agency and it has been a pleasant, stimulating and valuable experience.”* *(S, student social worker)*

“Thank you enormously for the way that you dealt with giving me all the information you had in my file....you were very good at putting me at my ease and going at a pace appropriate to the sheer quantity of it.”

*(Mr & Mrs J, adoptive family)*

“We will always be grateful for the support that Adoption Matters Northwest has given us, for without you we wouldn’t have the two lovely children who are such a big part of our lives.” *(Mr O, adoptive parent)*

*“We found the Adoption Preparation Course gave us a very positive, supportive and informal environment to really learn more about adoption before actually committing ourselves to the process.”* *(Mr & Mrs P, adoptive family)*

## CASE STUDY – Louise and Michael

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Professionals in their mid-thirties, Michael and Louise have been together for 15 years. They live comfortably in the north Sefton suburbs. Michael works in sales and Louise is an airline cabin manager.

“We both knew that we wanted children,” said Louise. “We did discuss the issue from time to time and we knew that one day, we would have a family, but the fact is that neither of us ever craved for a baby, and we were never in a rush.

“There’s certainly no medical reason why we couldn’t have children of our own – it’s just that the natural route didn’t appeal to us as much as it does to other people. We’re all different, after all.”

The catalyst behind the couple’s adoption journey was a magazine article on behalf of Adoption Matters Northwest.

The agency was appealing for would-be adopters to provide a permanent home for four year old Kriss. The feature generated scores of enquiries and resulted in Kriss being adopted less than a year later.

Louise continued: “I read and re-read the story a dozen times and the magazine was always around our home. I was fascinated and it really got both of us thinking about adoption.”

The couple didn’t act on the article immediately, but continued to discuss the idea of adoption with family and close friends. After several more months of consideration, the couple contacted Adoption Matters.

“We had an initial, informative interview with Adoption Matters and although it was helpful, we were determined not to rush into a decision. But after further contact with the agency, we decided we did want to take it further.”

A round of workshops, thorough assessments and preparation followed, with the question of why the couple wanted to adopt often cropping up.

Michael takes up the story: “We agreed we’d like to adopt two boys aged between three and seven but decided from the outset if one of us had any doubts, we would stop. We needed to be 100 per cent sure. We never wavered.”

The couple were eventually approved to adopt two children but with more boys than girls waiting for a new home, the couple faced a difficult challenge.

Michael explains: “We were aware that boys, especially between the ages of four and ten, were harder to place than girls and it was tough for us to decide. We had all these children to choose from and details about each one of them.”

Louise adds: “It was so hard looking at all the profiles. We were warned the first time we looked at the children we’d choose quite a few and you just end up falling in love with all of them. It was so difficult but eventually we realised we needed to be practical.”

After three months of searching, the couple finally found the perfect fit in brothers Thomas, then six, and Andrew, then five.

“Our social worker told us about the two brothers who were looking for a new family. As soon as we saw the photos of them, we knew they were for us. We’d always been told we’d know when we saw ‘our’ children. It was instinctive,” explained Michael.

A nail-biting few weeks followed when they discovered another couple were also interested in the brothers.

“It was a tough time. We had our heart set on the boys but had to face the possibility they may not come to us,” explains Louise.

The nervous couple received a home visit – prompting Louise to worry that the small size of their garden would work against them.

But to their delight, Louise and Michael were chosen: “It felt wonderful but I also felt awful for the other couple. We knew exactly what they had gone through,” said Louise.

During the next month, the new parents made the most of their time as a couple, enjoying several nights out. They also prepared the house for the boys’ arrival, with regular trips to toyshops and DIY stores.

Eventually, placement day arrived and they set off to meet the children for the first time.

“We didn’t know what to expect. We knew the boys had been told they were getting a new mummy and daddy but it’s always in the back of your mind – what if I don’t like them? What if they don’t like us? We needn’t have worried.”

Sitting in the boys’ foster home, Louise and Michael waited for Thomas and Andrew to return from school.

“We saw them walk up the path. They didn’t hesitate even though they knew they were about to meet their new parents. The first thing that struck us was how tiny they were!”

The meeting passed in a blur for the couple, but Louise recalls one moment that will always be with her.

