

Social Work

Argyll and Bute

Health and Social Care Partnership



Community Services ~ Children and Families

Family Placement Team ~ Adoption Services



Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Adoption Services

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Welcome to Argyll and Bute HSCP's Adoption Services

Thank you for enquiring about becoming an adoptive parent for Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP).

This pack will inform you about adoption, the type of children for whom we are seeking life-long families, the process to become an adoptive parent and how to take the next step.

At any point, Argyll and Bute HSCP are looking after around 40 children in foster care. The ages of the children will range from birth to teenager. The majority of the children will return either to their parent's care or to a member of their birth family. However, there are those who, for their protection and welfare, cannot return to their families and need a new lifelong family.

Adoptive parents are needed for Argyll and Bute children and for children throughout Scotland. Adoptive parents must be over 21 years of age. Adoptive parents may be married, in a long standing relationship, in a civil partnership or be single. They may own their home or live in rented accommodation, be in work, or not.

Adoptive parents must be able to offer a lifelong commitment to a child. They need to be able to offer a child a sense of stability, security, certainty and belonging. It is important to be patient, understanding, compassionate, flexible, and to have a sense of humour and fun. Crucially, it is essential that you believe in a child's right to be safe, to have a family life and the opportunity to reach their potential.

Argyll and Bute Adoption service is committed to finding adoptive parents for Argyll and Bute children and providing adoptive parents and children a service which will support and promote the growth of the new relationships.

Each adoptive placement is supported by the child's social worker and by a family placement social worker (usually the same person who completes the home study assessment and whom you have got to know well). In

addition, training will be offered along with invitations to support groups for adoptive parents across Argyll and Bute.

Please read this information pack and, if you are interested in finding out more about adoption, please contact the Family Placement Team. A family placement social worker will then arrange to visit you for an initial discussion.

Contact us:

Argyll and Bute HSCP, Family Placement Team, Dolphin Hall Annex, Manse Avenue, Dunoon, PA23 8DQ

Phone: 01546 605-517

Email: at fpduty@argyll-bute.gov.uk

There is information about our adoption service on our website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/adoption>



What is Adoption?

Adoption is for children who cannot live with their birth families. Most children being placed for adoption have spent some time living with foster carers because of problems in their own family. Adoption will only be considered once it is clear that attempts to support a child in their own family are not going to succeed. Adoption is a legal process, which involves a court transferring all rights and responsibilities of the birth parents to adoptive parents.

Adoption is different from parenting your own child. All parents want their children to grow up into well-adjusted adults. This means a child having a secure sense of his identity and wellbeing which includes an understanding of who they are and where they come from. This is difficult for adopted children because they have two families. For the adopted person, their sense of identity depends upon them knowing from the earliest stage possible that they have another set of parents; their birth parents. Older children will have memories of their birth family; some good, some less so. Their birth family will, in some sense, always be a part of their lives even where there is no contact or little recollection. They have both a need and a right, to grow up knowing about their birth family. They also need to know that if they choose to search for their birth family at some point, they will have the goodwill and support of their adoptive family.

In the past, adoption was of infants whose mothers decided their baby's welfare would be best met by being placed with adoptive parents. Nowadays, the number of children being placed for adoption this way is few. It is more common that children being placed for adoption will have been removed by the social work department because of significant concerns about their protection and welfare. Attempts to return the children to their birth family will have been made and will not have been successful. These children's backgrounds are likely to include drug and / or alcohol addiction, parental mental health difficulties or learning difficulties and parental lifestyles which will have been disorganised and chaotic. Children may have experienced a significant level of neglect and, on occasions, been physically, emotionally or sexually abused.

Where there are brothers and sisters requiring adoptive families, efforts are made to place them together. There are also children with physical and learning difficulties who require the lifelong commitment of a caring adoptive family.

