

# Potato Group Evidence

Presented to APPGAP - 2021



## **Evidence presented to APPGAP on behalf of Potato Group.**

There is lots of chatter, this report, that report but who listens and hears the real life of much loved, but traumatised children, teens, young adults and us their adopters. special guardians or kinship carers.

'OUR' children have two sets of parents, whether both sets of parents have a relationship with 'our' children as they grow and mature into 'good enough' people. Parents and members of their communities cannot be quantified by numbers or research but by the way ALL those lives are lived, supported, nurtured, cared for and are loved.

My ten minutes of talking to you today is to have you understand that the right of safety, family, history and justice must prevail otherwise, a stark truth is this:

IF government, if the Dept of Education and Health, if children and adult social care, and the criminal justice system are not willing to fully support our children and families, why bother 'rescuing' them (or so the narrative goes) from those that would do them harm in those early years of childhood, when we know what we know about the long-term effects of early adversity?

As a group of over 600 adopters that have been members of the Potato Group since our inception in 2013, and who collectively parent over 2000 children UK wide, we are in a unique position to inform both the APPGAP and the Care review about loving, living with and without our much loved children. We have tried to do that on several occasions over our eight year history of being a peer to peer support group. Hopefully it will not come as a surprise to you that collectively we parent the most vulnerable children, children that have been assessed as needing to live permanently in another family. We represent the two thirds of families that Selwyn referred to in the seminal work of 2014 'Beyond the Adoption Order' of those adopters living with our traumatised children displaying challenging behaviours and those who are unable to live at home.

We have met with the last two leaders of the ASGLB to discuss our and our children's needs. Each time we have met we have been assured that our information is helpful, patted on the head and forgotten about. That must change.

The herds of elephants, in this and every other room, discussing these matters are first and foremost Children's Social Care - they hold so very many keys - to removing children, decision making on permanence, training, approval of FC, adopters and SGs.

Matching, placing children, supporting placements and families, the holders of the keys to support, therapy, via RAAs, and the safety of the whole family until the child reaches 18 or 21 or 25 if our adult children have re-entered care.

Our families are often experiencing challenges from very early on, or, as in many a Potato's experience when our children enter the stormy world of adolescence, when the very familiar 'oh all teenagers do that' from friends, family, teachers and social workers are heard by us. HOWEVER, not all teenagers struggling with their identity, trying to understand their place in this world, abuse their parents, trash their homes, self-harm, are exploited sexually and criminally and become familiar faces to the local constabulary.

When family life is unsafe for all, but not because the child is at risk from us, our worlds can and often do become the mirror image of what 'our' children's first family went through but without the same level of care and understanding that is afforded to many of them today. When our children re-enter care or have to leave our homes prematurely, we are faced with hostility and a lack of care in most cases. I would love to tell you that XYZ local authority or borough have got it right but sadly, in our experience, that's not the case.

Many LAs talk the talk of being trauma aware, of understanding the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and yet are unable to fully support in a family sensitive way when push comes to shove.

To be told by CSC that we need to put in boundaries, we need to be more flexible, we need to safeguard our children yet not control them is useless at the point when the only statutory service that helps us when in the moment of true crisis is the police. So often our traumatised adopted teens need crisis mental health support but due to a lack of trauma informed acute mental health provision our teens and young adults are more often arrested rather than helped in any meaningful way. Meanwhile, we support our child when the CPS choose to prosecute our children, we write letters to the magistrates and judges to inform them about our child's early adversity and how they, and we, have been let down by so many state services and why, it's not really fair to fine our children when they cause criminal damage to their homes because we shouldn't have to pay twice to replace our furniture, TVs and repair our homes.

