
Evaluation of the Becoming a Family Pilot Programme

Final Report

March 2026

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Becoming a Family Pilot Evaluation: Final Report

1. Executive Summary

Becoming a Family (BaF) has been developed and piloted in England between October 2024 and December 2025 with support from Adoption England and the involvement of six regional and voluntary adoption agencies (RAAs and VAAs) working collaboratively together. BaF aims have included to generate a more consistent, proactive approach to equipping (prospective) adopters with the information and support they need in the early stages (particularly between approval and the Adoption Order) to have a successful onward adoption journey, including through provision of:

- A **purple book** - equivalent for adopted children and families to the 'Red Book' or Personal Child Health Record - in which to record key information about the child and reflect on their adoption journey.
- A **core offer** of information and support to include, for example: parent self-care; attachment; family finances; supporting lifelong links with birth family members; therapeutic parenting; personal and professional support networks.
- An **individual support plan** for the child and family, once matched, including to generate a clear expectation about the need for support moving forward that is reviewable over time.

This largely un-funded change programme benefitted from central (Adoption England) leadership and significant support from 'operational leads' working in the six pilot sites who contributed to its development, encouraged and supported their team managers and staff to implement locally, and regularly attended programme meetings to discuss progress. Specific Adoption England support included whole pilot 'framework' guidance; training for practitioners and a community of practice.

The Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University has undertaken a 12- month evaluation of early stage (pilot) BaF implementation including: facilitation of a Theory of Change workshop; support for the six sites to collect activity data and secondary analysis of their outputs relating to 161 parents; a survey of 19 parents who experienced the programme and agreed to participate in this way; parent interviews (n=5); practitioner and manager interviews (n=49 and n=46 individuals participating across early and later stage 1:1 or focus group interviews). The evaluation has explored feasibility of implementation and early signs of promise.

In terms of the feasibility of implementing BaF, key indicators identified at Theory of Change stage help to structure our understanding and include:

- **Practitioners using the materials and supporting the early core offer.** The starting point for programme implementation differed by agency, with some already having introduced 'the Purple Book' before the official launch and many others focusing mainly or wholly on that element alone throughout the pilot period. By about 10-12 months into the pilot, a minority only of practitioners described implementing all aspects of the programme including to inform or their regular interactions with parents. These were more likely to be practitioners who were relatively new in role. Some including more experienced practitioners thought that they did not need to change or further structure what they were doing between approval and Adoption Order, as they were already working positively in this way. Other practitioners thought they did not have the time to plan or structure visits, with some further reflecting that they should or could use the Purple Book or framework to do so. Overall, many practitioners and managers did not make a link between BaF overall or the Purple Book and any core offer of support their agency should be providing, particularly before the making of an Adoption Order. A minority view was that the BaF 'framework' or Purple Book, or both, had helped to make the pre-Adoption Order core offer more visible to practitioners and parents alike e.g. around life story (work); self-care (plan); support for lifelong links.
- **Practitioners offering the programme with a degree of consistency.** By the end of the 12-month pilot period, programme implementation was described variably by practitioners as 'picking up speed', 'not yet being used consistently' or 'having stalled'. Team managers had not always clear about the expectations in the early stages of the pilot and therefore had found it difficult to 'drive' implementation. By later in the pilot, most team managers described having made more progress with implementation but mostly with respect to the Purple Book and in some sites more, in others much less consistently. Managers often reflected that some members of their team(s) were more enthusiastic than others about implementation.
- **A productive exploration of (best or better) timings for formally introducing and providing key programme elements to families.** Even at around 3 months into the pilot, most practitioners and managers already reflected that introducing BaF at around linking or matching was ineffective, as families were too busy to engage. By around 10-12 months into the pilot, most practitioners and managers considered it better or best to introduce the concept and materials just after adopter approval and before linking. Some practitioners described having become confident not only to introduce BaF but also to apply it in different ways and at 'windows of opportunity' along the early stages of an adoption journey, post approval. Some practitioners and many managers thought it was useful also to 'trail' the programme at a very early stage i.e. before adopter approval, in training and assessment stages.
- **Practitioners feeling positive and confident** about using the approach and tools, **feeling 'bought in'** to the programme. At around 10-12 months into the pilot, some social workers described feeling positive and confident about the programme and had bought into its value. Others described their interaction with the programme in much

more cautious terms, feeling uncertain about its value in practice, in part because it had not yet felt like a ‘full implementation’. However, many practitioners and managers were positive or very positive about the concept and the overall aims of the programme.

In terms of early signs of promise, key indicators identified by the Theory of Change included that parents would:

- **Understand the programme and its benefits.** About one half (9/19) parents responding to the survey said they understood BaF and how they might benefit, often expressing enthusiasm about the concept. Most parents thought it was only about the Purple Book rather than all three key elements. Parents who had adopted before or who were adopting through an early permanence route were less likely to experience or anticipate its benefits. Timings were also important – parents identified how busy stages (such as child introductions or child coming to live with them) negatively affected their ability to engage positively and an overall theme was encouragement of services to introduce it earlier than at linking and to ‘keep on’ referencing it rather than introducing as a ‘one off’. Some parents also shared how they would prefer greater clarity at an earlier stage including about the purpose of BaF and what would be provided.
- **Have used the Purple Book in creative ways** to support their understanding of the child(ren) and how to interact with the whole system of support. Practitioners and managers interviewed towards the end of the pilot gave many examples of parents using the Purple Book to keep information in one place, for reflections on their personal adoption journey, to source further information or advice, or as a reminder about key things to ‘get on with’. Managers and practitioners reflected that the resource had seemed to be more or most useful so far for first time adopters and single adopters.

About one half of the survey parents thought an electronic or hard copy version of the Book had been fairly or very useful for finding sources of help. About one half were using the Book to incorporate ‘additional information’. About one third found the Book useful for reflecting and making notes on their journey. Some parents reflected key sections of the Book had seemed more relevant to older children (most of the children placed with parents were aged 2 or under).

Future improvements to the look and accessibility of the Purple Book were also proposed by parents and practitioners. Many also thought it was too soon to make a judgement about the usefulness of the Book because parents had not yet had time to explore it fully. Other parents, who had explored the Book more fully, were very positive about its usefulness in similar terms to the practitioners. Views were divided about whether the book should be provided in hard or electronic form, or both.

Many parents expressed a view that the Purple Book should be used more actively by social workers and for visits to be more structured.

- **Know about and/or have a meaningful, individualised support plan by the time of the Adoption Order.** This was not explored in depth by the evaluation, mainly because parents involved had not yet reached that stage. However, some parents shared that it could be difficult to be completely open about their support needs in advance of an Adoption Order because of how it might affect the process of matching and professional confidence early in placement.
- **Receive a life story book and later in life letter.** Most (13/19) parents surveyed for this evaluation thought they had experienced timely information about their child's life story. Most others expected this information to be shared in a timely way.
- **Be helped to connect to community services** e.g. to health professionals, nurseries or schools (including to receive Pupil Premium Plus). This was identified as a key strength of the support received thus far by adopters in the survey. Almost all had received 'a lot' or 'some' support to understand the key services available to them. However, many adopters did not yet feel they needed this type of support.
- **Have developed a social / peer support network.** Most (16/19) adopters in the survey had accepted support to develop their personal support networks and had begun to access this support in a variety of ways. They identified the most helpful supports as 'family and friends'; and 'meeting with other adopters' (peer support) to orientate their experiences and share learning.
- **Experience social worker support as appropriate and helpful.** Parents responding to the survey or in interview described their social worker support very positively both in terms of availability and usefulness. In interview, the parents who remembered experiencing one or more structured support visit described 'stand out' sessions as having focused on self-care or developing their personal (including peer) and professional support networks.

Two thirds of parents surveyed had received specific advice about self-care and one half had discussed a self-care plan. A majority (15/19) parents did not yet feel they needed support with finances, legal or other practical aspects of adoption.

Many of the others had not received this support but would have liked it, particularly advice about the costs of childcare and child or other family benefits.

The main source of support in general terms was reliably described by parents as their adoption social worker. Other, including more specific supports they had accessed included: therapeutic parenting (training); peer support (groups); and resources on the 'CATCH' hub. Some of these supports had been signposted by the Purple Book and/or

adoption social worker. In other cases, parents had researched and identified support independently.

- **Develop confidence in supporting the child's identity / keeping in touch** with birth family or foster carers. A majority of parents responding to the survey (16/19) had discussed a 'keeping in touch' plan for their child and all were very or fairly confident about that plan.
- **Feel confident about coming forward for support in the future.** All surveyed parents felt very (14/19) or fairly (5/19) confident about asking for help in the future, similarly around where to go for help in the future.

However, the extent to which parent-level outcome indicators are attributable to BaF is unclear, not least in the context of inconsistent implementation thus far. Indicators that appear from the parent survey and interviews to be potentially more connected to the programme so far are: encouragement for self-care and building support networks. Parents reflected that the programme needs greater trailing (early in the adoption journey) and 'layering' of the same information or messaging from a range of sources time and time again (including the Purple Book and social worker interactions). A key theme from parent interviews was that they would welcome more structured social worker visits, particularly between approval and the Adoption Order. Nevertheless, managers in about one half of the pilot sites considered introduction of the Purple Book and possibly BaF more broadly to have positively affected social worker practice, including by helping to clarify their role or to structure their visits after assessment and before an Adoption Order is made. Practitioners and managers also reflected that introducing BaF or even just the Purple Book element was unlikely to show real benefits until further along an adoption journey.

The evaluation team finds early promise in the concept, aims and some elements of BaF and recommends a further stage of implementation, including to test a revised model or programme that might but need not necessarily continue to be called 'Becoming a Family'¹.

Our recommendations for this next stage, based on all the findings including specific suggestions made by parents, practitioners and managers include to:

1. **Review and refine the Theory of Change**, based on learning from the early pilot, involving all six sites and leaders at Adoption England working together to agree a refined rationale for this work, its key elements and desired short to medium term and longer-term outcomes.
2. **Generate a more visible structure or 'scaffolding'** for the overall programme and clearer, consistent language about its key elements before proceeding with any further

¹ As this suggests it's all about the period after a child comes to live with parents. For example, one suggestion is that it could be called 'Fundamentals of Adoption'

implementation in existing or other sites. This should include consideration of practice standards or expectations to focus practitioner visits in stages from post adopter approval to the Adoption Order, a concept supported by most managers involved in this pilot on the basis of its potential to ensure adopters are more consistently in the best place possible before the making of the order. Key foci will be suggested by the existing evidence base combined with findings from this pilot. The structure should also specifically address best timings for (a) trailing and (b) formally introducing the programme including Purple Book, with care taken not to infer that the work is a 'one off' (introduction).

3. **Develop and clearly articulate a further implementation programme** with specific reference to what is known about effective change in public care settings, including attention: to both processes and people; to 'push and pull' factors and to specifically addressing known barriers to change. This pilot suggests barriers are likely to include: the number of initiatives happening simultaneously in any one site; uncertainty about key elements or timings; practitioners not understanding why they are being asked to change; change seeming optional; natural / understandable resistance to change from both practitioners and families. A change 'curve' approach also suggests that enthusiasm and adherence to change can dip in the early stages of change before reviving with the support of consistent embedding over time. Change takes time and may require some dedicated (central) resources.
4. **Re-launch the programme.** Options include to launch:
 - With the existing sites in the first instance, to make continued improvements. The main advantage is that they are already involved and on a change journey. A key disadvantage may be that they have already experienced an early prototype and may be confused about further changes. In any event, efforts should be made in the short term to keep the programme alive in the minds of practitioners and managers in these sites for example by involving them in the development work outlined above.
 - With some new sites. The advantages include a 'fresh start'. Disadvantages include that the overall (wave 2 pilot) change process may take a long time.
 - With a mixture of new and some existing sites, including to compare their experiences and impact over time. This option arguably provides more momentum overall for the programme.
 - With all RAA and VAA sites in England. This option is inherently riskier as the adapted programme will remain untested. It would also probably require an upfront national commitment to the 'standards' discussed above. In the event that this national work is achieved, arguably 'implementation' will be more concerned with the Purple Book as a support for these standards, and therefore possibly more achievable as a national roll out.

5. **Attention in implementation to early-stage opportunities for practitioners to hear about, absorb, and buy into the change programme.** This seems very important from the interviews with practitioners and managers. Our suggestions are that this should pay attention to the evidence base for specific elements being included in or emphasised by the programme and to amplifying the voices of ‘early adopter’ parents or practitioners about the value and impact from their perspective.
6. **Consider a ‘train the trainer’ style approach to training team managers** initially – as ‘first line’ adherents and promoters of changed practice in their teams. These materials could be used then in an ongoing way by team managers to support team implementation, through group and one to one supervision. Detail may include high level and more detailed aspects including ‘exemplars’ or examples of practitioner support focused on different topics including their rationale / goals. The risks of this approach include that practitioners and parents feel the structure too closely resembles assessment and does not recognise the flexibility that is sometimes needed e.g. when the focus of conversations and support needs to be on something more immediate e.g. child introductions.
7. **Consider developing information for parents** about ‘what to expect’ in the period after their approval as adopter(s) and before an Adoption Order is made.
8. **Consider making improvements to the quality of the Purple Book**, e.g. to the overall look and accessibility – to convey a confident message about its value to parents and practitioners alike.
9. **Provide sufficient central / national support** for learning and embedding of change through a pre-planned programme of support activities such as community of practice, change champions network, regular meetings of operational leaders / team managers leading change.

2. Introduction

In September 2024, the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University was commissioned by Adoption England to undertake an evaluation exploring:

- The extent to which and how a national Becoming a Family (BaF) pilot programme led by Adoption England could be implemented across different geographical and adoption support settings without any additional funding for sites involved.
- Whether there are any potential or indicative benefits to participating children and families or to social work practice in this area.
- The feasibility of capturing data to measure the operation and impact of the programme over time.

The **Becoming a Family (BaF)** Programme arose from a deepening understanding that adopted children carry increased risks of psychological, social and (neuro) developmental problems that may emerge over time and that the early stages of adoption are crucial in laying the foundations for family resilience (Rushton & Dance, 2006; Goldberg et al., 2013; Paine et al., 2021; Cawthorne & Woolgar, 2025). Newly formed adoptive families contend with life-changing circumstances through which a range of early support needs may emerge including to: assist children in making better sense of their lives; develop warm relationships; negotiate and implement contact with the birth family; help children to recover from trauma and loss; or adjust to changing personal and financial situations (Doughty et al., 2017; Duncan et al., 2024; AUK, 2025). However, the time between adopter approval and the making of an Adoption Order (including linking and matching) is a relatively un-specified, un-regulated stage, risking a form of postcode lottery for families (Ofsted, 2024; Bonin et al., 2014; Doughty et al., 2017). The recent Adoption UK ‘Barometer’ (2025) and Rennolds et al (2025) study exploring early adoption disruptions together suggest services need to focus even harder on ensuring adopters are well-informed and well-prepared during this period (AUK, 2025). Sector representatives involved in developing the programme also hypothesised that adopters without a good understanding of the likely needs of the child being placed with them, robust personal and professional support networks and strategies in place in the early stages often waited too long to come forward for support at a later stage, including in a crisis.

Supported by commitments outlined in the Adoption England Strategy (2024-2027), **BaF seeks to modernise adopter and professional expectations about early, preventative support** to:

- Encourage adoptive parents to gather together key, relevant information ‘all in one place’ to assist with their ongoing understanding of and advocacy for the child.
- Encourage parents to remain connected with their adoption agency and other community or specialist supports beyond the making of an Adoption Order - and to feel confident about reaching out for support when they need it.
- Develop broader ‘future-proofed’ personal and professional support networks including for peer support.

- Offer more consistent, purposeful early support in key areas, such as parent self-care, attachment, family finances (including eligibility for state benefits), lifelong links and therapeutic parenting to generate future child and family resilience.

Key elements of the BaF Programme are described visually below²:

Figure 1: Becoming a Family (BaF) Model



A more visible early support **core offer** is intended to underpin the purposeful, structured support provided to adoptive parents in the period between being approved and the making of an Adoption Order.

The **Purple Book** is intended to complement the core offer and, additionally, provide a physical or electronic space for parents in which to collate key information about their child, including (trauma nurture) timelines, life story and other documents such as the Child Assessment Record (CAR). Also to reflect on their journey together and to be signposted to key support services. Rather than being separate from the core offer, the expectation is that social workers will use the Purple Book as a support tool in conversations with parents.

