

# Adoption News

Summer 2015

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### Dear Parents, Children and Family Members,

I hope that you are all enjoying the summer break and that many of you have an opportunity to take time away from work, studies or other commitments to recharge your batteries and spend time with each other. I was pleased that so many of you were able to join the team at the picnic held last month and also that the weather made for a really great afternoon. We really value the opportunity to meet families, to see how things are progressing and also to give you the opportunity to share experiences with others in a relaxed setting.

Whilst the pace of work for us here within the Placements' Service reduces a little over the summer months there has been plenty happening to keep us occupied,

both within the Local Authority, on a regional and national level. Within Brent we have continued to develop our post-permanency services so that we can offer both adopters and special guardians good quality advice. We have been getting to grips with the Adoption Support Fund and have made the first few successful applications to the fund over the last month. More details of how the fund works are within this newsletter.

At a regional level we continue to strengthen our links with other Local Authorities within the consortium – particularly with adoption recruitment and commissioning post-adoption services. We have just finished the first year of a project with the Post-Adoption Centre aimed at improving adopted children's educational experience and the initial results have been very encouraging.

Nationally you may have seen the government's Education and Adoption Bill that proposes the creation of regional adoption agencies with the intention of improving the timeframe for children to be matched more swiftly with adoptive families as well as encouraging better commissioning of post-adoption support. The government has asked the sector to propose how this may work best and so we are working closely with our other Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agency partners to decide on how services will look in the future. There will be no immediate changes to how you work with us (or who you work with) but we will keep you updated through these newsletters and on our website.

With all good wishes for a relaxing summer and autumn period.

**Thanks, Nigel**

# Message from the Adoption team

Hello All,

We hope that you have been enjoying the summer holidays and have lots of exciting things planned. It's been a busy period in Brent's Adoption Service and things show no sign of slowing down. There have been some new additions to the team and some goodbyes. Nico Swart is new to the Adoption & Permanency Team and Alexandra Weatherill and Iran McGinn have now both returned from secondment. Alexandra and Nico are working with our children and Iran will be assessing and supporting adopters. Julia Walter, who has been with Brent since she was a student, has moved on to exciting opportunities. We will miss her, but sincerely wish her well!

As you probably know, there have been big changes to adoption legislation and adoption services over the past couple of years. There has been a change in court rulings and an increase in the number of special guardianship orders granted. As a result, nationally, and in Brent, there has been a decrease in the number of children available for adoption. Whilst we support children remaining with their birth families wherever possible, we recognise the frustration that many adopters feel at having to delay their own dream of having a child join their family.

As a service, we are doing our best to meet the needs of our adoptive families no matter what stage of the process they're in - from approval of new adopters, to providing therapeutic support during times of need, to counselling adopted adults. However, we are always open for your suggestions and feedback. If you need any assistance please don't hesitate to contact our duty line on **0208 937 4525** (option 2).

We are now available, Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm. You can also email us at [adoption@brent.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@brent.gov.uk).

Sincerely,

All of us at Brent Adoption Service

# Training



Things are slowing down a bit over the summer; however, there are plenty of opportunities to gain new knowledge and access to support this autumn.

## West London Consortium



The next WLC Seminar is scheduled for November 10th in Ealing. It will focus on 'Managing Contact'. This can often be a sensitive area for adopters, as the dynamics are sometimes difficult and a child's needs around contact change as they grow older. More details will be sent closer to the time.

## We are Family

For those of you who would prefer to attend a group during the week, or who are just looking for something a bit different, there is a new adoption support group, 'We Are Family' Shepherds Bush. The group is now available to adopters

in the West London area who have children placed with them. 'We Are Family' provides support for adopters and prospective adopters through parent support groups and other activities. The fortnightly meetings will take place at a local venue on a weekday evening and will be informal, friendly and run on a drop-in basis. The support evenings are run on a voluntary basis by other adopters and it's a place for adopters to share their experiences, rather than be offered information or training.

'We are Family' organisers say; 'We believe that parental self care is the foundation of a happy and healthy family, as only when we are well, can we truly be the compassionate, attuned, playful parents that we would wish to be. We Are Family was created out of a feeling that there was a need to share with other parents the questions, feelings, experiences and momentous changes that come with becoming parents through adoption.'

