

# One Adoption West Yorkshire



**One**  
Adoption  
Agency  
WEST YORKSHIRE

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**ANNUAL REPORT  
2022 - 2023**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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This is the Annual 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 2022 to 31st March 2023. The purpose of the Annual 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 our **vision:**

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

## **The agency's objectives are:**

- 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

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**181** children were adopted in 2022/23, the highest number since the agency formed in 2017.

This year has seen a decrease of children placed with adoptive parents, reducing from 171 in the previous year to **161** this year. There has been variation within the five West Yorkshire Local Authorities with four seeing an increase in children with an adoption plan, while 1 has seen a decrease. At the year-end **242** children had an adoption plan and were not yet matched with an adoptive family, an increase of 72 from the previous year.

The timeliness of children moving in with adoptive families after entering care for the **181** children adopted has increased from 441 days to **491** days.

The timeliness of finding a family and matching with adoptive parents following the making of a Placement Order for the 181 children has increased from 219 days to **232** days. There is an improving picture for children placed during the year, with a reduction to **217** days.

OAWY have approved **101** households to adopt, a decrease of 11 households from the previous year.

The agency is facing sufficiency challenges moving into 2023/24 as the number of children with an adoption plan in West Yorkshire has increased over recent months as the number of prospective adopters has decreased.



# 3. ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

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One Adoption West Yorkshire has approved 101 adoptive families over the course of this year and matched 89 families with children, all but one of these with children from the West Yorkshire region. On 31st March there were 119 households in the process pre-approval.

Within the 101 households approved in 22/23, there were 191 individuals. Of these, 40 (21%) are from Black and ethnically diverse backgrounds (last year this was 10%). There were 19 households approved for sibling groups this year and 26 households approved were open to an Early Permanence Placement, an increase on last year's 19. This has exceeded the demand for these placements over the year. 11 households could consider children over 5.

Fewer people attend information events this year but the agency received more formal Registrations of Interest (ROI) following a visit than in 21/22. The time between receiving and accepting the ROIs this year, has been halved compared to last year.

This year saw significantly higher numbers of families in stage one of the process, peaking in September 2022 at 96 households. The stage one team of advisors has managed this well, although timeliness in arranging initial visits has been impacted, taking an additional nine days compared to last year. Families have spent longer on average in stage one than last year. There are a number of 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' circumstances, meaning further exploration and additional visits needing to be completed before they progress to stage two. At the end of the year, there was a small number of families awaiting allocation for assessment due to capacity pressures.



The agency has continued to use sessional assessors to ensure families are assessed and approved in a timely manner. A focus this year has been increasing the capacity of social workers to assess families. Social workers no longer remain allocated to families for 12 months post adoption order. There is an extensive universal support offer which families can engage with, and those that need additional support are linked in with the Early Advice & Support or Adoption Support teams at this stage. The average time spent in stage two has been similar to 21/22 (seven days longer). More families have 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. 104 families adopted their children in 22/23 an increase on the previous four years.

*"I really appreciate all of the support you've given us throughout both of our adoptions - you've helped us to find our two amazing children and we feel very prepared to be able to support them to understand their life stories"*



## Marketing campaigns

Throughout the year the agency delivered a digital-first marketing strategy, which has been found to be the most cost-effective way to reach target audiences. Digital advertising amounted to much of the paid-for recruitment marketing activity, taking the form of pay-per-click and social media advertising, in addition to delivering some organic and owned content.

Social media marketing campaigns focussed on priority areas of need, including siblings, older children, ethnically diverse children, children with health and development needs and Early Permanence.

The OAWY Google ad campaign is 'always on' and achieved 117,158 impressions and the ads were clicked on a total of 15,781 times. There were 974 conversions (when someone takes an action on the website after clicking on an ad) which is a conversion rate of 6.2%.

Regular adverts for information events and priority campaign topics, were delivered through Facebook and Instagram, which over the year resulted in a 470,450-page reach on Facebook and 31,307 on Instagram.

The agency's Instagram following has significantly increased this year and now have over 900 followers from 300 in the previous year.

Twitter is used for organic posting regarding the support offer, as this audience mainly consists of existing adopters and adoptees. Posts regarding recruitment and campaign messaging do not do as well on this platform and can attract negative comments.

