



UK and Overseas

adoption

...is providing a permanent family for a child

What is adoption?

Adoption is providing a new permanent family for a child who cannot be brought up by their birth family.

As an adoption agency, we are legally allowed to arrange adoptions. This is done by a social worker gaining an understanding of the child's needs and seeking an adoptive family best able to meet them.

We find adoptive families for children of all ages and backgrounds.

However, we cannot make such an arrangement legally binding. Only a court can do this, by the making of an Adoption Order. This ends the child's legal relationships with the birth family and gives the child new legal parents. The child becomes a full member of the adoptive family, the same as being born to the adopters and usually takes the family's name.

Adoption means the permanent transfer of parental responsibility. As this is such an important thing to happen in a child's life, the law requires adoption agencies and courts to make sure that they put the child's long-term welfare first when they make decisions about adoption:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be respected and considered when decisions are made.
- The child's welfare, safety, needs and views should be at the centre of the adoption process and will be taken into account at all stages.
- Adoption is about meeting the needs of children not about the needs of adults wanting to adopt.

By deciding to adopt you are making a challenging, yet very rewarding decision. The information contained within this booklet is intended to provide background information and a starting point for those considering adopting a child.

Claire and Mark adopted brothers Michael and Jake eight years ago.

"Adoption has been one of the most rewarding and challenging things that we have done. We have got so much out of adopting Michael and Jake and feel that we're making a real and positive difference to their lives. Adoption is the best thing that has happened to us and we would thoroughly recommend it".

adoption

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Who can adopt?

A wide range of people can and do adopt

We consider applicants who live within the Solihull borough and those who live up to an hour's travelling distance from the border of Solihull. All enquiries will be considered regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion or relationship status. In every case, the most important thing is that the child grows up in a stable, loving and secure family.

Age

You must be at least 21 years old. There is no specific upper age limit but we do need to ensure that you have a reasonable expectancy of being able to care for the child until they reach independence. For this reason we look at the age difference between you and the age of the child you are considering adopting.

Relationship status

You can be married, in a civil partnership, single, divorced or living with a partner. If you are in a relationship you will need to have been living together for a minimum of three years. If you have imminent plans in place to marry we suggest that you continue with your plans prior to applying to adopt. The adoption process needs to be embarked upon at a time where there are no other significant life events taking place.

Identity

You can be of any ethnicity or religion. You should either be what is known under law as 'domiciled' in the United Kingdom or 'habitually resident' for one year prior to applying for an Adoption Order. This is to do with how long you have lived in this country and which country is considered to be your permanent residence. If you are unsure about this, you might need to seek legal advice.

Home

You may own your own home or be in rented accommodation. You will have to demonstrate that you have a secure home environment in which to bring up a child. You will need accommodation appropriate to the number and ages of children you are requesting. Pets must not pose any risk to a child.

Children

You can be childless, have children still living at home or have grown up children who have left home. Any children already in your family should be at least two years older or younger than the age for which you are applying.

Health

If you have any concerns about your health, it is better to raise this with us early in the process. Every applicant has a full medical check up and the medical advisor will advise us on your ability,

from a health point of view, to meet the needs of a child throughout their childhood. It is unlikely that a young child, or a child vulnerable to chest complaints, would be placed in a household where one or both parents smoke.

Employment

You can be employed, self-employed or unemployed, although we would expect your work commitments to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the child at any time. It will be necessary for you (one of you if a couple) to be at home during the settling in period and for there to be flexibility about returning to work, depending on the needs of the child.

Experience with children

It is important that the person who is going to be the main carer has some experience of children of the age in which you are interested.

Criminal record

If you have had any criminal convictions or cautions at any time you will need to inform us of these early in the process. All offences are looked at and the circumstances of the offence will be taken into account when considering your application. If you have had any offences against children and/or offences of a violent or sexual nature we will be unable to consider your application.

Fertility treatment

If you are currently undergoing or have recently completed fertility treatment it may not be the ideal time to pursue an adoption enquiry. However, it can be an ideal opportunity for you to gather initial information about adoption; the process and the children who need adoptive families.

