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An evaluation of The Cornerstone Partnership's Mentoring and Restorative Parenting Training schemes

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Impact & Evaluation team, February 2017

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all adopters and local authority professionals who participated in the evaluation.

Delivery partner:
The Cornerstone Partnership is a social enterprise founded by Clare Brasier and Helen Costa, who, driven by their personal experience as adopters and their desire to help children, realised that by combining their professional skills and personal experience there was scope for innovation and partnership to improve the life chances of children in the care system.

Evaluation partner:
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Since summer 2015 The Cornerstone Partnership (Cornerstone) has provided a mentoring scheme and a Restorative Parenting Training (RPT) programme to adopters and prospective adopters. Cornerstone's mentoring scheme provides adopters with additional support and advice about the process and experience of becoming and being an adopter. RPT is a three day course and webinar programme which teaches adopters, either pre or post placement, about parenting techniques and approaches as well as introducing theory about attachment. Both schemes have the ultimate aim of producing adopters who are more confident, resilient and have a better understanding of the adoption journey and the needs of children in care. This is intended to lead to adopters being ready to adopt quicker, to consider a wider range of children (i.e. those harder to place), and to more stable placements with fewer disruptions.

The evaluation

The main aims of Coram's evaluation were to explore the adopters' experiences of Cornerstone's services, the impact of the services on parenting capacity, if there was any effect on adopter journey and how well the service fitted in with local authority provision.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach:

1. collecting quantitative data from local authorities about adopter timescales
2. qualitative data about adopter experience from an online survey and semi-structured phone interviews with adopters
3. conducting focus groups with social workers.

This report presents an evaluation of the effectiveness of the schemes which began in July 2015.

Key findings

Overall feedback about Cornerstone's services

- Adopters were very satisfied with Cornerstone's services and considered the programmes to be of very high quality and generally better than other support they had received throughout their adoption journey. Findings gathered from both the adopter survey and interviews reported that Cornerstone's schemes, mentoring and RPT, impacted positively in a number of ways on adopter's experiences during their adoption journey. Those who attended RPT, and had a child placed with them, had noticed positive changes in their child's behaviour; 94% (32) of adopters said that the course would benefit (or already has benefitted) their adopted child
- Adopters said that Cornerstone's programmes were relevant to their lives and as a result they felt more prepared, supported and confident to deal with challenges during their adoption journey. Ninety-four per cent of adopters (22) either "strongly

agreed" or "agreed" that RPT equipped them with effective techniques and strategies to parent an adopted child and 87% (33) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the course helped them feel more confident to parent a child who has experienced trauma

- Social workers welcomed Cornerstone's services and praised the service's professionalism and responsiveness. Cornerstone's services complemented the local authority offer and the referral process was usually seamless. Social workers considered the programmes to be valuable to adopters and actively referred adopters from their local authorities to the scheme
- Quantitative data gathered from six local authorities (Ealing, Tri-borough, Slough and Reading) about 43 adopters found that Cornerstone adopters (i.e. local authority adopters that had received Cornerstone services) were more likely to be matched to children from out of borough. Eighty-six per cent of Cornerstone adopters were matched in another local authority compared with 27% of non-Cornerstone adopters
- Total revenue generated by the six local authorities who matched Cornerstone adopters externally was £486,000. Slough generated the most income (£270,000) by placing ten Cornerstone adopters with children from another local authority
- Cornerstone adopters in the six authorities appeared to be more likely to have a child placed with them from black or ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds i.e. 'harder to place' children. Sixty per cent (9 out of 15) of Cornerstone adopters had a BME child placed with them compared with 31% (5 out of 16) non-Cornerstone adopters
- On average non-Cornerstone adopters were placed with a child quicker than Cornerstone adopters (15.5 months vs. 19.9 months). Ealing and Tri-borough Cornerstone adopters however had a child placed with them 2.8 months faster than non-Cornerstone adopters in the authority.

Mentoring

- Adopters at interview and in the survey were positive about the support they had received from a mentor and how it had benefitted them. Adopters reported that the mentoring scheme had helped with parental confidence (e.g. 64% of adopters, 28, surveyed "strongly agreed " or "agreed" that mentoring had made them feel more confident about being an adopter) and made their experience as an adopter feel more normal
- Seventy-nine per cent of adopters (22) surveyed who had a mentor were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the experience. Five out of the 11 adopters interviewed described their experience as excellent and four had a good experience finding parts useful. Eighty-two per cent of adopters (23) surveyed would recommend the scheme
- Most adopters who had been partnered with a mentor described the scheme as unique because it offered support from someone who had already gone through the adoption process. Sixty-seven per cent of adopters (27) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that their mentor was supportive and helped them deal with worries and issues
- The adopter survey and interviews found that the majority of adopters had developed a trusting relationship with their mentor and sought advice on range of issues

- Emotional support and the opportunity to ask questions they might feel nervous about asking the local authority because of a fear of being judged were identified as key benefits of having a mentor
- At interview most adopters reported that they would turn to their mentor for support before contacting their social worker. This suggested that Cornerstone's mentoring scheme may reduce demands on social workers and therefore free up social worker time
- Adopters in the survey and at interview indicated that they would access their mentor and social worker for different reasons; adopters would go to their mentor for emotional support and contact their social worker with specific queries about the adoption process.

Restorative Parenting Training

- All adopters interviewed who had taken part in RPT praised the training and the impact it had on them and their children
- Adopters surveyed about RPT also reported very high levels of satisfaction. Ninety-three per cent of adopters surveyed were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" overall with RPT and all adopters (38) said they would recommend the programme. As discussed above, adopters reported that the learning had or would benefit their adopted child(ren) and strengthen their techniques to parent an adopted child
- Adopters considered the training being co-facilitated by a therapist and an experienced adopter to play a key part in helping them understand how to apply the learning
- Some adopters at interview revealed that RPT made a difference to how they proceeded in their adoption journey as it has helped them to think about what sort of children they could parent effectively
- Findings collected from both the adopter survey and interviews found that some adopters have already seen positive results on their child's behaviour as a result of using the PACE approach[1]. Many adopted children were described as calmer and less angry, and parent and child relationships were strengthened.

Learning for national policy and practice

The evaluation has produced some useful learning for national policy and practice including:

- The importance of early access to schemes to help avoid placements reaching a crisis point. Parenting training programmes appear to be most useful to adopters in the early placement stage of the adoption journey
- The effectiveness of a training programme for adopters co-facilitated by an adopter and a therapist

[1] The PACE approach teaches a method of parenting that uses playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy

- The importance of offering training programmes to adopters that are accessible and flexible to cater for other commitments
- Additional training on top of standard Stage 2 adopter training made adopters more "appealing" to matching panels and as a result a high proportion of Cornerstone adopters were matched with children outside of their own local authority
- The usefulness of an independent source of support to adopters, separate from a social worker, from someone who has been through the same experience. The effectiveness of this support is enhanced when adopters and mentors are matched on specific shared experiences, for instance, being a single adopter
- Social care professionals welcomed an external and "responsive" service which helped ease some pressure on workloads. Good partnership working was demonstrated between the local authorities and Cornerstone

Recommendations

Suggestions put forward by adopters about the schemes were generally to do with practicalities. The two overarching recommendations were:

Improve accessibility of the RPT course and widen its scope: some adopters said that RPT could have been more accessible. Thought should be given to offering a more flexible training programme to adopters to allow for people to manage attendance alongside work or other personal commitments. Adopters considered that there was value in inviting wider family members, such as their adopted and birth children, to the training. Also adopters could benefit from an action learning set or other follow-up mechanism post RPT as they try to apply the techniques learned.

Careful matching should be used for partnering adopters with mentors: adopters found support from their mentor valuable during their adoption journey. Being matched with a mentor who had similar experiences to them could strengthen this relationship even more. In addition, the scheme would benefit from ensuring mentors have up-to-date knowledge about adoption procedures, this is particularly relevant for mentors that had adopted some years previously and may not be familiar with the current process.

Limitations of the evaluation

There were limitations to evaluation which should be considered when reading the following findings. Limitations included small sample sizes, some missing data or patches of poor data quality and lack of representation from all local authorities in the quantative data analysis, adopter interviews and professional focus groups. An evaluation over a longer period of time would provide more insight into the impact of the Cornerstone schemes on timescales, local authority resources and stability of placements.

Introduction

Overview of programme

Cornerstone's mentoring and RPT schemes have been provided in 11 local authorities since March 2015. The programmes were funded by the Department for Education (DfE). There were three waves of the scheme since its inception:

- Wave 1: delivered in four local authorities, including Adopt Berkshire from March 2015
- Wave 2: delivered in the Tri-borough from June 2015
- Wave 3: delivered in Ealing, Hounslow, Reading and Slough since September 2015.

Cornerstone's mentoring scheme trains and supports adopters to become peer mentors to other adopters who are going through the process of having a child placed with them. The scheme aims to provide adopters, who are in different points of their adoption journey, with additional support and advice about the process and experience of becoming and being an adopter.

RPT is a three day course which teaches adopters, either pre or post placement, about parenting techniques and approaches as well as introducing theory about attachment. The programme teaches the PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) parenting approach as an effective way of supporting adopted children.

Both schemes have the ultimate aim of producing adopters who are more confident, resilient and have a better understanding of the adoption journey and the needs of children in care. This is hoped to lead to adopters being ready to adopt quicker following approval, consider a wider range of children i.e. those harder to place, more stable placements and fewer disruptions. Equally the scheme aims to have a positive impact on local authorities and social workers by reducing demands placed upon them and freeing them up to focus on other aspects of their role such as family finding.

The evaluation partner aims and approach

Coram's Impact and Evaluation team were commissioned by The Cornerstone Partnership (referred to as just Cornerstone in the report) in August 2016 to independently evaluate waves 2 and 3 of the programme[2].

Coram assessed the impact of the mentoring and RPT schemes on adopters and social workers in seven local authorities: Ealing, Hounslow, Slough and the Tri-borough (Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster). This final evaluation report summarises the findings from the online survey for adopters, interviews

[2] Wave 1 of the programme was evaluated by the University of Sussex.

with adopters, a focus group with professionals and local authority data about adopter timescales.

The purpose of Coram's evaluation was to assess whether Cornerstone's schemes have:

- improved the confidence and preparedness of prospective and current adoptive parents
- encouraged adopters to take on more complex children
- accelerated the placement of children
- positively impacted on local authority resources and decision making.

Four key research questions were designed to address these points:

1. What has been the adopters' experience of the services?
2. What was the impact of the services on the parenting capacity of adopters and potential adopters?
3. How did the services affect the adopters' journeys through the system?
4. How did the service fit with local authority provision and what were the impacts on local authority resources and decision-making?

Evaluation method

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach; collecting quantitative data from local authorities about adopter timescales and qualitative data using an online survey and semi-structured phone interviews with adopters and focus groups with social workers.

