



**ADOPT
LONDON
NORTH**

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2021 – MARCH 2022



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INTRODUCTION

This annual report for Adopt London North (ALN) covers the second full year of operation of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), from April 2021 to March 2022.

As with most other services working with children & families over this period, it has been extremely busy as we try to respond to the unusual and often unpredictable levels of need within our teams as a result of the 2020-2021 pandemic lockdowns. The number of children being made subject to Placement Orders and



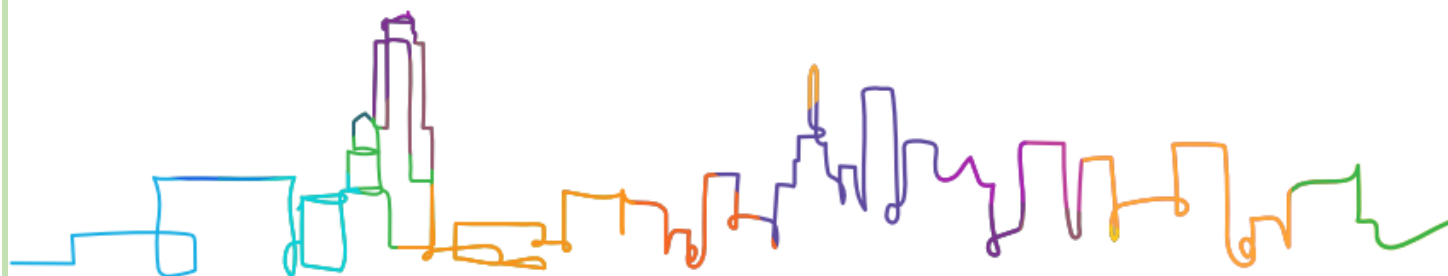
going on to be placed for adoption has been higher due to delays in court proceedings in the previous period, but the numbers do not necessarily reflect ongoing increases. Since the second national lockdown in early 2021 there has been a rise in the number and complexity of requests for adoption support from adoptive families throughout North London, increasing numbers of requests for support with contact arrangements from adoptive and birth families, and a higher number of adopted adults asking to access their adoption records. We have tried to be as flexible as possible with our services and adapt the way we do things to meet the needs presented.

Alongside managing these demands we have focused in this period on firming up the working arrangements we have with all our partner boroughs, building strong cross-working between different ALN teams, and developing systems and processes that support the ways we work in partnership. We want to protect our high standards of social work practice and wherever possible to innovate to improve the service we deliver.

In these early stages of being an RAA we still often find ourselves going back to basics when we identify a challenge that hasn't arisen previously and asking 'how do we want to do this in Adopt London North?'. This gives us great opportunity to question and re-examine the way that we want to work.

In this annual report we provide you with a summary of our work over this past year, examples of the changes and improvements we are making, and an insight into the challenges resulting from the level of demand we are facing.

Lydia Samuel, Head of Service



ABOUT ADOPT LONDON NORTH

1. Our context and responsibilities

Legislation requiring local authorities to deliver adoption services through Regional Adoption Agencies was passed in 2016 in the Education & Adoption Act. Nationally the first RAAs launched in 2017 and the final few RAA arrangements have been implemented in the last year. London RAAs were launched in 2019, around the middle of the national change programme.

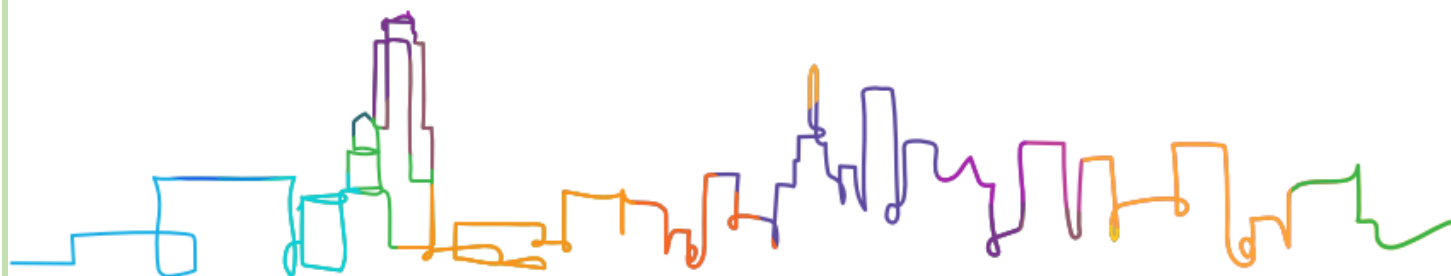
Adopt London North is a partnership between the six London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. The boroughs previously worked together successfully for over a decade as the North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium.

