

4th February 2020

Amber
[Shannon McLaughlin <request-633412-14ddcf3e@whatdotheyknow.com>]

Our ref.: FOI/20/021

Dear Amber

RE: Freedom of Information (FOI) request – Policy and procedures for adoption reunions

We refer to your Freedom of Information request which was received by the Western Health and Social Care Trust on 13th January 2020.

You requested “information regarding policy and procedure of adoption reunions, effective from September 2001. In particular, please provide the following:”

1. The official procedures followed when a Mother and/or Father approaches social services wishing to trace and locate their child.

The Adoption Regional Policy & Procedures outlines the role and legal basis of an Adoption Agency /Team in respect of working with a birth family member, child or adoptive family member.

Please refer to a copy of Chapter 9 (Appendix 1) of the above procedures for further information on the Post Adoption Service.

2. The procedures followed to prepare the parents and family (siblings for example), for reunion.

3. The procedures followed to prepare the adopted person for reunion with their family.

In response to questions 2 and 3 regarding Post Adoption Birth Family Tracing, the law changed in Northern Ireland in 1987 to allow all adopted people to trace their birth records and be supported in this. In Northern Ireland when the law changed in 1987 it did not make provision for birth parents to be able to trace children who had

been placed for adoption but most adoption agencies in the region (including the WHSCT) do support birth parents in this process.

An Article 54 Counselling Interview is a statutory requirement for all adopted people born before 18th December 1987. Adopted people born after 18th December 1987 do not have to contact an adoption agency for support in order to trace birth family, people born after that date can apply to the General Registers Office and have birth information provided to them directly.

Please find an (Appendix 2) Copy of advice on:

- Northern Ireland Adoption & Fostering Regional Website re Tracing and Contacting Birth Relatives
- information from indirect government services Tracing and contacting birth relatives and adopted adults. -

4. Procedures followed to prepare the adoptive family for the reunion of their adoptive child with their natural family.

This will be guided by the age and stage of the adoptee and current relationship with adoptive family. It is often our professional experience that adoptees do not wish for their adoptive family to be aware of their approach to trace and this has to be respected. Adoptions are more open and many adoption since 2001 come with some form of contact direct or indirect.

As part of our Post Adoption Service, advice and support is available to all parties as detailed in Appendix 1.

5. Procedures followed by the Western Trust when adoption reunion presents with issues, during reunion.

As part of our Post Adoption Service advice and support is available to all parties as detailed in Appendix 1.

6. The average time frame from when a parent(s) traces their child, and is subsequently reunited with them.

Regarding questions 4, 5 and 6, owing to the sensitivity and need to view each tracing case individually with many complex and competing variables to consider it is impossible to provide a time frame which is typical of such a scenario. Factors which have to be considered and can influence this include the wishes and feelings of each party (i.e. birth parent(s) and adoptee), best interests of the adoptee, response to attempts to contact the adoptee and their adoptive family and motivation of each individual to initiate or respond to a search.

7. Information on support services, counselling etc. offered to parents, families (siblings), and adopted persons, and adoptive parents.

Appendix 2 shows the different support services which can be availed of outside of this Agency's statutory role the latter of which are outlined in Appendix 1. The Trust can make this referral on your behalf if you wish or you can contact the Agency directly for advice.

8. Statistics on the number of adoption reunions carried out within the Western Trust from 2001 to present.

9. Statistics on successful and unsuccessful adoption reunions within the Western Trust from 2001 to present.

Regarding questions 8 and 9, as outlined above tracing is a complex process and a successful outcome can be measured and interpreted differently depending on the individual involved. Therefore the measurement of success /unsuccessful is not quantifiable for this reason. The Trust does not hold such information.

Appendix 1 (attached)

Copy of the Adoption Regional Policy & Procedures (Chapter 9)

Appendix 2 (attached)

Copy of advice from:

- Northern Ireland Adoption & Fostering Regional Website re Tracing and Contacting Birth Relatives (<http://www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net/adoption/adoption-tracing-and-contact>)
- Information from indirect government services - tracing and contacting birth relatives and adopted adults (<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/tracing-and-contacting-birth-relatives-and-adopted-adults>)

We hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely

(Not signed – issued by email)

**Freedom of Information Office
Western Health and Social Care Trust**

Freedom of Information (FOI) Office, Western HSC Trust,
Lime Villa, Gransha Park, Clooney Road, Londonderry, BT47 6WJ
e-mail: foi.request@westerntrust.hscni.net

Freedom of Information: If you are unhappy as to how this request has been handled, you have the right to seek a review within the Trust in the first instance. You should write to the FOI Office, Lime Villa, Gransha Park, Clooney Road, Londonderry, BT47 6WJ (foi.request@westerntrust.hscni.net) within two months of the date of this response and your complaint will be considered and a response provided, usually within 20 working days of receipt.

If, after receiving a response, you remain unhappy, you can refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner at The Information Commissioner's office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF. It is important to note that if you refer any matter to the Information Commissioner, you will need to show evidence of having gone through the Trust's internal review procedure to try to resolve the matter with the Trust in the first instance.