Online survey for adopters

Coram created an online survey for adopters in August 2016 (see Appendix 1 for survey questions). The survey link was sent to adopters who had taken part in either the mentoring and/or RPT schemes. Sixty-one responses to the online survey were received. Forty-four of these had taken part in RPT and 33 had taken part in mentoring. Most respondents were in the later stages of their adoption journey: 56% (34) had a child placed with them and 43% (26) were post-Adoption Order. The majority of respondents were female (80%), white British or white other (64%), aged 35 to 54 (89%) and three quarters were married or in a relationship. Nearly half (46%) of respondents accessed Cornerstone's services via Tri-borough or Ealing. Thirteen respondents were 'out of borough' typically meaning they had accessed the services via one of the seven authorities but did not currently live in that area (see Appendix 2 for breakdown).

Interviews with adopters

Semi-structured phone interviews with 18 adopters who had taken part in one or both of the schemes were conducted (see Appendix 1 for topic guide). Adopters who took part in the online survey were invited to take part in an interview. Fourteen of those that volunteered via the survey were interviewed. In addition Cornerstone circulated a call out for adopters to be interviewed and four more adopters came forward. Out of the 18 interviewees seven had taken part in the scheme via Ealing, five via Slough, five via Tri-borough and there was one adopter from Hounslow. No adopters were interviewed from Reading. Eleven adopters had

experience of the mentoring scheme and 14 had participated in RPT. Eleven adopters had their child placed with them and remaining seven were either in stage two of the adoption process or were approved and waiting to be matched or have a child placed with them.

Focus group with professionals

Social workers from all seven local authorities were invited to participate in a Coram facilitated focus group. Four social workers from two of the participating local authorities attended; Ealing and Hounslow (see Appendix 1 for topic guide).

Local authority data

Data about all adopters who had children placed with them between 01 September 2015 and 30 June 2016 was requested. Data was provided about 37 adopters from Ealing, Slough and the Tri-borough.

The impact of Cornerstone's mentoring scheme

Overview

Adopters were very satisfied with the mentoring scheme and considered it a successful initiative in offering effective support, encouragement and personal advice to adopters during their adoption journey. The majority of adopters involved in this evaluation who took part in Cornerstone's mentoring scheme said they had developed a trusting relationship with their mentor and would turn to their mentor for support before contacting their social worker.

Survey: views about mentoring

Findings

Out of the 61 adopters who responded to the online survey 33 had taken part in the mentoring scheme; a 22% response rate[3]. The majority of these respondents were female (85%) and 73% became involved in the scheme because their social worker told them about it:

"[My social worker said] I would receive support from a parent who had adopted and I could talk to them about any concerns/questions I may have." Out of borough adopter, mentoring.

One respondent had low expectations of the scheme because of the lack of support they had received from their social worker. In this case their expectation was exceeded and *"It was amazing. I hadn't expected that"*
Hounslow adopter, mentoring

Adopters in the survey reported that mentors usefully provided insightful knowledge about the adoption process and emotional support through the journey. This was corroborated by the high levels of satisfaction reported; 79% (22) were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" overall and a large proportion, 82% (23), would have recommended the scheme to other adopters.

Most respondents agreed that their mentor had helped them feel more confident about being an adopter (64% "strongly agreed or "agreed") and more prepared and motivated to proceed with adoption (61% "strongly agreed" or "agreed"), see Table 1. Certainly some of the comments made supported this and suggested that the mentors had made a positive impact on adopters, their preparedness to adopt and on their placements.

"[My mentor] made me less concerned about having a challenging child" and *"The [mentors] are committed, knowledgeable [and] supportive. Their support has meant this placement has continued. Without it, it would not have."*
Hounslow adopter, mentoring

[3] Response rate was calculated by dividing the total number of people who responded to the survey by the total number asked to participate in the survey.

Table 1: level of agreement with statements about mentoring scheme from survey

My mentor....	"Strongly agree" or "agree"	"Neither agree nor disagree"	"Disagree" or "Strongly disagree"
had good knowledge about adoption (N=27)	81%	11%	7%
was supportive and helped me deal with any worries and issues (N=27)	67%	26%	7%
helped me feel my experience is normal (N=28)	64%	21%	14%
has helped me feel more confident about being an adopter (N=28)	64%	25%	11%
was an effective support to me during the adoption journey, especially during more difficult times (N=28)	61%	25%	14%
helped me feel more informed about what it is like to be an adoptive parent (N=28)	61%	32%	7%
and I developed a positive and trusting relationship (N=28)	57%	29%	14%
helped me feel more prepared and motivated to proceed with adoption (N=27)	52%	33%	15%
improved my understanding about what kind of children can be adopted (N=27)	37%	48%	15%
made me think differently about what type of child I would like to adopt (N=27)	30%	52%	19%

Just under half of adopters (44%) reported that the mentoring scheme had made a difference to their adoption journey.

The survey responses revealed that most often adopters were looking for a mentor who understood their situation and this expectation was largely met. Six adopters who stated they hoped their mentor would provide empathy, all believed their mentor was able to do this. In addition, adopters indicated that they would approach their mentor and social worker for different reasons; adopters would go to their mentor for emotional support and contact their social worker with specific queries about the adoption process:

"I received the support at different times, but the mentor is more about supporting me rather than going through the process of adoption" Ealing adopter, mentoring.

Adopters were enthusiastic about accessing a mentor. The majority of adopters signed up for a mentor soon after they heard about it. Sixty per cent (18 out of 30) [4] heard about the mentoring scheme and then began receiving support from a mentor in the same stage of their adoption journey. This is broken down as follows:

1. **Pre Stage 1:** no adopters heard about the mentoring scheme in this stage and no adopters accessed the scheme
2. **Stage 1:** five adopters heard about the scheme in this stage and four of these accessed the scheme (80%)
3. **Stage 2:** eight adopters heard about the scheme in this stage and four accessed the scheme (50%)
4. **Completed Stage 2 (approved and waiting):** five adopters heard about the scheme in this stage and three accessed the scheme (60%)
5. **Matched with a child but not placed:** no adopters heard about the mentoring scheme in this stage and no adopters accessed the scheme
6. **Child placed, pre-Adoption Order:** no adopters heard about the mentoring scheme in this stage and no adopters accessed the scheme
7. **Child placed, post-Adoption Order:** ten adopters heard about the scheme in this stage and seven accessed the scheme (70%).

Ten adopters indicated that they would have wanted a mentor earlier in the process, if the scheme had been made available to them. Six of these had their adopted child already placed with them.

Adopters tended to keep in contact with their mentor once a month or more via email and phone. None said that they regularly met with their mentor. Adopters were generally very happy with the type (67% "very satisfied") and frequency ("64% very satisfied") of contact that they did have with their mentor.

Gender comparison

Five responses about mentoring were from male adopters vs. 28 female adopters. A larger proportion of men compared with women were "unsatisfied" with the scheme (40% vs. 9%) and were unsure if they would recommend the scheme to another adopter (60% men were unsure compared with 4% of women). Overall 40% of male respondents would recommend the scheme. Due to the very small number of men that participated in the scheme and responded to the survey these findings are not conclusive, however it is worth further investigation for future service development to see if men are benefitting from the scheme in the same way and if any targeted support should be offered to this group.

[4] Three adopters did not specify the stage they heard about and accessed the mentoring scheme.

Despite the lower proportion of men that were satisfied with the scheme the majority still indicated that they had developed a positive relationship with their mentor. Sixty per cent of men compared with 65% of women felt their mentor helped them feel that their experience of being an adopter was normal.

Similar levels of men and women (60% and 61%), reported that the mentor support improved their confidence about being an adopter but a larger proportion of men than women felt that their mentor had: 1. good knowledge about adoption (100% vs. 78%) and 2. improved their understanding about what kind of children can be adopted (60% vs. 32%).

Suggestions for service development: mentoring

A very small number of adopters (4) were not satisfied with the mentoring scheme, they were unhappy with the contact they had with their mentor and unsure if they would recommend the programme to other adopters.

These adopters said that they were referred to the scheme too late in their adoption journey. One of these adopters felt that their *"mentor was poorly matched and did not share the same open and honest approach to adoption"* Slough, Mentoring and RPT. Two adopters felt it was difficult to get in touch with their mentor and another found their mentor *"unsympathetic".*

The experience could have been improved by earlier access to the mentoring scheme (although it may not have been available in the earlier stages of their adoption journey), and by providing more consistent contact with their mentor.

Interviews: views about mentoring

Sample

Eleven adopters who had experienced mentoring were interviewed. Seven interviewees volunteered to take part in an interview via the online survey and the remaining four put themselves forward after a Cornerstone email circulation. Six adopters who were interviewed had their child placed with them and the rest were either still being approved or were approved and waiting or matched.

The largest proportion of adopters (5) who were interviewed about their mentoring experience was from Slough, or had accessed the scheme via Slough. Three adopters were from Ealing, two from the Tri-borough and one from Hounslow. Reading adopters were not represented.

The ages of the eight children placed with the five adopters post placement ranged from 21 months to 10 years old. The average age of the adopted children was 3.9 years at time of interview.

Adopters' experience of mentoring

Overall experience

Most of the 11 adopters interviewed about mentoring found the scheme useful and had a positive experience. Only two adopters did not find the mentoring scheme helpful. Most adopters (7) reported at interview that they would prefer to approach their mentor with questions or requesting advice ahead of contacting their social worker. Three adopters had found the mentor particularly useful during a stressful time in their adoption journey.

Impact on confidence

About half of the adopters (6) reported that mentoring had helped them to improve either their confidence to parent or their general confidence, for example:

"Definitely helped me regain some self-confidence. I had taken a bit of a knock … [the mentor] gets where you're coming from ... just someone to listen, they don't have to give you advice ... friends and family are great but quite a lot of the time you get 'oh all kids do that,, ' which can get a bit frustrating!" Slough adopter, mentoring and RPT

Impact on parenting skills

The mentoring scheme contributed less to the adopters' development and parenting skills and techniques compared to the impact on confidence. Three adopters did, however, talk specifically about how having a mentor had helped with their parenting knowledge and skills.

Timing

Six out of the eleven adopters discussed that the support from a mentor did not come at the right time in their adoption journey and five of these wished that they had been able to access a mentor earlier. Three of these five were post placement and two were at approval stage.

Interviewed adopters have been be grouped into three categories for more detailed analysis; 1. those who found experience excellent (5), 2. those that found parts of the scheme useful (4) and 3. those who did not find it helpful (2).

Adopters reporting an excellent experience

All but one of the five adopters that had an excellent experience started receiving mentoring before their child was placed with them. The adopter who did have their child placed when they started accessing their scheme had adopted nine years previously. She discussed how she wished that the mentoring scheme was available when the child was placed with her. The five adopters were spread across the four local authorities. This praise from adopters who were in the earlier stages of their adoption journey suggests that adopters find the scheme most useful pre placement or as early as possible in the process.

These adopters who had a very positive experience talked about how their mentors were empathetic and provided them with encouragement. They discussed that the mentor was

able to provide a unique kind of support because of their experience and understanding of their situation.

Adopters in this category viewed their mentor as an independent source of support and separate to their social worker, a key feature of the Cornerstone mentoring model. Adopters appreciated that they could ask any questions and discuss concerns with their mentor without having to worry about if it would impede on their adoption journey. All adopters reported that they would approach their mentor for support and advice before contacting their social worker.

