

Project Summary

The Adoption Support Fund: Market Review and Implementation Evaluation

Commissioned by the Department for Education (2014-2015), with Adoption UK

Policy and practice background

Adoption has been a key area of focus for the coalition government, which launched a new reform programme in 2012 with its *Action Plan for Adoption*. The focus initially has been on reducing delays and increasing the numbers of children adopted from care. More recently there have been a series of initiatives to improve access to adoption support services, where shortcomings have for some time been highlighted by adoptive families and agencies that support them. The impact of exposure to maltreatment and neglect, and the emotional dynamics of adoption itself, mean that adopted children may have elevated needs for support in relation to aspects of physical, emotional, cognitive, educational and social development. However, parents report high levels of difficulty in accessing the support they need, support providers describe capacity constraints and gaps in provision, and provision appears to be particularly stretched at high levels of need including for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), other therapeutic services and educational support.

The adoption support services market is a particularly complex one, involving different public services (social care, health, education) as well as the independent sector. Support ranges from universal to highly-specialised services, has multiple funding streams, and there is much variation between localities in what is available. The market is highly fragmented, and there are likely to be a number of barriers to its growth.

Background to the project

In 2013 the Department for Education (DfE) announced the establishment of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to increase the availability of and access to high quality, timely therapeutic support for adoptive families. This is a major systems intervention intended to stimulate

growth in the adoption services market. The Colebrooke Centre, in partnership with Adoption UK which is one of the major national providers of adoption support services, has been commissioned by DfE to carry out a study to support the design and implementation of the ASF. Currently (January 2014) details of the focus and operation of the ASF are still in development, but the intention is for a number of local authorities to pilot a prototype version of the fund to support the design and roll out of a full national model. The ASF is particularly intended to stimulate therapeutic support provided by the independent sector. However, the complex structure of the current market, and the fact that the ASF aims to impact on a *system* with multiple sub-systems, stakeholders, relationships and inter-connections, make the initiative, and the study, particularly innovative and challenging.

This implementation research study therefore has three core aims. First, to map the adoption support market and analyse its dynamics to understand how the ASF needs to operate to provide effective stimulus for market development and growth. Second, to understand what is required of local authorities and the independent sector to support its effective implementation, and how positive impacts can be maximised and unintended consequences minimised. Finally, to understand what will be required to move from a prototype to a sustained national model which is not solely dependent on central government funding.

Project design

The project involves desk research on the market and of families' needs and experiences, followed by three waves of qualitative research with local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies, independent adoption support agencies and parents, supported with collection of structured quantitative information. We will use models and frameworks developed from implementation science and from markets and systems analysis techniques to inform our approach and analysis.

Publications and outputs

The main output of the project will be the final report likely to be published by DfE in the second half of 2015. There will be a series of interim reports and outputs, and we will be working closely with DfE, the Expert Advisory Group it has established and the ASF managers to ensure that learning from the field quickly informs this complex and fast-moving policy initiative.

Contact

At the Colebrooke Centre: Jane Lewis, jlewis@cevi.org.uk

Further information on The Adoption Support Fund: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-193-million-support-fund-for-adoptive-parents>.

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