

Scoping Study: Historic Forced Adoption - Service delivery paper



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
1. Introduction and context	1
Service delivery paper	2
Post-adoption support services	2
Structure	2
2. Needs and expectations of people affected by historic forced adoption ..	3
Introduction	3
Search and reunion	3
Access to records	4
Emotional and psychological support	4
3. Overarching considerations for service design	7
Introduction	7
A single front door service	7
National and local support	8
One-to-one or group support	8
Remote or in-person support	9
Sensitive and empathetic support	9
Professionals' awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption and the support available.....	10
Flexibility	10
Capacity and funding	11
Volunteers.....	11
Financial assistance to cover the costs of support	12
The role of organisations involved in historic forced adoption.....	12
Involving people with lived experience in planning	13
4. Support with search, reunion and accessing records	14
Introduction	14
Navigating the complexity of search, reunion and accessing records.....	14
Advice, guidance and emotional support.....	14
Understanding the records	15
Digital and paper records.....	15
5. Emotional and psychological support	16
Introduction	16
Emotional support, advice and guidance.....	16

Peer support	17
Creative and alternative therapies	18
6. Conclusions and next steps	19

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to acknowledge and thank the people affected by historic forced adoption who shared their experiences with us. Without your involvement, this research would not have been possible. Thanks also to the campaigners, support organisations, local authority representatives, and academics who took part in interviews, completed and publicised our online survey, and supported the recruitment of interviewees.

1. Introduction and context

Historic forced adoption refers to practices across the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia in the 1950s-1970s “which resulted in newborn babies being unnecessarily taken away from unmarried mothers and placed for adoption, without regard for the mothers' and children's needs or wishes”¹.

An unknown number of families in Scotland were affected by historic forced adoption. These traumatic experiences had enduring impacts on health and wellbeing. There is a growing movement of advocacy to gain further recognition of, and more support for, the many affected people and a focus by policymakers on how to respond to their needs.

In June 2021, the then First Minister committed to considering the issue of historic forced adoption in Scotland fully. In a significant development, the First Minister formally apologised to people affected by historic forced adoption on behalf of the Scottish Government on 22 March 2023.

The Scottish Government is undertaking a range of thematic work on historic forced adoption, including gathering evidence on experiences of historic forced adoption and a survey of people affected; assessing the services required to meet their needs; and investing in measures to support parents and families affected, such as counselling.

As part of this work, in January 2023, the Scottish Government commissioned The Lines Between (TLB) to conduct a scoping study to explore support services for people affected by historic forced adoption. The study aimed to:

- Identify existing support services in Scotland.
- Understand the guidelines and training materials for GPs and mental health professionals supporting people affected by historic forced adoption practices.
- Engage with people who have lived experience of historic forced adoption in Scotland and gather their views on what new or additional support services are needed.

The research considers the following key questions:

- What services are available for post-adoption support in Scotland, and are these services available and suitable for those who have experienced historic forced adoption?
- What are the relative benefits and weaknesses of these services?
- What are the self-perceived therapeutic needs of those who have experienced historic forced adoption, and how do these needs vary between parents and adoptees?
- What are specific support services required for parents and adoptees?
- What services are available in other countries/regions?

Service delivery paper

The findings of the scoping study are set out in a separate report. This service delivery paper is designed to sit alongside the scoping study report. It identifies critical factors to consider when designing services for people affected by historic forced adoption in Scotland. This is based on the views of people affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders who took part in our study, their feedback on existing support services, and good practice examples identified through our literature review.

Post-adoption support services

The term 'post-adoption support services' is used in this paper to describe organisations that deliver support to people affected by adoption, spanning current or recent adoptions as well as historic cases that form the scope of this study. These organisations include adoption agencies such as Barnardo's, St Andrew's, St Margaret's, and Scottish Adoption & Fostering. We also use this term to describe Adoption UK Scotland and Birthlink, organisations that are not registered adoption agencies but do support people affected by adoption.

Structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 summarises the needs and expectations of people affected by historic forced adoption, as detailed in the scoping study report.
- Chapter 3 outlines the overarching considerations for service design.
- Chapter 4 explores support with searching for and reuniting with family members, and accessing records.
- Chapter 5 presents issues to consider when planning emotional and psychological support services.
- Chapter 6 concludes the paper and summarises our suggested next steps for developing support services.

