

# Preventing delays in adoption and ensuring permanence for children

## A case study from South Tyneside



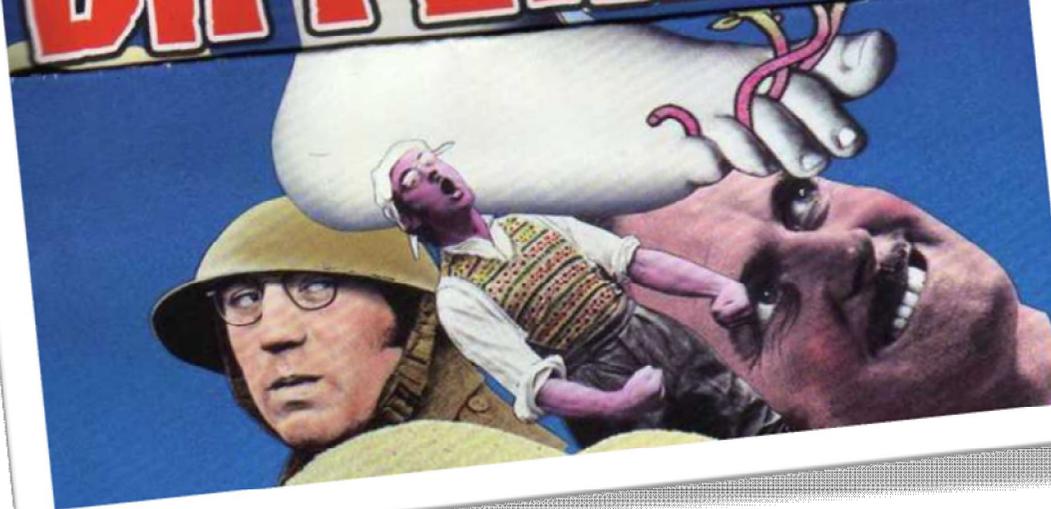
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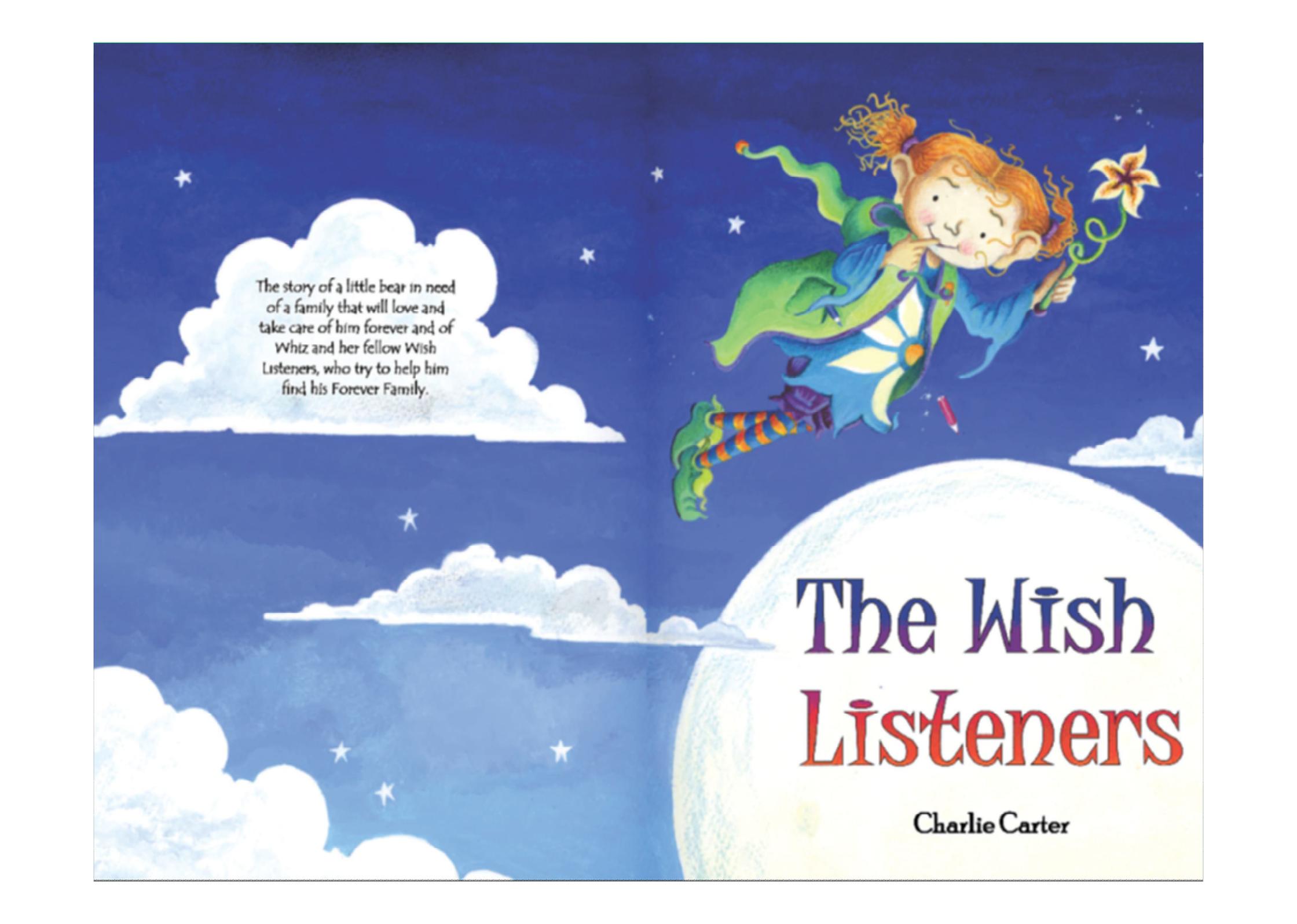