The adoption functions of the six boroughs officially became part of Adopt London North on 1st October 2019, hosted by the London Borough of Islington as the lead partner. The ALN Partnership Agreement covers the legal and financial terms of the arrangement. There is shared oversight of the RAA through a Governance Board and Quality Assurance Board.

Adopt London North has responsibility for all adoption led services, delivering these on behalf of the local authority. This includes:

- Recruitment and assessment of adoptive parents
- Family finding for children in need of adoptive parents
- Adoption support to adoptive families, adopted adults, and others impacted by adoption

Responsibility for the child (including corporate parenting responsibilities) remain with the local authority. The borough is therefore responsible for the progress of the child's case through the court system and for final decisions in respect of care and adoption planning.



2. Governance arrangements

All service functions and partnership arrangements are detailed within the partnership agreement. The agreement is being updated during 2022/23. The agreement includes:

- Governance
- Finances and budget setting
- Data sharing agreement
- Dispute resolution
- Termination of agreement

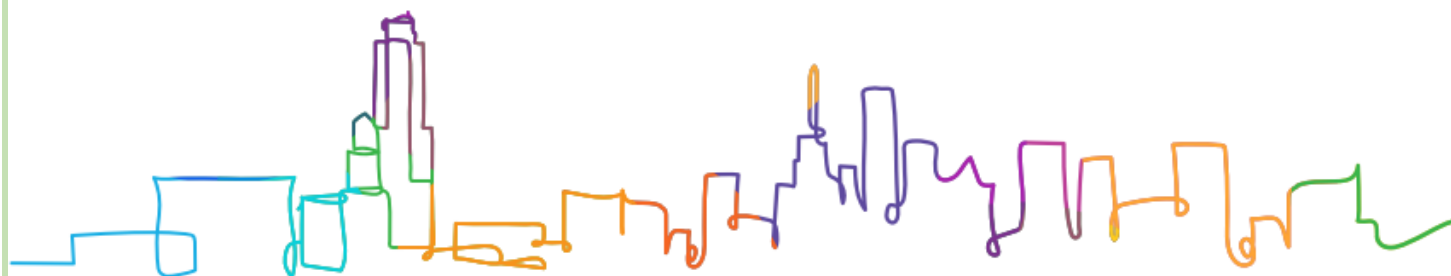
The ALN Governance Board has Director level representation from each of the six partner boroughs and has responsibility for all partnership decisions that need to be made above Head of Service level, and for monitoring the performance and budget of ALN.

A Quality Assurance Board (QA Board) has membership at Head of Service and Service Manager level from each partner borough. The QA Board has responsibility to monitor and improve partnership working across the boroughs and ALN, including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies. The QA Board also considers emerging information about differences in practice between the six boroughs, and where best practice can be implemented across all partners.

3. Staffing

ALN employs 40 members of staff who work across specialist teams focused on the different practice areas within the service. The service is managed by a Head of Service, Service Manager, and Adoption Business Manager. We do not carry any vacant permanent posts and we have a stable staff group, with only two members of staff leaving the service this year (to take retirement).