“It was when Andrew pointed at me and said ‘you’re my new mummy’. It took my breath away and I realised how much our lives would change.”

Louise and Michael spent 10 days with the children, enjoying days out and bonding as a family before finally taking them home.

“It was nerve-racking taking them home but it always felt right. We’ve had tantrums as you’d expect, especially considering the boys’ background, but we have been lucky,” said Louise.

And the couple are well aware of how much their life has changed.

“For the first two months we whispered when they were asleep, terrified we’d wake them up! But we soon got used to it and wouldn’t be without them.”

Michael adds: “There’s an idea that to adopt you need to be perfect, almost super human. I think that might put some people off.

“No-one’s perfect and that’s not what adoption agencies like Adoption Matters are looking for – adopters are ordinary people living ordinary lives and facing the same challenges as the rest of us.

“Children waiting for adoption don’t need saints – they need parents,” he added.

# WHAT IS ADOPTION?

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People are often confused about the difference between Adoption and Fostering, so it might be helpful to describe the differences:

## **Adoption**

Adoption is a way of giving children who cannot be brought up by their own parents or wider family, a secure permanent family. Adoption is a legal procedure, granted by the court, which gives the adopters the same parental rights, duties and responsibilities as any parent. Adoption is forever. The child takes the surname of the adoptive parents, inherits from them, and loses all legal ties with the birth family, although quite often adopted children may have some contact with members of their birth family.

## **Fostering**

Fostering does not usually involve a court process. It is a way of providing family life for children who cannot be with their own parents. Most children in foster care are looked after by foster parents on a temporary basis. Many children may only need help for a few days or weeks, but others may stay for longer while attempts are made to resolve the family's problems. If the problems cannot be resolved the children may be placed for adoption or long term fostering may be considered.

Adoption Matters Northwest is an adoption agency.

# THE CHILDREN WAITING TO BE ADOPTED

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## Who are they?

- Most of the children placed for adoption are cared for by their local authority in foster homes prior to placement for adoption and are living temporarily with foster carers. They are unable to be cared for permanently by their birth families due to neglect, maltreatment or other difficulties. The upheaval they have known in their lives is likely to make an impact on their general development and may also have an influence on their behaviour.
- Frequently brother and sister groups are adopted together, but we also find families for a wide age range of children who are being placed individually. In general, children who are under the age of two are part of a sibling group or have particular medical, developmental or background issues.
- Often, children with a disability are overlooked by prospective adopters, so Adoption Matters Northwest is seeking families who can rise to the challenge of caring for a child with a disability. The range of ability within this group of children varies greatly, some may have been physically disabled from birth, some may have moderate to severe learning difficulties. All have the potential to achieve and to bring their adopters an overwhelming sense of satisfaction and achievement.

## Where are they?

- Children from all over the UK are waiting for adoptive families.
- We receive new referrals of children directly every week from all areas of the country.
- At Adoption Matters Northwest placements are made from within the North West region and also from much further afield from Cornwall to Newcastle.
- Your social worker will give you full support to work out the right links for you with children and their placing agencies.
- Adoption Matters Northwest does not undertake inter-country adoptions directly, but may provide this service to local authorities at their request.

## How old are they?

- The law says that children can be adopted from infancy until the age of 18 years.
- We place children of all ages but the majority are between 2 and 8 years.

## What do they need?

- All the children have individual and varied needs. In every area of our work the interests of the children must be the first consideration.
- We consider that, wherever possible, the adoptive family should reflect the ethnic and cultural background of the children. However, if these criteria cannot be fully met, the child's agency may decide to support a placement with a family who are able to promote the important issues of background, culture and ethnicity for the child in an active and positive way.

- It is our aim to find families who can promote all aspects of their child's full identity. Adopted children have been born to someone else and we owe the children the right to know clearly about their origins, whatever the circumstances. We support our adopters in recognising that parenting through adoption is different to parenting born-to children.
- For most children it is valuable and appropriate to keep in touch with people from their past, including members of their birth family, previous carers and any other people who have been important to them. Contact arrangements vary considerably for individual children from an annual letter via the Local Authority to face-to-face meetings and we will be there to help and support you with your particular situation.

