

**adoption  
counts** 

**Supporting  
families  
through  
adoption**

**Manchester City Council**  
**Adoption Service – Annual Report**  
**01.04.20 – 31.3.21**

## **1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report**

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2021. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point that this report is read.

## **2. Working with Manchester**

Since going live, Adoption Counts has had responsibility to discharge Manchester’s responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the Local Authority (LA) and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels. The Deputy Director of Children's Services sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Head of Service with a link to adoption is a member of the quarterly Operations Group meetings which provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. There is a shared ownership of the agenda and a range of issues are discussed with very positive communication and outcomes as a result. The group has identified the need for input from the RAA to ensure that staff in the LAs maintain their knowledge and benefit from updates to practice and research. The RAA continue to work closely with colleagues from Manchester regarding child permanence reports (CPRs). Regular CPR clinics are offered to social workers in all localities (clinics are currently offered virtually) alongside specific CPR training and one to one guidance in writing CPRs.

Adoption Counts holds monthly tracking meetings, these are an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Manchester children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and through into the planning of introductions and placement
- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding

strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.

- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan form Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.

The RAA tracking meeting escalates any cases of concern to the Head of Service in Manchester. This can range from children adopted but with no life story work or later in life letter, to children waiting for care planning decisions to be implemented and is also used to update the Head of service about children for whom family finding has been problematical.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Manchester also provides information for the LA Permanence forum and she alongside the dedicated Family Finders, regularly work in Manchester office bases alongside the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings, provide advice at the “Should be placed for Adoption (SHOBPA)” stage and final care planning meetings.

Links between Manchester and the RAA seem to be embedded well, this was endorsed through an internal audit report in July 2020 which concluded there are “overall strong systems and processes in place, including effective communication between Adoption Counts and MCC staff to support delivery of timely and effective adoption arrangements”

### 3. Performance

#### 3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month							
Manchester	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	4	2	4	3	5	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	4	5	5	3	1	8	<b>45</b>

#### 3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders

Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month							
Manchester	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	4	1	6	4	3	6	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	4	4	6	4	3	8	<b>53</b>

The number of children subject to Placement orders this year has increased – last year 37 children were subject to a Placement order.

Out of the 53 Placement Orders granted within the period:

Thirty children were matched within the A2 threshold of 4 months.

For the remaining 23 children:

Two are being adopted by their foster carers. One child has had a change of plan.

Links / matches have been identified for ten of the children. Family finding is ongoing for 3 of the children. The placement orders for the remaining seven children were granted from March 2020 onwards so they remain within the A2 threshold.

#### 3.3 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

There are thirteen children who have had a SHOBPA rescind in the period.

- a sibling pair – rescind agreed on 26.5.20, their SHOBPA decision was agreed on 22.1.19.
- a sibling group of four – rescind agreed on 29.6.20, SHOBPA decision agreed 4.5.17 with placement order granted on 11.8.17.
- A three year old boy. Rescind agreed 10.11.20, SHOBPA decision agreed 12.5.20 SGO
- A six year old girl – rescind agreed on 13.10.20, SHOBPA decision agreed 31.7.2018.

- A four year old girl – rescind agreed on 8.12.20, SHOBPA decision agreed 13.8.19
- A sibling group aged 8, 6 and 4 years – rescind agreed 6.10.20, SHOBPA decision agreed 27.8.19.
- A one year old girl. Rescind agreed 16.3.21, SHOBPA decision agreed 4.8.20.

For the thirteen children who have had a change of plan, five of the children were successfully rehabilitated home to either the care of their parents or a relative which is a good outcome for those children. The remaining children the care plan changed from one of adoption to long term fostering. In terms of identifying patterns, many of the children are aged 4 years or over and / or part of a sibling group and therefore are children who are likely to wait longer in achieving permanence through adoption. A twin tracking approach was therefore in place for some of these children with an agreed time limited adoption search.

### 3.4 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during period.

Number of children placed for adoption per month							
Manchester	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	0	1	7	7	1	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	3	5	4	5	3	5	<b>44</b>

84% of the children placed for adoption were placed with prospective adopters approved by Adoption counts.

There were 44 children placed for adoption during this period. The A1 measure for this cohort of children is 481 days and the A2 measure is 129 days.

Twenty six of the children were placed below the A2 threshold of 121 days. Three of the children were relinquished babies so do not have a A2 measure.

Fifteen of these children were outside of A2 threshold with six of these children placed within six months of Placement Order.

A four year old little girl with a micro deletion and global developmental delay. The child was featured at an Adoption Picnic in November 2019 and from this, a potential family was identified but would not be approved until the end of January 2020. Once this family was approved, the linking / matching was progressed.

A two year old who was placed 5 days outside of the A2 measure. A family was identified within the A2 threshold, panel was delayed due to outstanding BBV tests.

A one year old of BAME who was placed 18 days outside of the A2 threshold.

A one year old who was placed 5 days outside of the A2 measure. The child has older siblings who were adopted, the siblings adopters were approached but were ultimately not able to offer care, this impacted on the family finding timescales.

A four year old boy of BAME with traits of ASD. A family was identified within timescales, however, medical information required updating prior to placement. In line with the child's identified needs, introductions needed to take place gradually.

A one year old girl of BAME. Nationwide family finding searches were completed as birth family members were widely spread around the greater Manchester area and a family was required who could meet the child's cultural needs.

Outside of 6 months:

A 2 year old of BAME. It took longer to find a family as adopters were needed who could meet the child's cultural needs and manage the uncertainty of mental health within his family background.

A sibling pair aged 4 and 3 years. Initially the care plan was for the children to be placed together with their older sibling. Following further assessments the plan then changed for the children to be placed together and their older sibling to be placed in a WRAPP placement. The children presented as having features associated to Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and it was crucial to identify adopters who would be able to manage the future uncertainty around this. There was also a Facebook campaign and demonstrations initiated by birth family and this meant that many areas within Greater Manchester needed to be ruled out. Prospective adopters were identified in November 2019, however, after hearing specific information, these adopters decided that they did not want to progress. Another family was identified in January 20 and the match was booked for Panel at the end of March but could not progress as the identified changes needed to the child permanence report had not been adhered to. The Match was then agreed in May but the children did not move until July 2020. The delay between these two dates were in relation to the Social Work Team needing to have a Risk Assessment around sharing information about adopters being found with the birth parents and arranging final contacts.