"Very, very useful, when it was first suggested to us we were so grateful and we had someone that had nothing to do with the local authorities and someone who had gone through the process as an adopter rather than someone from social services" Tri-borough adopter, mentoring and RPT

For two adopters their mentors also offered a point of stability during a time of staffing changes in the local authority. The adopters also felt their mentor offered a different perspective on their situation and they could approach their mentor to ask questions they might have felt nervous about asking the local authority because of a fear of being judged:

"... if I have a question I can get it answered from somebody other than a social worker … sometimes you might not want to ask your social worker something ... you want your social worker to see you in the best light possible, they might think 'oh why is she asking that for?!'" Ealing adopter, mentoring

As a result of the trusting relationships that were developed between adopters and their mentors, adopters were then likely to take on board advice and suggestions from their mentor: *" .. if you hear it from someone who has gone through it [adoption process] you take it more on board"* Tri-borough adopter, mentoring and RPT

For two adopters in the "excellent" group the most useful aspect of the scheme was the help the mentor offered in navigating the adoption system in terms of accessing support and progressing through the approval process. One of these adopters, whose child had been placed with her nine years ago, described the mentor as a *"lifesaver"* because they were able to support her to access adoption support services at a time of crisis. This adopter commented that the mentor's support was a *"gateway"* to other services and this help meant that a potential placement breakdown was averted (see box above).

> *"I think Cornerstone is amazing. I genuinely feel like [the mentor] saved our placement from breakdown. We were absolutely in crisis. I think it should be mandatory to have a Cornerstone mentor ... to really make a massive difference to people's lives."*
> Hounslow adopter, mentoring

This group of adopters also commented on the personal qualities that the mentors possessed which made them such effective support systems. Mentors were described as *"easy to talk to", "caring", "kind"* and *"open".* These qualities allowed adopters to feel able to discuss difficult circumstances with the mentor which helped reduce feelings of isolation and stress. For four out of the five adopters the mentor increased their confidence to parent. Certainly these adopters valued the important emotional support that mentors provided that was sometimes lacking in the adoption process:

"My mentor was very empathetic and her memories of the process were very strong so it made me feel very normal with the emotions and feelings I was going through." Slough adopter, mentoring and RPT

"The adoption process is very technical and everything is about the legalities… but there are also emotional questions that you want to ask that [your social worker] may not understand" Tri-borough adopter, mentoring and RPT

One adopter commented on how she appreciated that her mentor was also a single adopter as she had no contact with someone with this experience in her usual support network. This commonality meant the adopter felt reassured and more confident to progress with the adoption process:

"... it has been useful that she is a single adopter because she understands what it is like to do it on your own. Because I have friends who have adopted with a partner but that's different ... I think I can do it because I have seen what she has experienced." Ealing adopter, mentoring

Adopters reporting a good experience

Four adopters at interview generally had a good experience and found parts of the mentor scheme useful. Three had their child placed with them (average age of the four children was 3.1 years) and one was approved and waiting. The adopter who was pre-placement had a good support network of adopter friends already in her network therefore she felt she did not need to access her mentor. She described her experience as *"50/50".* She did however acknowledge that her mentor was responsive and that she may find the mentor more useful when she has had a child placed with her.

"I found my mentor very helpful. Cornerstone was very helpful and I now have monthly phone calls with an adoptive mum who can offer some real insight into her experience and knowledge. The encouragement she gives me I find invaluable and stops me fretting about the future and instead remaining hopeful and positive that the efforts I am making will see results at some point, if not immediately obvious."
Hounslow adopter, mentoring

The other three adopters were positive about the experience and found aspects, particularly seeking practical advice, of the scheme useful and appreciated the independence the mentor offered. One adopter did not access the mentor's support at the time of interview but found their mentor very helpful during early placement with a specific issue that she was experiencing with the school her child attended:

"... we were having a lot of problems with daughter at school at the time and she did help with that. This is now resolved ... that has become a lot easier" Slough adopter, mentoring and RPT

This adopter also acknowledged that her mentor had made her feel reassured, had provided a supportive, non-judgemental listening ear and had in fact helped her regain some self-confidence.

Another adopter who had a good experience welcomed the chance to speak with her mentor about practical areas such as sleep patterns. She did not use her mentor for emotional support but did think her mentor was a *"nice person"* and very *"positive"* about adoption. This Ealing adopter had a good relationship with their social worker and tended to access support from her local authority adoption team rather than the mentor.

The last adopter in this "good" category had accessed two mentors. This adopter's first experience was poor. They found the mentor they were initially matched with unresponsive and was *"really not impressed at all"*. However Cornerstone recently re-matched the adopter with a second mentor. The adopter was able to openly talk with the new mentor which helped the adopter *"realise things are not as bad as you think"* and gain an *"understanding of how other people have dealt with [challenging behaviour]".* This had helped reduced the adopter's stress levels.

Adopters reporting a poor experience

Two adopters did not find the mentoring scheme useful or have a good experience. Both of these adopters had accessed the scheme through Slough. One adopter accessed the scheme post Adoption Order and the other accessed the scheme at approval stage.

One adopter did not find the scheme helpful because they had hoped to be matched with a mentor that had experience of parenting a birth child alongside an adopted child. The adopter wanted specific advice about integrating the adopted child with the family. In addition, this adopter informally accessed support from an adopter through her local authority who was in a similar situation but further ahead in the adoption process.

The other adopter, who now is receiving support from a new mentor, found that her first mentor was not responsive and also was not in contact during a point in her adoption journey where she particularly was looking for emotional support (at approval stage). This adopter, although in the early stages, reported that she was pleased with the initial support and guidance she has received from her new mentor.

Suggestions for improvement

Eight adopters offered suggestions about how the mentoring service could be improved. Suggestions were made by adopters who had positive and negative experiences. Three of these adopters recommended that the mentoring service should be made available to adopters earlier in the adoption journey; something that should be rectified now Cornerstone is more embedded in local authorities. One of these adopters thought that the scheme should be widened so that all adopters can have access to a mentor.

Five adopters' suggestions for improvement related to the specific experience of mentors and how they were matched. One adopter felt the scheme would benefit from recruiting volunteers who were *"more recent"* as her mentor had adopted eight years ago so was not familiar with the current adoption process. Others wanted a mentor that had more similar experiences to their own situation. One single adopter commented that she wanted the mentoring scheme to help her build her support networks i.e. by being introduced to more adopters. This same adopter noted that her mentor supported quite a few adopters and therefore was sometimes cautious about approaching her:

"Sometimes I felt like I wanted to speak to her more but I refrain from calling her too much because I don't want to offload and I don't want to lean on her too much, only because she has other [adopters] to answer and she has her own issues ... I almost feel like I take a step back." Tri-borough adopter, mentoring and RPT

One practical suggestion was that the scheme should provide written guidelines about the mentor's role which would help with the expectations on both sides.

Professional feedback: views about mentoring

All seven local authorities were invited to take part in a focus group to discuss their experience of Cornerstone's services and the impact it has had on the adopters that they support. Four social workers from two local authority adoption teams, Ealing and Hounslow, took up the invitation and participated in one focus group facilitated by Coram.

All participants spoke highly of both the mentoring and RPT schemes commenting on their responsiveness and added value. All discussed examples where adopters had benefitted from both schemes and certainly felt Cornerstone were meeting its intended outcomes:

"[Cornerstone's] brief is to support adopters and build their confidence and they have fully met that brief and I really hope they get funded again." Social worker, Ealing

For the Ealing adoption team referring every adopter to the Cornerstone schemes was standard practice. The ease with which staff were able to refer to the services was one of the reasons why the scheme had become embedded as part of their offer of support. Hounslow staff also found the schemes simple to refer to however fewer adopters in this authority had taken up the offer because they were mainly *"quite settled*" in the placements (referring to

those adopters who were post-placement). When adopters in Hounslow had taken up the scheme they were in a range of stages in their adoption journey:

"... those who have taken it are across the board, from approval to post placement. I have referred people who have had children placed for over ten years." Social worker, Hounslow

The schemes were made even more appealing to social workers because of the approachability and responsiveness of the Cornerstone team and the opportunity to discuss cases in more detail if needed.

Participants also praised the care and thought that was often put into matching adopters with mentors. Indeed this was one of the reasons that the members of the group thought the mentor scheme had worked well:

"I called Cornerstone and talked about mentoring and they were able to identify a male adopter who was able to act as a mentor to an adopter dad, both had grown up children, it was just so responsive." Social worker, Hounslow

The social workers identified that one of the main strengths of the mentoring scheme was that it provided adopters with a neutral, independent support that also had the understanding of what it is like to be an adopter. Mentors were helpful throughout the adoption journey but in particular were viewed most useful in the early placement stage. The group acknowledged how the valuable mentor support offered something different and additional to what their team could provide:

"[The adopters] have a service that they can contact, it's like befriending and we can't fill that role. They cheer each other on ... it is about having someone who went through the same thing, someone who can suggest speaking to social worker, or 'I tried this...' or 'have you tried this?'. They can share their experience ... it is their reality as well as yours." Social worker, Ealing

Indeed social workers reported that the unique empathy and understanding that the mentoring service offered had helped reduce adopters' feelings of isolation during difficult times. One adopter in Hounslow fed back that they are contacted in a timely way and the mentors do what they say they will do, when they were going through difficult period their mentor was in contact daily. The mentor was able to relate to them and gave them some insight from their experience.

Participants acknowledged that this was often something that a social worker could not achieve because of their professional position:

"... they are worried that they are going to make us feel worried ... if they don't like the child and don't immediately love the child, but they can say this to a mentor. Knowing that they

have someone at the other end of the phone is massive. Knowing what an adoptive parent is going through is something we will never understand like they will." Social worker, Ealing.

Mentors also provided hope and encouragement to adopters during times where there were periods of waiting for instance after approval or waiting for adoption support post placement. This combination of empathy and encouragement in turn resulted in less stress for adopters. Participants suggested that this kept placements stable avoiding crisis points and ultimately disruptions:

"Certainly I think while that was being sorted out the mentor really kept that placement stable, while waiting for therapy support), having someone to talk to to help them see light at the end of the tunnel was really helpful." Social worker, Hounslow

Therefore mentors provided emotional support for mentors but in addition participants noted how mentors had also supported in signposting to services and developing practical techniques for parenting, especially challenging behaviour:

"[The mentor and adopter] can brainstorm ideas between them of what they can try, they can look at books, YouTube videos, all that stuff that the mentors will have compiled themselves." Social worker, Ealing

Participants recognised the benefits of the scheme for not only adopters but for the adoption team as well. Participants appreciated the additional support the scheme offered and liked that the scheme felt quite separate to the role of a social worker: *"they are coming from a different angle but I think that is helpful"* and *"they are coming from a more empathetic parenting angle and I think that is an advantage"*. Although there were differences in approach all supported the view that the Cornerstone mentoring scheme was working towards the same goal as the social workers.

