

# adoption west

“sometimes superheroes  
reside in the hearts of  
children fighting huge battles”



Prospective Adopters' Information Pack



# adoption

is all about making a positive difference to a child's life and providing a stable, loving and permanent home for a child who, for whatever reason, is not able to live with their birth family.

Making the decision to adopt is one of the biggest steps anyone can make, but also one of the most rewarding. In order to decide whether adoption is right for you we think it is important that you find out as much as you can.

This pack aims to provide you with as much information as possible about adopting a child with Adoption West.

adoption  
west

## Who are Adoption West?

The launch of Adoption West represents an exciting new chapter in how adoption services are provided. Local Authorities in Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire have joined together to provide a dedicated adoption service for the children in these areas awaiting adoptive families.

The aim of this collaboration between authorities is to deliver an adoption service that offers improved outcomes for both children and those who want to adopt. Working together as part of a larger region will help recruit new families more effectively, enable children to move into their permanent homes faster and will improve adoption support services as well as allowing us to share best practice and make our services even better.

We work in partnership with Action for Children, Adoption UK, After Adoption, CCS Adoption, the Centre for Adoption Support and Education and other agencies to find and support families.



**We welcome all prospective adopters within, and surrounding, the Adoption West area.**



## Our work at Adoption West is underpinned by these principles

1

Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. Where possible this should be within their own family.

2

The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.

3

The child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages.

4

Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.

5

The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.

6

The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.

7

The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.

8

Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved, including many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together in the best interests of a child.

9

Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

## What kind of people are we looking for?

There are many myths surrounding adoption, which we want to dispel. We are looking for individuals and same gender, married and cohabiting couples who can offer love and a caring environment to a child in need of adoption. People who adopt have a range of life experiences, and may be disabled, unemployed or live in rented accommodation. Anyone aged 21 or over can apply for adoption, and there is no upper age limit.

We need people from all walks of life and backgrounds who not only have the

commitment, patience, love and energy required, but also have a real understanding of children's needs. You will need to be able to care for a child where the rewards may not be immediate. Some children may need ongoing support into adulthood.

A child needs a lot of attention and care and you will need to be enthusiastic, energetic and able to commit to looking after a child as your own. Adoption is providing a child with somewhere to belong, where they can feel safe, secure and cared for, as part of a family.



12 things about...

# adoption

## **There is no upper age limit to adopt.**

Adopters need to be at least 21 years old and have the potential to provide care and support for the child through to adulthood.

## **Single? No problem.**

Children have been adopted into stable, loving homes by single parents and couples, whatever their gender or sexual orientation, for many years.

## **No ethnic matching.**

There are children from many different backgrounds waiting to be adopted. As long as you meet the child's needs you can adopt children of any ethnicity.

## **It's quicker than you think...**

In fact, you can now become approved as an adopter within six months and can have a child placed with you within three months.

## **Disabilities or not, you can still adopt.**

Health problems and disabilities are not barriers to adoption, provided you can care for the child you adopt.

## **Pets are allowed!**

Provided your pet does not pose a threat to the child's health or safety, then it can be an excellent addition to the family.

## **Renting, or worried about space issues?**

To become an adopter in England, you don't need to be a home-owner, and you may have priority for

council housing. If you have the space and security to care for children as they grow up you will be considered.

## **Wage is no barrier.**

Being on low income or benefits should not stop you from becoming an adopter. You may be eligible for Tax Credits or other benefits and allowances, such as Disability Living Allowance and Carers Allowance if you adopt a disabled child.

## **You can adopt if you already have children.**

...and you can adopt more than one child at once - some children will have siblings also wanting to be adopted.

## **British resident?**

You need to have been living in the British Isles for at least a year to apply for an adoption order.

## **Criminal conviction?**

Having a criminal record does not necessarily mean you won't be able to adopt - it depends on the nature and severity of the crime and how long ago it was committed. However, people with convictions for violent or sexual offences against children cannot adopt.

## **Statutory Adoption Leave.**

Employed adopters are entitled to adoption leave and may be entitled to adoption pay, which is a legal right. We expect adopters to take this leave at the initial stages. Some children may need a bit longer to settle with you, so flexibility about returning to work may be required.



