

We Are Family CIO

Annual report 2016/17

The Trustees of We Are Family CIO present their second annual report, covering the twelve months ended 31 March 2017 ('the year').

Reference and administrative details

The charity, We Are Family, is a charitable incorporated organisation which was registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales on 26 August 2015. The charity's registration number is 1163318. The charity does not have any offices or other premises; its registered address is 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AX.

The names of all those who served as the charity's trustees during the year, and subsequently, are given below (in alphabetical order), with the start and end dates of the term of office of each given, where relevant:

Name	Start	End
	19.9.16	
	19.9.16	
	26.8.15	25.8.16
	21.9.15	
	21.9.15	
	26.8.15	
	19.9.16	16.1.17
	21.9.15	
	26.8.15	
	21.9.15	
	21.9.15	
	21.9.15	1.3.17

Notes:

* Deputy Chair as at the date of this report

Chair as at the date of this report

The charity has been grateful for legal advice received from Hogan Lovell LLP.

Structure, governance and management

We Are Family existed as an unincorporated organisation before its registration as a charitable incorporated organisation in August 2015. It was originally founded in 2013 by a small group of adoptive parents to provide locally based peer-to-peer support for adoptive parents. From one group in Hackney & Islington, the organisation grew to seven groups over two years. Registration as an incorporated charity was sought in early 2015 to support the organisation's growth, facilitate future fundraising, and consolidate its existing reputation within the adoption field.

The charity's constitution provides for the appointment of trustees by the board of trustees, having regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the CIO. The charity's trustees from time to time are its only legal members (to be distinguished from

adopters and prospective adopters who have joined one of the charity's groups and who are referred to elsewhere in this report as 'members').

During the year, a recruitment process was conducted, with candidates sought from within the charity's wider membership, and based on a review of the skills and experience needed. This led to an election by existing trustees, the results of which included the appointment of new trustees with relevant skills and experience. As at the date of this report, a further recruitment process has been started, seeking candidates for the first time from outside the WAF community as well as within it, and with a key objective to find one or more new trustees with senior level finance skills.

During the year, a review was conducted of the charity's constitution, with particular regard to trustee terms of office. As a result of this review, and proposals made based on the outcome, a general meeting of the charity legal members was held on 20 March 2017 at which a number of changes were made to the constitution of the charity. In summary, the amended constitution now provides that the normal term of office for a trustee is three years and, taking account of transitional arrangements, one third of trustees will retire each year. A retiring trustee may then, if eligible for reappointment, be reappointed by the board. In addition, the constitution now provides for a trustee to be removed by a two thirds majority vote of the board.

There is an ongoing programme of trustee training on governance and subjects relevant to the work of the charity; as well as an induction programme for new trustees. There are usually twice yearly trustee training and strategy days.

The trustees have met on a bi-monthly basis since the charity was registered. Meetings during the year have been concerned principally with continuing to establish the appropriate systems for running the charity as well as overseeing the operation of the charity's groups and the provision of services to members.

During the year, the trustees agreed a medium term (three to five year) strategy to direct the charity's growth and development. This focusses on three key themes: sustain, consolidate and upscale. However, since that important step, the trustees have identified the need to focus primarily on the issue of sustainability. It is evident that with just a small amount of volunteer resource, both at group leadership level and on the board, the charity does not currently have the ability to put in place the systems and procedures that it believes are needed to support its ongoing operation and development in a way which will ensure high quality services and compliance with required standards. The board has looked at a number of ways to remedy this situation and believes that the use of experienced managerial resource (probably on a consultant/freelance basis), for about a year, is the best approach. Significant effort is being invested in finding ways of achieving this given the charity's low level of funds, lack of overall resources, and an unwillingness to take on the levels of risk associated with becoming an employer. This involves looking at ways of fundraising and working collaboratively with other organisations in the field of adoption.

To support the trustees, three committees have been established, comprised of trustees and others from within the charity's wider membership: Finance & Resources, Services, and Strategy. The charity's groups link to the chair of trustees on a day-to-day basis, send representatives to attend trustee meetings, and are represented on the Services Committee. The trustees are still working to embed these arrangements and ensure that they provide appropriate linkages between the Board and groups.

Objectives and activities

The charity's objects are to promote the health and well-being of prospective adopters and adoptive parents throughout the United Kingdom. In particular, this covers the predictable stresses, strain and sense of isolation that comes with being an adoptive parent and in parenting traumatised children. The charity currently operates through eight local groups across London and its surrounds; and three pan-London groups for single adopters (two) and prospective adopters (one). Each group is led by a small number of adoptive parents, and provides one or more of the following services to the charity's members, all of whom are either adoptive parents or prospective adopters (at at least stage 2 of the adoption process): parent support groups (including some hosted at playgroups); social events; family play events; and talks. In addition, the charity runs a regular blog about parents' adoption experiences; provides information about adoption related training and other matters; and represents adopters at pan-London adoption fora. We Are Family, as at the date of this report, has approximately 800 members.

