



Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2023-2024

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Northamptonshire Children's Trust

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the principles, values and aims and objectives of Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency. It contains information about the service, how it is monitored and operates to benefit children.

Our overarching aim is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of permanence via adoption and to support those children and their families as long as is needed. We offer child-led and adopter friendly services by an experienced and motivated professional team.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Adoption Agency is a registered Adoption Agency and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2012).

This Statement of Purpose provides information for children and young people, birth relatives, prospective and approved adopters, elected members, adoption panel members' staff, members of the public and other stakeholders.

2. Regional Adoption Agency

Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA are a partner agency of Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance. Family Adoption Links is a regional adoption partnership bringing together adoption services across Rutland, Leicestershire, Leicester City, North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. The partnership aims to provide excellent, friendly inclusive services to those looking to adopt and families who have adopted.

FAL operates through a hub and spoke model enabling individual agencies to benefit from coordinating central functions whilst retaining direct service delivery functions within their own borders. This ensures the Partnership reflects the local context, adapted to meet the needs of local children and families, and maintains clear links to local Children & Families Services.

The FAL partnership provides the Regional Adoption Agency for the partner agencies. By working together to align practice, with the aim of:

- Making the best use of our collective resources to recruit, assess and support prospective adopters across the region.
- Improving the quality and speed of matching for children through better planning and by having a wider choice of families.
- Providing all children and their families with the right support at the right time through a consistent permanency support offer available across the region.

3. Legal Context

The Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards 2011 (Care Standards Act 2000) and of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005, Adoption Statutory Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2001 revised July 2014 following the Children and Families

Act 2014, the Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.

4. Key Service Aims and Objectives

Northamptonshire Children's Trust believes that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe; to be loved, valued, and respected; and to have high aspirations for their future.

We want all children to have secure relationships with family, friends, and carers, be eager, excited, curious, and engaged in learning, have self-confidence, be able to co-operate and communicate socially and have the best possible health and development.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust aims to:

- Deliver the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and families.
- Ensure children and families remain the focus of everything we do and provide the best possible support to staff, enabling families to develop and flourish.
- To ensure children are fully supported in terms of their individual care plans with particular emphasis on placement stability, educational achievement, social development, health, and wellbeing.

The Adoption Act 2002 promotes adoption as a permanence option for Looked After Children. The Act places the needs and welfare of the child at the centre of the adoption process, with the welfare of the child being the paramount consideration for a court or adoption agency in all decisions relating to their adoption.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Adoption Agency supports the ethos that children and young people are best able to develop close and enduring relationships within a family setting. Northamptonshire Children's Trust aims to ensure that all children whom they place within adoptive families will experience stability, security, and quality of care throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

Where children from Northamptonshire are unable to live within their birth family and a plan for adoption is agreed, the Adoption Agency aims to identify an adoptive family who will promote the child's wellbeing through the provision of the highest possible standards of care in line with their individual assessed needs.

The objectives of Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency are to:

- Meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, associated standards, regulations, and guidance
- Ensure the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process as outlined in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption and Children Act 2002: s1)
- Support the process of timely decision making for children in relation to permanence options including the use of Early Permanence Placements
- Promote best practice in adoption through the provision of advice and support children's social work colleagues with the care planning process

- Undertake high quality marketing, recruitment, and assessment of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is targeted to meet the diverse needs of children with a plan for adoption
- Offer timely information and advice to members of the public enquiring about adoption
- Ensure the assessment and preparation of adoptive families is comprehensive and robust in order that adopters are aware of and prepared to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Provide child centred, needs led matching, transition, and placement processes for children
- Provide a comprehensive adoption support service for adopted children and young people and their parents, adopted adults and birth family members
- Support the provision of other permanent placements such as Special Guardianship
- Recognise that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore offer them the individual support and care that they need
- Ensure all staff involved in adoption have the appropriate level of skill, knowledge, and experience to deliver an effective service
- Regularly review and evaluate to ensure services delivered are of the highest possible standard, are compliant with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and associated legislation and continue to meet the needs of the children and families in receipt of our services.

