

## We Are Family CIO

### Annual Report 2018/19

#### Chair's introduction

The year ended 31 March 2019 was a significant one for We Are Family, setting the charity up for a period of change and significant development. As you will read below, we were successful in two significant funding bids during the year. This brought in the resources needed to tackle a number of key projects which we had been struggling to address before.

The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund, as it is now called, allowed us to begin work on developing a new member database. This work started in the second half of 2018. In September 2019 we were finally able to ask all our existing members to re-register on the new database; and from November 2019 we will be using the new database to communicate more effectively with members about events, register new members, provide more reliable data about our membership and allow members to manage their own information. As time goes on, we hope to develop the functionality of the database further.

The generous three year funding package we were awarded by The Tudor Trust gave us the confidence to employ our first member of staff. The part-time post of Operations Manager was created and the post filled from May 2019, originally on a six month basis but since extended to a full year. The post-holder has worked on various projects, described below, all focused around making the charity more sustainable. Because of this timing, we did not receive the first instalment of the grant until after the year end. As well as paying salary costs, this funding has also gone towards other project costs, including consultant fees.

All the while, We Are Family's nearly 40 volunteers have continued to run our groups across London, providing support to hundreds of adoptive and would-be adoptive families. After the year end we undertook another member survey which again showed how valuable what we do is for our members.

At the last board meeting of the year, in March 2019, We Are Family's founder chair, Marie Louise Sauerberg, stepped down as chair (although fortunately decided to continue as a trustee until the end of her term of office). Her contribution to the establishment, growth and success of the charity has been immense. All trustees, on behalf of themselves and WAF's members, thank her for her huge contribution.

You can read more details about many of these points in the following formal trustees' report.

*The trustees of We Are Family CIO present their fourth annual report, covering the twelve months ended 31 March 2019 ('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 by surname), with the start and end dates of the term of office of each given, where relevant:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>
Shireen Aga	19.9.16	19.11.18
Struan Campbell	18.11.19	
Samantha Fletcher	20.3.18	
Todd Foy	20.3.18	
Mark Houlton-Allen	18.11.19	

Ian Jacobs-Dean*	20.3.18	
Natalie Kavanaugh-Clarke	18.11.19	
Paul Meadows #	21.9.15	
Miranda Mercado Gregory	26.8.15	
Jay Nicol	21.9.15	
Klayre Rogers	20.3.19	
John Rolls	20.3.18	
Marie Louise Sauerberg	26.8.15	
Nandi Simpson	21.9.15	19.3.19
Onika Staas	21.9.15	8.7.19
Jody Tranter	20.3.18	

**Notes:**

\* Deputy Chair as at the date of this report

# Chair as at the date of this report

The board has been supported by its secretary, Robin Dormer, to whom grateful thanks are again extended. The charity has also been grateful for pro-bono support and advice received from a number of generous organisations, including Fieldfisher for legal advice.

**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 charity. 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').

Subsequent to the year end, in July 2019, the charity's legal members passed a number of resolutions to amend the charity's constitution. In particular, the maximum number of trustees was increased from 12 to 16, although it is intended that the normal number of trustees will remain at 12. This change allows, however, for new trustees to join the board before retiring trustees leave to allow for a better transition. Another change allowed for the term of office of any trustee to be extended once by up to three months. This is, for example, to allow for trustee terms of office to be better kept in approximate synchronisation or to provide extra time for a trustee to complete a particular project.

During the year, and subsequently, the board maintained an ongoing trustee recruitment process, recognising the challenges involved in trying to find candidates with the right skills and experience during a time-limited recruitment period. This has led since the start of 2019 to the appointment of four new trustees with a broad range of skills relevant to the charity's strategic development including fundraising, volunteer engagement, communications and operations, as well as experience of adoption. The trustees also wish to extend thanks to the trustees who left the board during the year and subsequently.

There is a regular programme of trustee training on 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 continued to be concerned principally with overseeing the operation of the charity's groups and the provision

of services to members; setting up systems for running the charity; and securing funding to ensure the sustainability of the charity.

To support the trustees, three board committees have operated during the year, comprised of trustees and others from within the charity's wider membership: Finance & Resources; Services; and Strategy. Subsequent to the end of the year, the Services Committee has been reconstituted to focus more on reviewing the delivery of services and the development of policies and procedures to support service delivery. With the charity's increasing focus on more structured fundraising activity, the Strategy Committee has been recently renamed the Strategy & Fundraising Committee with a broader remit to oversee fundraising.

