

This is Adoption and This is me

**A toolkit for
adopted young
people made by
adopted young
people**

coram

better chances
for children
since 1739

VOICES IN ACTION



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VOICES IN ACTION

Voices in Action is a programme where young people use their lived experiences to make positive changes for other young people.

Experiences of adoption are so different and vary so much from person to person.

This toolkit has been written for adopted young people. It is the work of five Adoption Ambassadors who have come together to share their thoughts and feelings on the complexities of adoption.

We would like to thank all the young people for their generosity and bravery in sharing their thoughts and feelings to make this toolkit possible. They are superstars!

Find out more



"People might not always understand exactly how it feels, but they can listen, recognise the impact adoption can have, and take what adopted young people say seriously."

What is Adoption?

Bella's perspective

"Adoption is when you get chosen to be a part of someone's family so that they can care/support you throughout your life. This is because maybe your birth parents/ family aren't able to look after you and this can be for different reasons".

Chan's perspective

"One of the main things I think is important is that adoption is recognised as lifelong. Adoption is current not past tense. Why were you adopted is different to why are you adopted. It does not just stop when you are adopted or when you turn 18. The way you feel about your identity, your birth family, where you come from and the questions you have can change as you get older."

Mini 'my life' story book

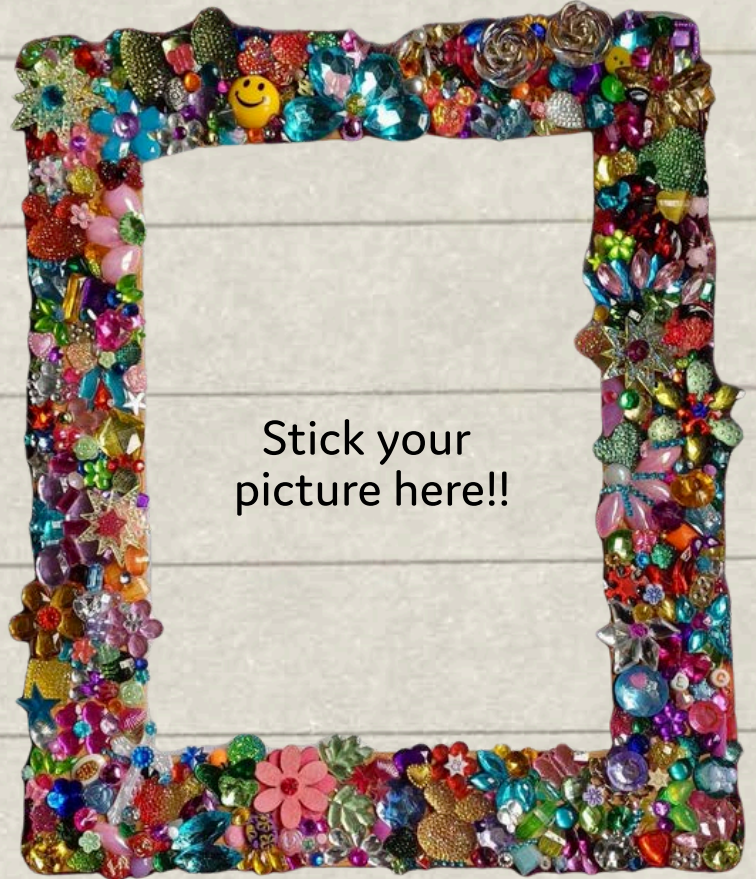
My name is :

I really care about...

When I was younger I struggled to talk about...

Now...

My adoptions means to me...

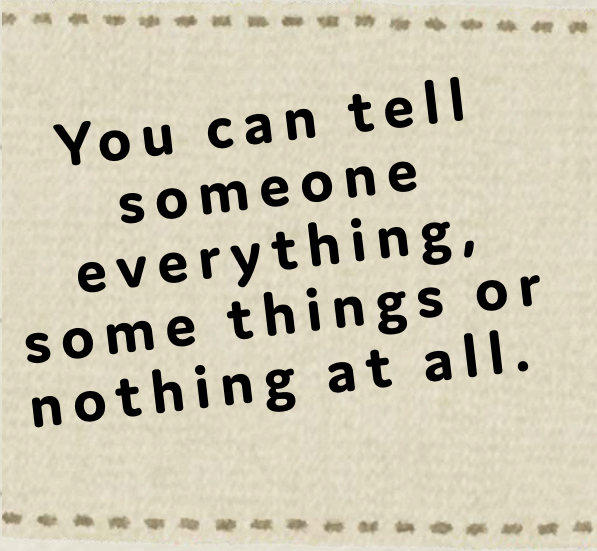


Stick your
picture here!!

