

THE
ISLE OF MAN
ADOPTION SERVICE

Welcome Pack for
Prospective Adopters

3 Albany Lane, Douglas, Isle of Man. IM2 3NS
Tel: 01624-625161
Fax: 01624-678304
E-mail general@iomas.im

Who are the children waiting to be adopted?

- ◆ Some 4,000 children are currently looking for adoptive homes.
- ◆ Most of the children are placed for adoption from the care system. They are unable to be cared for permanently by their birth families for many reasons. Their early life experiences may have an impact on their general development and behaviour in the present and in the future.
- ◆ Children may be placed as individuals or with their brothers and sisters.
- ◆ Children with special medical issues, disability and severe learning needs also need families.
- ◆ Children both from the Isle of Man and from all other parts of the British Isles are waiting to be adopted.
- ◆ Children can be adopted from infancy up to the age of 18 years; we find families for children of all ages but predominantly for those aged seven years and under. Around 50% of those waiting to be adopted are in this age range.
- ◆ Generally very few healthy white babies are willingly surrendered for adoption, though there are a number of younger children whose parents have tried to care for them but have failed to do so safely.
- ◆ All children have varied and individual needs and in all areas of our work the interests of the child is our first consideration.

What do these children need?

- ◆ We believe that, wherever possible the adoptive family should reflect the ethnic and cultural background of the children. When this is not possible a family will be sought who can actively promote aspects of the child's cultural background in a positive way.
- ◆ We consider that adopted children have a right to know about their origins and we support our adoptive parents in helping the children understand their history and the circumstances of their adoption. We also help adoptive parents to recognise that parenting through adoption has additional tasks over and above parenting a birth child.
- ◆ For some children it is important to keep in contact with people who have been important to them in the past including birth family members and foster carers. This contact may be face to face or in the form of letters and cards and we work with adoptive parents to promote this as a positive experience for all concerned.

Who can adopt?

- ◆ People from all walks of life can be adoptive parents. Single applicants as well as married couples will be considered.
- ◆ However, Manx adoption law states that if a couple wish to adopt a child together, they should be married to each other.

- ◆ We welcome couples who already have their own children. Generally the child to be adopted would be a few years younger than the youngest family member. During your application it will be important for us to speak with your children and help them develop an understanding of what adoption will mean to the whole family. Their views as well as yours will be taken into consideration.
- ◆ Children who are placed for adoption are emotionally vulnerable and demanding of attention and they may take time to settle into your family. For these reasons we would advise that you wait until your youngest child is aged at least three years of age before we proceeded with your application.
- ◆ Occasionally a family with their own young children are interested in adopting an older child, teenager or older child with a disability. In these circumstances we will help you consider your family's strengths and the type of child you could best provide a home for.
- ◆ We welcome childless couples considering adoption and would be pleased to talk with you about the special challenges this raises. However we prefer you to have completed any medical counselling and any subsequent treatment you may chose to follow. Therefore we would encourage you to discuss matters relating to childlessness with your GP and to pursue any medical investigations as far as you choose before considering adoption.

Are medical issues important?

- ◆ All adoption applicants are required by law to have a medical examination as part of their adoption assessment. This is undertaken by your GP and the necessary forms are supplied by us. The completed report is returned by the GP to our Medical Advisor for comment and recommendation to the Adoption Panel. Adoption medical reports are held confidentially.
- ◆ Prospective adopters are expected to be in good health. Life style related issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption are not in themselves contra-indications to adoption. However they will be looked at carefully by our Medical Advisor as part of the assessment process. If there is a particular health risk either to you or to the children who may be placed in your care we would discuss these matters with you before proceeding further.

Are there any costs involved?

- ◆ Medical expenses - Applicants will be asked to meet the payment of the statutory adoption medical which takes place at the beginning of your assessment.
- ◆ Legal expenses – There is standard national fee per child to lodge an adoption application in court. Which court will depend on the individual nature of each case. Usually local authorities will pay the legal costs of any complex adoption application if you are not eligible for legal aid.

Are there age limits?

