

## ADOPTERS AT No 10

It started as a fairly routine request from British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) to volunteer some adopters and their agency representative who might be willing to travel to London to help with some positive adoption publicity. BAAF said they were particularly interested in identifying adopters who had met their children through an Adoption Activity Day.

Jane and Shaun were an obvious nomination. They had first met their wonderful daughter Poppy at an Activity Day in September 2013 and a couple of months later they were matched and planning their first Christmas as a family. Jane and Shaun were self-confessed Activity Day sceptics, but they had cordially accepted our invitation and somehow Jane had persuaded Shaun that 'if they were going to do it they were going to do it properly' and that meant party attitudes and full on Pirates and Princess outfits!

On paper, Poppy was not the match they had been waiting for. On paper her needs looked terribly complex and beyond them. Nonetheless at the party that day, with her smile and a little of that indefinable 'spark' or 'chemistry', Poppy had them well and truly hooked. She wasn't a collection of scary complex needs in a profile anymore, she was simply Poppy. Jane and Shaun stopped thinking 'we couldn't ...' and started asking 'why couldn't we...?' But, there was still a lot of information to be shared, people to meet and future support to be considered. When it finally came around to matching Jane and Shaun were fully informed and as ready as they could be. By then they were Activity Day converts and they expressively told our Panel what a fabulous idea they thought they were. (Shaun comically told Panel that it was the first time he had ever 'clicked with a girl at a Party!'). Nine months on Jane and Shaun had forgotten what life was like before they were a mum and dad and Poppy was absolutely blossoming in their care. Who better then to offer as our Champions for adoption and Activity Days.?

The nomination was made and was duly accepted by BAAF. On the Friday before our Monday departure, it was revealed that the plan was for Jane, Shaun and Poppy to meet the Prime Minister and have their story told as part of his planned 'Focus on Families' speech. There followed a flurry of calls with No 10 to ensure the family were comfortable with the fact that this publicity may reach a wider audience than first assumed but once agreed, the trip had a whole new air of excitement.

At the conference venue in London David Cameron spent some time chatting with Jane, Shaun and Poppy, asking about their experience of the adoption process, support services and how they were enjoying family life. He asked how the government's reform agenda was influencing practice and spoke of the 25% increase in adoptions that he was about to announce in the press release. Jane and Shaun accompanied the Prime Minister to hear the speech and he returned with them to have photographs taken with Poppy.

Amidst all this we hadn't anticipated the Prime Minister's impromptu invitation to visit Number 10 the next day. That certainly proved a fascinating morning for the grown-ups, and we had a really engaging access-all-areas tour with one of the Number 10 staff, who shared endless stories about past Prime Ministers, the building and its contents. Poppy was delightful throughout and engaged

everyone we came across. As we hoped she also got to meet Larry, the Number 10 cat who turned up, as if on cue, just as we were leaving.

There was way too much going on for Poppy to consider a daytime nap so before heading back to Euston, we did a little sightseeing at Buckingham Palace. Despite our new connections at Number 10, we didn't get invitation inside on this occasion but Poppy and family have made it known they would certainly be pleased to meet the Queen, if she also wants to hear more about adoption and Activity Days!

Jules Clarke

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The Prime Ministers speech on Adoption and Families 18 August 2014 can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-cameron-on-families>