An **individual support plan** is intended to be co-produced by parents and their social workers prior to the making of an Adoption Order, including to generate a clear expectation about the need for support that can be reviewed over time.

At the time of an early stage Theory of Change workshop (see below, October 2024), there was a recognition that these programme elements together represented a change of social

² Note this is the evaluators' representation rather than a formal programme logo

work practice and culture that would need supporting, for example through the provision of ‘framework’ guidance, training, community of practice and regular meetings of operational leads.

A total of six pilot sites³ proceeded with implementation from December 2024 including four regional adoption agencies (RAAs) and two voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs). However, it is important to note that some of these agencies at least had already begun to trial one of the key elements – the Purple Book. There was a recognition at Theory of Change workshop that the programme needed to ‘re-launch’ to include all key elements and broader expectations relating to the core offer and practice development.

3. Evaluation methodology

3.1. Theory of Change and the generation of key lines of enquiry

Preparatory activities for the pilot and evaluation included the co-production of a Theory of Change in the context of a workshop attended by evaluators, representatives from Adoption England and ‘operational leads’ from the pilot RAA and VAA sites. Outputs included a programme rationale, expectations and **indicators of successful pilot implementation for practitioners** including:

- Practitioners using the materials and supporting the early core offer.
- Practitioners offering the programme with a degree of consistency – recognising some flexibility is required for individual families but without over-diluting the offer.
- A productive exploration of (best or better) timings for formally introducing and providing key programme elements to families.
- Practitioners feeling positive and confident about using the approach and tools, feeling ‘bought in’ to the programme.

Short to medium term **indicators of potential successful pilot implementation with adoptive parents** included that they would:

- Understand the programme and the benefits of it.
- Have used the Purple Book in creative ways to support their understanding of the child(ren) and how to interact with the whole system of support.
- Know about and/or have a meaningful, individualised support plan.
- Receive a life story book and later in life letter.
- Be helped to connect to community services e.g. to health professionals, nurseries or schools (including to receive Pupil Premium Plus).
- Experience social worker support as appropriate and helpful including to access legal, financial or other practical support, also to develop self-care plans.

³ One site dropped out of the pilot process after starting briefly – because of staffing turnover challenges

- Develop confidence in support for the child’s identity / keeping in touch with birth family or foster carers.
- Have developed a social / peer support network.
- Feel confident about coming forward for support in the future.

3.2. Detailed evaluation mixed methods

Mixed methods for data capture included:

- Evaluator support for consistent **site-generated administrative (‘tracker’) data** relating to adoptive parents (parents) recorded as having been engaged in the pilot between December 2024 and December 2025.
- **An online survey of parents** engaged in the BAF programme who, having received participant information, gave their informed consent to participate between July 2025 and January 2026 (n=19). Parents connected with all participating sites were represented. The key characteristics of families responding to the survey were approximately in line with those in the whole (tracker) cohort e.g. first time adopters in exactly the same (84%) proportions; similar proportions of couple (79% compared with 90% in the whole cohort) compared with single parent (21% compared with 10% in the whole cohort) adoptions; broadly similar proportions of White British (89% compared with 77% in the whole cohort) adopters.
- **Interviews with five parents** engaged in the BAF programme (a sub-cohort of the survey group above representing 4 of the 6 participating agencies) who, after the survey, gave their informed consent to participate further in this way.
- **Two ‘waves’ of qualitative interviews with site-based staff** who, having received participant information, gave their informed consent to participate. One to one interviews were undertaken with team and service managers or agency leaders. Focus group interviews were undertaken with groups of social workers from recruitment, assessment and early support teams in the six pilot sites. A first wave of interviews was undertaken in February-April 2025 (total 49 participants) and a second wave in November 2025 to January 2026 (total 46 participants).

A further breakdown of the number of professional one to one and focus group interviews by type is provided below:

Table 1: Summary site staff interviews for BAF Evaluation

Wave	No. Practitioner Focus Group Interviews	No. One to One Manager Interviews	Total interviews	Total participants
One	6 (total 35 participants)	14	20	49
Two	6 (total 28 participants)	18	24	46

The evaluation team undertook secondary analysis of the (pseudonymised) tracker data received from each of the sites and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of transcripts generated by all qualitative interviews or focus groups. Data generated by the parent survey was cleansed and the quantitative data analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Parents' 'free text' responses were also analysed thematically.

3.3. Evaluation strengths and limitations

The strengths of this pilot evaluation are that it has succeeded in collecting data from a range of sources (administrative data, data from parent and professional interviews, parent survey and interviews) to explore the key evaluation questions and 'indicators' outlined above. This supports effective triangulation and greater confidence in the findings. There was a reasonable degree of confidence amongst operational leads that the administrative 'tracker' data they shared with the evaluation team was accurate. There were also high levels of representation amongst managers and practitioners participating in qualitative interviews at both stages.

The limitations include that only a relatively small number of parents (19) completed a survey exploring their experiences of the programme and its effects. This represents 12% of all parents engaged in the programme over a 12-month period. Of the parents completing a survey, a relatively high proportion (5 or 26%) agreed to participate in a more in-depth interview, but this number is still also relatively small.

Nonetheless, the triangulated data does provide a well-rounded picture of programme implementation and its potential value with which to generate recommendations for the future.

4. Who was involved in the pilot programme?

Between December 2024 and December 2025, staff from the six adoption agencies taking part in the BaF pilot contributed data to a common 'tracker' of adoptive parents linked with a child/children and who were engaged in the pilot. It had been agreed at an early implementation stage that *all* parents at around the 'linking' stage should be so engaged, rather than selectively by sites or by parents themselves. In total, data was shared relating to 161 parents. A breakdown of these 'engaged' parents by (anonymised) site is provided below.

Table 2: No. families (single parents / couples) involved in BaF by participating site

Site Number	Agency Type	No. families involved
Site A	RAA	26
Site B	RAA	36
Site C	RAA	50
Site D	RAA	34
Site E	VAA	9
Site F	VAA	6
Total	All agency types	161

The data demonstrates how overall larger RAAs were able to engage with greater numbers of families than the (smaller) VAAs during the pilot period.

Of the total 161 parents, 89% (143) had a more traditional journey into adoption whilst 11% (18) had taken an early permanence (fostering for adoption) route. This is worth noting as, at the time of the Theory of Change, it was anticipated early permanence adopters would not be included in the pilot.

Table 3 below outlines other characteristics of parents in the BaF pilot, including parent structure and their ethnicity. A very small minority of parents described themselves as having a disability. In 84% cases, this was a first (rather than second or third) adoption journey for the parent(s).

Table 3: Characteristics of adoptive parents in the BaF pilot

Characteristic	Description	Number (%)
Adoptive parent(s) structure (n=161)	Different sex couple	104 (65%)
	Same sex couple	40 (25%)
	Single adopter	17 (10%)
Adoptive parent(s) ethnicity⁴ (n=305)	White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	236 (77%)
	White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White	23 (7%)
	Other ethnic group	15 (5%)
	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	13 (4%)
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	9 (3%)
	White: Irish	5 (2%)
	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	4 (1%)
Adoptive parent(s) disability status (n=157⁵)	No disabilities	156 (99%)
	Disabilities	1 (<1%)
Number of children adoptive parent(s) had previously adopted (n=154⁶)	None- first adoption	129 (84%)
	1	23 (15%)
	2	2 (1%)

As outlined in Table 4 below, 87% of the children with whom prospective adopters had been linked were individual children (rather than a sibling group). They ranged from age under 1 year to 7 years, with most (70%) aged one year or under.

⁴ This is counted for each adoptive parent, therefore the total is 305 individuals

⁵ No information for 4 parents, therefore total is 157

⁶ No information for 7 parents, therefore total is 154

Table 4: Characteristics of children being placed with parents in the BaF pilot

Individual child or sibling group (n=153)	Individual child	133 (87%)
	Sibling group of 2	19 (12%)
	Sibling group of 3	1 (1%)
Ages(s) of child(ren)⁷(n=163)	Under 1	27 (17%)
	1	87 (53%)
	2	22 (13%)
	3	14 (9%)
	4	7 (4%)
	5	4 (2%)
	6	1 (1%)
	7	1 (1%)

There were data gaps in tracker domains relating to time points – including time at linking, being told about the BaF programme and the child being placed for adoption. Therefore, caution must be taken when drawing conclusions from the data held in Table 5 below which appears to show an average (mean) of 54 days between linking and adopters being informed about the programme.

The data also appears to show an average of 110 days between children being linked and being placed for adoption.

⁷ This is counted for each child in the sibling group

Table 5: Time periods between different points in BaF journey

	Mean (days)	Median (days)	Range (days)
Time between child(ren) being linked with adopters, and adopters being informed about the programme ⁸	+54	+41	-313 to +382
Time between child(ren) being linked with adopters, and being placed for adoption ⁹	+110	+103	+7 to +390

5. How was the pilot experienced by parents?

5.1. Insights from the tracker data

In each of the sites' trackers, there was a 'free text' column inviting practitioners to reflect on their experiences of the BaF programme with individual families, and also a column where they could share any feedback they had actually received from parents about it. These sections were not completed consistently and appeared to have been used more to reflect when the programme had not been received well, as summarised below:

- Parents **intending to use the BaF materials, seeing the value** of using the Purple Book.
- Parents saying they are **too busy to engage** with the BaF materials.
- Parents **not believing BaF is relevant to them** as have **previously adopted**, fostered and/or have birth children.
- Parents not **believing BaF is relevant to them** as their child is with them through **Early Permanence**.

5.2. Data from the parent survey and qualitative interviews

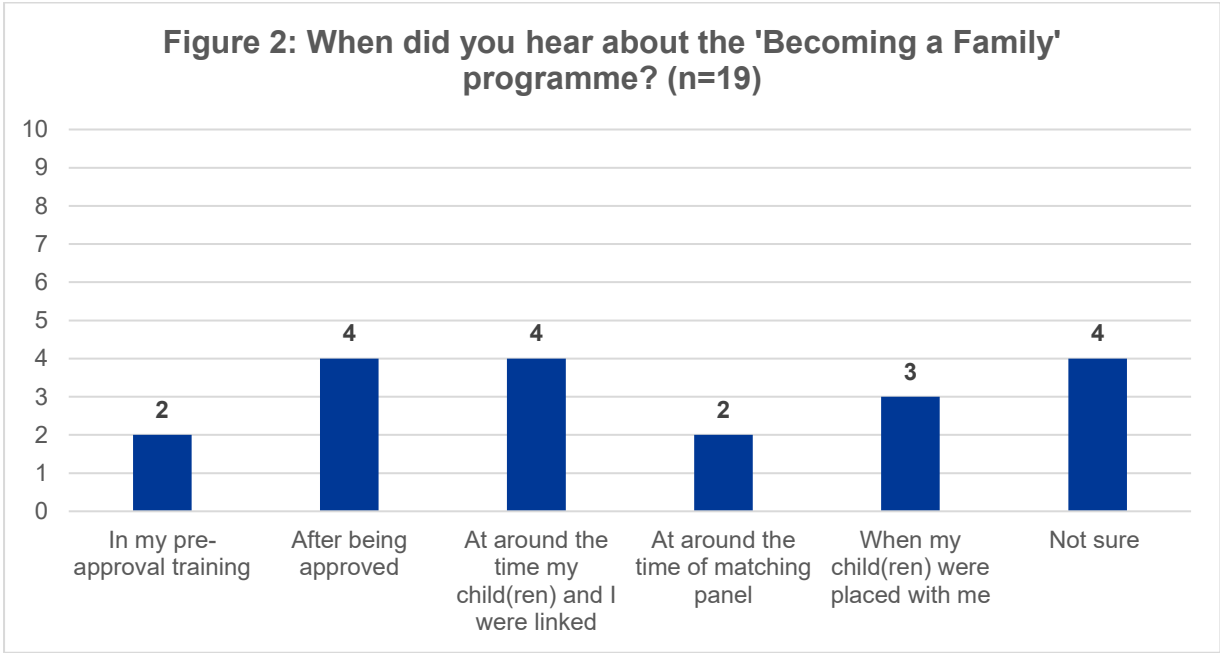
19 parents completed an online questionnaire (survey) about their experiences of BaF. Of these, 5 parents shared experiences in more depth in the context of a qualitative interview.

5.2.1. Knowledge and Experience of the BaF Programme Overall

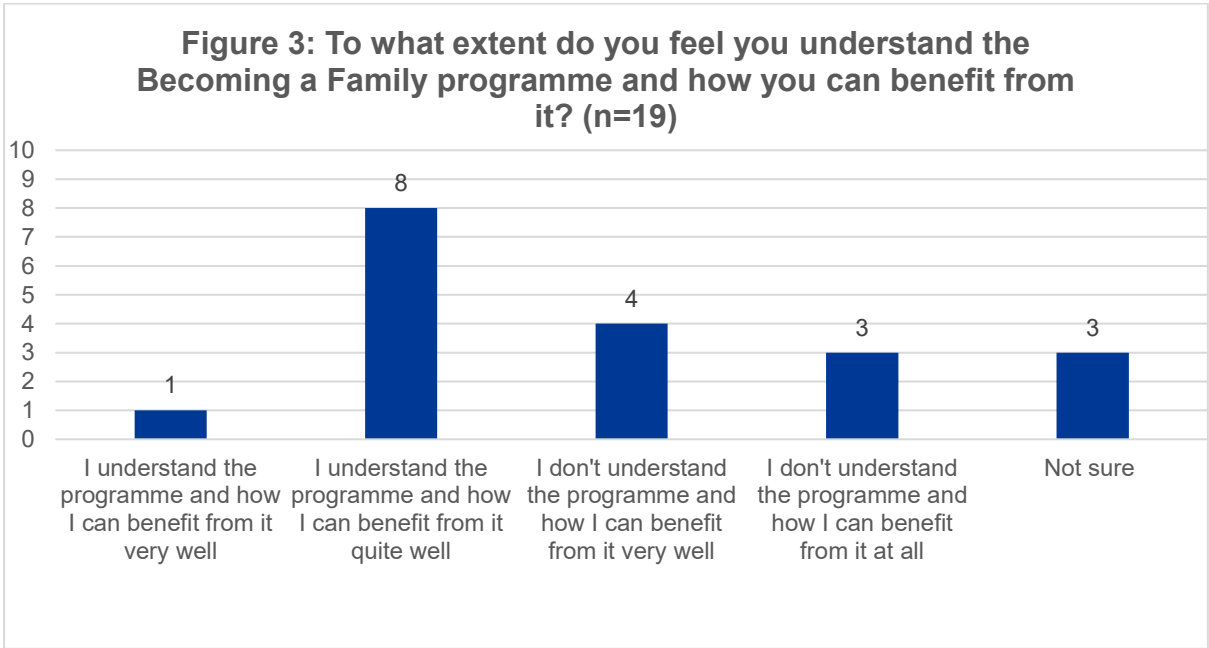
When asked at what point they had been introduced to BaF, a variety of parent responses to the survey were provided, as illustrated in figure 2 below:

⁸ Data missing for 49 of 161 families

⁹ Data missing for 19 of 161 families



Similarly, when asked about their understanding of the programme and the extent to which it had been explained to them, a variety of responses were provided, as illustrated in figures 3-4 below.