This additional support to adopters had resulted in a positive impact on the social care team's day-to-day role. Participants felt reassured that they were referring adopters to a scheme that was *"valuable"* and that they knew their adopters had a point of contact during out of hours times. Furthermore the mentor scheme had helped their workloads because adopters were *"not coming to us as much"* with questions that could be answered by a mentor. Professionals were confident that the mentors would continue to be valuable to adopters into the future when children reach the *"difficult teenage years when placements are at risk".* All noted how the scheme will, in particular, work well with the regionalisation process so that adopters have mentors as a point of continuity in an environment where social workers are less able to spend time with adopters and follow cases.

Participants did not have many suggestions about how the scheme could be improved. They were pleased with the service from Cornerstone and the positive effect that the scheme had on their adopters. There were one or two examples of a mentoring match that had not worked so well. In these cases the adopter and mentor had less in common to build rapport.

Therefore the group stressed the importance of careful matching and that this was key to making a partnership successful. Professionals suggested that the referral form should contain more space so that more information can be provided about the adopter and their background. The social workers also suggested that it was helpful when adopters were matched by geographical proximity as a mentor can then advise and suggest ideas about local services available. Social workers thought that perhaps some adopters were nervous about approaching or taking up support from their mentor for the first time. One suggestion made was to hold a mentor and adopter evening to help break the ice and encourage adopters to use the mentor as a support.

The impact of Restorative Parenting Training

Overview

Adopters who attended Cornerstone's RPT considered the programme to be of very high quality and provided valuable practical techniques that could support them in parenting their adopted child(ren).

Survey responses: views about RPT

Findings

Forty-four adopters responded about the experience of RPT. Forty per cent of these took part in the training post-Adoption Order.[5]

The findings from the survey showed that RPT provided adoptive parents with practical skills and confidence to parent their children. Respondents in the survey were even more positive about RPT than mentoring. Nearly all adopters (94%, 32) thought that what they learned in sessions would benefit (or already has benefitted) their adopted child. In the same way, respondents were very satisfied with the content, facilitation and practical arrangements of RPT. Ninety-three per cent (25) of adopters were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" overall with RPT and all adopters (38) said they would recommend the programme to others. Ninety-four per cent of adopters (22) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that RPT equipped them with effective techniques and strategies to parent an adopted child and 87% (33) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the course helped them feel more confident to parent a child who has experienced trauma (broken down in Table 3).

In the same way as the mentoring scheme, most adopters (59%) became involved in RPT because their social worker or another professional had told them about it. Over a third of respondents (15, 39%) would have liked access to RPT earlier in their adoption journey. Of these 15, 80% (12) had their child placed with them. Eleven of these were post-Adoption Order.

Twelve adopters attended the training with their partner and all found this beneficial. One benefit that was noted by adopters was the chance for both individuals to apply and tailor the knowledge gained on programme to their own parenting styles. One or two respondents, however, noted that *"one parenting attending the training was enough"* because resources and skills could be shared at home after the course.

A high proportion of adopters (87%) said that RPT had met their expectations. Over half of respondents (57%) hoped, before staring the training, that RPT would provide them with a

[5] 144 adopters who were trained across the seven local authorities were asked to participate in the adopter survey. 44 adopters responded, this is a 31% response rate.

better understanding of parenting skills and knowledge including techniques and tips on how to use them. A quarter of the adopters wanted to gain a better understanding of their adopter child's needs and how to manage challenging behaviour (see Table 2).

Table 2: responses to "did you get what you hoped out of the training?"

Hope for the training	No. answered "Yes"
Parenting skills and knowledge for the future	20
PACE training	5
Better understanding of adopted children's needs	4
Manage my own and my child's behaviour	3

The majority of respondents (92%) said that RPT had made a difference to how they proceeded in their adoption journey. Most (78%) adopters felt that the most helpful aspect of the training was learning parenting skills that they could apply at home.

Adopters indicated two key ways their children have benefitted or will benefit from RPT which were 1. their improved understanding of their child's needs and 2. new parenting techniques to deal with challenges and behaviour for example PACE training. Sixty-eight per cent of adopters noticed an improvement in their child's behaviour as a result of RPT, for example *"... [my child is] less angry"* and others noticed that their children were more settled and were able to speak about their feelings easier: *"My daughter is beginning to be better able to verbalise her feelings as a result of my efforts to PACE and particularly to repair when I get it wrong"*

The majority of respondents who participated in RPT reported in the survey that the training had improved their confidence to parent an adopted child and improved their understanding of adopted children's needs (see Table 3).

Table 3: level of agreement with statements about RPT knowledge, skills & confidence from survey

	"Strongly agree" or "Agree"	"Neither agree nor disagree"	"Disagree" or "Strongly disagree"
Equipped me with effective techniques & strategies to parent an adopted child (N=38)	92%	3%	5%

Helped me better understand the needs of adopted children (N=39)	90%	3%	8%
Helped me feel more confident in forming an attachment with adopted children (N=37)	89%	5%	5%
Helped me feel more confident to parent a child who has experienced trauma (N=38)	87%	11%	3%
Helped me feel more prepared to adopt (N=29)	72%	21%	7%
Improved my understanding & knowledge about adoption process (N=35)	63%	23%	14%
Made me feel more able to adopt children with complex needs or 'hard to place' children (N=30)	60%	30%	10%

Many adopters (90%) also praised the content of the training, the practical arrangements e.g. the venue and the group work and discussions. Adopters also responded positively about the combination of the therapist trainer and adopter co-facilitator; 74% rated it "very good". This finding was also supported by responses from adopters at interview.

Gender comparison

Eight men and 36 women took part in RPT. As there is a much lower number of men who participated in the training compared to women, these results are not conclusive. A bigger proportion of women were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with RPT compared with men (95% vs. 80%). Men and women had similar expectations of the training; that it would improve their parenting skills, and the same proportions had these expectations met (87% of women and 88% of men).

Suggestions for service development

A couple of respondents who took part in RPT highlighted that they preferred not to take annual leave to attend the training:

"The only challenge is that we've had to take so many days off work to do it all, when we are trying to save our leave for when a child is placed with us. It would be great if Cornerstone could provide some of this training as part of Stage 2 training" Ealing adopter, RPT

Some adopters felt more content could have been covered over the three days. One adopter suggested addressing the impact of changes in the family structure e.g. divorce in the training:

"I would personally like to see the adoption agencies address the impact of divorce, it is very common and adoptive families are not immune. When such separation happens the adopted child/children [experience] more change, loss [and] separation." Ealing, Restorative Parent Training

Cornerstone webinars

Forty-five per cent of adopters (20) who participated in RPT had accessed Cornerstone's webinars. "Cornerstone Reflections" was the most popular (accessed by 11 adopters) followed by "Play Therapy" (accessed by eight adopters). The least accessed webinar was "Music Therapy" (accessed by two adopters). The majority (79%) of respondents were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the webinars and most (81%) found the webinars useful in helping to apply learning from RPT.

Adopter interviews: views about RPT

Sample

Fourteen adopters were interviewed about the experience of participating in the RPT programme. These adopters volunteered to take part in interviews via the online survey and a Cornerstone email circular. The highest proportion of interviewees accessed the scheme via Ealing (43%), followed by Tri-borough (36%) and then Slough (21%). No adopters came forward to be interviewed from Hounslow or Reading.

Most adopters (8) had their child placed with them when they accessed the training. These eight had adopted nine children who were aged between 21 months and 11 years old. All were post-Adoption Order, although one adopter had recently adopted her second child (first adopted child was 5.5 years old and post-Adoption Order) and this was in the early placement stage.

Adopter experience

All adopters were positive about RPT and those that had children placed left with practical techniques that could support them in parenting their adopted child(ren). All adopters reported that they left the training with improved knowledge and skills to parent an adopted child. The training helped adopters understand adopted children's specific needs and the reasons behind their, often challenging, behaviour. The majority of adopters (12) used words such as *"excellent", "inspiring"* or *"amazing"* to describe and benefitted greatly from the course. The other two adopters still found the training good but talked about the training more on balance and discussed specific aspects that they found more and less useful. These two were both post-Adoption Order. Most adopters (11) commented that their confidence to parent an adopted child had increased due to the training. Those that reported that the training did not impact on parenting confidence were all at the post-Adoption Order stage.

Half of the adopters would have liked to been able to access the training at an earlier stage in their adoption process. Five of these were post-Adoption Order and two were approved and waiting when they accessed the scheme. Of the seven that reported that the training came at the right time, those with children placed (3) felt it was beneficial to have the training after the child was with them so they could immediately put the approach into practice.

The PACE approach was most often reported as the most useful aspect of the training. Adopters with children discussed how they were able to put PACE into practice and had seen the results of this on their child's behaviour. Many talked about their child being *"calmer", "kicking off less"* and *"fewer explosive incidents*" and being more *"open".* In fact all adopters with children noted that their children's behaviour had improved after the course:

"He hasn't needed to be so demanding to get heard and listened to. The time I did the course ... he was going through a stage of trying out physical reactions to things ... he was pushing those boundaries physically and I found that quite difficult ... when I started to use PACE it lessened... I definitely think because I could be more understanding and use PACE to be alongside him he definitely reacted really well, and calmed down quicker." Tri-borough adopter, RPT

In addition three adopters referenced the impact that the "plasticine exercise" had on them and its ability to assist them in understanding their child's experience of loss:

"... we adopted him at 16 months and he had been with a foster carer five days after birth, [Cornerstone] have an activity where you make up a plasticine family and they are taken away from you and you are given another family and this really struck home. My poor baby. It put another facet when he asks questions like 'could [child's birth mother] really not look after me or did she not want me' . It gave me that insight to deal with that emotion and address and keep addressing it" Tri-borough adopter, RPT

Attending with a partner

Some adopters had wanted to attend RPT with their partner but practical arrangements (i.e. taking time off work) had not allowed this. Just under a third (4 out of 14, 29%) of adopters attended the training with their partner or a close family relative and all considered to be beneficial. Interestingly, two adopters indicated that they would have liked for their partner to go on RPT but for them to both to attend the training separately.

"[I] have been able to share with husband but it is not quite the same. He has heard me talk but it doesn't resonate with him in the same way because he hasn't been through the training." Slough adopter, mentoring and RPT

Type of children

Five adopters reported that the training made a difference to their decisions about the type of children they were able to adopt, for example:

"It made me more clued up about what I am looking for and realising that a new born isn't necessarily the best option… it has made me wiser and made me think about if we have a child that we need to think about this." Slough adopter, mentoring and RPT

One of these adopters was post-Adoption Order but reflected that it would have influenced her criteria for matching pre-placement.

"It's made me consider children with behavioural and emotional difficulties, which before the course I might not have considered." Ealing adopter, RPT

Understanding adopted children's needs and adapting parenting to this and seeing the results

All adopters who attended RPT explained that the training improved their understanding of adopted children's needs and/or their knowledge of techniques and approaches that could be used to deal with challenging situations. The training encouraged adopters to reflect on their own experiences of parenting or working with children, to recognise the differences that may occur in caring for adopted children compared with birth children and to spot specific behaviours adopted children may exhibit.

