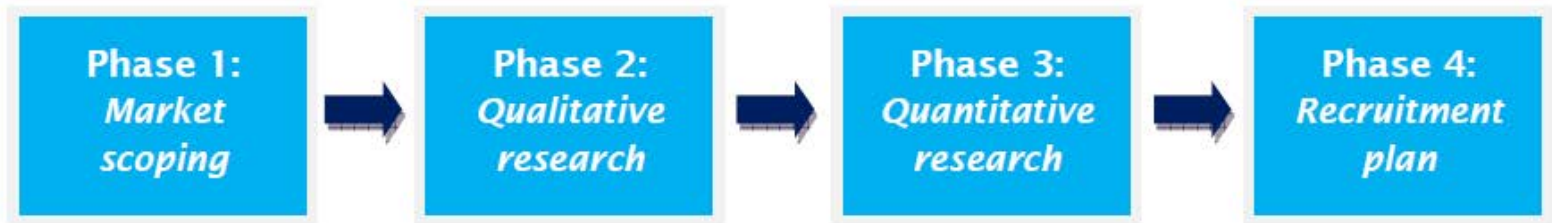


Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering

Qualitative Findings

November 2012

Project structure – overview



This report shares learnings from Phase 2: Qualitative Research

The role of this phase

- The qualitative phase of this study seeks to explore and map the barriers and triggers to fostering and adoption in depth, across a selection of targets identified in the market scoping phase
- Insight into the views of these targets will help to inform the quantitative phase and ensure themes, vocabulary and terminology are appropriate
- **IMPORTANT:** This is not a study in its own right
- We are not providing solutions at this point but there is additional, wider learning that could inform broader policy. This has been shared in this report.

Sample and methodology

- 18 extended in-home one on one interviews conducted November 2012 in the North, Midlands and South of England
- A phenomenological approach was used to allow for deep-dive, unstructured responses told in respondents' own words
- The priority characteristics identified from the scoping phase have been covered off across the achieved sample:
 - PROFESSION (Caring)
 - EMPLOYMENT STATUS
 - FAMILY STATUS
 - PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

 - Men and women
 - Couples and single people
 - Aged in their 30s, 40s and 50s
 - Social grades ABC1 and C2DE
 - White and BME representation
 - Urban and rural dwellers
 - Religious variance

Sample -

Depth Number	Name	Age	SEG	Occupation	Experience when working	School type	Role retired from	Level of career when retirement was taken	Sectors volunteered in	Ethnicity	Religious beliefs
1	Margaret	60	B	Retired Special Educational Needs Teacher	Children, children with complex needs	School for children with special educational needs	This year	I took early retirement	-	White British	Church of England
2	Mo	58	B	Special Educational Needs Teacher	Children with complex needs	School for children with special educational needs	-	-	-	White British	Catholic
3	Debbie	44	C1	School Secretary	Children, children with complex needs	-	-	-	-	White British	Jewish semi-practised
4	Lindsay	61	C1	Retired - Property Developer	N/A	-	-	-	Care Sector	White British	Jewish non-practised

Sample -

Depth Number	Name	Age	SEG	Family status	Working status	Partner's working status	Ethnicity	Religious beliefs
5	Seamus	46	C1	Biological child(ren)	Full time self-employed	Full time	White British	Roman Catholic
6	Maureen	50	C2	No children	Unemployed	Full time	White British	Catholic
7	Kevin	51	C2	Biological child(ren)	Full time	Full time	White British	Roman Catholic
	Leslie	37	C2	No children				Church of England
8	Denise	56	D	Biological child(ren)	Part time	Full time	White British	Church of England
	Keith	57	D					
9	Martin	52	C1	No children	Full time	N/A	White British	Catholic

