

The Adoption Support Fund – how it's working for families



Introduction



Welcome to this special Adoption Support Fund (ASF) update celebrating over two years since the Fund rolled out across England. In this time, more than £50 million has been spent supporting 17,000 families. This is hugely encouraging and I hope that some of the positive experiences outlined by adoptive parents here ring true for many of you reading this. If you are new to adoption, much like me in my new Ministerial post, or haven't come across the ASF, read on for everything you need to know.

One of the things that has struck me since taking on this role is the commitment and compassion of adoptive parents. It is also clear that this alone is not always enough to meet the needs of children who often have complex needs. Adoptive families deserve support and I am confident that the ASF has been a force for good since its introduction.

I am delighted that as well as celebrating the Fund's achievements, we have published an independent evaluation of its early implementation and impact. There are a lot of positive findings, not least that 84% of parents felt that the ASF had helped their child. There is also some learning for central and local government, and building on this will be key to the continued success of the Fund.

It is my pleasure to pick up the baton from Edward Timpson, who I know was also a force for good over the last five years. I am looking forward to engaging with as many of you as I can so that I can hear your experiences first-hand and continue Edward's good work.

Robert Goodwill

Minister of State for Children and Families



About the Adoption Support Fund

What is the Adoption Support Fund?

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was introduced across England in May 2015 because many adoptive and special guardianship families need some kind of therapeutic support and too many struggled to get the help they needed. The ASF enables families to access funding for a range of therapeutic services including specialist assessments, therapeutic parenting courses and creative therapies. It is designed to complement the core adoption support provided by adoption agencies. Since May 2015 over £45m has been spent on support for families and the budget for this financial year is £28m, approximately 20% higher than last financial year.

Who is eligible for the Adoption Support Fund?

The ASF is available to all children adopted from care and not just newly adopted children - it can be used to fund therapeutic support for children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families rather than having to wait until the adoption order is made. In April 2016, the fund was extended to intercountry adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in England) and children being cared for under special guardianship arrangements who were looked after immediately prior to the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) taking effect.

The ASF will fund therapeutic support for adopted children/SGO children living in England. It is available for children up to and including the age of 21 - or 25 with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Statement/ Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan - where they have left care through adoption or special guardianship arrangements.

What level of funding is available?

To ensure maximum benefit to as many adoptive/SGO families as possible, a Fair Access Limit (FAL) of £5,000 per child for therapy and a matched funding approach was introduced in October 2016. In April 2017, a separate additional Specialist Assessments Fair Access Limit of £2,500 per child was introduced for those children who require a specialist assessment before therapy can begin. The matched funding approach requires local authorities to share the costs of support above the respective FALs.

The vision for the ASF is:

- The delivery of excellent, timely and easily accessible therapeutic support for adoptive and special guardianship families;
- based on high quality assessment of need including, where necessary, health-led specialist assessments; and
- in a regionalised, integrated health and social care environment to ensure long term sustainability.



About the Adoption Support Fund

Where do I start?

Local authorities are responsible for carrying out assessments of support needs for adopters and special guardians so you will need to speak to them (more detail at point 1 overleaf). If you adopted through a voluntary adoption agency you could speak to them about how best to approach the local authority. Many will be happy to support that initial contact. Once the assessment is complete, local authorities can apply to the ASF on behalf of families and commission the therapeutic support needed.



Who will provide the services?

Local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies can all provide therapeutic services to eligible families. Independent providers (where they are commissioned to provide the services by the local authority) and NHS providers, e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) can also be funded to provide therapeutic services within the scope of the ASF.

What support is available to parents via the Adoption Support Fund?

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) funds a range of therapeutic support including therapeutic parenting services to equip parents with the knowledge, skills and techniques to support their child(ren)'s assessed needs.

Some examples of the therapeutic parenting services approved include:

- AdoPT course
- PAC-UK Peer-to-Peer Support Service
- Great Behaviour Breakdown
- KEEP
- Non Violent Resistance
- Secure Base/Safe Base Parenting Programme

For more information visit:

www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk

www.adoptionuk.org

www.first4adoption.org.uk

www.pac-uk.org/peer-to-peer-services/

Evaluating the Adoption Support Fund

The Department for Education commissioned the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to conduct an independent review of the early implementation of the ASF. This involved seeking the views of parents, local authorities and providers to gauge the Fund's impact and to help make improvements to the Fund in the future. You can access the evaluation at this [link](#).