"Understanding where [adopted] kids are coming from I think was probably one of the most powerful things" Ealing adopter, RPT

One adopter described how the training helped her recognise and understand why her adopted son has difficulty in forming relationships:

"I realised that my son has some attachment issues ... some of the things that I have been wondering about my child I realised were issues that adopted children have ... talking to the facilitators [make me realise] that this behaviour happens a lot with adopted children". Ealing adopter, RPT

Adopters pointed out that this combination of teachings on attachment theory, knowledge of adopted children's needs and the PACE parenting model improved their confidence to be able to adapt their parenting and care for an adopted child. One adopter described as a result of PACE training she is now able to respond to misbehaviour more effectively:

"... if you are dealing with a child [who is not adopted] you can talk about consequences in a particular way which is what I had done previously. I now know…to sit down with the child and be curious about what they are feeling and where it might be coming from. It gives you

the tools to have that kind of conversation so you look beyond what the behaviour is." Ealing adopter, RPT

Three adopters who were at post-Adoption Order noted that RPT did not improve their confidence as parents but certainly equipped them with a set of techniques in order to parent more effectively. One adopter explained before the training that she already had the confidence to be a great parent, however she felt she lacked the knowledge and skill to manage adoptive life. After attending RPT, she was equipped with an understanding of why adopted children may act in a different way and set of techniques.

"I definitely think [RPT] has impacted on my skills. I behave very differently in quite a few circumstances. I also comfortably behave differently. Sometimes you know you should behave differently but you might be going against what you thought, but because the understanding is there I will definitely have a better outcome" Ealing adopter, RPT

Adopters used PACE techniques not only to parent in the moment but also described how the strategies had strengthened parent and child relationships and taught them how "*to go back and repair"* Ealing adopter, RPT.

"I think they've [children] become more open and that's what you want… it builds foundations for future …. If you have an open relationship and you understand it will help when it comes to the difficult teenage years" Slough adopter, RPT

"He knows he has a mother who gets him, who he can share his emotions with, who will not judge him … he's actually a changed boy … I spent a whole summer playing academic catch up with him. That trust that he had for me has allowed him to enter this school year at a different school, more or less on par." Ealing adopter, RPT

Timing of the training

Training was probably most suitable for those adopters in the early placement stage of their adoption journey as techniques could be put into practice. Adopters noted that the material covered in RPT was relevant and valuable to all kinds of adopters, however findings suggest that the training would be most beneficial for those in early placement as the techniques could be put into practice. Five out of eight of those adopters who had their child placed with them when they accessed RPT would have preferred to attend the training earlier to help with their parenting sooner. Similarly most adopters (4 out of 6) who had attended the training before they had a child placed with them believed this was the right time for them to attend.

Adopters who were in the post adoption stages reported attending the training earlier on in their adoption journey would have been helpful preparation for when the child moved in. They explained being equipped with the knowledge of adopted child's needs and strategies

to deal with adopted children's behaviour would have meant that they could have adapted their parenting methods earlier on and responded to situations more appropriately.

"If I had gone on the course before I had adopted maybe I would have had some good strategies to try from day one and that's maybe what we were missing." Ealing adopter, RPT

"If I knew what I know now I would have thought [her behaviour] was something else and not just listened to the teachers." Tri-borough adopter, RPT

Among those adopters who had not had their child placed with them when they attended the training, the majority felt that the training was provided to them at the right time, however two adopters would have preferred to have attended the training earlier on. One of these adopters commented that RPT would have been helpful at the point that they decided what kind of children they wanted to adopt:

"I think it would have been useful to have the training earlier ... as a prospective adopter you need to make decisions on what age, sex, background that you want to consider and whether you would be prepared to take on a sibling pair…I think the PACE parenting could help with making good decisions"

Nonetheless, this adopter indicated that the training would still impact on the decisions made in their adoption journey: *"It has improved my confidence as an adopter and means that when we are going through the matching process we are confident in what we might take on".* Ealing adopter, RPT

Training quality

All adopters were very pleased with the quality of the training and facilitation and agreed that it was outstanding compared to any other training they had attended. Adopters said the teachings were well grounded in research and the challenges of adoption were discussed alongside practical coping strategies.

"A lot of the other stuff [from other training] was superficial. They talk about problems and what to expect but there was very little advice about how you might cope with it ... but that wasn't the case with Cornerstone… nearly all of it was new and useful." Ealing adopter, RPT

"The people in the local authority they have a huge amount of knowledge [but] they are juggling a huge amount of work [and] you don't necessarily get strong trainers in all of these environments … I think this is something that Cornerstone has nailed" Slough adopter, RPT

All adopters found the combination of adopter and therapist facilitation useful. Adopters considered this co-facilitation to be a unique feature that played a crucial part in helping apply learning and, in particular, understand how to put PACE into practice. This dynamic worked well as adopters felt that the therapist was a very strong and knowledgeable trainer

and the presence of an experienced adopter who had used the techniques brought the material to life.

"After years of wondering why she [is] so explosive at times, you are hearing it from a therapist [and] you are realising that this is normal and you are also being taught that you can heal this [by the adopter]." Tri-borough adopter, RPT

Improvements to the course

Overall the 14 adopters interviewed who participated in RPT considered the course to be very high quality and particularly relevant to their lives. Thirteen adopters offered some suggestions to how the course could strengthen its delivery which have been grouped into three themes:

1. Improve course accessibility

Six adopters noted that adjustments could be made to how the course (and webinars) is delivered to improve its accessibility to adopters. These adopters described the difficulty in committing three full weekdays to the course and the challenges of balancing this with existing work or personal responsibilities; some adopter's partners could not participate in the training for this reason. Adopters suggested a more flexible programme to allow for people to manage work or other personal commitments, for example the course could be converted into half day courses, condensed to two days or offered alongside the mandatory adoption training or run at a weekend. Two adopters commented on the need to consider how the webinars were delivered as they had trouble accessing the webinars due to technical difficulties.

2. More time spent on practising PACE strategies

Although adopters considered the PACE parenting model incredibly useful, four would have preferred more time to practise the strategies during the course for instance by testing out the versatility of the techniques using different role play scenarios. One adopter explained that greater opportunity to practise the PACE model would encourage her to use the techniques:

"I learnt this strategy PACE but didn't really understand how to use it. So it left me feeling like I should be able to do something because I have gone on this course but actually I am not sure how to apply it [PACE] and when it doesn't work I am not sure what to do next." Ealing adopter, RPT

3. Extend the training offer more people, including non-adopters

All adopters concurred that the course should be offered more widely to adopters across England. In addition, three adopters suggested that it would be helpful to open the course to wider family members e.g. older siblings, adopted and/or birth children and grandparents.

"I would like something parents and kids could do alongside each other. I know my daughter would not touch therapy, she does not want to sit in a room and talk about her feelings… if

something like Cornerstone was offered to parents and kids it could be a stepping stone for kids that needed therapy." Ealing adopter, RPT

Professional feedback

Cornerstone's training was viewed as high quality, valuable resource which had made a big positive impact on adopters' lives and their parenting approaches. The training achieved a good balance between theory and practice. Professionals in the group reported that the training had helped adopters with their parenting confidence, strategies and techniques. Importantly, the training had helped adopters understand the reasons behind the child's behaviour. Furthermore adopters, who had not yet been matched and had been on the training, were viewed by other local authorities as more appealing as a potential match with a child waiting:

"When you get in touch with other local authorities when they are family finding, they say the training is putting the adopters over the others because, more and more you hear about therapeutic parenting, they are more appealing, it jumps out at them." Social worker, Ealing

Participants commented on the quality of the facilitation of the session, the practical arrangements e.g. the venue, the resource pack and the content of the session. In particular, the group noted the effectiveness of PACE and the 'plasticine exercise' which highlighted the emotional impact of losing your family.

The training complemented local authority preparation groups and provided a more "solution focused" approach and the opportunity to put practical techniques into practice. Social workers wanted to see even more of a focus on these strategies and *"more play therapy".*

Despite this, participants suggested that the local authority and Cornerstone training could work together more seamlessly and that there was some overlapping material such as one exercise which uses building blocks to re-inforce the gaps in the care children who are adopted receive. Social workers suggested this could be ironed out by Cornerstone attending local authority preparation group training to understand what is covered.

Furthermore there was an example where an adopter had attended the training and had received some incorrect information about the approval process. Social workers concurred that it would be most beneficial to adopters if the Cornerstone training solely focused on parenting approaches and did not delve into social worker process such as discussing children's permanency reports.

Social workers, however, were overwhelming satisfied and positive about RPT. In a similar way to the mentoring scheme, workers were able to discuss real life examples of when the training had benefitted adopters:

"[the training] helped [the adoptive couple] approach parenting from the same point of view, it brought them together, they ... started using [the approaches] on their daughter and they found it worked straight away and this put them in a strong position when their second (adopted) child was placed with them." Social worker, Hounslow

Participants could see a difference between those adopters, who had not yet been matched, who had attended the training and those who had not. Those that had been on the training seemed more ready to adopt, more confident at panel and sometimes more able and willing to adopt children who are deemed harder to place. The training did not necessarily change adopters mind about their matching criteria but it certainly made adopters feel more confident to consider children who have more complex needs:

"I referred to a couple who were adamant that they could not adopt a child who had experienced sexual abuse but the training opened their minds a bit more … what they thought they didn't have capacity for before, they now feel more confident and feel they can do it." Social worker, Ealing

A practical suggestion from participants was that it would be useful for adopters in a couple to be able to attend together and that Cornerstone sessions that run at the weekend and evenings would be helpful to fit around job commitments. One social worker suggested that a targeted men only session may be useful to understand some of the specific challenges that adoptive fathers face.

Findings from local authority data

Method

One of the aims of Coram's evaluation of the Cornerstone package was assess whether Cornerstone's schemes have encouraged adopters to take on more complex children and accelerated the placement of children. In order to obtain a data derived response to these issues, seven local authorities were asked to provide details about adopters who have had a child placed between 01 September 2015 and 30 June 2016 (three quarters). This data was used to consider if there were any differences between adopters who had and had not received support from Cornerstone in terms of timescales and type of children they adopted. Coram received data from Ealing, Reading, Slough and Tri-borough as such results below only reflect these local authorities.

Findings from data

Data was provided about 43 adopters who had a child placed with them between 01 September 2015 and 30 June 2016 from Ealing (10 adopters), Tri-borough (7 adopters), Slough (20 adopters) and Reading (6 adopters). Most adopters (51%) submitted their Registration of Interest (ROI) in 2014 and just over half of these adopters (55%) were matched with their child in 2016. Cornerstone began providing its mentoring and RPT schemes to adopters in the summer of 2015.

Demographics of children adopted

Data was provided about 32 children who had been placed with these 43 adopters between 01 September 2015 and 30 June 2016 in Ealing, Slough and the Tri-borough. Among the children who had their date of birth provided by the local authority 67% (14) were aged from zero to two years and the rest (7) were aged between three to five years. The ages of 11 children were unknown. Slightly more girls (17, 53%) had been placed during this period than boys (15, 47%). Most children were white British or white other (55%), around a third were mixed race (29%), 10% were black African and 6% were Asian. Two children had a reported developmental delay or disability.

