

*Adoption Crisis*

**The Jarring  
Reality of Adoption**

Written By

**The Impassioned Voices of the Parents**

**Exposing The Failings**

&

**Pulled Together**

**By Lottie Stones**

**March 2023**

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This document has been created to provide a window into some of the complex issues facing some families who have adopted, and who are now experiencing significant trauma due to inadequate support by Local Authorities. Each person has shared their story from a depth of painful experiences, and all are battling the difficult and complex consequences of adoption, including a debilitating sense of parental blame.

People adopt for a number of reasons, but all wish for an extension to their family, and a journey of love to share with a child. None of us entered the adoption process with the view that there will be perfection at any level, but neither did we think it would result in crisis and condemnation, and the loss of everything that is meaningful to family life. This document has been created to offer a glimpse into the issues facing a growing number of adoptive families.

The adoptive families in this report have all cared for children with significant trauma, and physical and emotional needs. Due to a lack of support and understanding from social services and other professional services they have reached a level of crisis, and in some cases have had to make the agonising and desperately sad decision to disrupt.

Adoption support needs to change. If it doesn't, more and more children will end up back in care and the lives of more families will be shattered. We hope our stories will start the process of change.

## Summary Of Key Findings

The words chosen by each adopter convey the need for essential reform in the world of adoption and the key messages are:

- **Consider** the impact of early life trauma and use research about early life trauma to underpin how we can manage what may become the unmanageable.
- Social workers (professionals) need to **spend time** with adoptive families before they carry out assessments and provide training days for potential adopters. Their knowledge from university, or what they have learned in training courses is not nearly enough to truly understand the day-to-day lived experience of adoptive parents.
- **Training during the pre-adoption stage** needs to be a thorough, informed and accredited course, where families are prepared to manage the very worst scenario and are equipped with the tools we do not otherwise possess. Too often 'experts' are telling us to implement strategies which are NOT appropriate for us to implement when at crisis, we needed these tools to start with!
- **Therapeutic parenting** does not work when parents are already in a position of secondary trauma or survival mode.
- Do not send us on courses when they do not **fit the need**: it is essential that intervention meets the need.
- **Engaging** with families in crisis needs to start with listening, compassion and understanding, not judgement, condemnation, and poor advice.
- **Recognize** child to parent abuse as something real. Current practise is outdated. Be in the real world, we are also the victims.
- **Support** is not just about the child. Remember we are not failing the children, and we are not incompetent, although we may be suffering.
- Support plans need to be **meaningful**, tick box support wastes money and does not improve the situation one little bit.

- **Behaviour is communication**, the children communicate through their behaviour. The interventional support needs to be aimed at both parent and child to ensure survival of both.
- Use **us** as the **experts** in our children's lives; to guide the intervention, to help others, to build on services, as we are the ones who have lived it.
- Build a **partnership** with us, do not treat us as the perpetrators of the adversity.
- **Remember how much courage it takes to ask for help.**

If we acknowledge early life trauma affects education and life outcomes, then why are we not considering the impact on relationships in the family home. Sibling to sibling violence and abuse, child to parent abuse, both physical and emotional, the risk of disruption.

If post adoption support continues as an assessment signposting process, leading to minimal positive outcomes, and sometimes child protection enquiries or beyond, families will continue to fall apart, lives left in ruin.

- Disruption is on the increase.
- Less people are recommending adoption to the people they know.
- More families are being set up to fail and are now living in crisis.
- It is costing more and more money to pick up the pieces.

## Think On

Good people, the ones who have been successful through Panel - who have been assessed as more than good enough to adopt, who have been deemed to have the love and space in their lives to give, those who have been assessed as competent and able are now suffering with secondary trauma, mental health issues, blocked care, PTSD and more.

We all knew our children would have a (highish) level of need, extra support would be required, kindness, firmness, acceptance and love, and of course family life. Some of us now feel betrayed and lied to with essential information not provided, advice given that

has left us in despair, or advice given which is now condemned by different experts a few years on but has never been updated.

We, as adoptive parents, endeavour to be transparent; we are honest, we advocate, information share, engage with resources and courses. We admit our imperfections, and our own weaknesses and are open to change. Ultimately however we feel let down, condemned and punished by those who fail to comprehend the roots of the problem which is inadequate support from the very beginning of the adoption process.

Our friends, and our families don't understand what is happening, and distance themselves more and more, stating it's just normal (teenage/child/toddler) behaviour. They clearly judge our parenting as poor and inadequate not knowing the reality of what our children are like, with their behaviours often hidden from extended family, and outsiders, leading people to assume that it is us, the parents, who are failing. Sometimes we just want to hide away and deal with the ongoing stresses of our situation so that our friends and family don't form a bad opinion of us or our children.

Schools can make parents feel shamed, as though we are not "strict enough", "cannot handle our children", but it is them that cannot see the issues faced daily. Once the children are home and the masks have come off.

## Our Voices

### 1. Lottie Stones

I did not cause the trauma my children suffered in the womb and early years. I do everything to alleviate the impact and make their lives as full of love and as normal as possible.

As their mother I know that I am their rock but as anyone who knows anything about child development will be aware, a child who does not experience safety and rewarding relationships in the womb and early stages of life, will function in a dysregulated, impulsive, non-reflective, chaotic way with regards to their emotions and behaviour. My children suffered varying degrees of significant heart-breaking, life-threatening physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (one of my children is lucky to be alive given the extent of broken bones received at six months old, and the purposeful burns made to his body), all of which has been documented. Hence, they live in fight or flight mode with attachment difficulties, and our home is more often than not like a war zone, as one child kicks off and the other two react with verbal and physical abuse against me and each other: it is not their fault, it is how their brains work. I was never equipped to manage this level of behaviour. I have believed for years that I am failing, that I am not good enough, but I have come to realise that it is the adoption system that has failed: it is the system that is not good enough.

Emotionally the cost is unbearable, and nothing is helping. I have been battered by my children emotionally and physically, they try and control my every move, and sabotage the positive steps I take. So, what do I do other than live with the unliveable, the trauma and disruption that I must face on a daily basis. I lie awake each night feeling guilty for not parenting in the 'right way', for being too exhausted to manage, for feeling inadequate – I don't even recognise myself as

the person who went through the adoption process with so much confidence and hope. As siblings they also suffer some level of trauma from each other. I see the look of adoration in the eyes of the youngest sibling for his brother, who hurts him emotionally and physically. I constantly worry about the confusion this causes to that young child, and the impact it is having on his development.

Nobody sees the reality, understands the complexity, the trauma, the intensity, and the pain, but they always question the love and the family makeup. Do we love each other despite everything, despite not being biologically related? My answer to that is YES, YES, YES.

I am not alone in this cycle of trauma, supposedly only a ¼ of adoptions are stable, so why isn't more being done to ensure that the children can get the relevant support needed to thrive. How many adopted children are returned to care because the parents cannot manage? Providing the right kind of help in the initial stages would prevent disruption, which is so damaging to all concerned, especially the children. I am left wondering why none of the so-called experts, none of the social workers, none of the managers have asked for reform. Surely there must be someone out there who can see beyond the status quo, which is so damaging to families in crisis.

We need different processes. Therapeutic parenting cannot be taught in the aftermath of a crisis when families are already suffering trauma, it needs to be taught before. We need scheduled informal check-ins by experienced professionals to look for the early warning signs of emotional and behavioural difficulties; to ask the parents how they are managing. Not a tick box exercise that makes adoptive parents feel degraded (something I have experienced many times whilst trying to access support), but one where parents are able to openly express their concerns, and their feelings without detrimental judgement. One where they are received with empathy and understanding and appropriate advice.

Advice needs to be by professionals with qualifications relevant to trauma, including early life trauma, child development, attachment, therapeutic parenting. We need respite, it's not good enough for our friends and family to step in because sometimes they just don't understand what is going on. Local authorities should have crisis panels, with people who have lived and breathed similar experiences, so the advice can be real, appropriate and accurate. All too often we are told the advice we got at the beginning of our adoption process was wrong, and out of date. So here we are being condemned for following it. It's time for the Local Authorities to become fully aware of the reality of the experiences of many adopters, and not ignore the truth that is illustrated through the stories conveyed in this important, and unique document. Adopted children, and their 'forever families', need to know that they are fully supported so that they can survive the traumas and emerge as healthy families looking forward to a positive future.

## **2. Louise Mellor**

I found life with my son was extremely difficult. He was becoming more violent, physically assaulting my partner as well as hurting emotionally and physically to the other children. He would sell expensive items in the house, break into our locked rooms and go through our belongings. Finding a cash card or money was the goal. Couldn't take it anymore and asked for him to go into care. In his frustration he made allegations. He used to threaten this previously as he said I'll get rid of you. There was no evidence of this, and they won't tell me when this had apparently occurred. He's now in care. The foster carer was told he was in care due to the allegation. She wasn't told about the violent behaviour, the lies, stealing. Four days in and the foster carer text me saying she is struggling and when will he be home following the outcome of the investigation. She was unaware and shocked he was in care as I asked for him to be removed.

I am waiting for the backlash from social services (happened previously) of why I am an incompetent parent and can't handle him. As if all his issues are down to

my parenting and not the early trauma, substance abuse and the hereditary diagnosis from both parents that was downplayed as if they didn't have it. I will and have been told I am not parenting of how reasonably expected of a parent. Instead of acknowledging how hard it's been for all of us and how I've struggled for years but kept fighting hoping for change. Some positivity would be useful. I am still helping parent my son, but from afar. The love I have for him has not changed. I know he wouldn't want to be like this, but we just can't live how we were.

### **3. Louise Taylor**

A summary of our feelings since disrupting. Looking back, we were given poor advice and were not given enough support and direction. During the disruption, social services have lied in their reports, left us to manage our feelings, and have dragged us through the same legal system that abusive parents get shoved through. There are times I thought the guilt, shame, and sadness would break me. It's been a long and slow road back to recovery and one that I am still on.

Before social workers assess, teach, and support adopters they need to spend time in adopters' homes. They need to see the reality of what it's like to live with a traumatised child/ren. Also, the legal system must change - there has to be a better approach to working with adopters who sadly disrupt.

### **4. Chloe Davis**

#### **Summary of feelings about the experience and the frustration**

Systemic failures in the adoption system and within Local Authorities have a very real impact - emotionally, physically and financially - on entire families, specifically parents and their ability to parent their children into adulthood and, of course, on their adopted children.

