Moving to Adoption:  
a practice development project

Background
- In the UK most adopted children are very young (under 5 years) when placed for adoption.
- They will often have lived in foster care for up to 18 months or longer before being matched with new (usually unknown and unrelated) parents.
- Typically the move from foster to adoptive family takes place in 1-2 weeks after which children may have little or no contact with foster carers.
- The move can be distressing and abrupt for children and is highly emotional for adopters and foster carers.
- Where transitions are badly managed and distressing for children, there may be links to poorer child outcomes and even disruption (Selwyn et al, 2015, Neil et al, 2018)
- Professionals are uncertain about how to handle these moves in a more child focussed way.

Underpinning model
The Secure Base model:  
https://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase
Secure base relationships in foster care can support the child to build trust in the adopters and to gradually establish secure base relationships in the adoptive family.

Five key principles
1. A positive relationship between the foster carer(s) and the adopter(s) is helpful to the child
2. The timescale for the move should meet the needs of the child
3. The child's trust in the adoptive parent(s) should be allowed to build gradually
4. The child's feelings should be held in mind and responded to
5. Some continuity of environment and relationships will support the child in building trust

Case example – Fleur
Fleur came into care at 10 days old and lived with her foster family until she was 18 months. The plan was adoption and she was matched with a family she had not met before. Her adoptive parents had one son, age 8, and they lived 70 miles from the foster family.

• Adoptive family visit the foster home each Saturday for 4 weeks, spending time in the home and the local community.
• Adoptive family (including grandma) rent a house near the foster home for one week, and they gradually spend more and more time with Fleur caring for her and building trust.
• Fleur travels with her adoptive family back to their home.
• Her foster family follow in their car and move into local accommodation for 4 days so they can visit Fleur to help her settle.
• Foster family visit Fleur one week later then again after 1 month. Ongoing contact is planned.

Issues emerging from the pilot
- How to change entrenched views (that the traditional model is best) of professionals and foster carers?
- Who is responsible for directing the plans – social worker, foster carer or adopters?
- Should adoptive parents restrict friends and family from visiting when the child has newly moved in?
- How can children be helped to think about and process their feelings about their foster family after adoption?

Contacts: Elsbeth Neil: e.neil@uea.ac.uk Mary Beek: m.beek@uea.ac.uk

He had to be brought here screaming and kicking... I had him saying 'I want my mummy' meaning his foster parent and refusing to have cuddles and kisses
(The foster carers) let the children go willingly but emotionally... they made it clear to the boys that they consented to them being adopted by us and that helped their attachment to us