A 3 year old of BAME. Birth family posed potential risks to a placement and they were widely spread around Greater Manchester area. The child was matched with his prospective adopter in November 2019 but could not be placed due to birth mother lodging an appeal. When the appeal was dismissed, COVID meant that the child could not be placed until June 2020.

A 4 year old with complex emotional and behavioural needs, he also has Cerebral Palsy and global developmental delay. A decision was made to find the child and his older sister separate adoptive families due to the level of complex needs. Family finding therefore took longer as adopters were required who could meet his identified needs.

A one year old of BAME. The child had complex medical needs at birth including cysts on the brain, further assessment of his needs was required prior to moving to an adoptive family.

One year old twins with a chromosome deficiency resulting in complex emotional and behaviour needs.

A three year old boy. Although robust family finding searches were completed with several links identified, these did not progress and it took longer to achieve permanence.

**3.5 Number of children adopted**

Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month							
Manchester	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	0	1	6	2	1	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	1	3	1	3	4	1	<b>26</b>

For this cohort, the average number of days for A1 is 341 days, which is well within the threshold of 426 days. Twenty one of the children were placed within the A1 measure. The five children outside of the threshold:

A 3 year old of BAME. Proceedings were extended due to connected person’s assessment.

A 5 year old of BAME. Proceedings were extended due to additional connected persons assessments.

A sibling pair aged 3 and 2 years. Proceedings were delayed due to COVID-19.

A 7 year old girl. Proceedings were extended due to the court directing additional assessments.

A 4 year old boy of BAME. A family was identified within timescales, however, they subsequently withdrew from the match due to personal reasons.

For A2, the average number of days for this cohort is 111 which is again, within the threshold of 121 days. Sixteen of the children had a decision made about their match with their adoptive families within the threshold. Two of the children were placed just outside of the threshold by five days with a further child placed just outside of the threshold by seven days.

The children outside of the threshold are as follows:

A 2 year old of BAME. Nationwide family finding searches were completed as birth family members were widely spread around the greater Manchester area and a family was required who could meet the child's cultural needs.

A 3 year old of BAME. The child was adopted by her foster carers who were assessed as prospective adopters, this impacted on the timescales as she could not be matched with the Foster Carers until they were approved prospective adopters.

A 2 year old. There were a number of uncertainties in relation to her future development and this impacted upon family finding.

A 5 year old of BAME. His development was globally delayed. The child was featured at an adoption picnic and was linked to adopters who met him at this event.

A sibling pair aged 3 and 2 years. The children were placed separately to an older sibling and were in different foster placements. Transitions were planned to ensure the move to their adoptive family was in line with each child's needs.

A 1 year old boy. The adopters of the child's older siblings were approached as potential carers, unfortunately, following an assessment it was not possible to proceed and he was placed with another adoptive family who could promote direct contact with his adopted siblings.

A 4 year old boy of BAME. A family was identified within timescales, however, they subsequently withdrew from the match due to personal reasons.

A 1 year old boy. Health investigations advised additional medical tests should be completed prior to placing him with an adoptive family.

A 2 year old boy. Results from a medical test were needed prior to proceeding with the match.

Analysis:

The number of children placed for adoption and adoption orders has decreased this year – last year 52 children were adopted. COVID-19 has had an impact upon general court timetabling, a number of hearings have been deferred and there was a period of time when the courts were not processing adoption applications so directions hearings for adoption orders have experienced general delay. There was a period of time from March – end May where children were not placed for adoption due to COVID restrictions. There have also been 7 children where birth parents have applied for leave to oppose the adoption order, these proceedings therefore take longer to conclude.

In relation to identifying 'patterns', children of BAME heritage – particularly Black African/Black Caribbean, large sibling groups and older children can wait longer to achieve permanence. Adoption Counts have continued to focus on recruiting BAME adopters and during this period have been able to place several BAME children with

adopters approved by Adoption Counts. Adoption Counts and Manchester continue to work together to ensure assessments of need for older children and sibling assessments are completed at an early stage in care planning to confirm the plan is the right plan and is achievable.

### **3.6 Early Permanency**

Seven children have been placed in early permanence placements during this period within fostering for adoption families, temporarily approved by Manchester's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the Care Planning Regulations.

### **4. Disruptions**

There has been one adoption disruption during this period. This was a placement of a four year old boy who was placed on 19.6.2020. Significant support was provided to the family from the point of placement but sadly, the prospective adopter made the decision they were unable to continue to provide care and the placement ended on 3.2.21. An independent disruption meeting was held on 26.4.21.

### **5. Quality of Reports**

Child permanence reports are audited as routine at point of should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) decision and are re-audited prior to submission to the adoption matching panel.

44 audits have been completed. Of those:

3 were graded as outstanding, 14 as good and 27 in need of improvement at the point of SHOBPA.

CPR's are re-audited prior to matching panel and in order for the match to be heard by panel, it is required they have reached a standard of 'good' by this point. All CPR's that were graded in need of improvement at SHOBPA stage will therefore have been graded 'good' at point of match.

The available statistics evidence there have been improvements in the quality of paperwork between SHOBPA and matching panel over the past twelve months as at the point of matching panel 8 CPR's had moved to a grade of outstanding and 18 to a grade of good. However, as can be seen from the number still in need of improvement, there is an ongoing piece of work required to support practitioners and managers in implementing the advice they are given to ensure all CPRs reach a standard of 'good' by matching panel.

With this in mind, the auditing process has changed to directly involve the allocated family finder working alongside the child's social worker from the point of SHOBPA decision. The audit done then, carried out by the Adoption Counts team manager linked to Manchester, is shared with the social worker, family finder and the social

workers manager. The family finder will then support the social worker and advise where needed in order to complete the CPR to the required standard prior to matching panel. Adoption Counts is also offering training and workshops on CPR writing, has developed a template of good practice which clearly outlines what information is required in each section and is holding virtual clinics on a regular basis within the local authority for social workers to attend as required.

In addition, Adoption Counts is working with Manchester senior managers to improve the quality of CPRs at SHOBPA consultation, to avoid any delays or deferrals at this stage.