2. Needs and expectations of people affected by historic forced adoption

Introduction

The scoping study report provides full details of the support needs and expectations of people affected by historic forced adoption who participated in our study. Below we summarise the three main categories of support identified in the scoping study: search and reunion, accessing records, and emotional and psychological support.

Search and reunion

People affected by historic forced adoption described the importance of searching for and reuniting with family members separated by forced adoption. For parents, meeting their child and establishing a relationship with them is often the aim. However, even if they do not meet them, it can be important to know the adopted person is happy and healthy.

Adoptees told us that finding and meeting their parents, siblings and extended family members can improve their sense of identity and understanding of their origins. Again, even if a meeting does not happen, finding information about their family can enhance their sense of belonging.

Some interviewees, however, warned that looking for and reuniting with family members is not helpful for everyone and can lead to further trauma. This is particularly true if the other party does not want to meet, has passed away, the relationship does not develop as hoped after the initial reunion, or it is not possible to trace the person.

Research participants identified support required to help people prepare to search for and contact their relatives:

- Advice and guidance to help individuals manage their expectations, outline the information that legislation allows individuals to access, understand the potential outcomes of the search – including the risk of finding upsetting news – and consider what they aim to achieve, for example whether they want to meet their child or family members, or just to find out if they are safe and well.
- Support to ensure they are mentally prepared for search and reunionⁱⁱ.
- Help to access and understand the records necessary to find their family.
- Mediation and initial contact: for an organisation to act as an intermediary in making initial contact so neither party needs to divulge personal details.
- Supporting people with reunions and as relationships are being developed with their family members.
- Search and reunion can involve many contrasting emotions, so emotional and moral support is essential.

Different aspects of support are available from various sources, but research participants identified some inconsistencies, gaps and areas for improvement. They wish to have access to:

- Clear guidance about searching for family members and the support available for this.
- Enhanced emotional support during search and reunion activity, especially where the search is unsuccessful, one party does not want to make contact, or there are difficulties establishing the relationship. This is available from organisations that provide search and reunion assistance, but some interviewees felt they, or people they knew, needed more support like this.
- Support for people who access information through social media platforms and online commercial family-finding services to understand the information they find and decide what to do with it.

Access to records

Some interviewees explained that another motivation for accessing documents, besides search and reunion activity, is to help them understand the circumstances and events that led to the adoption. These include written records about the adoption, such as social work, NHS and court documents containing case notes and descriptions of meetings from the time of the adoption.

However, research participants identified various challenges in accessing records:

- Restricted access rights: for example, parents have no right to access any information about their child, including their adopted name, and adoptees described difficulties around having no access to their family medical history.
- Records that have been lost.
- Illegible records.
- Incomplete records and those lacking detail.
- Potentially inaccurate records.
- Difficulties around the language used, including legal jargon that laypeople struggle to understand, and derogatory and stigmatising language that can be upsetting to read.

Research participants identified gaps and improvements needed, including:

- Practical help and guidance to find and understand records.
- Enhanced emotional support to help individuals process any upsetting information they find, and to deal with disappointment when records are unavailable or lacking detail.
- More time to consult records.
- Ensuring people can photograph or photocopy records related to them.

Emotional and psychological support

The severe emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption was emphasised by research participants.

For mothers, feelings of loss, guilt and shame have stayed with them throughout their lives. In some cases, their mental health has suffered with examples of anxiety, depression and complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

Themes in interviews with adoptees included difficulties with their sense of identity and belonging, and a profound emotional and psychological impact stemming from the experience of separation from their mother early in life. Some adoptees reported mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression and complex post-traumatic stress disorder. It is important to note, though, that interviewees in our study were self-selecting and their views and experiences do not necessarily represent those of all adoptees, either now or historically.

Research participants highlighted the need for emotional advice, support and guidance, peer support, and creative and alternative therapies to help people deal with the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption.

Emotional support, advice and guidance

Stakeholders identified a range of support needed to address the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption, including:

- advice and guidance on the emotional impact of historic forced adoption; and
- intensive mental health treatments (such as talking therapies like counselling and psychotherapy) that deliver specialist treatment to support individuals with psychological or mental health issues. These services are delivered by counsellors, psychotherapists, psychiatrists or psychologists registered with a professional counselling body, such as COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the British Psychological Society.

People with lived experience and stakeholders felt that both advice and guidance, and counselling and other therapies delivered by registered counsellors or therapists are important for people affected by historic forced adoption.

Emotional support, advice and guidance is provided by post-adoption support services and local authorities. Interviewees who had accessed this gave positive feedback, but some said they needed more intensive therapy or treatment.

