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## Introduction by Chair

This is the third Annual Report I have had the pleasure of writing an introduction to. Once again the Charity has been busy providing post adoption advice, support and mediation to adults who live within our communities and in some instances much further a field.

The targets set by external funding bodies and internally as part of our own benchmarking system have not only been met but also surpassed in many cases. At our AGM in March we saw a change of trustees but have still managed to maintain a mix of professional and lay people who are, or have been, personally involved with the experience of adoption so that we keep a focused value base – helping people when possible!

Every effort has been made to help as many beneficiaries as possible and this has seen our workload continuously increase over the past year. At the same time we have been busy implementing and reviewing procedures that will be used to improve the quality of our work. We measure our work against a recognised Quality Assurance standard PAQSSO, or to give it its full title Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Voluntary Organisations. This year we have achieved level 1 status against this recognised standard and NEPAS will continue to develop PAQSSO alongside financial and management systems in the forthcoming year.

The addition of a Website ([www.nepas.org](http://www.nepas.org)) this year was welcomed but has meant implementing new working practices and guidelines and a protocol had to be established between the website provider and NEPAS so that electronic personal data would be afforded suitable protection. We have been astonished by the amount of work received from around the world and the level of openness of some clients.

NEPAS staff are now members of various voluntary groups and committees, for example Impact Project (Volunteer Induction Training) and Adoption Panel. Working in partnership is viewed as a prerequisite for good post adoption practice, especially if errors and assumptions about third parties are to be avoided. Outside the North East this approach is surprisingly easy and NEPAS has developed many links on behalf of our beneficiaries.

Lastly the Trustees would like to thank the many people, organisations and businesses that have supported our work throughout the year, especially the volunteers who give their time freely. Work undertaken by volunteers has been extremely diverse this year and includes fund raising activities, helping to implement an out of hours Telephone Advice Line and one volunteer being involved in Permanency training. Once again a big thanks to everyone involved!

## The Work

### a) Case Management

By January 2001 Client Management procedures had been

written, approved and introduced. These guidelines and procedures that efficiently support and monitor the quality of Post Adoption work

undertaken will be reviewed in 2002 in line with our Quality Assurance programme.

Services are categorised under three levels:

Level 1 Represents the cases where we have helped people with basic advice or information. This may have been gained through the provision of information leaflets, brief telephone calls or the information contained within the Frequently Asked Questions page of our web-site.

Level 2 Are those where we become involved with a specific query or request for support relating to an individual or family's adoption history. This typically involves between two and five contacts, either by telephone or via e-mail where a volunteer or worker gives specific advice relating to the person's needs or individual requirements.

Level 3 Are those in which a sustained working relationship is

developed with a client/family. This involves establishing a case management file, face-to-face meetings and a high degree of support and advice being provided. Level 3 cases also include such things as liaising with other agencies on the client's behalf and providing an intermediary service.

The purpose of this categorisation is so that NEPAS cannot only manage clients effectively but also evaluate our services with an emphasis on continuously improving direct work. Another reason why we have chosen this approach is so that we can maximize the work of the charity against limited resources.

Our procedures and guidelines reflect our ethical and realistic stance regarding the protection of information, whilst taking into consideration both legislative and moral aspects of post adoption work. It is considered that they have worked well and protected clients, third parties and NEPAS workers/volunteers from the mismanagement of personal information and bad practice.

## **b) Work Achieved**

The following tables provide an overview of the work carried out by NEPAS throughout the year. They

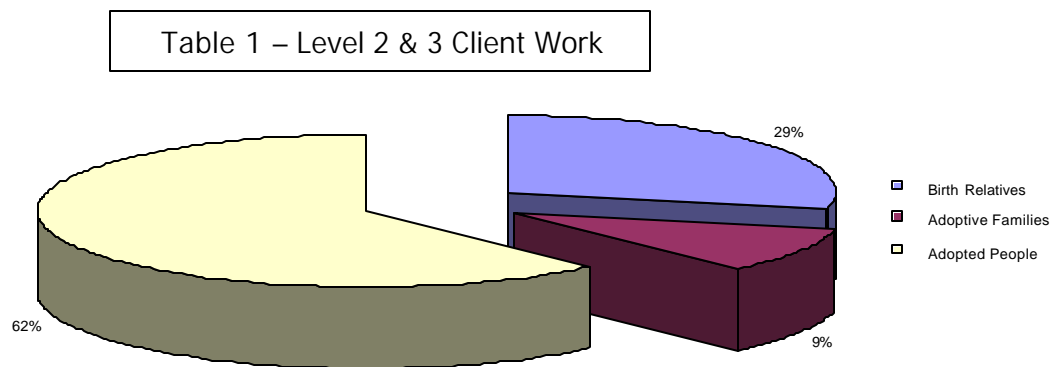
are self-explanatory and need no further detail in the annual report. If any reader would like further