## **6. Adoption Support**

Adoption Support remains integral to our delivery for adopted children, new adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing the life long journey. We remain committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement and when an adoption order is made. Thereafter we recognize that new challenges may emerge requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. We have based our service delivery on a graduated approach, with our Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery .

During this period we have delivered out Adoption Support differently due to the Covid 19 restrictions and this includes delivery of most of our assessments, therapy, support and courses online.

### **Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support**

#### **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

The short-term funding for this service has been agreed by the board until March 2022, with negotiations with Clinical Commissioners to secure longer term funding on a joint basis moving forward. This process is underway with our Greater Manchester and Cheshire East NHS commissioning colleagues.

This service was initially funded by the Centre of Excellence funding, which has since ended.

**5.1 The Adoption Psychology Team** is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for Adopted Children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts. The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry and educational psychology. The information in this report relates to the CAMHS component of the service. The service is partly co-located with Children's Social Care which enables a co-ordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint

working. It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments with some choice of venue. The service sits alongside other services that support the child’s home, care planning, relationships, health, education and hobbies. The iThrive model shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together

**i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support**



**5.2 AP Service outcomes**

1. Adopted children have good mental health
2. Adopted children have healthy relationships
3. Adopted children have stable placements
4. Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

**5.3 Service Aims**

- Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs.
- Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.
- Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.
- Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.

- Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.
- Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

During this period with continuing periods of national lockdown, the Adoption Psychology team have maintained their connections with the team and families . They have adapted their delivery model to meet the changing demand and circumstances. They have delivered the following -

- Consultation sessions - these have been set up to support staff with issues relating to mental health, attachment and trauma, school anxiety and transitions as well as discussing referrals for comprehensive assessments. This has proved an invaluable support to workers and assisted with planning for therapeutic interventions or assessment. These take place fortnightly.
- Newsletter – Adoption Counts has provided a fortnightly newsletter for parents containing information and support advice, events and activities.
- Website resources – all information produced by Adoption Psychology has been placed on the website for parents and schools to access freely. The website is in the process of being updated following consultation and feedback from Adopter Voice.
- “Let's Connect” parent education and support sessions – three of these one-hour sessions have been created and trialled, focussing on transitions, talking about adoption, and Theraplay.
- Foundations for Attachment – this was adapted to be delivered as a virtual group run by a Clinical Psychologist and Therapeutic social worker. A 6 week group took place in January 2021 and another took place in May.
- Virtual Theraplay informed parenting support group – this was successfully adapted from an in-person group to one delivered online to parents. This bespoke group was created by our Educational Psychologist and Therapeutic social worker. Two 6 week groups have taken place and another is planned for September 2021.

- Continued 1-1 virtual support for families including clinical intervention and occupational therapy support for sensory attachment needs.
- Completion of specialist assessments.

The **Multi Agency Resource Panel**, continues to consider complex cases that require Adoption Support Fund (ASF) match funding from the Local Authority. This has enabled more consistent and transparent decision making across the region. The panel consists of representative from CAMHS, Virtual Schools, Social Care and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA,s) which enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency.

In this period the panel have considered 19 requests for match funding. The panel have scrutinised the requests and challenged some of the length and frequency of the therapeutic plans. Further details are in the table below regarding ASF applications.

#### 5.4 Adoption Support Fund Applications

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families using the Adoption Counts portal, this has enabled families to receive specialist support that we would not have been able to provide in house or access from other universal services.

Between 1.4.20 – 30.9.20 there were 183 applications to the ASF, totalling **£ 693,156.98** . The applications are broken down below.

LA	Number of applications	Amount	Applications approved with match funding
Cheshire East	50	£206,460.91	2
Manchester	37	£166,656.78	2
Stockport	46	£162,463.65	1
Trafford	30	£97,878.11	0
Salford	20	£59,697.53	0
Totals	183	£693,156.98	5

There have been 290 applications to the ASF in Oct-Mar 2021, in this period totalling £888,956.85 (compare to 183 the previous 6 months). The applications are broken down below.

LA	Number of applications	Amount	Applications with Match Funding
Cheshire East	83	£268,031.58	5
Manchester	87	£254,701.24	1
Salford	16	£35,139.99	1
Stockport	60	£189,529.47	2
Trafford	43	£136,794.57	1
Group Application	1	£4,760.00	0
Totals	290	£888,956.85	10

We are awaiting the outcome of the Government spending review to ascertain if the ASF will remain as a funding stream for therapeutic support after March 2022.

In November 2020 there was an update to the ASF assurance policy. The 58% increase in ASF applications in the 6 months in question, reflects the new working practice and has placed significant pressure on the social work and business support (admin) workers, as well as the therapeutic providers who deliver the larger portion of the therapeutic support for families.

## 5.5 Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

There are 972 cases allocated to a worker in the Adoption Support service (compare to 953 in Feb 2020, 988 in July, 1011 in Nov. This reduction is relating to a drive to close cases when the work ended in a timely way). This does not include the number of families accessing the universal support services for all adoptive families, which will be higher.

These cases are:

591 adopted children with an allocated long-term social worker  
 127 adopted children with an allocated First Response social worker

254 adopted adults allocated for Access to Records (ATR) through the First Response team

Within these numbers:

30 children (some pre-adoption) have a Therapeutic Social Worker (this number has reduced significantly since November 2020, due to the therapeutic social work cases being re-distributed amongst the team when 1 FTE Therapeutic Social Worker moved into a new role).

48 children or sibling groups are also allocated to our Education Advisor

Adoption Counts received 37 new referrals for adopted adults to access to records during this period.

Letterbox team holding all letterbox referrals; the last count 1053 live cases. Demand for service has increased by around 50% as birth parents seek reassurance about the safety of adopted children; and vice versa.

All adoptive families have received initial advice and guidance and a surgery appointment where needed. The waiting time varies between 2 – 6 weeks between initial request and assessment date. All are offered a named First Response worker who is their point of contact and takes forward the initial recommendations from the assessment. Some of these families are awaiting a long term Adoption Support worker and will be moved into the long term team once there is availability.

Our service to Adopted Adults is not as responsive, and the waiting time for an initial meeting to progress with access to records is considerably longer. They do however all receive a response to their referral, advising them of the system and next steps. We have now (April 2021) created capacity for Access to Records workers and now have 5 days a week FTE available which we anticipate will reduce the numbers of adults waiting for records.