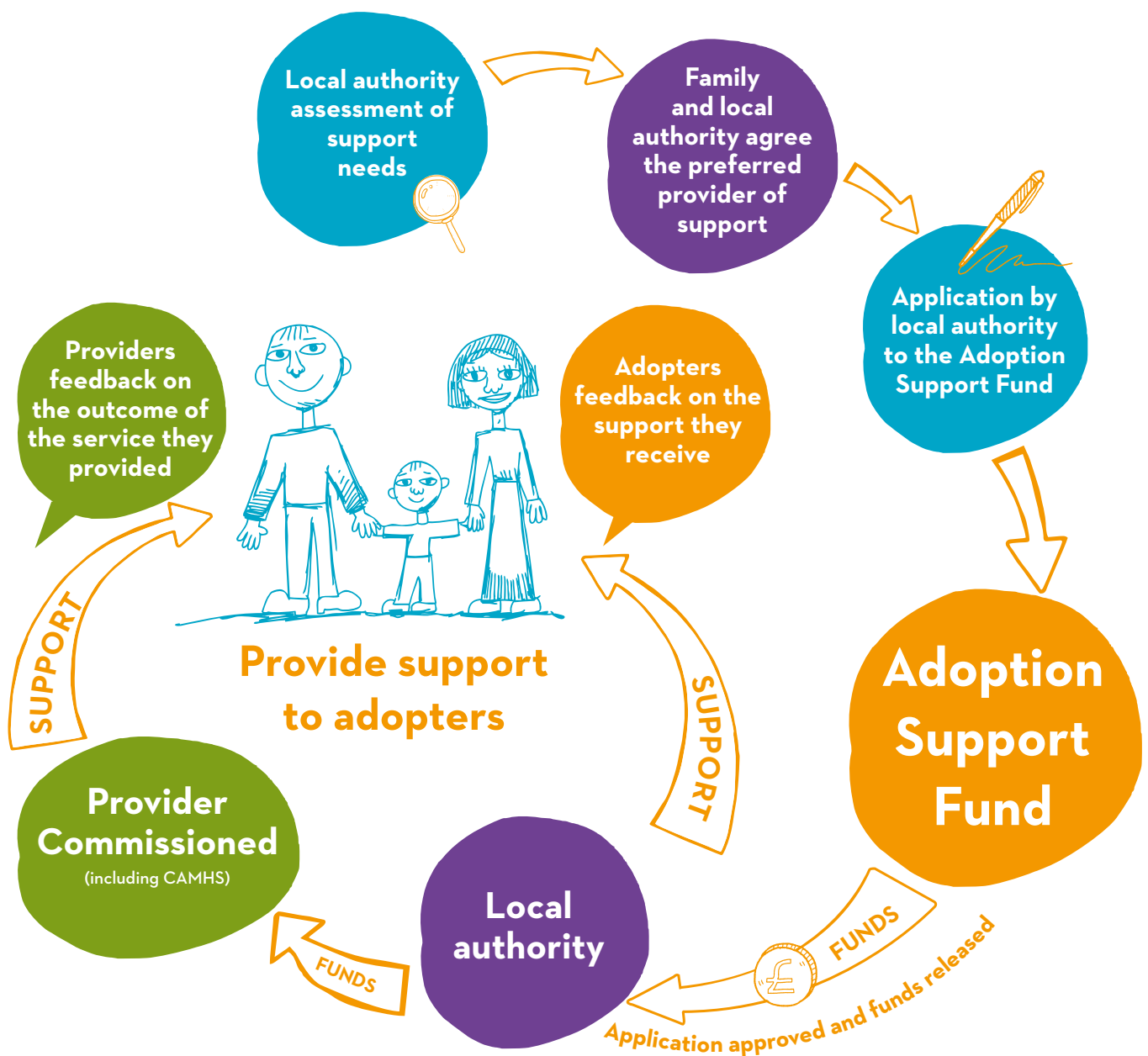
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-support-fund-evaluation>

It is an in depth evaluation with a wide range of findings including:

- that children accessing the Fund showed substantially higher levels of emotional, behavioural and development needs than both children in the general population and when compared to looked after children as a whole; and
- that 84% of parents believed that the Fund had helped their child.