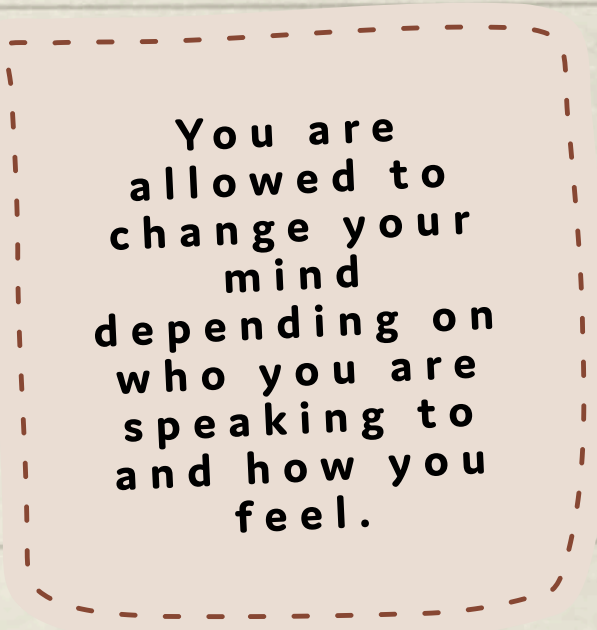
Telling My story

YOUR STORY BELONGS TO YOU!

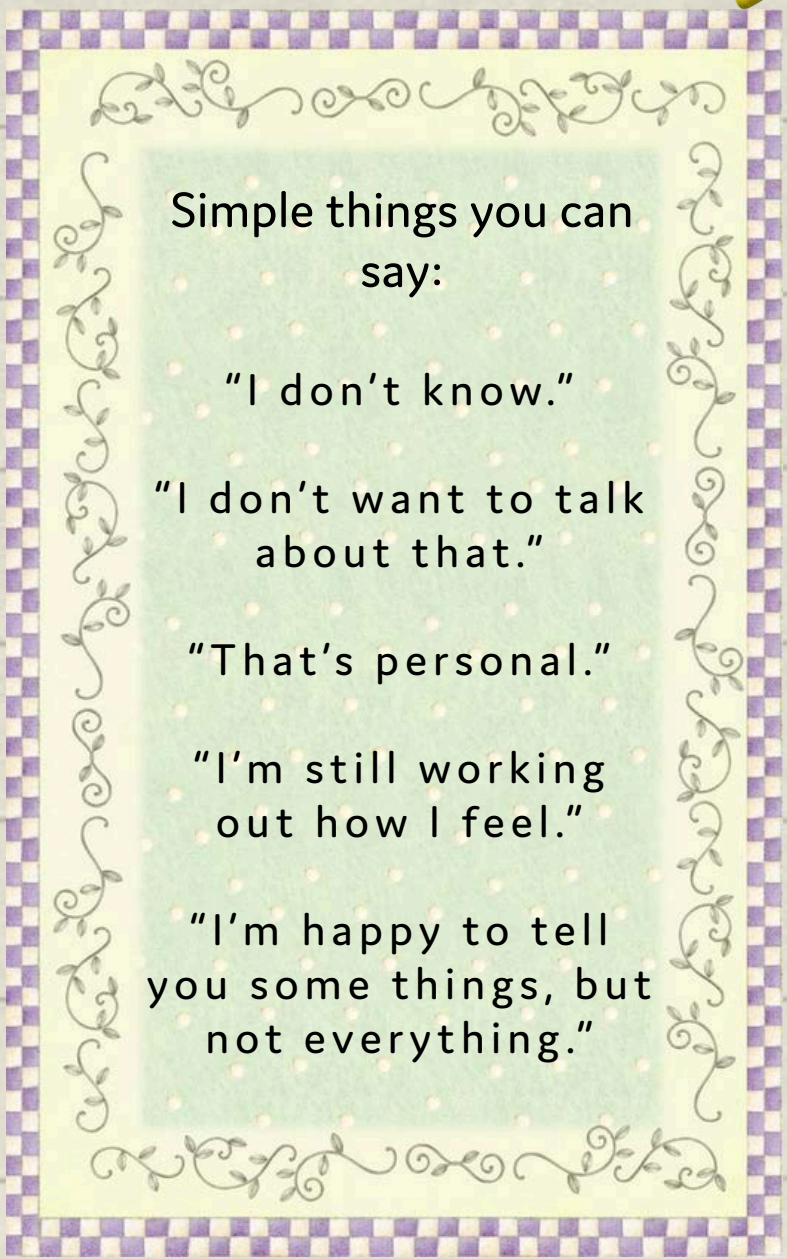
Just because someone knows you are adopted **does not** mean they are entitled to know what happened to you, what you have been told about your adoption, why you were adopted, who your birth family are or anything else that is personal..



