

ADOPTION



Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about adopting children from Lincolnshire.

This pack will provide you with information about the adoption process, why children need adoptive families, who can adopt, and the support available to adoptive families.

It is not expected that you will take in all the information at once - this is very much the start of a process. It may be useful to look back over this material as you move through the stages of the adoption process. Children's Services can also provide a Statement of Purpose upon request.

You will be provided with more detailed information at each stage and, if ever you feel the need to discuss a particular issue further, you can contact your named Supervising Social Worker.

For more general information contact us on our freephone number 0800 093 3099
or

Fostering & Adoption Enquiries
CSC – Customer Service Centre
Witham Park House
Waterside South
Lincoln
LN5 7JN

Tel: 01522 782192

Email: fosteringandadoptionenquiries@lincolnshire.gov.uk

If you would like a copy of this leaflet in an alternative format or a different language please contact 01522 782192.

P. Dinsbury

What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process by which children who cannot be brought up with their birth parents become a full, permanent member of a new family. Adoptive parents take full responsibility for the child once an Adoption Order is made in court. The process of becoming approved to adopt takes time and considerable commitment, usually between six months and one year.

Adoption is a very important decision and one that should not be undertaken without careful thought and preparation. It is a lifelong commitment and, like all parenting, presents challenges and difficulties which sometimes require a high level of perseverance. It also provides significant rewards as you observe your child grow and develop within your family.



Who needs adoption?

This pack contains profiles that will give you a sense of the background and circumstances of children who require adoption within the County. Children of all ages from differing cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds may need adoptive families. Lincolnshire, in common with other counties, have fewer babies available for adoption than before and many children are aged over two years. Often, these will be part of a group of brothers and sisters, and some children will have learning or physical disabilities.

Many will have experienced difficulties and traumas within their birth families which will have affected them. Dealing with this will require considerable patience and caring on behalf of the adoptive parents. All will have had changes of carers and will require time to establish and form emotional bonds with their adoptive parents.



Who can adopt?

Adoptive parents are needed from all walks of life to meet the wide range of children awaiting adoption.

- We do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, age, ethnic origin, class, culture, sexuality or whether you are in work or not.
- We seek to assess each application on its strengths.
- Anyone wishing to adopt must be aged over 21 years by law.
- Single people, male or female, can adopt and often have skills particularly appropriate to adoption.
- The supervising social worker will be able to provide you with the most current information.
- Couples will usually have lived together for at least two years before being considered as prospective adopters.
- Applicants can be home owners or live in rented accommodation.
- Applicants may be childless, have children living at home or children living independently.

In Lincolnshire, our ambition is to process, where appropriate, all applications from prospective adopters. However, our primary aim is to meet the needs of children requiring adoption. This may mean at times that we will prioritise individual applications. At busy times we will consider applications in the following priority order:

- Applicants who have responded to a specific advert or have expressed an interest in a particular child
- Applicants interested in offering a home to a group of brothers and sisters
- Applicants interested in adopting a child with special requirements
- Applicants interested in children aged 5+
- Applicants interested in children under 5 years
- Applicants interested in intercountry adoption

The contact needs of children

Whereas in the past it was the accepted practice to cut all the ties to the birth family, more recently this view has changed. Adults who have experienced adoption have told us that, as an adopted child, they would have wanted more information about their birth families in order to have a better sense of their own history and identity.

As a result, most children placed for adoption will require some ongoing contact with a significant person from their birth family. This usually takes the form of written information exchange via the Lincolnshire 'letterbox' scheme, managed by the Adoption Support Team. This could happen once or twice yearly and may include an exchange of photographs.

For some children, direct or face-to-face contact may be appropriate. This could be with a brother or sister (adopted or placed within another family) or with a member of the extended birth family with whom the child may have lived. There may occasionally be ongoing contact with a birth parent if this is considered to be in the child's best interests. Birth families are not given the address of adopters and staff will support you if direct contact is planned.

During the process of preparation, the issue of contact will be discussed with you at length. It is vital that, upon learning more, you are honest about the level and nature of contact that you are able to accept.

Frequently asked questions

• What checks do you undertake?