How to apply

1. Approach your local authority for an assessment of adoption support needs. The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs for three years after the adoption. After that, it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live. If you adopted through a voluntary adoption agency, talk to your agency about getting an assessment of your adoption support needs. Local authorities have a duty to conduct these assessments but your voluntary adoption agency may be happy to support you through the process.
2. Your local authority considers if therapeutic support is needed, the type required and if it is eligible for funding from the fund.
3. The adopter/special guardian and their local authority will look at the support that is available.
4. Local authorities apply directly to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of the adopter/special guardian from the point at which the child is placed with the family.
5. The Adoption Support Fund considers the application to check it is within the scope of the fund. Once approved, the £5,000 per child therapy FAL and where appropriate, the £2,500 FAL for Specialist Assessment are taken into account. Local authorities have been asked to match-fund costs above these limits.



The ASF so far...

Families have used the Adoption Support Fund to benefit from a range of therapies in a number of different ways. Here we share parents' experiences of accessing the fund.

Richard and Jill said: "The fund has made a significant difference as we are able to get support and advice from professionals who have experience and understanding of the effects of trauma, loss and severe neglect which these children suffered and how it permeates every part of their lives. It has meant that the children can have appropriate therapy that takes into account their difficulties with attachment."

"We are now parents to a 19 & 17 yr old and it's the first access to the level of help we need to do what we do, but I'm so relieved to get it," said Pear Tree

Susan said: "Coming to therapy (financed through the ASF) has taken a weight off my shoulders and helps to make things easier at home."

India said: "We don't like to think what life would be like without the ASF right now! It's not a magic wand but already we can see some chinks of light after only 10 sessions. Our daughter is making small steps of progress. We feel supported and also get advice as to how best to function when living with a traumatised teen."



@tobetherefor

wouldn't have got any support w/o it. not sure if we'd been able to continue as knock on effect of educating sch & sw needed.



@mrsmooshoes

Any other adopters benefitted from the #AdoptionSupportFund? We're getting some cracking art therapy, curious how else it's being used!

Julie said: "The ASF has been and continues to be a crucial lifeline for our family. The flexibility to tailor support to our circumstances has enabled us to find art therapy for our eldest daughter, which is helping her to make significant progress in processing her past, securing her identity and building self-esteem. The work gives us hope. We now have an application ongoing to find the right support for our youngest daughter too."

The ASF so far...

Claire said: "Accessing an occupational therapist for my daughter through the ASF was the best thing we've ever done. This has massively improved our lives. It's helped me to understand how Bethany's brain works and her needs. Bethany was exhibiting extreme self-harm - I previously had no understanding of what was needed to help her. Our social worker says Bethany is a different child to who she was prior to us accessing support through the ASF."

Emily said: "The support our family received through the ASF has given our son James the best shot at coming to terms with his early life, which has previously held him back in life. It would have taken a toll on us had we not received this support and James has come on wonderfully - words cannot express how important it has been for us, as a family. He's come on tremendously over the last couple of years and we're hoping this will help even more. Like all adoptive parents we celebrate all of the little things and milestones but this support is enabling James to do all of the things he really wants to do and not be defined by what happened to him."

Rachael said: "It would have taken a toll on us as a family had we not received this support and words cannot express how important it has been for us as a family."



@mumdrah

After waiting a loong time for approval, one session in, and the positive impact is clear @TalkAdoptSupp ASF = much needed ♥



@mrsmooshoes

It's making such a difference, just the right support for our eldest daughter. Great example of authorities working together.

Steve said: "Without the therapeutic support we received through the ASF we would have placed our son back in foster care."

The ASF so far...



approved applications



£55,443,373

funding approved
as at 31/08/17

How many people have been supported by the ASF?