You can tell
someone
everything,
some things or
nothing at all.



You are
allowed to
change your
mind
depending on
who you are
speaking to
and how you
feel.



Simple things you can
say:

"I don't know."

"I don't want to talk
about that."

"That's personal."

"I'm still working
out how I feel."

"I'm happy to tell
you some things, but
not everything."



Identity

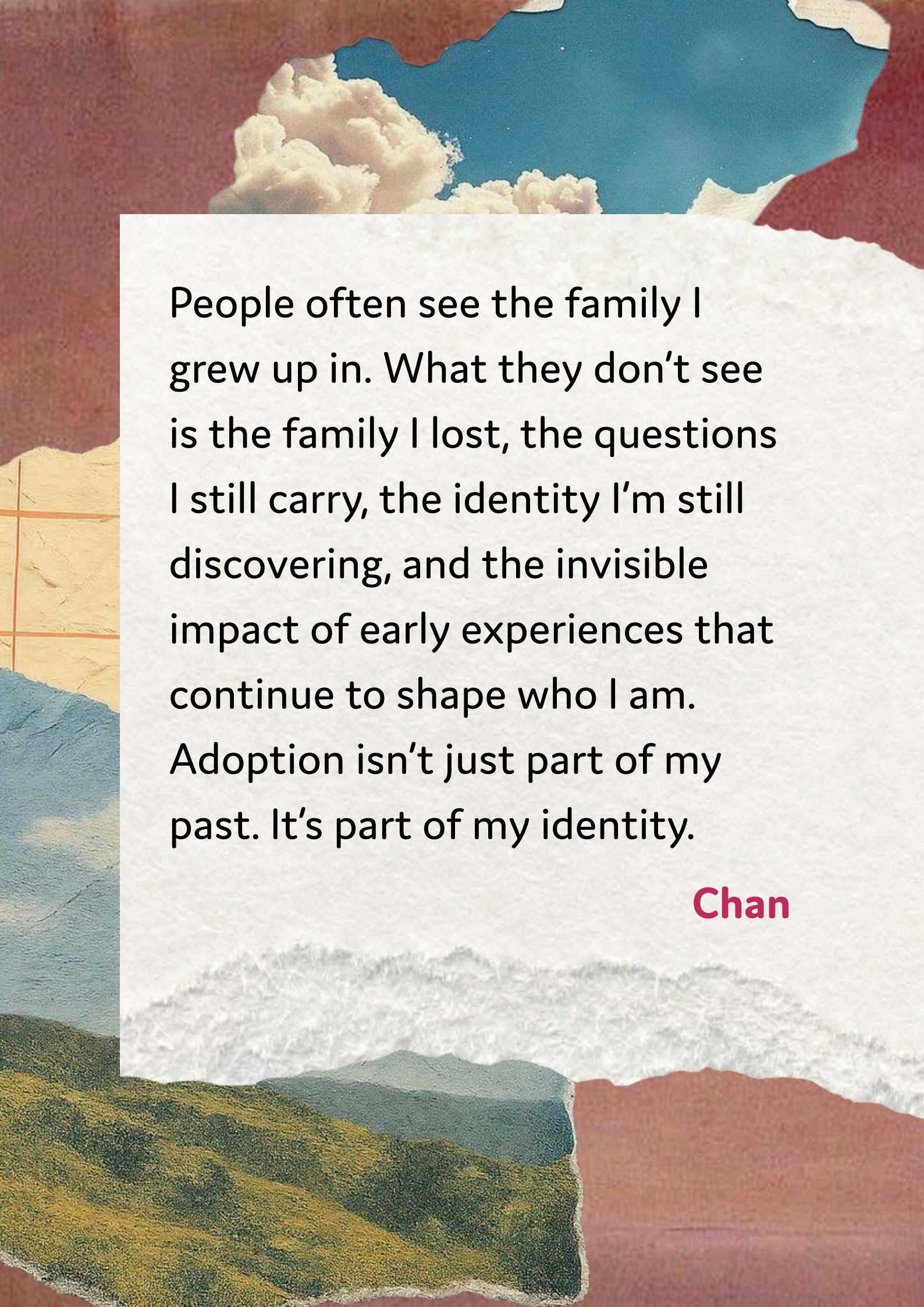
My identity isn't only new, there is a version of me that is stuck in the past. If you looked a little closer, you would see the insecurity. The pieces that make me hurt.

