

NAIRO Conference 2016

THE POTATO GROUP:
IRO HANDOUT

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WHAT DO OUR MEMBERS EXPECT FROM IRO's

- True independence, being prepared to challenge the social workers (who in many cases have been their colleagues over many years)
- An in-depth knowledge of adoption and the neurobiology of developmental trauma
- Familiarity with the complex challenges faced by adopted teens and their adoptive parents (e.g. Selwyn 2014)
- A whole family approach, recognising that the Adoption Order created a family (not a placement)

Well trained IROs, aware of the issues in modern day adoption, can play a vital role encouraging the LA to work in partnership with adoptive parents, valuing their knowledge and experience having parented this complex teen thus far.

The Potato Group represents 300 adoptive families across the UK who now have teenage or twenty-something adoptees. We may have adopted our children as young babies or older children, either as a single child or as a sibling group. Most have been removed from Birth Families because they have been neglected or abused, or due to abuse of previous siblings.

Our children have complex needs usually for multifactorial reasons

- Genetics – family history of learning disabilities or mental health issues
- In-utero alcohol, substance or cortisol exposure
- Neglectful or abusive care often with multiple moves between birth family members
- After being taken into the care by the LA, they may have had multiple moves of Foster Carer before being placed for adoption

Many of our children show symptoms of attachment and trauma difficulties/ developmental trauma disorder as well as having a much higher risk of learning difficulties, mental health conditions and genetic disorders than the general population. They can be very complex young people indeed.

EDUCATION

Many of our children struggle in school, recognised by the fact that Pupil Premium Plus is now available to adopted pupils (England). Many of our children have special educational needs and require an Education Health Care Plan. In complex cases residential schooling may be required to meet the young person's educational needs, their therapeutic needs and the needs of the adoptive family as a whole (including siblings).

School refusal due to anxiety is common in adoptees, often starting in adolescence. LAs may see this as poor, negligent, parenting rather than emerging mental distress of the child/YP. Parents can face prosecution and the YP can be at risk of being taken into care. The adoptive parents of complex teens may have requested costly support packages (education, therapy and respite) to prevent adoption disruption. Supporting the family in this way can enable continued lifelong, stable family support that adoption offers at far less financial and emotional cost than out of home placements with changes of worker and frequently placement breakdown.

SPECIALIST ADOPTION THERAPY AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Many of our children need long-term therapy more specialised than local NHS CAMHS departments can provide. The Adoption Support Fund ASF is starting to help in this area (England only ASF is not available in Wales nor Scotland, neither is pupil premium) and where there is no specialist Post-Adoption SW service, families needing high level support are dealt with by Children and Families SW with a child protection emphasis rather than a child trauma based / family preservation focus.

In 2014 Julie Selwyn et al published their report on long term outcomes of adoption, this showed the resilience of adopters often dealing with extreme challenges including child to parent violence. Only a small number of adoptive families 'disrupted' – though this is a poor term as in most cases the adopters were still in regular contact and supporting their child who was living separately, the adoptive parents continuing to 'parent from a distance'.

Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption

Research report April 2014: Julie Selwyn, Dinithi Wijedasa, and Sarah Meakings - University of Bristol School for Policy Studies Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies Department for Education

[Link to the Beyond the Adoption Order report here.](#)

Beyond the Adoption Order: An Investigation of Adoption Disruption in Wales :

Research Report - May 2014 - Dinithi Wijedasa and Julie Selwyn

[Link to the Beyond the Adoption Order in Wales report here.](#)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Troubled children can be troubling for society and our children may have involvement with the police and criminal justice system whilst living with their adoptive family or after becoming LAC. Some adoptees are placed in secure settings.

Our children's challenging behaviours may lead to safeguarding investigations of us the parents as 'we must be to blame' or police involvement for our children e.g. public order offences when a trauma triggered melt down is deemed 'affray', or criminal damage is caused at home or school. We may face Child to Parent Violence and struggle to keep younger siblings and ourselves safe. Our children may repeatedly go missing and be at risk of sexual exploitation, sometimes after unplanned contact with the Birth Family from which they were removed and who may still include Persons Posing Risk.

We may have to make difficult decisions about requesting our child is accommodated (Section 20), or declare them homeless. The local authority may then act as if they have a Care Order and effectively exclude us from our parental role – deeming this a 'disrupted placement' rather than a family whose complex child needs to live separately for reason of their trauma. We may still be the only safe base this child has ever had and their main source of support now and in the future.

We may face safeguarding investigation or Care Proceedings when the LA does not understand the hidden disability and long-term effects of developmental trauma and believes our parenting is to blame for the young person's current presentation 'beyond parental control'. If a Care Order is obtained it is hard to get it discharged; LAs do not work towards re-unification of the child with the adoptive family, it seems as if they do not recognize that the Adoption Order created a permanent family. The LA may promote birth family contact without considering the reasons this child was permanently removed and the continued risks posed by birth family members (sexual exploitation, substance misuse, criminality etc.)

Well trained IROs, aware of the issues in modern day adoption, can play a vital role encouraging the LA to work in partnership with adoptive parents, valuing the adopters knowledge and experience having parented this complex teen thus far. LAs may find this difficult if they start from a safeguarding / 'blame the parents' stance. (See article 'Culture of Services')

IRO'S WE NEED YOU TO BE ADOPTION AWARE

If our adopted child becomes LAC, either under Section 20 or a Care Order, we rely on you to advocate for the needs of our child and to ensure that the LA acts as a reasonable and conscientious parent (IRO Handbook). We hope you will ensure that our sole PR (Section 20) or our shared PR with the LA (Care Order) will be respected allowing us a critical role in care planning for our child. We are keen to work with you to ensure that all the team around the child understand the adoption dimension and the long-term effects of the early abuse and neglect which occurred before adoption. Child Care review/LAC review meetings can be very stressful for young people and for adoptive parents. We are developing a Potato Parent Mentor system to ensure that parents do not have to face difficult meetings alone.

Can we offer you training or a group discussion?

The Potato Group can offer training to professionals including IROs.

For more information about our group visit <https://thepotatogroup.org.uk>

Or email parentingadoptedteens@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Developmental Trauma Disorder, A new, rational diagnosis for children with complex trauma histories. Bessel A. van der Kolk 2005 https://traumaticstressinstitute.org/wp-content/files_mf/1276541701VanderKolkDvptTraumaDis.pdf
- Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook 2010 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337568/iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf
- Permanence: What is Permanence Holly van Gulden <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r270CJE0o0>
- Three excellent short videos from The Open Nest
 - The Open Nest: The Lost Children of Trauma: <https://vimeo.com/98650962>
 - The Open Nest: Brighter Thinking: <https://vimeo.com/121014535>
 - The Open Nest: Know Me To Teach Me: <https://vimeo.com/168805283>