Half of these children (16) were placed with adopters who had received Cornerstone support and the rest were placed with adopters who had not.

Cornerstone vs non-Cornerstone adopters

This section explores whether Cornerstone adopters were matched faster, took on more complex children and more likely to be matched inter-agency than adopters who had not received Cornerstone support.

It is important to note that adopters who were recorded as receiving Cornerstone support and had their child placed prior to September 2015 may not have accessed Cornerstone support because the schemes were not yet available in their local authority rather than

choosing not to access the support or not being offered the service by the local authority. The Cornerstone package was not provided until September 2015 in Ealing, Hounslow, Reading and Slough and from June 2015 in Tri-borough. In addition, as sample sizes were very small the differences between Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters are minor and in single units. More data is required to make an accurate and valid judgement about whether children with more complex needs are more liked to be matched and placed with Cornerstone adopters.

The data revealed that half of the 43 adopters (21) had received Cornerstone support. Of these 21 Cornerstone adopters ten were from Slough, three from Ealing, four from Tri-Borough, four from Reading. Most of the adopters in the Reading and Tri-borough data accessed Cornerstone but this was not the case in Ealing and Slough (see Figure 1).

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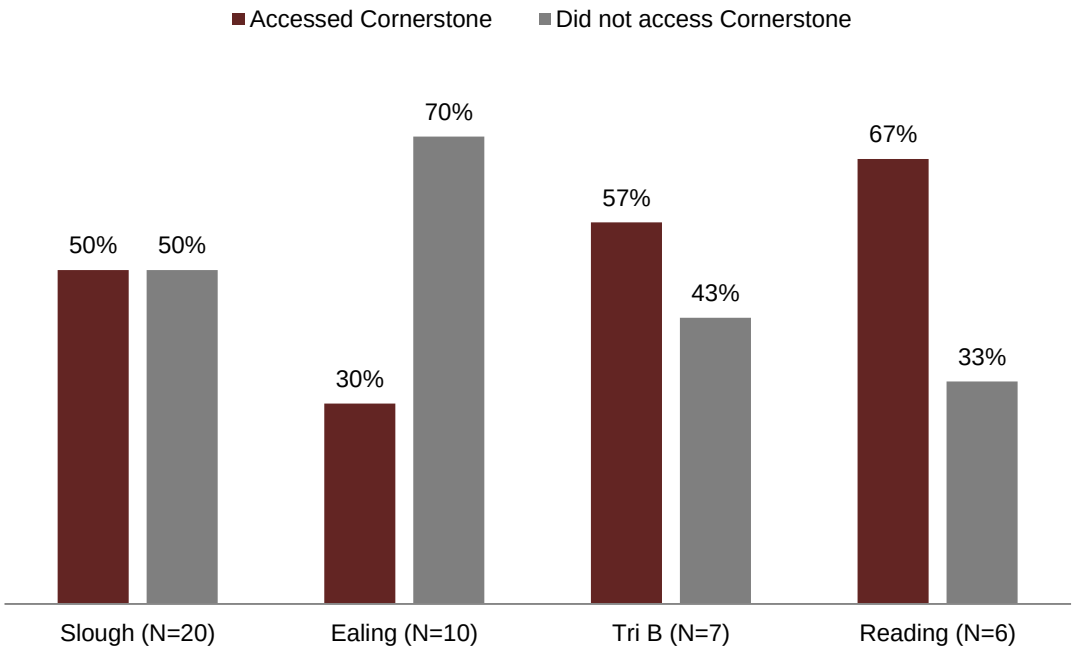
Figure 1: Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters by local authority



Over half of the 21 adopters (12) had participated in Cornerstone's mentoring scheme, two adopters had taken part RPT and two had taken part in both. For five adopters no data was provided about which programme they participated in.

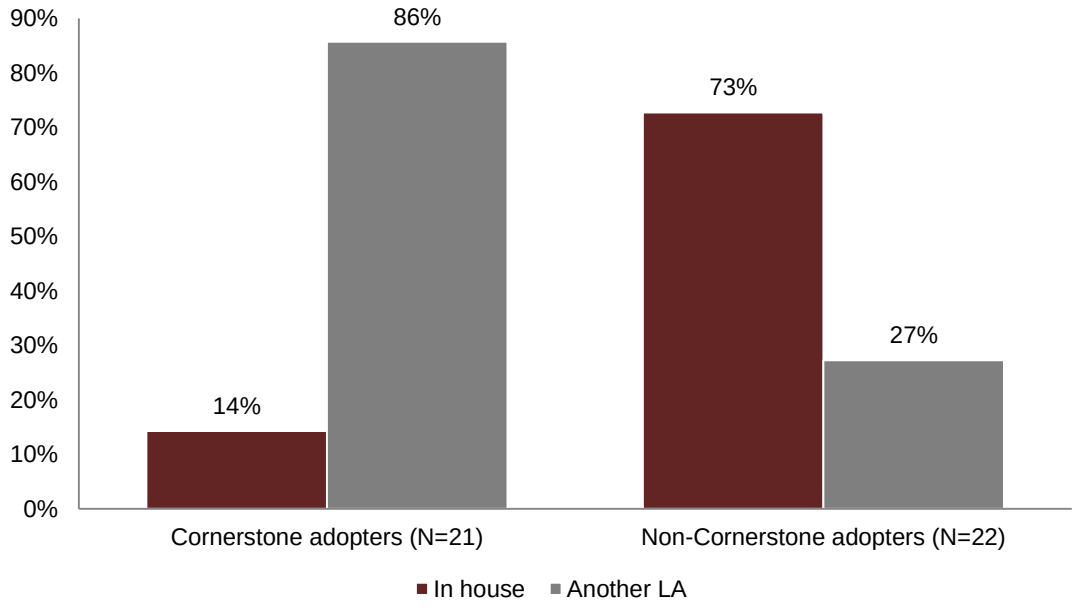
Were Cornerstone adopters more likely to be matched externally?

Out of the 43 adopters in the dataset 24 (56%) were placed in another local authority. Three-quarters of those adopters (18) that were placed in another area received Cornerstone support.

Results indicated that adopters who had received Cornerstone support were more likely to be matched with a child in another local authority. Eighty-six per cent of Cornerstone

adopters were matched in another local authority compared with 27% of non-Cornerstone adopters (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Where were adopters matched with a child?



In total, £486,000 was generated by local authorities placing Cornerstone adopters in other local authorities (this calculation is based on £27,000 per adopter who is externally placed). Slough placed ten Cornerstone adopters externally and received £270,000, Tri-borough placed four Cornerstone adopters externally and made £108,000 and Ealing and Reading placed two Cornerstone adopters in another local authorities and received £54,000 each (see Table 4).

Table 4: Revenue generated from placing Cornerstone adopters externally

LA	Cornerstone adopters placed in another LA	Revenue generated
Slough	10	£270,000
Tri-borough	4	£108,000
Ealing	2	£54,000
Reading	2	£54,000
Total	**18**	**£486,000**

Were Cornerstone adopters more likely to be placed with complex children?

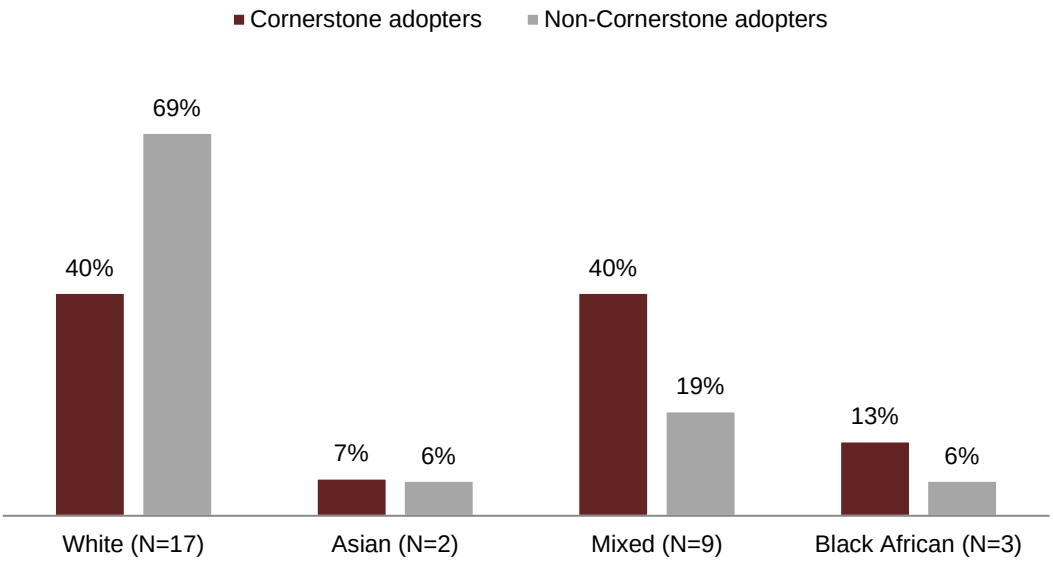
Siblings

There were five sibling groups reported in the data (missing = 9). Four of these sibling groups were placed with Cornerstone adopters and one with a non-Cornerstone adopter.

Ethnicity

Adopters who received Cornerstone support appeared to be placed with children who are considered harder to place in terms of their ethnicity. Data about ethnicity was provided about 31 children. Sixty per cent of the children (9 out of 15) placed with Cornerstone adopters were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds compared with 31% (5 out of 16) of children placed non-Cornerstone adopters (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Ethnicity of children Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters were placed with



Age

Information about the ages of children was only provided for 21 of the children in the dataset. The age of the children placed with Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters was similar. Sixty-two per cent of children placed with Cornerstone adopters were aged zero to two years which was similar to the 75% of children in same age range placed with non-Cornerstone adopters. Thirty-eight percent of children aged three to five years were placed with Cornerstone adopters and 25% of this age group were placed with non-Cornerstone adopters. No children placed in the period were aged over five.

Disability and developmental delay

The data does not suggest that Cornerstone adopters were any more likely to be matched with disabled children; results were the same for both Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters. Seven per cent of Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters were placed with a disabled child.

Were Cornerstone adopters placed with a child more quickly?

In order to assess whether Cornerstone's schemes have accelerated the placement of children the average length of the adoption process (ROI to child placed) was calculated for Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone adopters.

Results indicated that non-Cornerstone adopters were placed with a child more quickly than Cornerstone adopters. On average it took 15.5 months for a non-Cornerstone adopter to have a child placed with them (based on ROI date to placement date) compared with Cornerstone adopters where ROI to placement took 19.9 months.

Non-Cornerstone adopters were also placed more quickly out of borough than Cornerstone adopters. Non-Cornerstone adopters took on average 17.5 months to be placed externally compared to Cornerstone adopters who waited 20.9 months.