Sample -

Depth Number	Name	Age	SEG	Marital status (Q1c)	Family status (Q1d)	Statement best applies (Q4)	Biological child statement best applies to Q5	Activities done (Q6a)	Considered doing in the future (Q6b)	Ethnicity (Q7)	Religious beliefs (Q8)
10	Kevin & Clint	40 & 38	B	Cohabiting	I do not have children	Unable to have biological children	-	-	Adoption & foster care	White British	Non-religious
11	Tony	49	C1	Married	I do not have children	We are exploring or undertaking fertility treatment	-	-	Short term foster care	White British	Church of England
12	David	41	C1	Married	I have at least X1 biological child	-	Unwilling to try to conceive again	-	All	White British	Church of England
13	Samra	39	B	Married	I have at least X1 biological child, I have an adopted child	-	-	Adopt/ed a child	Adopt/ed a child	Pakistani	Muslim
14	Jean	59	B	Married	I have at least X1 biological child	-	-	Long term foster care	All	White British	Church of England
15	Nitin	67	C1	Married	I do not have children	-	-	Long term foster care	-	Asian	Hindu
16	Matthew	48	B	Married	I have at least X1 biological child	-	-	Short term foster care	-	White British	Agnostic
17	Nick & Gareth	45 & 27	C1	Cohabiting	Do not have children	-	-	-	Adopting a child	White British	Non-practising Church of England
18	Maria & Laur	45 & 24	C2	Cohabiting	Do not have children	-	-	-	Adopting a child	Greek Cypriot & French	Greek Orthodox & Catholic

Bringing our sample to life: Pen portraits



Matthew – has fostered in the past (short term)

Age 48, B, Essex, Married for 11 years and has one biological child aged 7, has fostered 3 times

- He and wife never wanted children – ‘felt no need to extend the gene pool’
- Enjoyed time for self, no responsibility, nice things, nice lifestyle, only one person to please
- Got pregnant by accident and have one son – no desire for more
- Believes they are good at being parents, ‘You never know that till you try’
- Realised had spare capacity and resources (love, parenting, space in house, toys, money)
- All set up for children, want to make other kids’ lives better, ‘to move them from a bad place into a good place’
- Wife saw ad for fostering in the local paper –signed up with agency close to them
- Waited 6 months to be offered first child – agency ignored boundaries and offered them older children / more than one child
- Comments that the system doesn’t make it at all easy...overly restrictive

It should be enough that you're going to look after them like your own child

Mo – 58, B, Been married 32 years, has 3 biological children and 3 grandchildren, is a part time special needs teacher

- Happily married for 32 years so far – husband is a Deputy Head Teacher
- She is one of 6, close family
- Got married and were both teaching in Southern Italy but decided to start a family so came back to UK, ‘would’ve adopted without a thought if we couldn’t have had children ourselves’ – would have felt incomplete without a family
- Has very elderly parents and three grandchildren who come after school and at weekends, ‘Care issues at both ends now – the very old and the very young’
- Husband and she are ‘in transition’ now – both gone part time, looking towards retirement and spending more quality time together
- Having grandchildren and parents – doesn’t want to look back later and regret not spending more time with them while she could
- Have paid off the mortgage, feel comfortably off, ‘now’s the time to focus on each other and the family’
- Feels could have adopted but couldn’t foster – really admires people who do, ‘would personally find that very hard, to take them in, love and care for someone and then hand them back’

As things get easier, it's a nice feeling!

Jean – 59, B, Been married 40 years, has 2 biological children and 1 grandchild, fostered in past then tried to adopt that child but it fell through

- Trained in the caring professions – did a diploma about children in care but now works in family business with husband
- On hindsight wishes had gone into teaching as loves children and seeing them develop
- Her 81 year old mother in law used to foster 4 children even though already had 4 children of her own “She’s an inspiration, she’s well respected, selfless, kids and husband always came first”
- Jean and husband took on one of her mother in law’s foster children after her own husband died and she couldn’t cope
- The boy fitted into the family perfectly and they tried to adopt him but the boy’s mother kept making things difficult even though she didn’t want him herself; it fell through, they were very disappointed and won’t try again
- The boy is still in foster care as far as she knows

*I hated being an only child,
I felt I was missing out on
that companionship*

Debbie – 44, C1, Married with 2 teenage biological children 16 and 19 yrs
Might have adopted if hadn't had own children but wouldn't consider it now

- Works as a school secretary in a primary school – loves being with children every day but not having to be a teacher!
- Pre kids she moved to Florida with her husband for work but they missed the close Jewish community and support network so returned
- Wanted her children to grow up in that community and learn their values – family and respect very important, not the current emphasis on material gain
- Very happy with how her family is and their comfortable lifestyle, wouldn't want to go through child rearing again
- Very little direct experience of fostering or adoption – thinks that it might just be that her close-knit Jewish community doesn't openly talk about such things
- She's cynical about fostering and thinks some do it purely for the money
- Thinks fostering isn't done by middle class families
- Thinks it's too easy for girls to have babies these days and be supported by the welfare state; wants the government to tackle that first