While intensive counselling and therapies are available via NHS Scotland and private services, and some research participants had accessed this, there were mixed reports about therapy experiences. Participants noted that the quality of support depends on the understanding of historic forced adoption among GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and counsellors. The consensus was that, in general, these professionals would benefit from greater awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption.

Some used private therapy services, but noted the cost of these services can be prohibitive. Suggestions to address this included providing financial assistance for people affected by historic forced adoption to help them access support privately. Participants, however, acknowledged this would strain central and local government funding. Similarly, SAAM recommends establishing government funding for free-to-access adoption- and trauma-aware counselling and therapyⁱⁱⁱ.

Peer support

Peer support helps people build connections among those who are also dealing with the long-term impact of historic forced adoption and the emotional complexities of search and reunion attempts. It also provides vital advice, validation and acceptance. However, some interviewees preferred one-to-one support and were reluctant to attend a peer support group.

During our fieldwork, we found no evidence of formal peer support groups in Scotland for parents and only a few formal groups for adoptees. However, the Scottish Government commissioned Health in Mind to develop a peer support service, recently launched in September 2023.

While few research participants had experience of formal peer support groups, many had joined or established informal groups and found these networks crucial. For example, mothers who met other mothers through the Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (MAA Scotland) indicated the group's support was invaluable. Similarly, adoptees mentioned groups including the Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (SAAM) and Group for Adopted People (GAP) Scotland. Research participants spoke positively about the value of these groups, particularly in emotional support and validating their experiences.

Creative and alternative therapies

A few research participants advocated for access to creative and alternative therapies, including art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy and hypnotherapy, to help mothers and adoptees address the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. These interviewees explained that trauma can be challenging to express in words, but creative and alternative therapies offer a different method for people to process their experiences and communicate their needs.

Research participants were unaware of creative or alternative therapies specifically for people affected by historic forced adoption, but a few said they accessed effective support through private therapists.

Some people with experience of historic forced adoption were aware of creative therapies delivered by post-adoption support services for children and young people, but none were aware of similar services for parents or adoptees affected by historic forced adoption.

3. Overarching considerations for service design

Introduction

This chapter outlines the key issues to consider when planning support services for people affected by historic forced adoption in Scotland. It covers: whether support should be delivered via a single front door service; issues around national and local provision; one-to-one or group delivery; remote and in-person support; sensitivity and empathy; professionals' awareness of historic forced adoption, its impact and the help available; flexibility of services; capacity and funding; involving volunteers; financial assistance for people affected; the role of organisations involved in historic forced adoption; and involving people with lived experience in service planning.

Chapter 4 considers issues about support with search and reunion and accessing records, and Chapter 5 explores emotional and psychological support.

A single front door service

In this model, a person affected by historic forced adoption would access support via a national organisation responsible for assessing the individual's needs and referring or signposting them to support in their local area.

The support landscape in Scotland is complicated, with multiple organisations offering different services. As such, people affected by historic forced adoption are not always aware how to seek assistance. Some stakeholders and people affected by historic forced adoption felt a single point of contact would make it easier for people to access support.

“There should be a single point of access. There should be a very simple way.” - Adoptee

“A one-door service. If you're only promoting one place, it's more likely that people will get that message... there could be three or four centres that offer it across Scotland, but maybe if there's one phone number, they can be redirected to wherever is closest to them... I think that might be a format that would work well.” – Stakeholder

Stakeholders consulted as part of Higgins and colleagues' Australian scoping study stressed the need for a centralised information point, integrated services, and clear referral pathways within and across agencies^{iv}. In Australia, a national helpline number, answered locally, provides a first point of contact for people seeking support with forced adoption^v.

Similarly, the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) in Northern Ireland established a new service in September 2022 to support people impacted by forced adoption in Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses^{vi}. VSS works with the WAVE Trauma Centre and Adopt NI to offer a 'one-stop shop' to access support. A Health and Wellbeing Caseworker assesses individuals' needs before referring or signposting them to the necessary support, including family tracing, psychological therapies, complementary therapies and befriending.

We have set out the research team's understanding of the potential advantages and disadvantages of establishing a single front door service.