However if we look more closely at how each of the local authorities performed results show that Tri-borough and Ealing Cornerstone adopters were placed with children faster than their non-Cornerstone adopters (see Table 5). On average Cornerstone adopters had children placed with them 2.8 months faster than non-Cornerstone adopters in these authorities.

Data was based on a very limited sample. For example, in Reading, three couples (6 adopters) had a child placed between 01 September 2015 and 30 June 2016; two of these couples were Cornerstone adopters and one was a non-Cornerstone adopter. As such, the average time a Cornerstone adopter waiting to be placed with a child was only based on two unique journeys, similarly the average length calculated for non-Cornerstone adopters was only based on one unique adoption journey. Interestingly, Slough who had a bigger and more varied sample of Cornerstone adopters (N=10) and non-Cornerstone adopters (N=10), Cornerstone adopters still waited longer to be placed with a child (although all these adopters were placed externally) than non-Cornerstone adopters.

Table 5: timescales per local authority, average length of time from ROI to child placed (months)

	Slough (N=20)	Tri B (N=7)	Ealing (N=10)	Reading (N=6)
Cornerstone adopter (N=21)	22.8	20.0	15.7	15.5
Non-Cornerstone adopter (N=22)	12.6	22.3	18.9	8.0

Furthermore between 2013 and 2015 the time taken for Cornerstone adopters to have a child placed with them child reduced dramatically, albeit still longer than a non-Cornerstone adopter on average. Those adopters who submitted their ROIs in 2013 and received Cornerstone support waited roughly 31 months to have a child placed. This compared with Cornerstone adopters who submitted their ROI in 2015 who waited around 14 months to be placed with a child; a major reduction in time. On average Cornerstone adopters who submitted their ROI in 2013 waited a year and half longer than Cornerstone adopters who submitted their ROI in 2015 (see Table 6).

Table 6: average length of adoption process, ROI to placement per adopter (months)

	2013	2014	2015
Cornerstone adopter	30.5	19.5	13.3
Non-Cornerstone adopter	28.3	18	7.3

Limitations of the evaluation

This evaluation has limitations and the impact of Cornerstone's schemes would benefit from further scrutiny. Small amounts of data and information were missing from this evaluation and not all local authorities were represented in different parts of the analysis. For instance, analysis conducted to assess whether Cornerstone's schemes have accelerated the placement and encouraged adopters to take on more complex children was based on six out of the seven local authorities included in this review; Hounslow's figures on adopters were missing. Reading adopters were not represented in interview findings and only Hounslow and Ealing social workers were represented in the professionals' focus group. The survey, however, did capture the views of adopters from all of the seven areas.

The evaluation analysis was conducted from a small sample; more longitudinal data over a longer period of time could offer more insight into how the schemes impacted on adopters' journeys through the system and local authority resources and decision making over time. It could also reveal if more stable placements were achieved after receiving accessing support from the Cornerstone schemes.

Some interviewees were self-selected therefore findings are open to potential bias.

Findings about costs and timescales are based on small samples therefore should also be used cautiously and are not conclusive.

Learning for national policy and practice

The evaluation of the Cornerstone programme has produced useful learning for national policy and practice.

Restorative Parenting Training: learning

Cornerstone's RPT showed positive signs of improving adopter's parental confidence and skills to deal with behavioural and emotional issues. The combination of discussions about understanding adopted children's challenging behaviour and a providing a set of techniques (and the opportunity to practise them) was a key contributor to these improvements.

Adopters found the adopter and therapist co-facilitation of the RPT course helpful as it reinforced both theory and practical examples. They considered the presence of the adopter an important feature in understanding and having the confidence to put PACE techniques into practice, but in come case would have liked more opportunity to try out approaches such as PACE and then discuss them further.

Adopters indicated that RPT and parenting techniques would be most useful to learn during early placement as they can apply their teaching to practice.

A practical suggestion from participants was that it was useful for adopters in a couple to be able to attend together and that Cornerstone sessions that run at the weekend and evenings would be helpful to fit around job commitments. One social worker suggested that a targeted men only session may be useful to understand some of the specific challenges that adoptive fathers face.

Mentoring: learning

Adopters appreciated that their mentor was separate from their local authority as they could offer a different perspective on their situation, and answer or discuss any worries they might not feel comfortable talking about with their social worker.

Some adopters stated that they would get in touch with their mentor for support before approaching their social worker, this independence that the mentor offers is beneficial and shows promise in being able to relieve some additional workload for social workers by fielding questions.

The findings also showed the importance of careful matching between adopters and mentors. Adopters found the support from a mentor most useful when there was a specific shared experience such as being a single adopter.

Professionals feedback: learning

Social workers welcomed the additional support the Cornerstone schemes provided and saw the mentoring scheme in particular as appropriately diverting queries away from them. The schemes show promising practice about how partnership working can take place with social care teams.

Local authority data: learning

Results demonstrated that the majority (86%) of Cornerstone adopters were matched externally in another local authority. This suggests that Cornerstone's support helps with prepare robust adopters who can be matched out of borough.

Conclusion

Cornerstone has demonstrated an extremely positive impact on adopters who have taken part in one or both of their mentoring and RPT schemes. Findings from this evaluation have shown that Cornerstone successfully provided adopters from different stages of the adoption journey with support and/or skills to deal with challenges they could face before and/or after their child is placed with them. Social workers also considered Cornerstone's mentoring and RPT initiatives to be particularly relevant to adopters' lives and as such actively referred adopters in their area to the programmes.

Adopters who were partnered with a mentor described the scheme as unique because it offered emotional support, encouragement and personal advice from someone who had gone through the system as well as the opportunity to ask questions they might feel nervous about asking the local authority because of the fear of being judged. The majority of adopters involved in this evaluation who took part in Cornerstone's mentoring scheme said they had developed a trusting relationship with their mentor and would turn to their mentor for support before contacting their social worker. This shows promising signs of Cornerstone's mentoring scheme freeing up social workers time and social workers having fewer demands placed on them.

Adopters who attended Cornerstone's RPT reported very high levels of satisfaction and those that had children left with practical techniques that could support them in parenting their adopted child(ren). Adopters valued the both the teachings on attachment theory and how adopted children experience shame as well as the PACE parenting model, and considered this approach of understanding the reasons behind adopted children's behaviour and practising techniques to cope with these challenges to play a key part in improving their confidence and skills to parent an adopted child. Some adopters noted RPT made a difference to how they proceeded in their adoption as the course offered adopters to gather a realistic understanding of their parenting capacities and the sorts of children they could or could not parent effectively. However others could benefit from an action learning set or other follow-up mechanism as they try to apply the techniques learned.

Coram cannot be confident that Cornerstone's programmes have led to more robust placements and less drop out from during the adoption journey however, the Cornerstone schemes have made incremental steps towards improving adopters' confidence, skills and knowledge to parent adopted children. As highlighted in Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child research[6] these are all important factors to achieving placements stability and therefore could lead to reduced disruptions.

The programme also produced some useful learning for national policy and practice including helping adopters being matched out of borough, relieving some additional workload

[6] http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/8-Things-to-Remember-About-Child-Development.pdf

for social workers by fielding questions and improving adopters' confidence and skill in parenting.

Recommendations

Adopters and professionals were generally very impressed with the quality of Cornerstone's programmes and considered the schemes to be valuable and much needed initiatives for adopters. Suggestions put forward by adopters were generally to do with the logistics of the programmes; participants were generally very pleased with the content and delivery.

Adopters explained that they found support from their mentor valuable during their adoption journey and being matched with a mentor who had similar experiences to them could strengthen this relationship even more. In addition, the scheme would benefit from ensuring mentors have up-to-date knowledge about the adoption procedures, this is particularly relevant for mentors that have adopted some years ago and may not be familiar with current process.

Those who participated in RPT felt that the course could have been more accessible. Thought should be given into offering a more flexible training programme to adopters to allow for people to manage work or other personal commitments. In addition, adopters considered that there was value in inviting family members, for example their adopted and birth children, to the training. Learning the material and practising the techniques alongside others who also interact with the adopted child could lead to greater success with PACE and positive impact on the children.

Appendices

Appendix 1: evaluation tools

Online survey for adopters

About you

1. **Which local authority do you live in?**

   Drop down options:

   - Westminster
   - Hammersmith and Fulham
   - Kensington and Chelsea
   - Slough
   - Ealing
   - Hounslow
   - Reading
   - Other:

2.
   - Gender: DROP DOWN OPTIONS
   - Ethnicity: DROP DOWN OPTIONS
   - Age range: DROP DOWN OPTIONS
   - Please provide details about your family:
     Are you: a single parent, married or in a civil partnership, other.
     Child(ren)'s details:

Age of child	Is the child ..... - adopted, - fostered - a kinship child - a birth child	If yes, when was the child placed with you?	Did you receive support from either Cornerstone's mentoring scheme and/or RPT when adopting this child?

3. **What stage of the adoption process are you in?**
   Drop down options:
   - Pre Stage 1 (e.g. attended information session)
   - Initial checks and registration (Stage 1)
   - Assessment and preparation (Stage 2)
   - Approved (completed Stage 2) and waiting
   - Matching with the child
   - Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, pre Adoption Order
   - Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, post Adoption Order
   - Other – please specify

4. **Which parts of Cornerstone programme did you participate in?**
   - Mentoring
   - Restorative parenting training
   - Support group (ROUTE TO END OF SURVEY)
   - Other training (ROUTE TO END OF SURVEY)
   - Mentoring, restorative training and webinars
   - Neither (ROUTE TO THE END OF SURVEY)

Mentoring scheme (routed so only those using the mentoring visit this page)

1. **How did you become involved in the Cornerstone mentoring scheme?**
    a) My social worker told me about it
    b) I found out about the scheme myself
    c) Another adopter told me about the scheme
    d) Cornerstone told me about the scheme
    e) Another professional told me
    f) Other (please state)

2. **Did you social worker explain who Cornerstone were and what they could offer?**

3. **At what stage did you hear about the Cornerstone mentoring scheme?**
    a. Pre Stage 1 (e.g. attended information session)
    b. Initial checks and registration (Stage 1)
    c. Assessment and preparation (Stage 2)
    d. Approved (completed Stage 2) and waiting
    e. Matching with the child
    f. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, pre Adoption Order
    g. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, post Adoption Order
    h. I have not received support from a Cornerstone mentor
    i. Other – please specify

4. **At what point during your adoption journey did you receive support from a mentor?**
    a. Pre Stage 1 (e.g. attended information session)
    b. Initial checks and registration (Stage 1)
    c. Assessment and preparation (Stage 2)
    d. Approved (completed Stage 2) and waiting
    e. Matching with the child
    f. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, pre Adoption Order
    g. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, post Adoption Order
    h. Other – please specify

5. **Were you matched with a mentor at the stage you wanted?**

6. **Was there any delay? Please tell us about this:**

7. **Please tell us about your mentor:**

No.	Date you signed up to the scheme	Approximate start date (when the mentor first made contact)	End date (if applicable)	Frequency of contact (drop down option)	How did you stay in contact? (i.e. type of contact, drop down options: phone, email)	
Mentor 1						

Mentor 2 (if applicable)						Please tell us why you changed mentors?

