

# 'Child Support Trust' - proposal

13<sup>th</sup> July 2015

## Introduction

The Child Support Trust (or CST for brevity here) is a proposed scheme that could help find families for children who wait longest for, or fail to find, adoptive placements, while ensuring support is in place for the placements to thrive.

We know that Local Authorities often do not provide sufficient post adoption support, even though it would cost less than a disrupted placement. Frequently, all that keeps families together is the determination and commitment of the adoptive parents, at great personal cost to them. For whatever reason, efforts to persuade a Local Authority to fund support may be unsuccessful, or take too long. The need for support may not have been anticipated, or incorporated in a support plan. The new Adoption Support Fund is a great step forward in making support available to families in these situations.

The scheme proposed here focuses instead on *Local Authorities themselves* making provision for support, for the children most likely to need it, *at the point of seeking adoptive parents*. This could bring reciprocal benefits – of better outcomes due to the ready availability of support, coupled with an increased chance of securing an adoptive placement in the first place.

Some adopters (and their children) already benefit from additional training and support due to choosing a specialist agency for their approval, or through opting into a scheme such as IAAM. CST would allow this kind of specialist provision to be 'spot-purchased' by a local authority in order to secure and support a placement with the most suitable family, wherever they might come from.

For a local authority this would equate to a fraction of the total cost of a child remaining in its care. The scheme provides a new option, with a clear business case, for local authorities to invest in finding, and supporting, the right adoptive placements.

## Operation

The scheme would be administered by an appropriate body in the sector. This would involve:

1. Defining packages of support and training, and drawing-up contracts to be used by participating support providers and local authorities.
2. Setting-up a trust to receive and distribute funding.
3. Receiving funding from local authorities to hold in trust for a specific child or children, on agreement of a placement with adopters.
4. Directly funding services for each child at the point that need is identified. This could provide:
  - Therapeutic support
  - Additional preparation and training for parents tailored to a child's needs
  - Intensive support pre and post placement

The scheme would be entirely sustainable, with interest on the investment funding administration. It would be advertised in two ways:

1. By an adopter, who has agreed with their agency that they would be willing and able to support a child with a higher level of need.
2. By a placing agency, which had agreed to provide CST for a particular child in the event of a suitable placement being found.

The willingness to provide or make use of CST would be highlighted during the family-finding process, and used to help bring applicable children and families together. On Adoption Link for example, where a local authority has agreed funding for CST for a child, a distinctive badge would appear on the profile, and adopters would be able to search for these children. Similarly, adopters would be able to display the badge on their own profiles, to show that they are willing to accept higher levels of need if CST were provided.

## Potential benefits – would more children find placements?

There is no question that additional support would be welcomed, and would ensure better outcomes. But would the promise of this support help to find more adoptive placements for the 'hardest to place' children? To what extent is support (or the lack of it) on the minds of adopters when they are considering a match?

Adoption Link conducted a survey in July 2015 of prospective adopters, some of which had experience of adopting previously. 404 families responded, and the full results can be viewed here: <https://www.surveymonkey.net/results/SM-KN6LN2VY/>

The questions related to children who are "likely to have emotional or behavioural problems in the future", and 95% of respondents indicated that they had considered children who they felt were in this category. 36% of adopters indicated that, when considering children, they were 'very concerned' about potential difficulties in accessing support. A further 47% indicated that they were 'quite concerned'.

*"Just about to adopt a sibling group - main worry is accessing future support as it is expensive and we'll have 3!! Feel this could put people off adopting siblings. Not really sure how easily accessible post-adoption fund is."*

*"We are currently considering two children who have experienced extreme neglect during their early lives over several years and have had to ask for a CAMHS assessment (as CAMHS have never been asked to be involved previously) and have asked that provision be made within the Adoption Support Plan to try to ensure that any on-going needs are met without delay after adoption. However, we are not confident that this will ensure the support we believe may be required will be provided without delay should it be needed."*

*"We have looked at two child, one an 8 year old ... we were told if he needed therapy, help later on we would have to shout for it along with everyone else. I get the feeling that their is no real long term plan for these children, everything is short term and stop gap."*

*"I am currently considering a match with a child with complex medical issues and am worried not just about the emotional and practical support, but also the educational issues she ay face. We are currently discussing support but I do worry that changing governments policies may impact the accessibility of support over the years."*

Several respondents spoke of potential matches that had not been pursued:

*"Own LEA reluctance to match out of county was partly attributed to costs and logistics of accessing support (e.g emotional and behavioural counselling) for a child who came from another county. We were told on at least one occasion that this was a reason for our SW 'not suporting an out of county adoption'. This almost certainly contributed to us sadly not being matched with a child."*

*"We have just rejected a potential match because we can't be sure the relevant support will be available when we need it."*

*"We were matched and went to panel for a little girl with significant needs and requiring intensive therapeutic support. We had met this little girl at an adoption activity event and were fully prepared to give her the help she needed. This was an inter agency match. Our social workers raised concerns from early on that they didn't think the child's agency would give us the support she would need. The child's agency was questioning the cost of therapy - despite expert psychologist stating she was suffering from significant post-traumatic stress and possible disassociated personality disorder... in the end our social workers said they had to pull out from the process as we were not going to get the support for our family."*

*"I think that the profiles listing existing/potential difficulties/challenges can be daunting to prospective adopters. we have a daughter through adoption already and are family finding for a second child we have turned down two cpr's on the basis of the uncertainties. if the LA for these children was up front and said that any difficulties that arose would be supported then we would have been willing to proceed."*

Despite the general level of concern, some respondents felt confident in the support available from their approving agency (notably, in most cases, a voluntary agency).

Finally, adopters were asked to imagine that money had been put in trust for a child whom they were considering, which could be quickly accessed to provide any support where needed. Nearly half of respondents indicated that they would be 'very likely' to feel more confident in being placed with the child, and a further 40% were "quite likely" to feel the same.

*"The availability of professional support/therapy is a significant factor for me in deciding what I can manage...is the help likely to be there and will it be enough to make it work for this child?"*

*"I am a single adopter on a low wage and having support in this way would make me feel significantly more confident and secure about giving a child the home they need."*

*"Confidence that we can access therapy needed to support the children is a big plus point and gives huge peace of mind"*

One respondent spoke from experience both as a social worker and a prospective adopter:

*"As well as being a prospective adopter, I am also a social work manager on a busy child protection team. Our team have worked with a number of children and young people facing adoption disruption due to their adoptive parents feeling that they have been unable to access the support they require to address their children's considerable emotional needs. I also see how stretched CAMHS services are offering a base line service to children and young with mental health problems. Sadly they often don't have the resources or capacity to offer adopted children the therapy they need. This has concerned me as a potential adopter. If financial contributions were given to adopted children to access therapeutic support, this would be very reassuring."*

It is clear from the responses, and not surprising, that prospective adopters vary a great deal in their attitudes to support, and the degree to which they consider it when family-finding. How a prospective adopter predicts they might feel, or act, when considering a child may not reflect reality.

The general trend from this study suggests that many adopters may be more likely to agree to being placed with a 'harder to place' child if they knew that finance was already in place for their future support needs.

# Compatibility with other developments

## **Adoption Support Fund**

CST would compliment the existing Adoption Support Fund. If successful, the CST would mean that more often, where it is *clear* that therapeutic support is needed from the outset, it would already be funded by the placing agency. This would take some pressure off the ASF, leaving more funds to provide support where the need may not have been anticipated.

## **£30m interagency fee fund**

This funding will save local authorities £27k (or more) when placing some of the children waiting longest – the same children the CST is designed to help. For a number of these children (possibly a significant number), there might not actually be any families willing to accept their level of need, in which case the waiving of the fee would not help. In these cases, there may be adopters willing to accept the placement if CST were offered, and the local authority could use the £27k saved from the fee to make this possible.

If Government wished to encourage the use of CST, it could offer to match a proportion of the investment made by local authorities, perhaps for children meeting certain criteria.

## **Regional adoption agencies**

There are a number of ways in which regional agencies may be formed, and a number of ways in which VAAs might be incorporated in them. The CST would make it easier for packages of training and support from a third-party provider to be attached to *any* adoptive placement, regardless of who recruited the adopter in the first place. This flexibility may help the specialism and experience within VAAs to be utilised within different organisational structures.

The CST has the potential work across all 4 UK nations, with a suitable UK-wide operator. Governments would have the option of contributing to applicable placements if they choose.

## **Adoption Link / Register adopter access**

The CST works on the basis that for some children waiting the longest, the right family may already be approved and waiting. The emphasis is on securing placements with families already recruited, by promising sufficient training and support. This approach relies on both adopters, and family-finders with children, having effective access to each other, and the right tools to identify where needs may be matched by capabilities. This situation now exists, and brings exiting opportunities to change the way support is promised, and expected, during matching.