

Adoption

# Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives



## Legal Framework

Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 allows birth relatives to trace and make contact with a relative who is adopted. This is done through an Adoption Support Agency providing intermediary services. The agency can then counsel the birth relative, seek information, from a range of sources to identify and trace the adopted person, and obtain their informed consent to release information to the birth relative. The Adoption Support Agency can facilitate contact with an adopted person and offer birth relatives ongoing support following a reunion.

## Who is a Birth Relative?

A birth relative is anyone who has a link by blood or marriage to an adopted person. There may be other significant people from an adopted person's past such as a foster carer who may seek contact. Such requests would be given consideration.

## Descendants

On October 31 2014 following an amendment to Section 98 of the Adoption and Children's Act, regulation came into force that allows prescribed persons including descendants of adopted people to seek an Intermediary Service.

## Is it a good idea to trace my birth relative?

As a birth relative it is important that you think about your expectations and the implications of tracing for the adopted person and for you and

your family. You should also consider the impact of an approach on the adopted person and their adoptive family and take into account their views. Your social worker will be able to help you think about all of these issues before an approach is made to the adopted person. However the decision to trace should be your decision.

## How can I begin to trace my adopted relative?

You can approach Tower Hamlets if you live in the borough or if you live elsewhere and if your relative was adopted through Tower Hamlets.

You can apply for a service by letter or by phone. As a birth relative you must be aged 18 or over. This also applies to the person you wish to trace; otherwise we cannot provide a service.

Unless you have your relative's adoptive name it is unlikely that you will be able carry out your own search without an intermediary service. This is because we are unable to release any identifying information about the adopted person without their consent.

## What is an Intermediary Service?

An intermediary service helps birth relatives and adopted people seek information, trace and make contact if this is something they both want.

### The service can help to:

- Prepare you for search and reunion
- Obtain information from Courts, Adoption Support Agencies or the General Register Office to aid a search

- Provide counselling, support and advice
- Trace your adopted relative
- Act as an intermediary for you
- Support you or direct you to alternative services after a reunion

Tracing can be an emotional time for you as a birth relative, it is important that you are well supported and prepared for the outcome of your search. It is important to have the support of family members, friends or a partner at this time. Talking to an adoption support social worker can help to prepare you for this.

You will be able to talk about your feelings relating to the adoption and your expectations of contact. You can raise any questions you may have and discuss any fears about a search. If you do not wish to search you can leave information for your relative which we will keep on the file. The social worker can advise you on how to do this.

## Welfare

In delivering an Intermediary Service we are required to have regard to the welfare of all the parties involved.

## What will happen when I apply?

You will need to provide proof of your identity and of your relationship to the adopted person. Tower Hamlets will then contact the relevant agencies to obtain information about the adoption. We will then decide whether to proceed with your application.

### We are required to have regard at all times to:

- Your welfare.
- That of the person you are tracing.
- Any other persons likely to be affected by a search.

Tower Hamlets can use its discretion in deciding whether to proceed with your application but your social worker will let you know as soon as possible if there are any concerns. We will keep you informed of the progress of your application and let you know the outcome as soon as we can.



## What factors can prevent Tower Hamlets proceeding with my request?

Your adopted relative may not want to be contacted and may have registered a wish for **No Contact** with the General Register Office.

They may also have registered a **Veto** with the adoption agency that placed them. If they register an Absolute Veto we cannot approach them under any circumstances. If they register a **Qualified Veto** they will have named the person or persons with whom they wish to have contact. If you are named then we can make an approach. The post adoption social worker will undertake the checks to see if any of the above conditions are in place. If we cannot proceed we will offer you support in dealing with your disappointment.

## Can I have information about the person I am tracing?

We will not be able to provide you with information that would help you to identify the person you want to trace without first seeking their informed consent. The adopted adult will need to have information about you in order to make an informed decision. This is important and recognises that some adopted people have no wish to be traced or to have their details passed on.

The adoption support social worker will discuss with you what information you will need to provide for your relative.

## Will there be a cost for the Service?

As an Adoption Support Agency, Tower Hamlets can charge a fee for processing your application. This is usually in relation to costs incurred for tracing or obtaining information. In order to trace your relative the agency may need to use the services of a family researcher and these costs will be passed on to you. If you are on income support or a low income we may be able to help. You should discuss your situation with your social worker.

## I do not want Tower Hamlets to handle my request. What can I do?

We understand that you may have strong feelings towards Social Services if we were involved in placing your child for adoption. In these circumstances you can approach another Adoption Support Agency. If you cannot find an agency; we can direct you to other independent adoption support agencies.

## Will I be able to have support at the outcome of my search?

Should we proceed with your application you will be offered ongoing support. The process of tracing and reunion can be very emotional for all concerned. Your search may be successful and you would then begin the process of getting to know your relative and trying to build a relationship. Your social worker will be able to support you at this time.

Should your search be unsuccessful, if you are rejected or your relative is deceased or cannot be found, we will continue to offer you support or refer you to alternative sources of help.

## **I have been having letterbox contact with my birth relative. How can I take this further?**

When the adopted person reaches 18 we will approach them and their adoptive parents to discuss the situation. We will speak to you about your wishes and act as an intermediary to help you both to reach an agreement about what should happen next. In some cases the adopted person may want to continue to exchange letters and we will help you with this.

Sometimes the adopted person may want to meet you. Again we will support you, the adopted person and their parents to achieve this.

Sometimes the adopted person may not want to continue contact. We know how difficult this will be for you and we will offer you the support you need for as long as you need it.

## **What if I am not satisfied with the service?**

You can contact the Adoption Team Manager in the first instance who will address your concerns. If you are not satisfied you will be advised as to how you can take your concerns further through the Tower Hamlets complaints process.

## **Contact for Adoption Support**

**Permanence and Adoption Support Team**  
4th Floor, Mulberry Place  
5 Clove Crescent  
London, E14 2BG  
Tel: 020 7364 5335  
Email: [adoptionFPS@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:adoptionFPS@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

## **Useful Reading**

**Preparing for Reunion: Julia Feast** –  
Published by the Children’s Society  
**Adoption Reunion Handbook** – Julia Feast

**Adult Adoptees – Stories of Adoption Tracing and Reunion:**

**Blue-Eyed Son: The Story of an Adoption** –  
Nicky Campbell

**Nobody’s Child** – Kate Adie  
**Love Child** – Sue Elliot

## **Useful Website**

**CoramBAAF**  
[www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk)

## **Independent Adoption Support Agencies**

**Post Adoption Centre**  
5 Torriano Mews  
Torriano Avenue  
London NW5 2RZ



**TOWER HAMLETS**

## **Tower Hamlets Fostering & Adoption Service**

For more information:  
call us on **0800 279 9850**  
or email us at  
**[adoption@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@towerhamlets.gov.uk)**  
**[www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk](http://www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk)**