Lack of support, delay and poor communication in times of need and compassion, lets us down, introducing the real risk of family breakdown and a poor outcome for young people who deserve more. Very limited early adoption support requires tenacity and the ability to take and defend against parent blaming at a time when parents need support, not the courage to keep asking for help, only to be turned away and left to get on with it. It takes real courage to admit that your child is violent and controlling in your home and to ask for help - we're all supposed to cope. Without support over time, needs and therefore behaviours escalate, and this introduces unacceptable levels of risk into a previously safe home. Post-adoption support, a joined-up agency/department approach and the willingness to treat parents as partners are all inadequate. Box-ticking and passing responsibility is, however, common-place.

#### **What needs to be better?**

Put in place post adoption support throughout from early years, through teens to adulthood. This needs to be guaranteed, not something we have to fight for.

Improved awareness, knowledge and understanding of the enduring impact of trauma and not expecting adoption to be the answer - far from it.

Professionals (social workers, CAMHS, schools, LAs) should work with **parents as partners**. We know our children best. So, listen to us and work with us instead of judging us, suggesting that it's as simple as needing to set clear boundaries or, worse, sending us on another parenting course as a quick fix and another box ticked.

#### **5. Sarah-Jane**

I, along with other adopters facing a failed or 'disrupted' adoption, will never get over the total injustice, disrespect and callous actions by our respective Social Services departments and staff that have continuously rocked our integrity and damaged our wellbeing and very souls forever.

Adopters are not responsible for the unresolved trauma and developmental issues that our children experienced prior to being placed with us and yet we are left, unsupported or at best, fighting for limited resources to help us. Trauma training is not part of the teacher training syllabus so what hope is there when the establishments taking care of our children are not trauma and adoption aware? This must be improved upon!

Adoptive parents are the most engaged, caring, inquisitive and vocal of parents who fight hard for their children from day one and we often feel abandoned and unsupported from the day of formal adoption. Our lives change forever and hopes and dreams sometimes evaporate along with deterioration in our mental health and relationships with our partners, families and employers.

Even our Independent Review Officer agreed that the Care System is under-resourced and broken.

## **6. Amelia Riley**

Here is a potted history of failures (ongoing) for the last 11 years.

Diagnosed with ADHD, ODD, AD, MLD, ASD and very challenging to parent. Sister 'only' diagnosed with attachment difficulties but clearly very traumatised from early life and equally challenging.

Begged for Respite. All professionals (including therapists, schools, doctors) wrote letters in support as I was clearly suffering as a single adopter. Was given Early Help parenting advice and ASF assessment for therapy. 60 sessions of therapy had no effect.

Child out of control and had to S20.

Children not doing well, Child Protection slapped on us for my emotional harm. Sixty-Seven visits from Social Workers since January 2022 so far. Not to mention emails, phone calls etc. Hundreds of emails I have sent chasing things they haven't done.

I am being hounded, belittled, humiliated by Social Workers at every opportunity. They ask me every few days whether I am taking them back. I just can't. They think she is just a normal teenager. They overlook what she is actually doing!

The other child became violent, and the allegations came. I phoned my doctor and said I felt suicidal, just to get the Social Worker off my back and give me some respite. It has gone against me and now I am an unfit mother who has severe mental health issues.

They have now instigated interim care order proceedings. They want me to have a psychological assessment to see if I can parent.

I am nearly at the point where I'm not sure how much more to try and fight, apart from the fact that I love him dearly.

### **7. Rosemarie Lewis**

We were misled from the start, a catalogue of errors in the PAR report, a child with FASD, years of asking for help, years of asking for respite, a refusal from CAMHS to even see the child due frankly to funding.

Finally, my health and my partner's fell apart, respite to be taken into hospital was rewarded with the very clear threat of a "parenting assessment", lies and more lies by social worker and we disrupted.

Now we face loss of PR and contact - all because the system is broken.

Make sure reports are accurate, make sure the support plan is actually delivered, make sure families get respite from children with complex disabilities and that the child is supported in the long-term too.

### **DO BETTER**

### **8. Louise Brooker**

Adoption breakdown is not failure to love or try to do your best for the child.

Adoption breakdown is not abandonment, lack of parenting skills, or neglect.

Adoption breakdown is in the sad reality that many hundreds of families up and down the country face each year due to the trauma that their children have gone through by being separated from their birth families and their experiences before adoption.

This is the reality of modern adoption in the UK.

The truth is, some of these children cannot cope with normal family life; social services promise the world and then disappear when the adoption order is granted, only reappearing when we are desperate for help and can take no more of the abuse, stealing, lying, violence etc that our children subject us to daily.

Are social services reappearing to help us, offer us respite or therapy? No! Quite the opposite in fact.

The same service that gave us these children with promises of support are now here to accuse us of failure, bad parenting, and abuse.

They may even threaten to take our other children and make sure we lose our jobs if we work with children.

Some of us start to wonder if our children's birth families were targeted unnecessarily, such is the feeling of being attacked and the lack of trust in social services.

Most people who adopt are professional, loving, caring people who want to make a difference to children's lives - the sad reality is that the difference that is made to our lives at the hands of social services is often irreversible, and the children end up back in the system that we tried to save them from in the first place.

The answer is honesty at the outset, some children need more support than a family can give - better to keep these children with therapeutic foster carers.

And for those children who can be adopted safely, continue to support the family throughout their child's life into adulthood - the cost will be nothing compared to a lifetime of public funds and the cycle continuing down the generations if the adoption breaks down.

Stop demonising adoptive parents when adoptions break down - we are finding each other in this modern age of the internet and sharing our stories which are

worryingly similar and offering each other support and we refuse to continue being blamed and shamed.

### **9. Lesley Robert**

Our family is in crisis, the system is broken, and we need our story to be heard. We're calling for systematic change in the way children and families are supported through the adoption process and beyond.

Two years ago, our family were the faces of a National Campaign to encourage people to adopt a group of two or more siblings. We visited Downing Street, had a short film on BBC iPlayer, were in the Guardian and were interviewed on two local radios - a campaign we fully supported, that had our hearts. But today our family's reality (along with hundreds of other families), is one that's facing Adoption Breakdown.

We desperately don't want this, but we are caught in an impossible situation within a broken system that offers very little real support. We have been consistently failed by Social Care, Children's Services and the LA, with departments that don't communicate and hold separate budgets. No meetings are held to discuss the overarching needs of the child, to pool departmental resources or knowledge, or provide assessments.

We have three adopted siblings. Whilst all our children have ongoing trauma. it's our eldest who is suffering the most. Undiagnosed as he's still on a never ending CAHMS waiting list.

Very few UK primary school staff are trained to help children with trauma, so unfortunately many adopted children end up in schools which not only fail to meet their needs but exacerbate their trauma. Our LA recognised there was no setting appropriate for our eldest child at Primary and so provided a budget to learn in a

way that more suited them. We were left to unpick a mess after 4 years of schooling but then after three years of home education he was able to thrive.

All this changed when at secondary school admission age the LA advised that funding for learning at home would no longer be an option. Was the trauma repaired? Absolutely not. Had circumstances changed, other than they were coming up to Secondary age? No. Were they no longer thriving and progressing in the bespoke environment that we had created for them, were there questions around what we were doing? Not at all. Our child was thriving, but this world was about to be shattered with yet another change, another bureaucratic decision made by one team within the LA.

The school we found was for vulnerable, neuro diverse children with behavioural challenges who couldn't cope in a mainstream setting, some of whom were known to Social Services. Getting into this school was a whole other challenge. Our child re-entered the system, but the two siblings were now at home being educated - a sense of continuous abandonment, unfairness and shame was most certainly felt. Alongside our eldest starting this specialist setting in the September of 2021, the decision was also made by Post Adoption (but naively agreed by us) that our eldest should have Life Story work. This work was to be conducted by our Post Adoption Support worker, but it meant that funding previously used for therapy at the well renowned Beacon House was now to be redirected to pay for the Life Story sessions. I'm still unsure why this is even the case - since we were allocated a Post Adoption Support worker anyway who had always previously made regular visits to our family.

Life story work consisted of fortnightly visits to our home, where myself, my partner, our eldest and our Support Worker went through a process whereby ultimately our eldest was given all the details that made up the story of how they went into the care system, and we became a family. Remember at this time, there was no therapy service in place to sit alongside and help them process this scary information at the age of just 11. After the final session they were given a book

that contained all the information they had been given - the neglect they had endured, the physical abuse they had witnessed, and the drug and alcohol misuse and prison sentences of birth parents – all of which was far above the ability of our child to cope with.

The combination of having this information, alongside starting a secondary setting, was clearly too much. The behaviour spiralled. At this point they were going to school still but would come home and disappear for hours at a time. They were only 12 but by now had become physically abusive to us, vaping, stealing, even setting fires. The times that they were at home became increasingly violent and unsafe. We had to call the police on our child multiple times and made regular trips to A&E. They stopped eating, they were self-harming, threatening to hang themselves - they were clearly clinically depressed. We were crying out for help whilst watching our family collapse around us. We were told that our concerns would be escalated to CAHMS – more than 6 months on we have had just an initial assessment by CAHMS. We were asked by Post Adoption and our now allocated emergency Social Worker what help we required, but we were never able to access anything like respite care, nor were we ever told what help was available to help families close to break down. We were just repeatedly pushed from one department to another, with nobody wanting to take ownership for what was happening. We were allocated a mentor from a team called 'Solutions', who met with our child once a week for several weeks and chatted about possible ways to help with the violence and anger. The emergency Social Worker was only supposed to stay with us for around 30 days, but as yet no more permanent Social Worker has been allocated as there are non-available. We were put on a Child in Need Plan but again no resources have been allocated/provided as it seems there is nothing else anybody can do. It has been recognised repeatedly that we record and voice our concerns and that we are

doing all we can from our end.

In September our child refused school. We listened and removed them. For two months we had a grace period, and it was like we had our child back. With that, the contact from various services disappeared- we were no longer high priority- apparently, we were fixed. But two months in and we were back in that sliding devastation. The violence restarted, with them threatening to kill themselves and us, going into great detail about how he'll slit our throats or chop us into tiny pieces. We are trapped in an impossible situation between keeping our younger two children safe and condemning our eldest to a mapped-out life of a residential care home under a Section 20 order, probably followed by time in the prison system or rehab system - take your pick.