- ◆ The law states that all adoption applicants must be aged 21 years and above. There are no upper age limits for adopters - prospective adopters should have a "reasonable expectation of retaining health and vigour so as to meet the many

and varied demands of children during their formative years". (National Minimum Standards)

What about employment?

- ◆ You do not have to be in secure full time employment. However, you do need to demonstrate your ability to manage your finances and that you have thought about and prepared for the additional costs a child will bring.
- ◆ Prospective adopters are advised to discuss adoption/parental leave with their employers at an early stage. Flexibility in hours of work and any requirement for a parent to stay at home with a child full time will depend on the age and individual needs of a child. We will discuss these issues with you during your adoption assessment and this important issue will be looked at specifically at the time of matching you to a child.

What do we offer?

- ◆ At The Isle of Man Adoption Service we aim to work in an open and honest partnership with you throughout the adoption process. All prospective adopters have their own social worker to help them through the assessment process, answer any questions and offer support once approved and seeking a child, at the time a child is placed in your care, and with ongoing post adoption support.

How long does the process take?

- ◆ We aim to complete the home study and bring your assessment to the Panel within 6 – 8 months from formal application. Once approved, the time taken to identify a suitable child can vary greatly.

What checks have to be made?

- ◆ It is required by law that checks are undertaken by the Criminal Records Bureau, Department of Health, the Probation Service, Education and any Local Authorities where you have lived previously as an adult.
- ◆ Your social worker will also need to see the following documents
 - Birth certificate
 - Marriage certificate (as appropriate)
 - Divorce certificate (as appropriate)
 - National Insurance registration
 - Evidence of income/mortgage/rent payments

Will I need references?

- ◆ It is a legal requirement that every adoption application must be supported by three personal references, one of whom should be a family member. Individual referees should know one or both of you well over a period of at least five years, be aware of your interest in adoption and be able to comment about your potential as an adoptive parent.

- ◆ Referees are asked to complete a written reference within the guide lines provided. When this is returned an appointment will be made by your social worker to visit them for further discussion. All references remain confidential.

What happens next?

- ◆ When you return your completed Registration of Interest form you will be offered an initial appointment to talk further about adoption. This gives us an opportunity to answer any questions and consider your individual circumstances.
- ◆ If you then wish to learn more you will be invited to attend a course of Adoption Preparation Groups. These courses are held quarterly and take place at venues in Douglas and Onchan. They consist of one evening from 7pm to 9 pm and four full day sessions from 9.30am to 3.30 pm.
- ◆ Areas covered in the Adoption Preparation Groups include child development, attachment, overcoming the effects of neglect and issues of separation and loss. You will also have a chance to meet adoptive parents and an adopted adult to hear first hand their experiences of adoption.
- ◆ Further training is included on sexual abuse, HIV/Aids basic awareness and the effects of alcohol and drug abuse. Attendance at all day and evening sessions is a requirement before you are able to move on to the home study assessment.
- ◆ One purpose of these preparation groups is to help you to make an informed decision about whether adoption is right for you. We will not expect you to make apply formally until you have completed the programme.
- ◆ At the end of the preparation groups, you will be given an application form. If there are any particular issues at this stage which need addressing we will discuss these with you during a home visit.

The Adoption Application

- ◆ The Home Study consists of a series of home visits planned together with your social worker and you will be encouraged to take an active part in preparing parts of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR).
- ◆ Your social worker will be looking with you at how your life experiences, present knowledge and skills will help you be a successful adopter. You may not have lots of experience of bringing up children but other events in your life may have given you knowledge and awareness that will be useful as an adopter.
- ◆ You will be asked to think about your life experiences and the relevant skills and knowledge they have given you. As well as employment and any qualifications you have gained, you will be asked to consider the skills you have acquired through family life, voluntary work, hobbies and interests.

You may be asked to complete small projects, guided reading etc to extend your knowledge and experience.

- ◆ The statutory checks will be initiated and you will undergo your adoption medical.