## WHO CAN ADOPT?

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**Adoption is open to people of all ethnic backgrounds, religions and marital status. These are some of the questions we are most frequently asked:**

### **Do you have to be married to adopt?**

No. We welcome applications from married couples, couples who have entered into a Civil Partnership and from unmarried couples who are in a stable, long-term and enduring family relationship. Unmarried couples, including same sex couples, are now able to make a joint application to adopt.

### **I am a single person. Can I adopt?**

We are pleased to work with single people who wish to adopt. As in all applications, careful consideration is given to the applicants' support network and to their flexibility regarding employment arrangements.

### **What if I have been divorced?**

We need to talk with you about your personal circumstances and learn about your personal history. We accept applications from individuals and couples, whose lives have been affected by divorce. We would need to be in touch with a previous partner where there have been children of that relationship.

### **Can you adopt if you have children living at home?**

We welcome applications from families with children. Generally the child to be adopted is placed as the youngest family member and usually an age gap of several years is preferred; after all that's how families usually grow. Therefore, if your child is presently of pre-school age, it would be wise for you to wait for a few years before applying. It will be important for your social worker to meet your children and to consider their views and understanding of adoption.

Experience has taught us that the children we place for adoption are emotionally vulnerable and very demanding of attention and that it will take time for them to begin to settle in your family. You will have to consider how this may affect the children living in the family.

Occasionally a family with young children are interested in adopting either a much older school-aged child or teenager or an older child with a severe disability. The circumstances of their application would be given careful individual consideration.

Prospective adopters who have adult children should note that every member of your household who is over 18 will be required to undertake CRB and Social Services checks.

### **Can you adopt if you are unable to have your own children?**

Yes. However, first of all we will always encourage you to discuss matters relating to childlessness with your GP and to pursue medical investigations before considering adoption. We always ask you to have completed any investigations or treatment before actively pursuing an adoption application. Both avenues to parenthood are emotionally arduous and our experience has shown that it is unwise to follow both options simultaneously. You will not be prevented from adopting if there is no clear explanation for your infertility.

## **What about general health?**

All adoption applicants are required by law to have a medical examination as part of their adoption assessment. This is done by appointment with your GP and the necessary forms are supplied by us. The completed report is returned by the GP to our Chester Office where it is looked at by our Medical Adviser for his/her comment and recommendation to the Adoption Panel. Adoption medical reports are held confidentially by the Agency.

Prospective adopters are expected to be in good general physical and mental health. You do not need to be a super athlete, but we need to be reasonably sure that you will be in good enough health to be around for a child's growing-up years. Whilst this includes consideration of lifestyle-related issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption, these factors are not in themselves contra-indications to adoption. We consider all medical information and if there is a particular health risk either to you or to the children who may be placed in your care, we would then discuss these matters with you carefully before proceeding further.

However, if you are a smoker, you need to be aware that there are some restrictions. In common with many adoption agencies we do not place children under 5 in smoking households or with particular medical conditions. If applicants are interested in caring for under 5's they must be smoke-free for a least six months before we can take up an application.

## **Are there age limits?**

We do not set age limits for adopters but the law states that all applicants must be aged 21 years and above.

All enquiries are given careful consideration and adoption agencies are advised by the Department for Education that prospective adopters should have "a reasonable expectation of retaining health and vigour so as to be able to meet the many and varied demands of children during their formative years". You will need to consider your age/s in relation to the age/s of the child/ren you wish to adopt. Younger children tend to be placed with younger parents.

## **What about employment and income?**

People do not have to be well off to adopt. The only financial constraint is that of being able to provide for a child, although adoption allowances may be available depending on your income. Prospective adopters do not have to be employed, but those that are in employment are encouraged to be as flexible as possible and to discuss adoption/parental leave at an early stage with their employers. The need for a parent to stay at home with a child full time and for how long will depend largely on the age and individual needs of the child. Pre-school children may need a parent to be available to care for them, help them settle and feel secure in their new family, rather than going to nursery or a child minder.

Following general discussion about employment matters with your social worker during your adoption assessment, this important issue will be looked at again at the time of making links with specific children whose needs will be outlined to you by their social worker.

Details of statutory adoption leave and pay are available through the Department of Trade and Industry ([www.dti.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.dti.gov.uk/adoption)).