We fight constantly for our family to stay together but we have other children to consider. I do believe that if we hadn't adopted, Social Services would have intervened on their behalf because of the level of violence and chaos within our home. We have even discussed selling our home, living separately, and keeping the children separate to allow our eldest to stay out of a care system and enable our younger two children some normality of a childhood. We would do anything for our children if it might work. At the point of Adoption Disruption, the only thing I do know is that with my eldest child going into the care system it will allow my younger children to experience a life without violence, it will stop them from being scared on a daily basis and will minimise the secondary trauma they are now experiencing.

We have the love, we are trauma informed, we have the means to home educate in a very bespoke way, we have the ability to facilitate any way of learning and experiences that will enable our children to flourish but we are crying out for more help and support. Our eldest child needs psychological assessments and 1-1 support, we all need some respite.

It is shocking, we are in crisis and there have been no actual quantified attempts between any department to work together, no ability to 'think outside the box' to enable our family to stay together. Nothing to prevent a child's life from being further unequivocally damaged.

I have read countless stories over the last six months of adoption breakdowns. I see that once a placement breaks down the funding is available via a different department for a full-time carer, psych and medical appointments, relevant assessments to establish any underlining concerns, counselling 4 times a week, specific educational requirements and so on, so why is this not accessible to us now?

I also read how negative these environments are. How vulnerable children together will create additional problems, how things like smoking and drugs are prevalent, how they have left a caring loving home with people that love them and are desperately trying to get them help and are now with different support staff who work shifts and don't really know their needs but have a job to do. If only just some of those things could be put in place now to prevent us from losing our child. To enable then to have a chance in life. To prevent the younger two siblings from losing their sibling. To enable the five of us to be safe within our home but stay together. To prevent the future of our family from being destroyed. To stop them from becoming another statistic in a broken system. One that spends millions on a campaign to encourage people to adopt sibling groups but nothing to maintain those families and keep them together.

## **10. Alice Lea**

For the want of appropriate, timely and professional support (that wasn't a post adoption social worker coming round to craft or bake for an hour!!) our family broke down. We were left to flounder for months after saying we were

desperately in need of more help as a result of violent and coercive behaviour (Child on Parent Violence) from our child - they were already aware of the situation. It took five months for a post adoption social worker to contact us after a half hour meeting and a further year for support to be forthcoming. By then it was already too late, our child would not engage, and a desperate situation was made even worse. It has had an appalling outcome for our child and an appalling outcome for the rest of the family.

For the want of appropriate and timely support when we asked for respite, because we were so desperate, our child is now accommodated under Section 20 and is no longer in the family home. Not to mention that is costing the taxpayer an absolute fortune! For a fraction of the cost, appropriate professional help may have saved our family. Our child has now had numerous placements as foster carers, social workers and placement staff have not been able to cope with them and their behaviours. I feel our child has been let down by people we were told were there to help when we started the adoption process.

The trauma caused by the impact of our oldest adopted child's violence has had a hugely detrimental impact on our youngest adopted child, who not only witnessed it themselves on an almost daily basis but was also subjected to it from time to time. The constant police visits and ongoing threats of violence and the coercion have also had an impact.

The secondary trauma caused, not only by our adopted child's violence but also by the treatment of us by Social Services has had a huge impact on our mental health. We have been made to feel that we are inadequate and have been treated as if we were the people from whom our children had originally been removed because they were unsafe, rather than the people who were judged by Social Services to be marvellous enough to be able to adopt them and parent them therapeutically and had done so for 11 years.

We have been gaslighted, patronised, condescended to and lied to & about. The amount of lying and back covering for inadequate and often unprofessional work from Social Services is horrifyingly widespread. Complaints elicit non-committal responses and further lies and thus we lose the will to stand up for ourselves.

## **11. Sally Miller**

### **Our experience!**

We adopted 2 children, although they are not biologically related. She always had attachment disorders due to early life trauma (a pull/push strategy) and challenging behaviours, we attended Theraplay, therapeutic life story work and she'd recently started EMDR, we also attended many parenting sessions over the years under the ASF. We both attended our own adoption-based therapy and an NVR course.

Our child was the birth child of a drug addict removed at birth; we had no idea of what was to come.

AS was finally diagnosed with full FASD and secondary ADHD after a traumatic few years when we could not understand his behaviours, and school was impossible for him. The Consultant said drug addiction and alcohol addiction go hand in hand - this had never been mentioned by the LA or in the adoption process. AS was out of full-time education for 2 years due to delays and no SEND school placement. A deeply traumatic time for all, as caring for his extreme needs was challenging. Due to an understanding of his condition and doing all we can, he is much more settled now but still needs a careful and strict routine to keep him feeling safe and well.

Our other child's behaviours of lying, disruption in the home, attention seeking however she could, often in dangerous ways, ignoring of basic safety rules, sabotage and manipulation and control grew as her brother needed so much attention simply to be safe. Being called to primary school to discuss elaborate

lies and behaviours was distressing, we were referred to MASH several times, but nothing came of it.

We soon had Covid to cope with, and I was going through early Menopause. (I started taking anti-depressants to help with my anxiety trying to survive around both children and mentioned in my GP records it was AD's behaviour starting in 2015). Home was a war zone most of the time, even when 'calm', it was a military plan to keep them apart or engaging positively for the short time we were able. Every trip/event/plan we made was ruined, stressful, and traumatic due to both children's high needs - EVERY time.

My partner and I often lived apart with one child each just to survive. If we had a holiday one would go, we'd stay together for a couple of nights, then the other would stay the rest of the week. We could not coexist without damage and trauma to us all emotionally and sometimes physically with fighting between the children. My partner has a job where he must work away 1-2 nights a week and this has always left both children to me when they both needed 1:1 support, AS ideally needs 2:1 due to his disability and needs. He has 1:1 at his SEND school.

We felt AD potentially had borderline personality disorder due to her ability to switch from reasonable to something completely different, just like that. It was all put down to attachment. She has since been diagnosed with ADHD.

Summer holidays 2019 were too much, trying to cope. We asked SS for help, and we were put under CIN. Nothing came of this, and we were left.

We fought the LA and managed to get AS respite via the CDT team, this was only because the Local Ombudsman took our case and took nearly a year, this in itself was a very traumatic experience.

Summer holidays 2020 were again too much, we asked for help and were put under CIN, (Child In Need). A new young social worker with no adoption experience took our case. Due to what AD was saying (a lot fabricated and embellished) we were escalated to S47 and CP (Child Protection), from Nov 21-March 22. Don't get me wrong, we were in a traumatic place for all of us, unable to co-exist, but again nothing came of this, no respite for AD, just time-consuming meetings going round in circles. AD stayed with family when partner was away for work, I feel this made her resentment of her brother even more. He could not stay with them as they cannot manage his needs.

During 2022 we tried all we could, we were left with nothing, nothing changed, no support. We asked the LA to consider weekly boarding school for AD so we could recharge in the week and parent 1:1 each child at the weekends. I sent over a cost comparison of this, it would cost less than AD going into foster care. Social workers came and went, some just disappeared, none were effective in their role. It was often 'I'll ask my manager' and we never heard anything again.

May 2022 our child engaged in sexualised touching and made threats to kill our other child.

We put ring cameras in the home and kept the children apart unless we could focus 1:2 on them which is impossible 24/7. Our child had a history of roaming the house at night trying to find gaming options to connect with anyone she could, which led to unhealthy situations.

Summer holidays 2022 were very traumatic. We had an option to go away to a friend's new holiday home but could not take our child for many reasons. One was the clashing and trauma/drama always caused when she is around. Also, two of the families have jobs in teaching and law, so could not risk being around a child who was a known fabricator. Also, one of the other children knew our child and did not want to go if she was going.

That week showed us how traumatic and stressful every minute of our lives is as that stress wasn't there. Our other child was able to play, engage and have fun with other children as despite his huge disability he does not have the attachment disorders/traits of his sibling. You could say we are not entitled to relax; we chose to adopt these 2 children; my answer is no-one can function 24/7 for years of stress and every human being deserves a break. AD went to stay with a family member and had a good week with treats planned every day. Although we acknowledge this was far from ideal, this was after years of coping, and it was one week.

When we returned behaviours increased hugely and our child, now the same height, was squaring up to me. Sometimes she simply had to go for a walk, sit in her room, do something for us to calm AS if he was having a meltdown, often triggered by her, and she refused. Together with teen hormones and moods, at the end of August her back chatting and disrespect whilst we tried to do all we could and give her all we can made me snap. Nothing was good enough for her. I was at the point of an emotional breakdown. As she's matured, she gaslights me, my fragile coping mechanisms gave up. I was panicking just being around her.

My partner lived separately with her for a few weeks, and we sought solicitors' advice, informing the LA we wanted Section 20. Living apart was hard, and my partner was going downhill trying to cope with AD alone. It was a distressing situation for all. We discussed splitting up and living with one child each. But we don't want to live apart, we're a team, a marriage, a couple, albeit a fractured one with no time together, even when there is time it's temporary and we're bracing ourselves for our 'normal'.

The LA kept saying there were no placements and our solicitor recommended we leave our child at school, so they had to place her. We said we'd do this, but the social worker said keep her at home, prepare her and wait for our call. It didn't happen. We waited two days and left her at school. This was THE most traumatic day of our lives, sickening, stressful, devastating.

She was finally moved well after school ended to a placement 40 minutes away in a family home, a taxi was provided to and from school. The cost of this placement and the taxi/chaperone far exceeds our suggestion of a private boarding school locally.

Fast forward four months in a foster placement where she was given very little care, no nurture and far too much freedom for a vulnerable child (expected to get trains alone at night, no lifts, no TLC, mocking and bullying), she refused to go back one night. She said she would run away, self-harm and try to kill herself. The foster carer resented any contact with us and actively dismissed us and belittled us to our child. This is where we are now. Hoping for another foster placement - a decent one this time.

All adoption support surrounding this has been dropped for AD and us, now that she is not in her family home. No adoption support social worker, no ASF. This needs to change. If she was still living at home, she'd have access to trauma therapy until she was 21! Now she has nothing.