Advantages of a single front door	Disadvantages of a single front door
Individuals would have a single point of contact, regardless of the type of support they seek. This would help overcome challenges around people being unaware of how to access support.	The cost of this approach would need to be considered carefully, as this gatekeeper role would be an additional expense on top of the support services required.
Single front door organisation staff would be trained and develop experience related to historic forced adoption, ensuring people are treated sensitively and empathetically.	The capacity required – and the cost – could be difficult to predict because there is no data on how many people were affected by historic forced adoption.
Staff would be aware of support services across the country and would be able to refer people appropriately.	If the service, or the support it refers people to, are not adequately resourced, people affected by historic forced adoption may have to wait to access support.
Staff could deliver some support services, such as emotional support, advice and information.	Staff would require detailed knowledge and training about the impact of historic forced adoption and the support services available. This could be expensive and time-consuming.
If another organisation took on this role, this approach could overcome some people's reluctance to access support delivered by post-adoption support services.	Close partnership working would be required between the single front door organisation and the organisations that deliver support to coordinate referrals.

National and local support

Our research has found a potential role for a national organisation to act as a single front door and coordinate support for people affected by historic forced adoption. However, participants were also clear that local organisations should have a role in delivering support too.

Australia takes a similar approach, where the federal government provides funding for support delivered in local areas by funded organisations^{vii}.

A few suggested a 'hub and spoke' model, where support workers would be based centrally but cover several communities. One idea focused on establishing two 'centres of excellence' in Glasgow and Edinburgh to deliver advice, support and therapy for parents and adoptees.

One-to-one or group support

The clear consensus was that support should be available on a one-to-one basis and in group settings so people can access assistance in a way that suits them. Some people affected by historic forced adoption prefer one-to-one support given the sensitive and

complex nature of their experience, while others like groups so they can share experiences with others in a similar situation. Some individuals may prefer different approaches at different times.

Remote or in-person support

Similarly, people affected by historic forced adoption and stakeholders felt support should be available in-person and remotely, depending on the individual's preferences. Remote methods such as telephone calls and online video calls are more affordable for services and can be more convenient for service users, especially in rural areas. However, some described in-person support as more appropriate due to the sensitivity and complexity of the issues and lack of familiarity or confidence with online platforms among some interviewees.

Sensitive and empathetic support

Some people with lived experience of historic forced adoption reported a positive experience of being supported by empathetic staff, but others felt judged and stigmatised.

“It was a very negative, negative experience... I ended up feeling quite diminished and dismissed, told to get a life... that was not very sympathetic.” - Mother

“There was a woman that offered it [support with reuniting with parents], but I fell out with her because of her approach, and the information she was providing which, to me, didn't fulfil the needs for a more rounded and trauma-informed approach to a really difficult reunion of birth family that happens with many adoptees because of the layers of trauma attached to the severance. I found her quite aggressive in her attitude to me, and it just made me back off from her. It happened twice with two different people and the second time it was done in a social work office which was really triggering for an adoptee who went through a traumatic severance of birth family in the past which was operated by social workers originally.” - Adoptee

Stakeholders and people with lived experience described a sensitive, empathetic and trauma-informed approach among workers supporting people affected by historic forced adoption as crucial. Higgins et al's paper reinforces this: it states that “best practice suggests service providers should approach all clients as if they might be trauma survivors” and includes a set of good practice guidelines for professionals supporting people affected by historic forced adoption^{viii}.

A sensitive and empathetic approach is required so people affected by historic forced adoption can talk openly and confidentially about their experiences without judgement or stigma.

“The ambition for it would sit within what we're saying around that national ambition around developing trauma-informed systems, services and workforces.” – Stakeholder

“They need to be listened to by a non-judgemental practitioner and have their feelings and emotions validated.” – Stakeholder

Professionals' awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption and the support available

As noted in Chapter 2, it is important that professionals who support people affected by historic forced adoption understand the impact of historic forced adoption and be aware of referral pathways to other support services.

Research participants called for more training and awareness raising among key professional groups, including GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers, which we explore further in Chapter 5. Some advocated for the Scottish Government to produce guidelines for support services to outline the support they should provide.

In Australia, the federal government has produced good practice guidelines and resources to help build professionals' skills and capacity^{ix,x}.

"I do feel that awareness needs to be raised among GPs and mental health professionals about the impacts of historic forced adoption... to get an awareness that this person who's been suffering most of their life, what might have caused that and to get appropriate help."
- Adoptee

Similarly, Critchley et al highlighted the need for regular supervision to support professionals working in this field, given the emotionally demanding nature of this work^{xi}.