All parents participating in an interview described having heard about BaF from their social worker, albeit at different stages of their adoption journey. They understood it mostly to be concerned with the Purple Book but one parent was clear the programme related to both the Purple Book and early support (core) offer. One parent described how the Purple Book had been shared but never mentioned again. A number of parents described having been enthusiastic about participating:

“... the social worker, explained the purple book was like the red book for child development...said it was a pilot...[I]thought it was a great idea and was keen to be involved” (Parent 1)

Key themes from parent interviewees about the timings of introductions to the programme (including Purple Book) included that:

- Sharing the information at around the time of introductions or when a child comes to live with parents is not recommended, as it is a busy time, full of ‘paperwork’, e.g. *“Timing tricky as other things can get in the way”* (Parent 6)
- It would be better or best to share information about the programme from an early stage of the adoption journey e.g. *“I think they need to introduce this much earlier... would have been really useful as we were going through our assessments”* (Parent 4)

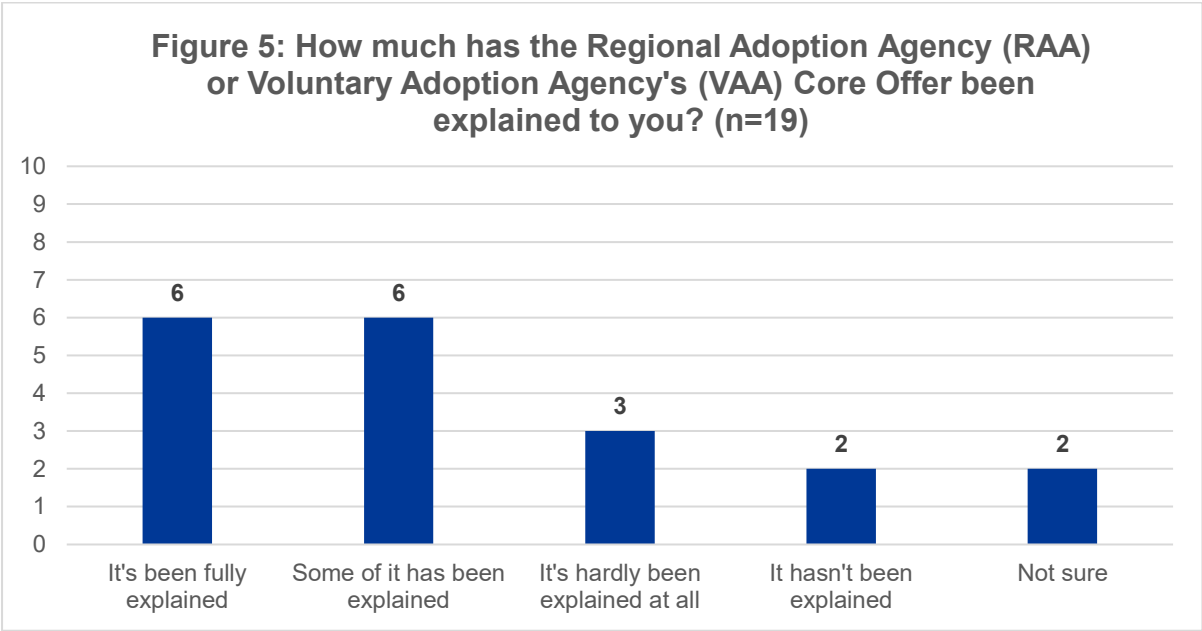
When asked about how well the programme had been explained to them and the clarity of the offer, parents generally again described very different experiences in interview.

- One parent considered the programme had been well explained to them (although may not have retained the information as “a lot of other things happened”).
- The other parents did not think it had been well explained including because it had been done in the context of only a one-off email or with too much jargon. Mostly, what had been introduced was The Purple Book. All these parents would have preferred more clarity about what was the purpose and what would be provided (by way of the Purple Book and early support offer combined).
- Some parents specifically described wanting the Purple Book to be used more actively by social workers (in visits) and for the visits themselves to be more structured for example around self-care, developing a network, or finances.

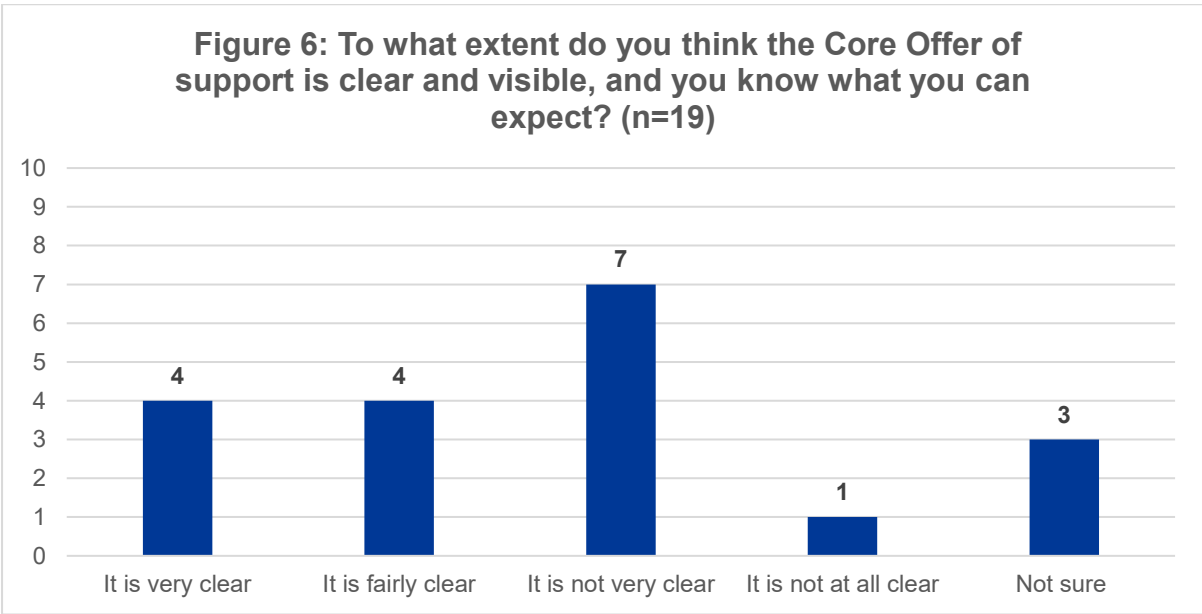
“We've had our approvals to adopt. The visits get less structured and with less of a purpose and more of a, you know, we have to come and see you...Sometimes the visit would be 45 minutes, sometimes it would be a few hours ...I don't think that focused on particular things...for both [the child's] social worker and ours, they turn up, we make a cup of tea, we sit and have a bit of a chat... And they go ‘Yeah, he looks great. You all look like you're doing amazing’ and they kind of leave us to it” (Parent 2)

5.2.2. Core offer

The survey asked parents about the extent to which their adoption agency’s core offer had been explained to them. Figure 5 below shows how a majority (12/19) parents considered it had been fully (6) or partially (6) explained.



When asked to what extent the ‘core offer’ of support was clear and visible, over one half of the participating parents thought it wasn’t clear or they weren’t sure:



There was opportunity for parents to explain, in a free text box, what they thought was clear or unclear about the core offer and how it could be improved. Thirteen parents responded to this free text question, with the following themes emerging:

- The agency’s core offer has been shared clearly with us, e.g. *“offer re training, support and events is really clear”*
- Not aware of what the core offer is, e.g. *“I’m not sure what this is”*

- We were already aware of the agency's core offer so did not need to be told about it, e.g. *"I already knew what post adoption support was offered"*
- It would be useful to have the core offer shared in one document or on a shared 'hub', e.g. *"We would love to see a simple document with everything on it"*
- It is hard to remember as so much information has been shared, e.g. *"almost information overload hence I remember it being explained but I can't remember the details"*

In interview, the parents who remembered experiencing one or more structured support visit described 'stand out' sessions as having focusing on self-care or developing their personal and professional support networks. Their main source of support was reliably described as the adoption social worker. Other, including more specific supports parents described having accessed included: therapeutic parenting (training); peer support (groups); and resources on the 'CATCH' hub. Some of these supports had been signposted by the Purple Book and/or adoption social worker. In other cases, parents had researched and identified support independently. The most frequently valued was peer support.

Some parents suggested in interview that it could be difficult to be completely open about their support needs in advance of an Adoption Order being made. This might lead to some parents minimising their support needs during the post-approval / linking / matching period.

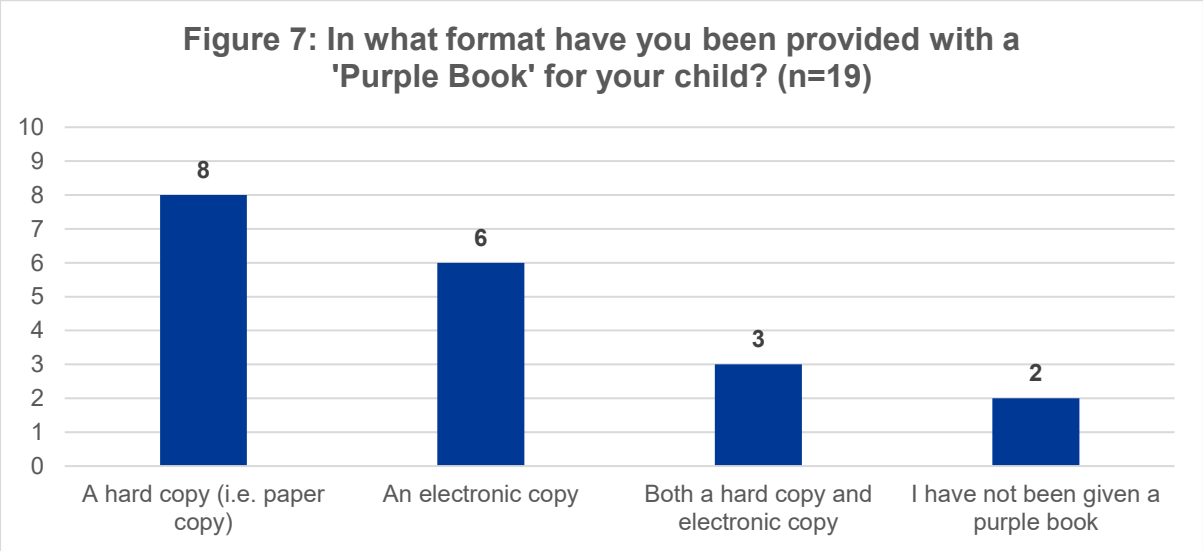
"I mean...the genuine impression I get is [it's] just all about the child which is quite right and then not so much [focus on] caring for ourselves... like, say, financial support...we're not poor, but when you put in your details, you don't want to put in something that looks like, you know, you're like struggling...But it might be difficult for some months, but you don't want to put that in because you could put it in, maybe get the financial support, but then they could say, well, you can't afford it so that there's always this fear of [judgement] yeah... Until it's gone through, you don't feel that you can really say that" (Parent 5)

Alternatively, parents described how they felt their need for actual support might arise further along the adoption journey rather than during the early stages:

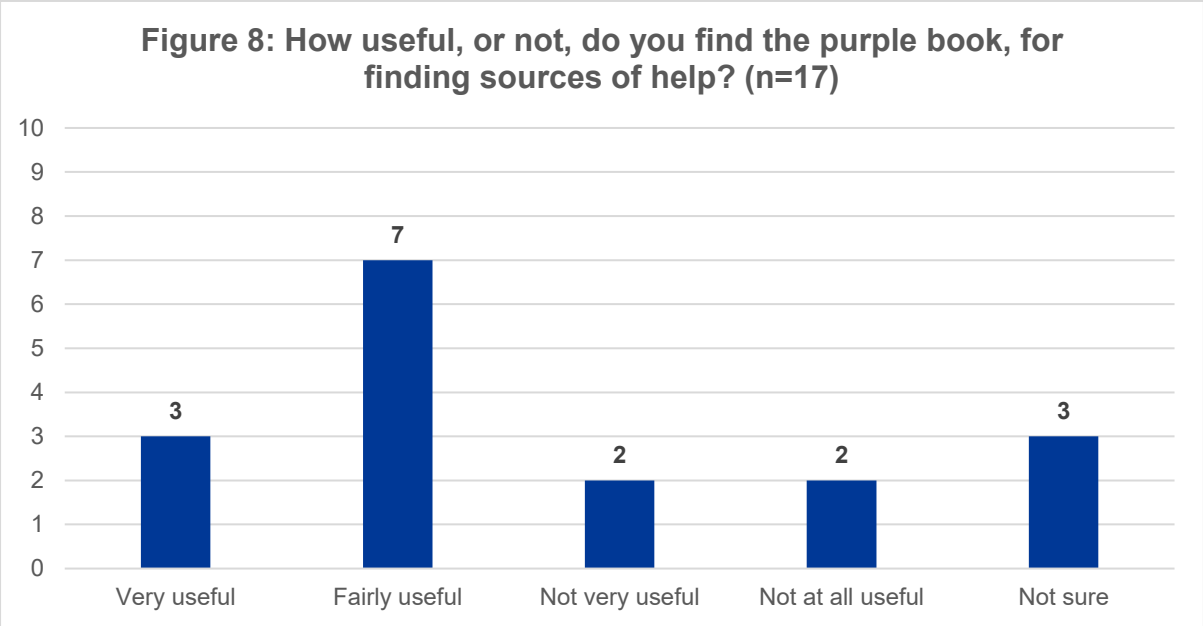
"The need for like help often comes like a bit down the track because [now] it's all new and a bit like a honeymoon period. And then after maybe a year, ...or as the children get older... I think it's the longer term that's that would be the problem" (Parent 5)

5.2.3. Purple Book

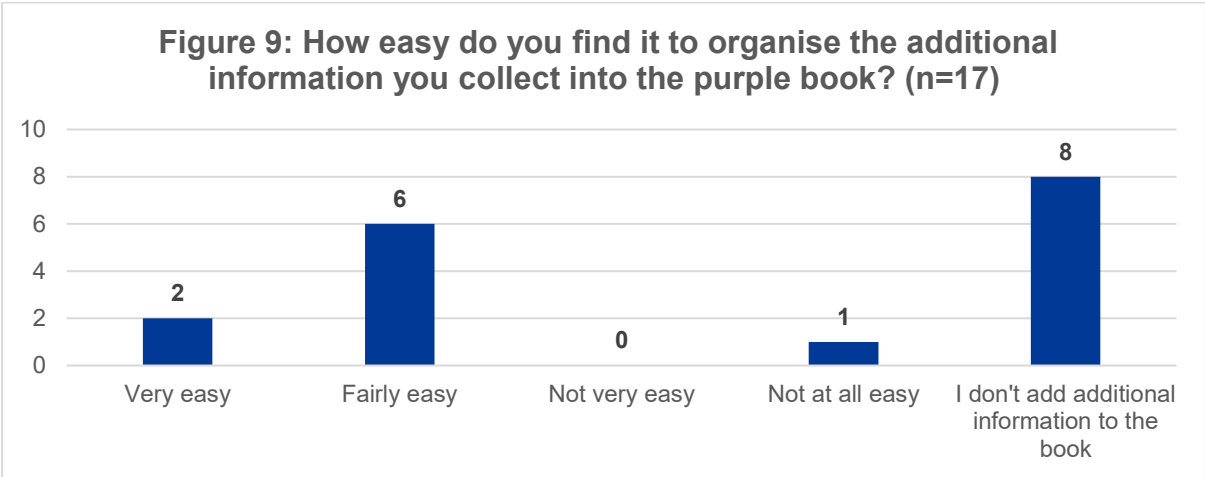
When asked about the Purple Book and the format in which it had been shared, parents responding to the survey again gave a variety of responses:



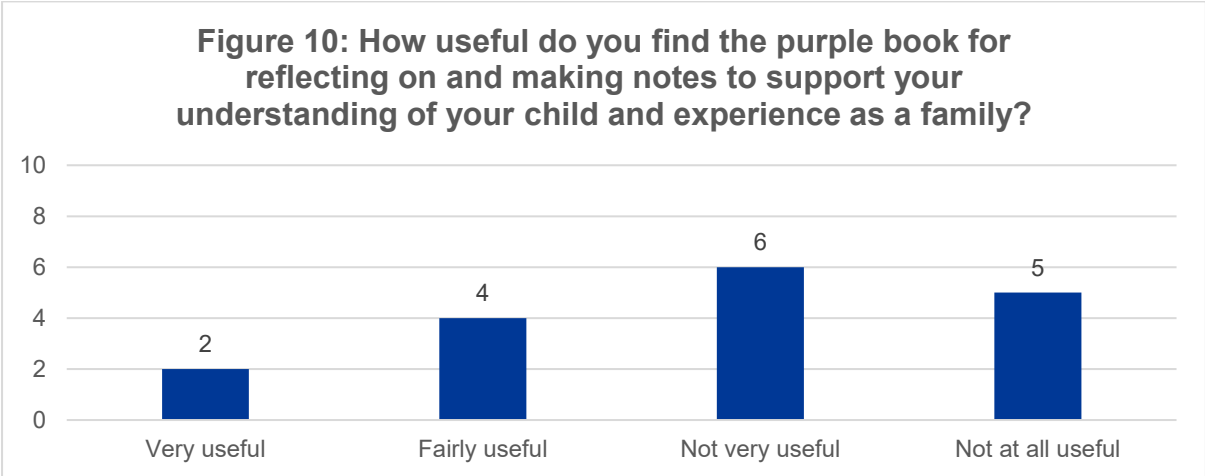
Of those who thought they had received a form of Purple Book, about one half thought it was fairly or very useful ‘for finding sources of help’.