The values which specifically underpin the work of the adoption agency are outlined in the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 and are as follows:

- The service is anti-discriminatory and anyone accessing the service is treated with courtesy, respect, and dignity.
- All enquiries to the service are managed in a timely and efficient manner.
- Northamptonshire Children's Trust Adoption Agency will work in partnership with other RAA's, LA's and VAA's to promote positive outcomes for children.
- In recognition of the lifelong implications of adoption, the service will ensure that appropriate support services are available to all those whose lives are impacted by adoption, i.e., children and young people, adopters, adopted adults and birth family members.
- All those accessing services from Northamptonshire Children's Trust Adoption Agency will be made aware of how to comment or complain about the service they receive and have access to external complaints mechanisms as required by legislation, regulation, and guidance.
- The service recognises that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore will offer them the individual support and care they need.

5. Staffing

The registered provider of the Adoption Service is Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

The Strategic Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Children's Homes is the responsible individual for the service.

The Strategic Manager for Children in Care is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Adoption Agency is managed by the Service Manager, through two Team Managers who are responsible for the supervision and professional development of the staff within the service, these are;

- Adopter Recruitment and Assessment Team has 1 FTE TM, 1.8 FTE PMs, 1 FTE Senior SW, 7.9 FTE ASWs, 2 FTE Family Finding SW, 1.8 FTE Business Support Officers, supported by 2 FTE Administrators
- Adoption Support Team has 1 FTE TM, 1.6 FTE PMs, 1 FTE Senior SW, 5.2 FTE SWs, 1 FTE Adopted Adults Coordinator, 1 FTE Letterbox Coordinator, 1 FTE Financial Assessment Officer, 1 FTE Post Adoption Counsellor, supported by 2 FTE Administrators

There are two Adoption panels:

- Adoption Panel A and B supported by a FTE Panel Advisor, 1.5 FTE panel coordinators and 1 FTE minute taker

All social work staff are registered with Social Work England. The workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experiences and are supported by the Trust to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice.

Recruitment is carried out in line with the agency's Equality and Diversity policies and recognises good employment practice. The Trust and the Adoption Agency seek to recruit a diverse workforce that reflects the community that they serve. All staff having direct contact with children must undergo enhanced checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional/work competence is appraised annually in line with the Trust's staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes. Social work staff use the Signs of Safety approach and practice framework.

The Adoption Agency offers work placements to social work students and support to the Social Work Academy. There is a full and varied in-house professional and personal development training programme available to all staff. Members of staff have access to independent counselling and support if required.

6. Services Provided

The Adoption Agency delivers services that facilitate the recruitment, assessment and training of adopters, the speedy and safe placement of children and appropriate follow-on support. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for children, adopters and birth family members and undertakes to provide support throughout the adoption life cycle, including services for adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.

The Adoption Agency recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive families in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of Northamptonshire children for whom adoption is the plan including children with harder to place characteristics and sibling groups.

The service works alongside colleagues in the Children's Trust Children in Care teams to support Family Finding activity for Northamptonshire children to ensure early permanence planning for children where adoption is a primary or parallel plan is given appropriate priority.

Adoption support services are provided for adopted children and young people, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth family members, recognising the lifelong journey for all parties as follows:

- Counselling, information, and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption
- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary service to track birth relatives are signposted to appropriate independent agencies
- Assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order and when appropriate will make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to support the provision of therapeutic services for adopted children and their families
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an Adoption Order has been made. This will include adoptive families' not known to the Agency who reside in the County and request adoption support assessments three years after their Adoption Order was granted. Likewise, the team provides adoption support to adoptive families who have adopted placements Northamptonshire children but live outside of our area for a period of three years after the granting of the Adoption Order.

7. Adopter Recruitment

7.1 Enquiries

The Adoption Agency operates a daily duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters.

On receiving a telephone call or internet enquiry an adoption information pack will be sent out to prospective adopters.

Information in respect of the dates of adoption information sessions is also provided to those making enquiries.

7.2 Stage One Assessment

Once the Registration of Interest (ROI) is returned, the enquirer will be given further information about Stage One of the assessment process, including:

- the Stage One Agreement form,
- information about statutory checks and Preparation Training.

