

PRESS RELEASE
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Landmark trial for British couple told they couldn't adopt a 'white child'

Sandeep and Reena Mander, with the backing of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, begin a four-day trial against Berkshire's adoption service on Monday 4 November.

British couple, the Manders were told by their local Berkshire adoption service that their application to join the register of approved adopters would be rejected due to their "Indian background" and that they might have better luck looking to adopt a child from India.

Mr and Mrs Mander, who are in their 30s and have been unable to have a child of their own, said they were willing to give a home to a child of any race.

The couple started the road to adoption in late 2015, after attending an introductory seminar given by the local adoption agency, Adopt Berkshire. At this seminar, the agency expressed a welcoming attitude to all prospective adoptive parents regardless of race or sexual orientation. The Manders were encouraged and resolved to submit an application.

On ringing the adoption agency to express their desire to apply, Mr Mander was asked to identify his ethnic origin. When he said he and his wife were born and raised in Britain but their parents were born in India, Mr Mander was told that they were unlikely to be approved as potential adopters due to their "Indian background", because only white children were available in Berkshire and the surrounding area.

Assuming this could not be a good reason to reject their application outright, the Manders continued in their efforts to apply. But Adopt Berkshire insisted that although the Manders had four spare bedrooms in their house and were willing to offer any child a loving home and indeed were otherwise suitable to adopt, it would still not let them apply to join the approved adopters register because of their "Indian heritage".

Both Sandeep and Reena Mander have been British nationals since birth and identify as British.

Mr Mander has previously said:

"We don't think a child should be separated out by its ethnicity and all we want to do is give any child the love and care they need in a loving home. You would think we would at least make it past the first stage but we haven't based on Adopt Berkshire's assumption of our "cultural heritage".

What do they mean by cultural heritage? We are not religious (although we do like to take the view there is something out there), we are born and bred in the UK and consider ourselves British and English.

Being segregated by Adopt Berkshire to us is discrimination which there shouldn't be any place in the world for. The fact that the only advice they can give us is to go and adopt in India (a country that has no affiliation to me) is completely unacceptable."

The Trial

The trial is taking place at Oxford County Court between 4 – 7 November 2019, *Sandeep & Reena Mander vs Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Adoption Service*.

The case is about the adoption service's decision to reject the Manders' 'initial enquiry' into making an application to be registered as prospective adopters. It is NOT a claim that adoption agencies should not consider ethnicity at all when placing a specific child with specific parents, just that the Manders should not have been rejected from even joining the approved adopters register because of where their parents were born. They were not permitted to get even to 'stage 1' of the adoption process.

The Manders contend that this is a simple case of direct discrimination on the grounds of race, in breach of section 13 of the Equality Act 2010 and the European Convention on Human Rights.

NOTES TO EDITORS

McAllister Olivarius

McAllister Olivarius is a market-leading international law firm with special expertise in bringing justice to clients who have suffered discrimination or abuse.

The firm helps clients seek redress in four key areas: employment, higher education, online reputation and privacy, and corporate advice and litigation. The firm has a global reputation for excellence, and is a pioneer in the emerging field of online abuse, tackling anonymous defamation, cyber-bullying, revenge pornography and other malicious uses of the Internet. The firm notably helped YouTube star Chrissy Chambers bring the UK's first reported civil action in this area, achieving a significant financial settlement at the High Court, and allowing her to regain control of her image. Two of the firm's clients were TIME Magazine "People of the Year" in 2017 as #MeToo "Silence Breakers," based on a sexual harassment case the firm brought on their behalf.

Interviews: Georgina Calvert-Lee, Head of UK Practice and Senior Counsel, and the Manders' chief lawyer, is available for interview.

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