Troy

If we are talking about identity there is only one thing I can see, a feeling that's unexplainable but very familiar to me. My identity isn't only just a smile. There was a time when smiling wasn't around. If you dig deeper down you find a little girl wait and wanting to be found. Within that little girl once she finally lets you in all you will realise she only ever wants other people to win.

What goes unseen is finding where you belong and who you are is beyond a smile.

Esha



People often see the family I
grew up in. What they don't see
is the family I lost, the questions
I still carry, the identity I'm still
discovering, and the invisible
impact of early experiences that
continue to shape who I am.
Adoption isn't just part of my
past. It's part of my identity.

Chan

Identity

"I think it would be good for the toolkit to recognise that adoption can connect with race, culture, disability and neurodiversity. All of those things can affect how someone sees themselves, how other people see them and how they understand their own story".

"What parts of your identity are important to you?"

"Do different parts of your identity sometimes feel complicated?"

Are there things about your culture or heritage that you would like to know more about?

**Your
Thoughts**



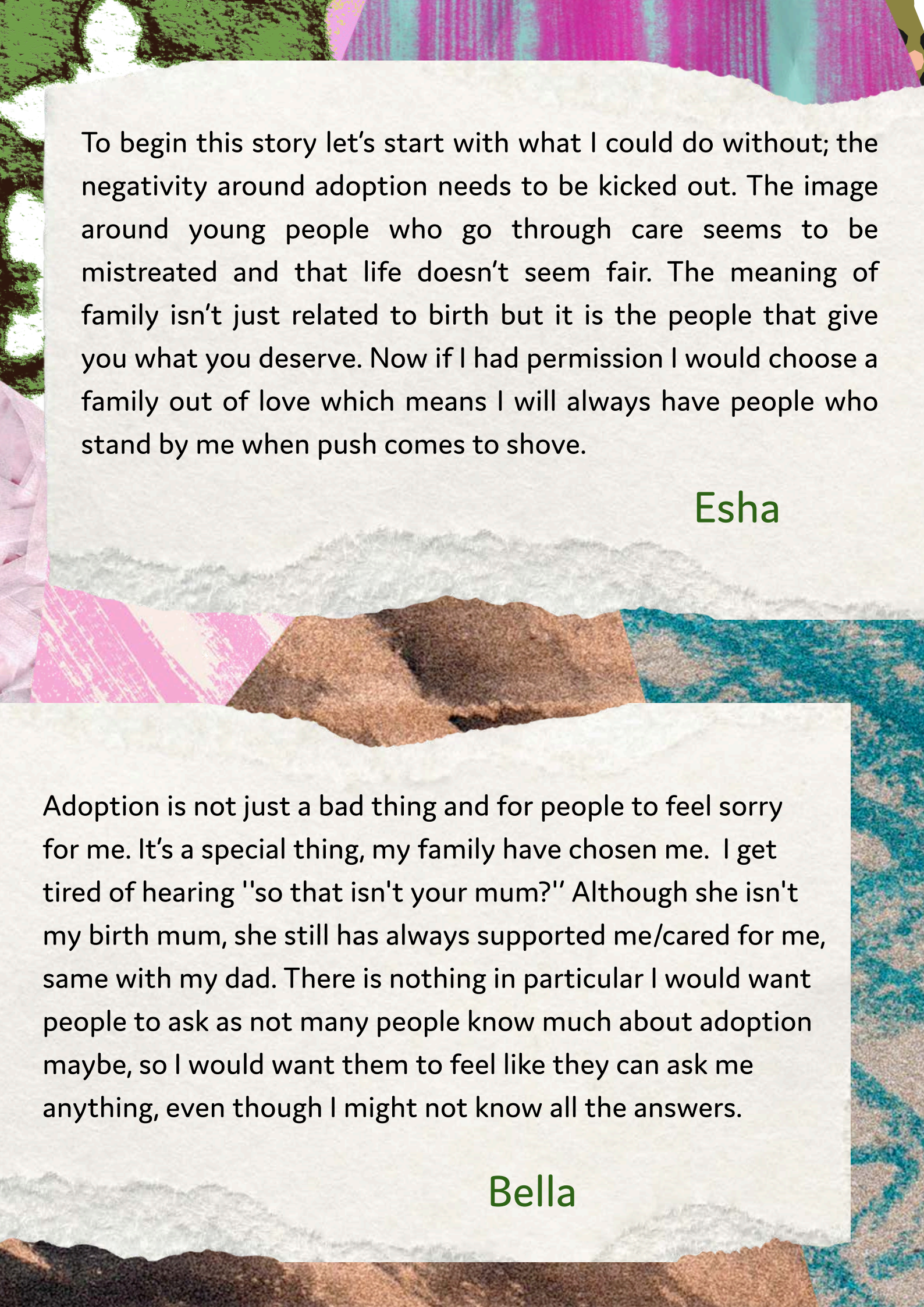
What is misunderstood?