You will be asked to agree to checks being sought from CRB (Criminal Records Bureau), NSPCC, Department of Health and your Local Authority, Probation and Education. You must declare any caution or conviction (however minor) at the earliest stage possible. Certain offences relating to offences against children are specified in law and would prevent you from adopting.

• What health assessments are required?

All prospective adopters must have a medical examination at the beginning of the preparation process. This is undertaken by your own GP. The purpose of the medical is to ensure that there are no existing medical conditions that would make caring for a child inadvisable.

The charge for this service will be the responsibility of the adoptive applicants and can vary from one GP to another. You should discuss any health concerns with your supervising social worker. An opinion from the Agency's Medical Advisor for adoption will be crucial to progressing your application.

• What Health and Safety issues do you consider?

- (a) We will inspect your home and garden in order to advise you on any safety measures that you may need to put in place such as pond safety, safety glass.
- (b) If you have pets, we will complete a questionnaire to indicate whether a particular animal is likely to prove a risk to a child's well being. We will also discuss the impact that a child may have upon your pet and how this could best be managed.
- (c) Because of the risks to children from passive smoking, we would not normally place children under 5 years with applicants who smoke. We would want assurances that all the living rooms remain smoke free.

• What references will you take up?

We will require written references from independent individuals, one of whom should have known you for at least five years and who can support your application to become adoptive parents. We will also contact previous partners who have shared parenting tasks with you and seek the views of your children (where appropriate). It will also be necessary to seek direct references from present employers.

• Am I too old?

There is a legal requirement that all adoptive parents are over 21 years, but age is only one aspect of your application that will be considered. We need to be as sure as possible that you are able to parent a child you wish to adopt into adulthood.

• What about fertility treatment?

Many people wish to explore as fully as possible having a birth child prior to the consideration of adoption. We believe that fertility treatment needs to be completed prior to accepting an application to adopt. Where such treatment has been unsuccessful, we believe that applicants require time to adjust to the prospect of not having a birth child before they can make a positive decision to apply to adopt. This issue may require an individual discussion with your supervising social worker.

• What about my birth children?

We are pleased to accept applications from experienced parents, especially when your own children are older or adults. As part of the application process their views and expectations will be sought.

Where your children are younger, we will need to be sure that adoption and sharing their parents is the right thing for them, and that there will be a sufficient age gap between them and a child placed.

- **What impact will adoption have upon my lifestyle?**

Applicants will need to fully understand both the practical and emotional impact that a child placed for adoption will have upon their lifestyles.

In the early stage of placement, the availability of a care giver will be critical to enable a child to settle and develop an emotional attachment. As with any parent of a school age child, you will need to be available out of school according to the child's needs.

Please note that you may be entitled to Adoption Leave once the child is placed with you. You can check your entitlements with your employer and also on: www.dwp.gov.uk

- **Will I get paid an allowance to adopt?**

All adoptive parents will be able to apply for universal benefits such as Child Benefit, Child Tax Credits, etc.

For some children, usually those who are older or disabled, some financial support may be available for a period to address a specific need or issue. This will be means-tested and you will be required to submit financial information to assist with the financial assessment.

- **What support can I expect?**

You will be fully supported throughout the process, from assessment to placement of a child, by Social work staff, continuing through the assessment process to the placement of a child, should that be the outcome of your application.

Once an adoption order is granted then routine contact with the team will cease, although you can come back to us at a later stage should problems arise. A helpline service is available each weekday morning (9.30 – 12.30) with an answerphone facility at other times. This is staffed by the Adoption Support Team who will also oversee 'letterbox' arrangements.

You can arrange to meet with other adopters and have access to training, advice and information both facilitated by Adoption UK and Lincolnshire Children's Service's Training section and Adoption Support Team. If there are specific needs associated with a placement, these will be assessed and we will advise you what support is available.



What happens next?

This section explains what happens once you have decided you want to adopt a child. We aim to complete the process from formal application to approval in one year.

Step 1 - Initial Home Visit

A Social Worker from the Family Placement team will visit you at home. They will talk to you about your own wishes and expectations and Lincolnshire's current need for adopters. They will also discuss whether there is anything that could prevent you proceeding at this stage. The visit usually takes place within one month from your initial enquiry.

