



Issue 13

Adoption Newsletter

Winter 08

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Adoption in Kent this Winter

Hello from the new County Adoption Manager



Well, I have been here just a year now and yes, I am beginning to enjoy the role. For those of you who don't know me or haven't met me, my name is Vanessa Glenn.

My previous role was as a Service manager for Looked after Children in a South London borough. I moved to the Kent/Sussex border three years ago and waited for the right job to come up.

My passion has always been finding permanent placements for children and in particular through adoption. As a social worker I placed several children with new families and I have a lot of experience of the joy and sometimes the sadness that adoption has brought to the children, their birth families and their new families. I have a vast experience of children and families including complex court work.

Over the last year, I have had to learn all about how vast Kent is, the different cultural complexions of the different communities and how difficult it is to deliver services to everyone in the way that they would desire. Originally, I herald from the Black country. This is a small area in the west Midlands where the industrial revolution started. It's a highly industrialised working class area, which rests about 10 miles west of Birmingham.

It has its own unique identity including its own dialect which most people find totally incomprehensible when spoken in its original form. I left there when I was 19 years of age but you will still hear my accent coming through occasionally - even more so when I become familiar with you. Black country people don't like to be seen as, 'Brummies' and vice versa. Its odd isn't it, how we all hold onto to what we value and feel safe with. Even now when I talk of home it's the Black Country I have in my head but I haven't lived there for 31 years (that's giving something away).

I feel very proud that the County Adoption Service is made up of a group of highly professional and highly skilled individuals. I recognise how big the community is that we are trying to deliver a service to. Over the last year, I have tried to listen to everyone's views and thoughts about my service and in the coming year you will see some changes taking place. Certainly we have already begun to make some small changes, for example there is now a County Adoption Duty Service for the whole county. In the coming months we will be reviewing the Adoption Support Service and taking into account the thoughts and view of all concerned. One of the key issues for me is beginning to work creatively with our partners in health, education and CAHMS in meeting the needs of children who are placed for adoption or adopted.

Well, enough for now. I recognise that the delivery of this newsletter has lapsed, but in the coming year we aim to get this out on a regular basis on the internet. We want to encourage you to see this as tool in which you can participate in and I would welcome your view/suggestion on anything written in this newsletter.

As they say in the Black country, Taraaa-se yo agin!

**Vanessa Glenn
County Adoption Manager**

National Adoption Week 10 - 16 November 2008

Kent Adoption Service hosted an Open Day at the Hilton Hotel in Maidstone on Saturday 15th November 2008.

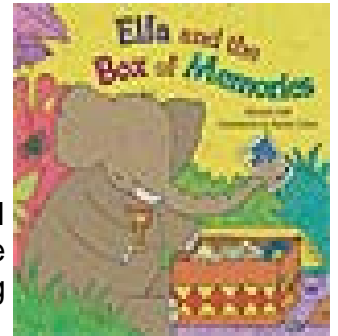
Over 70 potential adoptive families attended the event which enabled them to watch a presentation and talk informally with staff from the adoption service and with adopters who have been through the process, so they could find out what adoption is really all about.



Some of the Adopters & Staff from the Kent Adoption Service who were at the Open Day.

Kent Adoption Service are looking for all sorts of people from different backgrounds to provide loving and permanent homes for children. Adopters could be single people, married couples or unmarried couples in long-term relationships. Adoptive families are particularly needed for older children, groups of brothers and sisters and children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

For more information about adoption with Kent County Council take a look at our website www.kentadoption.com or contact our Initial Enquiries Team on 0845 330 2968.

ELFA AND THE BOX OF MEMORIES by Michelle Bell**Illustrated by Rachel Fuller****Published by BAAF - £9.99****ISBN 9781 905664 429**

When I volunteered to write a book review for the adoption newsletter, I envisaged myself at my desk, looking wise and reflective considering some weighty tome complete with footnotes and statistics. Instead I am reading about an elephant that plays with warthogs and confides in a monkey!

Elfa and the Box of Memories is a new book published by BAAF. It is aimed at young children. Its message is simple, that memories, both happy and sad, need to be shared and cherished. This simple book presents what is conveyed in a much more complicated way throughout the adoption preparation group and in a lot of post-approval training.