The table below indicates the data for each Local Authority in terms of those allocated cases ( excluding general cases) and those awaiting an allocated SW (excluding general cases)

The numbers for other Local Authorities included in the data, relates to other local authorities who have placed children in our RAA and are transferring over, or for the adopted adults, the records are held with one of the LAs in our RAA , rather than the person residing in our RAA.

<b>Local Authority ALLOCATED</b>	<b>Adopted Adult</b>	Oct 20- March 2021	<b>Adoptive Family</b>	Oct- march 2021	<b>Total</b> April- Sept	
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	April– Sept 2020		April– Sept 2020		2020	Oct– March 2021
<b>STOCKPORT</b>	17	17	93	82	110	99
<b>MANCHESTER</b>	29	28	103	85	132	113
<b>SALFORD</b>	12	12	52	45	64	57
<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>	12	12	126	119	138	131
<b>TRAFFORD</b>	9	9	102	92	111	101
<b>Other LAs</b>	0	0	42	22	42	22
	<b>79</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>533</b>

<b>Local Authority WAITING for long term allocation</b>	<b>Adopted Adult April–Sept 2020</b>	<b>Oct– March 2021</b>	<b>Adoptive Family April– Sept 2020</b>	<b>Oct– march 2021</b>	<b>Total April– Sept 2020</b>	<b>Oct– March 2021</b>
<b>STOCKPORT</b>	36	40	33	36	69	76
<b>MANCHESTER</b>	82	99	34	33	116	132
<b>SALFORD</b>	15	19	12	9	27	28
<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>	43	56	41	31	84	87
<b>TRAFFORD</b>	16	19	15	21	31	40
<b>Other LAs</b>	0	0	6	18	6	18
	<b>192</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>381</b>

During the period April 2020 – September 2020 we received 142 new referrals into the Adoption Support Service, This is a reduction on the previous 6 months , as calls are being redirected appropriately by business support at the initial stage of the enquiry.

The number of requests are defined below ;  
(Please note ; This does not include the Letterbox service , which is recorded separately.)

<b>April– 2020 Local Authority</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Adopted Adult</b>	<b>Adoptive Family</b>	<b>Birth Family</b>	<b>Advice &amp; Signposting</b>	
<b>STOCKPORT</b>		2	15	0	1	
<b>MANCHESTER</b>		14	32	0	2	
<b>SALFORD</b>		1	15	0	0	

<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>	2	24	0	3	
<b>TRAFFORD</b>	6	11	0	2	
<b>UNDEFINED</b>	0	1	0	1	
<b>OTHER LA</b>	0	7	0	3	
	<b>25</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>142</b>

During the period October 2020 – March 2021 we received **141** new referrals into the Adoption Support Service.

The number of requests are defined below;

17 advice and signposting

6 other (general enquiries)

81 support and assessment

37 access to records requests

(Please note; This does not include the Letterbox service , which is recorded separately.)

<b>April-2020 Local Authority</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Adopted Adult</b>	<b>Adoptive Family</b>	<b>Birth Family</b>	<b>Advice &amp; Signposting</b>	
<b>STOCKPORT</b>		2	15	0	1	
<b>MANCHESTER</b>		14	32	0	2	
<b>SALFORD</b>		1	15	0	0	
<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>		2	24	0	3	
<b>TRAFFORD</b>		6	11	0	2	
<b>UNDEFINED</b>		0	1	0	1	
<b>OTHER LA</b>		0	7	0	3	
		<b>25</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>142</b>

<b>Oct 2020 – Mar 2021 Local Authority</b>	<b>Adopted Adult</b>	<b>Adoptive Family</b>	<b>Birth Family</b>	<b>Advice &amp; Signposting</b>	
<b>STOCKPORT</b>	7	19	0	5	
<b>MANCHESTER</b>	14	15	0	3	
<b>SALFORD</b>	4	5	0	1	

<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>	12	24	0	4	
<b>TRAFFORD</b>	0	12	0	2	
<b>UNDEFINED</b>	0	0	0	0	
<b>OTHER LA</b>	0	6	0	2	
	<b>37</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>135</b>

### **Analysis**

The above figures show a 56% increase in applications for the Adoption Support Fund in this last 6 months. This is due to the change in ASF Assurance Policy which required a change in the way we apply for therapeutic support. The increased workload on a small team has led to greater pressure and we have had to draw in other business support colleagues to manage the demand, which has led to an increase in waiting times for the ASF applications to be made and granted. We have fed this back to the DFE and this appears to reflect the national picture.

We have received 135 new referrals into the Adoption Support Service (compare to 142 in the previous 6 months) showing a steady demand. There has been an increased number of Access to Records requests so as a result we have increased the capacity of this team in the medium term (6 months) and will review this at the end of this period.

We are currently working with 591 allocated cases (excluding letterbox) which is a reduction from 621 in the previous 6 months. This could be a result of the drive to close “dormant” cases where the worker was not actively involved. It would also reflect the slight reduction in requests for support. This may be due to the fact during the first lockdown period, requests for support increased; and this period now shows a levelling off of demand.

The increase in numbers of workers awaiting long-term allocation demonstrates an increase of social work time in our First Response team, where cases can now be held for longer while their support needs are met in the short term.

The Adoption Psychology team show a steady demand for their service with an increase in consultations during the lockdowns. Letterbox demand remains steady and consistent across all areas, in numbers of cases, but this does not reflect the increased number of contacts with birth family members and adoptive parents and children who needed reassurance about one another’s wellbeing.

### **Children and families from Manchester LA**

At the current time there are 70 referrals held in First Response, of which 29 are Access To Records for adopted adults. There are 111 families allocated to a social worker all receiving a service, which ranges from transition support to adoption for children seen as having more complex needs; early placement difficulties; access to therapeutic parenting groups; support for families to access Specialist Assessments; identifying and commissioning therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund; education support and education psychology assessment; sensory assessments; to contributions to multi-agency risk support for children at risk of placement breakdown.

