



Voice and Influence of Adopters, Children & Young People report Card April 2020 to March 2021

Outcome: Children and adoptive families to have an influence over decisions affecting their families' lives and the services we provide.

Best ideas - what has worked?

Webinar information events – Information events were delivered by a pre-recorded video link in the first half of the year due to Covid. From October upgraded to webinars which allow greater interaction between OAWY and prospective adopters. 13 webinars were delivered between October and the end of March with 190 households attending.



Here are some comments from those who attended:

- *'The interaction was easy and professional'.*
- *'We really loved the part that explained the process that children go through themselves, no one else has put it that way before'.*
- *'It was clear that the staff were passionate about their roles and adoption overall'.*
- *'The speakers were very clear giving the opportunity to ask questions throughout'.*
- *'Overall it was an excellent event and something that I would definitely recommend'.*



Adoptteens chat – This was adapted during Covid and runs between 7 and 8.30pm every Wednesday with 8 - 12 members logging on to use this space. Recently an adult adoptee has been employed who acts as a mentor on the forum and runs the Adoptteen chat sessions alongside us. The idea being that this person will bring the current Adopttee voice into our work and can build relationships and provide support & inspiration to newer members.

Support from our new member has been great and working well to engage the young people online.

Activity Days – 3 online activity days were delivered in October, November and December. Two were baking themed and 1 craft themed. All 3 were successful and well attended. We plan to vary activities in future as we feel it will reach a larger group as some young people like cooking, others arts and crafts whilst others enjoy competitive activities such as scavenger hunts etc.

Here are some comments from the young people who attend the activity days:

- *'I enjoyed seeing lots of people and it was fun to make the twig tree hanging. I love arts and crafts'.*
- *'It felt good even though I think it was my second activity day with adoptees. I am glad I have made some new friends especially on the chat forum on a Wednesday night'.*
- *'Adoptteens is a really helpful youth group'.*

Bradford Tweens Group has been running throughout lockdown each month on a Saturday via Zoom. There have been scavenger hunts, show and tell, art sessions, video bombing pets and lots of laughter. Here are some quotes from our latest questionnaire to our Tweenies:



- 'I like being able to talk to everyone and see how they are doing as sometimes I feel lonely with not being at school so good to see everyone. Love playing the games';
- 'Every week, I have enjoyed our sessions. Although, it's hard to see each other in person now, we still have fun via our Zoom meetings. Thank you!';
- 'When I am at tweenies on Saturdays, I enjoy it a lot because I love seeing all my friends. I am proud to be part of this wonderful group!'.

The group also worked on an activity to capture their thoughts on the Tween Group, please see below:



Seaglass Collective

Seaglass Collective has been developed with support from OAWY. Seaglass delivers stimulating and exciting arts projects exclusively for adopted children and young people across Yorkshire. Seaglass delivers projects where adopted children and young people can take part within an understanding and supportive environment. Here they can build their self-esteem, creativity, communication, imagination, sense of play and confidence.



Adopted young people have taken part in a youth theatre group, a dance group, a drama program, a song writing group, poetry and creative writing and an adoption choir.

'It gave me confidence and I was pleased mum and dad could see what I do- I am not just in my room messing with words- I am being creative and enjoyed the course. Cool'.

'We need more social opportunities for adopted children with trainers who understand attachment disorders and the emotional vulnerability of our wonderful but complex children. This is the first group that our son has managed to cope with outside of school and he has grown in confidence over the seven weeks'.

'Seaglass Collective provides access to the Creative Arts in an inclusive, fun, therapeutic and engaging way with tutors who just get our families. It's been a lifeline for us and has given our child so many tools to support his regulation and development. It's made life better having this to look forward to each week. We can't wait for the next group'.

'Online courses are so difficult to engage people and connect, but my daughter who struggles to communicate effectively loved the course and reminded me every week to log her on to the Sing Owt choir'.