**What needs to change is:**

Listening to adoptive parents. Active positive respite opportunities offered easily, or at least some consideration to solutions offered like ours of private weekly boarding. This would have been so much less damaging for our child. We were told normal social services couldn't help as this was the education budget. What is right for the child should come first not budget crossovers. Everything; SEN, disability, trauma, stress, mental health, all these things need care and there is nothing offered.

Funding for professionals seems to be at management level with not enough 'on the ground' where it is needed. All social workers are too busy, too stretched.

Treatment and care for the adoptive parents should be different to birth parents who have had their child removed. Requesting your child be accommodated is devastating and an absolute last resort, these children have already experienced severe trauma, they are not the same, they need extra care and understanding not just random social workers with no understanding making life changing decisions.

### **12. Jean Smith**

My experience has been horrific. Accused of all sorts by professionals with no understanding of attachment issues. The result is a family torn apart, a child back in care and a broken parent. And still, they don't listen as I try to hang on keeping a relationship with my child. The lack of knowledge has been awful, the lack of capacity for professionals to engage and keen about trauma and attachment has been shocking.

What would make it better? In my opinion more trauma-based training, awareness for professionals and for the family, the support that was promised at the very start, that never came.

### **13. Florence Walker**

I am immensely angry and frustrated. Even this afternoon something happened, and I tried to speak to the children's home manager and again, I am ignored, treated like I am some annoying busybody with snotty bits of kids who have no training, trying to give me half-hearted feedback on my child.

I asked Social Services for help back in April 2021. All they did for the next five months was send endless people to my home to ask the same questions and give unhelpful comments back. No actual help, no real support but more pressure to "get on with it".

By Nov 2021, I was on my knees. My child had always been aggressive, challenging, rejecting, argumentative and non-conforming in every sense of the word and after over five years of it, it was just too much.

From the second I served them with a Section 20, they focused all their efforts on writing reports telling me all the things I did and do wrong. Still no support, no therapy, no understanding, no compassion. All my efforts went into fighting all their claims and comments. Finally, ten months later, they took me to court for a Care Order. The judge awarded it on the basis that my child should not have been adopted. Especially not to a single parent.

My child is in his second children's home. Neither have any structure, strong leadership, or real hard-core knowledge of adoption. No understanding of needs not being met. Whilst he has lived there, they have failed him catastrophically. He has gained three stone, school attendance has gone from 99% to 40%, and they think they are doing a good job! It's all a joke. No one takes accountability when they don't action what they say they will. Every meeting is like Groundhog Day, same promises, same actions not delivered. It's all just brushed off.

My child runs rings around them at the home. I would be embarrassed to admit I work there if I were any of them. We have just had sign off for DDP but the dates for this to get going are weeks away and it's taken two years to get here. I have very little hope that it will have any positive impact.

I am so full of anger I could explode. I am on my third lot of counselling, but it doesn't take away my utter heartbreak that we ended like this. Our relationship is non-existent as once again, he has decided he "can't be arsed" talking to me. It's a tragic situation, a tragic life and it's not going to change any time soon.

#### **14. Joanne Coleman**

We have three adopted children. We disrupted with the oldest nearly three years ago and have a good relationship with our other children.

The eldest was delayed from the start, the foster placement he was in wasn't great and he spent most of his time in a baby walker.

By the age of four years old, we realised there were issues, he had speech therapy and occupational therapy (self-funded) and was not reaching many of his milestones.

By the age of seven years old, we had started seeking support from the after-adoption support group, initially attending group support meetings and then asking for more individual support.

We tried to access support from – Post Adoption, CAMHS and other agencies. It was like watching a slow-motion train crash and he would end up in prison. The professional laughed and when I said it wasn't funny, she said she wasn't laughing because it was funny, she was laughing because it was true.

By the time he reached being a teen we were in big trouble, we could not deal with his behaviours in the family home, he was verbally abusive to me and physically abusive to my partner, we were walking on eggshells and the impact on the other two children was starting to take its toll. Then came the false allegations.

Social Care offered courses for us to attend, but this was the beginning of the end.... If the situation escalated, we were advised to leave the house (with teen left in it) until all calmed down. More than once the whole family would be sat in a car away from the house waiting until we felt safe enough to go home. Over the next 12 months we had over 10 police visits. We could not do anything to defend ourselves due to walking on eggshells due to false allegations, although we were guilty of nothing. We were by now on the merry go round of School / Social Care / Therapist and Police. Finally, after he assaulted one of us we refused to have him home. We had been begging anyone who would listen for respite/help but felt no

one, except one after adoption support worker who really tried to help, understood the situation and it felt like they were all trying to pass the problem on.

Fast forward three years, the now adult has had multiple moves, each move has ended in 'disaster'. I have had two years of therapy (self-funded) to come to terms with what has happened.

The overwhelming feeling I have is sadness, sad that it had come to this, sad that he had to leave his home in a police van in handcuffs and sad that we have been unable to help the gorgeous little boy who came to live with us.

I think we were the first generation of adopters who were taking children from traumatic backgrounds with little or no knowledge of the consequences. The support from a group on Facebook has been so helpful to me as it made me fully realise it was not just us this was happening to.

I think the system is broken; had we been offered relevant support when we first started asking for help maybe this awful ending could have been avoided.

It seems to me that any intervention we received was aimed at us as parents, our parenting skills/techniques put under scrutiny. During the parenting courses we were more than happy to attend, we started questioning our own sanity, how could we be doing things so wrong, when two out of our three children were fine? So.....what would have helped?

**Therapy** - initially for our oldest, but perhaps some group family therapy as time went on so he could start to see the impact of his behaviours on me, my partner and his brother and sister.

**Respite** - we relied so heavily on our extended family to have our oldest overnight just so we could do 'normal' family things. I think had we been able to have guilt free, regular respite we would have all benefitted.

**Support** - instead of finger pointing, watching their own backs and passing us from one agency to another, we needed someone who understood and was willing to fight our corner to try and get the best support and outcome for the child and our family.

### **15. June Brown**

We disrupted at only 10 months in. Shortly after we took our child home, we realised the child had Oppositional Defiance disorder and extreme control issues. Neither of which we had been warned about. It became obvious information had been withheld. I asked our Social Worker to help with this time and again, but nothing was done to support us. We worked through these issues ourselves and were told we had it 'easy'. This made us question ourselves and feel belittled about seeking help. Despite this, we had made lots of progress, he thrived, putting on weight, eating healthy, drawing and writing. But, as he began to feel safe, evidence of trauma started to manifest. His already difficult behaviour became impossible. He began shouting and screaming at us all day, every day, he was dysregulated and aggressive and manipulative and cruel, clear attachment disorders. He was worse with women, trying to physically intimidate and bully, and he had no empathy for any of it. Once he started school, he became very physically aggressive to little girls first, then boys, then us. By this time, we had been begging our Social Worker for help for over six months. The one family counsellor we got to talk to told us to "grow up and be the parents". Not very practical advice, very emotionally damaging.

Our Social Worker kept telling us the same thing, "This is normal. He is testing that you love him and won't send him away. Stick it out and it will get better". We knew psychological support was needed, we asked for it over and over. These problems do not magically disappear. We could not cope once things became physically aggressive. We had no training or experience or help in coping, and we were genuinely worried he would hurt himself while engaging in these behaviours.

We disrupted but made it very clear we wanted to support him however we could. We were told we would have phone contact with him to help him settle, and so he knew we still loved him and were there for him. However, once he left

our house, we were never allowed to talk to him again. I understand our Social Worker may have been disappointed in us, but that did not help him. It taught him to further distrust adults and will worsen his attachment disorders. And it traumatised us, we are human too. We loved that little boy, and desperately wanted to help him. I lived in a horror of panic and fear for him. How was he coping, how was he feeling, how could I trust these people to look after him, and I had no way to gain peace as we were clearly cut off.

Additionally, his Social Worker never sat down and asked us what happened that we could no longer cope. They have no idea what behaviours were shown those last few weeks, and there has been no disruption meeting. They have no clue who this child is or what his needs are. We do. They then replaced his Social Worker with someone new who has never spoken to us. So, he doesn't know our child either, our child puts on an excellent show for strangers.

[How can they do what's best for a child they know nothing about?](#)

My partner and I were destroyed by this experience. The moral injury of realising how vulnerable these children are because of the ignorance of those who are supposed to care for them, has shaken me. Social Workers are not mental health professionals, and they are destroying children and those who wish to love them, by pretending to be.

We are both in counselling for stress, grief, trauma, anxiety and depression. I am suffering PTSD from what this has put us through.

But the poor kid is not getting the support he needs. Instead, they have created a situation of plausible deniability of his issues, so they can send him back out for adoption without a true picture of who he is and what his needs are. It will go wrong again, in time. He will suffer again, and more people like us will suffer too.

## **16. [Annie Murdoch](#)**

We disrupted early on so our experience may be a little different from those who lived through their traumatic experiences over years.

Our experience could be summed up by omitted information, rose tinted opinions and it being everyone's first case. We were matched to a sibling pair. The younger child settled well and was thriving. The older child was not prepared for the adoption and struggled greatly. Both children were removed despite sibling violence against the younger child.

From our experience: Child's reports and profiles were moulded to suit our placement. It very much felt like the Social Worker had ulterior motives, looking to get children off their case load as everything was rushed after matching, needs of the Social Worker superseded the needs of children or us as a family. There is a lack of support to deal with omitted information. For us, the needs of the child were out of parental control from the outset, but CAHMS and our Social Worker felt it was not the right time for intervention. These decisions were made by people who had not met the child. We were left in the dark a lot during adoption. Meetings were held and decisions made for us without our knowledge, behind your back. We have been left feeling frustration and anger because of it. We feel like collateral damage, everyone goes back to their lives, onto the next case and we are left to piece ourselves back together.

Most of our initial fears pre-placement were reassured by the amount of support offered, but in reality, there is no support available.

**What needs to be done?**

- \* Listen to the parents of adoptive children. They know their child, their situation.
- \* Quantitative assessments
- \* Experience matrix for Social Worker support, so due to large staff turnover everyone on your case is experienced and not "first case".