Achievements and performance

During the year, the charity's groups continued to grow in terms of both the number of members and the number of members attending events. The number of members in total grew to approximately 800 during the year. In the charity's previous annual report (for the period ended 31 March 2016), a total number of members of 800 was also reported. Since then, however, the trustees have become aware that this was an overestimate. In part, this was due to some groups reporting the number of families they had and some, individual members. The west London-based groups saw their membership grow in the year by over 50%, while other groups roughly kept the same size. Within the latter category, whilst some new members joined, others moved either away from London or even out of the country. In addition, all groups continued to develop their activities to better meet the needs of members.

Relationships with local authorities continued to be developed, as were links with other adoption related organisations. The charity plays an active part in both local authority and pan-London adoption related fora (such as the London Adoption Board) to ensure that adopters' voices and needs are communicated.

The regular blog (currently usually weekly), published on the charity's website and distributed to a large mailing list, shares the experiences of adoptive parents with a wide readership, both geographically and in numbers of readers. The blog is read daily by an average of 80 people and annually by around 30,000. It is well regarded having been recognised in various international blog awards.

The charity conducted a survey of its members during the year. This had an encouraging response rate of approximately 14% of members. The responders were overwhelmingly white (79.6%) and female (86.6%). Ethnically, 5.1% were mixed/multiple ethnicities; 4.1% were Asian/British Asian; and 7.1% Black/African/Caribbean (1% had another ethnicity and 3.1% preferred not to say). This compares well with current national figures for children in care (no data was found on the ethnicity of adopters). The trustees were pleased that the overwhelming majority of responders were extremely likely (70.4%) or very likely (14.3%) to recommend WAF to other adopters, making a total of 84.7%. A further 10.2% were neutral. The responders were mainly white women in a couple. Most responders either had attended or were attending one or more WAF events on a regular basis. The blog is clearly very popular with 56.6% reading the blog regularly. (For more detail on the survey please read the headlines on our website: <https://wearefamilyadoption.org.uk/pdf/WAF-Survey-April-2017.pdf>.)

Results of the survey for each group were also locally reviewed and actions taken. In terms of general points raised, members wanted events and meetings that better suited their own availability and location. Given the charity's resources and dependence on volunteers, there is a limit to what can be provided but some WAF groups have responded to this issue by, for example, trialling daytime coffee morning meetings for social and support contact.

Financial review

During the year the charity was grateful to receive three grants from two local authority adoption consortia, North London (two) and West London, totalling £4,600. This was all unrestricted funding and in each case the trustees have used and intend to use the funds for both local group expenses and central costs (the latter, of course, benefitting all WAF groups).

The charity was also successful in an application for a grant from the Aviva community fund for £1,000. The application sought funds for renting venues for group meetings and, as such, constitutes restricted funding. No costs were actually incurred during the year, in part because of challenges in finding appropriate space in place of existing free but less suitable accommodation.

Expenditure during the year was limited to an insurance premium (£258) and expenses relating to trustee strategy and training meetings (£187). This is because the charity continued during the year to be run on a no/low cost basis, relying entirely on volunteer efforts.

The accounts for the year are drawn up on a cash (ie receipts and payments) basis. The charity had no amounts due to it or known liabilities at the year end. The trustees believe, however, that there may be some expenses still owed to volunteers for expenses incurred during the year which have not yet been claimed or reimbursed. These are not believed to total more than £200.

At the year end, the charity had unrestricted funds totalling £4,155, none of which has been allocated to any particular purpose; and restricted funds of £1,000.

Since the year end, the charity has received donations from trusts and individuals totalling £2,200. No grants from any statutory organisations have yet been received. Expenditure has continued at similar levels.

The trustees continue to work on putting in place appropriate financial systems and controls beyond those necessary to manage its bank account. The charity has established a Finance & Resources Committee to work on these areas.

The trustees have not seen fundraising as a high priority for the charity up to now, both because of the need to allocate available time to other matters, but also reflecting the continuing nature of the charity as a low cost organisation, supported entirely by volunteers. As discussed elsewhere in this report, this situation is now changing as the trustees recognise the need for funds to support paid staff to develop the charity's systems and meet its objective of becoming sustainable.

Given the above, particularly the absence of any committed ongoing expenditure, the charity has not formally designated any funds as a reserve and there is not yet a reserves policy. This will be reviewed during the current financial year.

No funds were or are held as a custodian on behalf of others.

Public benefit statement

The trustees confirm that they have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission in exercising their powers or duties. In offering peer-to-peer adopter led support, through its local and pan-London groups, We Are Family supports the well-being of both adoptive parents and prospective adopters. This benefits both individual adopters, in reducing the stresses and strains of adopting, and their families. Membership of the charity, and access to its support network and other services, is offered on an entirely open basis, the only requirement being verification by a social worker in addition to being an adoptive parent or a prospective adopter (at at least stage 2 of the current adoption process). The charity offers all its services at either no or very low cost; arranges its activities so that they are accessible to both working and non-working parents, and to those with children of a variety of ages. It strives to be open to all sections of the community and sees developing this as a key aspect of its future work. As an example, it has recently started to reimburse parents attending its single parent support groups for childcare costs, so that those members can more easily attend; and a number of groups have established daytime support/social events for parents who cannot easily attend evening events.

Further information

More information about We Are Family, including its regular blogs, can be found at: www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk

This report was approved by the trustees of We Are Family CIO on 15 January 2018.

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Chair