Examples of Manchester families supported by Adoption Support:

- A child was placed with their new parent, and after 4 months the parent was struggling with the child's behaviour, which was non-compliant, rejecting and experienced by parent that the child did not want her as her mother. The family were offered a place on a Foundations for Attachment course to think about the child's experiences and impact of early trauma. Therapeutic social work was quickly offered and supported the parent in their response to the child when she apparently rejects her parent's care; this is helping the parent to see the child's behaviour as less personal and to think of strategies to support child in those moments. Education Psychology are supporting with school. (Child 8581)
- A sibling group of two children, ages 10 and 13, who have experienced anxiety, soiling, school difficulties; and relationship difficulties between parents exacerbated by the children's complex needs. Couples Psychotherapy was offered to both parents (only one attended) to support them in taking a more joint approach to parenting the children consistently. Sensory needs were identified for one of the children, with therapy being put in place to help develop their sensory understanding. Individual therapy is offered to both children to explore their own experiences and to support them in managing anxiety (child 8463 and 8527).
- A sibling group of three who are on the edge of placement breakdown having had CIN plans with Manchester. Multiple missing from home events and two of the children being at risk of CSE. Adoption social worker is taking part in the meetings and coordinating therapeutic support; the family have had multiple interventions over a number of years including MST support, sensory therapy, therapeutic life story work and therapeutic parenting support. Ongoing social work support to the family to support the therapeutic work, and support the children staying within their family (children 1533, 1532, 1531).
- Adoption Psychology have supported a child aged 7 during transition to adoptive placement, offering consultation to professionals around child's presentation and needs and formulating support plan (child 8493).

## Process

The first response model remains in place, to encourage better screening of calls and redirecting to universal services where appropriate . If a call is clearly adoption specific then advice, support and counselling can be offered via telephone and may be all that is required.

If it becomes clear from discussion that there is a need to gather more detailed information then the family will be invited into a surgery appointment to conduct an Adoption Support Assessment.

Of the referrals into the service for both Adoptive families 100% of adoptive families requiring an assessment / interview have been offered a surgery appointment within a 2-6 week timeframe.

All families without a named social Worker can contact the First Response team and speak to a social worker on duty. This is available every day, during working hours so they have access to a skilled social worker to respond to queries and offer support.

We have not been able to meet the demand for Access to Records (ATR) cases as readily and our service standards for this aspect of adoption support are below what we would want to deliver. We continue to develop a more systemic approach with a better use of business support to progress ATR cases more speedily and have boosted the staffing in this area to meet the need.

The **Adoption Support team staffing establishment** is as follows -

- 1 FTE Operations Manager (2 staff)
- 2.2 FTE team managers (3 staff)
- 9.2 FTE Adoption Support Social Worker (11 permanent staff ,3 agency workers - vacancies of 1.5 FTE. These vacancies have been recruited to and we are awaiting both new staff members to go through necessary employment checks).
- 2.7 FTE First response SW role ( 3 staff ) . This includes an additional 0.5 post which has been seconded into Adoption support from the R & A team temporarily from February 2020 and 1 day a week agency support for ATR.
- 1.4 FTE Therapeutic SW roles (2 staff, one SW offering additional hours on a temporary basis)
- 0.8 FTE Senior Letterbox SW
- 2.8 FTE Letterbox Family Support Workers (4 staff, one vacancy for 0.4 post currently offered and we are awaiting HR checks before they can take up the position)

We have also had a long-term sickness vacancy of 0.8 FTE in the First Response due to long Covid. She returned to work in May under a flexible retirement plan.

**5.6 Letterbox Service**

The Family Support Workers (FSW) letterbox workers continue to be supervised by the same senior practitioner as a discrete team of workers within Adoption Support. This allows Adoption Counts to support birth families and adopters to provide the best they can for the child to promote their identity.

We are currently operating over 1,053 letterbox agreements, which means over 2,000 exchanges in a year. We have additional administrative support to facilitate this more smoothly. Demand has increased by around 50% during the pandemic (as calculated from the number of email and telephone requests from parents and children) as birth parents and children seek information about one another’s wellbeing.

The Family Support Workers also undertake short pieces of work to assist families with adoption related issues, reducing the pressures of SW allocations.

As a Service, Adoption Counts is keen to develop best practice for our children and families. As such we are embedding new ways of supporting continued relationships with birth families and promoting children’s identities.

Current number of Letterbox agreements per LA

Manchester	Salford	Stockport	Cheshire East	Trafford
305	277	250	186	120

**Increased demand has created more pressure on the Family Support Workers and letterbox senior practitioner. We have increased business support to this area and a new member of staff has filled a vacancy. We have also worked with parents to encourage exchanges to take place electronically rather than by post, and this decreases the time required by workers to collect, process, and scan post. There is also time available from reduced travelling to and from appointments across the region.**

**We have been consulted about trialling a new letterbox exchange system which is an online service, designed to enable exchanges to happen more smoothly between birth and adoptive families. It is anticipated this service will be designed by the end of 2021 and we will then evaluate how beneficial this will be for Adoption Counts families.**

**5.7 Birth families**

First Family delivered through PAC-UK are our current provider of support to birth families following a decision for their child to be adopted.

The clear and easy referral process is increasing the number of families who access the service. PAC-UK provide the annual figures below:

	Q1: Apr-Jun 2020	Q2: Jul-Sep 2020	Q3: Oct-Dec 2020	Q4: Jan-Mar 2021	Total 2020-21
Cheshire East	1	3	5	2	11
Manchester	5	10	2	7	24
Salford	2	4	3	0	9
Stockport	2	2	1	0	5
Trafford	0	1	1	0	2
Total	10	20	12	9	51

**First Contact**

90% of Q4 referrals were contacted within 14 days.

**First Family Facebook Group**

This closed and well monitored group is allowing birth parents to share thoughts and feelings around adoption as well as for PAC-UK to post useful links to help and resources around eg mental health and domestic violence. A number of Adoption Counts birth parents are members.

**Further detailed information is available in the PAC – UK annual report, which can be shared on request.**

**5.8 Support Groups - Covid 19 update**

During this period all staff have primarily been working from home continuing to deliver Adoption Support in different ways, through email, telephone and virtual home visits, with face to face visits now being agreed where safely risk assessed. The impact of Covid19 on the personal and professional lives of both staff and on the lives of the families supported has been apparent.