Every effort is made to complete the work of Stage 1 within two months, unless there are clear reasons why it needs to take longer, for example when a statutory check is delayed, or if a prospective adopter needs more time to complete voluntary childcare experience.

Stage One of the process is 'adopter-led', therefore social workers will meet with prospective adopters to complete a Stage One Agreement based on their individual circumstances and learning needs. They will be given a named worker who they can contact for support during this stage of the assessment. Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA endeavour to support prospective adopters in Stage One to broaden their knowledge of adoption and children's needs and offer advice on how they can build on this knowledge and experience to support their role as adoptive parents.

Prospective adopters are offered Preparation Training in Stage One with additional, optional modules in Stage Two and post approval as appropriate. The training is designed to help prospective adopters to assess their own capacity and motivation to adopt a child by providing information, stimulating discussion, and meeting experienced adopters.

Prospective adopters will also be invited to attend an additional training session about Early Permanence Placements. The training is designed to help people understand the role of an Early Permanence Carer, how it differs from traditional adoption placements and the fostering components of early permanence including contact, work with parents and the role of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust childcare social work team.

7.3 Statutory Checks

All statutory checks, including DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as the ROI is accepted.

Once all Stage One training is complete and statutory references and checks are returned these will be reviewed by the service and the prospective adopter contacted to discuss progression to stage 2. If all parties are happy to progress to stage 2 of the assessment process further information in relation to the stage 2 assessment process will be sent to the prospective adopter.

At this point prospective adopters can choose, if they wish, to take a break of up to six months between Stage One and Stage Two of the process.

7.4 Stage Two Assessment

At the commencement of Stage two of the assessment process an assessing social worker is allocated, and a Stage Two Agreement meeting is held to plan the assessment and schedule presentation of the assessment to the Adoption Panel.

Every effort is made to complete stage two within 4 months. Stage two involves detailed preparation and assessment and producing a Prospective Adopter's Report. This process aims

to identify the strengths, skills, and qualities that adopters will bring to adopting a child and ensures that they are given information to prepared for them for their role as an adoptive parent.

Training for close family and friends is also offered to prospective adopters during Stage 2.

Once the assessment report is completed a copy is shared with the prospective adopters who are able to comment on it prior to finalisation.

7.5 Second Time Applicants

Second time applicants may be eligible for a fast-track process, depending on the time elapsed since their previous adoption. Their assessments will build on their experience and concentrate on issues that the previous placement has raised as well as considering the needs of their existing child/ren and their needs in relation to a new placement.

Enquiries from second time adopters or foster carers wishing to be considered to adopt a child in their care will be offered an initial visit to explore their current circumstances and the timing of their enquiry.

For second time adopters and foster carers, Stage One and Stage Two of the assessment process can run in parallel if appropriate following a positive recommendation from the initial visit.

As with first time enquirers if the recommendation is not to invite the enquirer to commence the assessment process they will be informed of the decision and be advised of the reasons for the recommendation.

7.6 Inter Country Adoption

The Agency offers a service to those applicants wishing to adopt from overseas. A fee is charged for the completion of the home study necessary to adopt from another country. The fee is based on the nationally agreed rate for interagency adoptions.

Those who adopt from overseas are welcome to take advantage of the support services available to all adopters by the agency. Information in relation to support services can be obtained by contacting the adoption help line: 0300 1261008.

8. Adoption Panel

The Adoption Agency Regulations require that all Adoption Agencies must establish a Panel to consider the circumstances of children who may require adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the placement of approved children with specific adopters. The Panel makes recommendations to the NCT VAA Agency Decision Maker. The role of the Agency Decision Maker is undertaken by the Strategic Manager, Children in Care Service, Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

9. Family Finding, Matching and Placement

Family finding activity within the agency is undertaken by Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA on behalf of Northamptonshire Children's Trust. Family Finding Social Workers located within the VAA work in partnership with children's social workers with the Children's Trust teams to identify the most appropriate adoption placement for a child in a timely manner.