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**AND NOW FOR  
SOMETHING  
COMPLETELY  
DIFFERENT**



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The story of a little bear in need  
of a family that will love and  
take care of him forever and of  
Whiz and her fellow Wish  
Listeners, who try to help him  
find his Forever Family.

# The Wish Listeners

Charlie Carter



**An extract from:**

# **“The Wish Listeners”**

**By Charlie Carter (an adoptive parent)**

A children’s story book that forms part of the Children’s Guide given to children who have a plan of adoption in South Tyneside



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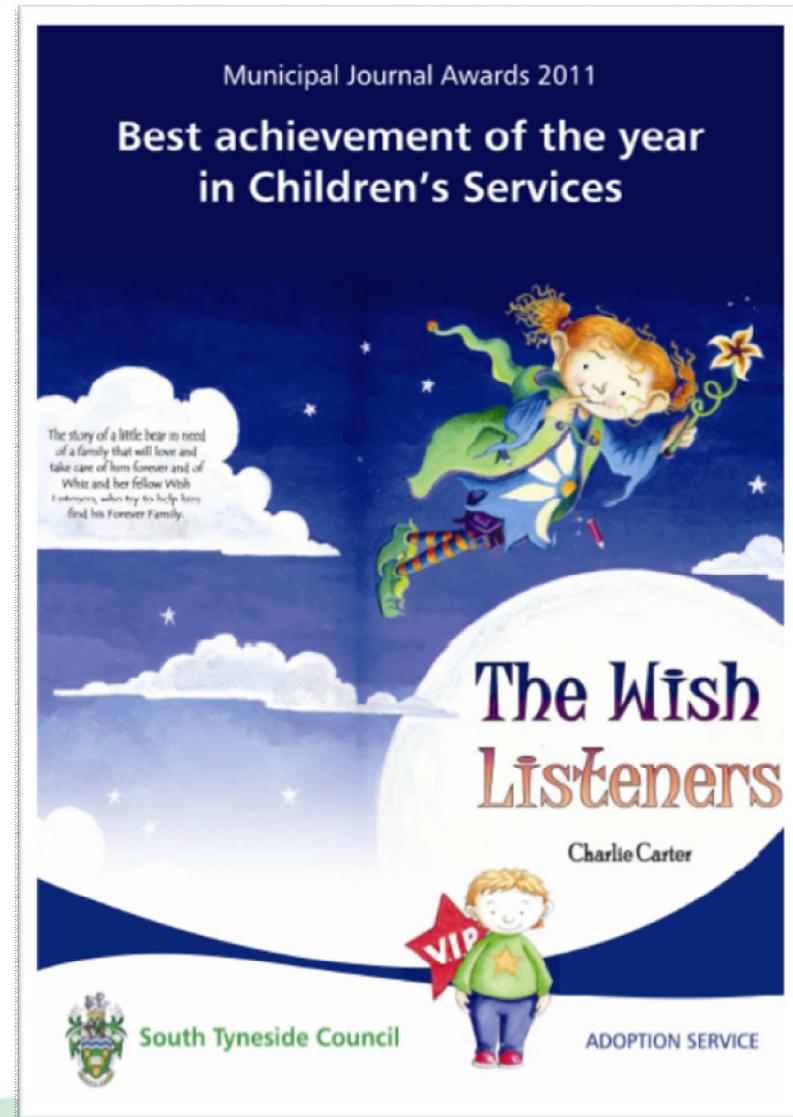
**We as Local Authorities are “The Wish Listeners”**