When asked how easy they found it to organise additional information ‘into’ the Purple Book, about one half had not yet tried to do so. Of the other parents responding to the survey, most thought it ‘fairly easy’.



When asked how useful they found the Purple Book for reflecting on and making notes to support their understanding of their child and experience, about one third parents responding to the survey described it as (currently) ‘useful’.



Twelve ‘survey’ parents shared further comments that can be summarised as follows:

- The Purple Book in its current form is perceived as something to get information out of rather than for putting information into, e.g. *“the purple book is a great resource of information but it feels like it’s more of a thing to get info out of”*
- Some sections of the Purple Book are not yet relevant to a child as they are too young, e.g. *“Many of the sections in the purple book also seem to relate to older children”*
- Parents have not used the Purple Book yet because they haven’t needed to/have been too busy/forgot about the book/already have too much paperwork, e.g. *“The first few months of the adoption were really stressful and all consuming, so we didn't have any extra capacity”*
- There are future opportunities to improve the Purple Book, for example by adding milestones, e.g. *“a future version could provide really positively toned and well signposted places to record milestones and information”*

- The Purple Book would be easier to use as an app/online platform, e.g. *“I think the book would be better as an app, or a webpage where you can add information in and this can be shared with the social worker at the click of a button”*

The parents completing surveys were also asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with specific statements related to the Purple Book:

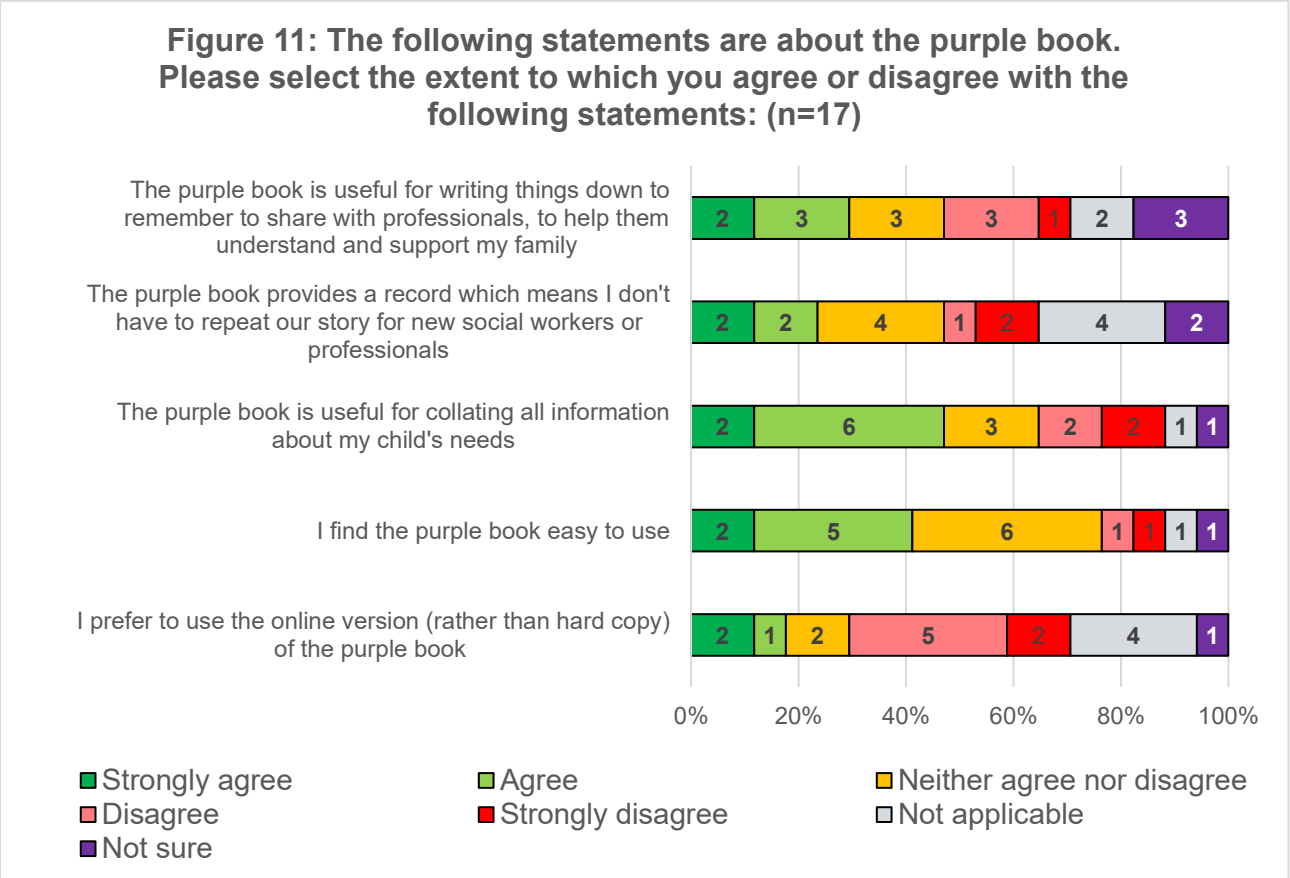


Figure 11 above demonstrates, again, how parents responding to the survey may have held quite different views about all aspects of the Purple Book and its value. For example, whilst three parents expressed a preference for using the online version, many more disagreed, or were unsure or thought this question did not apply to them (presumably because they had not accessed the online version). In their ‘free text’ comments, parents frequently commented that they found it hard to answer these scaling questions, for example because they had not yet had time to explore or use the resource in any meaningful way. Some also expected the book would become more useful as their child grew older.

Most parents interviewed for this evaluation described the Purple Book in positive or very positive terms, each reflecting on different ways in which the value was already or might be demonstrated in the future, for example:

- As a record of key information, events and reflections for reference at a later stage, e.g. *“...so beneficial for our little one's future of him understanding work like his journey, him and our journey as well with him. There's so much in there”* (Parent 3)
- For active reflection and ‘journaling’ at key stages of an adoption journey, including in particular for first time adopters, e.g. *“I do find journaling helpful. Like when I'm feeling a little bit like under pressure ...helps me to get my thoughts straight”* (Parent 2)
- To identify resources and supports within a professional network e.g. *“We knew once we read it through properly, we found out all the different sections and parts and support that we can get”* (Parent 3)
- For use in specific activities, particularly to record a ‘trauma timeline’ e.g. *“Would I use it if I didn't have the trauma nurture timeline? I don't know”* (Parent 6)

Most parent interviewees expressed a preference for the paper-based Purple Book and sometimes explained more about why, including with reference to its ease of use and reuse over time:

“I mean, we are quite old fashioned in a sense...Maybe you'd think that's a waste of paper but, especially if you're going to write in it and sort of do a journal, like for us, that would be helpful to have like pen and paper rather than electronic...you can read it in your spare time...providing paper copies is really important over everything because like, we wanted a copy of the past so that we could pass it on to...our children” (Parent 5)

“...for a little one's life, in terms of when he grows up asking questions or wanting to know about his journey with us, I think the physical for me, the physical [is best]” (Parent 3)

However one parent expressed frustration about *“...boxes not expanding”* (Parent 1) in the hard copy version. Another parent described how not providing a hard copy of the book conveyed a message to them that it was of little value.

“...and they said we just emailed one, but then it will get lost somewhere... It's not important enough to print out, maybe?” (Parent 5)

Two parent interviewees liked or would have liked having access to both the paper and electronic version(s). One parent actively proposed an app version e.g.

“...would be really useful if turned into an app that you can update... Because I think it is one of those things where if you just said to me, here's an app, you know, fill it in as you go along...we'd have used it a lot more” (Parent 4)

Concerns expressed about the emailed (electronic) version of the book included that it might be forgotten, lost or 'wiped out'.

Two of the five parent interviewees had been encouraged or supported to use the resource, although this was mostly through email communications rather than face to face:

"And it was all set out in an e-mail explaining it as well. OK. Again, very detailed, very clear. Yeah. Yeah, we I think it was all kind of like all laid out there for us. We knew once we read it through properly, we found out all the different sections and parts and support that we can get" (Parent 3)

The other parent interviewees had not experienced support to use the resource:

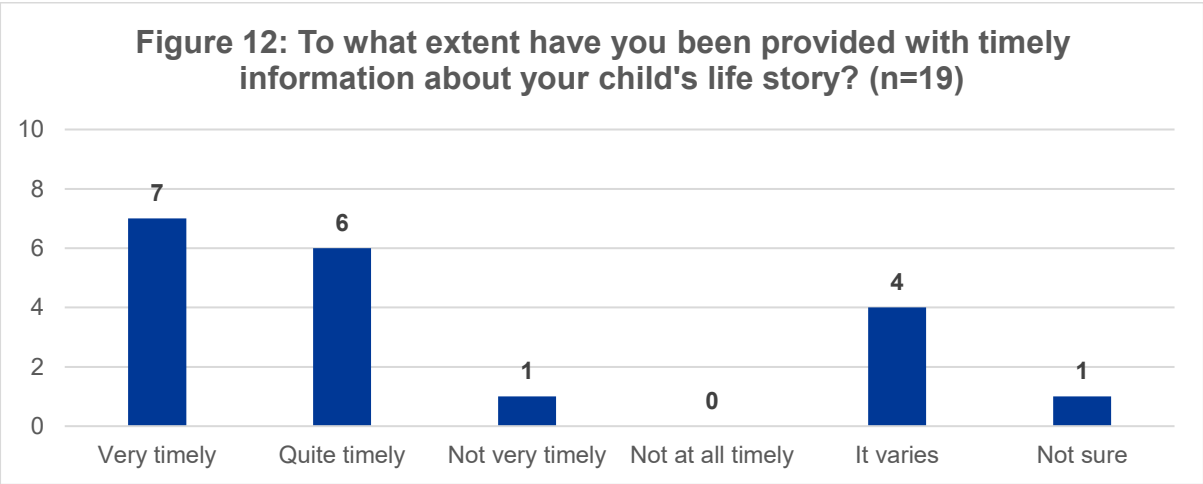
"It was just 'There you go'" (Parent 2)

Areas for improvement of the Purple Book identified by parent interviewees included:

- To further nuance the part of the Book encouraging parents to reflect on their child and their development by age range, including to recognise that 3 year periods can incorporate (particularly in the early months and years) quite a large span, e.g. *"That box is a three-year period. OK, three years is quite a long time for little [one]... so I can write something in there now, but he's not gonna be the same next year"* (Parent 4)
- To introduce the Purple Book earlier in the adoption journey e.g. *"Well...we've got documents in the beginning, maybe if it's made part of [a] whole one process rather than [at linking]"* (Parent 2)
- To provide better guidance on how to use the Purple Book and check in regularly on its usage / usefulness, e.g. *"But it's a really good idea. I think... having it is brilliant. It's like the red book, it's fantastic. And when I looked at it I thought it was great. But then it's actually how do you use it and make use of it?"* (Parent 5)

5.2.4. Support with child's life story

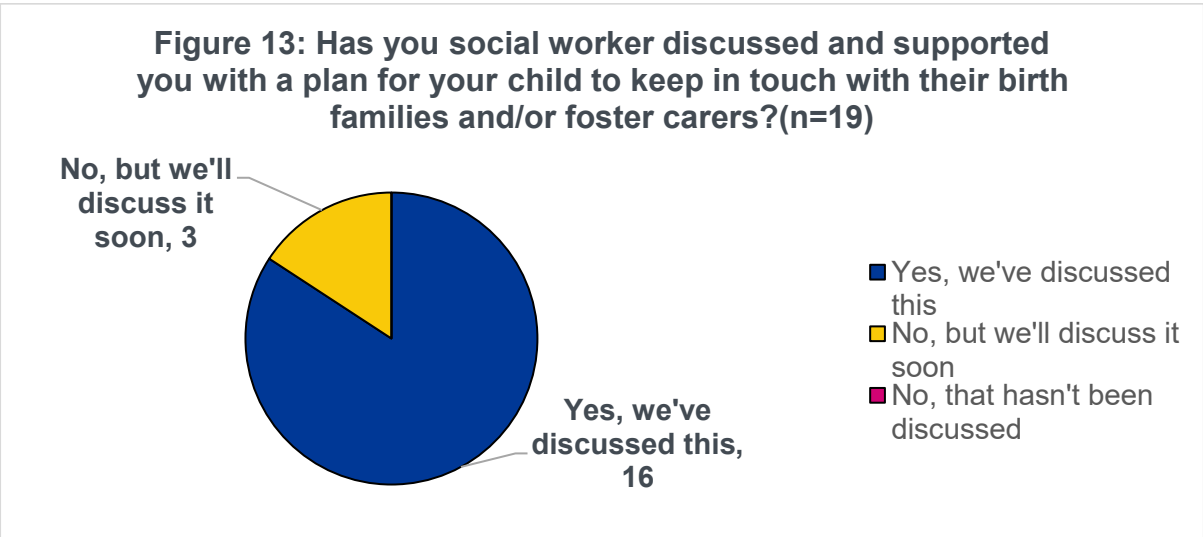
Parents were surveyed about their experience of support for the part of the adoption journey they had recently experienced. As illustrated in figure 12 below, most (13/19) thought they had experienced timely information about their child's life story.



However, only three parents thought they had (yet) received either or both a later in life letter and a life story book. Many others were expecting these materials to be shared later in their journey i.e. once the Adoption Order was granted. However, most (14/19) parents still considered, by the point of the survey, that they had been helped to understand how and when to share their child’s life story.

5.2.5. Support for keeping in touch

A majority (16/19) of parents responding to the survey had discussed with their social worker and been supported to develop a ‘keeping in touch’ plan for their child.



Most of these parents were fairly (11) or very (5) confident with the keeping in touch plan. Only 3 parents were either not very confident (2) or not at all confident (1).

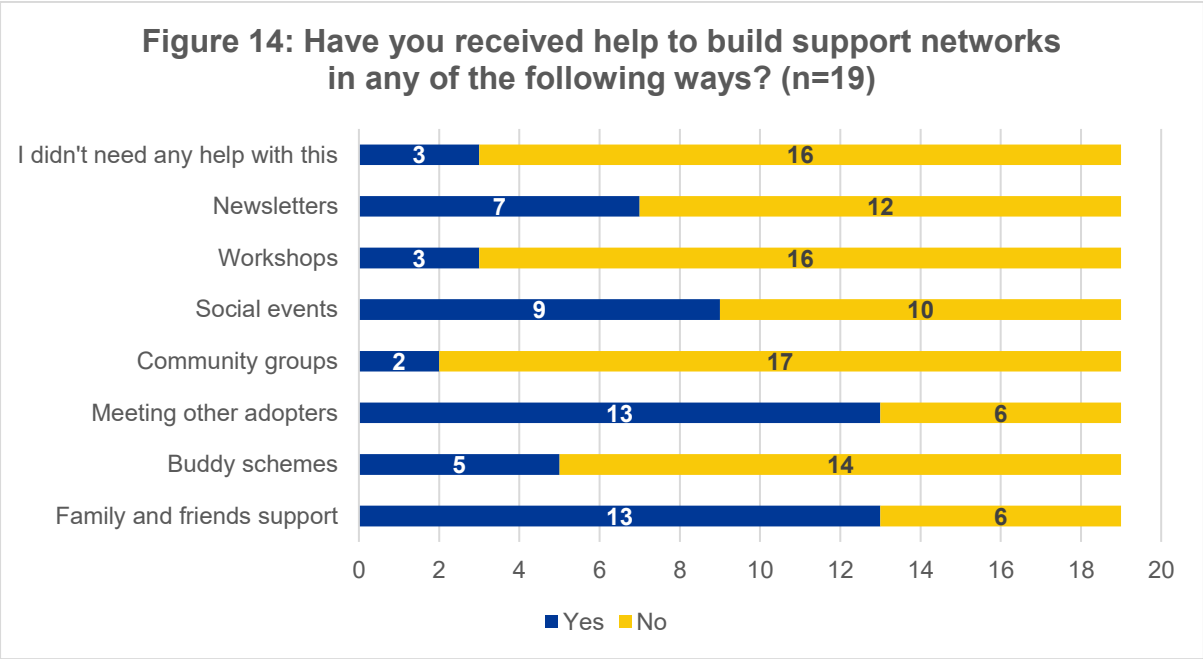
5.2.6. Support to access materials and agencies

Most (12/19) parents in the survey also described needing help to access learning resources. Those they had most frequently been supported to access were websites, e-learning and webinars / videos (training and podcasts were also mentioned).