Step 2 - Application Form

You return an application form. On receipt of this form we undertake a variety of statutory checks and send for references. The nature and reason for these checks will be fully explained to you during the initial home visit. They cannot be carried out without your full cooperation and agreement. You will also be required to attend a medical undertaken by your GP.

Step 3 - Adoption Preparation Course

If you proceed to the next stage, you will be invited to a preparation course. The course is designed to give more information about adoption as well as an understanding of the needs of the children placed for adoption. This is an opportunity for you to learn about skills you will have to develop to parent an adopted child.

The course is presented by Adoption supervising social workers, experienced adopters and foster carers. It gives you the opportunity to contribute your own experience. Most applicants say that they find the course very useful, particularly mixing with others who have the same goal.

Remember the purpose of the preparation course is to assist you in making an informed decision about adoption, so ask as many questions as you want. The preparation course consists of four day sessions usually held over two consecutive weeks.

The course is an important part of the assessment and preparation process and you are expected to attend all sessions. If you have difficulty attending you should contact the team to discuss your situation beforehand and we may be able to arrange for you to attend a different course in another part of the County.

We endeavour to minimise your wait by running courses at different times across a number of locations in the County. We usually run two courses per year in each area: east, west and south. Inevitably, given the size of Lincolnshire, this may require you to travel some distance. However, you can claim travel expenses and you will always be given the opportunity to wait for a course more local to you.

You may choose to withdraw at this, or any other stage of the process leading up to the Adoption Panel.

Step 4 - Home Study Assessment

At the end of the preparation course a supervising social worker will be allocated to complete your Home Study with you. This involves approximately eight home visits to discuss your personal background, situation and your strengths in relation to adopting a child. If you already have children, the supervising social worker will interview them to find out their wishes and feelings. If your children are at school, we will write to the teacher about this and we will also speak to your employer. If you have parented in a previous relationship your former partner will usually be contacted, together with any children you have who live separately from you.

You will need to provide at least two personal referees who will be interviewed. These need to be people who know you well and who are not related to you.

The final Home Study report (Form F) is shared with you at least 28 days before the Panel. Any written comments you have can be attached to the report, which you will also be asked to sign. The report will include a recommendation from your assessing supervising social worker to the Adoption Panel on whether to approve you and, if so,

the age, gender and number of children you would be best suited to care for.

If during the Home Study we decide we are unable to proceed with your application, the reasons will be shared with you both verbally and in writing.

Step 5 - Adoption Panel

The report is read and discussed by the Adoption Panel. This Panel is made up of people who all have a connection with adoption, either through personal or professional experience. You will be given the opportunity to attend the Panel before they make their recommendations. If you choose not to attend, this will not prejudice your application in any way. The Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve you or not. The final decision on approval is formally made by the Agency's decision maker. In Lincolnshire this person is the Assistant Director of Children's Services. You will be told straight away and in writing within seven working days of the Panel making its recommendation. There is a right of appeal to the Independent Review mechanism if your application is not accepted by Lincolnshire.

Following approval you will be given support during the waiting period until a potential match is identified. If a placement has not been made, we will hold a review with you after a year. This is to discuss how you are coping with the wait and any changes in your circumstances and your approval status.

Step 6 - Matching

The Family Finding group meets fortnightly and carefully considers which child(ren) to match you with. You will be given a lot of written information about the child and a chance to meet with their social worker to help us and you decide if this match is the right one. Also, an information meeting will be held between a range of professionals known to the child, to ensure full information exchange. If everyone agrees, the social worker and supervising social worker will jointly write a report for consideration by the Adoption Panel and the decision maker. This report outlines the child's needs and how they will be met by you and includes a section for your own comments on the Adoption Placement Report.

If the match is approved you will be asked to attend a meeting to plan introductions to the child. The introductory process is carefully planned to help the child and you begin to get to know each other. It will determine when you meet the child for the first time.