Support networks

You will need to demonstrate that you have accessible, established support networks of family or friends who will be in a position to support you in your parenting.

Who do we need?

We need people who can be warm, firm and consistent even when being challenged or unappreciated.

We need adoptive families for children of all ages and backgrounds. We aim to place children in families which reflect their cultural, ethnic and religious heritage.

Great demands can be placed on a family with adopted children. We need people who have the physical, emotional and practical resources to adopt groups of two, three or four brothers and sisters. We are also looking for families for school age children and children who have a disability or learning difficulty or who may be at risk of developing an inherited medical illness or have mental health needs.

All children who are in need of adoption will have experienced early separation from people to whom they are attached. Many children will have experienced physical or emotional abuse or neglect. Some children will have experienced sexual abuse. All of these experiences will have left physical and emotional scars and may well have affected their health, development and education. Adoptive families have the task of re-building trust in children's lives and helping them grow and reach their potential.

We need people who are flexible and want to put the needs of children first and people who value the child as he or she is, complete with memories – happy as well as sad. This may mean keeping links alive with important people such as foster carers, grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters.

qualities



Why apply to Solihull?

We are an adoption agency who are experienced in placing children and approving adopters.

- We are a small, personalised service. We aim to have one social worker to support each applicant(s) through the assessment process to adoption order.
- We have children waiting for adoption now. We work closely with children's social workers so if the match between child and adopters is good, we can usually move things forward quite quickly.
- We aim to reduce the time children are waiting to be adopted. The majority of approved adopters have a child placed with them within 12 months.
- We may provide financial support to families seeking to adopt. This is means tested and dependent on the needs of the child.
- We have a post adoption service which you can contact for advice after the adoption order is made.

benefits



What happens next?

1

Confirm interest

Please register your interest using the enquiry form on our adoption web pages www.solihull.gov.uk/adoption. We will arrange for a social worker to contact you to discuss your interest in adoption. If you wish to talk to a social worker about any questions you may have please call us on 0121 749 8100.

2

Home visit by social worker

If you are to proceed to the next stage a social worker will come and see you at home. This will be an opportunity for you to discuss your hopes and needs and ask any questions that you may have. The social worker will give you information about the children who need adoptive families, the process of adoption and our priority areas for recruitment.

At this stage, any criminal convictions, serious health concerns, issues around relationship status and residency or domiciliation should be explored. Any recent changes in your circumstances such as bereavement, fertility treatment, relationships, change of job will be taken into consideration as will any factor which may affect your capacity to prepare yourselves to become adoptive parents.

If your enquiry proceeds to the next stage, you will be invited to attend our consultation evening and the next set of preparation groups and you will be provided with an application form. The preparation groups will provide you with all the information you need to decide whether or not you want to become a family by adoption.

3

Attend preparation group

Preparation groups usually run in spring and autumn each year. Occasionally an additional group is set up if required. The groups are run by social workers with the help of adoptive parents. There are four sessions that are held during the day. The participants are all people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents and include couples and single people.

There are usually no more than fourteen participants. This is an important part of the process and you need to identify with us at an early stage if you have difficulty in attending.

During the group you will be encouraged to explore the possible impact of adopting a child. You will be given information about the kind of children you may adopt, their experiences and needs. You will also be asked to consider how you would go about meeting their needs and you will receive help in identifying your own strengths.

If you wish to continue to the home assessment after the groups we will ask you to make your formal 'application to adopt'.

4

Application to adopt

When you make your formal application you will be asked to give your agreement for checks to be made on you and your household members over the age of sixteen. These checks are required by law and involve an enhanced check with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and statutory checks.

You will be asked to put together a historical list of events in your life which will include your employment history. A reference will be requested from your previous employer. If we are told anything which suggests you may not be suitable to adopt a child, this will be discussed with you as soon as possible.