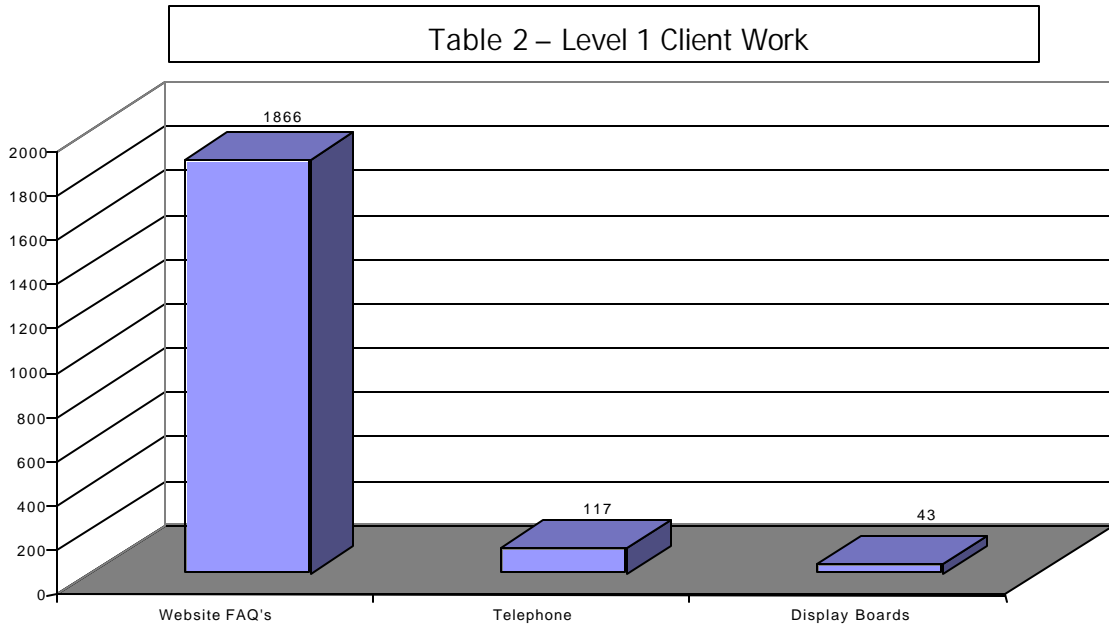
specific details about our client base, please contact the Project Development Officer (0191 2966064). As discussed earlier in the report direct work is split into

three categories depending on the level of input. This data has then been evaluated against such indicators as gender and age.

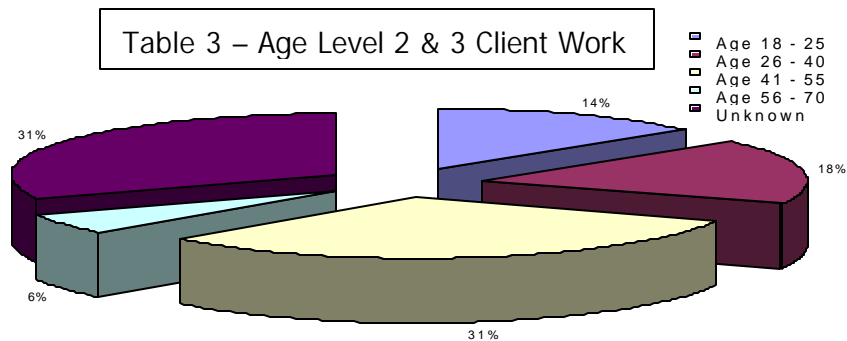
### **c) Data**

*Table 1 gives the overall numbers at casework Level 2 and 3 (n=108). As expected the largest section of work is with adoptees, birth relatives making up nearly a third of our casework and adoptive families representing nine per cent of the total.*





