Adoption Case Study: Emma, Fahmi, Aliya and Samir

Emma and Fahmi are a mixed race couple who have been together for 18 years. Their first daughter, Aliya*, was born a year into their relationship and 15 years later they adopted their second child, Samir*, when he was 15 months old.

After Aliya was born, Emma and Fahmi waited several years before trying for another child. When they had trouble conceiving, it was discovered that Emma suffered from second child infertility. They tried some different fertility treatments but none were successful. Emma found the whole thing physically and emotionally draining. When the last treatment failed, she felt hopeless as she went to tell the news to her husband and daughter. “Aliya was only 12 at the time and I remember her being so matter of fact about it. She said: ‘Don’t worry mum, there is always adoption to look at’, and that is where our journey really began.”

What have been the challenges of your adoption journey so far?

“Adjusting to having a little person needing our attention and relying on us for everything! It’s not so much a challenge but a big change.”

“Also opening up about our entire life to our social worker during the process was a very thought-provoking time for us all - in a way, it’s a form of therapy. I think it has been a good thing and, among other things, it has shown us how strong our relationship is.”

They spoke about adoption as a family and decided they wanted to adopt a dual heritage baby. As they began the process of enquiring with different agencies, they worried that having a birth child would mean that other potential adopters would view them negatively, or that they would feel guilty for wanting another child when they already had one. They quickly found that this wasn’t the case at all; lots of the other couples they met during training and preparation groups had other children.

“PACT was the third agency we contacted from the list on the First 4 Adoption website. We got a call back from a lovely woman who was so positive and gave us so much information. She answered all my many questions and from there, our journey with PACT began.”

Emma and Fahmi then attended PACT’s training course and found it a good experience, feeling excited for what was to come. Their initial assessment with a social worker was more challenging as there were several lifestyle changes that they needed to make to help them pass their medical evaluation and prepare to adopt.

At first, they were disappointed with this because it felt like everything so far had been one step forward, two steps back. They knew, however, that it was important to make the required changes: “Everything asked of us would be to benefit our family and any child that we were to potentially adopt. So we picked ourselves up again, looked at what needed to be done and we got on with it.”

*Names changed in line with confidentiality
Six months later, they were ready to attend PACT’s adoption panel to be approved as adopters. They brought Aliya along to their panel meeting; they had made sure to involve her in all stages of the process already and they wanted her to be there for the decision. Emma remembers feeling nervous and excited on the day and feeling wonderful when they were told the result. “Being approved by the panel took us one step closer to our dream and that felt amazing. I burst into tears of happiness as soon as they told us.”

Next came the linking and matching process, which Emma and Fahmi found difficult. Emma said: “Fahmi openly admits he would have said yes to every profile that was sent to us! In the end I had to be quite firm in sorting out which profiles we would realistically consider.” They included Aliya in the decision-making process so that she could be involved all the way through, and a social worker also did some one-to-one work with her to help her understand the process. “It was important for her to know that if she wasn’t happy at any point and this wasn’t what she wanted then we would stop, but she fully supported us all along which was great.”

When they were sent Samir’s profile, they all agreed that something about it felt right. After a few bumps, they were matched with Samir and met him for the first time. “We were so excited and nervous, but he had such a fantastic foster family that we instantly felt comfortable and just knew that this gorgeous little boy was going to be our son and complete our family.” They found that it was a big change going from having a self-sufficient teenager to having a 15-month-old who depended on them for everything, but Samir settled in really quickly and soon they had a good routine. “It honestly feels now like he’s always been here and we certainly wouldn’t be the same without him.” Both Emma and Fahmi felt that they had great support from PACT throughout the process.

Samir is of dual heritage and this was important for Emma and Fahmi. After Samir came to live with them, Aliya mentioned to a relative that she loved finally having someone in the family who looked like her. Emma said: “This comment has stayed with us. We had never thought of her feeling so different but when we thought about it, all her family members were either white or black. It was lovely for her to feel that she had someone else the same as her and I think this has made her bond with her little brother that much stronger.”

To anyone considering adoption, Emma and Fahmi say: “Just go for it! It isn’t a process that can or should be rushed so you have to have plenty of patience and be prepared to be as open and honest as possible.

“It’s an emotional rollercoaster so be kind to yourselves throughout and make sure you take time together as a couple and as a family.”