5

Home assessment

This will be a series of meetings in your own home with your allocated social worker. The social worker's role is to get to know you and your family, to have further discussions with you about adoption and to help you to identify the kind of child who would be best placed with you. The outcome of these discussions will be presented to the adoption panel in the form of a final report. When the final report is drafted, you will be given a copy and encouraged to add your comments.

You and your social worker will be sharing the responsibility for doing the ground work for the assessment which will affect the future of a vulnerable child as well as you and your family. It is crucial that both the applicant and social worker are open and honest.

All members of your household will need to be consulted and interviewed. It is important for any children, including adult children to be seen. If you have a previous partner we may need to write to them to ensure that there is no reason why you should not be considered as an adoptive parent.

During the course of the assessment you will need to have a medical examination. You will also be asked to give the names of a minimum of three referees; which should include one who is related to you.

We aim to complete the assessment and submit the final report to the adoption panel within eight months after accepting your application. You will be invited to attend panel.

6

Adoption panel

The adoption panel consists of a maximum of ten members.

Members include:

- An independent chairperson
- An elected member (local councillor)
- Medical advisor
- Two social workers (each with at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience)
- At least three independent people with experience of adoption (either personal or professional)
- Panel advisor

Your final report is presented to the adoption panel by your social worker. The process will be explained to you in detail and your social worker will be there to support you. Panel members will have a copy of your assessment report together with any additional material which you may have provided. The role of the panel is to recommend whether or not you are suitable to be approved to adopt a child.

You will be informed verbally of the panel's recommendation on the same day. However, this is subject to approval by our agency decision maker. You will be informed of the decision in writing within seven working days of the adoption panel's recommendation.

If you are not satisfied with the panel's recommendation you will have the right to ask for a review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). IRM is operated by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). You will be fully informed in the preparation groups and throughout the process about how this can be done.

7

After you are approved

Once you are approved, you are available to be considered for any appropriate children who need families. Matching a child to a prospective family is essential to the success of a child's placement and great care is taken to get the right match.

A child may be suggested for you by us or a link may be made with a child referred to us by the West Midlands Consortium of Adoption Agencies or another agency. Alternatively, you may decide to join BAAF or Adoption UK. Both of these organisations publish a regular journal which features children who need families.

When you have been approved for three months, it will be assessed whether your details need to be added to the database held by the West Midlands Consortium of Adoption Agencies. If no link has been suggested within six months, your details will be added to the National Adoption Register.

While you are waiting to be linked with a child, you will receive regular visits from your social worker and an annual review report will be considered by the adoption team manager. This review will provide an update on your situation and record any changes in your circumstances; a medical update and new police checks may also be required. If there are significant changes in your circumstances the review may be referred to the adoption panel.

How do we link children with families?

The needs of each child are identified and the strengths and abilities of each adoptive family are considered in order to weigh up which family can best meet those needs.

As an approved adopter, you will be asked to consider specific children and you may be asked to meet the child's social worker and foster carer to establish whether or not you should be considered further. Before a link is made you will be given full information about the proposed child and have the opportunity to decide whether you want to be considered.

When the link has been made, a period of introductions is then planned. Introductions will include your visits to the foster carer's home and the child's visits to your home, until everyone is satisfied that the child is ready for the new placement to begin. The period of introductions is geared to the needs of the individual child. Adoptive parents are expected to prepare a family album and DVD for the child describing their new home, family and pets.

After placement

After the child is placed with you, visits to offer support and guidance continue to be made by social workers. Your social worker will be on hand to help you. The child's social worker will also be on hand to support the child. There are regular reviews of the placement. The first review takes place within one month, then three months and then every six months until an adoption order is granted. One of the tasks of the review is to assist the adopters in deciding when they are ready to apply for an adoption order. Once the order has been made through the courts you will have full parental responsibility.

Because adoption is so complex and sensitive, despite the best efforts of everyone, not every placement succeeds. Sometimes it becomes clear that the wrong link has been made and the child and family are not right for each other. If this happens; everyone involved works together to move the child on without feelings of guilt, rejection or blame for the child or the family.