Initially there was an increase in calls to First response and on open cases, as families were worried about priority school access and changes to routine for their children. Following this period the referrals into the service remained steady, with a small proportion of assessments relating directly to the impact of social distancing and isolation on families. There have been a number of families who have experienced significantly increased pressure due to children being out of school, with child –parent violence being raised by some. The demand for the *Managing challenging behaviours* support group highlighted this as being a priority need for families on the data base. The course was always full within hours and waiting lists for each one held. These

were also parents not all with an allocated SW, as we allowed direct access, it is evident that this is was an increasing need during the period.

**As this course isn't available to be funded by the ASF, we are working with the provider to modify the content to enable this to be an ASF funded provision, while still offering the essential peer support that adopters fed back was so valuable. We anticipate the provider will be able to offer this course to parents in the near future. In the interim we have encouraged peer support informally, through the Adopter Voice Facebook group and Let's Connect sessions.**

From October 20 to March 21 we experienced two additional periods of national lockdown. There has been steady demand for adoption support assessments with some requests relating to the additional pressure on families of the lockdown, social isolation and home educating where the child's school bubble had been sent home.

We noticed fewer requests for support to access education and school places, probably due to the fact most children had been offered a place during lockdown 1, and these places were again made available.

There have been a number of families who have experienced significantly increased pressure due to children being out of school, with child –parent violence being raised by some.

**This need has been supported by the social work team, supporting and holding families who struggle with this behaviour. Social workers offer therapeutic parenting advice and a reflective space for parents to consider their own triggers and ways to reduce incidents. Workers can also offer NVR (Non Violent Resistance) or CPV (child parent violence) courses to parents run by outside providers; and therapeutic parenting courses and one to one therapy.**

As we have not been able to provide our usual support groups , evening workshops and family fun days face to face we have had to adapt our delivery model. Some virtual groups have been trialled, called "Let's Connect" and we have also had a virtual music group run by ARC (Arts for Recovery, Stockport) as part of their community funded programme, and art sessions run by Z-Arts (Manchester based community arts group).

**The feedback from the Let's Connect sessions has been used to prepare our virtual programme from September 2021 onwards. We are continuing to offer a variety of virtual events, some at lunchtime and other in the evening, on the topics which parents fed back were the most beneficial.**

Using additional ASF covid 19 funding, which was made available by the government for delivery of additional support to adopters and SGOs initially for a 4 month period

then extended to 8 months, we were able to quickly provide additional support to families on our case load and those within our region starting from mid-2020. Additional Covid funding ended in December 2020, so the following was delivered until that time. Access to the Adopter Hub continues as this was contracted for a year until August 2021:

- 5 Virtual therapeutic parenting courses delivered by Independent providers
- Additional 1-1 therapeutic parenting support for targeted families from an Independent provider
- 4 virtual support groups (over 6 weeks ) delivered by Adoption UK on the following topics ;  
Managing angry feelings and defiant behaviour during Covid-19 (CPV/NVR)  
Home schooling during Covid-19  
Living with change and anxiety during Covid-19
- Access to the Adopter Hub for all adopters living in the RAA , delivered by PACT
- Targeted access to 1-1 Peer Support delivered by Adoption UK for 50 families.
- Targeted access to Relationship Support from a private provider
- VAA SW secondment to assist with First response Service
- The Adoptables –time limited access to a peer support programme for adopted young people providing virtual activity groups open to all young people in RAAs.

**Feedback from adopters about this range of services has been sought, including formal feedback from each of the parenting courses. We have had very positive feedback from Adopter Voice about the accessibility of the courses. Adopters reported they also benefitted from the Adopter Hub provision which offers a forum, webinars on a range of topics such as therapeutic parenting, sensory needs, education support and lots more; at times when it is convenient to parents and families.**

**In response to this we will continue to commission The Adopter Hub access when the Covid funding ends. We are working with providers to offer therapeutic parenting programmes, nearly all of which can be ASF funded and encouraging parents to contact the First Response team should they wish to attend a course.**

## **Recruitment of Adopters**

### **6.1 Approvals**

There were 51 families approved as adopters during the first six months of this year 2020-2021 and 53 families approved as adopters during the last six months of this year 2020-2021. This is slightly up compared from both the previous six months (51), and also the same six months in the previous year (50). The total number of families approved during 2020-2021 was 104. This is only six families less than the previous year (110), which we feel is encouraging as this entire period was during the COVID-19 pandemic when many families delayed making applications, or had to withdraw due to uncertainties in their lives, e.g., redundancies, caring responsibilities, home schooling, etc.

At the end of the period (31<sup>st</sup> March 2021) there were 38 families in Stage One, 16 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 34 in Stage Two; a total of 88 families in the assessment process. This is an increase from both the previous six months (82) and the end of the March 2020 (77). This is particularly positive, given the difficult circumstances we all have faced this year as discussed above and is a strong position from which to enter the start of this year.

Enquiry numbers have decreased from the previous six months (510) to 464 in this last six-month period. However, in comparison to the same period last year (437) they have increased. Overall, for the full year 2020-2021, enquiry numbers were 974, compared with 990 the previous year. This is encouraging, to see there was only a slight drop overall, during the difficult year. The source of our enquiries remains predominantly web based and so we have maintained our investment in our promotion of the Agency through Google Adwords.

#### **Six month - October 2020 – March 2021**

Source	Enquiries
Online	336
Local Council referral / website	46
Social Media	16
Recommendation from friend / relative	24
Other	13
Outdoor Advertising	5
Event /info Stand	1
Radio	1
Second Time Adopters	3
Previous Adoption Enquiry	19

**464**

#### **Full Year - April 2020 – March 2021**

Source	Enquiries
Online	691
Local Council referral / website	117
Social Media	25
Recommendation from friend / relative	40
Other	43
Outdoor Advertising	10
Event /info Stand	4
Radio	2
Second Time Adopters	11
Previous Adoption Enquiry	31

**974**

Numbers of initial visits have increased slightly to 111 in this period, an increase of 7 on the previous six months (104) and an increase of 34 on the same six months in the previous year (77). Initial visits for the full year 2020-21 are 215, which is an increase of 34 on the previous year 2019-2020 (181). We expect this was as a result of the YouCanAdopt campaign, which saw a change in the national eligibility criteria, resulting in many families coming forward who may have previously assumed they were not eligible to adopt.