As efforts will have been made to return the child to their birth family, the child will have continued to see his or her parent/s. It remains the case that, in most cases where a child is being placed for adoption, face to face contact with birth parents will have ended. However, it is increasingly common for adoptive parents to be asked to write a letter once a year to the birth parent, informing of the child's progress. This is called "letterbox contact" or the "information exchange". This is always sent via the social work department and never directly between birth and adoptive parents.

As stated above, adoption is a legal process by which parental rights and responsibilities are vested in the adoptive parent or parents. In many cases the birth parents may be actively opposed to adoption, which may mean the legal process is long and complicated. The social work department only progress adoption plans where legal advice has been given that there is evidence demonstrating the birth family are unable and are unlikely to be able to look after the child. Where parents are disagreeing with the plans for adoption, the social work department will meet legal costs incurred by an adoptive family.

People come to adoption for a variety of reasons but for the majority it is because fertility has been an issue and perhaps they have had many emotionally painful years trying to have children of their own. Adoption may seem like the obvious next step, but it is important that people take time to come to terms with their infertility. People often find that this process is like dealing with bereavement and may feel various degrees of grief, loss, guilt and anger. Some find it helpful to seek counselling at this stage.

It is only when people have come to terms with their infertility that they may be emotionally ready to think about adoption. They then need to consider whether adoption feels right for them as individuals and if they have a partner, as a couple.

Also, will their extended family be able to accept an adopted child? Adoption demands complete commitment.

Adoption is not right for everyone and there are some who feel they could not parent a child who has not been born to them.

In recognition that adoption has become more complex as the children seeking adoptive families may be older, part of a sibling group or have additional support needs, post adoption support services may be available.

The above is general information only. Further details will be given to you throughout the process.



Who can adopt?

Whether you are single or married, male or female, a homeowner or renting, straight, lesbian, gay, trans or bisexual - you can adopt.

To ensure that every child gets the support and stability they deserve, there are a few criteria you need to be approved as an adoptive parent.

Criteria

Age

- **All applicants must be over 21 years old.**

Applicants should be able to meet the lifelong commitment of parenthood. There is no upper age limit. However, the age difference between the child and the adoptive parent must be within the normal range for children who stay with their birth family, unless the child has exceptional needs, which makes age a less relevant factor.

Status

Applications will be accepted from:

- Single applicants.
- Married couples.
- Unmarried couples, including those of the same gender, who are in an enduring relationship.

Health

- Applicant's health should be such that there is every expectation that they will be around until the child reaches adulthood and beyond.
- Smoking will not prevent an application being accepted but applicants should be aware that smoking will be addressed throughout the assessment. Those who smoke will be strongly encouraged to stop. Children under the age of 5 would not normally be matched with approved adoptive parents. Applicants who smoke and become approved adoptive parents need to be aware that there are certain children for whom they will not be considered such as those with respiratory problems. In addition, smoking may be a

factor which may prevent a match if another suitable non-smoking family is available for the child.

- Obesity. The health implications for longevity and lifestyle will be taken into consideration. Applicants will be encouraged to seek assistance in losing weight.
- Mental health problems. These and the impact these may have on an applicant's ability to parent a child will be considered as part of the assessment. Applicants with mental health difficulties should discuss these with their GP and raise with the family placement social worker who undertakes the first interview. Applicants should know that such issues will be explored in detail with their doctor and any specialist with whom they have had contact.
- If you have a medical condition which you think may affect your application, please discuss with the family placement social worker undertaking the initial visit.

Fertility

- Applications will be accepted from enquirers with or without children.
- Applications will not be accepted from those currently undergoing fertility treatment or who are on a waiting list for treatment.
- Applications will not be accepted from those who are actively trying to conceive a child.

Residence

- Enquiries will be considered from residents living within the Argyll and Bute area.
- Enquiries will be considered from those living outwith the Argyll and Bute area, provided they live within reasonable travelling distance of Argyll and Bute and are willing to travel to Argyll and Bute for preparation groups and any other meetings associated with the assessment and post approval processes.

Preparatory Groups

- Attendance at preparatory groups is mandatory for all applicants. Preparatory groups inform prospective applicants about many aspects of the lifelong commitments of adoption.