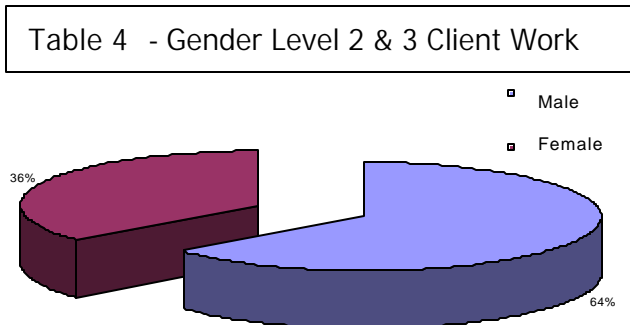
*For Level 1 category work it is not possible to give exact figures relating to the number of people we have helped throughout the year, however Table 2 gives data on the number of Clients who may have benefited from level 1 service. This has been collated from the number of recorded visits to the FAQ page of our web site, the actual number of information booklets taken from displays in public venues such as UCI Cinema, libraries etc. and telephone information given.*



*Table 3 illustrates our client group by age and shows a broad range. Again the Project Development Officer will discuss any data held with interested parties. We have examined these figures by using all forms of averages and*

recognise many interesting links between past adoptions and present services being accessed by specific age groups.

Table 4 gives a breakdown regarding gender. As the table reveals 64% of our level 2 & 3 clients are female and 36% are men. This signifies what we have

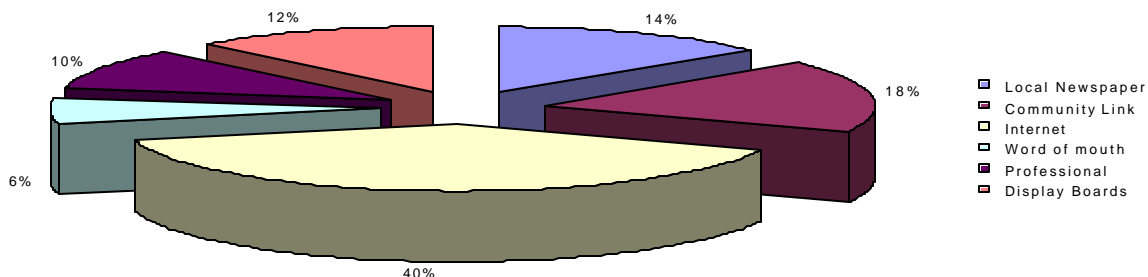


always suspected, that males not only have needs relating to past adoption experiences but also share some of the anxieties and concerns that their female counterparts display, for example knowledge of the child's well being. Again this data will be used within our developmental plans.

#### **d) Accessing Post Adoption Services**

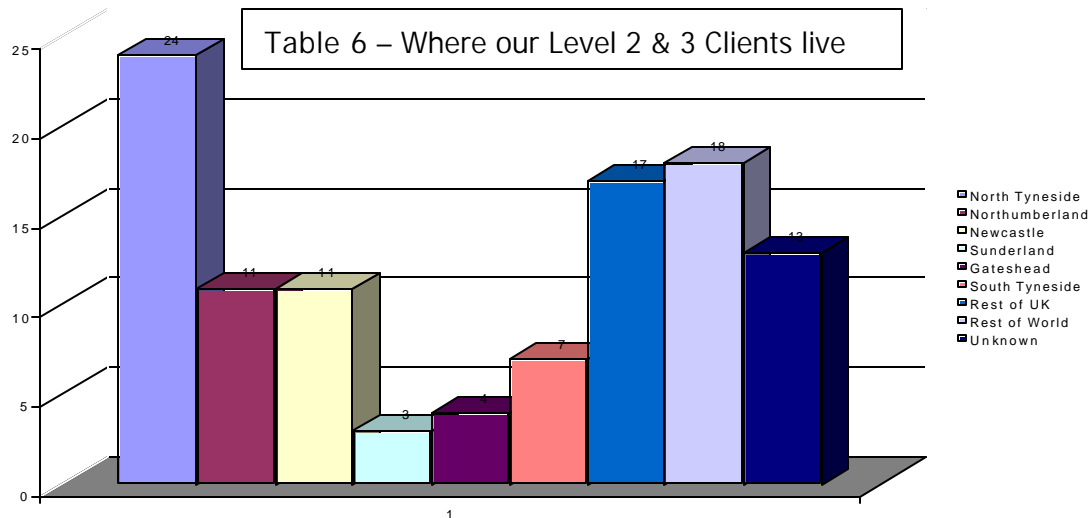
To evaluate the ways in which clients find out about post adoption services we ask all Level 2 and 3 clients to identify where they first heard about our services. Table 5 below illustrates that our efforts to publicise adoption services widely have been successful in reaching the people in the community. Our plan to publicise information in public areas, by enlisting the help of private companies, for example UCI cinemas and ASDA will certainly help to ensure that our beneficiaries are aware of what services are available.