Flexibility

Interviewees, particularly stakeholders, emphasised no one size fits all solution exists: different people have different needs, and an individual's needs might change throughout their life. Consequently, services must be flexible enough to meet each individual's needs.

"It affects everybody individually, in different ways. So it's about how do you offer a bespoke service when everybody's got slightly different needs." – Stakeholder

Some people with lived experience said support should be available as long as an individual requires it, and should not be limited by time or number of sessions.

"I feel that if the Scottish Government were to address counselling and psychotherapy, professional psychotherapy, for those impacted, I feel that it should not be limited to so many sessions. It should be [available] as long as the person needs it." – Adoptee

Stakeholders reported it is important to deliver support at a pace appropriate for the individual, recognising that some might want to pause search and reunion activity until they feel able to resume it.

“I think it’s just taking it at someone’s pace as well... sometimes we have lots of initial conversations with people, and they can be an hour long on the phone or an hour and a half, and we may never hear from them again for another five years, but that’s okay. I think it’s just about pacing it at where someone is in their lives.” – Stakeholder

Capacity and funding

Ensuring support services can meet demand was a common theme in the research. However, there is no data on how many people were affected by historic forced adoption, so need will be difficult to predict. Consequently, it will be challenging to plan the resources required.

Interviewees were clear people affected by historic forced adoption should not be charged for the support they access. Therefore, deciding if and how far services should be funded or provided by central or local government is essential.

Research participants argued that services should have the capacity to support people immediately, without waiting lists, but acknowledged this would involve increased funding.

“It would need to be available when a person needs it. If you’ve just been rejected by your birth family again, you don’t want to be told, ‘we’ll get back to you in two months’. That person is going through trauma there and then... It’s just awful for them.” – Adoptee

In Australia, a small grants programme is available nationwide to help organisations build their capacity and skills to support people affected by forced adoption^{xii}.

Volunteers

Some research participants suggested volunteers could support service delivery, providing a cost-effective way of improving organisations’ capacity. This could be particularly suited to peer support services if volunteers have lived experience of historic forced adoption.

However, there could also be some potential disadvantages:

- Volunteers would need extensive and high-quality training.
- Careful recruitment is required to ensure volunteers have the skills, experience and attributes to support people effectively.
- Certain types of support may be unsuitable for volunteers. For example, volunteers would not be able to deliver mental health support normally provided by psychiatrists, psychologists or psychotherapists, unless the volunteer happened to have the necessary professional qualifications.
- Volunteers would need regular support and supervision to ensure they are coping with their role and delivering it effectively.
- Regular evaluation would be required to monitor the quality of support volunteers provide.

Financial assistance to cover the costs of support

We reported above that participants felt people affected by historic forced adoption should not have to pay for support. Similarly, another important consideration is whether people affected by historic forced adoption should be provided financial assistance to cover any costs associated with their support.

Some people affected by historic forced adoption reported accessing private therapies, such as mental health counselling and creative and alternative therapies. However, the cost of these services can be prohibitive. In addition, a few interviewees said they were charged for some search and reunion services. This was not a common issue among research participants, but some organisations charge a fee to access records they hold, or ask for donations to support their work and administration costs, and Scotland's People (the official Scottish Government site for searching government records and archives, maintained by National Records of Scotland) charges a small fee to access some documents. In addition, there were a few examples where agencies in other countries (including England) charged fees to help individuals to search for family members who had moved away from Scotland.

The research team suggests, based on our findings, that enhancing the capacity of public and third sector providers to meet demand and reduce the need for private services is one option, but providing financial grants to support people to access private sector services could be another. These options' relative costs, advantages and disadvantages would need to be considered further. If grants are provided, processes such as application procedures and eligibility criteria would need to be carefully designed to ensure equitable access.

The role of organisations involved in historic forced adoption

As discussed in the scoping study report, there were mixed views about the involvement of organisations that engaged in historic forced adoption practices in delivering support.

Some were highly satisfied with the support they received from these organisations.

“They have been brilliant! As far as I'm concerned, I couldn't have got in contact with anyone better. And the person who has been dealing with me through it all has been amazing. [The worker] puts you at ease. She's just great. I don't know how to explain it. She's brilliant.”- Adoptee

“[The support worker] was really, really good. She was really empathetic... And the support has been good... I have felt valued throughout the whole thing... It was all dealt with sensitively and openly.” – Adoptee

However, others were opposed to those agencies delivering support. For example, MAA Scotland has urged caution around who provides therapeutic support and called for an independent central body to offer mediators during search and reunion activities^{xiii}. SAAM also suggests that mediators should “have no past or present connection to forced adoption practices”^{xiv}.

“Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of organisations with current or past involvement in arranging adoptions, continuing to be the gatekeepers of access to adoption records and support services. There is something concerning about adoption organisations having this power and not being accountable to any independent body.” – Mother

“It has to be independent of any adoption agency. I don’t think any other mothers or fathers would want to go.” – Mother

Evidence from our literature review reflects a similar concern. Higgins and colleagues identified a potential conflict of interest, where agencies involved in historic forced adoptions now support those affected. They describe the “deep feelings of mistrust” individuals may feel towards these agencies and called for careful consideration about which providers are allocated funding to deliver support services^{xv}.

Conversely, the organisations previously involved in historic forced adoption now have extensive expertise supporting people affected by those practices, particularly in search and reunion activity. Some interviewees warned this expertise may be lost if they were no longer involved in delivering support.

As suggested in the scoping study report, it could be beneficial to facilitate meetings between these organisations and the campaign groups opposed to their involvement to explore any improvements or changes that could be made to encourage more people to access this support. If this is not possible, at least some support will need to be provided through organisations with no link to historic forced adoption so individuals can access support from an organisation they feel comfortable with.

Involving people with lived experience in planning

In Wales and Northern Ireland, people with lived experience are involved in planning the support for people affected by historic forced adoption. An Independent Panel in Northern Ireland includes academics, legal experts, and people with lived experience. In Wales the Big Adoption Conversation gives all people affected by adoption (including current and recent cases as well as historic adoptions) an opportunity to share their views on the support required^{xvi,xvii}.

The findings suggest that engaging with people with lived experience of historic forced adoption in Scotland is crucial, including mothers, fathers, adoptees and wider family members. This could be a valuable forum for reviewing the scoping study’s findings, considering options for service delivery, and deciding how best to implement the necessary improvements.

4. Support with search, reunion and accessing records

Introduction

This chapter explores considerations around supporting people with searching for and reuniting with family members and those who want to access their adoption records. We discuss issues related to navigating the complexity of these activities; providing emotional support during search, reunion and accessing records; understanding the documents; and accessing digital and paper records.

Navigating the complexity of search, reunion and accessing records

Research participants identified challenges including difficulties locating and understanding adoption records and other documents required to trace a family member. A crucial initial barrier is that they are not always sure where to start looking.

For this reason, the single front door concept outlined earlier in this paper could be helpful. This would enable any person affected by historic forced adoption to contact a single organisation, which could then take details from the person, such as when and where the adoption took place, before referring the case to the most appropriate organisation for support with accessing and understanding the records.

Close partnership working between the single front door organisation and the multiple organisations that hold adoption records would be required. Staff at the single front door would need detailed knowledge of these record-holding organisations and how to access them.

Another, potentially more costly and complex option, could be to transfer all adoption records to a single, independent organisation, as proposed by MAA Scotland^{xviii}. SAAM has also called for a secure national database of all birth, foster and adoption records maintained by an independent central body^{xix}. This would allow the organisation to provide comprehensive support throughout the search and reunion process, including help to access records, preparing the individual for making contact, acting as an intermediary and supporting contact and reunion.

Again, staff would need detailed knowledge of adoption records and the sources of information necessary to track down family members. Awareness of the complexities around search, reunion and accessing records, and how to support people through that process practically and emotionally, would be necessary too.

Advice, guidance and emotional support

Search and reunion involves many conflicting emotions for people affected by historic forced adoption. Support is crucial for people affected, including advice on what the legislation allows for, help to manage their expectations, and emotional support throughout the process, particularly if the search is unsuccessful or the other party declines the opportunity to meet. This is currently delivered by post-adoption support services that support people with search and reunion.

Emotional support is also important for people who access their records alone; they may find upsetting or distressing information, so emotional support is vital.

Some participants felt that being accompanied by a friend or family member if they are physically viewing records can help to reduce the emotional impact of reading the information.

Understanding the records

Organisations facilitating access to records must ensure they provide support to help people understand the documents.

Digital and paper records

Consistency is also important in terms of methods of accessing records. While it would be helpful to have more digital records, digitisation is a costly process. Where people can access paper files, organisations must be consistent in whether individuals can photocopy or photograph their files.

5. Emotional and psychological support

Introduction

This chapter focuses on emotional support, advice and guidance, peer support and creative and complementary therapies.