- ◆ The social worker will visit your personal referees and a member of your extended family. The support that will be offered to you by your family and friends once you become adoptive parents is very important and we need to gain a sense of how strong these networks will be in the future.
- ◆ If you have older children, especially if they are living at home, it is very important that the social worker talks to them about the application and will consider their views carefully. Similarly, we will need to talk to ex-partners and adult children to obtain their views of your parenting experiences and potential.
- ◆ When the PAR is completed, up to 10 days are allowed for you to read and discuss the document except for the references and medical information which by law remain confidential. You will be asked to sign that you agree with the contents. At this stage you are also invited to note any concerns, points of interest or disagreement with this report.
- ◆ The report is then presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel. We would encourage you to attend (though this is not compulsory). Attendance will help you see the decision making process and allow you to answer and ask questions of the Panel to ensure a fair representation is made on your behalf by the Agency worker.
- ◆ The panel is made up of professional and community representatives who will consider the information in your report. They will make a recommendation on whether or not you should be approved as an adoptive parent. Usually this decision is ratified by the Decision Maker and you are informed of the decision in writing within three working days. If you are unhappy about the decision you have the right of appeal.
- ◆ The panel will give advice around the number, age and gender of children you are seeking to adopt, although there is some flexibility in this when matching you to a child.
- ◆ Occasionally the Panel will defer making a recommendation and request the agency provide additional information.
- ◆ If the Adoption Panel does not recommend that you are approved as adoptive parents the reasons will be explained to you and we will provide information on how you may appeal, if you choose to do so.
- ◆ The law says that approved adopters may only be registered with one Agency. Following your approval we look forward to continuing our partnership with you, moving towards matching you with children placed for adoption and placing the child in your care. If for some reason you have not been linked to a child within two years, your approved status will need to be reviewed and your statutory checks and medical will need to be updated.

How do we find you a child?

- ◆ During the home study, we will have identified the type of child – Manx or UK – who could fit into your family.
- ◆ Every week we receive details of children from all over the United Kingdom and our approved adopters are also placed on the National Adoption Register.

- ◆ You can also look for children by reading through the profiles in the “Be My Parent” newspaper and other similar publications.
- ◆ If you and your social worker consider that you might be a suitable match for particular child, you will be offered more information about the child, including a background report called a Child’s Permanence Report (CPR). In return your PAR will be given to the child’s social worker. If you, your social worker and the child’s social worker agrees, all the paperwork relating to the link will be presented to an adoption or permanency panel in the child’s local authority. This panel will make the decision whether to recommend the match.
- ◆ Once a link has been approved and you are matched with a child, the child’s social worker and your social worker will plan with you a range of introductions to the child. How long these introductions take varies a great deal, depending to some extent on the age of the child. You will need to be prepared to take leave from your employment.
- ◆ Following the introductions the child is placed with you. This should be an exciting if exhausting time for all concerned!! Again it is wise if you have made preparations for leave from your employment as this initial settling-in period is important both for the child and for yourselves as parents.
- ◆ In some circumstances you may be provided with financial assistance for the costs incurred in the introductions. To ease the arrival of the child into your family a settling-in grant may be payable and you may also be eligible for an adoption allowance. Your social worker will be available all through this process to provide you with advice and support and will explore the various financial considerations.

What happens once the child is living with you?

- ◆ Your social worker will continue to offer you support and guidance and there will also be a social worker for the child until the Adoption Order is made. The child’s progress is monitored by visits by the child’s social worker and by regular Review Meetings which are governed by regulations.

When does the Adoption Order happen?

- ◆ At these Review Meetings a decision is reached (only after the child has been living with you for at least thirteen weeks) about when to begin your legal application.
- ◆ When this decision is made your social worker will help you to complete the necessary paperwork to send to the Court to apply for an Adoption Order. The child’s social worker and your social worker prepare a joint report for the Court. A Guardian ad Litem is then appointed by the Court to review progress and to provide a recommendation to the Court on whether it is in the child’s best interests to be adopted by you. She will visit you and the child prior to preparing her report.
- ◆ An adoption only becomes legal when the Court makes the Adoption Order as this transfers, forever, all legal, parental responsibility for the child to the adopters.

And afterwards?

- ♦ Adoption affects families for life. We recognise that there will be times when you need some additional advice, support and practical help in facing the challenges of adoptive parenting. We are committed to offering you long term support – whenever you feel the need.