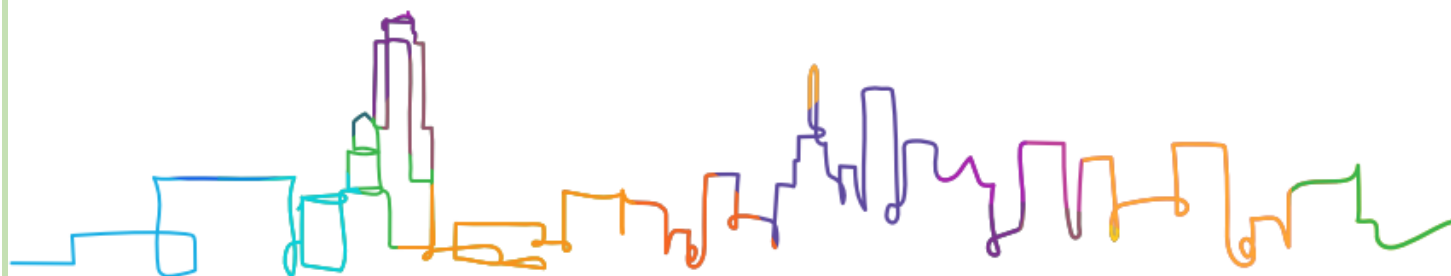
In 2021 we also very sadly lost an extremely skilled, loved, and valued social worker, Debbie Fossey, from our Adoption Support team, who passed away following an illness. Debbie had previously worked for decades in a variety of service areas in Barnet and had embraced bringing her experience and passion for adoption support work into the RAA. She is remembered and greatly missed by all her colleagues in ALN and in Barnet.



4. Outcomes

Adopt London North aims to improve outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption and those living in adoptive families in the following specific ways. We will report on these changes as we build up our data over time and will develop strategies to target different areas of improvement.