The organisations they had been directed most towards were CATCH (Children and Trauma Community Hub), their own RAA or VAA and Adoption UK (also Adoption England) websites, We Are Family, New Family Social and NATP – National Association of Therapeutic Parents). Only three parents remembered having been directed towards a local organisation.

5.2.7. Support to develop personal networks

As illustrated in figure 14 below, most parents (16/19) in the survey agreed they had needed support to develop their personal support networks. They had received help with this in a variety of ways including through newsletters, workshops, community groups, buddy schemes and other ways.



Parents were additionally asked to identify the most supportive elements in practice. Most parents identified **‘family and friends support’** and **‘meeting other adopters’** as within their most supportive experiences.

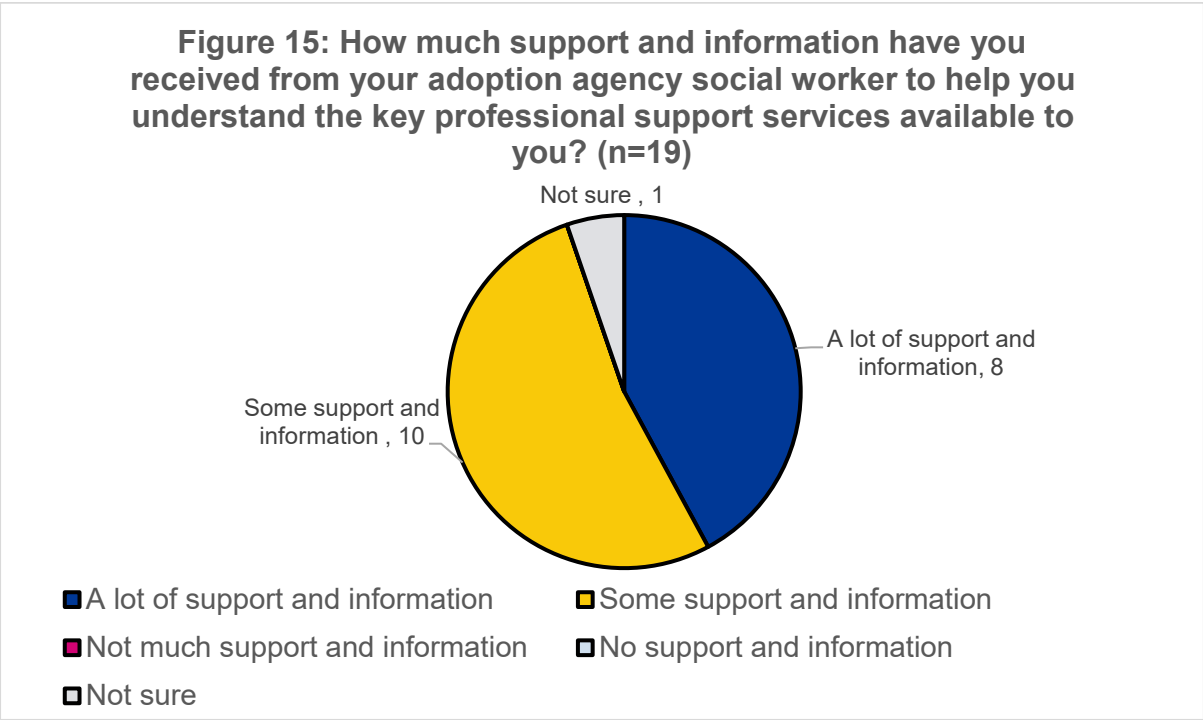
Opportunity was given in a free text response box for parents to give further views on the network of personal support they have, and their views are summarised below:

- It can be difficult at start of placement to know how open to be with non-adoptive parents, e.g. *“people presume that you have had the child since birth”*
- A buddying scheme was mentioned by agency but then hadn’t materialised
- Would have liked more support to link up with other adopters at same stage on journey
- Family and friends have been a massive source of support, e.g. *“We are very lucky to have a great friends and family network”*
- Meeting with other adopters is reassuring, e.g. *“to orientate our experience and share learning”*

5.2.8. Support to develop professional networks

Parents responding to the survey were also asked about professional networks and services, including how well they had been supported to connect with these.

As outlined in figure 15 below, about one half thought they had received ‘some support and information’ and about one half ‘a lot of support and information’.



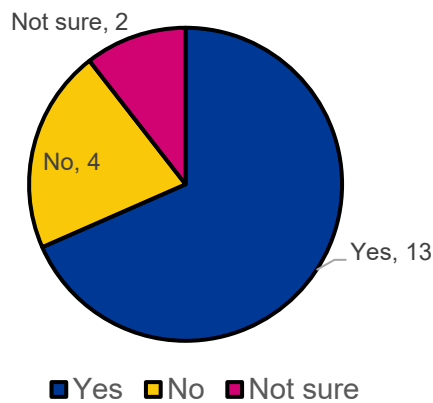
Many parents responding to the survey described not yet having needed help to connect with professional supports. The community or professional supports a small number (4-5) parents reported having been helped to connect with were: registering with a GP; connecting with the post-adoption support team; connecting with childcare, nursery or school; and connecting with a Health Visitor or School Nurse.

5.2.9. Support for and to develop self-care

Aspects of self-care were explored in the survey including the extent to which parents considered they had been supported to think about and find time and space for their own ‘self-care and wellbeing’.

As illustrated in figure 16 below, about two thirds considered they had been supported in this way but about one third had not or were not sure they had.

Figure 16: Do you feel you have been supported to think about and find time and space for your own self-care and wellbeing? (n=19)



About one half of the parents in the survey had discussed a self-care ‘plan’ with their social worker or thought they would do so soon. However, just under one half had not been offered this or weren’t sure they had. Only 2/19 parents reported that they did not want to discuss this aspect of support with their social worker.

5.2.10. Practical including financial support

Parents responding to the survey were asked about the support or advice they had been offered regarding financial or other practical matters. A majority (15/19) reported they had not (yet) needed any help of this nature. The other four families reported they had not received this support but would have liked it e.g.

“No support given so had to figure it out ourselves. The financial costs of having children should ensure that training is delivered on how to apply for child benefit, travel expenses etc”

“Not yet as but it would be helpful when I get closer to returning to work. I would have also appreciated more support with childcare costs which is very complex”

“No, I have found this myself, we would have liked better support on this. It's also interesting that child benefit and childcare cost departments don't seem overall knowledgeable on the adoption process”

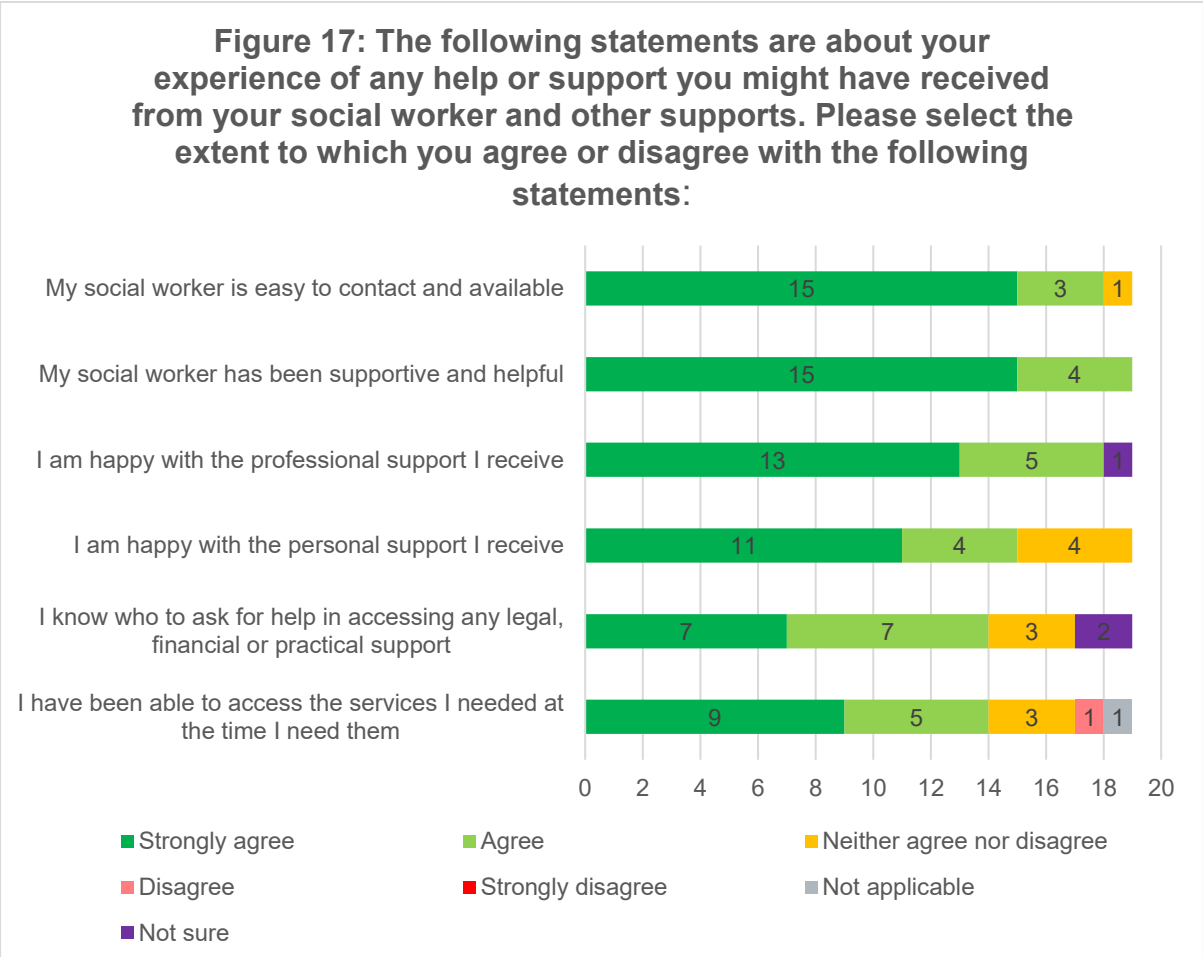
Only one of the nineteen parents remembered having received support about how to claim child-related benefits.

5.2.11. Support with the legal process

By contrast, almost all parents in the survey had received support regarding the legal process for adoption (16/19) or did not need any help with this (2/19). Only one parent described potentially needing more support of this nature as the application for an Adoption Order came closer. Parents were either very confident (16/19) or fairly confident (3/19) about when and how to apply for an Adoption Order.

5.2.12. Satisfaction with support overall

Parent responses to a set of statements in the survey suggest a relatively high degree of overall satisfaction with the support they *had* received, particularly from their social worker(s).



Parents who participated in an interview were generally happy with the support they had received overall although one described the support as ‘chaotic’. When asked about the impact of BaF specifically, including what they had done differently as they had progressed beyond introduction of the programme, all described having more consciously built a network of professional and personal support, particularly peer (adopter) support networks. When asked what they had valued most, parents described either or both elements of:

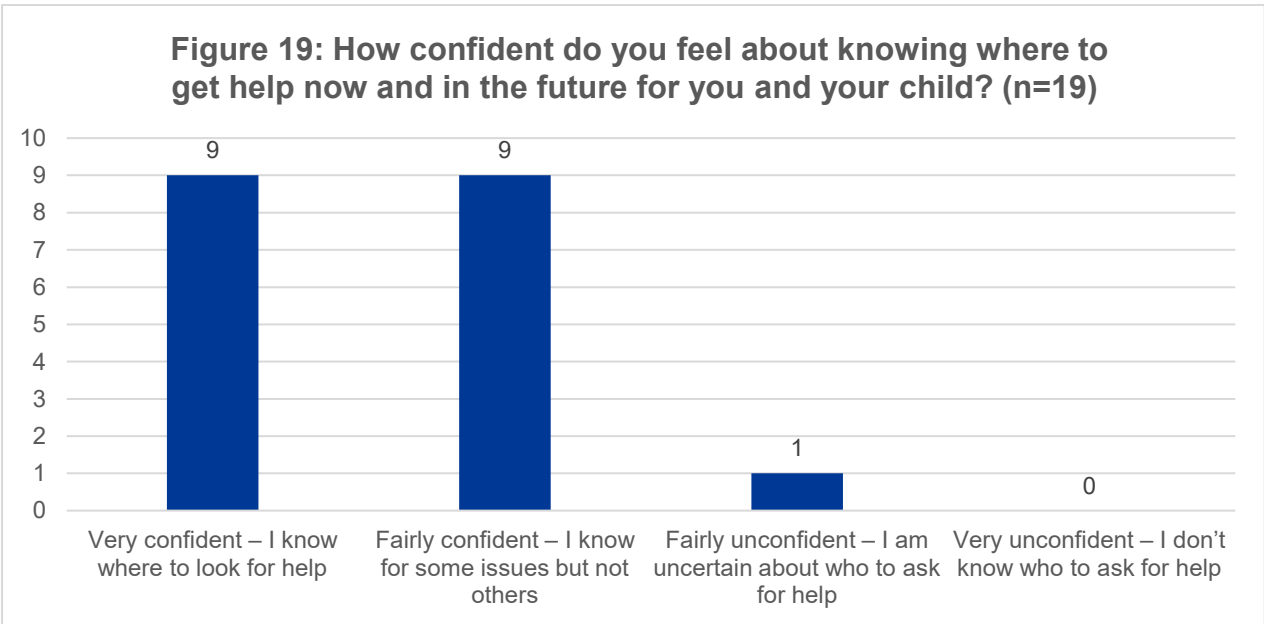
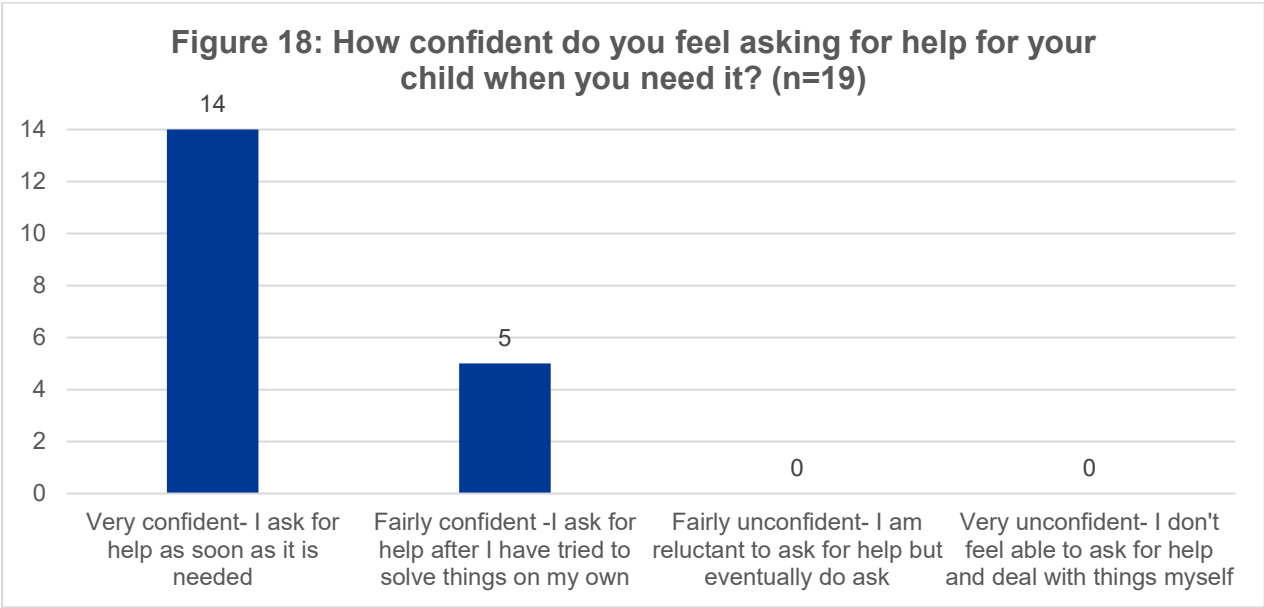
- **Encouragement and support for self-care** (even if this was difficult always to prioritise), e.g. *“It's just that reminder you're in such a set whirlwind that you just need that”* (Parent 3)
- **Peer support** e.g. *“It's nice to speak to other people who...understand the reality of it [adoption]”* (Parent 2)

Because not all or many of these interviewee parents thought they had experienced a ‘programme’ as such, it is difficult to attribute many more of their change or impact-related responses to BaF. However, key themes from these conversations were that:

- Receiving similar, ‘layered’ information from a range of sources (including Purple Book, conversations with social workers, peer conversations, buddies, online sources, networks, official documents, foster carers) helps to reassure new parents and to make them feel more informed or resilient going forward, e.g. *“Really makes you think that actually you're not on your own and you are doing the right thing. And I think as new parents and parents who've never had children before, we quite often question are we doing the right thing?”* (Parent 4)
- Networks of support might develop over time but, in the early stages of adoption, parents might not feel that they (yet) need it or that their family and friends would be the most important sources. The programme and Purple Book resources might be most useful as ‘legacy’ reference points rather than immediately.
- If a programme is to be introduced, to do so as clearly and early as possible (trailing it) and to regularly remind parents of it.
- To provide (even) more structure to visits between approval and Adoption Order including with reference to subject areas that may be of most value to parents at different periods of time.