Table 5 – How people found us (n=108)



**e) Geographical Data**

Table 6 – Where our Level 2 & 3 Clients live



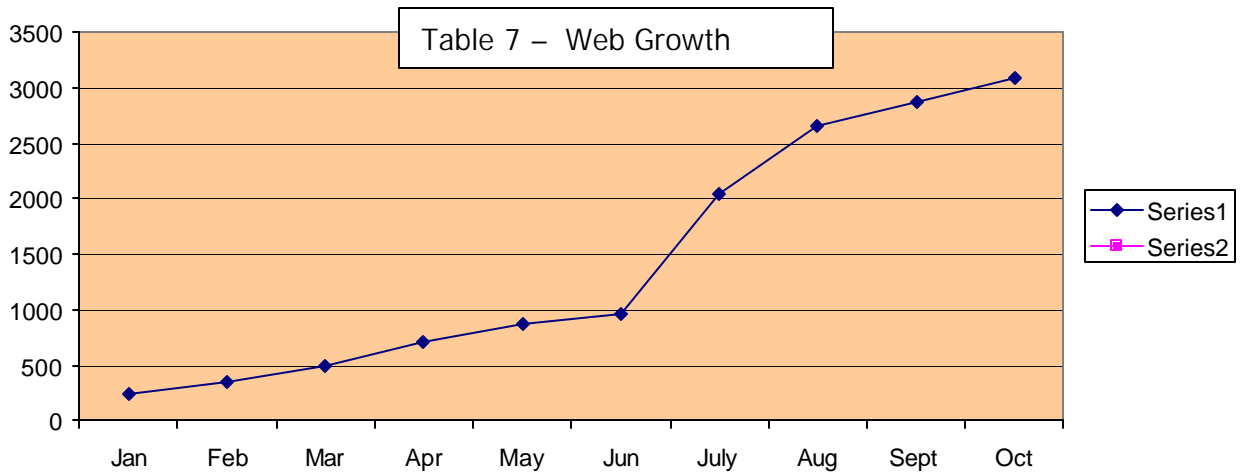
Understandably the majority of our Level 2 and 3 clients live in the North East region (see Table 6). However, over the last year we have increasingly worked with people across the UK, Europe and indeed the rest of the world, our website has reached people as far away as USA, South Africa and Australia.

Cross border adoptions between Scotland and England are certainly very visible in our direct work. NEPAS have strong links with BIRTHLINK Edinburgh and are grateful to our colleagues north of the border for their help and assistance.

## **f) Website**

In the first quarter of this year, and with the assistance of HPR Media, NEPAS decided to design and implement a Website. The main reason for this decision was the realisation that the regional remit outlined in our constitutional documentation covers a large geographical area. It was quite an unrealistic objective to cover this physical area by using a centre-based approach. With this in mind we looked towards modern

technology to help resolve this problem, thus maximizing limited resources. NEPAS website became operational on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2001. As the graph indicates, (see Table 7) the site has now had over 3000 hits. We have answered over 100 emails concerning practical requests for help, some dealing with very personal and emotive subjects that are followed up by safe means of communication.



Contact through the website has surprised NEPAS, especially the extent of disclosure over an open system. In June 2001 we decided to invest resources to modify and improve the site, especially the Frequently Asked Questions page.

