

One Adoption West Yorkshire



One
Adoption
Agency
WEST YORKSHIRE

**HALF-YEAR REPORT
2023 - 2024**



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1. INTRODUCTION

This is the Half Year Report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY), which is the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) providing adoption services to children and families on behalf of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, and Wakefield. This report details the work of OAWY from 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023. The purpose of the Half Year Report is to inform the public, elected members, partners and staff of the progress and developments of the adoption service during this period in line with the agency's vision:

"To be a flagship adoption agency that develops and promotes best practice, improving adoption standards nationally."

The agency's objectives are that:

- Children to move in with their adoptive family without unnecessary delay
- Families get help and support at every stage of the adoption journey
- Children have good quality care, a good understanding of their identity, a sense of belonging, and stability within their adoptive family
- Children, adoptive and birth parents, and adopted adults feel they have a voice and influence



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

69 children were adopted in the first half of the year.

At 30th September **251** children had an agency decision that they should be placed for adoption still awaiting a match, 166 of whom also had a Placement Order; court authority to place them for adoption and still awaiting a match.

The timeliness of children moving in with adoptive families after entering care for the 69 children adopted has increased from 448 days as at 30th September 2022 to **480 days** as at 30th September 2023.

OAWY have approved **49** households to adopt, an increase of **three** from the same period in the previous year.

The agency is facing sufficiency challenges as the number of children with an adoption plan in West Yorkshire continues to increase as the number of prospective adopters entering the process has decreased, both locally and nationally.



3. ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

One Adoption West Yorkshire has approved **49** adoptive families over the first half of this year and matched **54** families with children from the West Yorkshire region. This is an increase from the same period last year. On 30th September there were **99** households in the process pre-approval. This is a fall from the same period last year (135 households) and reflects the national picture of fewer families coming forward to adopt.

Within the 49 households approved, there were **85** individuals. Of these, **8** (9%) are of the Global Majority. In the same period of 2022/23 21% of our adopters approved were of the Global Majority so this is a decrease. Two days per week of manager time has been allocated to focus on engaging with Black communities and removing any barriers to them coming forward to adopt. We have engaged with the Staff College 'Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home' programme for strategic managers to better recognise barriers and identify solutions to attract and motivate potential adopters to come forward to meet the needs of Global Majority children in the care system. The program was delivered over several days to senior managers across the LAs and OAWY and we shall shortly be pulling together the learning in a recruitment strategy.

18% (**9**) of the 49 households approved were willing to consider sibling groups compared to 20% in the first half of 22/23.

27% (**13**) of the 49 households were open to an Early Permanence Placement, a significant increase on last year's 15%. This has exceeded the demand for these placements over the period.

Six households could consider children over five years old.

204 households attended the 13 information events in the first half of this year. This is similar to the same time last year and indicates our marketing is working well, as other RAAs have been reporting far fewer people coming forward.

In the first half of this year **108** households requested an initial visit, an 11% decrease on the 121 requests received in the same period last year.



53 formal Registrations of Interest following an initial visit were received, a 39% decrease on the 87 received in the first half of 22/23.

An audit of people leaving the process prior to submitting a Registration of Interest found that decision making at this stage was appropriate. Most enquirers had a visit from a social worker to discuss their unique circumstances and chose to withdraw with a view to returning when their situation was more settled. Of those seen as not suitable, the primary reason was smoking/vaping, followed by very recent fertility treatment/loss, imminent changes in accommodation or employment and limited English skills. All but a few were advised to address specific issues before returning to the process.

The stage one team of advisors continue to support families from the request for a visit through stage one. Families have spent longer on average in stage one than last year. There are several factors impacting on this timescale, including families asking to go on hold due to changes in their circumstances, GPs being unable to prioritise medical appointments and reports, and the complexity of families meaning further exploration and additional visits needing to be completed before they progress to stage two. At the end of September, very few families were awaiting allocation for assessment as capacity pressures have eased.