Registrations of Interest received (the formal application to be assessed as prospective adopters) followed a similar pattern and increased by 10 in the last six months of 2020-21 (80) on the previous six months (70) and also increased by 18 on the same six months period last year (62).

Our performance should still be viewed in the context of an ongoing national shortage of adopters. It suggests that the strategies implemented through our Recruitment and Marketing plan are effective though of course we are not complacent and continue to strive to increase our numbers further, to raise the profile of our agency and continue to aim to achieve adopter sufficiency for our children across our five local authorities, with a surplus to generate income and offset the cost of inter-agency placements for our children who need them.

Monthly Adopter Sufficiency meetings continue with the Head of Service, the Operations Manager with thematic lead for recruitment and assessment, the Recruitment and Enquiries Manager and the Marketing Officer meeting to plan and review our progress. The conversion rate from enquiry to approval remains constant at 11% which would suggest that we continue to receive enquiries from the right kinds of people who are in a position to offer a family to our children as opposed to an increase in unsuitable enquirers.

## 6.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

## 6.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Our Recruitment Team received 34 partner/step-parent enquiries during this period, compared with 14 in the preceding six months. Although this seems a high increase, the previous six months was an unusually low number and just after the COVID-19 pandemic began, when many families faced challenges such as home schooling, etc. If we compare the number to the same six months in the previous year – they were the same – 34. For the complete year, the number of enquiries received was 48, compared with 91 the previous year. It is therefore expected that we will therefore see an increase over the next six months. This also influenced the number of families moving to the application stage of a partner/step-parent application and decreased from 21 during the full year 2019-20 to 13 during the full year 2020-21.

Again, we expect to see an increase this year. These numbers are the totals across all five of our local authorities.

### Tables October 2020 – March 2021

#### Enquires received

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	7	21%
Manchester	9	26%
Salford	1	3%
Stockport	7	21%
Trafford	0	0%
Not known / Out of Area	10	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100%</b>

Seven enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place with a social worker, for information gathering and advice, in comparison with five during the previous six months.

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	3	43%
Manchester	3	43%
Salford	0	0%
Stockport	1	14%
Trafford	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Four applications were accepted during this period, a decrease in comparison with nine during the previous six months. These were predominantly from families who had been seen during 2019-2020.

<b>LA</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cheshire East	1	25%
Manchester	1	25%
Salford	0	0%
Stockport	2	50%
Trafford	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>

**6.4 Information events**

Before the pandemic, these were held on a fortnightly basis at locations around the region. After lockdown was announced, the last two information events in March were cancelled, whilst it was determined when they could be resumed. When it was evident this could not happen, plans were quickly put in to place for virtual information events, to be held on a weekly basis.

These started in early April and have been very successful indeed. It is thought that these may continue even after lockdown, with the potential for one a month in a venue for those families who would prefer that face to face connection.

**6.5 Training groups**

Before the pandemic, there were monthly 3-day preparation training groups for those families early in the application stage. The March group was due to take place the week after lockdown was announced and was therefore cancelled. When it became apparent they could not resume in April, a working group was set up to split the training topics in to modules and prepare these for virtual training, in the form of presentations, reading, exercises, etc. Six modules were prepared, with a learning log to be completed for each one.

It was recognised that this is not the ideal way in which to present training, as it lacks clarification for any subjects not completely understood, doesn't give the opportunity for observations of the families, does not help to build up support networks, etc. For these reasons, it was decided that a check-in video meeting would take place after each module between the applicants and their social worker. Some applicants have successfully moved forward with these in good timescales, whereas others have been a little slower, or needed more clarification on certain subjects before they could move forward to the next stage. However, overall, this was the best way of ensuring adoption

applications were not placed on hold during the pandemic. Other top-up training sessions have been carried out in similar ways. Towards the end of the period, we have trialled a live virtual training evening which was successful and so have now established a working group to look at how the three day preparation might be delivered in a more similar way to face to face groups as we are aware that applicants are missing out on a number of elements of that experience. These include the interaction with trainers, with guest speakers and with each other.

Previously, most training groups resulted in the applicants exchanging contact details, setting up 'WhatsApp' groups, etc. so they could maintain relationships and provide ongoing support to each other. This has been replaced with two, so far, WhatsApp groups which have been set up remotely for the families who wish to be involved and it has been reported that these are a great source of support for the families to each other. These groups are managed by adopters for adopters and staff are not involved.

## **6.6 Marketing and Recruitment Campaigns**

This period commenced just two weeks in to the Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, so marketing was somewhat lower key than previous years. However, we took the opportunity to use additional spend on digital and social media advertising, rather than outdoor advertising. Enquiry numbers understandably dropped significantly for the first few weeks, whilst the country adjusted to the new way of living, however they soon picked back up and there was no detrimental effect noted with application numbers.

The National Recruitment Campaign, which had originally been scheduled to start in March 2020, was launched in September of this year. The campaign theme is 'You can Adopt' and the website and social media hashtag #youcanadopt will be used widely. This will mainly be an online, digital and media launch rather than the original planned activities of outdoor and street advertising, due to Covid-19. The aim is to raise awareness of adoption and bust myths around who is eligible to adopt; ultimately to increase the number of possible parents registering their interest in adoption. Additionally, the campaign aims to target potential parents from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds as these children, as we know, traditionally wait longer to be matched with a new adoptive family, as well as older children, sibling groups, and those with complex health needs or disabilities.

The Campaign will run through to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and additional marketing will be evident during National Adoption Week too, which is scheduled for 12<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020. We are running our own advertising during the entire campaign period, to go alongside the national campaign, using the same message, content and useful podcasts, aiming to make Adoption Counts stand out amongst our competitors and drive applicants to our website.