What support is available?

You can contact adoption support social workers after the adoption order has been made for advice, guidance and support.

As an adoptive parent, you are eligible for adoption support at any time after the child has been placed with you until the child's 18th birthday. The adoption agency that places the child or children with you is responsible for your adoption support for three years after the adoption order. After three years, this becomes the responsibility of the local authority in which you live.

Adoption support social workers work with local agencies that can help you with various issues, including educational, financial, social and psychological needs. You will also be able to get help with parenting issues that can arise when living with an adopted child and therapeutic work may be offered with your child or children. Social workers will be able to put you in contact with national and local support groups.

support

Frequently asked questions

Here are some of the questions about adoption we get asked most often. If there's something in particular you would like to know please call the adoption team on 0121 749 8100.

Q. How long will it take for us to be approved as adopters?

A. We aim to complete your home assessment within eight months from the time that we receive your formal application.

Q. How long will it take before we have a child placed with us?

A. This will very much depend on the needs of the children available for adoption at the time that you are approved; the age and number of children and the backgrounds you wish to consider. The majority of our approved adopters have a child placed with them within 12 months.

There is always a shortage of families for sibling groups, school age children and children with learning difficulties or specific medical conditions.

Q. What age will the child be?

A. This will be discussed with you during your home assessment. Factors that will affect the child's age will be: your preference, your ages, the ages of any existing children that you may have and the recommendation made by the adoption panel. Your own views will be very important in this.

Q. Can I adopt more than one child?

A. Yes. We need families who can adopt two or more children so that brothers and sisters can stay together.

Q. Will I be competing with other potential adoptive parents?

A. Prospective adopters are carefully considered in terms of their ability to meet the needs of the child. There may be a variety of reasons why one family may be more appropriate than another for an individual child.

Q. Should I tell the children that they are adopted?

A. Yes! Some children will be old enough to remember moving to their adoptive home, younger children should be told before they understand the implications of adoption. Evidence shows that it is better to be open and honest about adoption. Not knowing may cause emotional difficulties in later life.

Q. Do the children keep in touch with their birth families?

A. Adopters are encouraged and expected to give their children age appropriate information about their birth family as they grow up. Children can be supported by their adoptive family to keep in touch with one or more birth family members by card or letter. We operate a letterbox system with birth families to enable this to happen. Face to face contact will be arranged if it is assessed as being in the best interest of the child and where this is the case, it is vital that adopters support these arrangements.



Q. I am working full time and do not want to give up work permanently. Can I still adopt?

A. Yes, you can. However, we would expect your work commitments to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the child at any time. Adopters are expected to take adoption leave in order to settle a child into their family and home. The period of time is based on maternity leave (around six months) but may need to be much longer for some children. Adopters are entitled to statutory adoption pay and leave which is roughly equivalent to statutory maternity pay and leave. Partners are entitled to paternity leave.

Q. Are there any costs involved?

A. There are no costs involved when adopting a child who is currently being looked after by a local authority.

Costs are incurred when adopting a child from another country. Applicants will be charged for the time it takes social workers to complete the assessment.

State benefits are paid from the time a child is placed in the same way as to any other parent. Financial support may be available where adoption would cause financial hardship to a family. This is especially true for those thinking of adopting a group of brothers and sisters, or a child with additional needs.

inter-country adoption

What is involved in inter-country adoption?

Inter-country adoption is the adoption of a child from another country.

We have a duty to advise and counsel anyone who lives in Solihull who wishes to adopt a child from overseas. There is a fee for the completion of the home assessment report. Please contact us for latest fees.

Applications from people who are applying to adopt a child within the UK will take priority over those applying to adopt a child outside the UK.



1 Decide which country

If you have not already done so, you will need to decide from which country you wish to adopt a child. It should be a country with which you already have links or can make links. Knowledge of the country's culture, religion, history and language will be important to a child.