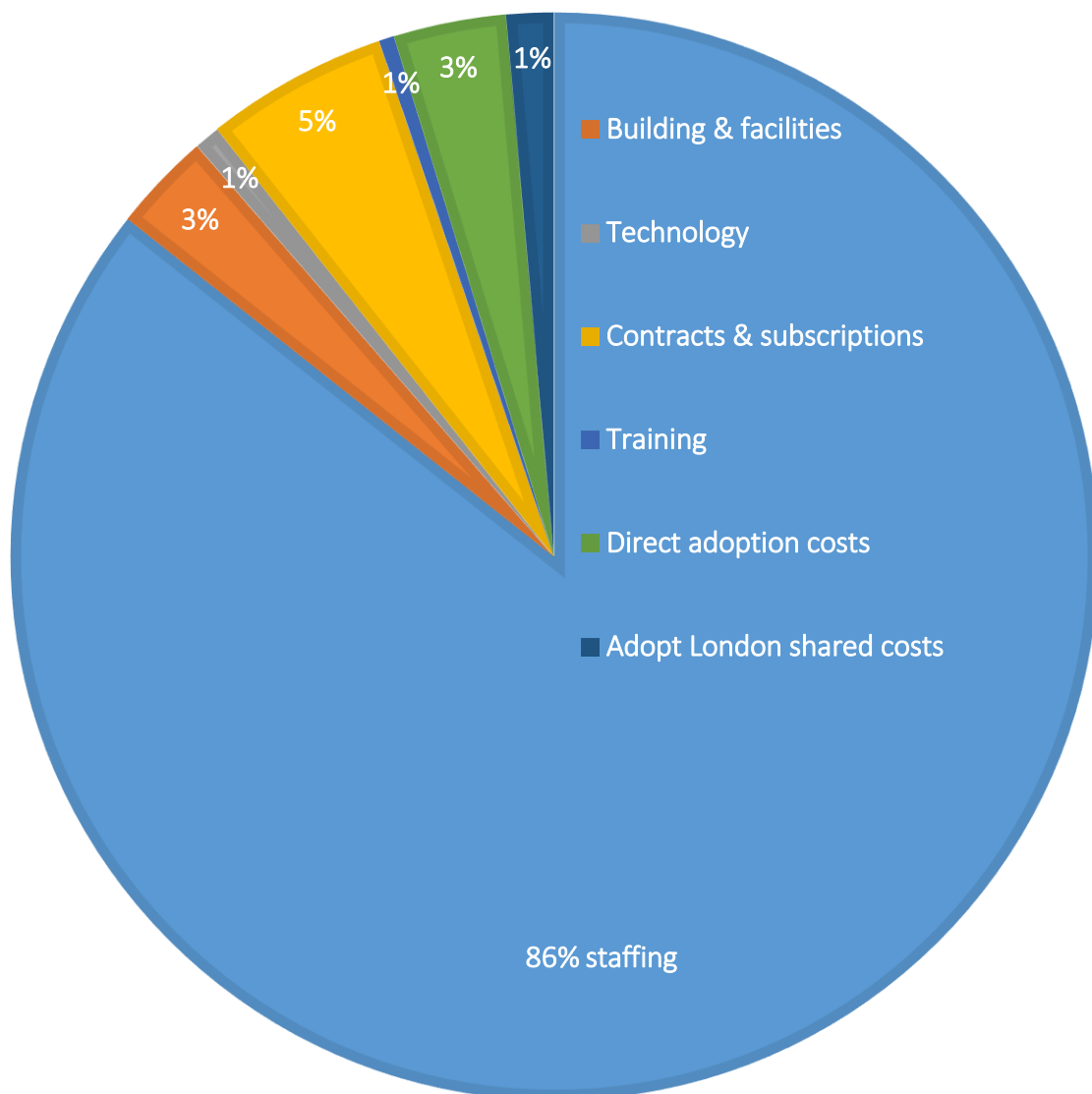
Finding prospective adoptive parents (pages 11 - 20)
Increase the proportion of prospective adopters who are of black and dual ethnicity in line with the needs of our children in north London
Preparing and approving adoptive parents (pages 11 - 20)
Improve timeliness in matching approved adopters
Assess, prepare, and support prospective adopters to a high standard so that they are fully equipped to successfully parent an adoptive child
Planning for children (pages 21 - 28)
Ensure all children who would benefit from adoption are identified appropriately
Ensure that all children who would benefit from an early permanence placement are identified early and matched with adopters prepared for early permanence
Placing children with adoptive parents (pages 21 - 28)
Ensure effective and time-sensitive family finding for children with a plan for adoption
Increase the proportion of in-house and local adoptive placements
Providing support to adoptive families and others (pages 29 - 32)
Improve consistency and timeliness in providing support for adoptive families
Increase awareness and uptake of support services amongst adoptive families in order to build resilience and reduce the need for crisis support
Provide specialist and targeted support to adoptive families with the most acute needs in order to reduce disruption in these families



FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2021/22

The total budget for ALN in 2021/22 was £2,694,323. Of this, 86% (£2,308,005) was spent on staffing costs – including permanent and agency staffing, sessional workers and maternity costs.

AREAS OF SPEND IN 2021/22



ADOPT LONDON

5. Adopt London structure

Adopt London North is part of Adopt London, working in close collaboration with three other RAAs in London and together providing services for 24 London boroughs. The London borough of Greenwich joined Adopt London South in April 2022. Adopt London is unique nationally in our close, consortium approach across a number of RAAs and large number of local authorities. Through this partnership, we aim to develop a London-wide profile, improve services that benefit from economies of scale, and share best practice. The host boroughs for Adopt London are Islington, Southwark, Havering, and Ealing. Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, and Marketing & Communications leads all work closely with their peers across Adopt London to develop shared services and practice standards.

Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Directors of Children’s Services meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board chaired by a non-host partner DCS. The Executive Advisory Board oversees the joint project work of Adopt London, supports with problem solving, and considers Adopt London issues that need the support of other senior leaders to resolve.

In 2021 the Executive Advisory Board wrote to all member boroughs to request agreement to work towards an Adopt London legal partnership agreement linked to local agreements. This will formalise the responsibilities of the Executive Board and protect the ownership of our shared brand and online resources. This work is taking longer than anticipated to progress due to the legal complexities however we hope it will be finalised before the end of the 2022/23 period.



