



Threads of Connection

Building relationships through post-adoption letter exchange.
A resource for birth families and adoptive families

Threads of Connection is a partnership between Lisa Morriss from Lancaster University and six members of the Common Threads Collective. Based at WomenCentre, the Collective are mothers living apart from their children and Siobhan Beckwith who facilitates their work. Having worked together for over ten years, collective members deliver training to prospective adopters and social workers, and deliver women-centred projects which address the issues mothers living apart from their children and their families face. The quotations are from birth mothers who imagined the potential of letter exchange and the dream letter they would love to receive.

I hope in the future through the project it may assist myself and other mums to overcome the complex battle to write, receive and mentally cope with letterbox contact as it is my only connection to my angels.

Further details about the project can be found here:
womenscentre.org.uk/mothers-apart-common-threads-collective



Threads of Connection

Threads of Connection is about the content of letters and their potential for relationship building between both families. When children are adopted, they are connected to two families. Letter exchange can help build relationships, so that children and their families understand their history, their identity, and their story. It is a voluntary agreement between two families to stay in touch in the interest of the children involved, so that everyone can stay up to date. It can lessen some of the anxieties, not all, that can arise around adoption.

Threads of Connection encourages birth parents and adoptive families to write letters to each other, based on mutual respect and empathy. All children are different, as are their families. Rather than offering templates, these four threads can help both families to weave their own unique connections.

Adopted children connect two families and exchanging letters can give children access to stories about themselves both before and after their adoption. Sharing the little stuff - milestones, hair colour, shoe size and whether the child is left or right-handed - can build bridges between a child's past, present and future. How do they understand their adoption? Are there any hereditary health conditions the child needs to know about? Do they have any support needs? What are their dreams and aspirations?

I reassure the girls that they are loved by all of us and remind them that they are part of me as well as you. I want them to know and cherish that fact.

I have just been diagnosed with autism and worried that Julie might have it too and what support she might need.

It puts my mind at ease knowing she has got her all about me book in her room to look through and I appreciate that you encourage this.

*Shahid is at nursery now and is enjoying it.
He has made some friends and is having fun finding out what he can and can't do.
He still doesn't like strawberries.
He is hitting all his marks and coming along really well.
We are very proud of him and we know you are too.*

They are turning into quite the little characters.

Our Child



Exchanging letters and sharing details about the child's world, their families and their heritage keeps everyone up to date. Stories about children's hobbies, religious routines or practices, home life, education and holidays paint a picture of children's everyday lives.

Jay still sees his big brother a few times a year. The foster carer always brings him along for a catch up. It is good for them both to see how each other is doing, so they don't worry about each other.

They are starting to understand more about their adoption now. We tell them that they have a younger sister and that she is at home with you and doing well. Thanks for sending the picture. When they ask next time, we will give it to them.

Does she still enjoy dancing? She used to do Tap and Ballet. Does she still love being outside in nature?

Sara knows her birth dad is Asian and that the Islamic faith has been important to you, so we help her to be proud of her identity. She really enjoys celebrating Eid at school because it is close to her heart. She knows her Great Grandmother is from Trinidad, and we talk about all of her heritage to help her be confident and proud of all of herself.



Our Child's World

Time



Letters keep hope going and offer reassurance to all about how children and their wider families are getting along. As children grow, letters will change and the relationship between both families will develop. Letters that started with first words might later include favourite foods and eventually mention subjects being studied at college. Handprints or footprints might become pieces of writing or artwork and eventually a note written by the young person.

They always ask about stuff when she lived with me, i.e. she was 8 when she lost her first tooth. They asked how old she was when she got them. She was late, 18 months old.

Your letter came in June, just before my birthday on the 15th which was lovely. It was my favourite birthday present this year.

If there ever was an opportunity to work towards meeting the children (telephone, video, in person), I would really welcome that.

She still has long blonde hair but darkening a bit as she gets older.

Taking the time to write letters helps the relationship between yourself and your child's other family to grow. Be curious, ask questions, share updates and stories. Imagine the letters are a two-way conversation, asking and answering questions, like when you talk to someone in-person. Every child is different and so are their families. Having a face-to-face meeting early on can help with letter writing, so you are not writing to a stranger.

We are so impressed with what you've been able to overcome. You had a right to be angry back then and now you have much to be proud of. We share this with Patrick so he can be proud of you. You are an inspiration.

Anything that the children might want to know, I would be happy to answer. If there are problems, we would prefer to know.

We are both in our late thirties and have wanted children for a long time as we were both from big families. We were so pleased to adopt the two of them together. They have settled in well now. It was hard for them at first, especially Nathan, as he had already moved twice.

It was really good to hear you are doing well. We look forward to your next letter.



Relationships
Start Here

Be curious and be open.

What works best between you and your child's other family?

Handwritten or typed letters, email, a mixture of both?

What would you like to know about?

What would you like to share?

What would they like to know and what would they like to share?

If you can't write on time, can you let the other family know?

Seek support.

Writing to people you don't know very well can feel difficult and issues may arise along the way. When this happens or if you are unsure about anything, contact your letter exchange team.

I am fortunate enough to have received excellent letters from the adopters so I can share some examples.

Key
messages
from this
project