In addition to online activity, OAWY also carried out a number of offline activities including a targeted outdoor advertising campaign which ran during October 2022, to reach ethnically diverse potential adopters. Adverts featured on 21 bus shelters (with a total weekly reach of 34,460) in neighbourhoods throughout the region in which there is a high footfall of people who meet the target audience. This ran simultaneously with an online campaign with complementary messages. To reach the LGBTQ+ audience OAWY staff attended Pride events across the region, highlighting that OAWY is an LGBTQ+ friendly agency, and supported the New Family Social Adoption and Fostering Week.

The agency also supported the YouCanAdopt and National Adoption Week campaigns organised by the National Adoption Steering Group.



## Preparation, Training and Support for Prospective Adopters

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

We have reviewed and updated our **information events** this year. These 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.

*"Lots of useful information and real experiences shared which was great. I feel much better informed now and excited to start the process."*

The **three-day preparation groups** have been delivered face-to-face since April 2022. The agency has also continued to deliver specific one day training for experienced adopters and foster carers. There has been an increased focus on early permanence in the preparation stage. In 23/24 all applicants will watch a mandatory Early Permanence webinar as part of their preparation and will have the opportunity to attend a one-day classroom training focused on Early Permanence.

*"I found the session, the trainers, and fellow trainees to be open, honest, and incredibly supportive of each other, as personal journeys, thoughts, hopes, and fears were shared, supported and encouraged."*

*"The sessions were thought provoking and made me keen to understand more and take on personal development in areas such as therapeutic parenting, understanding more about EPP, birth parent contact, and the impacts of trauma."*

The 'Connected by Adoption' training was attended by 140 supporters 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.

*"It helped me to understand and focus on the intricacies of the process and the profound needs of the child and what might be the needs of the adopting couple. The piece on therapeutic parenting was extremely helpful, we will definitely be doing more reading on this subject."*





The **Birth Parent Information Session** has now been made a required part of the stage two process which has meant an increase in numbers of those attending.

*"To hear the birth mums, talk of their children, their obvious continued love and care for them and how it's the little snippets of information that mean so much to them as birth parents ... not only to hear what they're doing, but also how tall they've grown, what their favourite colour is, etc. I am keen to explore more options when it comes to contact with birth family when I become an adoptive parent."*

Following approval adopters are invited to attend **Pre-Matching Training** which helps prepare adopters for transitions and early placement.

*'The whole training was very helpful'*

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.

*"Really informative, interesting and the therapeutic parenting tips were especially helpful. Excellent overview of the neuroscience behind distressed behaviours of us all!"*

*"Brain Based Parenting and Therapeutic Parenting courses were invaluable to look at the effects of trauma on little ones as they grow and develop and how successful parenting of these little ones can look different to "traditional parenting".*

Recently matched families are offered the opportunity to attend **"Six months in"**. This is 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. 113 families were supported this year through the **Peer Mentoring** service and 46 households accessed the **Adoption Passport**, providing access to online learning modules, message boards and support groups.



## 4. CHILDREN WITH AN ADOPTION PLAN

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The number of children with a decision that they should be placed for adoption has increased over the year and is at its highest since the agency was formed in 2017. At the end of the year 242 children had an adoption plan but were not matched, a significant increase of 72 children from the end of 2021/22. Of the 242, 143 have a Placement Order and are not yet matched, of those 50 have a potential family identified and family finding is ongoing for 93 children.

2022/23 saw the conclusion of a contract with Voluntary Adoption Agencies to provide 90 placements over three years for One Adoption West Yorkshire children. A review of the contract resulted in a move to a partnership agreement for the next three years with a focus of continuing to place more children who are likely to wait longer for adoption within or close to West Yorkshire.

Three **online profiling events** took place, featuring 60 children from across One Adoption West Yorkshire. From these events matches were found for 11 children and there is ongoing exploration of a further three links. 587 adopters and 111 social workers registered for the three events. A total of 211 expressions of interest were made in the children being featured at the event, often the same children have multiple interests.

*"These are an excellent addition to UK wide family finding, thank you for offering this service !"*

OAWY has hosted three pan-regional, nationally-funded, **fun days** in West Yorkshire this year. These events featured children from One Adoption West Yorkshire, One Adoption South Yorkshire, One Adoption North and Humber and Adopt North East along with adopters from the same agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Overall, 66 children and 86 adoptive families have attended the fun days resulting in 39 expressions of interest in 32 children and 17 links progressing.