It is not our responsibility to help you decide which country you intend to adopt a child, this is your decision. You will need to gather as much information as possible about the specific procedures and requirements of that country. All contact details in this section can be found on our adoption web pages www.solihull.gov.uk/adoption

2 Information day

We subscribe to the Inter Country Adoption Centre (IAC) which is an organisation set up to support inter-country adoption. If you intend to pursue your interest in adopting a child from overseas, you should first arrange to attend an IAC Information Day. These information days are held regularly and a place can be reserved by contacting the IAC administration team. There is a charge for these days and they are held in Barnet in North London.

After attending an information day, if you decide that you wish to proceed, please contact us on **0121 749 8100**. You will receive a home visit by a social worker within six weeks of making contact.

3 Home visit by social worker

See step 2 on page 7 of this pack.

4 Preparation group

You will need to attend specialist preparation groups held by the IAC in Barnet, London. The preparation groups will provide you with all the information you need to decide whether or not you would like to proceed with the adoption of a child from overseas. There is a charge per person for the course and this will be deducted from your home assessment fee.

5 Application to adopt

See step 4 on page 8.

6 Home assessment

See step 5 on page 8.

7 Adoption panel

See step 6 on page 9.

8 Application sent to state of origin

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) will check your application and send it onto the relevant authority in the state of origin.

After you are approved

The state of origin decides whether to accept your application and identifies a child to be matched with you. Details of the child will be sent to DCSF who will forward it to your social worker. Your social worker will share the information with you and discuss all the implications. It may be necessary to take other advice for example medical advice before reaching a decision.

If you decide to accept the match, you will travel to meet the child in the state of origin. You will need to adopt your child in the state of origin and this may involve a second visit. You will need to apply for clearance from the nearest British Embassy, Consulate or High Commission to bring your child into the UK. There are three different ways of obtaining an adoption order depending on the child's state of origin.



Status of foreign adoption orders

Convention countries – have fully completed the Hague Convention

The adoption orders of these countries are recognised by the UK. Children automatically acquire British nationality providing one of the adopters is a UK national. The order can be registered in the UK with the Registrar General and a UK Certificate of Adoption issued.

Designated countries – have not ratified and implemented the Hague Convention

The adoption orders of these countries are fully recognised by the UK. However, children do not automatically acquire British nationality. As above, the order can be registered in the UK with the Registrar General and a UK Certificate of Adoption issued. To acquire British nationality the child has to be registered under the British Nationality Act 1981 with the Home Office. Alternatively, it is possible to adopt the child again in the UK. To apply for an Adoption Order you should either be what is known under law as 'domiciled' in the United Kingdom or 'habitually resident' for one year prior to applying for the order. This is to do with how long you have lived in this country and which country is considered to be your permanent residence. If you are unsure about this, you might need to seek legal advice.

Non-designated countries

The adoption orders of these countries are not recognised by the UK. No parent/child relationship is created in British law.

If you are adopting a child from a non-designated country, you will need to obtain entry clearance for bringing the child to the UK for the purpose of adoption. This can be obtained from an Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the state of origin.

You will have to notify Solihull Council within 14 days of returning to the UK of your intention to adopt the child. We will then be responsible for monitoring the welfare of the child. As above, to apply for an Adoption Order you will need to be 'domiciled' in the United Kingdom or 'habitually resident' for one year prior to applying for the order. When you apply for an adoption order we will provide a report on yourselves, the child and circumstances of the adoption for the court.

Please visit our adoption web pages www.solihull.gov.uk/adoption for a list of convention and designated countries.