## The differences between Fostering, Adoption and Early Permanence

Adoption and long-term fostering are both ways in which to provide a permanent home for a child, but there are some differences.

### Fostering

When you foster, you provide a temporary home and family life for someone else's child when they are unable to live with their birth family. Most children who are fostered will, hopefully, return home. Where this isn't possible, alternatives will be considered, such as placing the child with other relatives, being adopted or possibly being permanently fostered.

Unlike adoption, a fostered child remains the legal responsibility of the council and/or their birth parents. Foster carers receive regular support from their social worker, training and financial support towards the cost of caring for the fostered child.

### Adoption

When you adopt, a court permanently transfers all parental rights and responsibilities for caring for someone else's child to you. You provide the child or children with a permanent home and the child becomes part of your family, as if they had been born into it, even taking your surname.

Adopters receive regular support from the local authority that has placed the child with them, until an adoption order is made. Post-adoption support is available.



## Early Permanence

Early Permanence refers to the arrangement where a child is placed with a family at the earliest opportunity. This is achievable by placing with approved adopters who have been prepared and assessed as suitable to undertake a temporary fostering role. They may then be able to go on and adopt the child if the court proceedings conclude that the child should be adopted.

Early Permanence is usually, but not exclusively, used for babies and young children coming into care, who have a high risk of being unable to return safely to the care of their birth families. They are likely to need adoption but still have a chance of being reunited with their birth families. If the court decides a child's future is best protected by adoption, the child already has a secure attachment to their carers who are now able to adopt the child.

Research shows that the longer the delay and the greater the number of foster placements,

the greater the potential for damage to children's mental health and development. Early Permanence arrangements are intended to lay the foundations for greatly improved health and emotional wellbeing throughout the child's life by giving more stability during the vital early years of development. Early Permanence arrangements are already showing positive results in limiting delay and securing better outcomes for children where adoption is the likely path to permanence.

Adoption West believe that Early Permanence provides the best possible futures for children. We therefore, give all our prospective adopters the chance to explore this option through training. The majority of adopters are approved as Early Permanence carers, so that our children experience fewer moves in their lives and can be placed with a family as early as possible, however it is a personal choice and you will be given the option to opt out of becoming an Early Permanence carer to follow a more traditional adoption journey.



## The Children

There are all kinds of children who need adoptive families. We are looking for adopters for children of all ages, including babies and toddlers. We always have a higher demand for people who can adopt children who need to be placed with a brother or sister. We welcome applications from people who could adopt children with specific medical needs or needs arising from physical or learning difficulties.

There are a number of reasons why children need to be adopted. It could be that their birth parents cannot cope or the environment at home is unsuitable for the safe and happy upbringing of a child. Some children have been neglected or abused physically, emotionally or sexually and have been removed from their families for their own safety.

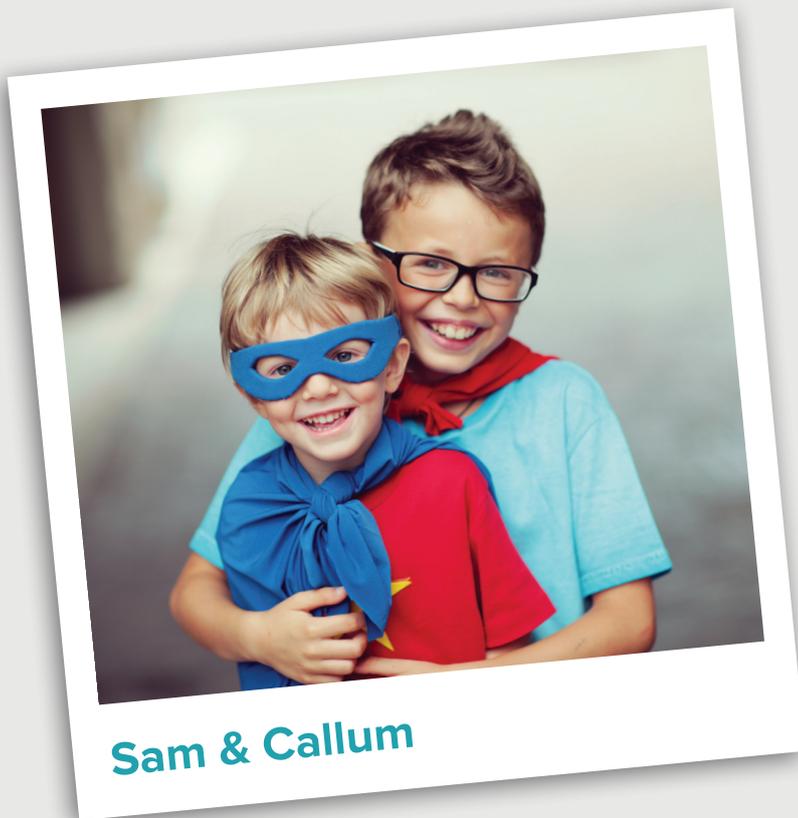
In most cases these children are living with a carer until the right adoptive family is found for them. These children need adoptive families with time and patience to help them thrive. All children looking for adoptive families will benefit from a stable, loving and permanent home.