Resource

- Applications will generally only be accepted from enquirers who are willing to consider children from a range of backgrounds. These are likely to include neglect and abuse attributable to the impact of alcohol and drug addiction.

Ethnic Origin, Cultural Background and Religion

- Applications are welcome from all sections of the community.

Birth Family Contact

- Applicants must demonstrate their commitment to sharing information about the child's birth family and the circumstances of the adoption with the child in an age appropriate way throughout the child's growing up.
- Applicants should be prepared to meet with birth family members for a single meeting, if requested to do so.

Children who need adopting

We are looking for people interested in adopting children:

- of all ages,
- from sibling groups,
- with challenging behaviours,
- with physical and/or learning disabilities.

Children of all ages

Many children who need adopting are not babies or toddlers. By choosing to adopt an older child, you could offer them the life that they deserve.

Sibling groups

You could keep children together by adopting siblings. We try to keep brothers and sisters together to maintain their family bond and need adoptive parents to offer caring and stable homes for children who are related by birth.

Children with challenging behaviours

Children waiting for adoption may have suffered neglect or abuse in the past. We offer ongoing support and training so that you can give a child with behavioural, emotional or social difficulties a better future.

Children with physical and/or learning disabilities

Some children waiting for adoption have mild or severe disabilities. In general, people tend to adopt children with no disabilities but all children need a secure home. We are looking for adopters who are willing to help meet the needs of these children. We offer ongoing support and training, so that you can help a disabled child to reach their full potential.



How does the assessment process work?

The Assessment

- This will be completed by a qualified social worker from the family placement team.
- It will be completed no longer than six months after the application has been accepted by Argyll and Bute HSCP, unless unforeseen matters arise during the process. The quality and thoroughness of the assessment will be the priority.
- The assessment will be undertaken within the applicant's home at times agreed between the applicants and the assessing social worker.
- The manager for the adoption service will undertake a minimum of one visit during the assessment.
- Prior to going to the Approval and Matching Panel, you will be given the opportunity to read the assessment report and, if you wish, to make comment. The only information we shall not be able to share with you is that from referees unless they inform us we may do so.

Local Authority, Health and Police Checks

- All applicants and other members of their household aged 16 years or above, will be subject to local authority, and Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) checks.
- If you have been convicted of any offence involving or against children, you will NOT be assessed as an adoptive carer. Other offences will be considered on a case by case basis.
- If you have a child who is under the age of five years we will ask for a report from your health visitor.
- All applicants will require to be medically examined by their GP and a confidential report will be submitted to the Agency's medical advisor.
- All applicants will require to give written consent to the Agency's medical advisor seeking information and reports from any health professionals who have had contact with the applicants.

References

- Applicants will require to provide names and addresses of six personal referees. These should be people who have known both applicants and who can testify to their relationship (for joint applications), character and potential as parents. Referees will be asked to provide a written reference and they may be interviewed by the assessing social worker.
- Family members who are highlighted by you as likely to be involved in a child's life may also be interviewed.
- We will seek a character reference from an applicant's employer.

Children within the applicant's family

- Where there are children living within the applicant's household, applicants should expect that the assessing social worker will meet with the children during the assessment. This will always be done with the consent and consultation of the applicants and, usually, within the family home.
- Where an applicant has children from another relationship living elsewhere, applicants should expect that the assessing social worker will attempt to meet and speak with them. This will be done in consultation with the adult with whom the child is living. Where such children are adult, the social worker will contact them and request an interview.

The purpose of these discussions is to gain an impression of the applicants as parents and to confirm that applicant's children know of the application and to gain their views.

Previous Partners

- Where an applicant has either been married or in a significant relationship, the assessing social worker will discuss with the applicant interviewing the former partner. This is primarily regarding their view of your ability to care for children safely. If your previous partner may pose a threat to you or your children, it may be possible to gather this information another way, e.g., by speaking to friends or relatives who knew you at this time.