*I admire those that foster
but perhaps I'm too selfish,
I'm happy with my lot!*

Samra – 39, B, Married with 1 biological child and one adopted child

- Married about 14 years ago, my husband is not Pakistani, and he is half Egyptian half Irish
- Both of them have come from families with abusive fathers. They have similar backgrounds growing up; his mother & my mother shared the same kind of abuse and the same kind of prejudice and racism
- Two years after the arrival of their daughter 'Holly' they thought they'd try again, without success, so decided to go down the IVF route, trying 3 times to become pregnant. It all became quite fatal and Samra was very ill as a result
- They had always discussed adoption, but that didn't satisfy the need of a birth child.
- By the time they decided to adopt their daughter was 6 years old and that was another big issue because they didn't want this huge gap between them
- They were very naïve about the adoption process and thought 'maybe it will take 2-3 months'
- They were surprised that no-one in the IVF process had mentioned adoption to them
- Eventually, they adopted 'Moses' and they couldn't be happier.
- They would love to adopt another child but finances mean they can't

They say let's leave it for 6 months and try again, no-one says to you, or gives you a counselling lesson about adoption. It would have been really helpful to have had someone say "There is another option"

Kevin (40) and Clint (38)– Gay couple, cohabiting

- Have been together for nearly 10 years
- Kevin was at home until he was 30, looking after his mother until she passed away
- Clint came from a large family and assumes he will be the ‘carer’ when his parents get older
- They remember seeing a rich gay couple obtain a child through surrogate means many years ago – ‘the famous gay dads’ (Barry and Tony Drewitt)
- It feels like lots of their friends, especially lesbian couples, are talking more about having kids nowadays
- For many, the discussion is about obtaining biological children and this feels like the route they’d go down first
- However, Kevin is more sympathetic to the idea of adoption as he can’t have biological children due to cancer treatment
- They are aware of agencies that could help them – they regularly see ads in the specialist gay press

Just like any straight couple, you’d want to try and have your own children first I think

Key insight from this phase

Identified characteristics and demographics are not necessarily a predictor of likelihood to adopt or foster

OR, it's unwise to predict based on a sample of 1 or 2; the quantitative phase will do that

Influential factors:

- **Individual, current circumstances:**

- Home set up, career stage/financial stability, age of children/presence of children, empty nest

- **Difficult childhood and/or challenging life experience:**

- Divorced parents, been through care system themselves, survived serious illness, difficult divorce, other traumas

- **Mindset and personality:**

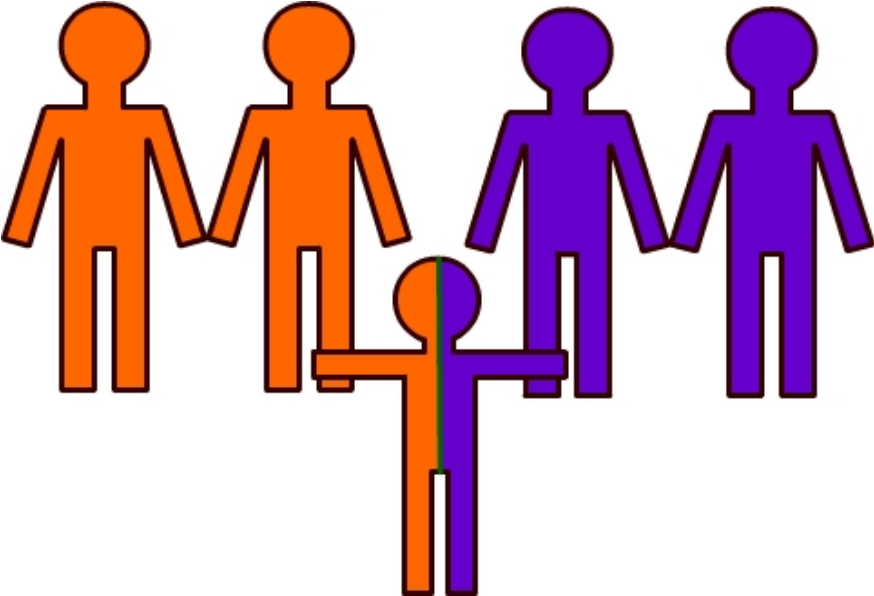
- More altruistic than average, care deeply about the world; giving, selfless personality, sensitive to the suffering of others

Perceptions/attitudes/myths

- the overall image
- the system
- the candidate
- the child
- my life context

NB. There was much overlap in responses towards adoption and fostering

THEIR VIEWS ON ADOPTION (based on perception....)



