

Annual Report

One Adoption North and Humber

1st April 2020-31st March 2021

Impact of Covid

2020-21 has been impacted by the ongoing pandemic and the implications of providing adoption services during several periods of lockdown. New practices and ways of working were developed to manage the changing health situation. This included implementing fully remote panels.

The pandemic has delayed the adoption process for children, as courts had reduced capacity to deal with Placement Orders and Adoption Orders.

It also had an impact on adoption support and adopter assessments. The staff worked hard to find innovative ways to continue to support adoptive families and undertake preparation, training and assessments over virtual platforms.



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Adopter approvals

There has been a significant increase in the number of approved adoptive families this year. OANH approved 100 adoptive families (10% up)



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The Children

There has been an increase in the number of children placed from the 5 OANH LAs, 94 children placed with adopters (6% up)

91% of the 5 LAs children were placed with OANH adopters (90% 3 yrs) this affords the social workers the scope to offer greater support than can be achieved when placements are made further afield. It continues to enable the development of close inter agency work between the 5 LAs and OANH.

86% of OANH adopters took placements of 5 LAs children (89% 3 yrs) which means that adoptive families will receive more localised support during the placement phase prior to adoption order from social workers in 5 LAs, who are accustomed to working together with OANH and its adopters.



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County Council

Early permanence

32 children were placed under early permanence arrangements (100% up). This is evidence that there is proactive exploration of early permanence opportunities, which has increased the confidence of LAs, Agency decision makers, the courts and adopters to plan such placements.

Sibling Groups

20 sibling groups placed (66% up). This evidences that the needs of children requiring placements with their sisters and brothers are being prioritised.



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External placements

One Adoption North & Humber still needs to find some placements for children externally through inter agency placements, as these may be the most suitable placements available. Similarly a small proportion of OANH's approved adopters are matched with children from LAs across the United Kingdom, as this reflects the placement matching requirements of those children and adopters.



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Post adoption additional support

Adoption Support continues to remain a key priority for OANH adoption teams and all teams have the capacity to support prompt assessment. There remains a variation of the number of open cases and referrals across the region.

The contract for birth family services, mediation services, adopter voice, Adopteens and birth family voice remains in place provided by PAC UK and Adoption UK. These services have continued virtually after the onset of Covid-19.



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The peer mentoring service for OANH is in place provided by Adoption UK. This service is growing with 16 trained peer mentors providing support to 37 adoptive families. There are 8 trained parent partners supporting transitions with 6 families. There are 34 prospective adopters supported in a facilitated Whats App group.

The Inter Country Adoption contract remains in place with The Yorkshire Adoption Agency guaranteeing the Inter Country service for up to five years.



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Annual Report, One Adoption North & Humber

1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is the third annual report of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), One Adoption North and Humber, summarising the work of the agency in the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. This was the third full operating year as a regional agency, after establishment in February 2018. This report should be read in conjunction with the Annual Performance Report for One Adoption North and Humber 2020/2021 (ANNEXE A).

2 Headlines

- 2.1 2020-21 has been impacted by the ongoing pandemic and the implications of providing adoption services during several periods of lockdown. New practices and ways of working were developed to manage the changing health situation, rules on social distancing and staff availability. This has delayed the adoption process for children, as courts had reduced capacity to deal with Placement Orders and Adoption Orders. The pandemic had an impact on adoption support and adopter assessments. The staff worked on finding innovative ways to continue to support adoptive families and undertake preparation training? and assessments over virtual platforms.
- 2.2 One Adoption North & Humber continues to concentrate on driving best practice, listening to the voice of our customers, and seeking to innovate. There has been development of the adopter voice and this has progressed to co-development and delivery of services, with an emphasis on empowerment of the adoption community to support one another.
- 2.3 There has been a significant increase in the number of approved adoptive families this year. OANH approved 100 adoptive families (10% up)
- 2.4 Also there has been an increase in the number of children placed from the 5 OANH LAs, 94 children with adopters (6% up)
- 2.5 91% of 5 LAs children were placed with OANH adopters (90% 3 yrs) this affords the social workers, who visit the placements the scope to offer greater support than can be achieved when placements are made further afield across the United Kingdom. It continues to enable the development of close inter agency work between the 5 LAs and OANH.