The following are some of the remarks made by our beneficiaries;

*"Thank you so much for your trouble! We are further now than we have ever been"*

*"Thank you for your feed back. Your website and quick response has helped me enormously. I shall let you know of any outcome"*

*" Thank you so much for the info on your website. I was really touched. I will follow the advice"*

### **g) Overview of Social Work**

In Table 1 we identified that adoptees represent the largest group requesting advice, support and sometimes help. Direct work carried out with this diverse group can be divided into three areas:

- Advice about search techniques using Public Records and more recently the Internet – and safely.

- Support work through our group/individual programmes (CHOICES/PALS)
- Financial assistance, usually with the costs of joining the Adoption Contact Register.

Post S51 work with adoptees is extremely diverse in its nature and therefore should never become prescriptive. It is evident that many beneficiaries, having given considerable thought to what they

want well in advance, do their own searching in their own way and their own time. It is never forgotten that a search is an individual's responsibility and we would never disempower or take away adoptees' rights to choices.

Our "CHOICES" group work is programmed to help people identify implications attached to their own adoptive search, for example, rejection, financial resources and Safe Searching. "CHOICES" has taken place on two occasions this year and on both occasions the available places were fully subscribed. However the numbers dwindled when the day of the event came nearer. Then what actually occurred was that we picked up these people/families on an individual basis. They openly admitted that they preferred to work individually with a worker or volunteer than undertaking group work.

As time progressed we recognised that beneficiaries who were well advanced with their search or who already had some form of contact with birth relatives chose to attend group sessions to reflect on their own experiences. These informal events, as opposed to formal (CHOICES) have been very successful but no records were made. At present we are re-evaluating our approach to group work and will change the format this year in line with this evaluation.

Although, we have successfully assisted many beneficiaries with their search, in some cases it has resulted in some form of veto to the reunion process being initiated. In most cases because of some incongruent perspective within the complex adoption system, it is often only the passing of time that alters this position to one of congruence.

Regarding this work we are monitoring and evaluating indexes relating to post adoption work. This is in line with the Register General Office, who records such variables as intra or inter family adoptions.

During the year we have used numerous Non Disclosure Agreements (NDA) with various Local Authorities and third parties. It has to be noted that there are many different types of NDA in force at present. Some of which we find are much more detailed and helpful. Others we find are ambiguous with regards to the subject of protected information. Hopefully in the future and with national standards, a uniformed NDA can be developed and used across geographical and professional boundaries. This will prevent unnecessary intrusions into some families/peoples lives, but at the same time promote equality.

**Birth Relative Initiated Contact** (BRIC) we find is still very confusing from a birth relative's viewpoint. We feel an open and honest approach is the only way to help birth relatives. Exactness of their

rights is the only methodology to underpin intervention if further emotional distress is to be avoided.

We offer birth relatives several services:

- Paralleled tracing.
- Assistance in approaching a placing agency and requesting a discretionary update regarding their birth child(ren). The replies to these requests on behalf of birth relatives are very wide-ranging, as you would expect.
- Post Adoption Links Service to help with aspects of emotional and social support.

Following three years of birth relative intervention it is evident that this area of work at practice level, requires developing against the broader ethical uses of adoption. Especially if future post

adoption services are to meet proposed draft legislation.

**Adoptive Families** As table 1 identifies, Adoptive parents account for 9% of our level 2 & 3 work. This group is mainly seeking advice that falls into two major areas.

- Issues in relation to the Adoption Order, parental rights and contact issues.
- Adolescent issues, often helping developed families to identify normal adolescent behaviour and preventing unnecessary labeling affects entering the family profile.

Obviously this is a limited overview of our work throughout the year and we will gladly discuss any of these points regarding our post adoption services with interested parties.

## Volunteering

Volunteers have been crucial to the availability of providing a Post Adoption Service over a wide geographical area. Six new volunteers undertook training in May 2001. This training was conducted in partnership with VODA. A third Saturday was allocated to

Telephone Counselling with the aim of gaining the necessary skills to run an out of hours telephone advice service. It is planned to offer this much needed out of hours support and advice service via a simple Redirection Call Facility by March

2002. Once again this will be monitored and evaluated.

Some volunteers have been introduced to direct work since June at a pace that is conducive to their present knowledge base, abilities and of course their availability.