'This was a superbly-run choir, totally accessible for my blended family of adopted and birth children. I appreciated how relaxed it was, how my children were made to feel included and valued whenever they chose to participate, and not admonished when they didn't!'

'It is great to have a choir for adopted children and their families, the experiences we families have are often unique. In this setting there is no need to explain or worry about tricky situations, it is also so beneficial for the children to meet and see each other'.

'It was beautifully run, couldn't have had a more engaging and friendly tutor who seemed to bring out the best in all the children. The routine and structure was perfect it allowed him to take ownership. The bedtime calming activities at the end were ideal as he is on sleep'.

medication, so again it fitted in perfectly between school and bed because of the consideration to the children's needs that went into it'.

'(Sing Owt!) has supported bedtime routine, has given a nice extra structure to a weekday routine and has been an opportunity for his growing confidence. It has been extra speech therapy and OT, with the warm ups and breathing. It has given us bonding time...I've actually sung some of these songs when he's been dysregulated and they've stopped a meltdown...he joins in and it's happy days again. We've been using toothbrushing songs etc before now but this really has shown how important music is for my child for structure, regulation and growth. And in this time of Covid it has been healing and a really positive experience'.

Talking Teenagers (commissioned from Deborah Stead Therapeutic Parenting) - is a parenting programme which considers the particular needs and challenges that come with parenting adopted teenagers. The programme runs over 4 evenings via Zoom and shares information from highly recognised authors and researchers alongside group discussion and learning on issues such as loss and separation, conflict and anger, teen identity and self-care. Here are some parent comments:



'It is not often that you are able to talk about your child's problems and behaviours and just to know that other people understand and empathise, without question. Thankyou.'

'It was made easier by not having to travel, or having to take time off work, we could eat and have a 'nice brew' whilst the training was going on'

Adoption UK - Festival of Families – In January we held a fantastic week-long festival of webinars for Adoption UK members, thanks to their partnership with One Adoption West Yorkshire. Here are some of the sessions that took place:

- FASD - an introduction and detailed insight to the condition;
- Preparing for Primary School with Julie Pocklington and Paula Walker;
- Looking at the map of recovery from complex trauma with Betsy de Thierry;