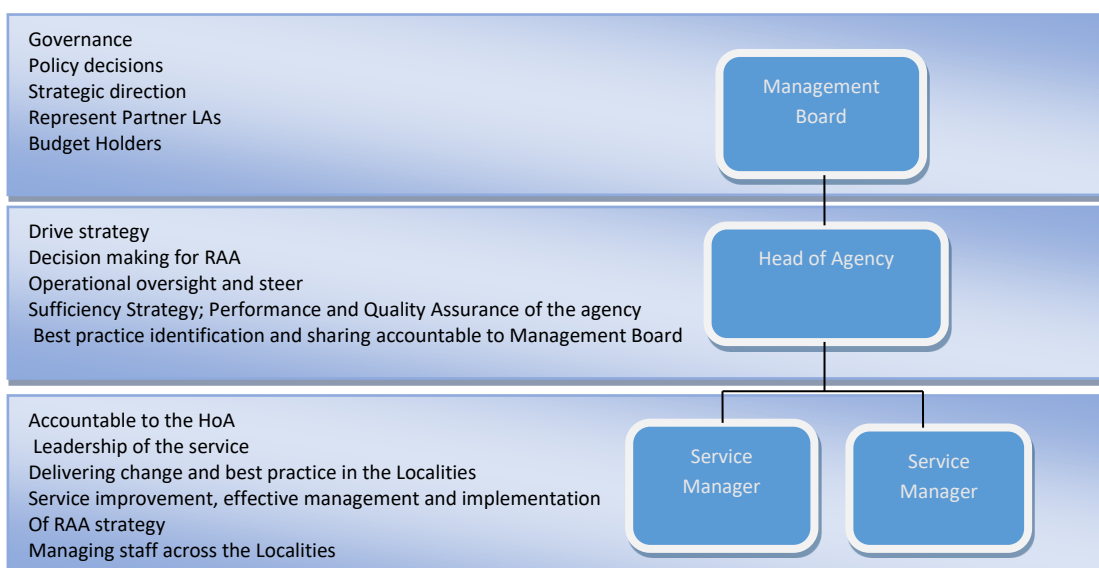
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- 2.6 86% of OANH adopters took placements of 5 LAs children (89% 3 yrs) which means that adoptive families will receive more localised support during the placement phase prior to adoption order from social workers in 5 LAs, who are accustomed to working together with OANH and its adopters.
- 2.7 32 children were placed under early permanence arrangements (100% up). This is evidence that there is proactive exploration of early permanence opportunities, which has increased the confidence of LAs, Agency decision makers, the courts and adopters to plan such placements.
- 2.8 20 sibling groups placed (66% up). This evidences? that the needs of children requiring placements with their sisters and brothers are being prioritised.
- 2.9 One Adoption North & Humber still needs to find some placements for children externally through inter agency placements, as these may be the most suitable placements available. Similarly a small proportion of OANH's approved adopters are matched with children from LAs across the United Kingdom, as this reflects the placement matching requirements of those children and adopters.
- 2.10 Adoption Support continues to remain a key priority for OANH adoption teams and all teams have the capacity to support prompt assessment. There remains a variation of the number of open cases and referrals across the region.
- 2.11 The contract for birth family services, mediation services, adopter voice, Adopteens and birth family voice remains in place provided by PAC UK and Adoption UK. These services have continued virtually after the onset of Covid-19.
- 2.12 The Inter Country Adoption contract remains in place with The Yorkshire Adoption Agency guaranteeing the Inter Country service for up to five years.
- 2.13 The peer mentoring service for OANH is in place provided by Adoption UK. This service is growing with 16 trained peer mentors providing support to 37 adoptive families. There are 8 trained parent partners supporting transitions with 6 families. There are 34 prospective adopters supported in a facilitated Whats App group.

3 Context – National, Wider Region and Regional picture

- 3.1** Regional Adoption Agencies have been established across England since 2017. One Adoption North & Humber work closely with One Adoption West Yorkshire, hosted by Leeds City Council, and One Adoption South Yorkshire, hosted by Doncaster Children’s Trust sharing the ‘One Adoption’ brand and website, and running a joint marketing strategy. Emphasis in the marketing strategy has been upon engaging with the #youcanadopt national campaign. The national campaign is targeting the recruitment of adopters for children whom adoption agencies struggle to find placements for including older children, those in sibling groups, children with additional needs and children from some ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 3.2** The One Adoption North and Humber Board oversees the Regional Adoption Agency, working towards a consistently high quality adoption service across the region. Hosted by the City of York, it delivers a single service whilst retaining many functions at a local level.
- 3.3** The One Adoption Hub that consisted of 15 local authorities in the region and run by Barnardos was closed in 2020, after the members considered that the new RAAs were fulfilling most of the former functions of the Hub or consortium.