Adoption: the overall image (1)

**High profile
yet low
salience**



Celebrity adoptions raise profile as a news story and many have indirect experience of adoption; yet very low awareness/personal identification with adoption shortfall

**Celebrities
have it easier**



Can fast track process, pay for 'results', cherry pick the child and/or country

**National
Adoption Week
could work
even harder**



(Amongst a limited sample) awareness was low and when heard of, felt it could be more impactful

**Negative
portrayals**



TV and film dramas like to show the 'negative' side of adoption E.g. biological parent disrupting happy life/rejecting child

Adoption: the overall image (2)

Indistinct image



Often 'lumped' together with fostering in people's minds

Contradictory perceptions



No definitive knowledge base of process – conflicting stories of what is and isn't allowed E.g. Can or can't adopt a child you have fostered

Why not tackle the root causes



Some question why there are so many unwanted children in the UK, they want Government to focus on causes

Adoption: the system and process (1)

Length of process



Unnecessarily long drawn out process, hindered by red tape

Too hard in UK



Hear stories/personal experience of frustrated parents eventually adopting abroad

Intrusive and intense



Fear of letting social services into life/home – expect a negative outcome
Appreciate checks are essential but can be invasive, especially if eventually rejected

Adoption: the system and process (2)

**Assumed
'guilty' first**



Genuine, decent people made to feel like criminals until proven otherwise

**Wishes won't
be respected**



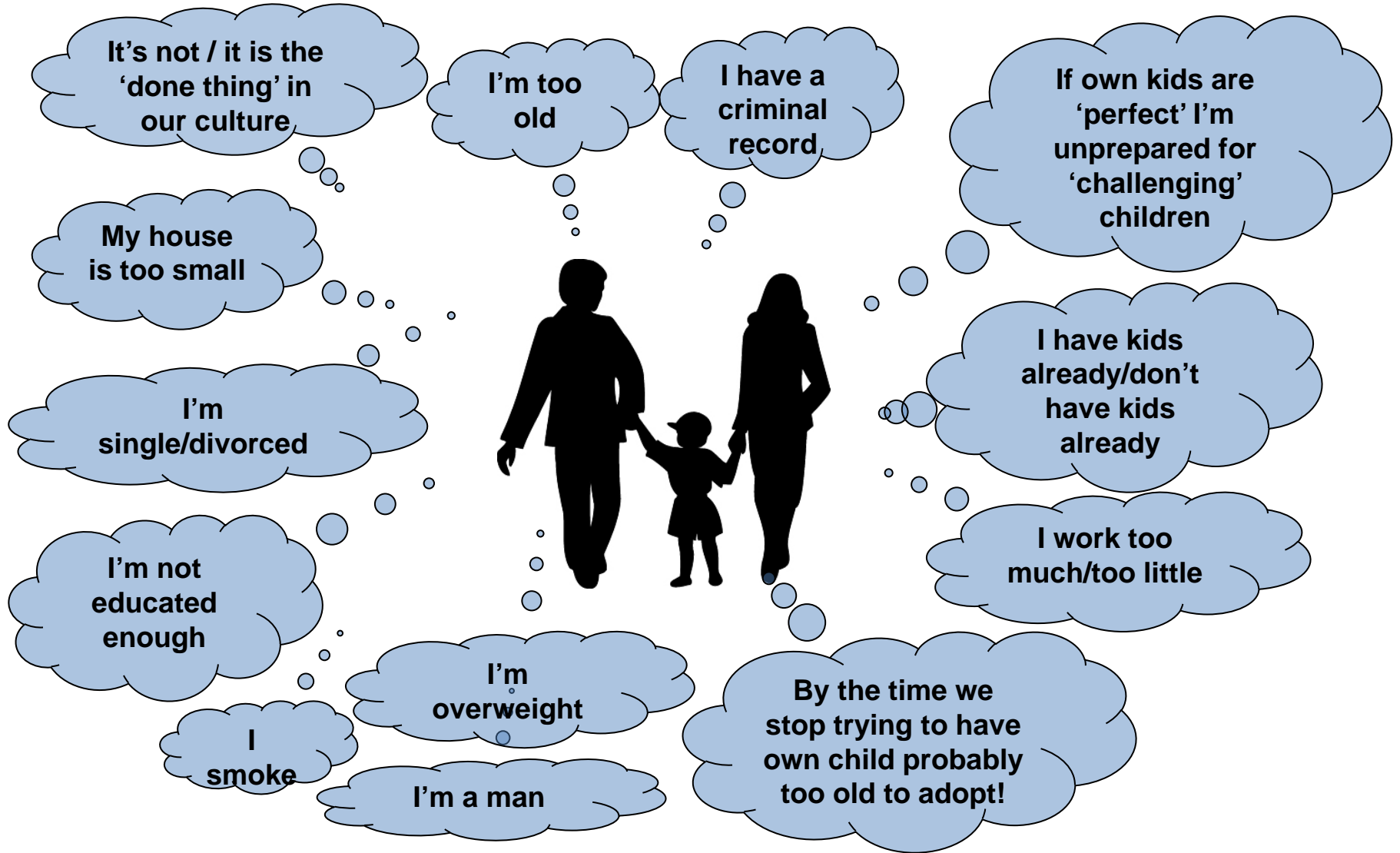
With regards to age, ethnicity, personality of child