23,154

children



19,111

families

Age range of main recipient



2,074

0-5 years



6,500

6-10 years



4,705

11-15 years



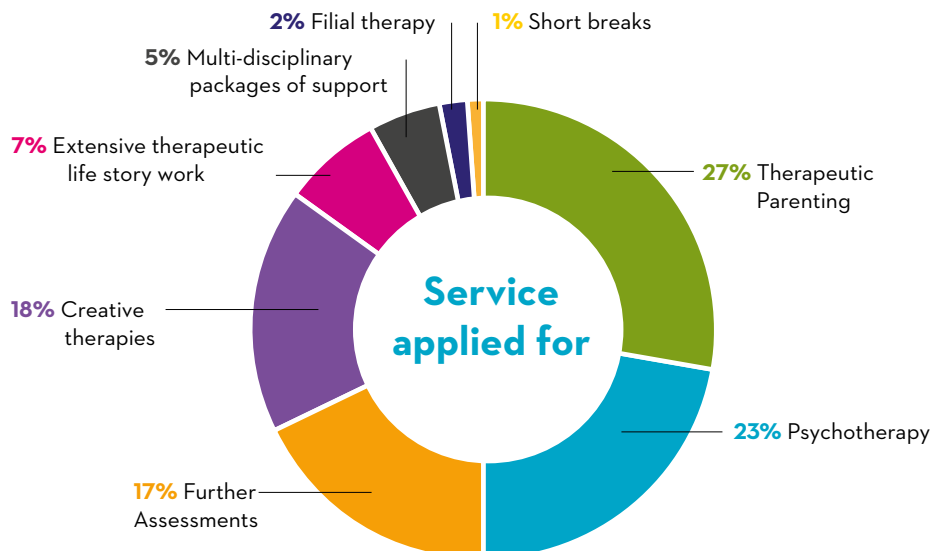
1,184

16-18 years



155

19+ years



What kind of support will the ASF fund?

Adoption support services should already be providing a certain amount of support to their adoptive families, such as:

- Information, advice, guidance and signposting
- Counselling
- Opportunities for adoptive families to meet, socialise and support one another (eg. family days, support groups)
- Managing and mediating contact with birth families
- Mediation when an adoptive family is at risk of disruption
- Financial support
- Basic life story work
- Short break care where no therapeutic input is provided (respite)



The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) will pay for therapeutic services that are not currently provided by local authorities including therapeutic parenting training, certain types of therapy and more specialist assessment.

For a full list of what the fund will pay for, visit www.adoptionuk.org



Adopters tell us what is working for them

Mark and Abby

Annabel* was found abandoned as a baby when she was just two days-old. Her birth parents have never been found, despite efforts to trace them.

This causes significant anxiety for Annabel, who is now aged five. It has impacted on her emotional well-being and relationships with both her adoptive parents and her peers.

Her adoptive parents Mark and Abby* were feeling overwhelmed and powerless to help Annabel as she exhibited increasingly challenging behaviour. She threatened to stab Abby when she was just three years-old. Her parents were also concerned that she has tried to harm herself on occasions.

They have always been open with Annabel about her history. But this has led to Annabel questioning who her birth mother is. She continually asks about strangers 'Is that my tummy mummy?'. She has also asked Mark 'Why didn't my tummy mummy want me?' Mark and Abby felt they were doing something wrong as parents - and Abby particularly - felt a lot of guilt about their daughter's start in life, and what she saw as the breaking down of her relationship with her daughter.

"We have attended two sessions of 'mindfulness' so far. I feel like it is

having an impact on our family life"

Her parents wanted help in understanding Annabel's anxiety, aggression and attachment difficulties - and for their daughter to feel more secure with them. The family was offered a therapeutic package of support, including intervention for reducing stress through mindfulness based cognitive therapy. Since the family received support, Mark and Abby have

been able to better understand the significance of her early trauma and how this is impacting on her in all aspects of her life.

Abby said: "We have attended two sessions of 'mindfulness' so far. I feel like it is having an impact on our family life. We are going on holiday and I am really looking forward to going - usually I am full of dread for weeks before we go! We feel much more hopeful as a family about the future."

Mark and Abby, who also received therapeutic parenting support as part of the therapeutic package, report that Annabel is calmer, less prone to explosive outbursts and emotionally is more stable, since coming to the end of the therapeutic input. They acknowledge that they still experience difficult times but these are less frequent now and more manageable.

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of the family



Adopters tell us what is working for them

Charlie and Kate

Adoptive parents Charlie and Kate* believe the timely help they received from the Adoption Support Fund to address violent outbursts from their son Joseph*, has saved their family.

Charlie and Kate were struggling to cope with their adopted son's aggressive behaviour. He kicked, hit and bit them. Joseph was unsure of how to behave and relate to others in a positive way because of his chaotic upbringing. Joseph was also unable to regulate his emotions or verbalise his feelings. This led Charlie and Kate to question their ability to support Joseph and manage the situation.

The family was offered therapeutic parenting to ensure a lasting adoption. Since starting the sessions Charlie and Kate have been able to understand and appropriately respond to child on parent violence, which has given them the confidence to manage the situation. Joseph, as a result, has developed a greater sense of security in the family and is now making progress in expressing himself.

Charlie believes his family may not have survived without the therapeutic support - both in terms of advice they have received as parents, as well as ongoing direct work with Joseph.

"We were extremely fortunate to access the right kind of support early in our placement - it kept us going when things were very tough," Charlie explained. "Now, ongoing support has become essential to the growing functionality and emotional well-being of our family. Without the security and stability of specialist, ongoing support, we'd all be facing a more uncertain future."

Joseph had experienced a chaotic lifestyle with his birth parents, suffering neglect, physical abuse and domestic violence.