## **What area do you cover?**

Every adoption enquiry is looked at individually. As a general guide-line we accept applications from people living in the North West of England and North East Wales.

### **Can you be approved by more than one adoption agency?**

The law states that a family can only be registered to adopt with one Agency. So if, as adopters approved by another agency, you are living in our area and now wish to work with us, we will discuss your individual circumstances with you and with the agency that approved you.

### **Can you adopt from Adoption Matters Northwest more than once?**

Yes, second and further applications are taken forward from families who have already adopted and these are considered on an individual basis.

### **At what point do you commit yourself to an adoption application?**

Adoption is a lifelong commitment. You need to take as long as you need to be sure of your desire to proceed. The preparation process is designed to give you information and it is not until this is completed that you will have to consider whether to begin an adoption assessment. We ask you to complete a formal application form before attending preparation groups as the Adoption Regulations say that this is necessary. However we ensure after the group process that you are still fully committed to proceeding.

### **Are there any residence restrictions?**

It is essential that all prospective adopters are clear about their domicile and habitual residence as early as possible in the adoption process.

For single applicants, the law states that they must either be domiciled in the UK, or habitually resident for at least a year before making an application. For couples, one of the applicants must be domiciled in the UK or both must be habitually resident in the UK for at least a year before making the application. If in doubt about this, you should seek independent legal advice.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

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Adoption Matters Northwest's commitment to work in an anti-discriminatory way informs all areas of our service provision and social work practice. We aim to treat all individuals fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. We welcome applicants of all faiths and none.

# YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

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## **Adoption can be very rewarding as well as challenging**

If you decide to proceed, we will be looking with you at how your life experience, present knowledge and skills will help you to be a successful adopter.

You may not have lots of experience of bringing up children, but other experiences in your life may have given you understanding which will be useful as an adopter.

For example:

- You may have cared for the children of relatives or friends;
- You may have experienced separation from people important to you or even bereavement. This could help you to understand how a child coming into foster or adoptive care may feel;
- You may have been bullied at school or work and so be able to stand up for a child who also feels different.

At this initial stage it would be helpful if you could begin to think about your life experience and the relevant skills and knowledge it has given to you. You need to think not only about the employment you have had and any qualifications you have gained, but also about experiences acquired through your own family life, voluntary work, hobbies and interests.

Why not use the following headlines as a guide to the sort of areas we will be discussing with you further.

- **Child care experience**  
What did you learn from the way you were brought up?  
What experience have you had in caring for children?  
Should you extend your experience by looking after friends' or family's children or by getting involved with local children's groups or schools?
- **Working with others as part of a team**
- **Links with individuals/groups in your community**
- **Relevant training/achievements**

# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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## INITIAL INTERVIEW AND PREPARATION GROUPS

- When you return the completed Initial Enquiry Form included in this Information Pack, we will be pleased to consider your details with a view to inviting you to meet a social worker for an **initial informal discussion** about your interest in adoption. This meeting is an opportunity for us to go through your queries together and to look at your individual circumstances.
- If then you wish to learn more, you will be invited to attend an **Adoption Preparation Group**. These courses are held periodically throughout the year. The dates accompany this pack.

The preparation groups cover a wide range of adoption-related issues such as child development, attachment, separation and loss, identity, resilience and the effect of maltreatment and neglect. Adoption Matters Northwest social workers facilitate the group. The groups will also provide an opportunity for you to meet adopters and to hear about their experiences.

Our aim is to help you make an informed decision about whether adoption is right for you. We do not ask you to make a commitment to the adoption assessment until you have completed the groups programme.

After groups, a shared decision is made between you and the agency to begin the adoption assessment. If we have particular issues to raise before the application begins, we will arrange to discuss these with you at a home visit.

## THE ADOPTION APPLICATION

These are some of the questions that we are frequently asked:

### How long does an adoption application take?

The law requires that “the adoption panel’s recommendation about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child should be made within eight months of the receipt of their formal application”. Occasionally specific issues relating to prospective adopters’ individual circumstances may lengthen this time, but in general eight months from formal application to consideration by the Panel is our aim.

### If you apply to adopt, do any checks have to be made?

Yes. It is required by law that checks be completed by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), which include Police and Department of Education records. Additionally, checks are completed with Social Services, the Probation Service, the Education Department, Ofsted (if you have worked as a childminder at any point in your career) the Community Paediatrician (if you have school aged children) and on the internet.

