



This is the November 2024 edition of our regular SWAC newsletter. It is for anyone working in a SWAC agency, to keep you up to date with what's happening in adoption in the region and nationally. The SWAC agencies are Aspire Adoption, Adopt South West, Adoption West, PACT, CCS Adoption and Barnardo's.

Please feel free to pass it on to your colleagues!

### **SWAC Open Sessions**

SWAC Open Sessions are held monthly (apart from August and December) and are open to anyone, in any role, working in a SWAC agency. They are all held virtually via Teams or Zoom, depending on the preference of the speaker.

These sessions take the form of a presentation by a speaker, followed by questions and discussion, so are suitable for registered social workers to record as CPD. We are planning to record these sessions and make them available on the SWAC website.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> November 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Dr May-Lin Lui and Dr Amanda Cundy**, medical advisers in Adoption West will talk about **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> January 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Lindy Wootton** is running our January session and has called it **Staying in Touch Post Adoption – "the times they are a-changing"** (to quote Bob Dylan!). Many of you will know Lindy from her work across the region, including with CCS Adoption and Early Permanence.



She will be presenting an overview of the present climate of change in post-adoption contact practice by drawing on the research evidence which advocates the need to maintain relationships.

Lindy will also look at what children need and at how well-managed Staying in Touch/post-adoption contact arrangements can help with this, outlining the risks/benefits for all involved.

#### **4th February 2025 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Claire Mason** from the University of Lancaster will talk about the Research in Practice/Centre for Child and Family Justice research on **services for parents who have experienced recurrent care proceedings**.

#### **4th March 2025 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Vicky Swift** from Adoption England will lead a session on **the use of digital technology in maintaining relationships post-adoption**, including the evaluation of the Letterswap pilot.

Please let Heather or Becky if you need the link for any of the sessions. Although every effort is made to get the invitations out well in advance of the meetings, it is not always possible. Keeping circulation lists accurate is a challenge, so we do rely on managers within agencies to forward the links to their teams. If for any reason you don't get the link, just let us know and one of us can forward it to you.

Also, let us know if there are any other topics that would be helpful to your practice, or if you know of anyone who would be able to run a session for us.

#### **SWAC Best Practice Sessions**

These are reflective sessions for those working in a specific area of adoption work in whatever role to meet with colleagues from across the region to share good practices and dilemmas. They are held via Teams on average every two months. Contact Heather or Becky for the Teams link if you do not automatically receive it.

For more information about SWAC please email [heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org](mailto:heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org)  
or Becky Hosken at [becky@ccsadoption.org](mailto:becky@ccsadoption.org)



We are looking into embedding the link to the Best Practice Sessions and the Open Sessions in future editions of the newsletter – watch this space!

**13th November 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Those supporting birth relatives**

**19th November 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Panel administrators**

**19th November 11.30 am to 1.00 pm**

**Family finders for children and adopters**

**26th November 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Marketing, front door, recruitment and assessment workers**

**28th November 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

**Those working in adoption support**

**28th November 12.00 noon to 1.30 pm**

**Those offering access to records and intermediary services**

**6th December 10.00 am to 12.00 noon**

**Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs**

**10th December 9.30 am to 11.00 am**

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## Panel Advisers

### SWAC Management Board Meetings

There are two SWAC Boards, the SWAC Governance Board and the SWAC Operational Management Board.

### SWAC Governance Board

The strategic priorities and funding arrangements for SWAC are determined by the SWAC Governance Board. Board meetings are held every 3 months to include the SWAC Project Lead and the Heads of Service of the participating agencies.

**The next meeting of the Governance Board will be held in person on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December at the CCS Adoption offices in Bristol.**

### SWAC Operational Management Board

Membership of the Operational Management Board is for each agency to decide, depending on the structure within their agency, but those attending are likely to be at the service manager or team manager level and should reflect that the work plan for the Operational Management Board will cover all aspects of adoption work. The first half of each meeting is for discussion of general adoption matters, relevant to all managers regardless of their role. The second half of the meeting will focus on a different area of practice on a rolling basis.

It is important for each agency to be represented at this Board. Those attending are the main link at an operational level between SWAC and their RAA or VAA, taking information about SWAC back into their agencies and helping to shape the SWAC offer.

The next SWAC Operational Management Board meeting will be held via Teams on **10<sup>th</sup> December from 12.00 noon - 2.00 pm** and will focus for the last hour on family finding for children and prospective adopters. What can we do differently or better to promote matches across the region?