**We believe in adoption, and know the benefits it brings for children**

**No-one is better placed to improve the system than Local Authorities**



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# A familiar quote?

**“It is hard to overstate the importance of a stable and loving family life for children. That is why I want more children to benefit from adoption.**

**“We know that adoption works for children. Over the years, many thousands of children in the care of Local Authorities have benefited from the generosity and commitment of adoptive families, prepared to offer them the security and well-being that comes from being accepted as members of new families.**

**“But we also know that many children wait in care for far too long.**

**“Some of the reasons are well known. Too often in the past adoption has been seen as a last resort. Too many local authorities have performed poorly in helping children out of care and into adoption. Too many prospective parents have been confused, or put off, by the process of applying to adopt, and the time the procedure takes”**



# “Quiz of the day” - who said this?

Was it:

a) David Cameron?



b) Michael Gove?



c) Tim Loughton?



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And the answer is ...



Prime Minister's Review of Adoption  
2000



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# Same old story

**Has much changed in the last twelve years?**

**Successive governments have been concerned that:**

- Children wait too long before being placed with their adoptive family
- Prospective adopters are often put off by the attitude of adoption agencies
- The whole adoption procedure takes too long



# How to avoid delay

- Have a strong Permanence Policy
- Early identification of candidates entering care
  - informed by IRO at the 28 day review
- Confirmation of potential plan of adoption
  - informed by IRO at 4 month review
- Involvement of Adoption Social Workers throughout
- Schedule sufficient adoption panel meetings
- Adoption 'surgeries' with social work teams

## Where Support is given with:

- Completion of CPRs
- The adoption medical process
- Adoption support plans
- Placement of siblings
- Contact issues
- Care plans
  
- Adoption Officer quality assures our Permanence Planning.



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## Adoption and Me



The Adoption Service  
in South Tyneside



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# Adopters

**Without adopters there would be no adoptions**

- We always respond promptly to enquiries
- Home visits rather than host information evenings
- Advertising timed to coincide with Preparation courses
- Have sufficient assessors available
- No geographical restrictions for recruitment
  - we have approved adopters in Scotland, London & Yorksh
- Outline timetable with prospective adopters from the outset
- On average we approve applicants within 4 months



## Matching

- Large pool of prospective adopters to draw from.
- Actively use Inter-Agency placements.
- Panel minutes within 2 days of panel for most cases
- Inter-Agency placements minutes complete before the end of the meeting.
- Gain the agency decision 4 days after panel.
- Conduct early planning meetings (usual in the week of panel)



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# Placement

- Adoption Officers attend all adoption reviews
- Adoption manager attends all inter-agency placement reviews for continuity purposes
- Bundle prepared for court at the time of application for an adoption order:
  - application
  - fee
  - certificates
  - Annexe A report
- Giving a bundle to the court at the time of application (rather than waiting to be asked for the Annexe A report) often gives us the opportunity to negotiate a court date.
- This can save at least 6 weeks - a long time in a young child's life!

## Outcomes in 2011-2012

- 30 children adopted from a LAC population of 320
- All children placed with adopters in less than 12 months
- 43 applications to become prospective adopters received
- Average time from application to approval was 4 months



# Early Permanence Planning

- **Family S** known to us for a number of years (one child **S1** already placed for adoption)
- We became aware that they were expecting a second child – likely to need adoption
- Upon birth child would be placed in foster care for the duration of care proceedings
- Legal proceedings would commence with the associated assessments taking place
- An adoptive placement would need to be found when legal proceedings completed.
- Family finding, matching panel, introductions and placement would then take place sequentially
- Child S2 approaching 1<sup>st</sup> birthday - would likely be placed with an adoptive family.