Emotional support, advice and guidance

Participants called for more talking therapies (including counselling and psychotherapy) to help people deal with the emotional, psychological and mental health impact of historic forced adoption. As noted in Chapter 2, these therapies comprise specialist, intensive treatment delivered by a counsellor, therapist, psychiatrist or psychologist registered with a professional counselling representative body such as COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the British Psychological Society.

In addition, participants were clear that advice and guidance delivered by skilled practitioners such as social workers, is also important. This includes support to help individuals prepare for and deal with the emotional nature of search and reunion activities and to address the psychological impact of historic forced adoption more widely, where appropriate.

Should a new specialist service be established, or existing services enhanced?

The research team suggests there could be scope to establish a new service specialising in providing mental health support for people affected by historic forced adoption. Alternatively, existing services could be up-skilled to support people affected by historic forced adoption.

The preference among research participants was for existing services to be up-skilled to deliver support sensitively and effectively. This finding aligns with literature from Australia, where Higgins and colleagues suggest building capacity among existing services rather than developing new services to better ensure sustainability and improve referral pathways^{xx}.

To achieve this, an extensive training and awareness-raising programme would be required to ensure professionals have the skills and knowledge to:

- Work with people in a sensitive and empathetic manner.
- Understand the impact of historic forced adoption.
- Be able to support people affected sensitively and effectively.
- Refer or signpost individuals to other services for further support, including counselling services and help with search, reunion and accessing adoption records.

Many professionals could benefit from such training, including GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists and other mental health professionals.

Other professionals, such as social workers, are also likely to have contact with people affected by historic forced adoption and may benefit from training. While these

professionals do not deliver mental health treatments, they must be able to engage with people affected sensitively and to refer or signpost them to further support with search and reunion or mental health services. Birthlink and Barnardo's deliver training and awareness raising to local authorities, so could potentially help with this process.

The costs of delivering such a training programme could be extensive and must be planned carefully.

Enlisting assistance from professional groups and representative bodies to encourage participation in training among professionals could be beneficial. Key organisations could include, for example, the British Medical Association, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, Social Work Scotland, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and the British Psychological Society. Working with these organisations to promote the inclusion of topics around historic forced adoption in pre-registration and continuing professional development training requirements for these professionals could help encourage uptake and reduce costs, if it negated the need to introduce a brand new course.

A challenge here, however, will be advocating this as a priority issue alongside the many other topics already mandatory in professional training and learning.

Another suggestion could be to establish a directory of therapists and counsellors with training and expertise in historic forced adoption. In Australia, the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self-help (VANISH) set up a register of forced adoption informed counsellors, who were required to be 'trauma-informed' or have completed VANISH's two-day training course^{xxi}.

Peer support

The peer support service commissioned by the Scottish Government and recently launched by Health in Mind meets the criteria and considerations identified by research participants, including the following:

- The opportunity to take part in peer support groups or, for those who do not feel ready to take part in a group, one-to-one peer support with a trained Peer Development Worker.
- People can take part in online or in-person meetings.
- Involvement of volunteers, with lived experience of historic forced adoption and who have completed Health in Mind training, in facilitating groups. MAA Scotland has emphasised the importance of peer support being facilitated by people with lived experience^{xxii}.
- Involving volunteers also helps to enhance cost-effectiveness and capacity.
- The chance to share experiences confidentially, listen to other people's stories and provide empathy. Accounts of how individuals have moved forward and factors that help their wellbeing can also be discussed.
- Availability of groups for mothers, fathers, adoptees and other family members affected by historic forced adoption.

- Interviewees with experience of other formal peer support groups described the adverse effect that domineering members can have on groups. The service must address issues like this effectively.
- It will also be important to evaluate this service carefully. Monitoring outcomes for members will provide evidence of its effectiveness and identify any areas for potential improvement as they arise.

Creative and alternative therapies

A few research participants requested creative and alternative therapies such as art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy and hypnotherapy to be available for people affected by historic forced adoption.

There may be a need to conduct further research to identify services that offer this support, but research participants were unaware of creative or alternative therapies specifically for people affected by historic forced adoption. However, a few described accessing effective support through private therapists.

Some were aware of creative therapies delivered by post-adoption support services for children and young people, but none were aware of similar services for adoptees who are now adults. However, there could be potential for post-adoption support services to offer this type of support, although this is likely to require funding.

Options include providing services like these through NHS services, funding adoption support agencies or other appropriate organisations to deliver services for people affected by historic forced adoption, or providing financial assistance directly to individuals to pay for creative and alternative therapists of their choice.