We feel we give our volunteers a wide range of opportunities. Some fund raise and organised the Balloon Race for National Adoption Week. Others carry out direct work and some have

become members of the executive board. Along with recruited volunteers we have had a steady number of new volunteers that "drift" into helping and we will be running a volunteers training course next year.

If anyone wishes to help NEPAS reach it's full potential as a charitable organisation contact the Project Development Officer. No one will be excluded and work can be very much of a practical nature.

## Resources

NEPAS, as with most operational charities find obtaining levels of resources to fulfill the stated objects a continuing source of concern. But having said this we have managed to successfully keep a pace of the ever-increasing telephone and administration costs. We have also been able to support some people financially with their

searches and reunions. This is due largely to the volunteers who do such a good job fund raising the necessary amounts of money.

Below are details abstracted from our annual income and expenditure again copies of our full end of year accounts are available.

Annual Income and Expenditure 1 August 2000 – 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2001			
Income £		Expenditure £	
Balance B/F	1,842.27		
Grants		Fees	
NLCB Recruitment	1700.00	Accountancy	117.50
NLCB Main	57824.00	Professional BAAF	62.50
NLCB Capital	520.00	Insurances	
Northern Rock	2000.00	Professional Indemnity	420.00
Interest		Employee and Public Liability	84.00
Bank Received	159.73	Accommodation	
Fundraising		Rent	1500.00
Summer Raffle	353.00	Furnishings & Equipment	224.78
Autumn Raffle	177.00	Recruitment	
Donations		Advertisement	436.14
Client	75.10	Salary	30477.84
Corporate	400.00	PAYE	11181.60
		Pension	1756.82
		Training	442.39
		Running Costs	
		Telephone	563.65
		Postage	111.50
		Travel Costs	424.92
		Room Hire	50.00
		Promotional	160.00
		PR Literature	350.01
		Stationary	725.13
		Professional Books	10.70
		Web Design	275.00
		Fundraising Licence	17.50
		Client	
		ACR Fees paid	15.00
		Certificates purchased	6.50
		Cash	
		Petty Cash	40.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65051.10</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49453.48</b>

## Education

**Background** Another area of work we have been actively progressing against NEPAS' constitution is that relating to our second Object of Education and Awareness:

*"Object 2.2. To advance the education...and raise awareness in the general public of issues relating to Adoption. (NEPAS, 1999)*

By utilising various mediums, local press, displays and presentations we have continuously raised the awareness of services available to families/people touched by adoption

in the region. With the help of a degree student in Media Studies, working for a large entertainment group, a display was designed and produced giving clear and precise

information. The information boards have been exhibited in a variety of venues. These include both public areas and private companies, for example local libraries and a UCI cinema foyer. The results were measured by recording the number of respondents from each venue. Interestingly we received two referrals from boards placed in

Public Libraries over a six-month period (a total of 54 days viewing time), against a response rate of 12 people showing interest from boards placed in the UCI cinema over a 24 hour period. NEPAS is planning to increase the use of displays this year to raise the awareness of adoption services available to the community.

### **Community Link**

Between the 9 and 14 July NEPAS appeared on the Tyne Tees Television Community Link programme. Again this raised considerable interest in the services

available and the central issues appertaining to adoption in general. The website was especially busy following this community initiative. See table 7 for information.

### **Student Placement**

Joep Schuringa a student from Holland undertook his 3<sup>rd</sup> year placement with NEPAS whilst attending a programme of studies with the University of Northumbria. Next year volunteers and staff will be visiting the University of Groningen to meet

with both social work students and colleagues from the Adoption field. Whilst there we will be giving presentations about NEPAS' work and answering pertinent questions regarding Adoption matters in England and Wales.

### **Media**

Throughout the year we have been asked to provide diverse stories of interest to various media groups in exchange for publicity coverage.

We have declined these offers so far on the basis of confidentiality and respect for the views of all NEPAS beneficiaries, including those we will never meet.

### **General Register Office**

Regular contact is maintained with the Adoption Desk and advice is

sought on a variety of subjects regarding post adoption situations.

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In June a team from the Adoption Section journeyed to the North East and carried out a presentation on the Adoption Contact Register and

how other services can be accessed. It was well attended and very informative.