Elfa carried her memories around on her back in a beautiful shiny box. They are very precious to her and she is most put out that nobody seems to notice her box and ask about it; everyone except her friend and confidant, Marvin the Monkey. When Elfa has a chance to share her memories with Marvin she is distressed to find that some of her memories have faded away. The two set off on a little journey to find the missing memories and fill up the box again. They visit some special places from Elfa's past and meet up with some of the people, actually Zebras and Hippos, who looked after her when she was little. Soon Elfa's box is full again and she is happy to leave it in a shady spot without the worry of snagging it on low branches as she runs about the jungle with her friends.

For many years it was really difficult to find any books about adoption written specifically for young children. Now there are a growing number of bright, well-illustrated, accessible books. Some deal with moving on to adoption and the mix of feelings experienced by children during this time of huge change. There are books that introduce the idea of living in a different family structure or with a family that doesn't share your ethnicity. All of these books potentially give carers and adopters the confidence and language to raise very sensitive and sometimes painful subjects. They should never take the place of life story books but they are a good starting point for testing out a child's level of understanding of their circumstances.

Elfa's story covers twenty five pages. Some of the language seems to be aimed at slightly older children and could possibly have been simplified. It is nicely illustrated and flows along well and concludes happily with Elfa and Marvin wandering off into the sunset. There is a little book attached to the back cover in which children are encouraged to record their memories. I think this is asking a lot of any child. It would have been better perhaps to have a simple blank sheet for a picture or a pocket to store some little treasure.

If you have used Elfa with your child, or any similar publication, we would welcome your thoughts and of course more importantly feedback from your little person.

Katie Boyce
Family Finding Social Worker
East Kent Adoption Team

Action for Children Kent Independent Services for Kinship (KISKA) A Successful Reunion

When I was 3 years old, I was adopted alongside my older brother who was 6 years old at the time. We were taken away from our parents when I was 6 months, we were put into a foster home for 2 ½ years. We stayed there until the social workers had found us a new family to adopt us. During the time we stayed at our foster parent's house we still had occasional visits from our birth parents, as I was so young when I got taken away from them I didn't regard them as my parents and saw my foster parents as my mum and dad, so visits were not as hard on me, as they were my brother.

After we were adopted we didn't have any more contact with our birth family, but Kent social services organised a letter-box contact so that our birth parents could still send us things and vice versa. We were allowed to get the letter-box contact when we reached 18 or if our adoptive parents felt we needed it earlier.

When I reached 18 my adoptive parents sat me and my brother down and we talked about whether we wanted to contact with my birth parents, my brother could have contacted them 3 years earlier, but my adoptive parents asked him if he wouldn't mind waiting until I was 18 too, as I was having a hard time at school. Before I was 18 I read through my life story book and looked at the pictures to see what my birth parents looked like, as I was very interested in who they were at the time. My brother and I decided that we would like to contact with our birth family, so first we decided to get our letter-box contact. My adoptive mum started the process, as I was at college still and my brother worked in a hotel, as we neither of us had time in the day to ring up to start the process.

After a few weeks, my dad and I went down to Kent, which is about 3 hour journey, to collect the letter-box contact. All the way through the process my dad made it clear that he would take us to collect the letter-box contact. We had to be in Kent for about 10am, so we had to leave our house at 6am to avoid all the traffic jams on the motorways. We collected two boxes of contact from our birth families, one for me and one for my brother. As soon as we collected the contact, we went for a coffee and a little break then we got straight back on the road home. When we got home, my dad had to pick my brother up, so we could see all the contact at the same time.

We spent all afternoon looking at all the cards and letters of each others and showing our adoptive parents when they asked us "let's see what you got then". When I was looking through the cards I felt a bit guilty as most of the cards had "Daughter" on or "Grand-daughter" but I didn't see them as my parents, the people who brought me up were more of parents to me than them!