Family finding is linked to the permanence planning processes within Northamptonshire Children's Trust Children in Care team. (NCT CiC). Adoption managers have oversight of children with a potential plan for adoption through joint tracking process with NCT CiC.

Adopters are supported by their social worker to make an informed decision as to whether or not a proposed match is right for them and their family. They are provided with written information and assessments about the child's needs and experiences, have an opportunity to meet the child's current foster carer and other key professionals involved with them including their social worker. They will also be provided with an opportunity for consultations with the agency Medical Adviser.

Matches of children with prospective adopters are made on the basis of a child's holistic needs, including age, emotional and behavioural development as well as ethnicity, race and religion. A placement will not be delayed in order to find an exact ethnic/religious match if a family is available who can meet the child's other needs. However, transracial adopters will need to demonstrate how they can promote a child's positive sense of identity.

Proposed contact plans will be discussed with prospective adopters as part of the matching process.

Matches between adopters and specific children will be presented to the agency's Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will make the decision in respect of the match.

Matching and placement of children with Early Permanence Carers will follow a similar process in terms of information sharing and consideration of the child's known needs although there is often limited information available about a child's health and development at the point that specific placements are being considered.

Matching will be driven by the agencies understanding of the child's background family factors and antenatal experience against the matching considerations that adopters have indicated during their assessment process that they would feel able to manage.

10. Adoption Support

10.1 Adoption Support Services Advisor

Regulations require that adoption agencies providing adoption support have a named Adoption Support Services Advisor, known as the ASSA. In Northamptonshire Children's

Trust VAA this role is undertaken by the team manager for the post adoption and SGO support team:

Sarah Fletcher

Adoption Support Services Advisor

The Adoption Service

One Angel Square

Angel Street

Northampton NN1 1ED

10.2 Adopters and Adopted Children

Adoption support is defined as including:

- Assessment of adoption support needs
- Financial support to adopters, following an assessment of need
- Priority access to social housing, and access to additional support to cover a spare room whilst adopters wait for their child to arrive in their new home
- Priority admission for school places, including academies and free schools
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children and adoptive parents to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation, with contact agreements between adopted children and their birth parents or others with whom they share a significant relationship
- Therapeutic services for adopted children
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children to support the adoptive placement and enable it to continue
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children where a placement disrupts or is at risk of disruption
- A range of support services, including access to counselling, information and advice for both adoptive parents and their children, who may have complex needs
- Applications to the Adoption Support Fund as appropriate following an assessment of their adoption support needs

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency recognises the importance of supporting adopters and their families to access a wide range of support provision, to ensure placement stability, and to help secure positive lifelong outcomes for the child.

At the point of matching, all children will have an adoption support plan which sets out both the prospective adopters and child support needs including one-off expenses or ongoing financial support. Where on-going financial support is requested, the adopters will undergo a financial assessment and annual review once finance is agreed.

Following the granting of an Adoption Order, the adoptive family are entitled to request an assessment of their adoption support needs at any point until their children are aged 18 or 25 years if they have an Education Health Care Plan.

10.3 Birth Parents

It is acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that an adoption placement represents the best outcome for the child. As an Adoption Agency, Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA fully supports the principle that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognise the lifelong implication of adoption.

The service offers independent birth relative counselling services via a counsellor employed by the Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA. Birth relatives are able to access support at any point during or after the time that a plan for adoption is being considered for their child or their child is placed with adopters and an adoption order is granted. As a service we acknowledge that many birth relatives will not feel able to access this support in the early stages of their child's adoption and as such they are able to access support at any point when they feel it would be beneficial to them. Support can be accessed by contacting the adoption support team on **01604 367301** or by emailing the team on; postadoption@nctrust.co.uk

11. Adoption Support Fund

On the 1st May 2015, the government launched the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund has been established to help to pay for therapeutic services for children up to and including the age of 21 years (or 25 with an Education Health Care Plan) who have been adopted from Local Authority Care.

On 14th January 2016, the scope of the fund was increased when the government announced that it could be accessed for provision of therapeutic support to children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families and the fund was open to applications from SGO carers and their children, if they were previously Looked After.

From 1st April 2016, the fund remit was widened to families and adopted children from outside England via inter-country adoption arrangements, from certain agreed countries.