Certain criminal convictions, in particular those involving children, automatically exclude applications.

Enhanced CRB checks and Social Services checks are undertaken on all members of the household who are over 18. Any additional person who will have regular care of any children placed with you will also need a CRB check

Applicants who have been in the Armed Forces or had a partner serving in the Forces, living in quarters (here or abroad), need to have checks with SSAFA and applicants who have lived abroad need international checks. International checks sometimes require payment of a fee.

All statutory checks and medicals have to be renewed every 2 years.

Your social worker will ask to see your birth certificate, passport, marriage and divorce certificates (as appropriate), your national insurance registration and evidence of rent/mortgage payments and income.

### **What about references?**

It is a legal requirement that every adoption application must be supported by two personal references. At Adoption Matters Northwest we also ask for a reference from a family member. Your personal referees should know you well, be aware of your interest in adoption and be able to comment about your potential as adoptive parents.

Your personal referees and your family referee are asked to complete a written reference based on guidelines provided by the Agency. When this is returned, an appointment will be made by your social worker to visit them for further discussion.

The Department for Education also advise us to contact former partners where there have been children of that relationship. We would discuss the individual circumstances with you first. We ask former partners or spouses to complete a questionnaire and we sometimes follow this up with a visit to them.

In addition, we also seek the views of any adult children who live either with you, or apart from you. If you have school aged children, we are required to write to their school to obtain the school's view of your application and of your relationship with your children.

We are also required to seek a reference from your current employer and if you have worked with children or vulnerable adults at any point in your career, any relevant previous employer. We also obtain a reference if you are employed in a voluntary capacity. We would discuss the timing of this with you.

All references are held by the agency as confidential information.

### **What is a Prospective Adopter's Report?**

A Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) is compiled during the assessment process and is a document which describes you, your life and your suitability to be an adoptive parent. You are allocated a social worker who will work with you throughout your assessment and placement. You and your social worker complete the PAR together. This process usually takes 8–10 fairly lengthy visits to you in your home. You will need to put aside time during the day for this if at all possible.

When the report is complete, you are given ten days to read and discuss the documents. You will not have access to the references and medical information as they are confidential. When you have signed the document and made any written comments that you wish to make, the document goes to the Adoption Panel for consideration.

### **What is the role of the Adoption Panel?**

The Adoption Panel considers your application and recommends to the agency whether you should be approved as prospective adopters. You can choose if you would like to attend the Panel meeting. You are informed verbally of the Panel's recommendation within 24 hours and receive written confirmation of the Agency decision within seven working days. If you are unhappy about the agency's decision, you have the right for your application to be heard again by the Panel or to be put before an independent panel. However, we aim to work openly and honestly with you in partnership and to have aired any concerns at a much earlier stage. Once you are approved as prospective adoptive parents, the Agency will begin the process of finding a suitable child/ren for you to adopt.

# THE PLACEMENT AND BEYOND

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More frequent questions:

## **How is a child matched with us?**

Following your approval, we will continue in partnership with you, working towards the placement of children for adoption in your family.

Adoption Matters Northwest works in partnership with Local Authorities throughout the country who tell us about children for whom they are seeking adoptive placements. We also refer all our families to the Adoption Register to maximise the potential for finding suitable children. Once a possible link is found, you will be given written information and meet with people who know the child/ren. If all parties agree, the child/ren's agency will be asked to approve the match. You may be invited to attend their Matching Panel. You are then involved in making arrangements to be introduced to the child. After this period of introduction, the child then moves into your home.

## **What support is available from Adoption Matters Northwest?**

Prospective adopters tell us they have chosen to come to Adoption Matters Northwest because of our clear commitment to the support of our adopters and our strong reputation for this service. People value our independence from the Local Authority who are placing the child/ren

Support is offered by the Agency at all stages; from your registration as adopters, through placement and should you wish even in the years ahead after an Adoption Order has been made.

We will guide you through discussions regarding the child/ren who eventually join your family and support you through introductions to them. We will then remain in close contact to help you with advice and guidance regarding any particular issues that you encounter in caring for the child. Case recordings completed after placement of a child/ren will be shared with the relevant Local Authority.