*"Wonderful organisation and a very productive day ending in a brilliant positive result for us."*



Given the success of the fun days hosted by One Adoption West Yorkshire, the agency has secured national funding for two further events in July and November 2023.

Children who are likely to wait longer for adoption have continued to be a key priority. The agency has commenced two nationally funded projects which focus on finding families for these children:

- The **Child Focused Family Building** model (CFFB) is a nationally funded project which started in September 2022 and will run for two years. The project aims to find families for children who are identified as having the most complex needs and for whom finding adoptive families will be incredibly difficult. For this small cohort of children often conventional methods of family finding do not result in a suitable family being found. To identify children for this project an assessment tool designed by Adoption Matters called the Family Linking and Assessment Guide (FLAG) is being piloted. Once children are identified discussions will take place with the Local Authority regarding using the CFFB approach. Leeds Beckett University have been commissioned to evaluate the project, which will inform future family finding practice on a local and national level.
- OAWY is also working in partnership with the local Voluntary Agency Alliance (VAA) on a nationally funded project to recruit, assess, prepare, and support adopters to provide **Early Permanence** placements for children aged two years and over and sibling groups across Yorkshire and the Humber. The availability of Early Permanence placements locally for this cohort of children needs to be increased to ensure that placements are available where this is an appropriate plan for a child. This project commenced in Autumn 2022 and will run for two years.

OAWY staff have attended two nationally- funded **exchange days** this year in Leeds and Manchester where we have featured children who wait longer for adoption. Unfortunately, no matches have been made from these events, however attending helped raise awareness of the agency on a national scale and develop relationships with partner agencies.



## Early Permanence

There has been a focus throughout the year on increasing the use of Early Permanence across the region for children likely to have an adoption plan. A Project Lead was appointed in May 2022 to develop Early Permanence practice across Yorkshire and Humberside through a nationally funded project. 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 year increased from 14 to 38. The number of children successfully placed in Early Permanence Placements increased by 10 and the percentage of children matched following an Early Permanence Placement increased by 1%, evidencing the positive impact of the work. The number of prospective adopters open to Early Permanence has also increased from 22% to 26%.

Independent information and support for Early Permanence carers in West Yorkshire is provided by Adoption UK and this year 30 families accessed this service.

## Disruptions

There were six adoption disruptions across One Adoption West Yorkshire for four single children and one sibling group of two children, this is down from eight the previous year. Only one of the disruptions was with a OAWY family, all the other children were placed with families approved by other agencies.



# 5. ADOPTION PANEL

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81 panels took place during 2022/23. There were 99 approvals, 135 matches, two relinquished children and three disruption reports considered by panel in this period. There was one rescind of approval.

There have been increased and successful efforts to recruit more panel members which has increased the diversity of membership. OAWY has produced a new pack for new panel members which has proved particularly useful in clarifying expectations and ensuring consistency across all the panels. All serving members of panel including chairs are having their reviews on a rolling basis. The annual panel members training day took place in December 2022. This was a virtual event, featuring a number of workshops covering subjects such as Brain Based Parenting, life story work, and considering the learning from the Child Practice Review into the death of LJ. The support to panels provided by the business support team continues to be excellent despite significant changes in personnel during this period.

There were 31 feedback responses from applicants and adopters who attended panel for the period that the report covers. 29 found the experience very good, and two found the experience to be good.

*"On the day we were both very nervous, the chair however put us at ease. She was polite, informative, caring and extremely likeable. Panel members were polite, and it was lovely to see such a diverse range of individuals." (Applicant)*

*"Everything was explained well on the day and before. The panel covered a wide range of backgrounds, and our social worker is brilliant!" (Applicant)*

*"The panel process has continued to run well over this 12-month period and is now fully settled and established in a virtual format The four panel chairs are providing a consistent approach and benefitting from excellent communication between themselves and the agency." (Panel Chair)*



# 6. ADOPTION SUPPORT

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At the end of March 2023 there were 851 children/young people receiving a service from a worker across the four Adoption Support Teams. There were 674 applications to the Adoption Support Fund approved across the year equating to £2,531,949 of funding for therapeutic interventions.