OAWY has continued to use sessional assessors to ensure families are assessed and approved in a timely manner, though the reliance on these assessors has lessened. The focus on increasing the capacity of social workers to assess families by removing some of their other responsibilities has worked well. The average time spent in stage two has increased by 12 days. More families asked to take a break in stage two and increasing numbers have required additional preparation and support to be ready to meet the needs of children.

43 families adopted their children in the first half of 2023/24 a slight decrease on the same time last year, 47.

Feedback from Interactive Learning Audit:

"She felt in good hands and her SW is insightful and on the ball. She said that she can't praise her enough and feels very lucky to have chosen OAWY and had D as her social worker"



Preparation, Training and Support for Prospective Adopters

All training continues to be featured on and accessible through our website. Adopters can learn more about what is offered and book directly onto training through web forms.

Our **information events** continue to be delivered online and always include an experienced adopter who shares their experience and answers questions. There are daytime, evening and weekend sessions and applicants can book directly onto a session that suits them.

"The session covered all sorts of areas and I found it very informative. I was also thankful to hear from an adoptive parent and his experience."

Three-day preparation groups have been delivered face to face since April 2022. Training includes presentations, video content (including Virtual Reality headsets) and group activities. In the first half of the year, there were five groups which 43 families attended. Feedback received was entirely positive:

"This was a fantastic three days and really exceeded my expectations. The application of theoretical concepts in real life circumstances was really helpful in enabling us to envisage how things could be."

"I found hearing from XXXX, an adopted adult, particularly powerful and having an adoptive parent giving real-life examples provided a great insight into family life and how the theory works in practice."

Specific one day online training for **experienced adopters and foster carers** continue to be delivered. Nine households attended the experienced adopter training, and five households attended the foster carer training. Some of our experienced adopters and foster carers attended the three-day training where this was felt to be beneficial.

Delivery of training on **early permanence** in the preparation stage has been improved. All prospective adopters are now asked to watch a 45-minute pre-recorded webinar as part of the preparation training. Following this the applicants have the option to attend a one-day, classroom-based session to explore early permanence in more detail. The session is delivered alongside an experienced early permanence adopter. So far this year we have run two sessions to 24 households.

"I found it really informative, and it was delivered exceptionally well. It definitely clarified for me that EPP is a route that I'm interested in."



84 supporters attend the 'Connected by Adoption' training to learn more about the needs of adopted children and their families and think about how they can best support their friends/family on their adoption journey.

"Really informative and answered lots of questions that I was wondering about. Really liked the therapeutic parenting side which I have never come across before."

The **Birth Parent Information Session** is an opportunity for prospective adopters to hear directly from birth parents in a two-hour classroom-based session. There were seven sessions between April and September attended by 52 households. The feedback was entirely positive.

"Really appreciate the honesty that everyone brought, and I found their stories very moving."

Following approval, adopters are invited to attend our **Pre-Matching Training** which helps prepare adopters for transitions and early placement. There were six sessions between April and September which 64 households attended. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

"Lots of great advice and opportunities to ask questions, which were all taken on board and answered well."

Most prospective adopters attend **Brain Based Parenting, Therapeutic Parenting and FASD** webinars to learn more about the particular needs of the children waiting for adoption.

"Another parenting training which was very interesting and informative. We have more knowledge about brain development in children now".

Recently matched families can attend **Six months in**, a four-day therapeutic parenting program run over two weeks, led by an experienced adopter. It is aimed at the first year of adoptive parenting and supports parents to understand the needs of their child/ren.

All prospective adopters can access independent support through **Adoption UK**. Peer support and Passport are commissioned from AUK. 36 families were supported in the first half of the year through the one-to-one **Peer Mentoring** service and 84 households accessed WhatsApp support. 62 households accessed the **Adoption Passport**, providing access to online learning modules, message boards and support groups.