The Adoption Panel

- All applications are considered by Argyll and Bute HSCP's Approval and Matching Panel, which is comprised of a range of people who have knowledge and experience of children and adoption.
- The application will be presented by the assessing social worker.
- Applicants will be invited to attend the panel considering their application.
- Applicants may be accompanied by a family member or a friend.
- The Approval and Matching Panel will make a recommendation to a senior social work manager, called the Agency Decision Maker.
- Applicants will be informed of the recommendation verbally at the panel.
- Applicants will receive written notification of the decision of the Agency Decision Maker within 21 days from the panel.
- In the event of an application being refused, applicants may ask for the decision to be reviewed. The assessing social worker, along with the manager of the adoption service, will provide details of this process.

Throughout the assessment, you should expect to be kept informed of your progress. Should any issue arise, this will be discussed with you.

The manager of the adoption service will visit at least once during the assessment but if a matter arises within the assessment, which you feel requires discussion with the manager you should feel confident in asking for a meeting.

Adoption and the law

Adoption is the legal process by which a child becomes a full and permanent member of a new family. The placement of children for adoption can only be carried out by approved adoption agencies, such as the local authority.

The birth parents, including an unmarried father if he has parental rights and responsibilities, must be asked whether or not they agree to adoption. If they do not agree, the court must decide if there are grounds to dispense with their agreement. The court will hold a hearing for this purpose and the birth parents will have the opportunity to contest the adoption petition. Contested court cases can be lengthy and expensive. If the child has been placed by the social work department in the belief that adoption is in the best interests of the child, the department will undertake to meet reasonable legal costs.

Few children are placed for adoption with their parents' agreement, although not all parents actively contest the legal action. The majority of children placed with adoptive families will be subject to compulsory measures of care imposed by the Children's Hearing, to which they will have been referred when their home circumstances were not meeting their needs. The Supervision Order (Section 83 of the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995) imposed by the Children's Hearing will usually be terminated when the adoption order is granted. Until this point, the Children's Hearing makes most of the important decisions for children who are subject to Supervision Orders, including where they will live. When the social work department has matched a child with a prospective adoptive family, a Children's Hearing will endorse the move of the child to his / her new family.

Birth parents have the right to attend Children's Hearings and also to know where and with whom their child is staying. In certain circumstances, these details can be withheld. This is usually the case in an adoptive placement but not always. The Children's Hearing, while a Supervision Order is in force, will also decide whether or not a birth parent may have contact with their child.

The granting of an adoption order by the court transfers all parental responsibilities and rights from the birth family to the adoptive parents. It

is usual for the child to take the adopters' family name. Once the child has been placed, it is the responsibility of the adopters to petition the court for an adoption order, usually employing the services of a solicitor with experience of adoption law. The timing of this will be discussed with you by your social worker but may be determined by the legal processes.

What about finance?

It is usual for adopters to assume full financial responsibility for their adopted child. Therefore, it is important, for prospective adopters to consider their financial arrangements for after a child has been placed, taking into account the additional financial commitment a child involves. This may include a period when one parent remains at home. Adoptive families are eligible for Child Benefit and may be eligible for other state benefits.

In certain circumstances, the criteria for Adoption Allowances may be met. An Adoption Allowance is to assist the placement of older children, children with additional support needs, learning or physical disabilities or to enable brothers and sisters to be placed together. There are certain criteria for eligibility.

Adoption Allowances are subject to a financial assessment of the adoptive parents.

Allowances are paid quarterly. They are reviewed at least once per year or when an adoptive family's financial circumstances have changed. Allowances may be terminated if the criteria for the allowance no longer pertains or if a family's circumstances change.

When the family placement social worker visits he or she will give you more information about Allowances.

Support after adoption

Argyll and Bute HSCP remains committed to supporting adoptive families after an adoption order has been granted.