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. One Adoption West Yorkshire's support model was reorganised into three incremental tiers with the service reshaped to respond at each tier:

- **Tier 1 or Universal/Core Offer** – these are various aspects of support that can be accessed without an assessment of support needs or via an adoption worker. This now includes the Adoption Advice Line which is staffed by four workers who make up the newly formed Early Advice and Support (EAS) team. The team provide an initial response service, ensure consistency for callers and a personal service from the first point of contact.
- **Tier 2 or Targeted Work** – this work sits within the wider Adoption Support teams and will include working with families where there is only a single action on the adoption support plan (typically an ASF-funded intervention) which then requires a review and potentially further application to the ASF (Adoption Support Fund). The Advance Practitioner in the team along with the Team Manager act as the first point of contact for families and will maintain oversight of pending tasks, which will then be allocated to any worker within the team to complete.
- **Tier 3 or Co-ordinated Approach** – these are families who have a more complex support plan which may include several multi-disciplinary professionals. These families have a named allocated worker who will continue to support them in achieving their identified support goals.

Although early days, positive feedback has already been received regarding the Advice Line service provided by EAS, from families and professionals. Feedback has been received from families receiving targeted support that not having a named worker has not proved detrimental to the service received. A review of the new model will take place in January 2024.

Additionally, there have been developments in 'Supporting Connections,' the umbrella service that relates to all aspects of birth family connections and identity. A strategy has been devised which includes plans for a support offer for young adults, a protocol for response times for file access requests and embracing various methods of maintaining connections - be that via letterbox, digital means, or face to face. In July 2022 an Adoption Support Worker post specifically for supporting connections work was appointed, and whilst the role is continuing to be developed and the caseload is variable, at end March 2023 there were 27 cases allocated from across the region, with a waiting list of a further 10, evidencing the necessity of this post.

The letterbox service has processed 3438 pieces of mail coming in and sent out a further 2578 exchanges. This has been alongside the agency taking part in a pilot of a digital platform with a small number of adoptive and birth families.

File Access has received 360 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 team developed a protocol for responding to requests for records in a more timely way, with the aim of providing the records within a calendar month or if that cannot be met, by agreeing a timeframe with the local authority where the records are archived and the person requesting them.

PAC-UK has continued to provide a commissioned service to adults as well as the Adopteens service. There were 467 calls to the PAC-UK advice line and the team worked with 151 service users across the year offering 647 appointments; the overwhelming majority to adult



adoptees, but there is also an increase in birth relatives seeking information about their relative who was adopted.

West Yorkshire is very well represented in Adopteens with 75/134 young people being from the region. Adopteens 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. MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT)

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There have been significant changes within MDT in the last year. A clear clinical model has been implemented which focuses on embedding the team within OAWY and providing an accessible service for Social Workers and families. The referral process has been streamlined to allow easy access to MDT for Social Workers, through a clear referral and MDT triage process. Relationships between OAWY and MDT have been built by link MDT workers attending OAWY team meetings as key points of contact as well as access to MDT via informal conversations, drop in consultations, formal consultations, the education helpline, and our new life story help line for social workers.

The clinical model focusses on early intervention and providing the team around the child with the skills and support necessary to support children who have experienced developmental trauma and loss through adoption. To support social workers the MDT this year has developed and delivered a robust support offer to social workers, including DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) and Theraplay<sup>®</sup> supervision groups, one-to-one clinical supervision and co-working cases and groups, as well as bespoke training in life story work and outcome measures.

A key area of development this year has been supporting the OAWY core offer that focuses on supporting adoptive parents in developing attuned relationships with their children. This offer includes a robust annual plan of groups supported by MDT, including Foundations for Attachment, BUSS (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems) group and the therapeutic play group. The MDT have also developed and are delivering further training for Social Workers and families, including Speech and language difficulties, Closer in Play, Life Story, outcome measures training and introduction to therapeutic parenting.





The MDT has this year reviewed the offer of support and has identified gaps in services. It was highlighted that there is limited support for school-aged children. The Occupational Therapists (OT) within MDT now offer one-to-one BUSS interventions and OT specialist interventions for older children. The MDT are also supporting Social Workers to offer one-to-one Theraplay<sup>®</sup>, which offers a cost effective, high-quality in-house provision for families, where children are too old to attend the therapeutic play group.