3.4 Organisational Structure





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- 3.5 The five local authorities contribute equally to the core functions of the Regional Adoption Agency. These include posts for the Head of Agency, Development Assistant, Communications and Marketing Officer and Business Intelligence Officer. These posts are located in the host local authority that also provides finance and legal support to the RAA.**
- 3.6 The funding also includes a joint marketing budget combined with One Adoption West Yorkshire to fund the One Adoption website and shared marketing activity. Marketing strategy is detailed in the annual marketing report.**

4 Children

- 4.1 In 2020-21 there were 102 children with placement orders granted (20% up) These figures include increases for Hull, NE Lincolnshire and East Riding and decreases in North Yorkshire and York. The variability between LAs needs consideration in each area as regional variation is likely.**
- 4.2 Only 63 children adoption orders were granted in 2020-21 which is a 33% reduction from previous years. This reduction is reflected in national figures and relates to the impact of the pandemic on the courts and the adoption process.**
- 4.3 Across the region, 29 children had their decision for adoption reversed in the year; this is a consistent number compared with 29 and 28 in the two previous years. Reasons for reversals are varied. 1 child had changing needs, 13 children did not have a Placement Order made by the Court, for 1 child we were unable to find an adoptive family and 14 were due to other reasons. The outcomes for this group of 29 children varied and 11 returned to the care of their parents or kinship carers, 12 became fostered long term and 6 children were made subject of special guardianship orders.**



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- 4.4 When it is established that a child's plan may become adoption, a search is made across the regional agency using dedicated family finders, family finding forums, and Linkmaker: an electronic national searching tool. The intention is to link children where possible by the time a plan for adoption is made by the agency decision maker (ADM) in the local authority. This prevents delay for children. The time that a child waits from entering care until being placed with their adoptive family has fallen across the region in all local authorities that were not meeting the national target, all local authorities are significantly better than the national average.
- 4.5 One Adoption North and Humber takes satisfaction from the high percentage of children who are placed with adopters approved by OANH. However, they have to be the right adopters for the children waiting, and at times, it is not possible to find the right match for a child within the region. If this is the case a decision is made early by the child's local authority that a search should be made on a national basis. Some children will wait longer due to a national shortage of adopters for sibling groups, older children, and children with disabilities.
- 4.6 The agency has been successful at placing 20 sibling groups. This year saw 19 sets of two children and one set of three children placed. This is consistent performance which has increased over three years.
- 4.7 Hull have placed significantly more children for adoption than in the previous two years. Other LAs are placing roughly comparable numbers of children to preceding years. The regional aggregate of placements is 94, the highest level achieved in 3 years of operation. 91% of 5 LAs children were placed with OANH adopters (90% 3 yrs)
- 4.8 Early Permanence Placement is when children are placed directly with a family that foster them with a view to adoption if Court agreement is given. 32 children were placed in an Early Permanence arrangement in 2020-21, this is a significant increase from the previous year when 16 children were placed. The majority of these placements were from Hull with that LA placing 22 of the 32 children in an Early Permanence Placement.



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4.9 Adoption performance is measured by the Adoption Scorecard published annually by the Department for Education, a year in arrears, delayed this year due to the impact of the pandemic. The most recent scorecard relates to outcomes in 2019 and a three year period from 2016-2019, this was reported in the annual report for 2019-20 and therefore, there is no updated information.

5 Adopters

- 5.1 There continues to be a national shortage of adopters particularly for sibling groups and harder to place children. Most regional agencies report a shortage of adopters and rely on other regional adoption agencies or voluntary adoption agencies for between 20% and 50% of their placements for children, the national average is around 25%. One Adoption North & Humber's 5 LAs only placed 9% of children with other adoption agencies. This is the lowest percentage of inter-agency placements in England.**
- 5.2 This year One Adoption North and Humber have seen a rise in their approval of adopters, with 100 families approved compared to 89 families last year. There is a steady flow of prospective families in the approval process which has remained consistent with preceding years.**
- 5.3 One Adoption North and Humber have a joint marketing and recruitment strategy with One Adoption West Yorkshire, with local delivery organised by the North and Humber marketing officer.**
- 5.4 This year there has been an emphasis on ensuring that the quality of assessment was not affected by virtual working and making sure that all our adopters move through the system and their adoption journey in as timely way as possible. The increase in the number of approved adopters is evidence of the success of this approach.**
- 5.5 Families wishing to adopt from abroad are offered a service through the Yorkshire Adoption Agency with a contract across Yorkshire and Humber LAs.**



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- 5.6** Assessment has two stages: during stage one statutory and other checks are undertaken; in Stage two the in-depth assessment, report for the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision regarding suitability to adopt. Due to the pandemic regulations were changed and until September 2020 adoption agencies could progress prospective adopters into stage two without a medical or DBS check. In One Adoption North & Humber, we took advantage of this change in regulation to allow families to move with as little delay as possible. However, a managerial decision was still required for progression and these checks need to be in place before approval can be made. Since January 2021, the utilisation of this flexibility has not been necessary, as completion of adoption medicals and DBS checks have reverted back to their previous process.
- 5.7** The performance timescale for stage one is two months and stage two four months. The outcomes are included in the annual performance report.