**Fear of losing
the child**



**Of adoption falling through at last hurdle
Biological parent returning to claim child**

Adoption: The ideal candidate



Fear of rejection is biggest barrier of all

Adoption: the child/children

**Teenagers are
too much trouble**

**Fear of unknown
background/history of
child**

**Will I bond/they
bond with us?**



**If adopt an older child -
they have already been
'shaped'**

**Fear of child
contacting
biological
parents/parent
re-entering life**

**Everyone wants a
newborn but they're
hard to get**

Adoption: my life context

**Never the
'right' time**



**Own children too young/still need us/doing GCSEs
Going through career changes/relocation
Still trying for own children
Too much else going on in my life**

**Fear of
raising
subject**



With partner – means have to finally accept can't conceive naturally

**We are
'complete'**



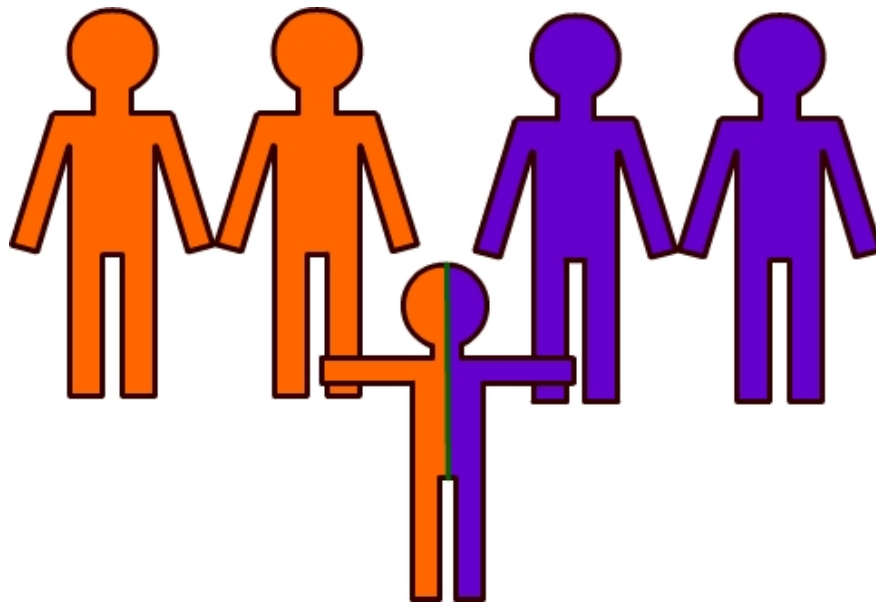
**Family size already perfect, functioning at optimal level,
children happy, why disrupt**