Throughout the process, you will be supported by your supervising social worker and the child's social worker. The length of introductions depends on the child's age and needs, and your own availability. Also an Information Sharing Meeting will be held

Step 7 - Moving in Day

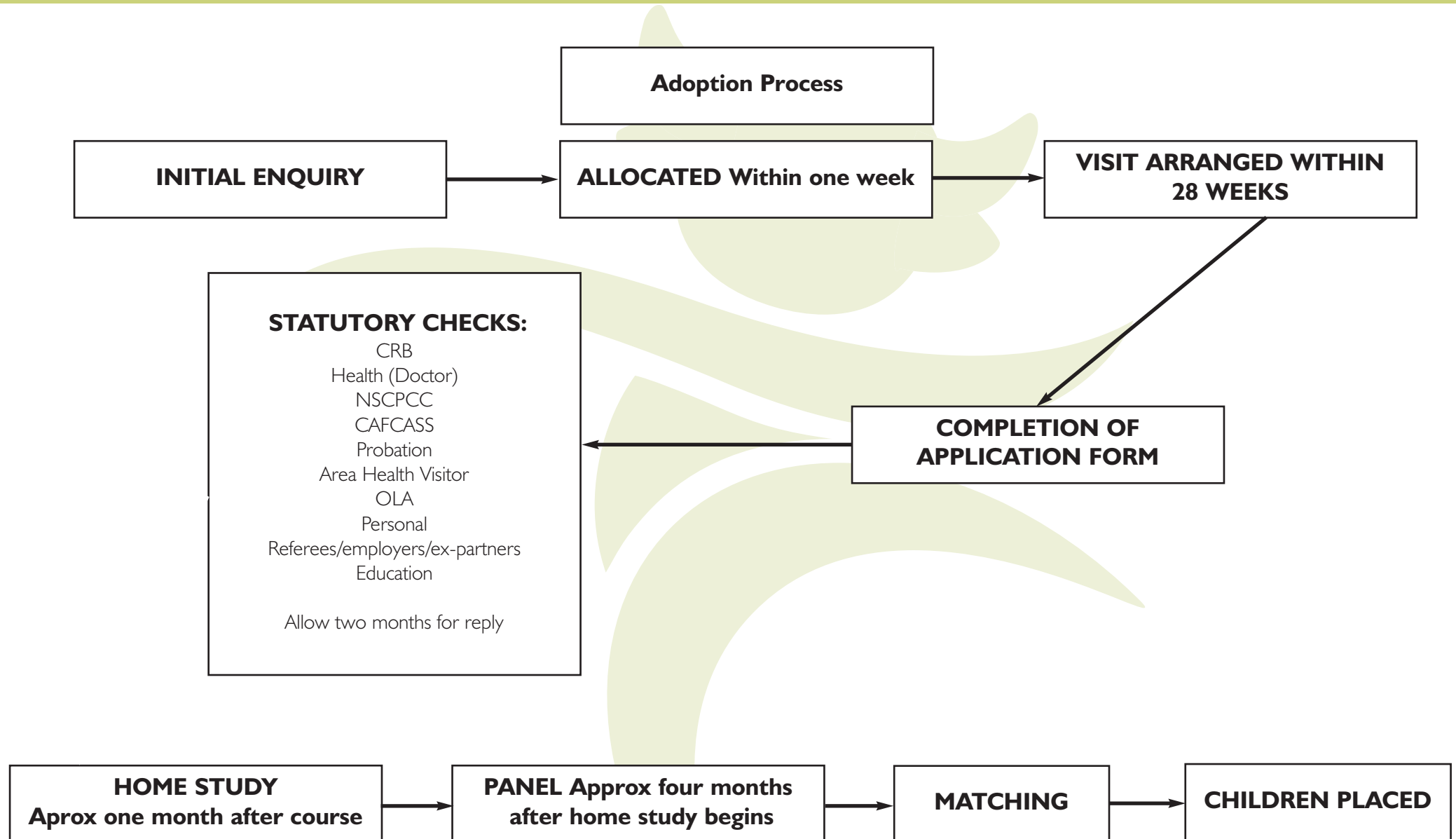
When the child has been placed with you, your supervising social worker will keep in touch through visits and by telephone. The Agency has a duty to review the child's placement up to the adoption order being made. The child's social worker will also undertake visits during this period.

You will also receive a copy of the Adoption Placement Plan which contains a lot of important information about the child, key documents and people, and designated responsibilities (this also outlines the Adoption Support Plan for all members of the household).