Adoption is not just a transaction, I get tired of hearing your lucky you have a good family. I wish people would ask how it made me feel.

Troy

People often see the family I grew up in. What they don't see is the family I lost, the questions I still carry, the identity I'm still discovering, and the invisible impact of early experiences that continue to shape who I am. Adoption isn't just part of my past. It's part of my identity.

Chan



To begin this story let's start with what I could do without; the negativity around adoption needs to be kicked out. The image around young people who go through care seems to be mistreated and that life doesn't seem fair. The meaning of family isn't just related to birth but it is the people that give you what you deserve. Now if I had permission I would choose a family out of love which means I will always have people who stand by me when push comes to shove.

Esha

Adoption is not just a bad thing and for people to feel sorry for me. It's a special thing, my family have chosen me. I get tired of hearing "so that isn't your mum?" Although she isn't my birth mum, she still has always supported me/cared for me, same with my dad. There is nothing in particular I would want people to ask as not many people know much about adoption maybe, so I would want them to feel like they can ask me anything, even though I might not know all the answers.

Bella

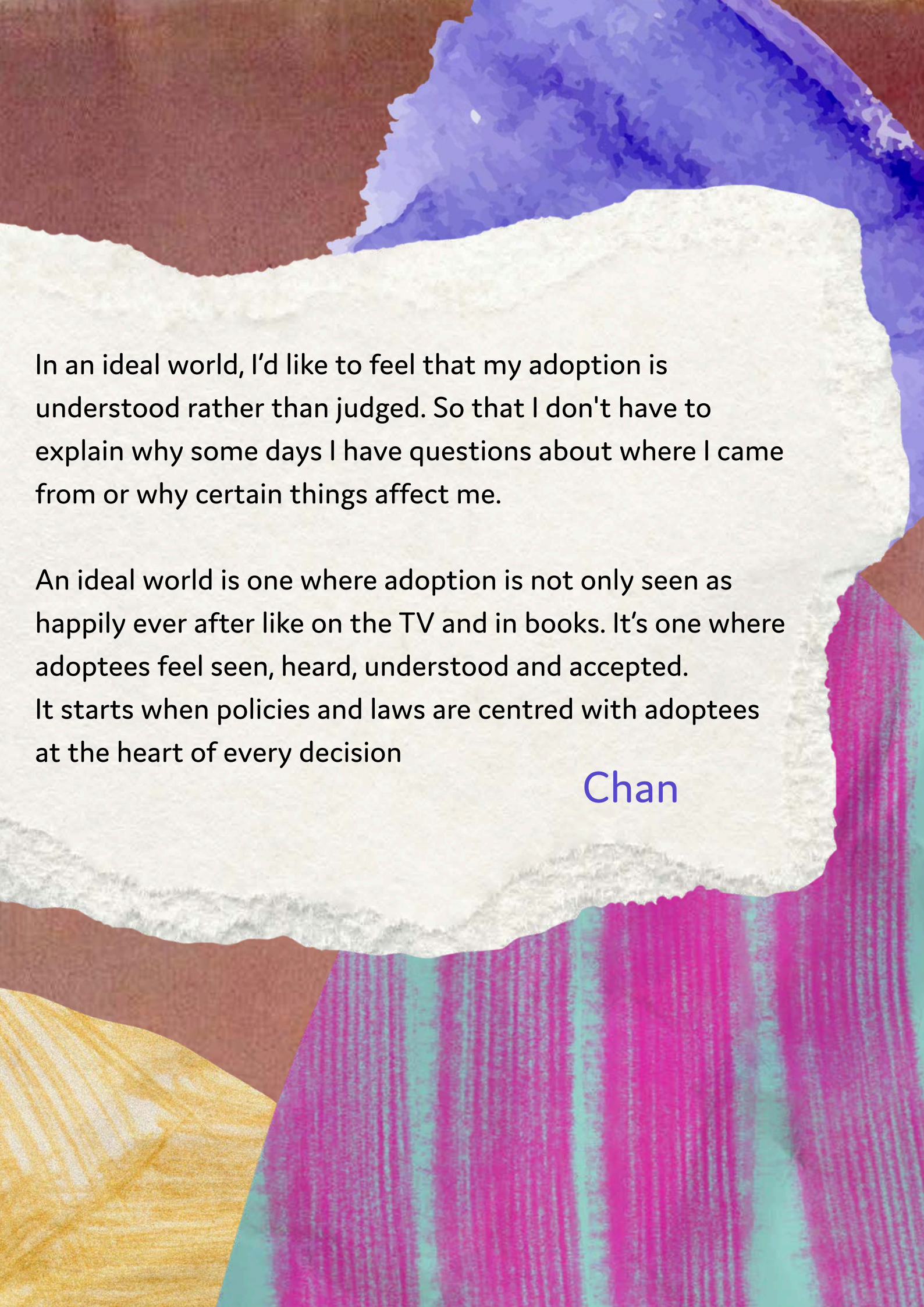
In an ideal world

To get closer to the ideal world we need to look at what's wrong, we need to face the fact that people with our background can fulfill a beautiful song. With that in mind all you have to do is open their eyes, and prove what they have been told this whole time is a bunch of lies. Because what we have to offer is an amazing story, unfortunately it's a picture made with love and fury. To finish off this poem, to make them all see, is to get them to understand what it's really like to be me.

Esha

I would want to feel how I do now as I think of adoption as a special thing. I also think it's ok to have different thoughts/feelings as being adopted isn't a simple thing. It has a lot to it to get your head around, even as an adult. In my Ideal world, I would want permission to medical records as this can be difficult for when you go to doctors, opticians and this can make you worry for the future.

Bella



In an ideal world, I'd like to feel that my adoption is understood rather than judged. So that I don't have to explain why some days I have questions about where I came from or why certain things affect me.

An ideal world is one where adoption is not only seen as happily ever after like on the TV and in books. It's one where adoptees feel seen, heard, understood and accepted. It starts when policies and laws are centred with adoptees at the heart of every decision

Chan

Mixed Feelings



I think it is really important that adopted young people know it is okay to have mixed feelings.