"Thank you for all of your support over the last few months I know we would have disrupted without it"

4. CHILDREN WITH AN ADOPTION PLAN

The number of children within the family finding service has continued to increase over the first half of the year and is at its highest since the agency was formed in 2017. At the end of September 2023 **251** children had a plan of adoption but were not matched.

There was a 46% increase in the number of children made subject to a Placement Order and the number of children placed for adoption in the period remaining static. Despite the challenging climate, there has been a 2% increase in the number of children placed with OAWY approved adopters and a 42% increase in the number of children placed in Early Permanence Placements. Keeping children local and placing them with permanent carers at the earliest opportunity is greatly beneficial for a child. So far for the same period 69 children have acquired Adoption Orders. This is against a climate of extended court processes and as such the figures show this is down by six on the same time last year.

Four children had their placements disrupted across One Adoption West Yorkshire for two sibling groups of two children, this is up from zero disruptions in the same period of the previous year. One of the placement disruptions in the first half of this year was with an OAWY family, the other children were placed with families approved by other agencies.

Specific Family Finding Activity

In addition to placing children with OAWY adoptive families partnership work continues with other regional and voluntary adoption agencies locally and nationally to find families for children.

An initial search for families is carried out within the Yorkshire region but the agency must also balance this with providing an opportunity for children to have permanency through adoption with families best able to meet their needs, even if this results in the children being placed at distance. When placing children, the importance of providing support for the children and their families is also factored in.



Profiling Events

Two online profiling events took place within this period. Profiling events serve to share information to a wider audience about the needs of 'children who wait longest.' The profiling events are open to families from regional adoption agencies (RAA) and voluntary adoption agencies (VAA) UK wide.

The following table sets out the numbers of children and families and the results so far. Although there had been several expressions of interest this generally centred around only a fraction of the number of children featured, hence some children received more Expressions of Interest (EOI) than others.

PROFILING EVENTS HELD	May	September
No. of single children profiled	9	10
No. of sibling groups profiled	6	9
No of expressions of interest (EOI)	45	23
No of EOI that progressed to a linking visit	3	3
No of linking visits that progressed to a match	2	n/a
No of children matched	2	n/a
Adopter attendance at event	126	124

Child focused family finding

OAWY has been working with Adoption Matters on a pilot called Child Focussed Family Finding Building (CFFB) service. The aim being to identify specific children with high-end level of need, using a scoring mechanism called a FLAG tool that the advanced practitioners have been trained in using at the point of SHOBPA decision. The project is building on the work started so far, and to date there is a growing list of five children either confirmed, or under consideration for the project.



Fun Days

Fun days (formally activity days) are a way of prospective adopters exploring the needs of children they would be best placed to care for, so although we do not always see that Fun Days result in matches directly, they do feed into the adopter experience which leads to more appropriate matches happening further down the line.

In July a Fun Day was held which resulted in three matches being identified:

Fun Day Held	July
No. of single children that attended	8
No. of sibling groups that attended	9
No. of expressions of interest	12
No. of EOI that progressed to a linking visit	5
No. of linking visits that are progressing to matching panel	3
No. of adopters at the event	36



Early Permanence Project

The project is now in the second year. The same Project Lead has remained in post and continued the development work that commenced within the project's first year. Following the success of the project in raising the profile of Early Permanence, additional funding has been secured to extend the Project Lead role until May 2024. Within One Adoption West Yorkshire, Early Permanence Champions have been established to drive the use of Early Permanence and support the Project Lead in developing practice through the implementation of the Early Permanence Strategy.

The number of children identified for Early Permanence in the first half of the year increased from 13 to 18. The number of children successfully placed in Early Permanence placements increased by five and the percentage of children matched following an Early Permanence Placement increased by 12%, evidencing the positive impact of the work. The number of prospective adopters approved in period that are open to Early Permanence has also increased from 16% to 27%.

