

# INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

**Advice and guidance for working with  
people with lived experience of adoption.  
Developed by members of the Adoption  
England adopted persons and birth  
parents reference groups**



# **INVOLVING ADOPTEES AND BIRTH/FIRST PARENTS IN ADOPTION PREPARATION, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING SHOULD BE A PRIORITY FOR ALL ADOPTION AGENCIES.**

Involving adoptees and birth/first parents in adoption preparation, workforce development, and other opportunities can help prospective and approved adoptive parents, and social work staff, develop a deeper understanding of the lifelong impact of adoption and subsequent support needs following adoption. It can also help influence policy and practice at a local and national level, as well as inform future training and support needs by highlighting the real-life impact of adoption. Feedback from Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) events highlighted that adoption professionals are keen to increase the involvement of adopted people and birth/first parents in their adoption preparation sessions and subsequent training.

To help Regional Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies planning around involving more people personally impacted by adoption, reference group members have worked collaboratively to develop this guide for practitioners. We hope you find it useful.

Please note, this booklet is not designed to be an exhaustive check-list and there may be other considerations beyond those detailed in this guide.

We encourage you to consult with those with lived experience of adoption in your local areas to identify anything else to be aware of. We hope this guide is a good start!



# 1

## Reimbursement for time

Ensure there are two contact points for any participant who is taking part (in case of staff absence) and that email and telephone details are shared well in advance. Contributors are likely to have practical questions and additional ideas and thoughts to share.

Whenever possible allow people to choose how they are paid. Some may be in employment or self employed and wish to be paid by bank transfer, others may be in receipt of certain benefits that could be impacted by receiving payment and may choose to be paid in vouchers. It is vital that no one who shares their lived experience suffers negative financial consequences as a result.

### **Clear on time/ expectation**

Be sure to talk through travel time and consider if accommodation is needed if travel is involved.

### **Clear on purpose**

Give enough notice for participants to prepare and to engage fully with the event, meeting or work being planned.

### **Feedback**

Be sure to share feedback from the session so contributors feel they are valued and have had an impact.

# 2

## Support needs around events

Contributors may feel very anxious before presenting at an event so please check in to see what might help us prepare our section in advance. Always ask what support may be needed before, during and after a speaking event. Please provide full contact details so the contributor can reach out for help at any point. This is especially important in case any issues or sensitivities arise during the session. For example, if a particular question has brought up difficult feelings, or made someone feel uncomfortable.

### 3

## Impact of previous services

Some contributors may not have had good experiences with social workers and adoption services over the years. Please have a conversation to check in about this. Some venues may hold difficult memories for people with lived experience, for example, if they've had difficult meetings or experiences there, so please be considerate of this.

### 4

## Impact of trauma

Many of us are still working through the impact that adoption has had on our lives. Some of us will not have found counselling support. Everyone impacted by adoption will have their own individual support needs and boundaries about what they wish to share. Please be trauma informed and sensitive to individuals' situations. There may be specific issues which are difficult to talk about or answer questions about. Where possible, screen questions beforehand to avoid insensitive or inappropriate questions being asked publicly.

### 5

## Language

Take care and courtesy to check our preferred terms and language. Some people prefer the term adoptees to adopted person or first parent to birth parent etc., so please ask.

### 6

## Views and feelings about adoption

Every adoptee and every adoption is unique. Some adoptees have not had all together positive experiences, or their views may have changed over time. Take some time to talk with us about the event being arranged and our views and experiences. Most contemporary birth parents will not have consented to adoption. Many will not have had support around their experiences and loss.

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## **Including transracial adoptees**

Transracially adopted contributors may have additional layers to their adoption and this may include experiences of racism and/or bias, please be aware and sensitive to this. Even when adoptive parents and families are more reflective of the adoptees racial and ethnic background, there may be pain and difficult experiences the contributor is navigating.

**8**

## **Have enough contributors to give breaks**

Speaking about lived experiences, especially around such life changing issues, can be exhausting. It takes its toll emotionally and physically. Please ensure you do not rely on the same people continually; people need some time to recover and re-charge so it's important to give breaks.

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## **Anonymity/confidentiality issues**

The adoption community is relatively small, some contributors may be concerned that staff or event attendees may know them and/or their families. This may be a particular issue in smaller areas, or when involved in a local speaking events. Please ask and talk through any concerns. Some may prefer to be anonymous or use a middle name or nickname. Screenshots and tagging photos of events should also be discussed.

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## **Including adoptees with disabilities**

Consider any specific issues or adjustments, including accessibility for people with disabilities. Ensure you have discussed requirements well in advance and clearly explained what is and is not possible. Planning and considerations will be different for online and in person events. Be sure that contributors are fully briefed and prepared and have the offer of support before, during and after an event. Not all disabilities are visible so be sure to ask if someone needs any additional support.

## Questions to ask those with lived experience

We encourage you to gather feedback from those with lived experience of adoption after working with them. This will help to ensure their needs are considered on an ongoing basis. Below are some questions you could ask as a starting point:

- What could have gone better?
- Did you feel you had all relevant information- if not ,what would have assisted you?
- Did you feel valued and included through the session- if not, what could be improved?
- What do you think had the most impact on the audience?
- Are there any gaps from your perspective?
- Are there any suggestions you could make to help the organisation or team improve their inclusion of people with lived experience?