5.2.13. Confidence in asking for help

Responses to the survey also suggest a high degree of confidence amongst parents that they could ask for help when they needed it (now and in the future), as illustrated in figures 18 and 19 below.



6. How was the pilot experienced by social workers?

6.1. Insights from qualitative focus group interviews

Evaluators facilitated two ‘waves’ of focus group interviews with social workers from the six pilot sites – in the early stages of programme implementation (in February – April 2025) and approximately 9 months later (in November 2025 – January 2026).

6.1.1. Implementation of the Programme

At the time of the first wave interviews, implementation was understandably described by many social workers as being in the ‘early stages’ with only a small number of families yet having been engaged. Some social workers had not even yet begun to implement the programme directly with families, but many described having themselves looked at the (Purple Book) materials and being ‘keen’ on the content and programme potential. The focus was very much still on the Purple Book, with some practitioners noting the (informative) content meant they might have less to do or to explain to parents. Others were initially apprehensive about using the Purple Book, as they couldn’t see the fit with their work or their families, felt it remained a little ‘abstract’. Some social workers noted how they had recently received changed instructions, from trialling the programme with one or two families to piloting it with all relevant families.

By the time of the second wave interviews, practitioners described still being at varying albeit overall further stages of implementation, including sometimes within the same agency. For example, some staff were using the programme or Purple Book at least with most or all parents. Others described only having used the programme or materials with a small number of parents or ‘just starting to use it’. In at least one agency, staff still thought they were only ‘handing out [Purple Book] folders’. Social worker reflections on progress with implementation within their team overall included that it:

- was picking up speed, becoming more familiar, being discussed in the team; or
- was not yet consistently being used or embedded in practice; or
- (for a minority) that implementation had stalled.

6.1.2. The significance of timings

At wave one interviews, some social workers were already noticing (as individuals or a team) that formally introducing BaF at linking or matching was not working – as families were too busy to engage at that stage, including with the child’s social worker. The significance of good timings for doing things was also a key theme in the second wave focus group interviews. At that point:

- Some social workers described having been expected to ‘hand out materials’ (the Purple Book) at around the linking or matching stage(s) of an adoption journey.

“I have used the purple books, just introducing them to families once they've been matched” (Social Worker)

- Other social workers had understood they were expected to start the programme at just after adopter approval.

“I think for our team it's very clear. So we've got when prospective adopters go to panel and are approved, that's kind of when we... hand the becoming a family folder over and discuss it with them” (Social Worker)

For those social workers who had continued to introduce the programme at linking to matching stages, their reflection was often still that this was not a good time because too much was going on for the parents at this time.

“I would absolutely be clear that I'm not sure that that's the best time [at linking], but yeah, that's what we've been doing” (Social Worker)

“...quite an overwhelming stage to be to be sharing the book with them” (Social Worker)

Some social workers had begun individually to adjust the timings for doing things, having learned from where the programme had not yet landed well.

“...the stage in which, like I'm introducing it with families...I've kind of altered that. And I think that kind of helps because I think trying to introduce at a point where things are kind of chaotic and there's lots of stuff going on, there's already lots of paperwork, it isn't received as well” (Social Worker)

Second wave focus group participants debated what was a good or better time to introduce the programme.

- Most social workers considered a good time to *introduce* the concept and materials to be between just after adopter approval and in the very early stages of family finding before linking (although some acknowledged this could happen quite fast).

“Before, I was kind of introducing it ...around kind of that matching panel bit and we're talking about a specific child and that was probably the worst time because we're doing lots of paperwork. To be honest, it was...just another stressor for me. And then we're kind of in transitions and you know, the priorities are different in terms of, you know, everyone's kind of that capacity in terms of the building, the relationship and that being the focus and us as social workers providing support. So [now] I'm doing it earlier now...generally at the point where they're, yeah, in their family finding journey, we start talking about it” (Social Worker)

- Some social workers further reflected that, having introduced the concept and materials, a good time to provide more structured input was in a perceived ‘lull’

between a child actually coming to live with parent(s) and the making of an Adoption Order.

“...and now we're in the lull while we're waiting for Adoption Order. Actually, it feels a little bit more like I could go back and use that as a way to structure some of my visits in this intervening period before we get the Order... I've got, yeah, apace for this now” (Social Worker)

Some of the social workers participating in a wave two focus group had considered using or were confident to use the programme and materials in different ways and at different stages (in ‘little windows of opportunity’) with in mind all the different variables that might come into play along an individual adoption journey.

“...every single case is unique ... I don't know. I'm trying to try and think when is the magic time to do it with each” (Social Worker)

Participants sometimes also reflected that the programme or concept could be initially introduced or ‘trailed’ much earlier, i.e. during the prospective adopter training and assessment phase. Some social workers were already doing so:

“I have mentioned it when assessing adopters and then I just write about the Purple Book very briefly in the PAR. But I have noticed that panel have never picked up on it. I don't know whether they I don't know whether they should or shouldn't, but I just mention it” (Social Worker)

6.1.3. Programme integrity

At the time of first wave interviews, it was clear that social workers considered BaF only to relate to the Purple Book. Most had just started sharing the book with some or all of their relevant families.

A minority of practitioners participating in the second wave focus group interviews described applying all key aspects of the programme including Purple Book and practice framework, including to structure their work with parents.

“So I increasingly have been using the Purple Book as a real kind of framework to talk to adopters about what next. So, I would say...that it's taken me a while to kind of get my head around exactly how, like how beneficial it is. But I'm, yeah, definitely, I've been sharing. Yeah, much more frequently. I'm finding it, yeah, helpful” (Social Worker)

These were not only but more likely to be staff new in role e.g.

“So I came from fostering...and I think the difference that I found between fostering and adoption was...fostering was very kind of clear cut and very like we knew when we had to visit, we knew what was available, we had handbooks...within regs that you know, that we had to follow. And I suppose that's something that in adoption, you know, initially I found that shift quite difficult and I think that that actually this framework to me, it does feel a bit more in line with what felt ...a comfortable way of working ...when we have this kind of behind us, this this as a sort of background to what to what we do in terms of supporting our adopters” (Social Worker)

For many other social workers, neither the framework nor the Purple Book’s key components were being used to structure or focus their time with parents. The reasons for this were articulated in two main ways:

- **Experienced adoption practitioners considered they did not need to structure their work in this way**, that the content was probably what they were doing already.

“I'm being really honest, probably not [using the material]. I feel like I'm a very, you know, experienced practitioner and I'd go in and obviously... it might be things I'm covering are already in there, but I've not, I've not necessarily looked up and thought, well, I'm going to cover that today” (Social Worker)

These more experienced practitioners often reflected that the programme might be more useful for staff newer in role:

“I find it really hard to like introduce a framework which I kind of feel like I'm already doing...whereas I feel like maybe if I came in now and joined adoption and was like, great, I'm using this framework, that would be super useful” (Social Worker)

- **A sense that work pressures meant there was no time to structure visits in this way.**

“And that might just be about capacity. If I'm being honest, whether I've got capacity to prep my visits to that extent. But generally I just, yeah, I go with some, I know what I'm going to discuss or what I need to cover. And I do that” (Social Worker)

6.1.4. The Purple Book

The Purple Book still seemed quite abstract for practitioners participating in wave one interviews. The need for administrative support (for putting the books together) was a key

theme of these early discussions, including (sometimes) the lack of such support – as an inhibitor to implementation.

By wave two, focus group participants had got into patterns of sending (or business support sending) or taking out copies of the Purple Book to parents. This varied greatly by team e.g. whether to share either a hard or an electronic copy or both and whether to have it sent at arm's length or to introduce it in person.

Practitioners generally considered the Purple Book contents to be good or the right kind of material to be sharing with parents. A small minority described beginning to use the book to structure their visits:

“...just to kind of guide those discussions ...I've definitely felt ...it gives a focus...like what happens next, that that I would say has been the main benefit for me that we're all kind of on the same page” (Social Worker)

“Yeah, that gives us a sense of purpose and focus, which works for me otherwise, yeah, I could be too disorganised” (Social Worker)

Some other social workers reflected that, to maximise its value, they should be using it more to help structure their visits:

“I actually think the Purple book is really good and I think it's a great resource for our adopters. But I think I need to be far more directive ...about working through the book ... and not just leaving it with my families and working, you know, sort of planning my visits and looking at the book with them” (Social Worker)

“And I do think it needs to be worker lead on going through the book with them... then it gives a structure to the book in that this is what we're focusing on when we come for the visits. And it keeps it relevant and it keeps it in in you know sort of in people's minds and as a as a working document with your families. So I have to say I haven't done that yet but I've been thinking that's the way I think I want to use it with my families” (Social Worker)

Wave two social workers considered families themselves to be using the Purple Book in a range of ways including:

- **To keep key information in one place**, e.g. *“...as a file for keeping things in...if there's a review or anything like that”*
- **For reflections on their personal adoption journey or that of their child, like a journal**, e.g. *“...reflections when children first arrived with them...Really important for them to look back on in sort of, you know, but maybe 10-12 years down the line,*

either in just in that sort of yes, this is what it was like for our children when they came to us and, you know, this is why it was they were struggling so much because of their background, but also some of those really joyful memories"

- **To source (further) information or advice**, e.g. *"...they have all the information they need, they know what support is available. They're interested to know what workshops and like courses like training is available"*
- **To remind parents what they should be getting on with**, e.g. *"...kind of making applicants aware that this is the responsibility of the agency and this is what we're going to be offering, but also, within that, I think what I like about it is putting the emphasis on them as well to kind of say like you, you can't just be passive in this like, this, this stuff in here that you're going to need to be doing"*

Some practitioners reflected that single adopters had valued the resource in particular, because of the reflective element (being more relevant to them):

"One adopter [values the reflective element]...a single adopter, so she hasn't really got the same bouncing off someone in the same way as when you're in a couple" (Social Worker)

However, many workers reflected that a key barrier to parents seeing the value and using the Purple Book in practice was their capacity (for taking on new information, undertaking 'additional' processes or reflecting), particularly at times of challenge early in placement.

"I don't think my other couple really have used the [Purple Book]. They've had a difficult placement and I don't think they've got capacity probably to think about anything other than get through the day" (Social Worker)

As with their reflections about timings overall for the programme, practitioners often considered that the value of the Book might not be visible yet, because of these challenges, but would emerge later in the adoption journey.

"So I think there's so much goes on and it and ...information can be lost and for me it just felt like this really clear cut way of being able to, you know, not not just keep like and hold on to some of this information but add to it so that so that it's more available about that child's journey from start, and that it might not be something that we see any benefit from in our roles... Because I think it's very likely that it could be years down the line that hopefully they've got this....They're going into a school and saying my child needs additional help and then they've got access to all this information that they could share or with a paediatrician or with a psychology or whoever they're accessing in the future. It's all recorded" (Social Worker)

“Very useful...sometimes when people come back to us, you know they often forget the support package” (Social Worker)

Advantages and disadvantages of the hard or electronic versions of the Purple Book were articulated by wave two social workers, as outlined in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Advantages and Disadvantages of hard copy or electronic Purple Book(s)

Type of Purple Book	Advantages	Disadvantages
Electronic	• Most documents sent electronically (now)	• Electronic folders more likely to get removed • Electronic folders less likely to be used (for some families)
Hard Copy	• Folder for actually storing documents • Something physical to look back through as a family • Separate from ‘work’ • People like something to hold	• Restricted fields • Poor quality materials gives the message this isn’t of value – feedback from some parents the folders look ‘cheap’ • Sensitive content could be seen (unsupervised) by children • Harder to access the links (to more information)

Ultimately, focus group participants reflected that individual parents had different preferences. However, some social workers considered it difficult themselves to work with both – particularly if they wanted to actually make recordings in the book:

“I understand why it needs to be physical and electronic, it completely makes sense, but it just makes it really difficult to work with it when you've got two formats going on. I've been physically like typing into [it]...but then they also had the physical one, which they really liked ...having a place to store it. But it's clunky with both, isn't it?” (Social Worker)

6.1.5. Core offer (of support)

At wave one focus group interviews, many of the social workers were not yet aware of a link between the BaF programme and their ‘core offer’ of support, e.g.

"We're just doing the Purple Book and I had no idea that there was kind of a bit to go alongside that" (Social Worker)

Others were more aware and beginning to reflect on how the framework (as a manifestation of the core offer) could be useful, e.g.

"I know that core offer has always been there. It's just that people don't know it's there. Now it's good because all the information is clearly there. The offer hasn't changed, but the fact that it's so explicitly open and available has changed" (Social Worker)

When asked about the clarity of the local core offer (of support) at the time of wave two interviews, some practitioners considered this to be all about post-Adoption Order support. Whether or not focus group participants considered the core offer to relate to pre- or post-Adoption Order support (or both), most described their local 'core offer' as quite or very visible (now) but something quite separate to the BaF programme.

A minority of social workers participating in a wave two focus group reflected on the link between the two and how the BaF programme had helped to clarify the core offer.

"I think that's been the biggest you know, benefit to this programme...The core offer's very visible. It's clear to you know, staff and adopters. It's...also just streamlined perhaps what we are offering... I was just thinking about visits like it sometimes it was a little bit hazy how often you were meant to see people in like in the early stages, but actually now it's really clear it's written down. Yeah, you kind of know where you can signpost people to" (Social Worker)

6.1.6. Value and impact of the programme

At the time of wave one interviews, practitioners were not yet able to comment on the value or impact of the programme.

By wave two, most practitioner conversations relating to programme value or impact really just re-emphasised the value and potential impact of the Purple Book (see above).

"...we're giving them a physical folder. It's like a little gift, isn't it? You know, when you're approved, you get a folder, you know, put stuff in it. But really, you know. Yeah, that's it" (Social Worker)

Some social workers reflected that the value might reveal itself only at a later stage and how this could make it difficult at times to invest fully in the activity.

“But it's hard for us to see that this point, it's kind of investing now for the longer-term benefit” (Social Worker)

However, it could feel reassuring as a practitioner to be ‘handing over’ material that could travel with parents into the future:

“And I suppose at least that feels like, yeah, it's been kind of sort of tangibly kind of given over. So I suppose that kind of feels, yeah, reassuring” (Social Worker)

Overall, most wave two focus group participants considered it was too early (yet) to see or to be confident the impact of the programme.

“I think I just feel like it could be really super important. But I feel like it's not there yet like it's still too for me, it's too clunky and it's not so easy to engage with. But I feel like it's got massive promise, like I love the idea of it” (Social Worker)

6.1.7. What would assist to improve or embed the programme?

Practitioners participating in wave two focus group interviews reflected on a number of barriers to implementation they had experienced including: the sheer number of simultaneous initiatives with which they had been expected to engage; uncertainty about key aspects or elements, such as timings; and a lack of buy in including because they had not felt involved in the early stages of implementation or because the pilot had seemed ‘optional’. Others reflected that there had been too much focus on the Purple Book and not enough guidance or support about to use the Book and framework in practice. These barriers were similar to those articulated at wave one. The only additional barrier articulated at stage one was (lack of) administrative support to produce hard copy purple books.

With regards future improvements, key themes from wave two focus group interviews with practitioners¹⁰ were:

- **Being given time to hear about, absorb and buy into the approach and best practice implementation** – including through being able to witness others talking about how it had been used and its value.