Post adoption

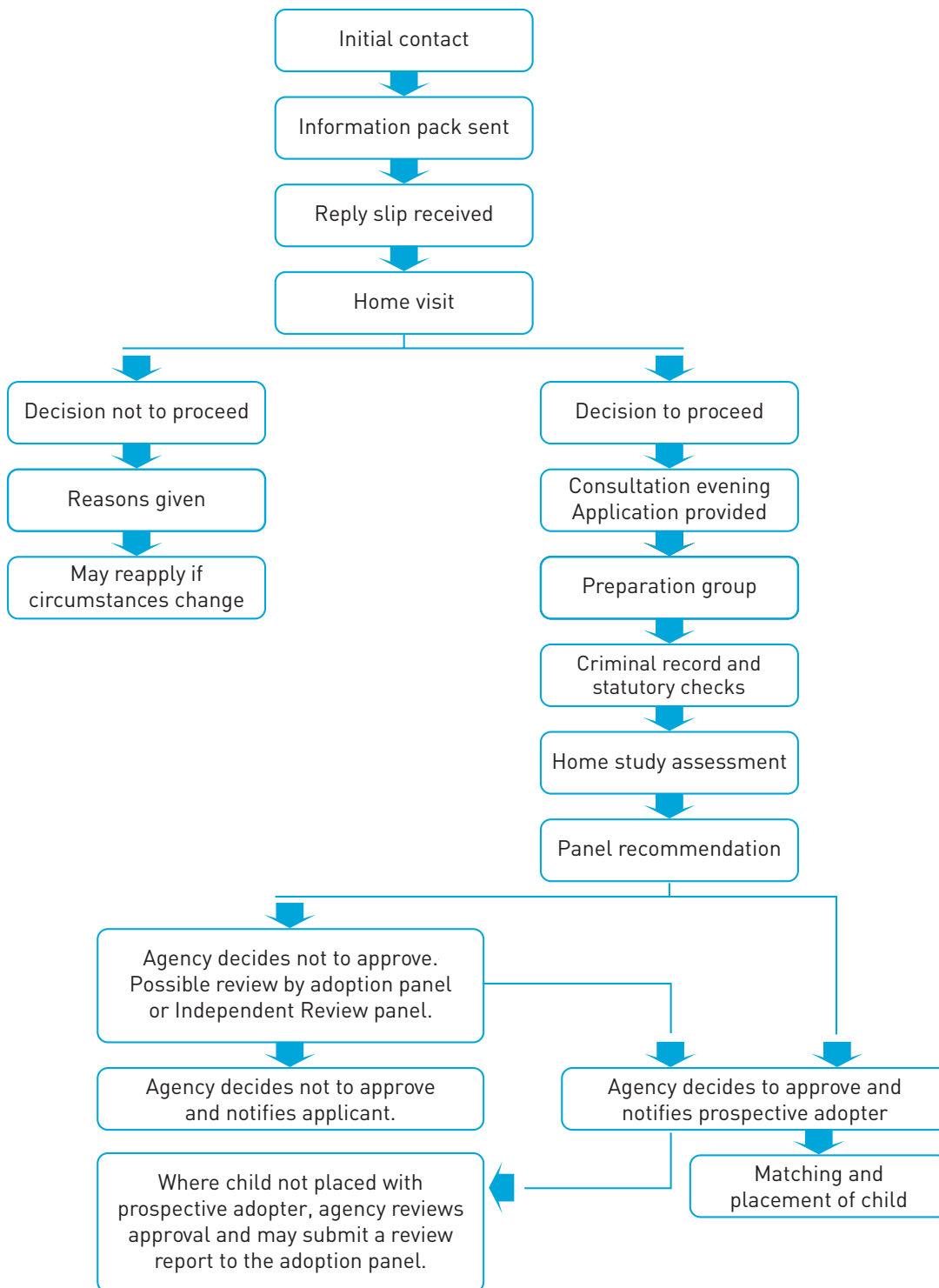
Many countries require post-placement reports on the progress of the child. This can be discussed and arranged with your social worker.

You are entitled to the same state benefits/adoption leave from work as UK adopters and should make enquiries at the Benefits Agency.

You are entitled to the same adoption support service from the local authority where you live as UK adopters. See page 11 for details.



Process of adoption applications within the UK



the process



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Adoption Team

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Smiths Wood
Birmingham
B36 0SN

0121 749 8100

ssplace@solihull.gov.uk

www.solihull.gov.uk/adoption

Disclaimer: To protect the privacy of adopted children the photos in this brochure are not actual photos but are representative of the children that we find families for.



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