Action for Children Kent Independent Services for Kinship (KISKA) A Successful Reunion

After reading all the cards and the few letters, I decided that I would like to start writing letters to my birth family before I went to meet them face to face. While I was writing letters I also prepared myself for meeting my birth family by getting books and reading on the internet about other people's reunions. After a few months of writing letters, my brother and I then went for a talk with the social workers from NCH in Kent. We both decided we wanted to meet them that year, as we knew our grandma was 94 years old and we both decided that we would really like to see her before she died. As she lives with our birth father, we then had to decide on how we were going to meet her without our father, which is what I would have preferred to do. One of the social workers from NCH went around to their house first, to see how this could be arranged. As our grandma relied a lot upon our birth father, we had to compromise and meet them both at the same time.

In the few weeks leading up to the meeting I was quite scared, but I was looking forward to meeting the people who looked after me for six months from my birth. I dreamt of how the first meeting with them would be. I thought we would have a lot in common and we would really get to know each other, but on the day of the meetings I was really nervous and didn't really want to go. I knew I had to go as we had arranged it in advance.

When we got to our birth grandma and dad's house, we found that some of the aunties had come too. I didn't really like that, as we had only arranged to meet our grandma and dad that time. If I had wanted to meet anyone else, I would have asked if they could come too. When we first saw our birth dad, it was very emotional because I knew he was my father and I really didn't see him as that, as he didn't bring me up. The meeting was nothing like how I had dreamt it would be, but much more difficult. For most of it, I just sat in silence taking the surroundings in. In some ways, I think I was a bit too young to meet them when I did, as I was only 18 years old, but I knew that if my brother went on his own I would be jealous and would want to know all about them from him, so I went too.

After a few months, we decided to meet our birth mum. This was less emotional for me and no tears this time, but the same thing happened again, I hardly talked to anyone and only spoke when I got asked questions. For both of these meetings our adoptive parents took us to Kent and waited for us. They'd both taken days off work, which was really nice of them.

Even though it must have been hard for our adoptive parents whilst my brother and I met our birth parents, and receiving and sending letters,, they have been there helping us along the way. Our adoptive parents always made it clear to us that they will be there for us to talk to, whenever we needed to talk about our birth parents which really helped as we both had a second opinion on what we should do throughout the hard times of the reunion.

At the time, I really wanted to meet my birth parents but now I think I was way too young, as I was only just 18 when I met them again. For the time being, I feel that I have got to know my birth family as much as I need to at this time in my life, but I don't want to burn the bridges with them as I might feel differently in the future.

Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team

Spring Event

It's been a busy year!

We have held a very successful Spring Event at Lenham and the Kent Circus School came to improve our circus skills. The morning was spent creating an impressive spring mural and another with a ocean theme. Both children and parents contributed. The children were given the opportunity to make a mask and a sea creature. All of the art work was amazing and unusual. Well done all who attended.

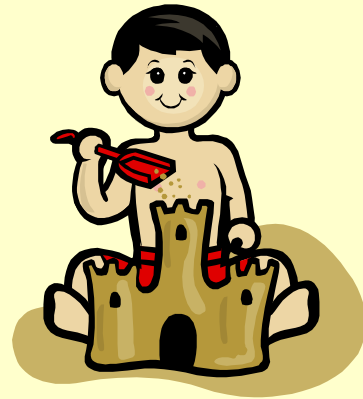
The Circus school showed us their skills and encouraged plate spinning, tightrope walking and uni-cycling.

Even the team members took part!



Beach Party at Joss Bay

The weather was kind when we held our Beach Party at Joss Bay. This was well attended and Charlie Chuckle was on hand to entertain and enthrall the younger participants with his balloons.



Don't forget - dates for your diaries

Winter Party at Lenham - 6th Dec 2008

Introducing Theraplay Games—7th Feb 2009

Keeping your Cool - 28th Feb 2009

"Telling" - 18th March 2009

Spring Event - 15th April 2009

More details of the workshops and events will be available in the New Year

We very much look forward to seeing you at our events and should there be anything you would like to include in the Newsletter please contact us:

Adoption Support Special Guardianship Team (ASGT)
Doubleday Lodge, Glebe Lane,
Sittingbourne, Kent. ME10 4JW
01795 566227



www.adoptionuk.com

Supporting adoptive families before, during and after adoption

Helpline 0844 848 7900

Your local Coordinators

Janet (W)
(Tel No: 01322 525091)
Email: janetwalker00@hotmail.com

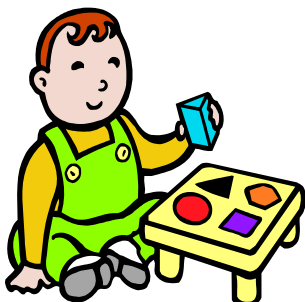
Janet (J)
(Tel No: 020 8301 1297)
Email: janet.jones.1@talktalk.net

Julia
(Tel No: 01322 669106)
Email: juliaabrams@hotmail.com

Diary Dates

Details may change at short notice
please phone a Group Coordinator for full details
and to confirm your attendance.

5 December (Friday)	Under 5s Group – North Cray Neighbourhood Centre, Sidcup Please phone Janet (J) for details (020 8301 1297)
7 December (Sunday)	Family Christmas Party (3.00 – 6.00pm) Boys' Brigade Hall, Broadway, Bexleyheath Reeling on the success of last year we're going to inflict more fun and games on our innocent families! Keep the date free in your diaries and wait for invitations to follow shortly
10 December (Wednesday)	Girls' Christmas Night – Chapter One, Farnborough Common www.chaptersevents.co.uk Yes it's time to put on the glam and glitz for a very special night – This promises to be one of our most special diary dates of the year so start saving now (see tear off slip for more details).
9 January 2009 (Friday)	Under 5s Group – North Cray Neighbourhood Centre, Sidcup Please phone Janet (J) for details (020 8301 1297)
6 February 2009 (Friday)	Under 5s Group – North Cray Neighbourhood Centre, Sidcup Please phone Janet (J) for details (020 8301 1297)
11 February 2009 (Wednesday)	Speaker Meeting – North Cray Neighbourhood Centre, Sidcup Further details to follow in January's Newsletter.



Under 5's Gang

Meet on the **FIRST FRIDAY** of each month

5 December / 9 January (2nd Friday) / 6 February

Please phone Janet (J) for more details; (Tel No: 020 8301 1297)

Useful contacts

Mid/East Kent Adoption

Kroner House
Eurogate Business Park
Ashford
Kent TN24 8XU
Tel: 01233 898630/1/2/3
adoption@kent.gov.uk

**Central Adoption Team
(Adoption Panel & Resources
Non-Agency & Inter-country)**

(Kroner House—address as above)
01233 652315

**Adoption Support Special Guardianship Team
(ASGT)**

Doubleday Lodge, Glebe Lane,
Sittingbourne, Kent. ME10 4JW
01795 566227

**Action for Children - Kent Independent Support
for Kinship & Adoption (K.I.S.K.A.)**

3rd Floor, Westbrook House,
18-20 Albion Place, Maidstone, ME14 5DZ
01622 693692—This is an advice line which is open
to general enquiries 10 am - 1 pm each working day.
kiska@nch.org.uk

West Kent Adoption

17 Kings Hill Avenue
Kings Hill
West Malling
Kent ME19 4UL
Tel: 01732 525323
adoption@kent.gov.uk

**British Agencies for Adoption
and Fostering (BAAF)**

Tel: 0207 593 2000

Adoption UK Tel: 01295 660121

Advice and help line Tel: 0870 7700 450
(Mon-Fri 11am-4pm)
admin@adoptionuk.org.uk

Post Adoption Centre (PAC)

Tel: 020 7284 0555
Confidential advice line Tel: 0870 777
2197
(Advice Line Open Mon, Tue, Wed, Fri 10
am-1pm Thursdays 5.30pm-7.30pm)
advice@postadoptioncentre.org.uk

We would love your feedback and contributions for the Forum publication

- Are we getting this newsletter right?
- Do you find it useful?
- What else would you like to see included?
- Could you share your adoption experience?
- Any children's activities or puzzles to share?
- Feedback on the website?
- An adoption book to recommend?

**Please send any ideas/articles to Chris Clark
Kent Adoption Service**

**Kroner House,
Eurogate Business Park,
Ashford,
Kent TN24 8XU
Email chris.clark@kent.gov.uk
Telephone 01233 898572**