## **17. Clare Kirkwood**

We feel there is so little understanding of willingness to acknowledge how bad our home life really was by social services because they're already drowning in cases through lack of staff & funding. Constantly being told our situation didn't meet the threshold for receiving support, despite our son being groomed, gaslighted & told he wasn't. He was arrested several times & put into police custody, involved in gangs, frequently staying out for days on end with no communication. All of this was ignored & the only support we got was fortnightly home visits from family support officer that suggested parenting classes for us!

Our voices & concerns were ignored. We were frightened for our son, no petrified, but we were ignored. Our home life was hell & we received no support despite begging anyone & everyone we could think of. He's now in supported living, receiving the support he needs. We are left to cope on our own, no support provided for us, no one even checking to see if we're ok, apart from 1 kind police officer who informed us our son had stolen & crashed my car.

Parents need to be listened to. Respite needs to be available when families are in crisis & when families do break down the parents need support to, not condemnation & false allegations. They also need legal support provided free of charge.

I've been thinking; teacher training should include trauma training & an awareness of the needs of LAC & adopted children. Schools should be held accountable as to what they spend the PP+ money on, explain how they're supporting our kids & not just put it in the pot. Virtual schools should be more involved & make schools support our kids, thus avoiding the revolving door of exclusions & lack of support that creates absolute havoc in our homes. When disruption does occur, there should be support for the parents too.

What is needed? Teacher training should include trauma training & an awareness of the needs of LAC & adopted children. Schools should be held accountable as to what they spend the PP+ money on, explain how they're supporting our kids & not

just put it in the pot. Virtual schools should be more involved & make schools support our kids, thus avoiding the revolving door of exclusions & lack of support that creates absolute havoc in our homes. When disruption does occur, there should be support for the parents too.

### **18. Karen Hunt**

Our children are referred to as 'placements' by social work and to me, it's really felt like it was a case of getting these placements in a permanent home rather than being a more thorough assessment of the child's true needs and a potential family's ability.

We were definitely told the bare minimum in terms of negative behaviours at the outset as had we known the full story, we'd unlikely have agreed to the match.

I think instead of putting children into adoptive homes and only the most basic support given at the start and being told all the worrying behaviours are normal, countless children are hugely traumatised by their early childhood experiences and should have access to intense psychological support to try and help repair the damage as early on as possible.

Instead, that support isn't there at all in Scotland with no adoption support fund so what started out as strong and supportive adoptive families, become broken over the years of trying to parent an incredibly angry and traumatised child.

Where the worst outcome in adoption disruption, the cost which then follows for a fulltime care home place, social work time, police time, school time, full time PSA assigned, therapy sessions that fall apart as our daughter will only engage if she can tell them her version of events for anything. The costs now I dread to think but the saddest of all is feeling that the system failed our child and countless others.

I believe that early intervention to whatever level each child needs it, is critical and could avoid many of the breakdowns and then further trauma involved for our children and for the whole family.

I think all children who have been removed from birth homes have suffered varying degrees of trauma and we shouldn't just be hoping that'll disappear for them in time, as often it's the very opposite happens. It manifests itself until things are out of control and parents can no longer cope.

We need help getting better outcomes for adoptive children and their families.

### **19. Mel Jones**

We adopted our two children 12 years ago.

Our only parenting advice at that time was have strong boundaries, only to now be told that therapeutic parenting is the way forward.

We have had horrendous issues with violence, stealing, safeguarding issues over last five years, have repeatedly asked for any respite but told this doesn't exist.

We have been through continuous change if support workers, early help workers, child in edge of care workers, post adoption support, therapists, therapeutic parenting courses. We found the ever changing round if different workers, social workers who went on long term sick and change really detrimental.

We have been threatened with section 47 for abandonment which was never put in writing and told by social workers that they are only there for children, never parents.

Our local authority refused to acknowledge or interact with our solicitor.

We had to contact our MP and were only listened to when we continued to copy our head of children's services in our emails.

We have told our Social Worker we are at crisis point, our marriage and mental health are in danger and still left for months with no support.

We were continuously refused a Section 20, we were told it didn't apply to us.

Police have been called many times to our home. The violence towards us became so bad that our adopted son at 16 was put into independent living and within three days of moving persuaded to sign a section 20 without his parents' knowledge or involvement.

Our family is broken, and we have been massively let down by so called "support".

## **20. Nikki Smith**

We adopted a three-and-a-half-year-old who we fell in love with instantly. I took 18 months off work to settle him in but in that time, we knew we required more of a support group so moved near my family. He always displayed aggression to peers and pets. He started stealing and we asked for help. No assessment was done as we moved but Social Services said it was due to the move even though he had displayed these behaviours previously. I have recently found they wrote a massive report even without coming to see us. He has continued with aggressive behaviour, stealing and lying and at 14 he committed a very serious sexual assault on a three-year-old neighbour. We asked for him to be assessed as we were worried about re-offending. We had put in a safety plan and so did school. Social Services said it was great. We asked for respite as all our world's had changed. I sorted out charities and advice without any help from Social Services. After basically us locking him down for 7 months and us informing Social Services we couldn't cope, we asked for a Section 20 then we were told a CPC was needed and we are emotionally abusing him due to the strict safety plan. Still no assessment but the youth justice team said he was a high risk of re-offending. I've offered to pay for counselling but have been told it has to come through Social Services. Now we have been given a deadline. If we had received support and just a little respite it would never have come to this. He recently threatened me with a pool cue. I've found him with my underwear and Social Services basically said we are lying. We feel bullied and emotionally blackmailed. We are constantly ill due to chronic stress. All reports are fabricated yet when we argue the point that they have lied, they don't change them. I hope this is enough but after 11 years we are broken as a family.

## **21. Jess Jones**

### **Thoughts**

We started this process wanting to complete our family. We weren't told that in the fifteen years our daughter lived with us our family would be tested to its limits by the trauma and challenges faced by our daughter. If we'd entered the process knowing the challenges and being offered support such as respite, that parents with children with more obvious and visible disabilities get, we might have done better. But, for most of the time our daughter was with us we were fighting to have her needs recognised and our support needs met.

Before she was diagnosed with multiple conditions the focus from professionals was on attachment. Our parenting was scrutinised and told if only we could parent more therapeutically or on other occasions, we were told we just need to have better boundaries, all would be ok. We wasted more energy going on training and talking to therapists, when we would later discover she has organic brain damage and neurodiversity.

The endless appointments and retelling our story with very few people understanding the complexities were exhausting. It destroyed our confidence and our sense of self and on many occasions we felt hopeless and on our knees.

Throughout this journey we managed child-to-parent violence and abuse and learnt skills and techniques and joined online communities to cope. Mostly we coped and we thought we would somehow get through the remaining teen years until she could have some kind of independence. However, in mid-teens we all felt our lives were at risk, pets included. We lived daily with threats and actual harm and every potential weapon locked away. The police took our concerns more seriously and showed more empathy than most other professionals, although surprisingly a couple of CAMHS practitioners also supported us well.

After much searching and more battling. our daughter is now being cared for elsewhere. It's not the outcome any of us hoped for and if we'd been believed, supported and offered the right kind of help in the early days we might not be here.

It's destroyed our faith in adoption, we see very few happy stories around us. I was also a social worker but still had no understanding of the challenges faced in adoption. There needs to be more honesty, more shared care arrangements for these complex children who often do not suit typical family life.

## **22. Sarah Green**

You're hopeful, you're "trained". You are sold a dream.

You are told there will be a "support package to reflect needs".

You quickly realise these are just words on a piece of paper.

The dream slowly becomes a nightmare.

It's normal. It will take time. Things will settle down. Try this therapy, try that one.

It is not normal. If an adult was displaying those behaviours, they'd be sectioned. The child is crying out for help and there is none.

You're not trying hard enough.

You're not therapeutic enough.

The social workers get replaced and go off sick, the therapists leave, or the funding runs out.

Nothing is helping.

Your life is falling apart.

Your marriage is failing.

Your other children are being traumatised.

You are told it's YOUR FAULT.

You try and you try, and you try but it is never enough.

Days become months and then years go by.

Everyone is suffering.

You decide you can't do it anymore.

You must get a solicitor.

You're blamed even more. Have an assessment. Have respite once a month.

It's too little too late.

Like sticking a plaster on a gaping wound.

They threaten to take your other children. They say you're not engaging. They write down everything you say. They lie.

You must split your family apart to get the help one child needs.

Love is not enough.

Things can improve. But you're taken to hell and back first.

The children are thriving.

But not together. Not with you.

The dream that never was.

### **23. Matt Walker**

Our son was adopted, aged three years old. With his sister, aged one, he settled in quickly. Our children had been removed from their biological family owing to concerns of their safety due to neglect, the children had subsequently been placed with two foster parents before arriving with us.

Our son prospered academically, overcoming some early speech problems, and was settled socially. However, he would sometimes have temper tantrums that displayed themselves as meltdowns, resulting in violent and destructive episodes which could last up to three hours. He would then become exhausted, fall asleep and show remorse. His affection on reflection may have been contrived.

As he matured his violence would become unmanageable and in early 2020 the parents approached the social services for support with his challenging behaviour. The response was “you do not really want us to become involved, we may deem the adoption as breaking down and remove him from your care, go to CAHMS”. This, as parents, was clearly distressing, CAHMS in a recent BBC report has a waiting time of more than 1000 days.

We made appointments with our sons GP and he was placed on the waiting list for CAHMS. We also approached his school who offered counselling. It was agreed that there were behaviours that may have resulted from early life trauma and that “need, want and I don’t want to” were triggers to his tantrums.

The Covid pandemic resulted in no contact from the councillors and the supports were never followed up. However, the father was a primary school teacher in a previous career and structures were put in place and our son was calm and happy during Lockdown, with daily structures from 9.30am until 5pm resulting in very few tantrums, he was much more settled.

At 11 years old our son was placed in a private school. The biological mother was still living within local authority, and she was one of 10 siblings with an extensive family across the local authority. The private school was an option to remove the children from the local authority education system because the adoptive family could not move owing to care of elderly parents.

In October 2021 our son was displaying difficulties at school and getting into trouble almost daily. He has become fidgety, distracted, distracting others, and struggling with English language-based subjects. In June 2022 the school and the parents identified that there may be characteristics of ADHD, and this was

investigated through a private consultation. This initial consultation recommended that there should be full investigation for ASD, ADD and possibly ODD.