We have an adopters' support group which meets regularly and we can link you into Adoption UK which is a national adoption support network.

## **When do I/we obtain Parental Responsibility for the child?**

When a child is placed with you, you will automatically gain some aspects of Parental Responsibility for him/her, which is shared with the placing Local Authority and the birth parent(s) or guardian. This means that you will be able to make certain decisions, which will be explained to you before the child moves to live with you. Local Authorities are legally able to restrict the level of parental responsibility of adoptive and birth parents.

## **When does the Adoption Order happen?**

The child's progress in placement is reviewed by the placing authority with you and your social worker every few months and, together, a decision is reached about the time to begin your own legal application. The time then taken to obtain the Adoption Order depends on the child's individual circumstances and is usually completed within six months to two years.

The effect of an Adoption Order is to give sole Parental Responsibility for the child to the adopters and to join the child to his/her new family forever. Your social worker will guide you through the legal process and we also have the benefit of expert specialist legal advice.

Post adoption your child may have some contact with their family of origin. Every situation is looked at individually. It may be beneficial to the child to remain in contact with important people from their past. This might be a birth parent, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle or a sibling. Contact may be direct, through face-to-face meetings or may be indirect through annual letters or progress reports.

### **Is Post-Adoption Support on offer from Adoption Matters Northwest?**

We will draw up an individual post adoption support plan with you in conjunction with the local authority, so that everyone is in agreement about the level of support that you might require. If your support needs change in the future, you have the right to ask the local authority for an assessment of your needs.

Adoptive families are encouraged to keep in touch with Adoption Matters Northwest. We have a support group and provide regular social events and newsletters.

# FINANCIAL ISSUES

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## Medical charges

You may have to pay for your adoption medical. This is conducted and charged for by your GP and payment is at their discretion, but the recommended fee is £73.86.

Medicals have to be renewed every 2 years, and you also may need to pay for this. The current cost is £24.36.

## International checks

If you have lived or worked abroad you are required to have police checks in the relevant country. This sometimes involves the payment of a fee. In some situations the check will need to be translated, and this may also involve a payment to the translator.

## Legal Expenses

There is a standard national fee of £140 per child to lodge an Adoption Application in the County Court. The child's local authority sometimes agrees to pay this fee. They will always pay any legal costs involved in a complex adoption application if you are not eligible for Community Legal Help (formerly Legal Aid).

## Financial Support

Local Authorities will consider the possibility of offering financial support to families for children who have a range of special needs that require extra funding. Families may be required to make an income declaration and, generally, allowances are taxable. Once agreed, allowances may continue to be paid long-term (post Adoption Order) or may be a one-off lump sum. The allowances do not undermine the legality of the Adoption Order.

## Child Benefit

Adopters are entitled to claim Child Benefit straight away following placement. Their claim will be endorsed by the child's social worker, and payment should continue uninterrupted following the making of the Adoption Order.

Details of Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit can be obtained from the Inland Revenue ([www.taxcredits.inlandrevenue.gov.uk](http://www.taxcredits.inlandrevenue.gov.uk)).

## Agency Running Costs

As a voluntary agency, we endeavour to run Adoption Matters Northwest as efficiently as possible. We work in partnership with many local authorities through service agreements and specific contracts, and also value the contribution made to our work through various Trust Funds. Sponsorship is always welcomed, and donations, however large or small, made to us by individuals, families, churches and other community groups are of the greatest importance to our continuing work.

## Organisations and addresses that you may find useful

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- **BAAF (British Association for Adoption & Fostering)**

Address: Saffron House, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1N 8TS  
Tel: 0207 421 2600  
Website: [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

BAAF is an independent organisation that provides information and advice about adoption and fostering, strives to improve practice and to influence policy, runs courses and conferences and publishes a wealth of informative literature.

- **Adoption UK**

Address: Adoption UK, Linden House, 55 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury, OX16 9AB  
Tel: 01295 752240  
Email: [admin@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:admin@adoptionuk.org.uk)

Adoption UK is a national self-help group run by, and for, adoptive parents, offering support before, during and after adoption. Adoption UK publishes Adoption Today, a magazine for those interested in adoption. Children Who Wait, which is part two of the magazine, features children for whom new families are being sought.