## Note:

- Child S1 was born prematurely (28 weeks) - 7 months old when she came into care
- She was placed in foster care during legal proceedings until a family were identified.
- Placed with adoptive parents at 13 months - 1 year later she was adopted
- Whilst in foster care, psychological and psychiatric assessments of the birth parents confirmed that they were not capable of protecting a child.

To prevent child S2 having to be placed with foster carers and then be moved some time in the future to adopters, consideration was given to a form of concurrent planning.



# The “Plan”

## The principles behind this thinking were:

- Upon birth we would place baby S2 with prospective adopters who were approved as foster carers
- The adopters of child S1 were approached about taking child S2 -they wished to be considered
- The prospective adopters were then re-assessed as second time adopters and approved.
- Prior to the birth , the prospective adopters were also approved as foster carers for a specific child.

## The Plan unfolds

- Child S2 is born prematurely (32 weeks) and placed with her sister S1's adoptive parents in a fostering capacity.
- Care proceedings are commenced with an up-date to the psychological assessment requested.
- During assessment, facilitated contact between S2 and her birth parents takes place.
- Although the foster carers/adopters kept a contact diary they did not meet with the birth parents and the placement remained protected.
- After 8 months, the legal proceedings drew to a close with adoption being the accepted plan
- The case is presented to the adoption panel for a recommendation about the match
- Following the agency decision, the child S2 is now placed for adoption
- The carers fostering status is rescinded by the fostering panel
- 11 weeks later the child S2 is adopted



# The Outcome

- Child S2 was observed to be meeting her milestones really quickly despite her prematurity - in some situations she had surpassed her elder sister.
- The physical and emotional benefits were clear to see and this case served to build our confidence as an agency that such a form of planning is the right thing to do in selected cases.
- This was our first concurrent plan and since then we have had 20 children benefit from this form of planning.



# How do we go about it?

- Involving adoption officers in early planning helps determine feasibility
- Concurrent planning is covered during our Information & Preparation course.
- CAFCASS officers are always kept informed of our plans
- The legality of such placements is clarified with local court clerks
- Fostering Panel educated about their role in such planning
- Using Prospective Adopters Report as the foster carers assessment
- IROs support practical arrangements required for LAC reviews (given the protected nature of the placement)
- More frequent support given to Prospective Adopters/Foster Carers
- Contact arrangements are supervised by contact officers and not foster carers
- Prospective Adopters/Foster Carers do not meet with birth family
- Children's plans are brought to the adoption panel for a decision that the child should be placed for adoption towards the end of legal proceedings
- Care order/Placement order granted
- Match brought to panel for a recommendation followed by agency decision.
- Child now placed for adoption
- Foster carer status rescinded



# The “Pitfalls”

- Increased awareness required to maintain confidentiality
- Positive feedback from contact meetings can promote a rollercoaster of emotions for the Prospective Adopters/Foster Carers
- Protracted legal proceedings can cause a high level of stress for the carers.
- Carers unable to take “Adoption Leave “ whilst fostering the child. This limits those families that can be considered for a concurrent placement.
- The child could potentially return to the birth family at the end of legal proceedings. Given that the carers are essentially adopters who are approved as foster carers, this possible outcome is a source of stress particularly as they have bonded with the child.



# The “Benefits”

- No placement moves for the child
- The child is able to bond with a primary carer virtually from birth.
- Adopters are able to observe the child reach significant milestones.
- Children are able to be placed with siblings.
- It provides a quicker route to adoption

A summary of our Early Permanence Planning is available on the C4EO website  
[www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren)



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# Champions of children

- None of the processes and practice initiatives shared today demand 'rocket science' to deliver.
- They are simple examples, but if we all do the simple things well then success is often achieved.
- Spain have become the European and World Champions at football through doing the simple things well and passing their way to victory.
- We as Local Authorities can become the Champions of children through doing the simple things well and avoiding delay.





It is a privilege for Local Authorities to work in the adoption field as lives can be transformed.

**“The Wish Listeners”** may be a fairy story

But the benefits of avoiding delay for children and securing their future through adoption are very real indeed.

**Thank you!**



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