In order to access the fund, families will need to have an assessment of their adoption support needs completed by Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA. If the social worker undertaking the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial, in consultation with the family, they can then make an application to the fund if successful, the fund will release the money to the agency to commission the identified services.

Access to the post order support team for an assessment of need can be secured by families and professionals, with the families' consent are able to refer to the service to

request such an assessment by contacting the Adoption Duty Social Worker on **01604 367301** or by e mail to postadoption@nctrust.co.uk

12. Special Guardianship Support Services

A Special Guardianship Order is a way of providing a legally secure foundation for those carers who are caring for a child who is unable to live with their parents. Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, financial support services may be available for the Special Guardian, the child, and the birth family if they were looked after by a Local Authority immediately prior to the order being made.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA offers Special Guardianship Support Services which may include:

- Mediation to assist with new or existing contact arrangements
- Counselling, advice, and information
- Access to support groups
- Assessments of SGO support Needs including means test financial support assessments
- Training for the Special Guardian to meet the needs of the child
- Financial support subject to an annually reviewed means test

As an Adoption Agency Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA is responsible for the provision of support services for Special Guardians for duration of the child's minority or up to three years following granting of the Order for families who live outside of Northamptonshire. After three years, the Local Authority where the family reside are responsible for the provision of needs assessments and services

In 2016, the Adoption Support Fund was widened to include access to support for SGO carers and their children. It is accessible in the same way as for adoptive families.

13. Complaints

All prospective adopters, adopters, children and young people, birth parents, SGO carers and adopted adults accessing services via the Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint.

The Service manager of the Adoption Service, along with Strategic Manager for fostering and adoption monitor all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Adoption Service. Service users are advised what independent sources of support are available to help them make a complaint and advocate on their behalf if they do not feel confident making a complaint by themselves. Information about how to complain is also included in the Children's Guide to Adoption.

Any allegations of abuse will be dealt with in accordance with NCT's Safeguarding Procedures. We will ensure that Ofsted is kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

14. Monitoring and evaluation of the service

14.1 Monitoring

An annual report is written by the Service Manager for adoption, providing the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Leadership Team of the Trust with statistical data in relation to Northamptonshire Children's Trust VAA's activity. The Senior Leadership Team also receives regular reports which enable them to monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users, and satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

Other monitoring includes staff supervision linked to the annual appraisal process, feedback from the adoption panel and service users at different stages throughout their adoption journey and other key stakeholders.

The adoption service collects data surrounding performance against the adoption scorecard measures and the numbers of people accessing services to support effective use of resources and aid service planning and delivery.

14.2 Evaluating the Service

The information gathered through quarterly and annual reports, audit, inspections, and customer feedback is constantly evaluated by the managers of the Adoption Service, to judge its on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Adoption Service is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted.

15. Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

The adoption service manager overseen by the responsible individual is responsible for the annual revision of the Statement of Purpose. Revisions may occur at other times if necessary. Staff, stakeholders, and those accessing services will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The revised Statement of Purpose will be presented to the Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Parenting Board for their consideration and will also be sent to Ofsted annually and when any significant changes have been made.

The Statement of Purpose will be available to all staff via the Trust's intranet and to members of the public via the Trust's website. Paper copies can be provided to children looked after and their parents on request.

16. Details of Registration

Northamptonshire's Children's Trust Limited –

Company Number 12430084

The Adoption Service is registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency –

URN: 2605174

One Angel Square
Northampton

Northamptonshire
NN1 1ED

17. Registration Authority

The name and address of the Registration Authority is:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Governance Arrangements for Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency

North and West Northamptonshire Councils agree budget and allocate key performance indicators. Their roles are:

- Lead Members Children's Social Care
- Director Children's Services (Statutory DCS)
- Corporate Parenting Board

Northamptonshire Children's Trust look monitor performance and quality and report back to the two councils. The trust roles are:

- Trust Board
- Trust Chief Exec
- Trust Senior Leadership Team

Northamptonshire Children's Trust voluntary adoption agency has a responsible individual and the VAA branch manager who is the service manager for adoption