When Joseph was placed with Charlie and Kate, aged five, they struggled with his aggressive behaviour. An assessment of Joseph and his adoptive parents was carried out to identify the support required. This was completed early on and the assessment concluded a high level of support, starting immediately, was required for a successful placement.

Therapeutic parenting support was identified as a priority because Charlie and Kate needed guidance on how to parent without bringing about any shame in the child, or trigger any abusive memories. Therapeutic parenting has helped them to reflect on their style of parenting and identify the best approach to deal with Joseph's unique needs.

Having been able to access support from an early stage of placement, the family has also been able to successfully put in place systems and structures which allow for a greater sense of security for the child.

A spokesman from the couple's local authority, said: "As a result of the ongoing support from the ASF the parents have worked with the therapist to move from containment to exploration of Joseph's history with him. Joseph agreed, as a result, to come to play therapy. He has received 12 sessions. Joseph as of today (6th April) reports a closer relationship with both parents and emerging trust of them."

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of the family

“We were extremely fortunate to access the right kind of support early in our placement - it kept us going when things were very tough.”

Adopters tell us what is working for them

Tom and Ella

Adoptive parents Tom and Ella were finding Freddie's anger issues so challenging that they were concerned not only for his welfare - but also for the whole family.

Freddie's birth mother left him at the hospital after the birth saying she could not look after him. Freddie was placed with foster carers until his birth parents came forward claiming they wanted to try again.

Freddie had a short time living with his birth parents in a supervised family and baby unit. But during this time there was an incident resulting in Freddie being admitted to hospital with a rash; medical professionals diagnosed Freddie with Impetigo, which they felt had transpired due to his high levels of stress. Freddie was then returned to the foster placement, where he remained until his adoption, at 19 months-old.

Freddie displayed extremely challenging behaviour as soon as he was placed with Tom and Ella. Since the adoption, the family has had involvement in the Therapeutic Parenting Programme which supports parents to help regulate their child whilst reflecting on their own experiences, which might impact on their parenting style.

Tom and Ella later conceived two children after adopting Freddie. This caused some issues around the dynamics between Freddie and his two siblings. Freddie was exhibiting uncontrollable anger, often aimed at his brother or mother.

Tom and Ella were understanding and supporting of Freddie but his outbursts were causing concern, particularly around the safety of Freddie and his younger siblings, their birth children. Stress levels were high and this was impacting on all members of the family.

Ella's hope was that Freddie would be able to talk through and express his feelings. She longed for him to be happier in himself and not so angry about everything. She also hoped to see an improvement between Freddie and his brother's relationship.

Freddie was offered 12 sessions of drama therapy to help him to explore some of the issue that he is struggling with, such as violent nightmares, a

negative sense of self, how he understands his own emotional response in situations, his relationship with his adoptive family and particularly how he relates to being adopted and his struggles in school.

Following the sessions Freddie's relationship with his brother has improved and he is more able to identify his feelings in certain situations. Freddie still expresses anger, however there seem to be fewer incidents. Triggers for physical aggression tend to be when anxiety is high and Freddie is faced with change - for example moving from Beavers to Cubs.

Tom and Ella now feel more secure as a family and it is less challenging parenting Freddie. Stress levels within the family have also improved and they are more hopeful as a family for the future.

Ella said: "Freddie has gained confidence in himself, he is more accepting of help from us. He talks more about how he is feeling. It is helping Freddie build confidence and we are getting regular feedback which is very useful."

Freddie has now extended his friendship group and his teachers say he has gained in confidence at school and seems happier in himself.

Freddie's therapist said: "Drama therapy seems to be helpful for Freddie. He is using the sessions to explore emotions and feelings and how they apply and change in different situations. He is developing creative imagination and play which can be useful in improving relationships and communication outside the sessions.

"Freddie has started to explore family dynamic and change, however he often changes the theme/story before it can develop. We will continue to work on finding a safe and contained way for Freddie to continue to explore family dynamics. He used the sessions well to explore emotions and feelings and how they apply and change in different situations. He has developed creative imagination and play which has helped to improve communication outside the session and improved his relationship with his brother."

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of the family

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Our vision is a world where all children and young people unable to live with their birth parents can find security and happiness with permanent families who have the right support to build brighter futures.

We provide our members with the highest level of service, support and education.

We campaign for change for you at the highest policy levels.

Adoption UK Helplines

England 07904 793974 or 07539 733079

Wales 029 2023 0319

Scotland 0131 201 2489

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