Adoption is separation, loss and trauma. It is also unconditional love. The two can exist at the same time.

You don't have to be grateful all the time or feel guilty for having questions.

You can love your adoptive family and still have difficult feelings about adoption. You can be happy with your life and still have questions about your birth family or feel sad about things that happened before you were adopted.

Journal Entry

Use this space for your feelings and to explore
any questions you might have

Being told and feeling that you know

For me, there is also a difference between being told why you are adopted and actually feeling that you know the reason yourself.

The reason why I am adopted has been explained to me through what social workers told my mum. So I know the version that has been passed on to me, but I do not feel that means I know the full story for myself.

As I get older, I might want to understand more, hear different perspectives or ask different questions. What you are told as a child might not answer the questions you have as a teenager or as an adult.

What I Know

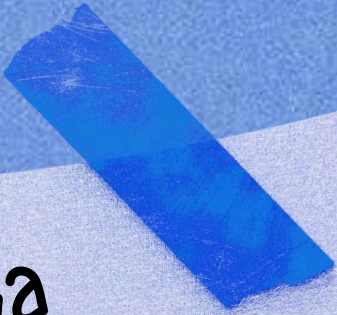
**Questions I still
have**



Challenging assumptions about adoption

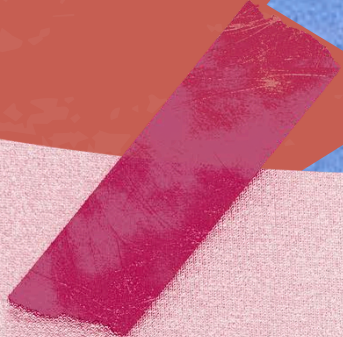
Bella

With situations such as telling people I'm adopted, I wish I could of told myself that it's nothing to be ashamed about, and that it's exciting talking to people about it who may not know about adoption.



Eva

Not all adoption stories are the same and it affects everyone differently at different points in their life, but it doesn't define you.



Chan

I wish I had understood that difficult situations didn't always need an immediate answer. I would have paused, asked more questions, and talked to someone I trusted instead of carrying everything around.

How can we change the stereotypes about adoption



That's not your "real" family



Family is not defined only by biology. Even if people are not blood related, they can still hold a parental bond.

Adoptees don't know their birth family.



That's not always the case. Some people have a relationship with their birth parents, especially if they have been adopted later on. Also adoptees can get in contact with their birth parents if they choose to.

Once you are adopted, everything is ok.



Being adopted doesn't mean that everything is magically ok. Adopted young people can still experience loss and questions about identity. Yes, they have a loving family but they can have difficult feelings, both things can be true at the same time.

It's awkward to talk about adoption



Being adopted is an exciting thing to tell people, you can inspire some people to get informed. You can also find that other people are adopted through that.

Once i'm settled, the trauma is gone



Trauma can resurface, the trauma comes back. Through key life stages, you can struggle through the trauma.

How can **YOU** change the narratives about adoption?