- **Be My Parent**

Address: As for BAAF  
Tel: 0207 421 2666  
Email: [bmp@baaf.org.uk](mailto:bmp@baaf.org.uk)

Be My Parent is a monthly colour newspaper, produced by BAAF, which features children who need new, permanent families.

- **The Adoption Register**

The Adoption Register is a database that holds information about children awaiting adoption and adopters wishing to adopt. Approved local authority adoption agencies and voluntary agencies send in data to the Register about adopters after they are approved to adopt and about children for whom adoption is the plan.

The Register then suggests links between the children and prospective adopters.

Adoption Matters Northwest refers all prospective adopters to the Register as soon as they are approved, so maximising the possibility of a link. Consent is always obtained before a referral is made.

Adoption Register Adopters' Helpline: 0845 450 3934

- For information purposes you may wish to visit the following website to access 'Children's Messages on Care: Your Rights, Your Say, A Children's Views Report' by Roger Morgan – [www.rights4me.org/content/beheardreports/114/childrens\\_messages\\_report.pdf](http://www.rights4me.org/content/beheardreports/114/childrens_messages_report.pdf).

# Comments, Complaints & Compliments

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**Adoption Matters Northwest** aims to provide through its social workers and administrative staff a comprehensive adoption service.

We make every effort to ensure this work is carried out efficiently, effectively and in an open and friendly manner.

This sheet outlines the ways in which you can give us your views or complain if you are dissatisfied in any way with our services.

It is useful to know what people think about our work and we welcome your comments, compliments or complaints. If you do complain, we shall do all we can to investigate your complaint objectively in the shortest possible time and to explain the result to you.

You may use the tear-off form on the next page or you could write a letter or telephone and ask to speak to the advice line social worker.

## Comments

If you return this form with a comment about our services, we shall reply to you in writing.

We are always working hard to improve the services we provide. We would welcome any suggestions you may have about how we can do this.

## Complaints

If you have a complaint, the first step you should take is to discuss it directly with the person with whom you have been dealing. If this is not possible, or you are not happy with the outcome, you should ask to speak to that person's supervisor.

We hope that most problems can be sorted out at this stage and a solution reached which is acceptable to you.

If not, you can ask for the matter to be dealt with informally by the Chief Executive. You may use this form, write a letter, or telephone.

If the Chief Executive is unable to resolve the matter to your satisfaction, or if the complaint is about the Chief Executive, you will be asked to write to the Board of Trustees to make a formal complaint. They will appoint an independent person to look in detail at your complaint and the way it has been dealt with. You will be notified of the Board's decision in writing, together with their reasons and any actions they have taken as a result of your complaint. If you are still not satisfied, you will be given the opportunity to write to or meet with a Panel of three people from the Board of Trustees. This will conclude the agency's complaints procedure, but you will be advised of other avenues for complaint such as Ofsted.

All those involved in investigating and responding to a complaint will respect the confidential nature of the information under review.

Complaints may be made on behalf of children. No person will be subject to any reprisals as a result of making a complaint.

## Compliments

We are always glad to hear from people using our services who want to compliment a particular member of staff or the service they receive. If you send us a compliment, we shall write back to you and send a copy to the staff concerned so that they will know their work is appreciated.

### Mission Statement

Adoption Matters Northwest is an agency which aims to improve the lives of children who may otherwise be denied the benefits of a secure family environment. As a specialist adoption agency, we will recruit and prepare people who are willing and able to adopt or provide permanent care for these children. Our services are designed to support all those whose lives have been affected by adoption and other types of long term care. We will work in partnership with other agencies. We are a Christian organisation which aims to make a positive difference to children and families of all faiths or none. We will ensure that all people who use our services are treated with dignity, professionalism and respect, without discrimination.

### Equal Opportunities

Adoption Matters Northwest strives to operate an equal opportunities policy. We are committed to welcoming people from the widest possible diversity of backgrounds, culture and experience. If you have comments, complaints or compliments on equal opportunities issues, you are encouraged to bring them to our notice by using this form or by writing or telephoning.