### SWAC Adoption Exchanges

For more information about SWAC please email [heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org](mailto:heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org)  
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SWAC is committed to running 3 Adoption Exchanges a year, either virtually or in person. The next Adoption Exchange will be held on **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025**. The number of adopters waiting to be matched is low, so recent Exchanges have been held virtually via Teams. A decision will be made nearer the time of the next Exchange whether to hold it in person or virtually, depending on the number of adopters waiting.

At these Exchanges, family finders for children can profile the children they have waiting, and social workers who are supporting adopters waiting can also attend, as can prospective adopters themselves.

Please put this date in your calendars and give any of your families who are waiting for the dates too so they can decide whether to attend.

More details nearer the time from Heather or Becky.

### **SWAC Monthly Virtual Profiling Sessions**

Monthly profiling sessions featuring the children waiting to be matched across the South West agencies are held virtually. Family finders in the 3 SWAC Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) can profile their children waiting. Workers in the RAAs and VAAs also attend virtually to represent their prospective adoptive families waiting. These are usually held on the first Monday of the month.

The next profiling event for children will be on **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November from 10.00 am**.

The one on **Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>** will be one where we reverse our usual format and feature prospective adopters waiting for the children's family finders.

You need to let Heather and Becky know which children you want to profile by midday on the Wednesday before the meeting. Just email with the name of your child or children, dates of birth, ethnicity, whether being placed with a sibling and if the child has any significant additional needs.

You will be given time to attend and will have 10 minutes to talk about each child or sibling group. You can share photos and videos but above all, you need to know

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your little one. Anyone can read a LinkMaker profile, but what works best with these sessions is where the family finder tells us little stories and anecdotes about the child, their likes, and dislikes, to bring them alive.

The agenda is set on the Thursday morning before the meeting and sent out to all of those profiling a child or children. It is important to let Heather and Becky know if you have a particular time you would like to attend, and we will try to accommodate your request.

**Do remember that Heather and Becky are always very happy to circulate children and family profiles around SWAC, or to circulate requests for EP placements. Just email us!**

### Training

#### **SWAC Safeguarding Training 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024** **9.30 am to 1.00 pm**

Within the SWAC Terms of Reference, there is a commitment to providing safeguarding training once a year, open to all of those working for a SWAC agency. To fulfil this commitment for 2024-25, it has been agreed by the Heads of Service to commission KCA training to run a half-day virtual training session on November 27<sup>th</sup> 2024. The title of the session will be **Adoption and the Impact of Adolescence in a Time of Collective Trauma**.

The session will be led by **Kate Cairns**, who has been a social worker for fifty years, and a trainer for thirty years. With her husband Brian and their three birth children, Kate provided a permanent family for twelve other children between 1975 and 1997. In 2002 she published *Attachment, Trauma and Resilience*, which explored how these three key concepts could provide a structure for understanding ourselves and those with whom we work. The book became a bestseller and has influenced practice around the world.

In more recent years, Kate has concentrated on translating the insights of current neuroscientific research on brain development and function into accessible knowledge and practice skills for carers and practitioners working with children and young people, and for those who support them. She has developed online learning and vocational qualifications and provided widely acclaimed training and consultancy

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to both universal and specialist services across social work, childcare, health and education.

The course outline is as follows-

*'This is a time of profound collective trauma, with stress and chaos affecting everyone in the community. Trauma affects the way people think, feel and behave, and in our communities, at present, we see the impact of this everywhere: social connectedness reduces, trust reduces, language skills are diminished, anxiety and depression increase, and aggression increases. In this environment the transitions of adolescence for adopted children and young people, already carrying the legacy of early childhood trauma, can be fraught with difficulty.*

*Adoptive parents can find themselves faced with risky and challenging behaviours, while they themselves are also experiencing the impact of collective trauma at the same time. Adolescence as a life stage naturally drives securely attached children to begin to shift their primary attachment from parents to peers, while actually really needing their parents to be there as a secure base. For adopted children adolescence has always been more of a challenge than for children with a secure start in life. In our current environment, the challenges of adolescence can be overwhelming for adoptive families, causing disruption and disconnection for everyone involved.*

*This webinar looks at the causes of this disconnection and offers a way forward using tried and tested models for creating positive connections, moving beyond disconnected behaviour and resolving the unmet needs that underlie such fracturing of relationships.*

#### Course content

- *The impact of early trauma on adolescent development*
- *The impact of collective trauma on everyone involved: reduced trust, reduced language skills, increased aggression, increased shame*
- *Collective trauma and social thinning – meeting needs is so much harder now*
- *Five to Thrive as a model, an approach and a framework for connecting with others*
- *Offering parents a way of noticing connection (and noticing disconnection without blame)*
- *Emotion Coaching*
- *Recognising and validating the emotions driving the behaviour*
- *Non-violent communication – what are the needs driving the emotions?*
- *How do we connect to ensure that needs are met?*

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- *Reflecting together on connected relationships and recovery.*

There is no charge to SWAC agencies for this course. Places have been allocated to each agency to decide who can attend, on a pro-rata basis, dependent on the agency's funding to SWAC.