As described below, We Are Family currently runs local groups across London and a number of cross-London groups. Each of these groups links to the chair of trustees on a regular basis, provides regular reports to the board and may send a representative to attend board meetings. Since the appointment of the Operations Manager, groups are increasingly in regular contact with the post-holder for support and to build cross-organisational links. It is hoped, following the refocussing of the Services Committee, that a new group leader forum can be established to provide a place to share experiences and best practices.

### **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.

During the year, We Are Family ran seven local groups (based in East London, Hackney & Islington, Havering, North Bucks, Richmond, Shepherds Bush and Southwark but with each serving a broader local area); and three cross-London groups: two for single adopters (one in North London and one in South London) and one for prospective adopters. 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 (ie at stage 2 of the adoption process or further): parent support groups (including some hosted at playgroups); social events; family play events; and talks. Since the year end, a further group has been established in Thurrock, serving the surrounding area of Essex, and the North Bucks group has closed. Since WAF's start, groups have been established in an organic way by adoptive parents who wanted to find local peer-to-peer support from other adoptive parents. We are currently considering how to develop this effective model to start groups in areas of London further from where existing groups meet.

In addition to support groups and other activities which are provided locally, the charity offers centrally-provided services accessible to members generally and the broader public. These comprise a regular blog about parents' adoption experiences; information about adoption related training and other matters; and adoption-related resources on its website. We Are Family also represents adopters and prospective adopters at various pan-London adoption fora and in discussions with many statutory adoption bodies. We Are Family, at the year end, had approximately 800 members.

### **Achievements and performance**

During the year, the trustees' main strategic priority continued to be the issue of sustainability. Some progress was made early in the year to further develop the systems and procedures needed to support the charity's ongoing operation and development in a way which will ensure high quality services and compliance with required standards. But our limited volunteer resource, at both board level and group leadership, continued to constrain this.

#### *Fundraising success*

The board recognised that to allow the necessary development, let alone any growth, it would be necessary to use experienced managerial and technical resource, which would need significant additional funding. In the past, We Are Family has had minimal costs and has existed on a very low level of income. A small number of carefully chosen applications were therefore made to grant-making organisations to support the key infrastructure building projects the trustees wished to pursue. The trustees were delighted that these were

largely successful. A major grant of £65,000 over three years was secured from the Tudor Trust. A grant of almost £10,000 was made by The National Lottery Community Fund (as it is now), specifically to support the development of a new member database. In addition, a grant of £5,000 was received from Islington Council Community Chest, to allow the further development of adoptive parent support groups, benefitting residents of Islington, and a grant was received from Aviva. We Are family is grateful for all the financial support it has received.

#### *New Operations Manager post*

Having been awarded the generous grant from the Tudor Trust, the trustees felt confident enough to explore the possibility of employing the charity's first member of staff. They felt that this would be a better way of securing the necessary focus and ongoing continuity in comparison to one or more consultants. In addition though, it would mean that where a consultant's specialist skills might be needed, the manager would be able to manage that resource better than a volunteer. It was decided to create a part-time Operations Manager position, initially for a six month period. The recruitment campaign, towards the end of the year, attracted a strong field of candidates and the trustees were delighted to appoint the present post-holder, who started employment after the year end in May 2019. The board agreed arrangements for line management, payroll and other administrative requirements. The post is focussed on a number of projects to support the charity's sustainability including the development of policies and procedures, volunteer engagement and training, further fundraising and service development. One particular project, being undertaken with Adopt London South, is to explore the establishment of support arrangements specifically for BAME adoptive parents and trans-racial adopters. This significant step for We Are Family has, at the date of this report, proved successful with the post holder performing strongly and progress being made across many areas. The post was extended for a further six months in September 2019.

To build on the initial success in fundraising, the trustees decided to allocate part of the first instalment of the Tudor Trust grant to a fundraising consultancy. The selected consultant has helped identify a number of relevant trusts and foundations to whom applications will be made. The aim is to secure further resources to support the emerging ambitious strategic plans mentioned below.