Adoption Matters Northwest  
14 Liverpool Road, Chester  
Cheshire, CH2 1AE  
Tel: 01244 390938 Fax: 01244 390067  
E-mail: [info@adoptionmattersnw.org](mailto:info@adoptionmattersnw.org)  
Website: [www.adoptionmattersnw.org](http://www.adoptionmattersnw.org)

The agency is inspected and approved by Ofsted. They can be contacted at:

Ofsted, North Regional Office  
Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA  
Tel: 08456 404045

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### Tear-off Form

You may ask a member of staff to help you complete this form. Please give as much detail as possible and continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Either hand your completed form or letter to the member of staff with whom you have been dealing or post it

to: The Chief Executive  
Adoption Matters Northwest  
14 Liverpool Road  
Chester  
CH2 1AE

Name .....

Address .....

Post Code .....

Tel No .....

This is a:    comment             complaint             compliment  (please tick)

Please give details:

# THANK YOU

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Thank you for your enquiry and for reading our Information Pack. We hope it was of interest and that it answered your questions about adoption.

We hope that you will now fill in the enquiry form and return it to us. We look forward to meeting you and to discussing your interest further.

## Preparation Group Programme 2012



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### Venue: Chester\*

- **February**  
Monday 6th  
Tuesday 7th  
Monday 13th  
Tuesday 14th

### Venue: Chester\*

- **March**  
Tuesday 13th  
Wednesday 14th  
Tuesday 20th  
Wednesday 21st

### Venue: Hale\*

- **May**  
Monday 14th  
Tuesday 15th  
Monday 21st  
Tuesday 22nd

### Venue: Blackburn\*\*

- **July**  
Tuesday 17th  
Wednesday 18th  
Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>  
Wednesday 25th

### Venue: Chester\*

- **September**  
Tuesday 11th  
Wednesday 12th  
Tuesday 18th  
Wednesday 19th

### Venue: Hale\*

- **November**  
Monday 12th  
Tuesday 13th  
Monday 19th  
Tuesday 20th

*\*Training days at Chester and Hale begin at 10.00 am and end at 4.00 pm*

*\*\*Training days at Blackburn begin at 10.00 am and end at 3.30 pm*

# INITIAL ENQUIRY FORM FOR ADOPTION



Please fill in your details and return this form to:  
Adoption Matters Northwest, 14 Liverpool Road, Chester, CH2 1AE

Before you complete this form we would like to make you aware of a couple of things. Adoption Matters Northwest is primarily concerned with finding families for older children. We do place some younger children in the 0 - 2 years age range, but they invariably have a disability, learning difficulties, a medical problem, developmental delay or a background issue such as mental illness. If you can consider young children with these needs, or older children or sibling groups, we would be delighted to hear from you. For further clarification or discussions about this information, please ring our office on 01244 390938 and speak directly to the advice line social worker.

Applicant/s' surname/s	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
First name/s	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Dates of birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>	
Post code	<input type="text"/>	Home Tel <input type="text"/>
Tel (mobile)	<input type="text"/>	Tel (mobile) <input type="text"/>
Tel (work)	<input type="text"/>	Tel (work) <input type="text"/>
Home email	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
Work email	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
Occupation	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
Ethnic background	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
Religion	(1) <input type="text"/>	(2) <input type="text"/>
'If married or in a civil partnership, please give date of marriage/ceremony'	<input type="text"/>	

Details of children already in your household:

	Name	Date of Birth	Relationship to you
1.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

3.

Details of children living elsewhere or deceased:

	Name	Date of Birth/Death	Relationship to you
1.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Please give us some idea about the children you might be interested in adopting.

Age/s:

Single child or brothers and sisters?

If you can consider any particular issues or difficulties, please give details here, eg medical issues, disability, learning difficulties:

How did you hear about this agency?

If you are in contact with other agencies, please indicate the current situation:

Have you made a previous application to adopt or foster a child. If so, please give us the name of the agency or local authorities with the approximate dates and outcome:

Are you currently undergoing infertility

treatment or investigations?:

Do you consider yourself a person with any disabilities? YES/NO

Are you a registered disabled person? YES/NO

It would be helpful if you could tell us something about yourself/ves below, covering the following points:

1. The reasons why you are considering adoption.
2. A little about your way of life, jobs, interests and hobbies.

Signed (1)..... (2).....

Date .....