Finding families who can offer the time, patience and commitment to help these children adjust to a secure family life and reach their full potential in life, is the ultimate aim for our adoption team. We continue to be mindful that initially all a child's needs may not be clear. As children settle and develop it is likely that further needs will arise; this is particularly relevant to children that have experienced early trauma and exposure to controlled substances or alcohol in utero. As a result adopted children will require flexible, adaptable parenting from people who are able to manage this uncertainty.

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**Each child waiting for their adoptive family is very different. The profiles overleaf are not of real children, but are typical of those waiting to be adopted in our region.**

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**Sam & Callum**

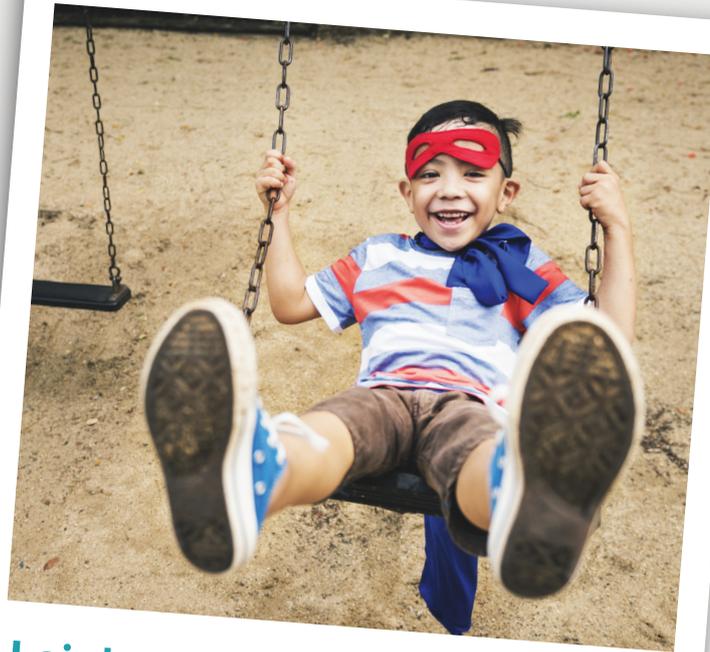
“Exceptional children need exceptional parents.”

Sam and Callum are brothers who are currently in foster care. Both brothers have cheeky smiles and interact well with those around them. They were showing signs of developmental delay when they came into care, but have made good progress and are now within the expected ranges for children their age. Sam (aged 5) has a good vocabulary and can be very animated when engaged in conversation. Sam enjoys playing with his cars and trains, as well as doing art and craft projects. He is very attached to his favourite teddy bear called Fluffy.

Callum (aged 3) attends preschool three mornings a week and has established a good number of friends to play alongside. Callum's favourite activity is being outside and playing in the muddiest, wettest part of the garden.

Sam and Callum share a close relationship with each other, and so it is very important they are placed together. The boys have shown they can respond well to a family offering stability, consistency and reassurance. They long for a family who can give them the support and love they both deserve.