Several key areas are under consideration for development including high quality and regular training for local authority social workers and other professionals across the region giving a clear message that Early Permanence can be considered for children of all ages. The work to date has had a positive impact in increasing the number of children placed through Early Permanence and has aligned preparation of Early Permanence carers across Yorkshire and Humber. An additional project, working with the local Voluntary Adoption Agencies to provide Early Permanence for sibling groups and older children, is progressing, with an agreed training and preparation package now in place.

AFDiT Project

'Anti-racist framework for decision-making in transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families'

This is a joint pilot project with a research body which includes the University of Sussex with input from other regional adoption agencies alongside OAWY. The project's focus is on transracial and transcultural adoptions. While transracial adoption can provide a loving and nurturing environment for children who may not otherwise have a stable family home, it has also been recognised that this has its own unique challenges. The project's aim is to provide a framework which leads to best outcomes for children transracially or transculturally placed. OAWY is devising a toolkit to assist family finders, local authority social workers and assessing adoption workers to identify appropriate permanent placements for children.



5. ADOPTION PANEL

38 panels took place during the first half of 2023/24. There were **52** approvals, **69** matches and **two** relinquished children considered by panel in this period.

Two panel chairs, will shortly be leaving but they have been replaced by two experienced panel chairs, who will commence chairing panels in November 2023. The agency continues to recruit new panel members both to increase diversity and the number of members available. All serving members of panel including chairs are having their reviews on a rolling basis. The annual panel member training will take place in December 2023. In the first half of this year, additional workshops have been made available to panel members to share knowledge about relevant topics including an introduction to Safeguarding, use of VR and Attachment Style Interviews. The support to panels provided by the business support team continues to be excellent despite significant changes in personnel during this period. Communication between the chairs and OAWY is very good and occurs regularly, both informally and formally. This includes meetings between the Panel Chairs, the Service Manager responsible for panels, Business Support Manager and the Panel Adviser, allowing for regular and useful dialogue and discussion which have contributed to the smooth running of panels.

There were 19 survey responses from applicants and adopters who attended panel in the first half of 2023/24. 14 found the experience very good, four found the experience to be good and one rated neither good nor poor. 8 rated questions as very helpful, 10 as helpful and one did not rate.

"[The questions] made us think about a couple of new things which will be helpful as we get ready for the arrival of our child" (applicant)

"A great experience for us, we were made to feel at ease and reassured by all involved, very kind and helpful people. Amazing work from our social worker." (applicant)

"They put the adopters at their ease, and this helped them to answer the questions to the best of their ability. I felt that everyone had a chance to speak and that the questions were thorough and well thought out" (social worker)

"The relationship between panel chairs and the agency is a positive and open one allowing discussion and development to improve the process for all concerned. The panel process continues to function smoothly and contribute to well evidenced and thoughtful recommendations to meet the needs of West Yorkshire children who are placed for adoption." (Panel Chair)



6. ADOPTION SUPPORT



At the end of September 2023 there were **983** children/young people receiving an Adoption Support service from OAWY.

In January 2023, the Adoption Support service was reconfigured to deliver services differently to families. This was in response to the growing number of families who were waiting for a service from the first point of contact. The team has continued to embed the model and an evaluation of the Tier one and Tier two services was undertaken at the end of quarter two. The information gained from this will be used to identify further actions required and will be reported here at year end. Both services are busy with **235** children/families receiving a service at the end of Q2 from Early Advice and Support and **241** children/families receiving a service from Targeted Support.

Work in the Supporting Connections service continues at pace. Worker capacity has been increased slightly with the addition of a part-time Adoption Adviser who has been redeployed from the Recruitment and Assessment service. This worker has been able to provide invaluable support to the existing worker and at the end of Q2 they were actively supporting a combined **46** families, with an additional **63** families currently waiting for a service. This is clearly an area of work that is going to grow in the future with the increasing emphasis on the importance for adoptees of maintaining connections with their birth family.