If you are interested in joining them, please do get in touch on [shepherdsbush@wearefamilyadoption.co.uk](mailto:shepherdsbush@wearefamilyadoption.co.uk)

# Training

## Brent Council Training

Brent Placements Service has an excellent training & development programme. While most of this is geared towards foster carers and kinship carers, much of it is transferable to adoptive parents as well. In 2015/2016, there are a number of courses which you may find useful. Some of the upcoming ones are listed below. Do get in touch with Zak Darwood, our training coordinator, to book a course.  
[Zak.Darwood@brent.gov.uk](mailto:Zak.Darwood@brent.gov.uk)

**12th of August, 2015** - Attachment & Emotional Well Being

**9th of September** - Attunement & Attachment with Babies

**10th of October, 2015** - Life Story Work for Adoptive Parents

**19th of November** - First Aid for Babies and Toddlers

**24th of November, 2015** - Working with Traumatized Children

**18th of January, 2016** - The Importance of Child Focused Play

## Next Steps Support Group

The Next Steps Support group was started in recognition that Brent, like most other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies, now has a number of adopters who remain unmatched for a significant period. This is because of the limited number of children available for adoption nationally. We understand this can be a frustrating time for many prospective adopters as they wait in limbo to complete the family that they are so much looking forward to. The Next Steps group aims to engage adopters during this period and continue to provide training and support from Brent staff and other adopters. Two groups have been held so far and it has been

very well attended. The most recent meeting focused on how to critically read a Child Permanency Report [CPR], so prospective adopters are aware of what questions they should be asking the child's social worker.

We are pleased to offer this service to our adopters during what can be a challenging period. If you are currently awaiting a match, we warmly welcome you to attend this group. The group is held bi-monthly and the next one is due to take place in September. We'll notify everyone when details are finalised.

## Opportunity for Couples Counselling via the Tavistock

The Tavistock is offering FREE couples counselling, either group or individual. The aim is to offer adoptive parents support for their relationship, help to manage the stresses of parenting, and thereby enhance their children's lives. You must have already been granted the Adoption Order to benefit from this service. The group therapy sessions will be meeting for sixteen weeks for two hours. It will consist of a small number of adopters exploring their various parenting experiences. Alternatively, if couples prefer to meet with a therapist individually, they can do so for up to twenty sessions. The Tavistock is a very well respected organisation and this is a good opportunity to access additional support to strengthen your relationship.

You can be referred to either of these services via Brent's Adoption Service or you can contact them yourself. Further details are available online at [www.tccr.org.uk](http://www.tccr.org.uk).

You can call them on **0207 380 1950** or email [adoptingtogether@tccr.org.uk](mailto:adoptingtogether@tccr.org.uk)

## Upcoming Dates for the Brent Adopter's Support Group

Where:

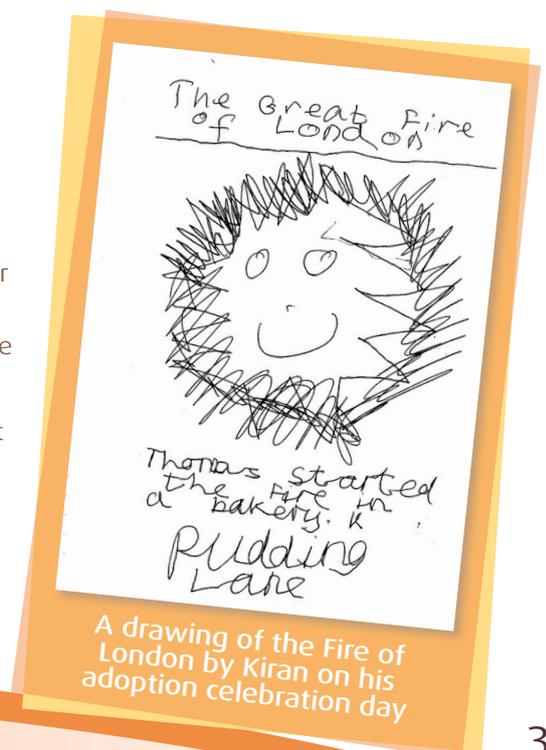
**The Willows Children's Centre  
Barnhill Road  
Wembley  
HA9 9YP**

When:

**26th September  
14th November  
30th of January  
19th of March  
7th of May**

\*A crèche will be provided.

Anyone who has a Brent child placed with them for adoption is welcome to join us. The meetings include information around topical adoption news, but are mostly a forum for adopters to meet and discuss their experiences. It is an important forum in which you can share both the challenges and joys of being an adoptive parent. Please mark these dates on your calendar. We look forward to seeing you!



# News!!!

## The Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund went live on the 1st of May 2015.

Hopefully, you have read about this in our last couple of newsletters or seen this highlighted in the media. The Adoption Support Fund is a government funding initiative, (£19.3 million pounds), which is now available to local authorities to assist children or families who may need therapeutic support following the making of an Adoption Order. Brent has made their first application and has several more in process.

If you or another adoptive family you know could benefit from this, please call us on the duty number [0208 937 4525, option 2] for more information. We can give you an idea about what sorts of things are covered by the ASF. Alternatively, there is some information on the First4Adoption website, which you may find useful.