Step 8 - The Adoption Order

You will be advised about when to make your adoption order application and you must also decide on whether you are ready. Your Adoption supervising social worker will help you with your forms if necessary. The child's social worker and your Adoption supervising social worker will write a report for court. You will receive notification of the Adoption hearing from the court, marking the end of a lengthy but worthwhile process.

Thank you again for your interest in adoption. As you will see from the information in this pack, adoption is no small undertaking and there will be setbacks and challenges - as well as rewards and the opportunity to make a significant difference to a child's life.



CHILD PROFILE

LILLY: Aged 6

Synopsis regarding why the child was accommodated

Lilly was three when she came into care, and had a two year old brother, Jamie. They have a very close relationship with each other. When they first came into care, they had their own way of communicating with one another.

What is Lilly like?

Lilly is a white British female; she is five years of age with long brown hair and blue eyes. She is a very loving little girl who enjoys cuddles and lots of attention and likes to blow kisses to people. Lilly likes to help around the house and in the garden. She enjoys school, especially drawing, painting and PE and looks forward to attending. She has a helper to assist her with her toileting needs.

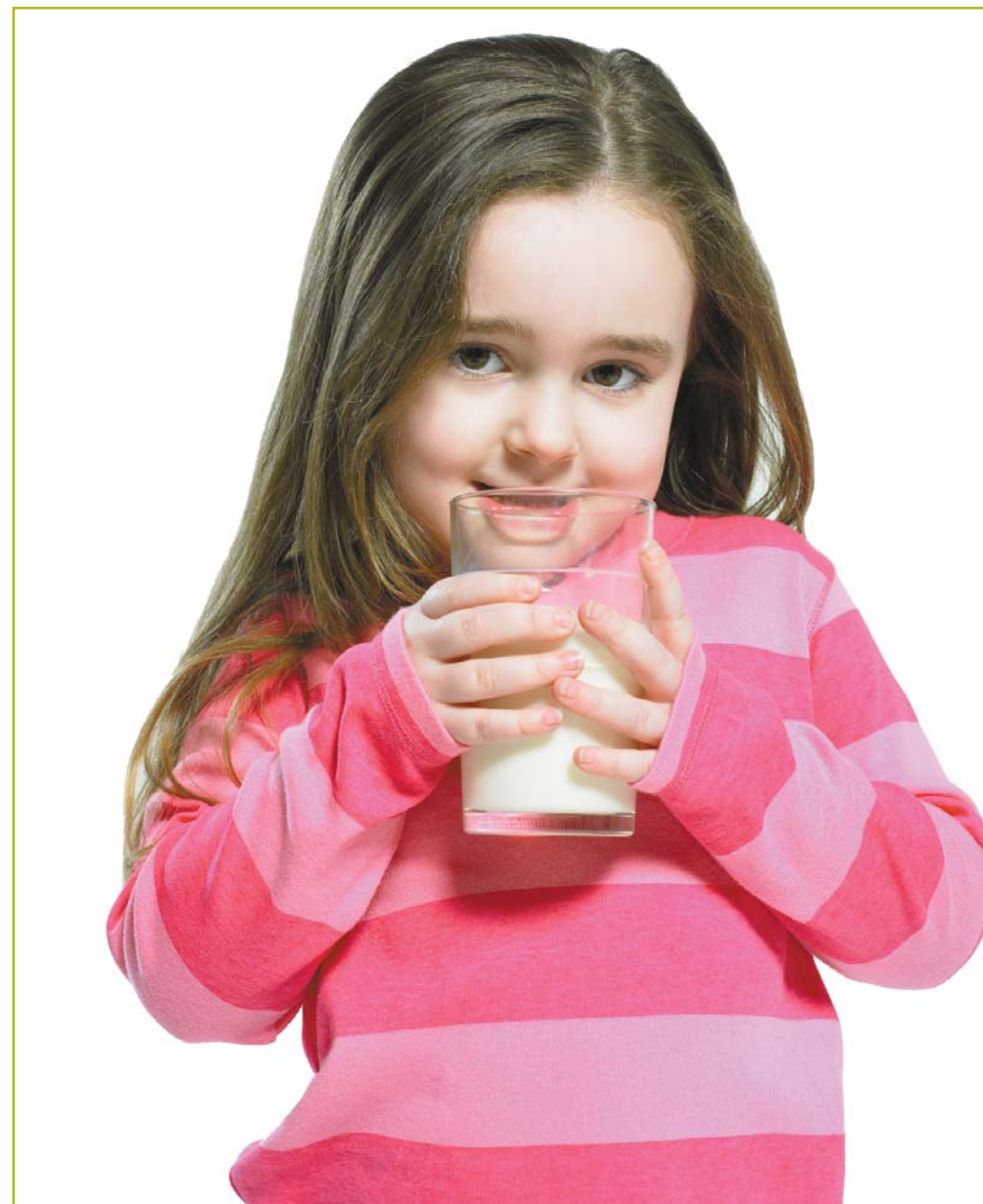
Lilly is a very placid little girl and appears to be happy for most of the time.