Many parents 'blamed' by social services for the family disruption that child to parent abuse causes, requiring re-entry to care, is by its very nature a deeply flawed process. That LAs seek to evoke care proceedings where voluntary accommodation under s20 is most often enough. That they seek to take parental responsibility from us, to alienate our children from us is at best morally corrupt. Where our children are accommodated by the local authority, so many are then 'cared for' by private providers that do not love our children, do not understand their trauma histories or our continued role of parenting at a distance. They need to. It is imperative to these future parents of tomorrow that they know and feel our love, care and support for them despite their not living in our homes.

Molly's words resonate with hundreds of members of the Potato Group, on all the issues she raises, from being excluded from LAC reviews because our child, so say, doesn't want us there, to judges having to record in judgments that we must remain involved in order to support our children for the life-long nature of our commitment to them.

As young people and adults, it may be rather stereotypical of me to say, but anecdotally, our Potato experience is that traumatised young people and adults following re-entry to care are more often than not involved in the CJS, NEET, our young women pregnant, in poor or sub-standard supported living and further wedges put between us and our children by a variety of professionals who vanish into thin air at their earliest possible convenience.

Our sister group, SG&AT have submitted a wealth of information about what happens when our children re-enter care under S20 and via S31. I am hopeful that you will include that evidence in your report. The data on re-entry to care is a national disgrace when over 4.000 children re-enter care but LAs purport to not knowing their previous permanence status and, one that all in authority should be deeply ashamed of.

I remain hopeful that those in a position to change things for the future of the babies that are removed today (and that was met with a hue and cry last week) will start to listen to the experiences of care experienced young adults, and that true support for them and those that love them will ensue. We have to have hope because for SC to offer condolences and to help with funeral costs when our children die as care leavers or adults, rather than truly helping and supporting them before they believe there is no other option for them but to die at their own hands, Social workers telling us that our teens and young adults need to learn that there are consequences to their actions in supported and semi supported living which may involve YOI, prisons or the social worker that tells you to stop financially supporting your adult child, to let them stand on their own two feet when they living away from us and trying to do so on a single person under 25s UC. To making assumptions that we can care for our grandchildren under child arrangement orders rather than fully supported SG arrangements has to stop.

'Our' children deserve better. We, all of their parents deserve better. Society needs to step up. You, decision makers, policy makers and the holders of the purse strings need to step up. Social Care, family courts, the criminal justice system and the DWP need to step up.

Here are a few things that could be sorted within the lifetime of a parliament that would go some way to addressing these things:

EHCPs to become a legal document to cover education, health and [social] care across both Depts of Education and Dept of Health and Social care. To be automatically issued by the courts when an adoption order is granted. To be re-assessed at an interval of not less than every five years until the adopted person reaches the age of 21. Should it be decided that the EHCP is no longer required, that the plan can be re-assessed at any point in the adopted person's journey. This new true education, health and social care plan should be informed by a neuro sequential model of therapeutics.

That when we ask for 'support' we do not have to jump through hoops and have to battle for the support that is needed in education, health and social care (in effect a true EHC Plan that covers all three).

Where it is safe to do so, CSC ensure that 'letter box schemes' are brought into the 21st century to ensure that 'our' families have ongoing, helpful communication with each other to the benefit of 'our' children.

That CSC do not view a need to re-enter care (or a family's need for respite) to be turned into a blame game in order for our children and us to be able to be fully supported in our role of parenting at a distance.

That the ASF recognises that some adopted young people leave home prematurely, that access to the ASF is not based on 'reunification' but their need for therapeutic input.

That the family courts consider whether there is merit in cases of children re-entering care due to the sequelae of their trauma histories rather than risk of harm should remain S20 rather than LAs having to go down the CO route because they believe that they are following guidance from a previous President of the family division.

That our much-loved children, no matter what age, can have us as their advocates within social care, the CJS and any and all aspects of their involvement with the DWP.

That our child's full and open, non-redacted SC files are available to them as adults and that they are fully supported to access that information.

Consider your language. We may have had a period of family disruption – not adoption disruption.

Our children RE enter care for the second or subsequent time in their lives

We parent at a distance until we take our last breath. Help us to do so for everyone's sake.