**Cultural
issues**



More acceptable in some communities and cultures than others

THEIR VIEWS ON FOSTERING (based on perception)



Fostering: the overall image (1)

Not fully understood



Vague understanding of how it works, who is eligible, time periods involved

Done for the 'wrong' reasons



Some only do it for the money

It's 'downmarket'



Not something that is done by the middle or professional classes

We'd be out of pocket



Not everyone aware of financial support given if foster

Fostering: the overall image (2)

Indistinct image



Often 'lumped' together with adoption in people's minds

Contradictory perceptions



No definitive knowledge base of process – conflicting stories of what is and isn't allowed E.g. Can or can't adopt a child you have fostered; you can / you can't cuddle them

Tackle the root causes



Some question why there are so many unwanted children in the UK, want Government to focus on causes as well as finding homes

Fostering: the system and process (1)

Intrusive and intense



Fear of letting social services into life/home – expect a negative outcome

Appreciate checks are essential but can be invasive, especially if eventually rejected

State can be over protective



Accept child's welfare is critical but feel bureaucratic delays keep children in care when could be with real families

Too many 'unnatural' regulations



"It's parenting with your hands tied behind your back"

Perception that forbidden to show love and affection or to discipline foster children

Lack of Support



What training do you get to help you deal with 'difficult children'



work.



Fostering: the system and process (2)

Wishes won't be respected



With regards to number of children, age, ethnicity, siblings, personality of child

Fear of losing the child



Of becoming too attached and then child/children being removed

Length of process



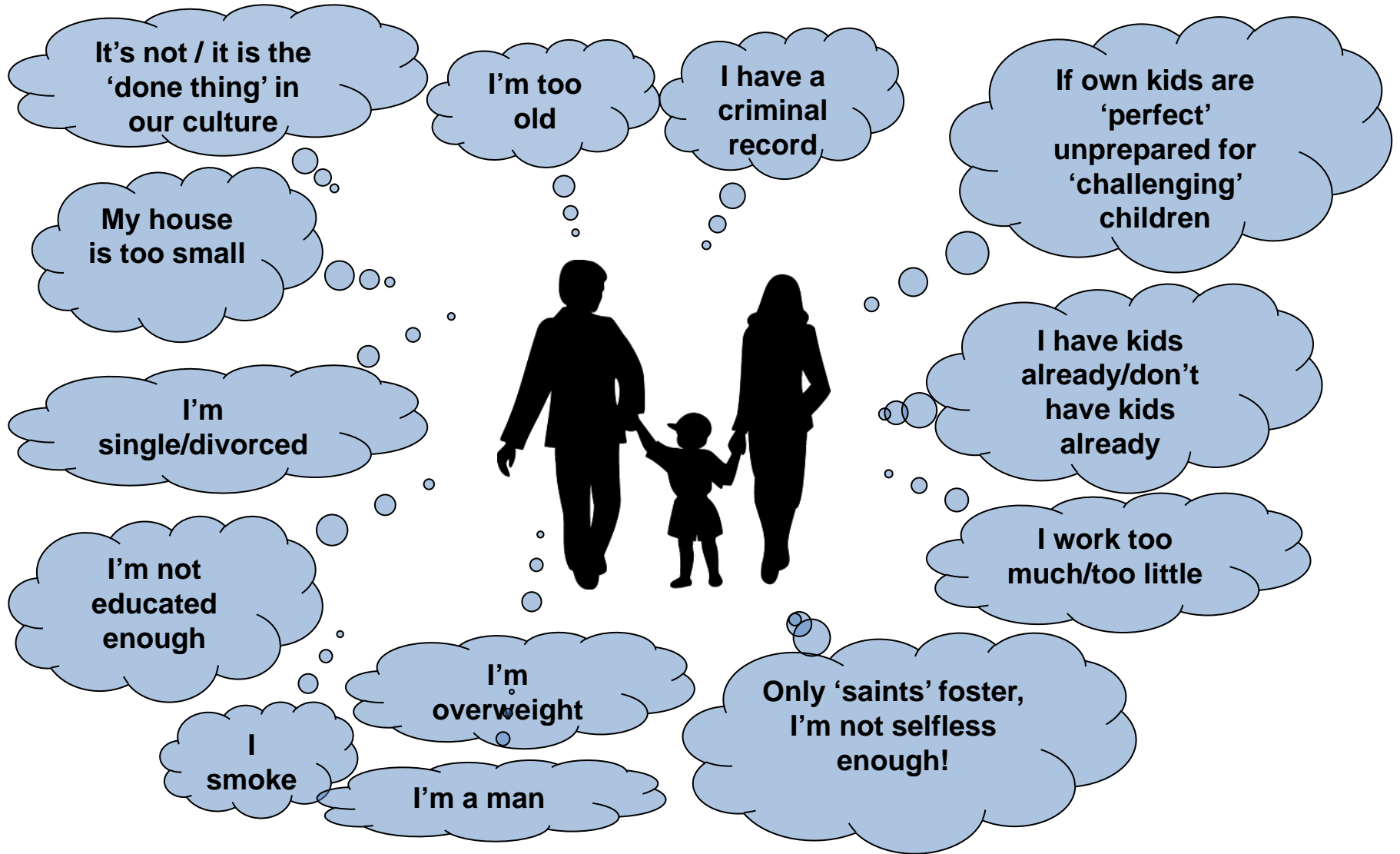
By the time approved to foster their circumstances may have changed eg. divorced, redundant