However, at times she can become very distant and disassociated. This behaviour is believed to be associated with her early care experiences. Lilly is delayed at meeting her developmental milestones and, although she is five years of age, her behaviour is that of a two or three year old in all areas of her development. Consequently, at this point of Lilly's life, it is difficult to assess how she will grow up, and it may be that she does not catch up with her peers. Despite this, Lilly's current foster carers describe her as 'a joy to look after'.

What sort of family life does Lilly need?

Lilly needs a placement that will give her lots of love and attention and offer routines. She is very close to her brother and needs a home where they can be together.

Photograph is of a model and not of actual child



CHILD PROFILE

WILLIAM: Aged 6

Synopsis regarding why the child was accommodated
William was placed on the Child Protection Register in March 2003 under the category of Likelihood of Emotional Harm and taken into the care of the Local Authority in April 2003. William witnessed many serious domestic violence incidents between his parents and has seen both parents sustain serious injuries as a result of assaulting each other.

What is William like?

William is a six year old, blonde haired, green-eyed young boy. He is a bubbly, chatty child who loves attention from everyone.

He is an excitable young boy who likes to receive hugs. He likes to be active and enjoys playing and reading on a one to one basis. William loves trains, and has recently been swimming for the first time. William responds well to boundaries and has no behavioural difficulties.

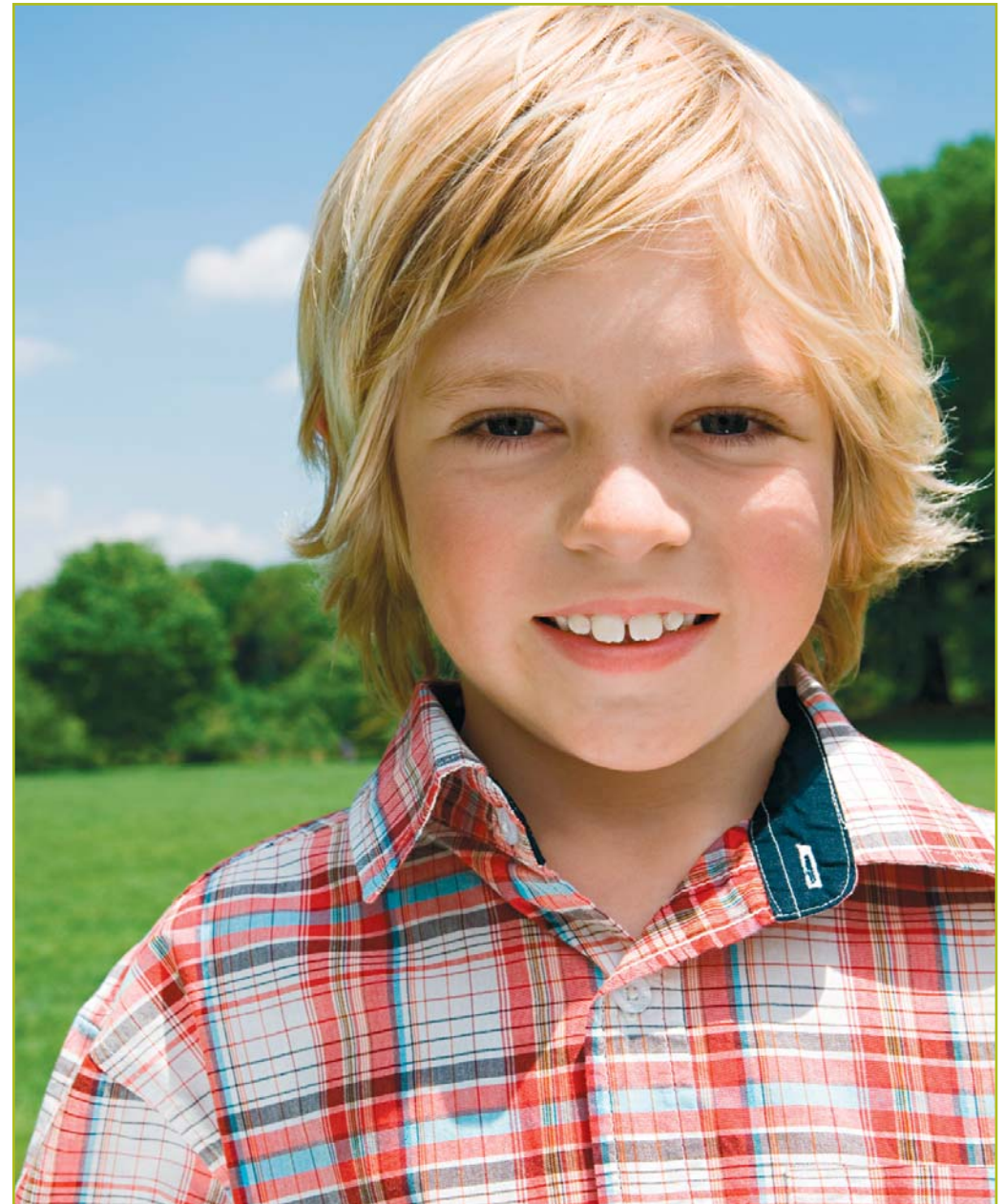
What sort of family life does William need?