Contact Becky to find out who is coordinating places in your agency.

### **CoramBAAF Training**

Check out the CoramBAAF website for the full list of events and courses which they are running in the next few months. The following course is one many of you may be interested in.

### **Transgender applicants: assessment and analysis** **5 Dec 2024, online via Zoom 10.00 am - 4.00 pm**

This course is aimed at social care professionals who are engaged in the assessment of prospective adoptive parents, foster carers and kinship carers and who wish to increase their awareness and confidence in considering gender issues in assessment, analysis and decision-making.

The learning outcomes for this course are:

- *To explore what we mean by the term diversity and how this impacts our practice*
- *To consider anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice as core principles in working with prospective adopters, foster carers and kinship carers*
- *Explore gender identity, and diversity issues relating to gender*
- *Consider our own values and beliefs about different people and groups in society and critically reflect on the impact of personal values on professional judgements and decision-making*
- *To increase awareness and confidence in the assessment of transgender applicants*
- *To consider diversity in practice – recruitment, assessment, panels, family finding, matching and support.*
- *Consider the implications of all these factors in undertaking effective assessments and making appropriate decisions.*

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There is a cost to this session, but it would be well worth agencies sending at least one person in their agency to it so that they can cascade their learning to their colleagues.

Follow [this link](#) for more information.

### **National Adoption News**

#### **Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) - Transitional Funding for 2025/26**

Given that we are in a Spending Review (SR) period and all government departments are awaiting updates on budget allocations for April 2025 onwards, the DfE has clarified that approved ASGSF applications which begin in 2024-25 and extend into the 2025-26 financial year will continue to be funded. This means that children, young people and families can carry on receiving therapy for up to a maximum of 12 months if this is appropriate for them.

However, the department will not be approving any new applications with a service start date of 1st April 2025 or beyond, in which the funding is purely for the 2025-26 financial year until department budgets have been allocated following the SR. We expect to receive an update in December/January from DfE once we know more about spending for 2025/26.

Also, it has been confirmed that the changes to the ASGSF application form to make it easier to complete, will be delivered from Monday 18th November 2024. Changes include the removal of some free text questions, word limits for certain questions, and picklists for Specialist Assessment Questions. The ASGSF team will soon be creating a webinar on how to submit an application which will cover the changes.

### **National Adoption Week**

National Adoption Week saw a huge increase in traffic to the 'You Can Adopt' website (almost 300%), as well as referrals to agency websites.

As part of National Adoption Week, CVAA published a blog containing a new analysis of Coram-i's adopter characteristics data. They found that over one in four VAA adoptions (27%) are to LGBT adopters. For RAAs, the figure was 17% though it

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is higher in some RAAs. They also discovered that in recent years VAAs have been twice as likely to have Adoption Orders made to families from minoritised ethnic backgrounds compared with RAAs.

### Other useful websites-

#### Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA)

CVAA is a network of 34 independent, not-for-profit organisations that provide adoption services across the UK, including Barnardo's, PACT and CCS Adoption. They have an excellent website and run practice workshops, seminars, training and conferences for their members and non-members. Details of their training programme can be found [here](#).

#### Adoption England

Adoption England is a collaboration of Regional Adoption Agencies working together, with a small central team, aiming to improve adoption practices and develop support and services to better meet the needs of children and families. It receives funding from the Department for Education and works in partnership with all agencies involved with adoption in England, including voluntary adoption agencies and local authorities, as well as specialised adoption charities and third-sector services.

They are continuing to host free online Adoption Matching Bitesize Sessions for the Matching Learning Programme, and the fourth session is on Matching for Siblings on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November from 9.30 am to 10.30 am. The session focuses on siblings' birth and adoption and you will learn about the importance of sibling assessments specific to family finding and matching. Check out their website [here](#) for more details.

#### SWAC website

We now have a SWAC section on the CCS Adoption website, where you can find details of forthcoming events and other useful information. Do check it out [here](#)!

#### Contact us!

SWAC is hosted by CCS Adoption and is run by a Project Lead, **Heather Freeman** who works 10 hours a week, assisted by **Becky Hosken**, who works for SWAC for 5 hours a week. Heather's email address is [heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org](mailto:heather.freeman@ccsadoption.org).

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Becky's email address is [becky@ccsadoption.org](mailto:becky@ccsadoption.org). We are happy to help with any queries you might have and to circulate requests for help or information around the other SWAC agencies or further afield.

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