#### *New member database*

For the majority of the year, a key focus has been the development of the new member database. This work was made possible by the grant received from The National Lottery Community Fund (as it is now) specifically for this project. We Are Family had an urgent need to move to a centralised, more secure database which would allow better member communication, proper management reporting and a simpler experience for volunteer group administrators. After developing project user requirements, an appropriate developer was selected and development started in early 2019. This was a challenging project for a charity of We Are Family's size and the work imposed significant pressures on the volunteers involved. However, the new member database was launched to existing members in September 2019 with a request to re-register membership on the database. The new database is planned to become fully operational in November 2019 after which it will drive all member communications and, for the first time, provide trustees with comprehensive data about WAF's membership to support service development, a better member experience and fundraising efforts.

#### *Groups activity*

During the year, the charity's groups continued to develop, particularly in terms of the number of members attending events and the number of events held. The number of members at the year-end was approximately 800. In addition, all groups continued to develop their activities to better meet the needs of members. For example, some groups offer coffee morning social events for members who cannot make evening events. We continue to see a gradual shift towards evening events with a greater focus on social interaction and information provision, rather than traditional support group activities.

The charity has continued to operate a system for recording events held across its groups, the types of event and the numbers attending. During the year, We Are Family held at least 195 separate events across its nine groups. These events comprised playgroup sessions (49), family meet-ups (26), parties and social events (15), coffee and chat sessions (23), events with speakers (8), and parent support meetings (70). This range of

activities was designed to engage with and support the widest possible number of adopters and prospective adopters. We are working to further improve the consistency of our event reporting; we know that the above figures will certainly have been exceeded in practice.

#### *Links to statutory authorities*

Relationships with local authorities continued to be developed, as were links with other adoption-related organisations. The charity played an active part in both local authority and pan-London adoption related fora (such as the London Adoption Board and local authority adoption consortia) to ensure that adopters' voices and needs were communicated. We were asked to participate in the discussions around proposals to regionalise local authority adoption responsibilities in London, again to reflect adopter views and share our experiences. Since the year end, of course, these proposals have been implemented and WAF is beginning to actively work with the new Regional Adoption Authorities (RAAs) covering London.

#### *Blog and website*

We Are Family's regular blog (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 website, relaunched in 2017/18, has seen a significant increase in visits. During the year, page views are up from 31,534 to 53,660, divided over 15,375 sessions, equating to 42 daily visitors. The bounce rate remains very low and has dropped from 1.19% to 0.70%. Behind the home page views, the blog and its individual posts remain the most popular part of the website and account for 12% of total website visits.

In the current year the blog has already had posts from an adoptee, a new approach offering new perspectives, and been linked to some local authority adoption/post adoption websites to help ensure the blogs get an ever-wider readership. As part of the Blog strategy, we are looking at increasing circulation and providing a calendar of topics to assist would-be and continuing bloggers share their valuable experiences and insights for the benefit of blog readers.

WAF's website continues to be a popular source of information not only about its own activities and services but also for adoption-related resources generally. One of the most popular parts of the website is that offering information and resources about schools and education, one of the subjects most often presenting challenges to adoptive families. This area of the website accounts for 5% of total visits.

#### *Education Working Group*

The charity's Education Working Group has continued to be active. This was set up in response to the fact that many adopted children under-achieve in school compared to their peers and that the needs of adopted children (as well as other children with trauma in their pasts) are often not well recognised by schools. A highlight for the group was the major event held in June 2018 at which an external speaker, headmaster and adopter Stuart Guest, gave an evening talk directed at members and education professionals. Approximately 170 people attended this event which sought to both raise awareness of the problems and suggest solutions. The event was co-hosted with the North London Adoption Consortium. Members of the group also participated in the 2018 Adoption UK annual conference.

Subsequent to the year end, in June 2019 the Education Working Group staged another event, again hosting Stuart Guest for an evening talk. This time the event was arranged in collaboration with the West London Adoption Consortium (WLAC), which generously paid Stuart's speaking fee. WAF covered the travel costs through a private donation. A free venue was provided by a school in Shepherds Bush. The event was the last training event for WLAC before it was disbanded prior to the new West London RAA being launched. The event was also popular with over 120 parents and school staff attending from across WAF's groups and West London local authorities. We plan to stage another WAF Education event in Spring 2020.

WAF Education would also like to take advantage of the new member database to launch a regular newsletter. This would include regular updates which would be sent at the same time each year, timed according to when information about choosing a school, transitions etc would be useful. We would also include relevant recent

articles or resources. Unfortunately, the Education Working Group cannot answer specific enquiries or give advice but can point parents towards resources such as the PAC-UK education advice phone line, their local virtual school etc. We also plan to refresh and renew the WAF Education resources page on the WAF website.