# about



**Leighton**

Prior to moving in with his current foster carer Leighton (aged 3) lived with his birth parents, both at home and in a mother and baby foster placement. He has experienced neglect and witnessed domestic violence. Leighton's carers are very fond of him and describe him as an intelligent boy who is making progress in all areas, including speech.

He was quite self-sufficient and avoidant at first, however he is now able to ask for cuddles, saying if he is hurt and seeking comfort. He is particularly fond of his male carer and loves snuggling up to him to watch television or read a book.

Leighton is enthusiastic about trains. He is an extremely active boy, his favourite activities are spending time in the garden jumping on the trampoline, splashing in puddles, playing football or riding his toy truck.

Leighton eats well. Although he is mainly exposed to English food, he is familiar with Nigerian foods. He sleeps through the night and there are no concerns regarding his health or development.



## Unborn Baby

The unborn baby's mother came to the attention of health visitors late into her pregnancy, at 35 weeks pregnant. Mother is a drug user and leads a chaotic lifestyle with no stable home. Little is known about birth mother's pregnancy other than no prenatal care was accessed until very late in the pregnancy. The identity of the father is currently unknown.

Birth mother has had two children previously removed from her care, who have since been

adopted. The adoptive family are not in a position to care for this child, but some form of contact will be expected between the two families to enable the siblings to have contact with each other.

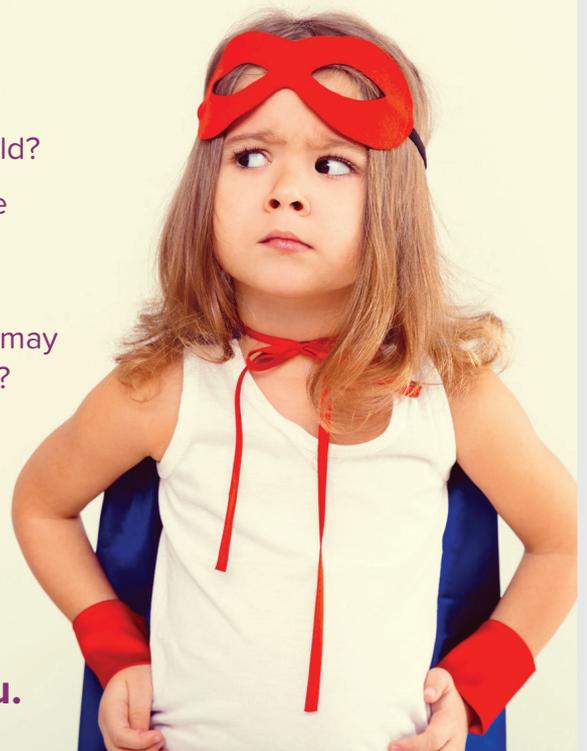
We would expect that the unborn baby will be born suffering from drug withdrawal and any carers identified will need to make daily visits to the hospital until the baby can be released into their care.

# adopt

## If you are considering adoption, ask yourself these questions:

- Can you provide love, time and commitment to a child?
- Can you empathise with a child who may never have experienced the security of feeling safe and loved?
- Do you have the humour, resilience and flexibility to manage the uncertainty and unique challenges that may present from the child's circumstances and early life?
- Do you have the support network to help you when things get tough?
- Do you have the energy and health to provide a long-term family for a child into adulthood?

If you feel you can answer yes to these questions, we would love to hear from you.



## The adoption process

Our target time from the time you make your formal application to the time you are approved as an adopter is six months, but this can vary depending on your circumstances. We aim to fast track second time adopters and foster carers wherever possible.





The adoption process is split into stages. We are here to support you and work in partnership with you throughout this, however the initial stages are adopter led, and the emphasis is on you as the potential adopter.

The process will take up a large amount of your time, and many of the appointments and training courses take place during the working day. We strive to be as flexible as possible.