- Following the granting of an adoption order, Argyll and Bute HSCP pays for the adoptive family to have a three year membership of Adoption UK. Adoption UK is the leading charity providing support and advocacy for all those parenting or supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents.
- There will be an allocated worker for the adoptive family, who will remain in direct contact for one year following the adoption. After this time, when circumstances require it, support remains available to the adoptive family.
- Argyll and Bute HSCP subscribe to Scotland's Adoption Support Service (SASS). Barnardo's SASS is a post-adoption service offering advice, support and counselling to anyone affected by adoption. Adoptive families can self-refer to SASS or contact the family placement team and ask to be referred.
- Argyll and Bute HSCP provide a minimum of two opportunities per year for adoptive families to get together for support.
- Argyll and Bute HSCP will provide training opportunities to adoptive families.
- Communication is maintained with adoptive families by email correspondence.

Intercountry Adoption

Argyll and Bute HSCP accepts enquiries from those wishing to adopt a child from outwith the United Kingdom.

Intercountry adoption is complex, as each country has different criteria which applicants are required to meet. The legal requirements of each country also differs. There will be an expectation that you will find out the relevant information about the requirements of the country from which you wish to adopt.

It is essential that applicants discuss their intentions prior to embarking upon adopting a child from another country.

Argyll and Bute HSCP will provide a social worker to undertake the assessment which will be very similar to that described in the Assessment Process within this pack. It is very likely there will be additional requirements which your country of choice may have stipulated.

Your assessment will be considered by Argyll and Bute HSCP's Approval and Matching Panel before being submitted to the Scottish Government for approval and the issuing of an Eligibility Certificate.

As with adoption applications for children resident in the United Kingdom our timescales remain the same. However, applicants should be advised that there are no timescales for the progress of the assessment after it is sent to the Scottish Government.

For further information about Intercountry Adoption you may wish to consult the following websites:

<https://www.mygov.scot/adopting-child-from-abroad/>

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/lac/adoption/incountryadoption>

<http://www.corambaaf.org.uk>

Suggested websites and reading



Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland

AFA Scotland
Foxglove offices/GF2
14 Links Place
Edinburgh, EH6 7EZ

www.afascotland.com

Phone: 0131 322 8490

Email: info@afascotland.com



CoramBAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy

CoramBAAF
Coram Campus
41 Brunswick Square
London, WC1N 1AZ

www.corambaaf.org.uk

Phone: 020 7520 0300

Email: advice@corambaaf.org.uk

adoptionUK

for every adoptive family

Adoption UK,
Units 11 and 12, Vantage Business Park,
Bloxham Road, Banbury, OX16 9UX

Phone: 01295 752240

www.adoptionuk.org/

Email: admin@adoptionuk.org.uk



Barnardo's Scotland Adoption Support Service

Building 10000
Academy Park
Gower Park
Glasgow
G5 11PR

www.barnardos.org.uk

Phone: 0141 419 4796

Email: sass@barnardos.org.uk

Books

Adopting a Child in Scotland

By Robert Swift, BAAF

The Adoption Experience: Families Who Give Children a Second Chance

By Ann Morris, Adoption UK

An Adoption Diary

By Moira James, BAAF

Loving and Living with Traumatized Children: Reflections by Adoptive Parents

By Megan Hirst, BAAF

Adopters on Adoption: Reflections on Parenthood and Children

By David Howe, BAAF

Suggestions, comments or complaints

If you would like to make a suggestion, comment or complaint about Social Work Services please do so in writing to:

Argyll and Bute HSCP

Kilmory

Lochgilphead

PA31 8RT

Phone: 01546 605-517

Alternatively you can make a complaint to Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) about the quality of service provided by a registered care service. Please refer the matter to:

The Care Inspectorate

Compass House

11 Riverside Drive

Dundee, DD1 4NY

Phone: 0345 600 9527

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, you will then have the right to refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman by writing to:

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

4 Melville Street

Edinburgh, EH3 7NS

Phone: 0800 377 7330

You must do this within 12 months of first being notified of the matter you are complaining about.