Foster periods



Too short for some and too lengthy for others

Fostering: the ideal candidate



Fear of rejection is biggest barrier of all

Fostering: the child/children

Teenagers are too much trouble

Will I bond/they bond with us?

There are kids who 'play' the system



Fear of unknown background/history of child

Hear stories of kids making false allegations of abuse

The law automatically favours the child

Fostering: my life context

**Never the
'right' time**



Own children too young/still need us/doing GCSEs
Going through career changes/relocation
Still trying for own children
Too much else going on in my life

**Fear of
raising
subject**



With partner – means have to accept can't conceive naturally

**We are
'complete'**



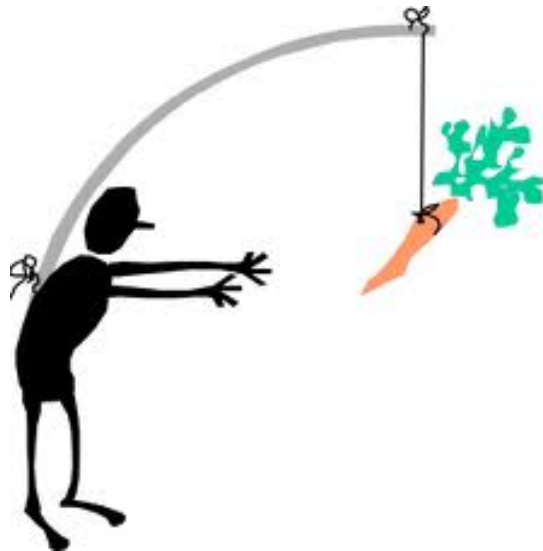
Family size already perfect, functioning at optimal level, why disrupt

**Impact on
own kids**



Don't want to upset them, especially if feel don't get enough of parent/s' time as it is