8. **Please tell us how satisfied you were with the:**
    - Frequency of contact
    - Consistency of contact
    - Type of contact

Not at all satisfied, slightly satisfied, moderately satisfied, very satisfied, extremely satisfied

9. **Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below :**
   (SCALE: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, n/a):

   NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE

   My mentor ....

   1. ... had a good knowledge about adoption
   2. ... was an effective support to me during the adoption journey, **especially during the more difficult times**
   3. ... and I developed a positive and trusting relationship
   4. ... helped me feel more prepared and motivated to proceed with adoption
   5. ... helped me feel more informed about what it is like to be an adoptive parent
   6. ... improved my understanding about what kind of children can be adopted
   7. **… was supportive and helped me deal with any worries and issues I have**
   8. **... has helped me feel like any other parent and family**
   9. **... helped me feel more confident about being an adopter.**
   10. … made me think differently about what type of child I would like to adopt (ROUTE TO OPEN ENDED QUESTION - PLEASE TELL US ABOUT THIS)

   Please provide any additional comments:

10. **What were you hoping the mentoring scheme would do for you?**

11. **Did the scheme do what you were hoping it would do?**
    Yes / No / Not sure

    Please tell us why you have selected this answer:

12. **Overall, how satisfied were you with the Cornerstone mentoring scheme?**
    Very satisfied
    Satisfied
    Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
    Unsatisfied
    Very unsatisfied

    Please tell us why you selected this answer:

13. **Did the Cornerstone mentoring scheme make a difference to key decisions you made in your adoption journey?**

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer:

14. Did you find it useful to have a mentor?

Please rate how useful you found having a mentor on the scale below (1=not useful, 5 = very useful).

1 2 3 4 5

Please explain your answer:

15. Was there a particular stage of the process when you found it most useful to have the support of a mentor?

a. Pre Stage 1 (e.g. attended information session)
b. Initial checks and registration (Stage 1)
c. Assessment and preparation (Stage 2)
d. Approved (completed Stage 2) and waiting
e. Matching with the child
f. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, pre Adoption Order
g. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, post Adoption Order
h. Other – please specify
i. There was not a stage where it was most useful to have support from a mentor

Tick box grid

Columns - Had a mentor but not useful, Had a mentor and it was useful, Did not have a mentor but I don't think it would have been useful, Did not have a mentor but I think it would have been useful

Please provide any additional comments:

16. Was there a particular topic or activity that the mentor helped you with (e.g. filling in forms during the approval process, how to deal with challenging behaviour)?

17. Were there any challenges/difficulties in having a mentor?

a. Yes
b. No
c. If yes – please explain

18. Was there a difference in receiving support from a volunteer mentor adopter compared to a professional e.g. social worker? If yes, please tell us about this:

19. Was there a difference in how you used the two roles? Please tell us about this?

20. Were you clear about what the different roles were and how they could support you?

21. Would you recommend having a mentor to other adopters?
Yes / No / Not sure

RPT (routed so only those using the restorative parenting training visit this page)

1. **How did you become involved in the Cornerstone RPT?**
    - My social worker told me about it (comment - did you social worker explain who Cornerstone were and what they could offer?)
    - I found out about the training myself
    - Another adopter told me about the training
    - Cornerstone told me about the training
    - Another professional told me
    - My Cornerstone mentor told me about the training
    - I have not been on the training
    - Other (please state)
    -
2. **At what stage of the restorative parent training are you on?**
    - I haven't started yet
    - Day 1
    - Day 2
    - Day 3
    - Completed training and process of completing webinar series
    - Finished training and webinar series

3. **At what point during your adoption journey did you take part in RPT?**
    a. Pre Stage 1 (e.g. attended information session)
    b. Initial checks and registration (Stage 1)
    c. Assessment and preparation (Stage 2)
    d. Approved (completed Stage 2) and waiting
    e. Matching with the child
    f. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, pre Adoption Order
    g. Child 'placed' (moved in) with you, post Adoption Order
    h. Other – please specify

(x)

4. **Did you attend the training with your partner?**
    Yes
    No
    Prefer not to say
    N/A

5. **If yes, please tell us if you thought it was beneficial for you to both attend. Why/why not?**

6. **If no, do you think it would have been useful to attend? Why/Why not?**

7. **Overall, how satisfied were you with the Cornerstone RPT(3 day group work)?**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

8. **What aspect of the restorative parenting training was most helpful to you?**

9. **Do you feel like your child/ren has benefited, or will benefit in the future, from your attendance at the 3 day group work?**
    - Has benefitted
    - Had not yet benefitted but I think will in the future
    - Has not benefitted and I don't think will benefit in the future

    Please tell us more about your answer:

10. **Please tell us about any changes you have noticed in your child/ren's behaviour:**

11. **What did you hope to get out of the restorative parenting training?**

12. **Did you get what you hoped out of the training?**
    Yes / No / Not sure
13. **Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below**
    (SCALE: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, n/a)

RPT has …

I. Improved my understanding and knowledge about the adoption process
II. Encouraged me to adopt sooner than I originally planned
III. Equipped me with effective techniques and strategies to parent an adopted child
IV. Helped me feel more prepared to adopt
V. Helped me feel more confident as to parent a child who has experienced trauma adopter
VI. Helped me feel more confident in forming an attachment with adopted children
VII. Helped me better understand the needs of adopted children
VIII. Made me feel more able to adopt children with complex needs or 'hard to place' children

- Please provide any additional comments:

14. **What did you think about the following (SCALE: very good, good, neither good nor poor, poor, very poor)**

a) The content of the training
b) Practical arrangements for the session e.g. venue, refreshments etc.
c) The presentation of the training
d) The knowledge of the trainer
e) Group work and group discussions
f) Therapist attendance and presentation
g) Adopter attendance and talk

Please add any additional comments:

15. **Did the restorative parenting training come at the right stage in your adoption journey?**

- Much too soon
- A bit too soon
- Just right
- A bit late
- Much too late

- **Comments**

16. **Have you attended any other ~~parenting~~ adoption training before the Cornerstone programme?**
    Yes/No

- *If yes, what was the training? How did this compare to Cornerstone's training?*

17. **Please let us know if the Cornerstone parenting training make a difference to how you proceeded with your adoption journey?**

18. **Are there any other topics not covered in the course that you would have found useful or any improvements you think could be made to the training?**

19. **Would you recommend the restorative parenting training to another adopter?**

- **All adopters**
- **Selected adopters (please specific)**
- **I would not recommended to adopters**

Comments:

Webinars

1. **Please tick the webinars you have watched :**

- Filial play
- Art therapy
- Music therapy
- Play therapy
- Cornerstone reflections
- Education
- Adoption Support
- Sensory Awareness

2. **Overall, how satisfied were you with the Cornerstone webinars?**
   Very unsatisfied
   Unsatisfied
   Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied
   Satisfied
   Very satisfied

3. **How useful have you found the webinars in helping you remember and apply learning from the 3 day training ?**

Not very useful, not useful, neither not useful or useful, useful, very useful, haven't watched

Comments:

4. **Did you experience any difficulties in watching the webinars?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please tell us about this

5. **Do you think the webinars could be improved in any way?**
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please tell us how

Questions for those who have used RPT and mentoring

22. **Was there a part of your adoption journey when you didn't have a mentor but would have liked one?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. If yes - When and why?

1. **Did the support from the mentoring scheme and restorative parenting training complement each other?**

- Yes
- No

Please explain why you have chosen this answer:

Professionals focus group topic guide

Aims of session

- To gather your thoughts on the Cornerstone Partnership
- To discuss what is **going well** and what can be **improved**
- I'll ask about what the impact of Cornerstone services is or could be on local authority's resources and decision making.

There are four research questions which we would like your views about:

1) What has been the adopters' experience of the services?
2) What was the impact of the services on the parenting capacity of adopters and potential adopters?
3) How did the services affect the adopters' journeys through the system?
4) How did the service fit with LA provision and what were the impacts on LA resources and decision-making?

Questions

1. What has been your experience of using Cornerstone's services?
   (which aspects have you used? How often have you used? What has the demand been like?)
2. Are you clear about what Cornerstone offer and how to refer to the services?
   (is referring to the service the exception or the norm?)

Mentoring

1. What has been your experience of Cornerstone's mentoring scheme?
    a. *How was the referral process?*
    b. *Is referral to the service an exception or the norm?*

2. What are the benefits of Cornerstone's mentoring programme for the team?
    a. *Benefits for the LA*
    b. *Benefits for families*
    c. *Benefits for social workers*

3. What are the challenges of offering Cornerstone's mentoring service alongside LA provision?
    a. *Challenges for the LA*
    b. *Challenges for families*
    c. *Challenges for social workers*

4. How does the Cornerstone mentoring service complement what your LA offer? What are the contradictions?

5. Have you noticed any differences between adopters who have received mentoring services and those who have not?
    a. *adopters who have been involved in Cornerstone's services are more/less prepared to adopt?*
    b. *quicker to place children with?*
    c. *More likely to consider adopting a wider range of children i.e. hard to place?*
    d. *More like to be match inter-agency?*

6. Did the Cornerstone mentoring services make any difference to your workload? Tell us about this.

RPT

7. What has been your experience of the Restorative Parenting Training?
    a. *How was the referral process?*
    b. *Is referral to the service an exception or the norm?*

8. What are the benefits of the RPT programme?
    a. *Benefits for the LA*
    b. *Benefits for families*
    c. *Benefits for social workers*

9. What are the challenges of offering RPT alongside LA provision?
    a. *Challenges for the LA*
    b. *Challenges for families*
    c. *Challenges for social workers*

10. How does the RPT complement what your LA offer? What are the contradictions?

11. Have you noticed any differences between adopters who have received RPT and those who have not?
    a. *adopters who have been involved in Cornerstone's services are more/less prepared to adopt?*
    b. *quicker to place children with?*
    c. *More likely to consider adopting a wider range of children i.e. hard to place?*
    d. *More like to be match inter-agency?*

12. How effective do you think RPT is in helping adopters tackle challenging behaviour from children?

13. How effective do you think RPT is in increasing parental confidence?

The whole service

14. (OPTIONAL) What are the overall benefits of Cornerstone's programme for LAs?

15. (OPTIONAL) What are the overall challenges of offering Cornerstone services alongside LA provision?

16. Have you noticed any impact on LA resources and decision making as a result of Cornerstone services? Please tell us about this.

17. Have you noticed any differences between adopters who have received Cornerstone's services and those who have not?

a. *adopters who have been involved in Cornerstone's services are more/less prepared to adopt?*
b. *quicker to place children with?*
c. *More likely to consider adopting a wider range of children i.e. hard to place?*
d. *More like to be match inter-agency?*

Appendix 2: survey response raw data

Table 7: survey respondents by local authority area

Local authority	Number	%
Tri-borough	1	2%
Westminster	4	7%
Hammersmith & Fulham	5	8%
Kensington & Chelsea	2	3%
Ealing	16	26%
Hounslow	7	11%
Reading	5	8%
Slough	8	13%
Currently out of borough	13	21%
Total	**61**	**100%**