**String exercise to help prospective adopters understand the child’s experience of loss**

One of the facilitators takes the role of the child and stands in the centre of the room. The prospective adopters stand in a circle around the child. The second facilitator gives the end of the string to the ‘child’ and then goes around the circle giving each adopter a role.

The roles include foster carer, foster carers neighbour, foster carers pet cat, foster carers toys, school teacher, lollypop lady/man, dinner lady, best friend at school, teaching assistant at school,  local park, brownie leader, best friend at brownies, church/mosque leader, lady who serves the tea at church/mosque, social worker etc . The roles must also include the birth family and the new adoptive parent.

With the ‘child’ holding onto the end of the string, the facilitator then takes the ball of string to each person playing a role and back to the child. The end result is that the child is in the centre of a wheel of string with two lines of string leading to each person playing a role.

Whilst giving out the roles the facilitator embellishes the story. For example, the story might start: “This is Chantelle. She is five years old. She has been in foster care for two years and had just started school. Her foster carer is great and loves her very much. She understands Chantelle and is very patient with her. The foster carers neighbour is an elderly gentleman who always teases Chantelle when he throws the ball back to her from his garden. The foster carers cat is called Lucky and he sleeps on Chantelle’s bed. She loves that cat ...” The facilitator tells the story ensuring all the roles are included in the narrative.

At the end of the story Chantelle is going to be adopted and the facilitator emphasises how excited Chantelle is about meeting her forever mummy/daddy.

The facilitator goes back to the start of the circle and explains that Chantelle will no longer see the foster carer in the same way anymore and snips one of the strings leading to the foster carer. (Only snip one string as it is good practice to encourage appropriate ongoing contact with the foster carer). The facilitator explains that Chantelle probably won’t see the elderly neighbour again, and so snips both strings leading to the elderly neighbour. In this way the facilitator goes around the circle snipping away the strings connecting the ‘child’ to the ‘roles’. At the end, the child is left holding one string connecting her to the foster carer, one string connecting her to the birth parent, one string connecting her to the social worker and two strings connecting her to the new adoptive parent. She is also left holding all the ends of the snipped string.

The exercise symbolises loss. This is just one cycle of loss of a child leaving one foster carer. The facilitator emphasises that the child will have gone through a similar story when the left their birth family, and if they have had more than one foster home they will have gone through these experiences, perhaps many times.

Each adopter is left holding a piece of string. It is a stark reminder of the huge loss our children go through.

There is also an animation prepared by a VAA on this exercise.