With someone you trust or on your own, write down ways in which you would like to challenge stereotypes about adoption

People often believe
adoption is...



However, this is the
reality



Social Media and Contact



"Social media has changed things because adopted young people can sometimes find birth relatives, or be contacted by them, much more easily now.

That can happen suddenly and bring up lots of different emotions. I think young people need support to think about what feels right and safe for them, without being pressured either to have contact or not to have contact".



Do you actually want contact?

Do you feel ready for contact?

Who can you speak to before you reach out?

What are you comfortable sharing about yourself?

What can you do if the contact becomes upsetting or overwhelming?



Social Media and You

I think that with social media in general there are pros and cons for sure. With being adopted it has been something I have wanted to be careful with since I first got social media. I make sure I am private on all social medias as then it keeps things private such as where I am etc...

I also think that with social media it is very easy to find your birth family which if you then do find them or they pop up on your phone it can make you feel all sorts of emotions.

**"You don't have to have
all the answers."**



This is Adoption

Speaking about adoption to new people can be difficult. Sometimes people don't understand. Have a think about these questions and they may make asking for what you need a bit easier.

This is what adoption is

What does it mean to you?

This is what happens

You can tell your story if you want, but you don't have to if you are not ready.

These are the good things

Think about the great things for you and other young people.

These are the challenges

Think about what has been hard for you.

This is Me

When I was younger I felt

How did you feel about your adoption when you were younger?

Now I feel...

Has this changed? If so what has changed for you?

When things are hard I...

We all do different things when things are hard, we may go quiet, or make jokes or feel angry. Is there something you do?

When that happens I need

How can people help you when this happens? Do you need space, do you need to be distracted, or do you need a hug?

Conversations about adoption

Have you had conversations with your parents about your adoption and can you remember when they started?

I have had a few with my parents. I can't remember the age I understood I was adopted but as soon as I did, there were always questions and conversations. I do enjoy those conversations with my parents.

What curiosities did you have?

When I was younger I had contact with my dad through the letter box system. I think one of the first conversations I had with my mum was around that. I remember asking more about my birth mum.

With the letters, I was always open to reading them with my mum - they weren't hidden. It was nice to read with my mum. I was open about that.

When do you feel more comfortable having conversations? What makes it easier?

We just sit and have a conversation.

What has been important for you to learn?

When I had the understanding of why I was adopted and what they [my birth parents] went through. It was important that my birth dad got to meet me. I know he has always wanted to be in contact. I did it for me but I knew it would be really nice for him.

There are some questions I still don't know the answers to.

What helps you you speak about adoption?

Its just finding the right people to talk to, calls with other young [adopted] people has really helped.

I am open having conversations with my parents, but mum doesn't know what its like to be adopted so speaking to other adopted young people really helps.

Messages from Coram

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ambitious for
adoption

What is adoption, what does it mean for a young person?

Being adopted means that you have a unique life story that began before you joined your adoptive family. Adoption can mean different things to different people, it can bring feelings of belonging, love, loss, questions, uncertainty or a mixture of all of these. There is no 'right' way to feel about being adopted, and your feelings can change as you grow and experience different things. Being adopted is one part of who you are, not all of who you are, and your story, identity and voice belongs to you.

What does adoption mean for professionals?

For professionals, adoption means understanding that every young person's experience is unique and that adoption is a significant part of their identity, relationships and life story. Young people's experience of separation, loss and change can have a lasting impact, even when adoption provides safety, stability and loving relationships. It is important to listen with openness and without assumptions, recognising that feelings about adoption can change over time, and create safe spaces where young people can ask questions, express difficult emotions and have their experiences taken seriously. Most importantly, young people should feel seen, heard and valued for who they are, while having the freedom to explore what adoption means to them in their own way and in their own time.

The many faces of adoption

Adoption doesn't look just one way.