¹⁰ These were similar to enablers or key supports for implementation articulated at wave one

“... if you don't feel confident in your understanding of it and its purpose and you haven't received that training, how do you then present it with confidence, with purpose to families?” (Social Worker)

“Time and space really [needed] to understand it” (Social Worker)

“...because I don't really, personally I can't push stuff if I understand it” (Social Worker)

Video's, 'talking heads' or case study examples of people using the programme and materials were suggested by some:

“I'd love to see it like to see it in a video or whatever would just be so powerful”

- **A stronger, more visible framework or structure to the overall programme.**

“I think we need to understand the framework, which is a basic which we still haven't got and we've been asking for a really long time” (Social Worker)

“Another [change programme] was implemented because I can see the model” (Social Worker)

- **Consistent training provided before starting to implement.**

“Yeah, we needed a whole day. We should have gone as a team somewhere to a venue and had a whole day training by someone other than X and Y [managers]. Maybe. And you know someone that. Yeah, to take us through it. Let's practise it. Let's have a little go and you know how we can use it” (Social Worker)

Some social workers suggested the guidance and training should include clear(er) advice about timings for introducing the programme and Purple Book.

- **Being required after an introductory period to implement** (rather than feeling like it is optional)

“Across the board, everybody has, everybody uses it and we have a prescribed way of doing it” (Social Worker)

“...really important to have that kind of consistency. So then in terms of adopters in the community and the general community talking about the Purple Book and what the dialogue is around that, it will be consistent and that will help it to bed in” (Social Worker)

- **Embedding consistently after launch, including through team manager, champions or communities of practice**

“...just having team a conversation with within your team thinking about how you're doing it and what you're doing. And I think that also encourages you to do it more if you hear other people doing it in a certain way” (Social Worker)

“It just brings it to the forefront again, I think, yeah” (Social Worker)

- **Improvements to the quality of the Purple Book.**

“I think the quality of it would help adopters as well because then it's like we're what are we giving, what message does it give that it's some pieces of paper that we've printed off?...Have some pictures in it. It looks really dull” (Social Worker)

- **Consideration given to developing a Purple Book ‘app’**

“I don't, you know, we're meant to be paperless and yet here we are giving out a folder with bits of paper. You know, I feel like we've gone backwards, you know, like an app would just be the really obvious thing to do” (Social Worker)

“I think like if I think the most useful would be probably like an app which sits on their phone and they can yeah, click on and perhaps downloads” (Social Worker)

Other suggestions included to involve people with lived experience in further developing the materials and/or colleagues working in post-adoption support.

6.2. Insights from the tracker data

Practitioners involved in BaF were encouraged to reflect on supporting BaF with individual families – at the end of each tracker ‘entry’. The following summary of comments made in one or more individual cases pick up or add to themes from focus group interviews:

- Practitioner concern that the **written materials will be too much** for a dyslexic adopter.
- Practitioner reflections that one family is struggling or very busy with sibling groups so **don't have capacity to engage** in BaF.
- Practitioner reflection that the use of BaF materials is **different for an EP family** as they already know child well.
- Suggestion that BaF could be **made into an app** so that adopters have resources in a quickly accessible way.

- Recognition of **usefulness of BaF/ the Purple Book for a single adopter to structure conversations** as no partner with whom to reflect.
- Recognition it would be better to **give purple book ahead of linking so adopters can familiarise with it**, as this is such a busy period.
- **Practitioner needing to be the one to encourage conversation** around the BaF materials and to remind parents about it frequently.

7. How was the pilot experienced by managers?

7.1. Findings from qualitative interviews

Wave one interviews were undertaken with managers from participating sites in February to April 2025 and wave two interviews in November 2025 to January 2026. A large majority of interviewees were team managers, but some were service managers or agency leaders.

7.1.1. Programme Implementation

At the time of wave one interviews, managers described implementation in quite differing terms:

- Some had not yet really understood the Programme themselves, were not yet driving its implementation with their teams.
- Others (a minority) were driving the programme forward, building it into their existing processes and introducing it to all their relevant families.
- Some were beginning only to implement, getting their teams on board and interested.

A key change since an earlier (pre-relaunch) stage was that, by that point, national and RAA or VAA programme leaders had agreed BaF should be introduced to all and not just some (selected) families. In some teams, managers noticed that they and their staff had previously referred to the ‘Purple Book Pilot’ rather than ‘Becoming a Family’ and that tag had been difficult to shift.

By around November 2025 – January 2026, a strong theme from the manager interviews was that progress had been made and the concept was better or well received by staff:

“I feel really positive about it. I think you know it's a good way of working” (Manager)

“...the reception to the to the idea from the outset has been positive...the reality of the implementation can be a bit a bit trickier to achieve, but... yes, the concept is well received” (Manager)

A journeying metaphor was used by many managers to describe their (local) progress with implementation, to the point of sites (now) introducing the Purple Book to all or most families, but with more progress still needed.

“I think be fair to say that we're still on a bit of a journey as to how the workers are using it to, to be honest...the improvement we made was getting to a point where everybody was provided with the book” (Manager)

In two sites, managers were sometimes less confident that the concept or materials were being introduced consistently to families, in each case reflecting that only some staff were piloting it or most staff but with only some (hand-picked) families. In these cases, staff were more likely to perceive BaF as ‘an extra task’.

Another exception to overall enthusiasm about the pilot was for early permanence families who, managers frequently reflected, could be harder to engage:

“I think what's been really clear is EP families haven't even really considered [BaF]...I think because they will have been having...support visits. So those families just haven't really engaged. Those have been the ones that more likely to just say no... Although I can see the argument of, actually those are the families where you really need that reflective space” (Manager)

Managers also frequently observed that individual teams or staff members had been faster to grasp and implement the concept with enthusiasm:

“I think that there is still variation. I guess my sense of it is that everybody believes in it, but we're struggling a bit more to make it practical and effective... I would say being brutally honest, I'd say that some of my workers are embracing it and some of them are a little bit more cautious” (Manager)

“I'm not convinced other than one very proactive social worker that it has really developed their thinking around what they're doing and why they're doing it” (Manager)

Another key theme from manager interviews was that the focus for implementation remained largely on the Purple Book and not yet on the full framework or practice.

“We were a bit...naughty. I call it the Purple Book quite a lot ... We're aware of the Purple Book element. We're aware of the importance of utilising that as a reflective tool” (Manager)

“I don't think we cracked the Purple Book...I have not heard one single person say, you know, we're using the Purple Book and I bring that out deliberately, you know, to talk, you know, look in and add things into...When I do speak to social workers, I have the impression that it feels like it's a step too far” (Manager)

However, in two of the six sites, managers were more up-beat about BaF beginning to be implemented *more fully*:

“We're now kind of enabling the workers to understand what do you do with it, what is the, you know, what is the framework and what actually should you be doing with it? So we we're in that space now, I think and it's slowly starting to improve... And I spoke with the worker last week and...they're looking at linking with a child and they've asked their family to do a timeline... And I think that's one of the things that's sort of suggested within the Purple Book in that framework” (Manager)

“I see this as this is the way we practise with all families...This is more about ...changing the way that we practise and what families therefore experience...And I think that's been tricky in the wider in the in the wider pilot...[We're] nearer than we were. I think we've had to work on that... people are now starting to see this as it's a way of practising” (Manager)

7.1.2. The significance of timings

At the time of wave one interviews, most managers described encouraging their team to introduce BaF to parents at linking or matching stages. Some were noticing already that this did not seem to be a good time to introduce the programme – as parents were distracted by other things happening then. Other managers were a little unclear about the timing of BaF introductions.

By the time of wave two interviews, managers in most (four) sites described encouraging their staff to introduce the programme or Purple Book at between adopter approval and ‘into’ family finding. In two sites, managers described staff continuing to distribute the Purple Book at the linking to matching stage(s).

In about one half of sites, managers described beginning to ‘trail’ the programme at an earlier stage or beginning to encourage their staff to do so:

“We talk about it in Prep [training] as part of our adoption support direction of travel and then talk about it again during the assessment” (Manager)

These changes had resulted from team manager / staff conversations about how best to implement the programme:

“So, my understanding is that it's now initially...discussed as part of the assessment process...And it's discussed in the stage two training that as well. So it's introduced as a concept, as an idea fair early on, which I think is a really positive thing because people can be aware of the expectation around being reflective and holding that information and an opportunity... And that was introduced ...as a consequence of feedback in team meetings and things like that about that being a helpful time”
(Manager)

When asked what was or might be the optimal start time(s), most managers considered the best time to formally introduce the programme was after adopter approval (panel) and before things got too busy with linking and matching.

“I think to begin with we were doing it around matching and it really was not a good time for our families and we had a very poor uptake. So now we're doing it immediately after approval and we're finding that actually most families are really liking it at that point. Because they want something solid to do as soon as they're approved, gives them plenty of time to have a read and have a look. Most...families get matched pretty quickly, so it's good really, because it's fresh in our mind as they start to go into family finding...So I think I think that's spot on actually just after approval, I think that works” (Manager)

A minority view was that the optimal time was at linking “because then they know what to expect moving forward into transitions...how the placement support offer will look” (Manager)

However, almost all site managers agreed that the real value came from introducing the concept (and possibly the Purple Book in electronic form) in the early stages of an adopter journey e.g. in assessment and training stages to trail the programme. In about one half of the sites, managers were beginning to see how the value of BaF could unfurl gradually along a journey with early trailing, followed by formal introductions of it, leading to structured visits focusing on the framework at a later stage.

“So just not trying to do everything all at one time” (Manager)

7.1.3. Purple Book

At wave one, managers were noticing their practitioners ‘taking’ different versions of the Purple Book to families e.g. initially electronic, then hard copy (if families requested this). There was some enthusiasm expressed about the book, e.g.

“...some great feedback from some of the initial parents, they’ve run with it, they’ve really, really used it, on their second folders now, they’ve put so much information in it” (Manager)

However, some limitations were also noticed e.g. insufficient space within ‘boxes’ in the hard copy versions and there was still some uncertainty expressed about the value (if introduced at linking or matching).

By wave two, managers gave varied descriptions of the Purple Book and its use with families. Most experienced staff ‘distributing’ both hard and electronic versions, with some considering either the hard copy version or electronic version to be more consistently used.

Managers mostly considered the Book to be well received by parents overall, but some parents had received it better than others, including because of what was considered as their openness generally to reflection or to needing support in the immediate future:

“It’s fair to say that quite a few adopters haven’t really taken to it. They’re not bothered at all by it. They don’t see the worth of it, despite us saying, you know, when you get into the adoption support arena, you’re going to need it... I would say it’s probably 50-50, maybe 60-40 using it. Some people are just much more interested...more reflective than others... [who] can’t imagine themselves being in an adoption support arena, so it’s hard to convince them” (Manager)

In three sites, managers considered the Purple Book to be used more by parents than by staff.

“I’m not quite sure how often they [social workers] refer back to it once they’ve handed it out...I think my staff...will probably tell you they’re still not 100% confident in using it” (Manager)

Parents were thought by managers to be using the Book mostly to keep key documents in one place but also, perhaps less frequently:

- To reflect on key stages of their journey or specific events.
- As a support resource in its own right - to signpost parents to other sources of information and support.
- To better understand their child and own their family support needs.
- To be clear about what support should be available in the future, should they need it.

Managers reflected on the quality of the Purple Book, sometimes agreeing the content was good and relevant, other times considering the Book to be:

- Visually of poor quality.
- A little old fashioned (with reference to technology).
- The wrong colour (with reference to the safeguarding connotations of purple).
- Not so relevant to the early stages of adoption with an infant.

7.1.4. Core offer / BaF Framework

At wave one, managers expressed quite different views about the core offer and its relationship to BaF.

- Some were not yet fully au fait with their local core offer, or thought it was still in (re) development – including to recognise changes to key areas e.g. ASGSF.
- Others thought that BaF references to the core offer (for example in the Purple Book) were helpful in that it made the offer ‘more visible’ e.g. *“Good to be more explicit about self-care”* (Manager)

Whilst agencies’ core offer had been developing since the time of early interviews, most managers did not make a link between that development and the BaF programme at the time of wave two interviews i.e. the two were considered to be quite separate initiatives. Some managers associated the core offer more directly with post-adoption support. Others thought the BaF framework or Purple Book, or both, had helped with making the pre-Adoption Order core offer more visible or tangible to social workers:

“I like how the framework sort of goes into depth about key...themes that are important to adoptive families, so like around support to help with identity, such as what the expectations are around life story work, what that might look and feel like for a child, and then how the adopters support their child with whatever identity you know is individual to them. Same with...maintaining relationships” (Manager)

...or that it had captured key aspects of this work that was already happening:

“So I think it would be fair to say that there are kind of core elements to, to our social work practise which are captured within the framework ... we're not always as good at is how we record that that work is happening” (Manager)

One manager described a level of confusion about what was a core offer and what was the framework (for pre-Adoption Order support within the BaF Programme).

“I feel clear that they know what they're doing, but I don't know that they would call it the framework...We've talked about it...and some people went on to some of the training that was offered...And actually it was more about a discussion about how they were finding rolling out the core offer etcetera” (Manager)

7.1.5. What has helped and what has got in the way of implementation?

At wave one, site managers articulated a range of enablers to early implementation including:

- A clarified structure and focus emerging from the Theory of Change (workshop).
- Having time to work on it with teams (locally) and reflect nationally – with other operational leads.
- Drawing in newer, less experienced staff to the pilot.
- Having ‘champions’ in the team – people who could articulate the benefits.
- Team discussions initially and then recurring to ‘keep it on the radar’.

At wave two, the most frequently described support for implementation was team manager conversations with staff in the context of group or one to one supervision.

“...making sure that in supervision I'm checking in. ‘Have you spoken to them about becoming a family initiative?’” (Manager)

Team managers were sometimes described by more senior managers as a key group from whom ‘buy in’ was needed to make implementation successful.

“I think the buying from the managers has been really important. Actually. I think their belief in it” (Manager)

Another key aspect of implementation for some managers had been at least one ‘champion’ within the team:

“For us, the turning point was having was having a colleague, a practitioner, that really bought into it, who really understood it, who took the time to read it, to learn it, and she actually brought it to the table and said, you know, this isn't a scary thing. This is, this is really helpful” (Manager)

Other supports identified by some managers included: having adapted timings for introducing the BaF concept to families; senior leadership support; and central (national) support meetings or training sessions. Training or community of practice sessions were also identified by some managers as having been less helpful than they had wished, including because staff did not really have enough time to engage or the subject matter had not brought the overall programme to life.

Noted barriers to implementation at wave one included that: the programme had initially been seen as ‘optional’ for social workers; insufficient families were ‘coming through’ to make it business as usual; workers not having enough information about the why and what of implementation to enable them to invest properly; BaF being seen or sold as ‘extra

work' rather than integral to practice; there were practical barriers (e.g. to printing out and distributing hard copy Purple Book); uncertainty over the best time to introduce BaF to families; and the plethora of change happening in teams alongside the programme.