MOTIVATIONS and TRIGGERS for adoption and fostering



Why adopt / foster

Inner Directed Motivations

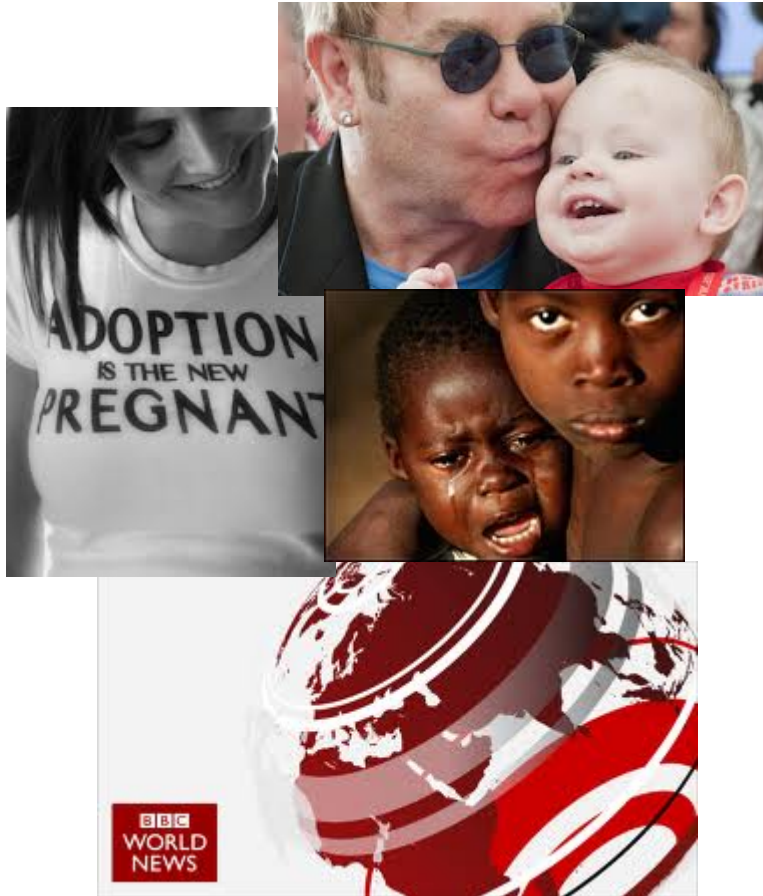
- I want a baby
- I want more children
- Paid employment inside the home
- Enriching your own life if it's a bit empty
- Love being a parent – I think I'm a good parent
- I just love children
- Somebody's going to love me
- Conforming to what's expected
- Challenge of taking on something scary/new
- Want to 'rewrite' your own history if difficult past or childhood
- Want to form/shape a child



Outer Directed Motivations

- Sheer altruism
- I want to take a child out of the care system
- Lots of children in the world need homes
- Nurturing type of person
- I've got resources to spare
- Been through the care process myself – I can empathise

External triggers can play a part but are always combined with inner or outer directed motivations



- Saw an ad asking for people to adopt/foster
- Read an article
- ‘Rosy’ stories in the media about the joys of fostering/adopting
- Heart wrenching stories of children without homes/parents – feel compelled to act

Some respondent suggestions for how the system could help them adopt / foster

Accessibility



A mobile drop in centre to talk about adoption/fostering
Be proactive and come to us with information rather than us having to go to hunt it down
An information pack you could pick up

Transparency



Be open and upfront from the start about who is eligible

Connectivity



A joined up approach across regions, councils, adoption and fostering authorities

Process



Make the process less bureaucratic and more human
Fast track ideal candidates
Provide a coach/mentor to guide us through the process and check up on us afterwards
Treat fostering as a profession

Some suggestions from respondents for how communications might help

Keep it top of mind and high profile



A large scale Children in Need-type event but not just to raise money – to generate willing families/individuals

The face of adoption/fostering



A well known success story who has benefited and excelled in life

A champion



A Jamie Oliver-type advocate who will keep momentum going and use their contacts/passion/profile

Use emotional triggers



**Show us heartbreaking stories we can't ignore
Communicate individual children's journeys through the care system to show reality – not just statistics
Show us the emotional rewards of adopting/fostering**



work.



Summary

Summary

- There are some early indicators of likely behaviour across the different categories that will be quantified in the next phase:

Profession



Many of those interviewed did demonstrate an empathy with the needs of children in care
However this doesn't always translate into a desire to foster or adopt – many present the same barriers as the sample generally

Employment status



This has no impact on attitudes to adoption within this sample
Fostering specifically is seen as a full time role and therefore those working part-time don't see themselves as eligible
Beyond this, desire to foster is driven by other factors

Family status



Those who are unable to conceive naturally are more likely to first pursue fertility treatments to obtain a biological child – that need is a very powerful driver of behaviour

Personal experience



The likelihood of adopting a second child is not driven by altruistic needs; rather it's a broader decision about having another child per se, therefore other contextual factors will dictate behaviour
Foster caring doesn't translate into a likelihood to adopt within this sample

- NB. These are based on samples as low as 1 in some cases

Summary

- The pre-defined characteristics have not necessarily been an indicator of propensity to adopt/foster in this qualitative phase although some early indicators have emerged (NB. sample not designed to predict likelihood, merely to illuminate)
- This research also suggests it is the personal, psychological context that is the key influence:
 - People who are more open to the idea have been shaped in some way by their life experiences to date and have either had a challenging life and/or have a highly selfless, altruistic personality
- The quant will aim to provide targeting data (size, demographic profile etc.) for the recruitment planning phase