## An Important Reminder about Letterbox Contact

Letterbox contact continues to be an important part of post-adoption in order to ensure that links between adopted children/families and birth families are maintained. Adoption is clearly a continuing journey and what we know from adopted adults is that this 'link' is important to adopted children as a way of acknowledging and respecting a child's past. This part of their life needs to be honoured and validated and maintaining contact through

letterbox gives this very important message to an adopted child.

We very much appreciate the time and effort taken by adoptive families in ensuring letters are written for the birth families. We also know how much it means to birth families for this link to be maintained.

Life-story work is another way of respecting and validating a child's past and this work is essential in strengthening a child's sense of identity and sense of self. It is important for adoptive families to introduce the life-story book to the child in a gradual and sensitive way, whilst at the same time not to overwhelm the child with giving too much information. Often, adopted children already have a sense that 'something' has happened and by introducing the life-story book you are also allowing them to trust their instincts and 'felt sense'.

Both letterbox contact and life-story work are important ways to keep the link with birth families alive by respecting the adopted child's right and need to know their past.

## Pupil Premium

There were a number of questions in relation to the Pupil Premium at the last Adoption Support group, so we thought it would be a good idea to clarify some of the details.

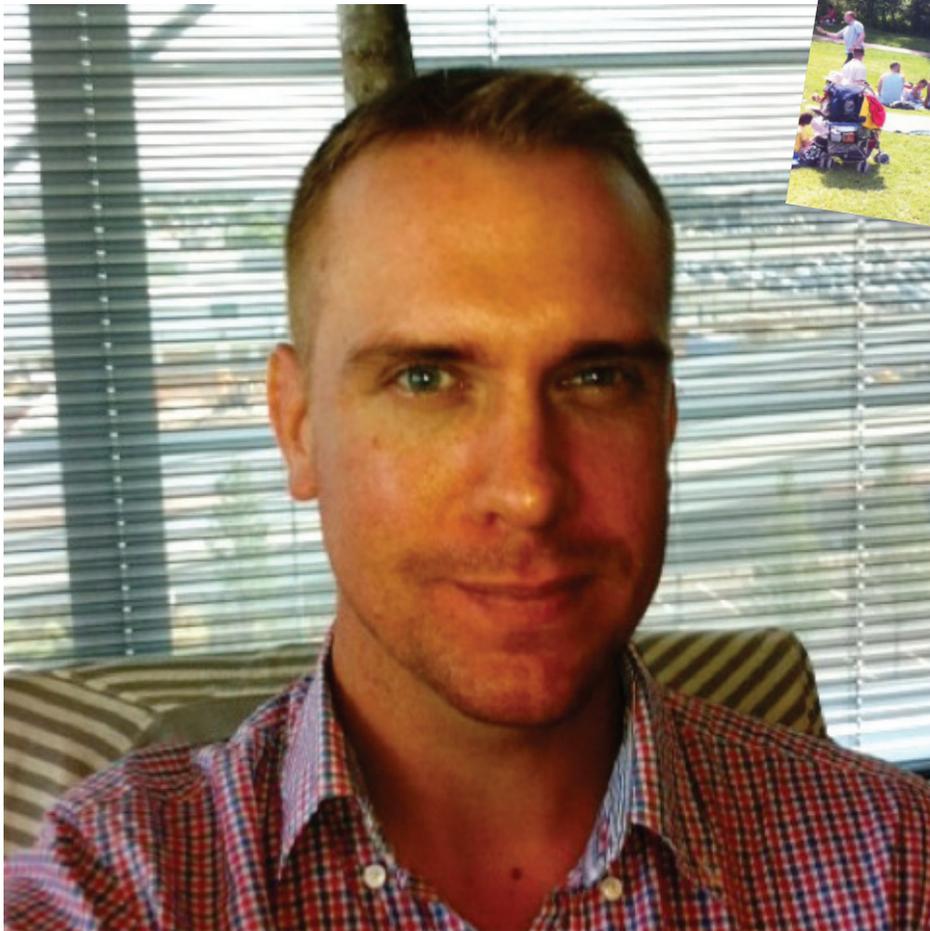
The pupil premium is a pot of funding available to Looked After Children and those who have an Adoption Order or a Special Guardianship Order. This is a recognition by the government that these groups of children have often been impacted by their difficult early life experiences. The impact of these experiences is that these children often have various issues in the academic environment, which make hard for them to succeed. The aim of the pupil premium money is to help bridge that gap.

It does not matter when your child was adopted - the government has changed requirements to ensure that all children and young people are eligible from reception up to Year 11. They must be attending a state funded school or non-maintained special school.