At wave two, barriers were similar but expanded upon to include:

- **Purple Book resources being introduced before the overall framework**, e.g. *"Well, I think what I would have liked to have seen is us understanding becoming a family framework first and then out of it comes the Purple Book. But what happened was the Purple Book arrived, and then we tried to build the framework around it. And I don't think that worked at all. I think it should have gone the other way"* (Manager)
- **Lack of clarity about and structure to the programme**, e.g. *"But it's sort of lacked a bit of structure...it just wasn't tangible at the beginning"* (Manager) or *"...like the goal posts kept changing on what was expected"* (Manager)
- **Lack of clear guidance about when to introduce and how to use, affecting staff confidence** e.g. *"You know what I would want my practitioners to be able to go to is something about learning about the framework, learning about what the practitioner role is, talking about any challenges or any problems with that - and it...hasn't really been that, it's sometimes been subjects that seem a bit random kind of not really relevant"* (Manager)

For managers in about half of the sites, this barrier extended into a lack of actual standards or expectations for practice:

"Had we had practise standards, and this is this is what we want to be doing... meeting these practice standards..., I wonder whether that might have helped the implementation. We can't go back and do anything about that, but we can think about what that means for any roll outs" (Manager)

"...there was something within our model where we didn't want to be very prescriptive. We wanted people to get the essence of it's about that, you know, these are the areas you need to think about with your family. But ...we weren't very clear...we didn't want to be prescriptive...we didn't want to be teaching granny to suck eggs... and therefore for people it didn't feel very tangible and they weren't really sure what is this framework... I think that when things are voluntary, it falls to the bottom of everybody's To Do List" (Manager)

"Don't hit the spot because there's too much flexibility in it" (Manager)

- **Not involving practitioners sufficiently to make the case for change** e.g. *"I think we didn't involve practitioners soon enough... to win their hearts and minds to know what it is and what to do with it and what benefits it could bring"* (Manager)

- **A lot of general (other) change happening simultaneously** e.g. *“And I don't know how other RAAs function, but there's a lot going on. We've got lots of initiatives happening. We're involved in lots of, we're involved in lots of things. It's been a bit wearing”* (Manager)
- **Practitioner resistance to change**, including resulting from feeling like this is just another thing to do or because the timings don't feel right (for engaging parents) or because they feel they are already practicing in this way e.g. *“I'm not sure that social workers are that confident in doing that”* (Manager) or *“I think we found that we that we were doing the majority of it already you know”* (Manager)
- **Parent resistance to change**, including viewing their social workers as ‘assessors’ not ‘supporters’ or not seeing this as something they need (yet) e.g. *“...but I think we're still struggling with families actually engaging with it ...it's still a mixed bag in terms of the level of engagement”* (Manager)
- **Practical barriers** e.g. not having space at home or in cars for hard copy Purple Books e.g. *“...because we're we carry cover massive geographic area, if I'm going to something in person, I'll have a load of messages saying can you bring purple books? And I sort of tend to fill up the back of my car and people are really keen [on getting them]”* (Manager)

Many managers reflected overall that, simply, real change takes time:

“I really sort of believe that it does take a long time to change a culture. I think lots of things fail because you kind of have one workshop ... So I've tried to sort of keep it live and also kind of reflecting on it when we have had disruptions and thinking actually how can we use the Purple Book to help people sort of really reflect on the children they're going to get because I do still feel that the sort of when you hear about disruptions, it's nearly always that people just have not really thought about what parenting this they haven't got past the excitement to be parents” (Manager)

7.1.6. Impact so far

At wave one, managers articulated what they anticipated would be the potential value of BaF (or the Purple Book), including:

- **For parents** (e.g. emphasising their child's needs and how they ‘would’ not ‘might’ need adoption support).
- **For practitioners** (e.g. to help focus their practice within post-approval visits).

By the time of wave two interviews, managers articulated ‘no negative impacts’ of BaF apart, in a small number of cases, from negative effects on staff feeling over-burdened with the task (of distributing the purple books).

Managers in about half of the sites considered introduction of the Purple Book and possibly the BaF Programme more broadly to have positively affected some at least of

their social workers' practice by helping clarify what their role included or to their structure visits pre-Adoption Order.

"I think it is more so because I think there's a bit around adoption social workers understanding their role and then therefore their purpose ... there's an emerging sense of this is an important part of our role and, for adopters, this is an important part of their journey as well. Just as important as the early stages" (Manager)

This was particularly but not exclusively so for social workers who were new to adoption work.

"We've now got some quite new people...you know, to social work generally. So, which I think is really healthy. But I don't think we do the best inductions for people and explain what there is [to be done]. So I think yeah, I think the framework will really help" (Manager)

Two managers described how the programme had helped their team to re-consider what supports should be provided early in placements, or how to describe themselves and their work:

"...helps us think more carefully about what our families need in that space... This is a time that's really vulnerable for everybody" (Manager)

"So, we're talking about a name change for our part of the team being assessment and placement support and...there's been something about social workers going, of course, because actually sometimes two thirds of our cases are placement support and yet we're called assessment...that's been part of the culture shift I think of social workers thinking, yeah, this is an important part of our work" (Manager)

Many managers likened impact from the Purple Book on families themselves to a long-term goal (rather than something to expect in the short to medium term).

"Because it is almost like a longer-term investment, isn't it? Maybe you don't see the value of it immediately" (Manager)

"I think it will become more impactful as they go further on into it's too early in the journey to say how impactful it is actually... it's not until they need that support and they need to start using some of the tools that we're using with them that it's going to show the impact. So I think it's a bit early really" (Manager)

A minority of managers thought the programme was already having an impact in terms of some families feeling better supported:

“I think definitely, because of the shift in approach, there is more [support] available I think, to families, certainly families, and I would therefore dare to say that they feel better supported” (Manager)

7.1.7. Progressing implementation

At wave two, managers from the six sites involved thus far in implementing BaF were all asked to reflect on what would assist with further implementation of the programme. They offered seven areas outlined below:

- **Clarify the significance of BaF for social work practice (framework, standards or expectations)** including that this is not just about the Purple Book.

“I think language is going to be a huge thing and it's not to be frightened of that. Actually, you're doing a lot of this anyway, but this is just, you know, in a more structured framework that is beneficial for our adopters. You know, they've really found benefit from it... As practitioners as well that you feel more supported actually by your RAA or your VAA, you know...there is just more structure around it and a framework” (Manager)

“It's that scaffolding, it's really ensuring that adopters are in the best place at Adoption Order. So plans are in place, so meeting up letterbox, whatever the contact arrangement plans are there and they're solid... and got life story work... those really basic fundamentals in place” (Manager)

Managers in almost all the sites expressed enthusiasm about clarity emerging through the development of **national ‘standards’** for the support work (that could be represented more visually or used to adapt visit recording templates):

“I think the practice standards was a good idea that came out of the last meeting that we had in person. So yeah, that'd be helpful because the framework as it stands, it's just a big document” (Manager)

“I'd like to think they do [understand the framework], but I don't think they do. I still think it's this, you know, separate thing. But you know, I think I think once you know we disperse the practise of standards and things like that, it might, it might, the penny might drop” (Manager)

“Well, I think the practise standards are very welcome. They're very accessible, you know. Absolutely makes sense in a nutshell, actually more accessible than you know, with the general core offer or the framework. Yeah, I think that... Much more sort of user friendly” (Manager)

“So I think practise standards are the are the bedrock” (Manager)

“I think we've got to be more prescriptive” (Manager)

“I feel like it would be really helpful to give explicit guidance to me and adoption social workers about sessions they can do with families in the first six months of and that isn't because my staff don't have a massive amount of expertise. But I think you want to make sure that you've got consistency... And not everybody has had the same level kind of experiences or knowledge or access to training materials. And I would like to know everybody across the board is knowing, you know, for example that it would be really sensible to do a session about sensory needs... I would have really, like, not something that's really prescriptive ... you know, almost like a little kind of ...these are the 8 sessions that we really should do” (Manager)

...a small minority were less certain about the need for either standards or a framework to support their social workers' practice:

“I think we're all aiming to support our adopters better and we're always looking at better ways of doing that.... I'm not sure whether that needed to be as a framework, I'm not sure” (Manager)

- **Make some key improvements to BaF resources**, including tweaks to the content and improvements to the 'look' of the Purple Book:

“I don't think the [Purple Book] layout is quite right for us. I sort of feel it just needs to be a bit more personalised and a bit more in it so that people think, oh, this is really interesting and this is what I want to do... practically make it look better” (Manager)

One manager specifically mentioned wanting to test out the feasibility of developing a 'mini-version' to use with prospective adopters at an early e.g. preparation stage.

“Thinking about this child...so it just sort of becomes a bit more familiar and useful...so that people think, oh this is interesting, and this is what I want to do (Manager)

- **Build practitioner confidence** before asking them to implement BaF, including by clarifying the need for BaF, its vision, goals and value added – including from the perspective of other practitioners and parents who have experience e.g.

“...social workers [will] take that on that culture change, they'll go with us on it and that framework, but they need the clear vision I think” (Manager)

“I suppose that whole making sure it's really tangible. So stuff is really accessible and it's really clearly explained what the goals are” (Manager)

“I think it will be really helpful to have a adopters and/or social workers talk about the value and how they use the purple book...maybe that would help the social workers, because I don't think that's quite clicked into place [yet]... Yeah, maybe there's a bit more in getting all of us to really see the value of it probably over time and then be able to convey it, you know, to the adopters... film clips, different people speaking” (Manager)

Some managers also thought guidance about best timings to implement the programme or for team managers was crucial:

“You know or practice guide...how to launch it, you know what's helpful in terms of having conversations with your staff and you know ...sort of top tips around that” (Manager)

- **Develop a planned programme for implementation** for new sites including a clear programme of training and/or communities of practice and a web page for all key materials e.g.

“...training with webinars, workshops, you know...kind of bite size ... lectures on each of the important things...once a month there's going, you're going to be given information. So somebody an expert in this bit of the field is going to come and give you an hour's training on a conversation...how you talk about education in the early days or whatever. I think that would have been a really [good thing]. Most social workers are really interested in our profession and how to do it well” (Manager)

“If at the start we had a plan to say, then we'll do this and then we'll do this and then we'll do this and then we just kept that momentum going and said great, now we're giving it out. Let's do some, let's do a little bit development work around practising how we could use it. Let's do this next bit and there was a...A programme I think that would have helped” (Manager)

Many interviewees expressed a view that the ‘knowledge hub’ was not the answer (as it was not a frequently used resource), some expressing a preference for key materials to be available ‘on’ the Adoption England Website (for both practitioners and families).

“This is this is the book. This is the framework. This is the guidance. These are the standards and you know this. This this is the best... This is our advice for taking it forward. I think that all needs to be in one place [on the website]” (Manager)

- **Anticipate the need for an extended period to embed** – change takes time e.g.

“It takes time to build confidence” (Manager)

- **Publicise the programme to parents** e.g.

“And I think there's a bit around adopters realising as well. This is now our piece of work. And what how we'll review it and what we'll do with you and about them understanding that as well” (Manager)

- **Launching the programme** nationally after clarifications have been made.

“I mean, I think a bit of a launch, if you like...helpful for all practitioners...you know, kind of getting that, you know, hearts and minds” (Manager)

8. Recommendations based on findings

This programme clearly has promise but has not yet been implemented or adopted by social workers consistently enough to achieve all the desired outcomes articulated in the Theory of Change or emerging through the period of piloting. The evaluation team recommends a further stage of pilot implementation, including to test a revised model or programme that might but need not necessarily continue to be called ‘Becoming a Family’.

Our recommendations for this next stage, based on all the findings including specific suggestions made by parents, practitioners and managers include to:

1. **Review and refine the Theory of Change**, based on learning from the early pilot, involving all six sites and leaders at Adoption England working together to agree a refined rationale for this work, its key elements and desired short to medium term and longer-term outcomes.

2. **Generate a more visible structure or ‘scaffolding’** for the overall programme and clearer, consistent language about its key elements before proceeding with any further implementation in existing or other sites. This should include consideration of practice standards or expectations to focus practitioner visits in stages from post adopter approval to the Adoption Order, a concept supported by most managers involved in this pilot on the basis of its potential to ensure adopters are more consistently in the best place possible before the making of the order. Key foci will be suggested by the existing evidence base combined with findings from this pilot. The structure should also specifically address best timings for (a) trailing and (b) formally introducing the programme including Purple Book, with care taken not to infer that the work is a ‘one off’ (introduction).
3. **Develop and clearly articulate a further implementation programme** with specific reference to what is known about effective change in public care settings, including attention: to both processes and people; to ‘push and pull’ factors and to specifically addressing known barriers to change. This pilot suggests barriers are likely to include: the number of initiatives happening simultaneously in any one site; uncertainty about key elements or timings; practitioners not understanding why they are being asked to change; change seeming optional; natural / understandable resistance to change from both practitioners and families. A change ‘curve’ approach also suggests that enthusiasm and adherence to change can dip in the early stages of change before reviving with the support of consistent embedding over time. Change takes time and may require some dedicated (central) resources.
4. **Re-launch the programme.** Options include to launch:
 - With the existing sites in the first instance, to make continued improvements. The main advantage is that they are already involved and on a change journey. A key disadvantage may be that they have already experienced an early prototype and may be confused about further changes. In any event, efforts should be made in the short term to keep the programme alive in the minds of practitioners and managers in these sites for example by involving them in the development work outlined above.
 - With some new sites. The advantages include a ‘fresh start’. Disadvantages include that the overall (wave 2 pilot) change process may take a long time.
 - With a mixture of new and some existing sites, including to compare their experiences and impact over time. This option arguably provides more momentum overall for the programme.
 - With all RAA and VAA sites in England. This option is inherently riskier as the adapted programme will remain untested. It would also probably require an upfront national commitment to the ‘standards’ discussed above. In the event that this national work is achieved, arguably ‘implementation’ will be more concerned with the Purple Book as a support for these standards, and therefore possibly more achievable as a national roll out.

5. **Attention in implementation to early-stage opportunities for practitioners to hear about, absorb, and buy into the change programme.** This seems very important from the interviews with practitioners and managers. Our suggestions are that this should pay attention to the evidence base for specific elements being included in or emphasised by the programme and to amplifying the voices of ‘early adopter’ parents or practitioners about the value and impact from their perspective.
6. **Consider a ‘train the trainer’ style approach to training team managers** initially – as ‘first line’ adherents and promoters of changed practice in their teams. These materials could be used then in an ongoing way by team managers to support team implementation, through group and one to one supervision. Detail may include high level and more detailed aspects including ‘exemplars’ or examples of practitioner support focused on different topics including their rationale / goals. The risks of this approach include that practitioners and parents feel the structure too closely resembles assessment and does not recognise the flexibility that is sometimes needed e.g. when the focus of conversations and support needs to be on something more immediate e.g. child introductions.
7. **Consider developing information for parents** about ‘what to expect’ in the period after their approval as adopter(s) and before an Adoption Order is made.
8. **Consider making improvements to the quality of the Purple Book**, e.g. to the overall look and accessibility – to convey a confident message about its value to parents and practitioners alike.
9. **Provide sufficient central / national support** for learning and embedding of change through a pre-planned programme of support activities such as community of practice, change champions network, regular meetings of operational leaders / team managers leading change.

9. What have we learned about data capture?

In the context of the findings outlined above, it is likely that the programme Theory of Change, model, starting point, underpinning materials and training / other support for practitioners and their managers will change before any further roll out of the concept. Therefore, it is perhaps too soon to consider the onward applicability of the data capture methods used here.

However, what we have learned through this early evaluation period includes that:

- **It is feasible to (continue to) capture basic administrative data gathered by sites** implementing the programme, for example about the number and type of families accessing the programme. However, in the future, if the understanding is more

definitively that all families will experience the programme, perhaps this form of monitoring is not as essential. For any further piloting, it might also or instead be interesting to ask social workers to keep for a time limited period a form of journal relating to an early cohort of families they work with where the full programme is introduced – to track what they are doing or doing differently with each family.

- **It is essential to gather information from families about their experience of a programme of this nature.** It will be useful to do so independently from the services involved in any (extended) pilot period e.g. via an online survey and/or qualitative interview. Parents usually like to know the information they are sharing will be collected by someone independent of the service itself and treated confidentially. Whilst take up rates for the survey and interview in this study were not very high, the responses still illustrated many of the potential benefits and implementation barriers this pilot has experienced. The findings are powerful for service developers and practitioners alike and help significantly to steer continuous improvement. Future survey questions would need to be adapted to ensure they correspond with a renewed Theory of Change set of indicators.
- **Speaking with teams and managers involved in implementing any (revised) programme also seems essential** going forward, not least because the re-launched programme will likely include major revisions. After a period of time, we anticipate that the programme sponsor (Adoption England) and the agencies involved will wish to feel confident about whether or not to continue to roll out the programme or to make further adaptations. A key part of that confidence will come from practitioner and team manager feedback. The usefulness of revised change management levers such as training, materials and other centralised or local support will also need further testing. Whilst there are benefits from independent evaluators undertaking these interviews, clearly the information from practitioners and managers could be collected in an alternative way e.g. from a facilitated conference or workshop undertaken either locally or centrally / nationally. However, a small risk of these forms of data capture is that practitioners do not feel able to share their experiences freely and/or may feel they have to describe implementation in positive ways only.
- **Robust child and family level outcomes data** is difficult to capture over a relatively short period of time. As practitioners and managers reflected in interview, the effects of a programme like this are unlikely to be felt until perhaps much further along an adoption journey. Whilst it might be worth tracking parents receiving a further developed programme over time, our advice is that it is still worth collecting short to medium term indicators of success such as those used in this evaluation, including to compare with the early pilot findings.

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