6 Adoption Support

- 6.1** Adoption Support continues to be a large area of work with 90 new assessments started in 2020-21 and 265 open cases across the region. The numbers of adoption support cases vary significantly across the region with a higher concentration in North Yorkshire, City of York and East Riding.
- 6.2** The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) continues to be used throughout the region to provide families with therapeutic interventions. This fund has been expanded to offer Covid-19 assistance to families and new interventions including trauma intervention for carers and Child on Parent violence initiatives have been put in place.



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- 6.3 Adoption Support is an area that continues to develop in the region. A peer-mentoring project was commissioned in response to our adopter voice; this is now well established with many peer mentors providing support to a large range of families. There was a new development for peer mentoring for all prospective adopters in stage one, meaning that most families will be part of a peer mentoring group for their whole adoption journey. Peer Mentors will also be part of the support being offered to families in adoption support. This scheme has been expanded with additional training given to experienced peer mentors becoming parent partners to offer specialist support in transitions and trauma.
- 6.4 Peer mentors are co delivering preparation training for adopters and information events and although these have moved to virtual delivery this is still working really well.
- 6.5 The peer mentoring service for OANH is in place provided by Adoption UK. This service is growing with many trained peer mentors providing support to a large range of adoptive families. There are also trained parent partners supporting transitions with families. All prospective adopters can be supported in a facilitated Whats App groups, if they wish to engage.
- 6.6 Adoption UK undertook an external review with the University of Newcastle. The key findings of the research were that the peer mentoring programme in Yorkshire and Humber was highly valued by participants and partners. It has supported significant numbers of adopters in their journey both as mentees and mentors - reducing isolation, building confidence and increasing access to adopter lived experience within practice delivery.
- 6.7 There is a process being undertaken in June 2021 to procure peer mentoring services under a Yorkshire and Humber tender, led by Leeds City Council.
- 6.8 A contact review has been undertaken in the region with a comprehensive survey produced and completed by over 200 adopters, the information is being analysed currently.



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7 Adoption Panels

- 7.1** Joint adoption panels for North Yorkshire and York and East Riding, Hull and North East Lincolnshire continued to run well, in spite of the impact of the pandemic. They follow the same procedures and contribute to establishing and aligning best practice across the region. All panels have continued to sit despite the pandemic, by moving to virtual sessions. Regulation changes allowed a reduced quoracy (3 members) for panel or a move to Agency Decision with no panel held. This flexibility was utilised in very few instances and the usual pre pandemic arrangements have returned with full quoracy and panel recommendations to the agency decision makers. Panels continued to mitigate any delays for children's planning.
- 7.2** There is exploration of the scope for Panel operation to be continued as a virtual meeting, as the recovery from the effects of the pandemic reduce on 2021-22. A review will be undertaken to ensure compliance with social distancing and Covid safety, while ensuring suitable continued scrutiny of social workers' recommendations.

8 Raising Practice Standards

- 8.1** One of the purposes of the formation of a Regional Agency was to raise practice standards in adoption across the region. Live audits and dip samples of cases are undertaken regular and standardised to monitor and ensure best practice.
- 8.2** Heads of Service from the five local authorities meet to discuss and scrutinise developments and practice with the Head of Agency and Service Managers, making sure the needs of the Local Authorities are met by their regional agency.
- 8.3** All staff events took place twice during 2020-21 and a further day is planned for June 2021. Workshops will be held on early permanence placements, support to prospective adopters and adoption support.



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- 8.4 The assessment framework for adoption support developed by the Centre of Excellence was adapted and training and guidance provided for OANH. This aims to unify the approach to adoption support through the region and raise the standards of assessment, planning and reviewing for our adoptive families. Emphasis is being made on outcome led plans and support being wider than therapeutic or social work interventions.
- 8.5 Managers had the opportunity for management and leadership training via First line, part of the Front Line organisation. This aimed to align the management approach across OANH and ensures managers have an emphasis on strong leadership and driving best practice.

9 Finance

- 9.1 The Local Authorities contribute equally to the costs of the core staff of the RAA employed by the host City of York and the marketing and website costs for the joint branding with One Adoption West Yorkshire. This contribution is £40, 000 per Local Authority.

10 Recommendation

- 10.1 That the Board notes this information on the activity of One Adoption North and Humber in the year 2020-21

A Shovelady

Head of Agency

13 May 2021