<b>Pre-Stage 1</b>	<p>This starts when you make an initial enquiry to our adoption team. We will arrange for you to attend an information session.</p> <p>During the information session we will also ask some questions of you, and time will be given for you to ask questions. At the end of the session you will also receive a Registration of Interest form which you will need to complete if you wish to continue.</p>
<b>Stage 1 Pre-assessment</b>	<p><b>Work book</b></p> <p>You will be given a work book to complete at home. The work book is designed to help you look closely at your background and better understand adoption in order to prepare you. The adoption team are available to support you through this, and will be in regular contact.</p> <p><b>Preparation course</b></p> <p>Throughout Stage One and Two of the process, you will be invited to attend a four-day preparation course; applicants are required to attend every session and to participate fully throughout. Within a challenging and interactive process we cover a wide range of topics, including child development, how our own experiences and relationships influence our parenting, contact with birth families, telling your child about adoption and understanding and managing behaviour.</p> <p>We will encourage regular opportunities to discuss any issues that may arise.</p> <p><b>Allocation of a social worker/home visit</b></p> <p>At the beginning of Stage One, you will be allocated a named social worker who will arrange a time to visit you at home. This provides both parties with an opportunity to look further at your experiences, what you can offer an adopted child, and for you to ask any questions you may have. At the end of Stage One you will be invited to a review meeting. This meeting will review all the information, workbooks and checks.</p> <p>A decision about proceeding onto Stage Two will then be made.</p>



## Stage 2 (Social worker led)

### Stage Two Assessment

The assessment process consists of a number of home visits by your adoption social worker to assess whether adoption is right for you and what kind of children you would be best matched to. This is a demanding and challenging process that requires applicants to consider their own development and beliefs and how they could meet the needs of an adopted child. At the end of the assessment your social worker produces a Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR), which includes the opportunity for you to add your own contributions.

### Adoption panel

Your full application report is presented to Adoption Panel for consideration. The Panel is made-up of social workers, County Councillors, medical professionals and independent people, who may have personal experience of adoption. You are invited to attend this meeting with your social worker.

In the exceptional circumstance that the Adoption Panel recommends that adoption is not right for you at this time, you can discuss with your social worker what action you can take. This can include your right to ask for the Independent Review Mechanism to consider your case. Your social worker will explain the process and the options open to you.

## After Approval

Once you are approved as an adopter we will begin the matching process to ensure the best match for you and a child/ren. We try to place children with prospective adoptive families as soon as possible within the agreed Statutory Timescales and National Minimum Standards for adoption, but there are no set rules as to how long you may have to wait for a child. However, we will keep you updated on a monthly basis during the waiting process.

“To ask for support  
is not admitting defeat.

## Support

We recognise that adoptive families may need support from people who understand the challenges they may face in meeting the needs of children who have experienced difficulties early in life.

We offer support to all adoptive families in our region including those who have adopted inter-country or through independent adoption agencies. It doesn't matter whether or not you have been in regular contact with us - we are there to provide support when you need it from approval onwards (until the child reaches 18).

Seeking support is  
not a weakness.”

This support can range from a one off phone consultation to ongoing therapeutic support, and will depend on the current needs of a child and their family.

We are committed to offer continuing opportunities for ongoing training to help you meet the needs of your developing child.

Find out more about support available here;

[www.adoptionwest.co.uk/support](http://www.adoptionwest.co.uk/support)

[www.first4adoption.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Adoption-Passport.pdf](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Adoption-Passport.pdf)

## Is Adoption right for you?

It is about taking responsibility for a child who is vulnerable or might have been through a great deal in their short life. You will be guiding and supporting them as well as providing love and care. This demands a great deal of time, energy and commitment, and we would like to be here to support you with this.

The assessment process will examine the reasons as to why you want to adopt and if those reasons are right for you and your family.

You will have to put the child or children's life first, guiding them and protecting them. These are exceptional children who need exceptional parents.

But, if adoption is right for you then it will be one of the most rewarding decisions you will make – providing new opportunities for a child or children who need someone to care and love them, and somewhere to belong.

Other useful sources of information;

**First4Adoption**

**Adoption UK**

**UKCORAMBAAF**

We can produce this document in braille, in large print, on audio tape and in other languages. If you would like a copy in one of these formats, please call:

**03303 550333**

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