## Wider Picture

At the time of writing this report we are very much working within the shadow of the much awaited Adoption and Children Bill (ACB). Parliamentary time permitting this could be law before the year is out. A move NEPAS believes can only help structure post adoption support for the good of our beneficiaries, whatever part of the country they live in. Offering in the long term some form of equality for

all concerned with the adoption triangle. This will hopefully be within a legislative framework and supported by the new national standards.

The new clauses found in Chapter V of the draft ACB should radically enhance the mediation services offered by the General Register Office.

The suggested service found under clause 65 (4) offering the facility of a veto, which can be used by a natural parent, obviously takes into account the views of some minority groups involved in adoption outcomes. When implemented it is envisaged that the ACR will need to take into consideration the needs of the recipient of a veto and offer some form of sensitive advice and support. Plus there is the thorny issue of how to prevent people circumventing this veto.

Throughout the year we have received numerous requests for help from client's who live abroad via the [www.nepas@nepas.org](mailto:www.nepas@nepas.org) Website. From evaluation it is apparent that many Anglo adoptees seem to arrive in this country with the belief that they can access post adoption services immediately. We will be updating the website to remind people searching from abroad to carefully plan and structure their visit so that the optimum can be gained from their inter-country search.

PALS (Post Adoption Link services) and Choice's courses have run consistently but with hindsight will be adapted slightly to take into account our evaluation process. As indicated earlier in the report NEPAS found people wish to undertake group work after their reunion/search had taken place and not beforehand. Their preference

appearing to be working on an individual basis at the earlier stages of the search.

Working in partnership is now a central feature of welfarism and post adoption services are no exception. This is a central theme of the new ACB. One major improvement should be regarding the sharing of adoption information, including both protected and unprotected. The problem is that a person's birth or adopted identity may be held by numerous agencies, including statutory and voluntary adoption agencies, health and legal institutions; and in some cases by inter country agencies. We hope that future DOH guidelines help our beneficiaries and replace the present confusion.

Given the amount and diverseness of the independent work undertaken this year, a day never passes without some form of ethical issue or compromise being raised. Each new client is a precursor to a new dilemma. With hindsight the value of working within a transparent Client Management System cannot be over emphasised for any organisation undertaking post adoption work with adults. It helps workers and volunteers to remain focused and objective and this clarity has helped support our cognitive mediation model of social work.

## **Future Work**

Throughout the next year we plan to undertake the following major aims as identified by external bodies:

- Develop the Telephone Advice Line to meet client demands. This will be monitored and evaluated.
- Facilitate two programmes of CHOICES group work.
- Arrange an independent evaluation of our direct work including Exit Surveys and opinions from other professionals.

- 
- To gain additional volunteers to help provide support to meet the objects of the charity.
  - Explore future sources of funding to meet the continuing objects of the charity.

We have also internally identified the following practice areas for development through the year:

- To secure adequate funding to add the facility of a message board to use with our website under the control of NEPAS.
- To enlist the support of private organisations to gain prominent public access areas for publicity purposes, with the aim of raising public awareness regarding services available.
- To examine our ethical position and establish a mediation service that is totally transparent and takes into account both historical and contemporary views of adoption research. This will include updating our assessment document to include a constellation of needs and move away from prescriptive methodologies.
- In partnership with the University of Northumbria at Newcastle create a Narrative Audio archive ([nuna.unn.ac.uk](http://nuna.unn.ac.uk)) that includes biographical narratives of our beneficiaries.
- To continue developing a Congruence Chart.

## **Conclusion**

As this brief report identifies it has been an extremely busy year for the North East Post Adoption Service.

Individuals and professionals from all over the region have now accessed our confidential services and to date we have not received any complaints, either formal or informal.

Each time a new beneficiary contacts NEPAS, we cannot help but notice how it

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adds another dimension to our development as a post adoption service. Absorbing these new ethical ideas and moral changes has been a central mainstay of the organisation's ability to develop and provide quality post adoption support.

We now look forward and relish the opportunity of the new challenges that year four will bring. Feeling confident that we will once again respond to all the new aims and objectives a need led service has to face.

*A. S. Saint*

A Saint  
Chair