Our son ran away in July 2022 for a period of three days as a result of being blamed for anti-social behaviour in the local areas, which was not true but he was with new friends he met at the beginning of the summer holidays. This was a week after a holiday abroad where he was settled but distant. Within 48 hours he had made new friends. The only way I can describe the impact on returning from the runaway period was a complete change of personality. He walked differently, had adopted a new accent, different clothing, posture and was very angry – before this he had tantrums but was a lovely well-presented and politely spoken young person.

Quickly this escalated into violence, destruction and terrorising my wife, daughter and me. He would smash our home, vehicles, doors, walls and my wife daughter and I were sleeping in a dead-bolted bedroom with a fire ladder as he had taken to fire raising.

Social Workers described the result of his change in behaviour as over-bearing parenting to normal teenage behaviours. They would not believe that his personality had changed. They ignored our requests for urgent psychiatric supports. One report to the Children's Panel suggested we made our son sleep in a tent in the garden, despite them telling us that this was his request. He refused to enter the home and insisted on being accommodated in a children's home. "I will have no rules, no-one will tell me what to do" – these were all views promoted by the social workers who are "his voice", a distorted adaptation of The Promise (a Scottish document).

One night when our son was smashing the house up and causing mayhem a social worker attempted to get us, as parents, to sign an "Abandonment Agreement". Under no circumstances were we abandoning him, he needed to be in a place of safety for himself, his family and the wider community with access to immediate psychiatric supports.

He was accommodated in 2022 under a Section 25. Once accommodated he made an allegation of assault by me, his father. I had made the social workers aware in writing of three incidents which took place which involve me restraining my son, in one instance he was trying to stab me. But this resulted in a six-week investigation by the child protection team of Police, to which they agreed the allegations were unfounded. During this time the parents were not informed of the nature of the allegations (disclosure).

There was very little to encourage family rehabilitation and the social workers continued to insist that some of his behaviours were typical. Over a period of months, he had accumulated between 60 and 120 police pending or actual charges: Fire raising, vandalism, assaults, theft, drug and alcohol abuse as well as moving drugs around for dealers. Meanwhile, the social workers had stated in reports that we had recruited the community to spy on our son and monitor social media, where he was posting his antics.

Despite writing to the first minister, the Chief Constable for Scotland and every politician and councillor we were getting no-where. We called every day to the children's home. He was running feral in the community, terrorising the community.

In November 2022, the Children's Panel hearing date was set and paperwork was submitted to the Children's Panel. This paperwork from the social workers included our children's biological mother's name. He contacted her soon after.

After this the relationship was encouraged but not managed between our son and biological mother. After a temper tantrum in the Children's home, social services permitted a sleep over with the biological mother. Despite our pleas that this was not appropriate, she now had a 7-year-old autistic son, social services moved forward with an un-coordinated plan. By January our son was absconding from the children's home, living in derelict flats. After a particularly violent episode when he did return to the children's home (assaults, arson, vandalism, and attempted theft of the safe) he was placed with the biological mother – she was not informed of his behaviours.

Earlier this year our son was placed in a secure unit and will remain there for a period of 3-4 months. He has access to psychiatric assessments and ongoing work but with the biological mother divulging biological fathers' full details. Our family is again at risk, one of the father's is very violent and lives close to our home.

We are now in regular communication with our son, and he is much more settled. His initial diagnosis suggests ADHD and ASD. But also, attachment disorder and FASD will be investigated, all issues I had raised in July 2022. Meanwhile the toxic relationship with his biological mother is still being promoted.

Our son has been set up to fail since birth, removal from a biological mother by a local authority who were not interested in his ongoing wellbeing or needs. And then when the adoptive parents request support, they threaten, blame, and lie about circumstances and facilitate allegations of assaults and abuse that are not true. This system does not work, it is broken as are the children the system abandons.

#### **24. Sarah Shamus**

Very briefly, our experience of adoption had its ups and mostly downs. We didn't expect, nor were we ready for the traumatic experiences all of us were about to go through or the lack of support that was available to us. Even the support we were provided was, overall pointless and of no help whatsoever.

We weren't properly warned about our AD's, then a month off her seventh birthday, trauma and how this was affecting her behaviour badly. Looking back it's clear we had no chance from day one but we fought through the toughest of times and she stayed with us for six years before we could take no more. Not once were we offered respite, despite our loud cries for help and a break.

Behaviours included: violence, going missing episodes, damage to property, injuries to our dogs, inappropriate sexual behaviour from an early age (we weren't ready or prepared for that!) A total disrespect of rules and boundaries, she couldn't

take responsibility for anything, self-harming.. etc.. etc, the list goes on. Too much to mention in a few paragraphs.

Dealing with this 24hrs a day meant our friends and family distanced themselves, my job became impossible to keep due to the time off and the need to go home at short notice for example, my partner rung me screaming one day that AD had knife pointed at her, so I had to shoot home to deal with this.

The threats from AD were astonishing at such a young age. She became impossible to manage. We needed help, but there wasn't any help to be offered. Some of the social workers wanted to help but didn't know how to or were unable to.

When we finally disrupted and told them she wasn't coming home, the system completely turned on us. After all the trauma we had been through and continued to go through, they then made it worse by trying to blame us as parents for what was happening. Showed their lack of understanding for adopted children from traumatic backgrounds. The Social Workers and the "System" made our trauma 100 times worse and is something we will not ever forgive or forget.

We tried to stay in touch with AD but Social Workers made this impossible. A subsequent complaint that took two years to get to stage three!!! Finally agreed we had been treated badly yet nothing changed, no compensation, no new systems and people continue to be treated horrendously for trying to do the right thing. This system MUST change.

It's disgusting that just our Facebook group has over 500 members, all of whom have a very similar story.

I want this to change, social workers to get a proper understanding of adoption and when it goes wrong, what to do.

Social Services must keep, and publish, statistics relating to adoption disruption, so the real picture is made public. Currently this information is not available - that is clearly them hiding the truth about adoption.

It was meant to be the best thing that ever happened to us. Turned out to be the worst decision we ever made.

**It's not OK and it has to stop.**

### **25. Jane & Russell**

We adopted two girls (sisters 7 and 1) seven years ago. As I'm sure you know it was a difficult journey from the start with the lack of help, particularly for the eldest girl. TheraPlay was implemented for her but she didn't always connect with the lady taking the session and that ended anyway after a time. We have had several social workers, but two years ago my wife got cancer and the lack of any sort of help from our eldest daughter at this time finished us off. She stayed in her room on her phone and only appeared for meals...eventually she decided that she wanted to go back into foster care. She is now in foster care in a nearby town and is getting all the help she needs from a social worker, a youth worker, a psychologist and help at her new school. None of this help was given to us with her - she was just put on endless waiting lists and nothing was forthcoming. Finally, a social worker came in January last year who thought he could resolve the situation but after six months he admitted defeat and set the wheels in motion for our daughter to go back into local authority care.

Our biggest bone of contention since she left us last June is that we have been given no information from the Child in Care worker about how she has settled in at her new home or how she's doing at college. She says this is down to our daughter who doesn't wish us to hear anything. However, we have kept pressing for information and a couple of weeks ago the social worker finally checked with her boss about this (she said no information was correct) but the social worker went to the legal department and in fact both her and her manager were wrong!

Now we have been given some information, but this is after nine months of no news.

Our youngest daughter is of course missing her sister, but we are dealing with this reasonably well and she continues to do well at school. Onwards with her!

## **26. Diane Kennedy**

People go into adoption for many reasons but ultimately the outcome they hope for is to give a child a forever home.

However, the sad reality is that disruptions both pre & post adoptions are on the increase. What has become clear with time is that the LA's understanding of a child's early trauma is not fully understood and plans for long term support of the child who is placed for adoption is not taken into consideration. When adopters ask for help for their adopted child, it is all too common for such requests to be rejected/dismissed.

The LA & RAA are disjointed and don't work together & trying to get ASF funding is a lengthy process which in some cases is abused by the LA using funds because they can, rather than because they need to.

Adopters are scape goats for disruptions, yet disruptions are the last resort and only come about when adopters are at the end of their tether (physical & mental well-being seriously impacted & in some cases adult relationships destroyed) as all requests for help from the LA have been ignored.

Children who are placed for adoption have experienced more trauma than most people experience in a lifetime. They need professional help & support throughout their childhood and into adult life to process this, yet adopters are expected to provide this without the necessary knowledge and skill whilst also living in what would be considered a war zone.

The number of disruptions of children in Foster Care is also on the increase. Foster Carers are paid, receive significantly more help & professional support than adopters or guardians, in a timelier manner, yet their names are not dragged through mud when they disrupt like adopters are.

We tried to work with a LA for a year before disrupting, but they chose not to listen when we asked for help. We were blamed both verbally and in writing. Yet it was only when our complaint was investigated by an Independent Social Worker and Investigating Officer that the extent of the failing by the LA came to light with a Social Worker playing “God”, breaching multiple policies and procedures and basically doing whatever they wanted. The evidence we provided was significant which meant the LA’s option for deniability was short lived but there is little evidence that measures have been put in place to prevent such failures happening again which puts other adoption placements at risk.

Local Authorities need to be held accountable. LA staff need to undergo training on what is it like to live with a child with trauma because until you have experienced it, you have no idea! LA need to work with adopters & not just treat them like second class citizens. The ASF also needs to be extended long term & be accessible to those that need it, in a timely manner. “Adopters lives matter”, as without that respect the system will fail the child and families.

## **27. James Mills**

Let down, tormented, heartbroken and drained. This process was something my husband and I trusted to the fullest and cited that trust regularly throughout the process. Throughout our journey we changed from wanting to adopt one child to then siblings because social workers and adopters on training persuaded us, we were capable. I don’t doubt we could have been. What I do doubt is how possible it is to be capable when vital information about children is missed out.

The system has let these children down, let us down and lead to setbacks for us but more importantly these beautiful children. We were not the right family for them, that was clear from the day they moved in with us, but nobody had considered them in this situation which left us to make the most heart wrenching decision to disrupt.

I don’t doubt everyone has the children’s best interests at heart, but we MUST be better and consider every aspect of a proposed move and ensure FULL

transparency of information between adopters and social workers. We owe that to these children who have already suffered so much loss and trauma.

This disruption has not only broken the possibility of the forever home for these children, but taken our relationship to the brink of survival, who knows if it will survive only time will tell.