Further research may be required to ascertain the demand for these services. Establishing the demand for these services may help inform decisions about whether to fund provision for this through NHS services or post-adoption support services, or to provide grants to individuals where appropriate to access services like this.

6. Conclusions and next steps

The scoping study has gathered evidence of the types of support required by people affected by historic forced adoption and their experience of existing support services. It also highlighted gaps and improvements needed.

This paper has presented considerations for the development of services for people affected by historic forced adoption, based on research participants' views and the results of our literature review. We suggest priorities should include:

- Ensuring support is delivered in a sensitive and empathetic manner.
- Enhancing professionals' awareness of the impact of historic forced adoption and the support services available.
- Assisting people with search and reunion, accessing records and the emotional and psychological impact of historic forced adoption. This should include talking therapies, emotional support, peer support and complementary and creative therapies.
- Considering the role of organisations that were involved in historic forced adoptions – some people have reservations about accessing their support but others spoke of their expertise and valuable assistance.
- Thinking about how to fund support, and whether financial assistance should be available to individuals to help pay for private sector services.
- Assessing the merit of introducing a single front door service to act as a gateway into all types of support with historic forced adoption.

We suggest the Scottish Government should work with partners and other relevant organisations to enhance the support available for people affected by historic forced adoption. A useful first step could be to engage with people who have lived experience of historic forced adoption, as suggested in Chapter 3, to review the findings from the scoping study, agree priorities for responding to the needs identified, and develop plans to implement the necessary improvements.

-
- ⁱ [Information about historic forced adoption](#). Scottish Government website. Accessed on 26/4/2023.
- ⁱⁱ Robinson, E. (2005). [Use of Intermediaries in Adoption Contact](#). Clova Publications. Accessed on 1/5/2023.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). [Adoptee Recommendations to: The Scottish Government. Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People](#). Accessed on 22/5/2023.
- ^{iv} Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014). [Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#). Accessed on 26/4/2023.
- ^v [Information about Forced Adoption Support Services](#). Australian Government website. Accessed 26/4/2023.
- ^{vi} [Information about the Victims and Survivors Service](#). Accessed 26/4/2023.
- ^{vii} [Information about Forced Adoption Support Services](#). Australian Government website. Accessed 26/4/2023.
- ^{viii} Ibid, p.xi
- ^{ix} Australian Government. [Forced Adoption Support Services – Operational Guidelines](#). Accessed 2/5/2023.
- ^x Australian Government. [Supporting People Affected by Forced Adoptions – Fact Sheet](#). Accessed 2/5/2023.
- ^{xi} Critchley, A., Grant, M., Hardy, M. & Cleary, J. (2023). [Final Report: Supporting Roots](#). Accessed on 1/5/2023.
- ^{xii} Relationships Australia Victoria. [Information about Small Grant Funding](#). Accessed 2/5/23.
- ^{xiii} The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). [Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology](#). Accessed on 22/5/2023.
- ^{xiv} Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022, p.12). [Adoptee Recommendations to: The Scottish Government. Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People](#). Accessed on 22/5/2023.
- ^{xv} Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014, p.45). [Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#). Accessed on 26/4/2023.
- ^{xvi} Northern Ireland Executive Office (2023). [Appointment of Truth Recovery Independent Panel](#). Accessed on 2/5/2023.
- ^{xvii} Adoption Voices Wales. [The Big Adoption Conversation: Annual Event for the Community in Wales](#). Accessed 2/5/2023.
- ^{xviii} The Movement for an Adoption Apology (2022). [Recommendations to the Joint Commission on Human Rights from the Movement for an Adoption Apology](#). Accessed on 22/5/2023.

^{xix} Scottish Adult Adoptee Movement (2022). [Adoptee Recommendations to: The Scottish Government. Historic Forced Adoption Practices, the Violation of Family Life: Rights of Adopted People](#). Accessed 22/5/2023.

^{xx} Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R. & Ockenden, L. (2014, p.45). [Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study. Report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#). Accessed on 26/4/2023.

^{xxi} Parliament of Victoria Legal and Social Issues Committee (2021). [Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria](#). Accessed on 3/5/2023.

^{xxii} The Movement for an Adoption Apology in Scotland (2022). July, 2022 Newsletter.



© Crown copyright 2023

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.
ISBN: 978-1-83521-678-1

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1388954 (12/23)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
December 2023



Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-83521-678-1

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1388954 (12/23)