In 2023-24, the MDT will continue to develop and grow the team. There are plans to offer a Theraplay-informed group for school-aged children. The team is looking forward to developing this therapeutic play group for school-aged children, alongside OAWY social workers, which is to be launched in September. The MDT is also planning to expand the social work training offer and is developing Theraplay-informed and Foundation for Attachment training for social workers, to enable social workers to support their families with DDP informed therapeutic parenting.

The MDT this year has commenced its own internal evaluation, using routine pre and post outcome measures and a selection of tailored post-intervention surveys. This data will help improve the service; however, the team is also delighted to be offered an opportunity to be evaluated by Oxford Brookes University which will commence the summer of 2023.



# 8. QUALITY ASSURANCE

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OAWY has several mechanisms in place to ensure its quality of the work:

- An independent Panel Advisor quality assures all panel paperwork prior to the panel meetings
- All paperwork presented to Adoption Panel (the Prospective Adopters Report, the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan) is quality assured and signed by Team Managers
- Adoption panels provide feedback to social workers following panel and to the agency via quarterly meetings with panel chairs and bi-annual reports regarding the quality of the approval and matching work carried out
- Prospective adopters are asked to provide feedback regarding their experience at adoption panel
- Advance Practitioners quality assure Child Permanence Reports prior to Agency Decisions in relation to adoption plans for children and provide feedback
- Adoption Support Assessments are quality assured and signed by Team Managers
- The MDT utilises clinical outcome measures at the start and end of interventions to evaluate impact
- In 2022/23 a new interactive audit tool was developed, piloted, and launched to quality assure the work undertaken by the agency
- Four Thematic Audits have taken place of 893 case files
- 13 Joint Audits have been carried out with three Local Authority Partners
- Surveys are sent out to attendees following all training, webinars, and workshops
- Families and children are asked to provide feedback regarding the service they are provided from OAWY
- Staff have received an annual survey to provide feedback on the agency and a specific survey regarding working arrangements
- All staff have twice yearly appraisals to review performance and development



# 9. GOVERNANCE

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The OAWY Management Board has met four times during 2022/23 to review the work of the agency. The Management Board is made up of senior representatives from each of the five West Yorkshire local authorities, along with adoptive parents and health partners.

OAWY has met with the Joint Committee on two occasions, presenting the annual and half-year reports. The Joint Committee is attended by the children's lead councillor from each of the five West Yorkshire areas.

The Multidisciplinary Team board, which includes adoptive parents, local authority and health representatives, has met on three occasions to consider the work of the MDT.

OAWY has attended Corporate Parenting and Scrutiny Panels in the West Yorkshire local authorities to share the work of the agency in relation to adopter recruitment, placing children for adoption, and support for families.

OAWY provides quarterly reports to each local authority outlining the work undertaken in each area in relation to adopter recruitment, progressing adoption care plans for children, and supporting children and adults impacted by adoption.



# 10. STAFFING

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There were no social work vacancies at the year-end, with all posts successfully recruited to during the year. Interim Head of Service and Service Delivery Manager posts have been permanently appointed to. There are currently two Team Manager posts being covered in an interim basis; permanent recruitment is underway. There are two business support vacancies which are also in the process of being recruited to.

Staff absence due to sickness equates to 0.28 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 2022/23 the following training has been undertaken by staff:

- Theraplay Level 2, delivered to 11 staff
- DDP Level 1, delivered to 45 staff
- DDP Level 2, delivered to 24 staff



# 11. FINANCE

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At the end of the financial year OAWY had an underspend of £5,000. The largest in-year expenditure related to staff costs (£6,445,000) and Interagency Fees for adoptive placements outside of OAWY (£1,661,291).

# 12. KEY PRIORITIES 2023/24

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- Safeguarding refresher training for all staff
- Developing family finding practice for children who wait longer
- Increase the number of adopters able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption in West Yorkshire
- Increase the number of children placed through Early Permanence
- Improve the help and support for adopted teenagers and young adults who are moving towards independence
- Improve participation and voice and influence in service development and delivery

# APPENDICES

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- Appendix 1 - Annual Performance Report
- Appendix 2 - Equality, Diversity, Cohesion, and Integration Impact Assessment
- Appendix 3 - Marketing Strategy
- Appendix 4 - Voice and Influence