In order to qualify for this financial support, adopters are supposed to self disclose their child's adopted status and provide evidence such as a letter from the placing local authority or copy of the adoption order (although we have received some reports of schools applying for the PP without notifying parents). Their status will be recorded on the school census, which is what makes them eligible. As long as you have provided this information to the school by that deadline then the funding will be paid. The money is paid directly to the school on a quarterly basis and totals £1900 per child per year.

If your child is moving schools, you will need to notify their new school of their eligibility by the time of the January census in order for them to be eligible when they start their new school in the autumn. Although the money is to support this specific group of children, the £1900 will not necessarily specifically be spent on your child individually. For example, some schools decide to use this money to assist in hiring additional support in the classroom or to access particular learning opportunities for the school. They are not obliged to seek input from adoptive parents, although I'm sure that most schools would welcome suggestions as to how best to help their children. The money is monitored by Ofsted and each school must evidence how they are using the pupil premium to help the child in question achieve to the best of their ability.

# News!!!



## Profile on Nico

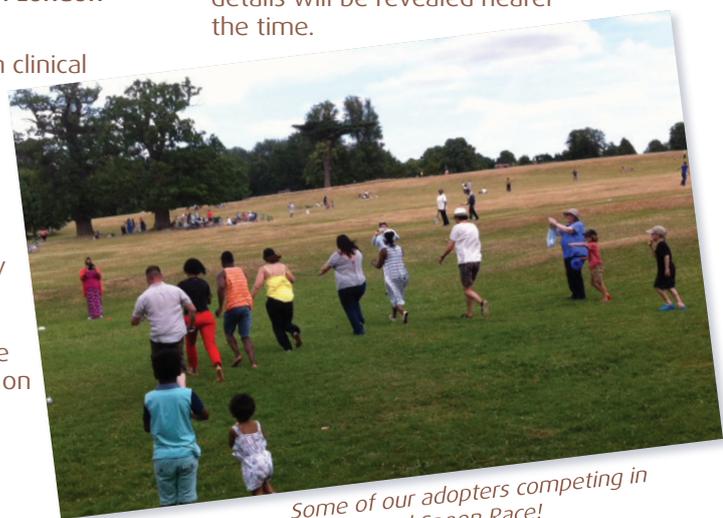
Our newest colleague in the Adoption & Permanency Team is Nico Swart. He originally hails from Cape Town, South Africa, but has been in London since 2004.

Nico brings an extensive skill set to the team. He holds a degree in clinical social work; however, he is also a practising psychotherapist. Nico previously worked in the Brent Fostering and Assessment department for many years. He says 'On a personal level I am very grateful for this opportunity. That said, I miss my foster families and the children I worked with. Their commitment, resilience and compassion of Brent Foster Carers has been truly inspiring. It is my aim to bring at least some of this positive energy to my new role. Joining the Adoption and Permanency Team feels like a very natural progression and I have been welcomed in such a warm way by my colleagues that I immediately felt at home.' He has already been doing a terrific job and we're happy to have him on board. Welcome Nico!



## Summer Picnic

The Adoption Picnic took place on Saturday, July 11th. It was held at Cassiobury Park in Watford and we were fortunate enough to have marvellous weather. More than fifty adopters and children attended throughout the day. There was delicious food and lots of things to do, including relay races, badminton games, and even a parachute! Some adventurous folks headed off to enjoy the paddling pools, train, and bouncy castle as well. This event provided a good opportunity for old friends to reconnect, as well as for establishing new links with other adoptive families. Thank you so much to everyone who attended. It was delightful to see you all! We hope to have an equally good turnout to our Holiday Party which will be held in December. More details will be revealed nearer the time.



*Some of our adopters competing in the Egg and Spoon Race!*

# Fun Summer Activity Ideas!



**Summer is finally here! Make the most of your precious time together by engaging your child in fun and creative activities. Here are a few suggestions to get you started!**

- ▶ Make edible body paint and let your child decorate themselves. All it requires is some instant vanilla custard and food colouring in various shades. We suggest that you use this one outside to make cleaning up easier!
- ▶ Body tracing - Use sidewalk chalk to trace your child's outline at the playground, in your back garden, or wherever you can find some pavement. Let your child then colour themselves in.
- ▶ Make a 'Summer Memory Jar' using any clean glass or clear plastic jar. Encourage your child to collect bits and pieces from your adventures throughout the summer- this could be objects from nature, small mementos from your travels, or anything that captures their imagination. The possibilities are endless!

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and feedback to  
[adoption@brent.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@brent.gov.uk)  
020 8937 4525

[brent.gov.uk/adoption](http://brent.gov.uk/adoption)