Right now, we hate ourselves, we aren't fond of each other and don't know where to go next. Please support adopters more, because the alternative is not just adoption disruption but many broken lives that are in a difficult place to repair.

### **28. Sarah Johnson**

AS went into care at 15 after a year of mixing with a traveller family, going missing over 60 times in that year.

Police recommended going into care on a Section 20 to get him out of the area.

After fighting to get it, they removed him locally, saying it was our parenting!!

He returned to the travellers, was seen on the traveller site with a gun.

Finally got him removed after fighting with Social Services, by armed police.

Handed over to our Social Worker who let him out of the car 10 mins later and he returned to the site. This happened three times!! Eventually they asked us if he could live with them! When we complained to her manager, they disputed that they'd ever asked and accused me of lying, even though I told them the date, day and time it happened.

They took him to the centre of London against our wishes. They allowed one of the travellers to go with him, again against our wishes as they said it would help him. We told them that the travellers would know where he was, and they told us to basically butt out! That evening the travellers came and got him!!

When he turned 16 they told him that he could sign himself out of care. We said by doing that, he would go straight to the travellers. They said that he was allowed and of course he went straight there.

On Christmas Eve 2021 we got a letter saying that they no longer were needed and as such they signed him off.

We said that we would wait for a knock at the door from the police saying he was injured, arrested or worse.

That knock at the door came on 22nd January 2022. He and two of the traveller brothers were involved in a fatal car accident. The driver, a young girl died, and our son was seriously injured. He had a head injury, broken back and other injuries.

They visited him in hospital against our wishes to check on him. 🙄

They let him down yet again. He was discharged to our care.

All the time he was with the travellers he was under the missing and exploited team of the police , although Social Services disputed this.

### **29. Caron Pip**

Adopting my boys was the worse decision we ever made. They were the first children we fostered, and we knew the boys were very challenging but loved them and believed we could give them the love and nurture they had lacked, and we would make a difference. Social Services asked us to adopt them after six years of fostering them!!! We were going to carry on fostering long term, we all knew the behaviours of the boys were difficult and they promised we would have support readily available when times got too difficult. Social Services said the boys having the secure permanent base and our names would make them feel they belonged and this was the best thing for them but basically we've had to fight for everything. As soon as the children are "no longer looked after" no one really cares about the well-being of the parents. Just get on with it.

We have been abused constantly for years by these children and all we are ever offered is parenting courses for traumatised children and told to do self-care. We have done every course offered and attended every meeting, but nothing made any difference.

We are traumatised parents now, not only from the children but also from Social Services and how we are let down.

When we are at rock bottom and suffering from compassion fatigue this is just not recognised and needs to be.

Our safety plan is call the police, call out of hours duty (they never call back).

Our child gets arrested and released over and over. The police say Social Services need to sort this and Social Services say call the police.

Why do they not listen?

We haven't damaged these traumatised children. All we have done is try to love them and parent them, but some children are just beyond parental control. They are already too damaged when they are put into the system.

Adopted Parents are not supported or believed, it's not a game. It's our lives and the government need to address this and make changes.

Foster carers are listened to, and they can give notice for children to be removed.

Why is this not the same for Adoptive Parents as the children still have the same trauma, they are the same damaged children.

### **30. Maya and Mason**

Our journey has been doomed to fail. We had fostered to adopt a sibling pair with an age gap of only 11 months. We needed to prove ourselves as worthy adopters. I volunteered in a Nursery and my husband also did some volunteer work. Additionally, we had our niece over. Nothing had prepared us for what was to come!

We were matched with two boys, ca 1.5 and 2.4 years old and for the purpose of naming Mike and Matthew. Just in case they were going to come and live with us we had organised two beds, as it all depended on the outcome of the court case. The transition was five days only. During this period not once did we meet them in their own environment. After five days, on the Friday evening Social Services had packed up and wished us a good weekend! They just left. OK! Suddenly it was four of us. The 'Pot Noodle family' was born.

Thinking of it now. The analogy of Pot Noodle family works well. Not just the 'instantness', but the artifice ingredients no one understands how that meal is formed. The unpredictability.

We had received a handwritten list of routines. We wanted to do the right thing and do everything right!

We could not put a t-shirt on Matthew.

It was not possible to prepare food in front of the boys.

We did not know how to start building loving boundaries. Everything was explosive.

The dynamic between the boys had been unhealthy, which we did not recognise with them being so young. Matthew was always all over Mike – this further developed over the years. Despite trying to manage, help them with their relationship. We had pointed that out quite early on. One Social Worker said “oh let them naturally develop their relationship, their pecking order”. Wise words – I remember these comments to this day!

Everything that had happened later – already happened with small people in a smaller version. We had gone from pillar to post asking for help.

- GP
- Health visitor – advice was reward charts...
- We were filmed interacting with the boys.
- We attended parenting courses.
- Once someone had come out to help, not with parenting advice but to babysit while I had built a cupboard. This was then later labelled as “help, as we were not coping”.
- Our marriage struggled, and we had marriage counselling.

Whatever we did was judged, not being able to be ourselves. For almost 10 years we started walking on eggshells and still are.

Constant unpredictable outbursts of anger as soon as it came to boundaries and the unhealthy sibling relationship festered. No matter what we applied from what we had learnt in the parenting course. It did not work when it came to real life situations. The boys were sharing a room and Matthew was not able to leave Mike alone.

We had decided to move to a more rural area. Matthew was just about to start school and while we did not want him to get unsettled through a move, we wanted him to start school and not having to change once settled into education. We chose a house in the countryside. No high viz jackets, but green trees and cows in the fields -allowing the boys to free play. A good place to build a support network, which we did. We were judged for this move and it went down negatively in our records.

In the meantime, Matthew was diagnosed with sensory integration disorder and dyspraxia. We had some funding for Occupational therapy. The therapist observed Matthew's response on occasions when I placed boundaries and when interacting with Mike. I had an in-depth discussion and she advised this was behaviour related. She/he wanted to support us to get additional support and had reported it to our Social Worker. The intention was to receive support, but instead we were judged, and it was put down to already in crisis due to parenting. Yes, in crisis but not due to parenting.

I was crying with the OT!

We had been encouraged to disrupt by friends and family – but we did not want to. We wanted the boys to have a chance and continued to ask for help.

The boys had direct contact with their great grandparents, this is where they lived before they came to us. Initially it was only supposed to be letter contact, but Matthew missed them and we instigated direct contact 3 x year. One week before an arranged meeting it was really tricky and we had cancelled the contact. Social Workers were finally alerted and received funding for a psychotherapist. We could not choose one, but were assigned one. We did not have a good rapport with her/him but were too afraid to ask for someone else. This continued for several years. Our Social Worker did not once check in with us to see how it worked, whether it was fruitful or not. It was not.

One side of our neighbours in this new world supported us, the other side did not and reported us to Social Services. More judgement and no meaningful help.

The dynamic with the boys was unbearable from the moment they woke up until they fell asleep. Not even when they went to bed because it did not end there. Everything was a

competition. Going up the stairs, toothbrushing, what they looked at, what they touched, what they did, bedtime. Not a day without conflict!! We were exhausted.

The boys got bigger and bigger violence started. In a nutshell:

- I tried to work closely with school, and we were always very transparent.
- Matthew, as he got older, continued to undermine Mike.
- Matthew also compared certain salad crème with certain bodily fluids – we had been more alerted about their relationship.
- At one stage Mike had a dog cuddle and compared it with a kiss from Matthew – high alert.
- I was not able to get Matthew to school on time.
- Doors had to be removed.
- Matthew was not safe by himself and threatened Mike and us and our belongings.
- The house was trashed.
- I have had nose bleeds and bite marks.
- Mike had to have safe houses in our road.
- Matthew mentioned that all in his life was ok until Mike came along.
- Mike and his friends in school set Matthew up to trigger him.
- Mike set up subtle traps in the house.

We felt we were targeted by Social Services, placed on Child Protection for emotional abuse. Judged and emotionally destroyed. Matthew came to an emergency foster placement just under one hour away.

- Mike felt empowered that Matthew no longer lives with us.
- Hardest thing we have ever had to do.
- Parenting Matthew from a distance
- Matthew comes home for sleep-over every 2 weeks, the other week we have a day visit.
- Parenting from distance – as much as we can.

So much more insight to tell...but out of time in writing it down. I hope we will have an opportunity to elaborate.

- Transition was too short – we were not prepared enough. We should have met them in their environment.
- Sibling assessment was not done. They said the boys had been too young. Though the dynamic had already been developed. Surely at that age it was a good time to assess and adapt and/or make a decision whether to place them together. (Please don't get me wrong we love both boys).
- When we asked for help over the years it was attempted to put a plaster on, but not support parents in a positive way, but instead Social Workers thrive on judgement and guilt.
- Felt we had no option but to disrupt.
- Matthew has had an autistic assessment and was borderline. Other professionals see him as undiagnosed autistic.
- Mike has been diagnosed with ADHD.
- Worked with a trauma therapist but cannot afford to carry on.
- Matthew settled into foster home – he is Perfect Peter. But does not talk a lot about his placement. Foster mother says how well he is doing. There is a lot of masking going on.
- Despite asking for further help – to support family unit we get nothing at all.
- Mike hostile when Matthew is at home.

Matthew has been placed in foster care. He is brave and masking. He gets no support to work through this. We get no support to deal with this. Mike gets no support. We are left hanging in the air. We parent long distance – we are doing the best we can in this situation. Neither the needs of the children nor our needs have been met. We are continually judged. We are all broken by this. When the boys were placed with us: I finally have a mummy...mummy why me?