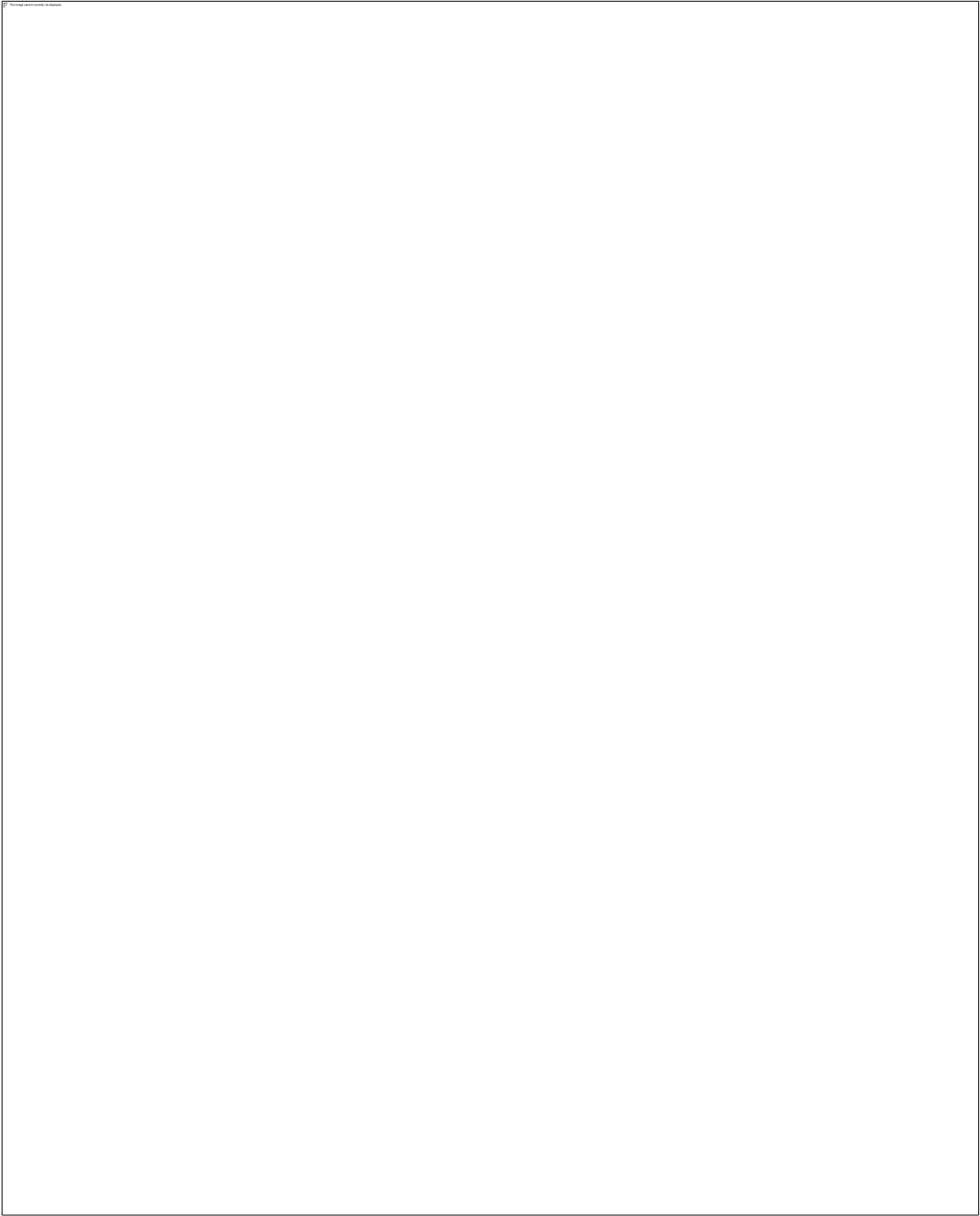
- DDP Principles and Practice: Relevance for Adoptive Families with Dan Hughes;
- Managing Meltdowns with Sarah Fisher;
- Parenting teens - the tricky years? With Rachel Gillett;
- Life Journey Work focus group with Philippa Williams.

This event enabled 97 adoptive families from across the region to access a range of online activities. As well as those listed above there was also magic, wild animals, wacky science gymnastics and arts for children. Here is comment from a parent whose son attended:

- *'I would like to tell you how much my son and I have enjoyed the 2 online events we have joined in. My child is 11 and not the most confident to speak up. We laughed, we joined in, we had fun together. It's made a real difference and has lifted our spirits.'*

Adoption Today is a magazine published by Adoption UK. In the latest additions it featured a piece written by Emily, a OAWY adopter giving positive feedback about her assessment experience during the last year, see below:





Best ideas - what next?

Newsletter for birth families – we will be co-developing a newsletter to send to birth families advising them of developments in One Adoption West Yorkshire. Part of the consideration will be how to ensure this is a 2-way conversation.



Support groups

We are developing 2 additional support groups. 1 for adoptive dads and 1 for parents involved in transracial adoption arrangements.

Support for older children

OAWY have recognised a gap in the support services for older adopted children. 2 sessional Youth Workers have now been recruited and their role will be to enhance the Teens and Tweens service across the region.



Adopteens

An **18 – 25 Therapeutic support group** is planned to start when it is safe to hold face to face meetings.



Train the trainer - The project applied to children in need for funding to develop a train the trainer program based on children's rights training (Total respect) and was successful. £30k over the next 3 years has been secured. The idea is that we will work with a group of Adoptees to develop a half to full day training event based around their experiences (looking at issues such as life story, identity, transitions/ contact) aimed at supporting social work practice , but with a scope to widen/ adapt this for education and health care workers. The aim will be that the core group of young people will go on to train other Adoptees in other regions so the initiative can grow.