William needs to be placed with a white British family who can spend time with him on a one to one basis. William has recently had a foster placement where the foster parents had a fourth birth child and William settled very quickly into family life. William himself has stated that he would like a kind family with children but he would also like to have one of his own.

Post Placement Contact

William has never had contact with his three half siblings or one full sibling during his lifetime. It is hoped that William would, in the future, have indirect contact with them through the letterbox scheme. Both birth mother and father would be offered indirect contact through the letterbox scheme. Father has had no contact with William since November 2003 and mother has had no contact since July 2004.

Photograph is of a model and not of actual child



ADOPTION READING LIST

A Child's Journey Through Placement

by VERA FAHLBERG. Pub – BAAF

First Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts;

Tykes and Toddlers

by CAROLINE ARCHER. Pub – Jessica Kingsley

First Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts;

Tykes and Teens

by CAROLINE ARCHER. Pub – Jessica Kingsley

Attachment, Trauma and Resilience

by KATE CAIRNS. Pub – BAAF

Adopting Children with Attachment Problems

by DAN HUGHES. Pub – Child Welfare (USA)

Safer Catering from the Fostering Network

A Boy Called 'It'

by DAVE PELZER True Story

A Brother's Journey

by RICHARD B. PELZER (Brother of above) True Story

One Child

by TOREY HAYDEN. A 6 year old Sheila has special needs – True Story

The Great Ormond Street Book of Baby and Childcare

by TESSA HILTON

The Adoption Experience

by ANN MORRIS

Could You Be My Parent.

Pub – BAAF

Making Sense of Attachment in Adoption and Foster Families.

ADOPTION UK

Supernanny

by JO FROST

Adopting a Child; A Guide for People Interested in Adoption

by J LORD. Pub – BAAF

The Adoption Experience; Families Who Give Children a Second Chance

by A MORRIS. Pub – Jessica Kingsley

Talking About Adoption to Your Adopted Child

by M MORRISON. Pub – BAAF

The Adopter's Handbook; Information, Resources and Services for Adoptive Parent's

by A N SALTER. Pub - BAAF

Why Adoption? Experiences to Share for Teenagers and their Adoptive Parent's

by K SPARKS. Pub – Thomas Coram Foundation/BAAF

Real Parent's, Real Children; Parenting the Adopted Child

by H Van GUELLEN and L M BARTELS-RABB.

Pub Crossroad Publishing, New York