We had thought about disrupting for a number of years. Had confidentially spoken with several professionals from connected areas about solutions. Splitting the boys – taking it in turns. I did art projects for myself to work through it and had counselling. Probably more than a year before the disruption (could be longer) a friend found Ridley & Hall for us. I had a lengthy discussion. Learnt about Section 20..we did not follow through...we were hanging onto a thread. Every so often I had checked in with them. We had been emotionally very low and broken and were placed under the Child Protection in 2019. No

respite...marching on – loads of big words, judged..but nothing came of it. Through coincidence I connected with a lady who had disrupted her adoption and supported other families. She recommended a trauma therapist, who kindly worked with me free of charge. So kind, so supportive. We wrote a proposal to work with him, supported by him. Rejected!! This was done a few times (even after Matthew had left the family home). Whatever we had put on the table was bounced back..and still is. We had asked how to respond when Matthew was in a rage. What do to, who to call? We had not been supplied with a strategy. Call emergency Social Worker or the Police. One weekend we had to call the Police 3 x and called emergency Social Worker. No one came. I believe that Social Worker would have put in a care order..but that weekend we had made the decision. To be fair it did happen quickly (3 weeks or so, maybe even less). Our minds and hearts shattered. Lost so many tears, underweight... shattered and destroyed – by judgement..no help..no coming to terms with it. It has been a mourning process. We have been trying to view the family from a different angle. We are positively trying to have this family – short and long distance. Marriage shattered – but we will always be there for the boys.

### **31. Carrie Smith**

Technically we didn't disrupt. We walked away at the end of introductions. New information about health, behaviour, birth family came to light daily during introductions. Our feelings were minimalised and ignored. We found ourselves looking at an entirely different, uncertain future. We were broken down, any confidence we had dissolved. Social workers and foster carers constantly talking down to us and our "inexperience" instead of supporting and guiding us. We were scared, we were unsupported, and we were unheard, so we walked away. The way we were treated on making that decision was cruel and totally unprofessional. Our characters were picked apart, assumptions placed on us, and we were misquoted. At no point did anyone ask how we were or consider how difficult that decision was. We were emotionally and financially invested!

I think social workers need training in how to handle disruptions. To stop throwing insults at people. No one I have spoken to has made this decision easily! It may be inconvenient for the social worker, but we shouldn't be treated that way!

Also, if any new information comes to light, social workers should work through this with the adopters and support them through this to ensure it is considered in the same way as prior to matching panel.

Be open to concerns about behaviours and health. Just because some adopters don't have their own children doesn't mean they can't see issues. They should be listened to and support signposted!

Adoption needs to be supported from all angles. Adopters are making a massive commitment, a massive change to their life and ultimately, we don't HAVE to do it and we CAN walk away, so just treat us with some care!

### **32. Tash Rhomanos**

I am a parent of 2 adopted children with special needs. We adopted our daughter in 2008. We then adopted our son in 2015. They are not blood related. Our son returned to the care system in June 2020.

Right from the start, we were being failed by the LA. The adoption panel agreed with us that we should not be matched with a child that has known special needs as we already had a child with special needs.

We were then introduced and matched with our son. We believed them, this child had no known special needs. During the first 6 months we were concerned with his behaviour and inability to do things. We were told this is normal and he will be regressive due to the move to our home and the new routine. He will soon catch up once in a stable family with routine. We believed them.

The promised therapy for the family to bond never happen. We were having incident after incident with our son and no effective help was forthcoming. Not even the primary school showed support. We asked for an EHCP and were told he

will not get one. I eventually submitted a parental request and he was granted an EHCP, band 2. He is now on the highest level.

We were asking for help. We were put on parenting courses. Our parenting skills were questioned over and over. Our son received no input until 6 months before he moved out. Our daughter didn't seem to exist in their eyes. He was given play therapy and we received weekend respite. This was like treating a broken leg with a band aid – too little too late.

He was placed on a Section 20. They found him a foster placement. We rejected two before this one on grounds that they were not suitable. We also rejected this one but were told if we do not send him, the LA will not find him another placement.

We were told we had to take him to introductions – we did.

We were told we had to move him to his new home – we did.

We were told he cannot stay on a Section 20 and unless we want immediate reunification, they will go to court for a Care Order. We did want reunification, but it was too soon. We had not started healing; we had had no time to recover from the trauma he had bestowed upon us.

They pushed for a CO. We were accused of terrible things in court by the LA – our solicitors got it all retracted. Our son was beyond parental control.

We were treated like dirt on a shoe and expected to provide support to our son. The FC saw contact as respite for her and started controlling the length of contact to suit her. We have not missed one contact, all through covid lockdown we maintained contact and we are seeing him every 3 weeks.

We have been, and still are, ignored and overlooked by these so-called professionals.

The placement with the FC broke down. Our son is now in a residential setting with a SEN school. He has one to one at school and at the residential setting.

It is costing the LA over £300k a year to accommodate our son. If we had had a fraction of that spent on us as a family with better support, respite and therapy, we would still be together as a family instead of trying to parent from a distance.

### **33. Hannah Mason**

My experience is when you are looking to adopt, everyone speaks very highly of you and how you will be fantastic parents. The training is good in making you aware of the background these children have come from but not clear in stating that love is not enough and that you will have to fight every day for support that you will unlikely get!

By the time our girls moved in, we felt that we just needed to love them and give them structure and routine and all would be fine and of course life is not like that. AD8 moved in when she had just turned 5. I remember a conversation with our adoption agency to say that most adopters wanted babies and considered 4/5 year olds too old. I thought how sad but unfortunately it soon became clear to me the reason why. AD6 had just turned 3 when she moved in and we have had hardly any issues with her.

I also think there is a mantra of siblings must stay together. A sibling assessment was never carried out on our two and should have been. Our eldest makes the younger one's life an absolute misery due to jealousy and competitiveness she feels which was escalated in birth family as there were more siblings. Due to this the eldest does not cope in a family with siblings. She is fine one-to-one, although still hard work but the behaviours are reduced considerably.

I also want to raise how as soon as you get the Adoption Order and are struggling, they then look for every piece of evidence that the problem is you as the parent and not the child. We threatened to disrupt within the first 12 months and got

told that once professionals were involved everything would be better. We now have 4 professionals involved and we are worse than ever. Medication was only a very temporary solution.

We had a referral for Child Protection. Within the first five minutes of the phone call, bearing in mind this woman has never met myself or my family, she was making comments that were completely inappropriate. Talking to me as though I was stupid and hadn't the first clue about parenting.

We are families at crisis point who so desperately need support and the last thing we need is someone telling us how worthless we are. We already feel that every day!!

#### **34. Jodie Welch**

Firstly, I would like to raise the challenges we faced when trying to contact someone to access any support, it was very hard to get to who you needed to speak to without having to explain the situation several times to different people because they didn't read reports or information that had already been given. At this point you are at the end of your patience line and just want some help but it's quite exhausting having to navigate the different services to get help

Then once we had been assigned someone, it was all nice at first, come to do an initial assessment and talk to us but then that was it - the only support we get is an email with a link saying look at this website, or contact this group for info. Post adoption support has been horrendous, poor communication, ignoring emails, not answering calls, not keeping us informed of changes, passing us from one team to another, it has literally been mentally challenging to the point of illness to get any form of support. We had no phone calls to check in on any of us as parents or even

the child to see how their behaviour was going or how any of us were coping. We were offered 'parenting' courses which we gladly attended to develop our knowledge of the issues but in the end, we realised it is the child themselves that needs the therapeutic intervention, as which stage the child is violent and family life is non-existent due to the issues we face. It just feels like we are the lesser people in the loop, we have done the Local Authority a big favour taking these children on as our own and whilst we have parental responsibility for them, the services need to be improved to help those families that have rescued the local authority from accommodating more children in care.

Things had to get to a quite serious level involving police before we were offered any kind of tangible support for the child and even this was slow to come to fruition. It just feels like we are seen as second-class citizens, that we have adopted these children who we knew would have issues later in life but left to 'get on with it'. The lack of financial support for adopters too is diabolical, think we received £200 as a one-off payment back in 2011 and that was it, whereas foster carers are paid for their services, receive regular respite and seem to be thought of a lot better than adopters are!

When adopting you are 'promised' lifetime support with the child, but it is very hard to come by and feel like you have to 'prove' you are not coping to even be able to speak to anyone about it.

## **The end – well not quite.**

Just three more things:-

- 1.** Please remember, as it has already been noted throughout this document a large majority of us came to adoption through loss, failed fertility, miscarriage, and more. We took a step in a different direction, through hope and love, with no misconceptions. The forever family was waiting.
- 2.** The children we have adopted were removed because their birth parents abused them. Abuse/ adversity/ trauma/ can impact brain development and result in long-term effects on learning, behaviour, and health. Trauma/-adversity can start in-utero, and we were most definitely not there then. Toxic stress in any part of a child's life can lead to behavioural difficulties even after the abuse ends.
- 3.** We do acknowledge some level of imperfection, of poor parenting at times, as any parent is guilty of, and we do want to make adjustments, but we want the right advice to help us not the wrong judgement and alienation!

We parents did not cause the abuse, we were not in the children's lives when it began, often at conception, so how can we be penalised and blamed for not managing the consequences when support and training is totally inadequate.

Each Local Authority works differently, some slow, some fast, some condemn, some punish, some are supportive, others are not. Why are they all so different when this is such a difficult, delicate situation. Social workers should not be the

leading professional in post adoption support, it should be psychologists, therapists and people skilled and educated on trauma related issues.

○ **These pages represent only a glimpse into the family situation we find ourselves in. This is not of our own doing, and without the necessary support of post-adoption services the experience has broken each one of us. If it has done this to us, please take time to consider what it is doing to our children. How emotionally damaged will they be in the short and long term. It is a truly heart-breaking situation for everyone.** ○

○

○ **We need radical reform of the post-adoption services, we need change, not just for ourselves but for the future of adoption, and most importantly for the future of children who need their forever families.** ○

**With great thanks to all those who have contributed to this document**

♥ Louise Mellor ♥ Louise Taylor ♥ Chloe Davis ♥ Sarah Jane ♥  
♥ Amelia Riley ♥ Rosemarie Lewis ♥ Louise Brooker ♥ Lesley Robert ♥  
♥ Alice Lea ♥ Sally Miller ♥ Jean Smith ♥ Florence Walker ♥  
♥ Joanne Coleman ♥ June Brown ♥ Annie Murdoch ♥ Clare Kirkwood ♥  
♥ Karen Hunt ♥ Melanie Jones ♥ Nikki Smith ♥ Jess Jones ♥ Sarah Green ♥  
♥ Matt Walker ♥ Sarah Shamus ♥ Jane and Russell ♥ Diane Kennedy ♥  
♥ James Mills ♥ Sarah Johnson ♥

**\*\*\*All the names used in this document are pseudonyms\*\*\***

**Please contact Lottie Stones - [theatothedis@gmail.com](mailto:theatothedis@gmail.com) if you require further information**