The Supporting Connections strategy and action plan includes a number of areas of development work, and the team has successfully achieved some of these, including clarifying and publicising the core offer to adoptees aged 18+ and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of letterbox workers alongside those of the supporting connections workers. The adoption support team continues to work on protocols for making an 'Expression of Wish'; an offer for 16+ year olds to think about connections in the future; and archiving arrangements for 'dormant' letterbox files.

The letterbox service has processed **2104** pieces of mail coming in and sent out a further **1594** exchanges in the period – both an increase. OAWY has continued to take part in the pilot of a digital platform with a small number of adoptive and birth families and are planning to take part in a second pilot later in the year.

There were **442** applications to the Adoption Support Fund for individual therapeutic input or for therapeutic groups approved across the period equating to **£1,785m** of funding.

File access has received **165** requests to look at records. These requests are from PAC-UK (on behalf of adult adoptees or a birth relative), other professionals (including other adoption support agencies, therapists, safeguarding social workers, police) and adult adoptees. The file access team has continued to work to the protocol of responding to requests within a calendar month and have by and large been able to achieve this (except for one LA which is currently digitising their database, so requests to that area are taking longer; we are able to explain this to those making the requests).

PAC-UK has continued to provide a commissioned support service to adults as well as the Adoptees service. They have received **231** calls to their advice line and worked with **183** service users across the period offering **344** appointments; the overwhelming majority to adult adoptees, but are also starting to see an increase in birth relatives seeking information about their relative who was adopted. West Yorkshire continues to be well represented in Adoptees with **83** out of 146 young people being from the region (this is an increase of eight from 22/23 year-end). Adoptees continue to run activity days, both in person and online, and a member of OAWY staff attends regularly to provide some support to the project.



7. COMPLAINTS

Six complaints were received during the first half of the year. Two investigations are ongoing; four were resolved at stage one of the process.

Learning for the agency in relation to:

- Review and re-sharing of finance policy in relation to adoption allowances.
- Review of enquiry and stage one process for prospective adopters seeking to adopt specific children to ensure clear processes and information sharing.
- The importance of clear, timely and professional communication.

8. STAFFING

There were no vacancies at the half year point.

Staff absence due to sickness equates to 3.89 days per full time staff member. Staff absence is largely due to stress and mental health; wellbeing remains a focus in all staff supervision discussions. Sickness within OAWY remains lower than the wider social care workforce.

During the first six months of 2023/24 the following training has been undertaken:

- BUSS Level two – delivered to three social workers.
- Role specific learning, assigned to nine staff.
- Safeguarding Children and Young People Refresher training, delivered to 70 staff.

9. FINANCE

At the end of the mid-point of the year the agency is predicting a balanced budget position.

The largest in year expenditures relate to staff costs and interagency fees.



10. KEY PRIORITIES 2023/24

Priority	Progress
Developing family finding practice for children who wait longer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family finding strategy on how we identify children likely to wait longest in early tracking process in draft. • Trail with Coram-I collective matching underway.
Increase the number of adopters able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption in West Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing strategy reviewed. • FASD webinar held in May. • Three live podcasts and a further three in development.
Increase the number of children placed through Early Permanence	Internal EP Teams channel created that shows list of adopters, who and where.
Improve the help and support for adopted teenagers and young adults who are moving towards independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear core offer for 18+ year olds produced and on OAWY website. • Supporting contact strategy implemented.
Work collaboratively with partners to improve the flexibility, variety & quality of family connections.	Letter Swap pilot running with 10 families and extended until April 2024. Arc Box pilot scheduled for Q3.
Improve participation and voice and influence in service development and delivery.	Methods to better capture the voice of children and young people are being introduced. Interactive learning audits now up and running.
Review development opportunities for staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUSS Level 2 - delivered to three social workers. • Role specific learning, assigned to nine staff. • Safeguarding Children and Young People Refresher training, delivered to 70 staff.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Half Year Performance Report