### Compliments, comments and complaints

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description - compliments</b>
04.06.20	Adopters thanking an adoption support worker about her practice and the support she had given.
18.06.20	Feedback given by an adopter who had previously made a complaint who said how helpful and proactive two adoption support workers had been.
18.09.20	SSW saying how warm and professional a Family Finder and social worker have been during the linking and matching process.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description - complaints</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
01.07.20	An adoptive parent complained about the lack of support provided to her son from Adoption Counts. Adoption Counts agreed therapeutic support is needed and provided an explanation as to how this is being discussed / progressed with the appropriate agencies to ensure the most effective support is provided.	Not upheld.
18.1.21	Prospective adopters complained about the social worker who had completed their initial visit and stated the initial visit report the social worker had completed contained errors / incorrect information. The complaint was investigated at stage one / stage two. The investigation found the report did contain inaccuracies. These were amended and our initial visit process has been updated in order for factual information to be checked by prospective adopters at an earlier stage.	Partially upheld.
18.02.21	Informal complaint about letterbox that the adoptive parents had not written back to a birth parent when she was expecting them to. Supported by management discussion with birth mother.	No action.
31.03.21	An adopted adult complained about the length of time it has taken for her to access her records. We identified that some delay was due to Adoption Counts, in following up referral to request the records from the appropriate LA. Some delay was out of our control as this was caused by the LA holding the files (Croydon) who had not responded and then reportedly lost the records.	Partially upheld.

## **8. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts**

### **Family Finding**

During this period, Adoption Counts have developed and reviewed family finding processes to look creatively at all cases where children's plans for adoption have been delayed and to ensure that as far as possible we are able to progress permanence plans in a timely manner. We have developed new guidance re planning and managing introductions, due to this we have been able to place children on fostering for adoption plans and since the beginning of June have planned successful transitions, moving a number of children from foster care into their adoptive families. A robust risk assessment is completed for each individual child moving to an adoption placement taking into account the current Covid-19 guidance and recommendations.

The family finders have continued to meet regularly as a group via teams to discuss practice issues and developments. During our last two development days, we have discussed a range of issues including performance data, sharing best practice, information sharing, our shortlisting and matching process, early permanence and the UEA transitions model. From these discussions, we have formed a working group that will begin to collate and share best practice with our colleagues in terms of the UEA 3 stage transitions model.

We have built and developed a SharePoint early permanence page. This aim of the page is two-fold – it provides information and resources for colleagues about early permanence planning alongside having an inbuilt referral process to enable our family finders, recruitment and assessment workers and children's social workers to refer both children needing an early permanence placement and adopters who are approved with the FFA component to their approval. We hope this will help simplify our referral process and assist us in continuing to provide a high quality early permanence response.

We have also updated our early permanence training provided to prospective adopters in assessment considering caring for a child placed on an early permanence plan. We now are delivering an online modular training session in stage one and a two-day (currently virtual) training course in stage two of their assessment.

We have continued to hold adoption picnics and have profiled children using a range of video clips. Adopters are able to access these video clips of children for a limited period of time via a secure Adoption Counts website on our SharePoint site. We have held four adoption picnics: 69 children have been profiled with 108 households accessing SharePoint resulting in 52 expressions of interest. Matches have been identified for ten children via our Adoption Picnics – this includes a sibling pair aged 6 and 4 years and a child aged 5 who had previously experienced an adoption disruption. We will continue to hold these events every 6 – 8 weeks – whilst these events have

been successful in identifying links and matches for a number of children likely to wait longer, we are also aware the level of interest expressed has been much higher when delivered face to face. As covid restrictions relax, we will therefore be exploring ways we can facilitate this event to incorporate face-to-face meetings. In addition, Adoption Counts recently profiled 14 children at a national exchange event. We received only 6 enquires from the event, where 72 children were profiled and only 10 adoptive families attended. This highlights the national shortage for children with more complex needs and emphasises the internal success we have had in the past using the picnics.

## **Recruitment and Assessment**

Information events have been held on a weekly basis, the numbers of families attending these have increased to 159 (01.04.20 to date) from 128 in the same period last year. It is thought that these may continue even after lockdown, with the potential for one a month in a venue for those families who would prefer that.

Before the pandemic, there were monthly 3 day preparation training groups, virtual training is now delivered in the form of presentations, reading, exercises, etc. Six modules were prepared, with a learning log to be completed for each one.

A national recruitment campaign '#YouCanAdopt' was being prepared prior to the pandemic, but the launch had to be delayed. It will therefore now commence on 16th September, and will focus on myth busting. The campaign will run to 8th December and will also cover National Adoption Week, 12th to 18th October, the theme of which will have a specialist Black, Asian and minority ethnic strand. This will also coincide with Black History Month.

We are now starting to evaluate our experience of remote working - trying to learn from the successes, whilst also clarifying what might be the risks. We will be undertaking evaluation surveys with staff and Panel members as a starting point, and then with adopters who have had experience of virtual training, assessment, approval and matching. Virtual information evenings and initial visits may, for example, be some of the changes we wish to retain as they have speeded up entry of adoptive applicants into the process.

## **Adoption Support**

From 17th March 2020, we have been continuing to deliver Adoption Support in different ways via email, telephone and virtual home visits, with face to face visits now being reinstated where safely risk assessed. This has continued throughout the year with home visits being made when considered necessary by the social worker, family and manager.

There have been a number of families who have experienced significantly increased pressure due to children being out of school, with child to parent violence. Other families have found that having children at home has relieved the stress in relation to

often daily issues with education for their children and have used the time to strengthen family relationships. This very much confirms the national picture.

Adoption Psychology have delivered some on line training and support for families. Using additional ASF Covid-19 funding, which was made available by the government for delivery of additional support to adopters and SGOs initially for a 4 month period then extended to 8 months, we were able to quickly provide additional support to families on our case load and those within our region.

### **Adoption Psychology**

During this period the Adoption Psychology team have maintained their connections with the team and families, delivering specialist assessments, consultations, therapeutic input for families and training for staff. They have adapted their delivery model to meet the changing demand and circumstances. We were joined by a highly specialist Occupational Therapist (0.2 FTE) who is offering sensory assessment and interventions.

Training has taken place for the Adoption Support team, including training on Sensory Interventions by our specialist Occupational Therapist. Training and reflective sessions were also provided by our Educational Psychology service with a focus on school support.

Systemic Peer Support sessions have been created by the Adoption Support Team managers, and therapeutic social worker, and these have been beneficial for workers to receive peer support with complex cases and consider alternative hypotheses around intervention and support.

### **Adoption Panels**

Information about panel will be covered in full in the Chairs reports.

Name Nicola Booth

Role: Operations Manager

Date 8.7.2021