*Strategy development*

Since the year end, and with the additional resource available from the new Operations Manager, the trustees have been able to work on a new strategic plan. This is nearing completion as at the date of this report. It envisages a number of key objectives:

- Consolidation: for the remainder of the current year (April 2019 to March 2020) consolidating the charity's governance and operations infrastructure, including securing funding for the further strategic development which the plan envisages.
- Volunteers: also starting within the current year, increasing volunteer recruitment and engagement, including more volunteer training.
- Membership and existing services: from 2020-21, increasing WAF membership and broadening current service delivery.
- New services: from 2021-22, developing new services to better meet the needs of WAF's diverse membership.

Once this new strategic plan has been completed, the trustees expect to make it available as a separate document, for members, funders and other stakeholders.

#### **Financial review**

During the year, We Are Family was, as mentioned above, grateful to receive a grant of £9,610 from the Big Lottery Fund (now The National Lottery Community Fund), to be used to create a new member database. Further restricted funding totalling £5,125 was received from the Islington Council Community Chest, Aviva, and the West London Adoption Consortium, to be used primarily to fund events for single adopters and to improve facilitation of peer-to-peer support groups.

Additionally, WAF received unrestricted funding from the South London Adoption Consortium and the Islington Community Fund which together came to £3,450. This has been used for local group expenses and central costs. Further unrestricted funding was received, primarily from cash donations and sponsored events.

In total, the charity's income during the year was £19,578, of which £14,735 was restricted (prior year total income £6,900, restricted £1,900).

Expenditure during the year was £7,017 (including £3,591 from restricted funds), compared to £3,258 in the prior year. The spending was mainly on IT consultancy and consumables, primarily in relation to the new member database, venue hire for events, and reimbursing childcare costs for parents attending the WAF Single Parent support groups. Aside from increased investment in WAF's infrastructure, core running costs remained low as WAF local groups continued to be run on a largely no/low cost basis, relying solely 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 at the year end. A total of £5,950 was committed as at the year-end date in relation to the member database but not yet spent. Since the year end, expenses relating to the 2018-19 financial year have been paid to volunteers, totalling some £1,500. These related primarily to reimbursement of childcare costs for single adopters.

At the year end, the charity had unrestricted funds totalling £8,166 (prior year £6,749), none of which had been allocated to any particular purpose; and restricted funds of £13,192 (prior year £2,048). In March 2019 the trustees approved a formal reserves policy which aims to maintain reserves equivalent to three months of general operating expenses – calculated at the date of approval of the reserves policy as £3,000. Whilst this

calculation may be revisited in future, it is still deemed sufficient as at the date of approval of this report and accounts. Reserves in fact remained well above this limit as at the date of this report.

After the year end, the charity received the first instalment, £30,000, of the generous grant from the Tudor Trust of £65,000 over three years. Whilst core costs remain low, expenditure on infrastructure projects has since increased, primarily through the employment of the Operations Manager to help progress WAF's ambitious programme of consolidation and sustainability, continued expenditure on the member database, and the engagement of a fundraising consultant.

During the year the trustees further strengthened financial controls and systems through the introduction of a formal expenses policy for volunteers, trustees and employees. In addition, management accounts are produced to coincide with board meetings, and bank statements regularly reconciled to the accounting system.

To consolidate and increase the charity's funding base, the trustees have engaged a fundraising consultant as mentioned above. The intention is to use this expertise to support further fundraising applications to generate resources to achieve the charity's short and medium term strategic objectives.

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

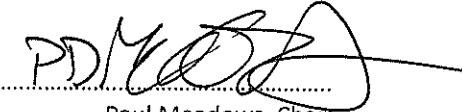
### **Public benefit statement**

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 cross-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 (ie from at least stage 2 of the adoption process onwards). The charity offers all its services at either no or very low cost; and arranges its activities so that, as far as possible, 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. It continued during the year 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 run daytime events for parents who cannot easily attend evening events. Since the year end, as a further example and as noted above, work has started on exploring how to set up specific support opportunities for BAME and trans-racial adopters in South London, in conjunction with Adopt London South (whose support WAF gratefully acknowledges).

### **Further information**

More information about We Are Family, including its regular blogs, can be found at: [www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk](http://www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk)

This report was approved by the trustees of We Are Family CIO on 18 November 2019.

  
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Paul Meadows, Chair