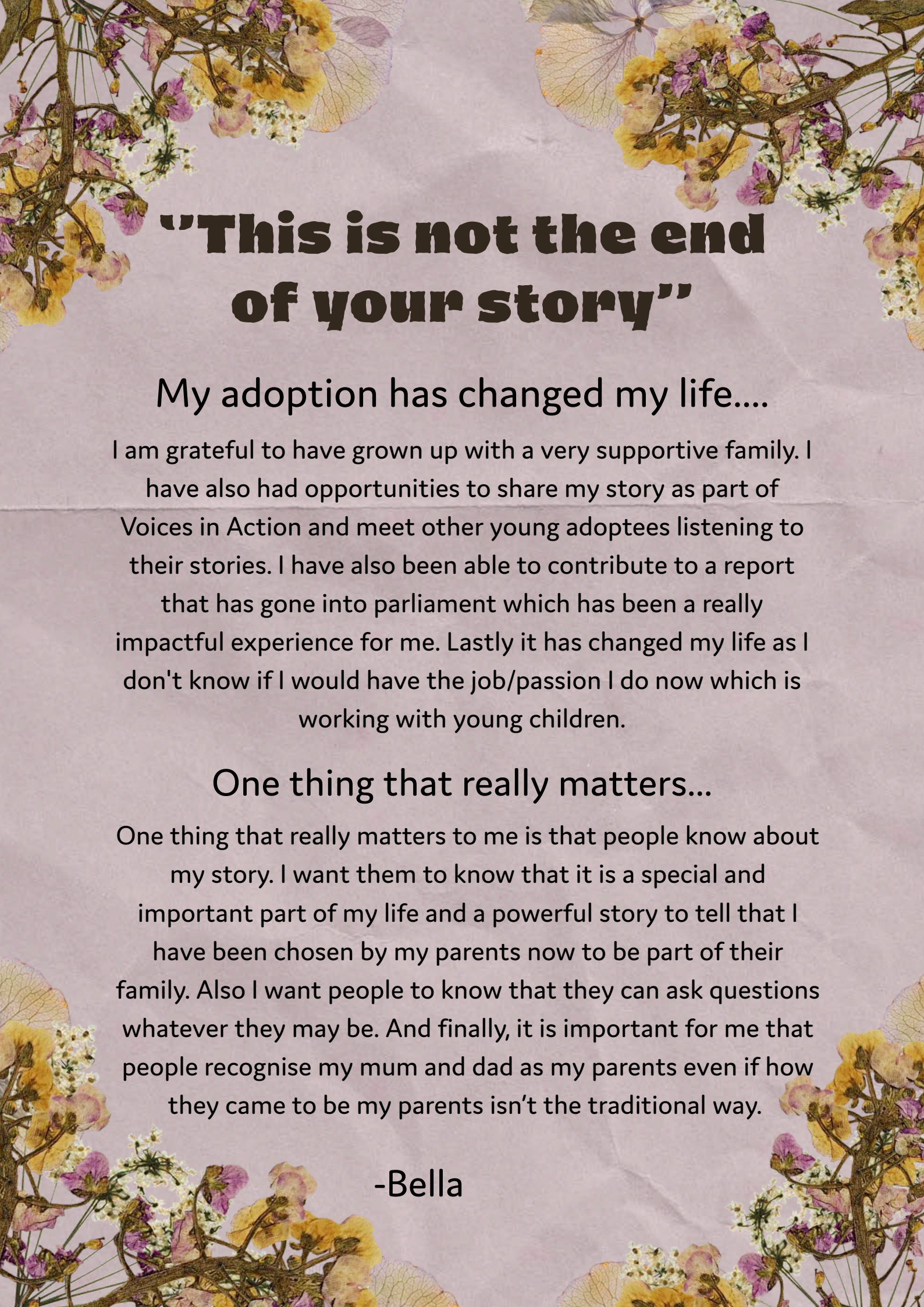
Adoption doesn't look or feel the same for everyone. Some young people may have always known they were adopted, while others may have found out later, some may have contact with birth family, while others may not. Adoption can happen in many different ways, including through a step-parent, within a wider family or between families. Families, cultures, backgrounds and experiences are all different, and so are the feelings that come with them. There is no single 'adoption experience' - your experience is your own, and whatever that looks like, your feelings and story are valid.

The lifelong impact of adoption

The journey doesn't end when you are adopted.

Adoption is not a one-time event, it is something that is part of your story throughout your life. As you grow, you may think about your adoption in different ways and have new questions about your past, your birth family, your identity and where you belong. Some stages of life may bring these feelings more strongly than others. There is no set journey or timeline for being adopted, and you don't have to have all the answers. What matters is having people around you who listen, understand and support you as your story continues to unfold.

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adoption



"This is not the end of your story"

My adoption has changed my life....

I am grateful to have grown up with a very supportive family. I have also had opportunities to share my story as part of Voices in Action and meet other young adoptees listening to their stories. I have also been able to contribute to a report that has gone into parliament which has been a really impactful experience for me. Lastly it has changed my life as I don't know if I would have the job/passion I do now which is working with young children.

One thing that really matters...

One thing that really matters to me is that people know about my story. I want them to know that it is a special and important part of my life and a powerful story to tell that I have been chosen by my parents now to be part of their family. Also I want people to know that they can ask questions whatever they may be. And finally, it is important for me that people recognise my mum and dad as my parents even if how they came to be my parents isn't the traditional way.

-Bella



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