6. Adopt London strategy and priorities

The Adopt London Heads of Service work towards a strategic work plan that is supported by the Executive Advisory Board. The plan covers; governance and commissioning arrangements, strategic development including opportunities to access national funding, operational and practice developments, the voice of adopters, adopted children, adopted adults, and birth family members, and marketing and communications.

Each practice-based group has a different focus and has made progress in taking forward their priorities during the last year:

Recruitment & Assessment

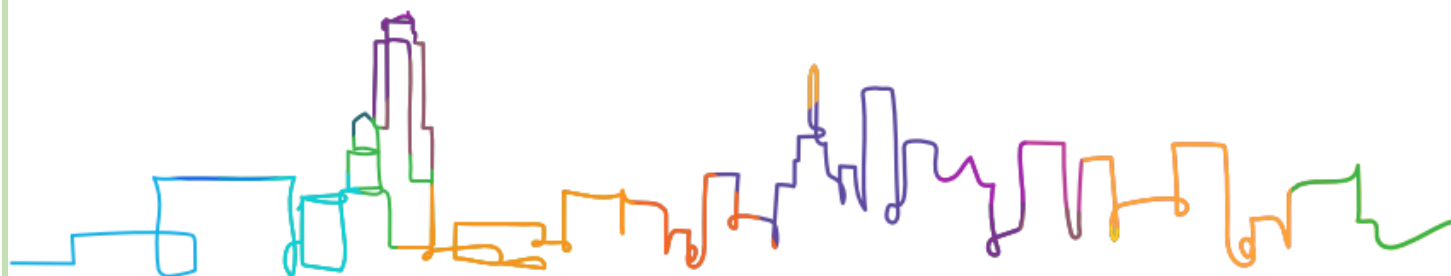
The group have launched Family & Friends preparation workshops – an opportunity for those who will be supporting new adoptive families to develop a better understanding of adoption and the needs of adopted children. Staff have been trained to deliver Early Permanence preparation training so we can deliver this in-house for the first time, improving availability of spaces and cost efficiency. The group are receiving training in a new, research-based Prospective Adopter Report tool which they hope to launch across Adopt London in 2022/23.

Family Finding

The group aim to improve family finding across the RAAs so that children who cannot be matched within their own RAA are more likely to still be placed within the London region. The group are implementing a system to enable them to share information about children and prospective adopters more effectively. They have developed Adopt London networking events for practitioners to share profiles and discuss potential links, and are working to establish a more regular pattern of Adopt London 'activity events' for children and prospective adopters to meet.

Adoption Support

The group have been developing ideas together on managing increases in Adoption Support demand and learning from different models offering triage and duty systems. They have begun to pilot a model for offering specialist therapeutic parenting training to adoptive families together, funded through the Adoption Support Fund, with the aim to increase uptake of preventative support.



THE ADOPTION PANEL

7. Structure of the panel

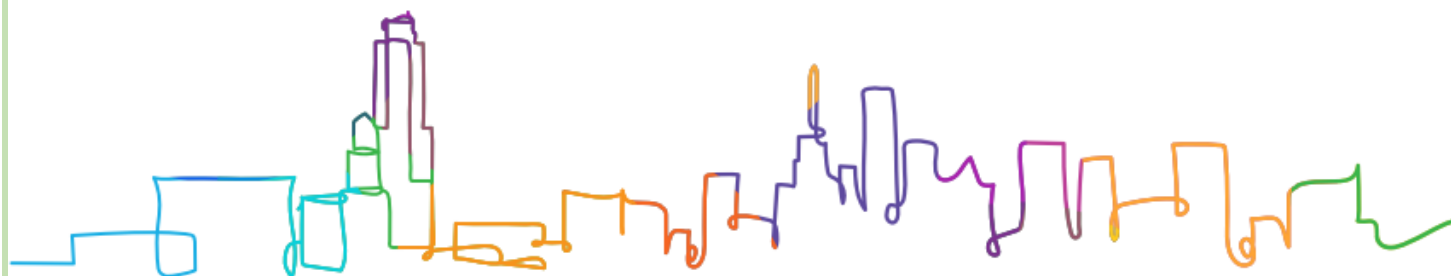
Adopt London North run one central Adoption Panel which oversees all:

- Matching decisions relating to the choice of adoptive placement for a child
- Best interests decisions for relinquished babies
- Approval of prospective adoptive parents
- Review or rescindment of approval of prospective adoptive parents

Panel recommendations relating to individual children are presented to the Agency Decision Maker in the relevant borough for ratification. Prospective adopter approval and review of approval decisions are presented to the Agency Decision Maker in ALN.

The ALN panel meets twice per month, with capacity to run additional panel meetings if required. There is one independent Panel Chair and central list membership to ensure consistency of decision making and robust oversight of the work of ALN. The independent panel membership is diverse in terms of their experiences of adoption, their age, gender, relationship status, and ethnicity. Social workers from ALN and partner boroughs also sit on the panel regularly however it has been harder to ensure gender and ethnic diversity in the social work representatives and this is something we hope to improve in 2022/23 as those panel positions are rotated. The panel have regular training and there is a programme of annual appraisals.

The Panel Chair provides a report of panel business every 6 months which is shared with partner boroughs. The panel provide quality assurance feedback to ALN and the relevant partner borough for every case they consider.



8. Feedback from the Independent Adoption Panel Chair

In her report covering the most recent period October 2021 – March 2022 the Panel Chair, Josephine Scorer, provided the following conclusion:

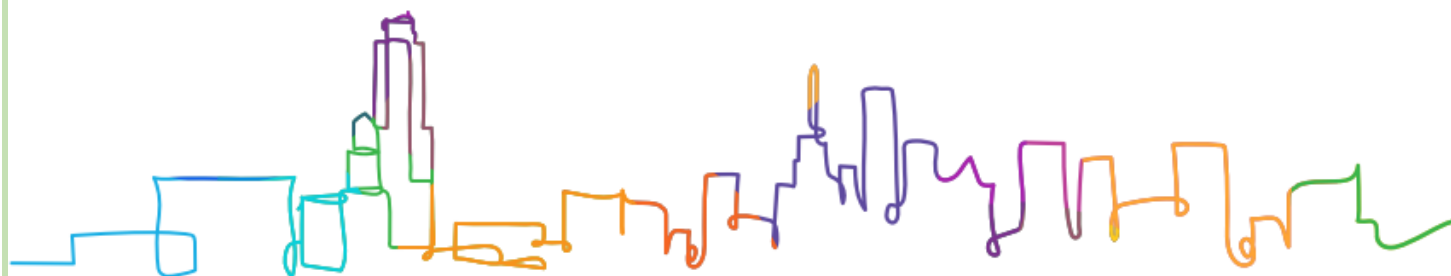
The adoption panel has had a very positive six months and is now functioning very well. The panel is settled and stable, and the panel membership is diverse, well balanced and contains broad and wide ranging personal and professional expertise. Panel members are focussed, collaborative, and mutually respectful, and clearly able to use critical thinking to robustly scrutinise cases being presented to the panel, and to make safe recommendations. While there are still gaps in the panel membership these do not detract from the strong position panel is now in.

Virtual panels continue to work well with clear advantages. There is a clear training programme for the panel with future training dates already in place, and annual reviews of panel members are up to date. The working relationship between the panel chair, panel advisor and panel coordinator continue to be very strong.

The quality assurance process is good but could be improved so that panel has more of an awareness of its impact. Feedback to panel is currently an area for improvement and is work in progress.

The strengths across Adopt London North are also clearly apparent. Standards of practice are very high, with robustly analysed assessments and strong, well evidenced matches being consistently presented to the adoption panel. Although CPRs still need some work, the overall standard of reports is extremely high. The presentation from social workers is also consistently high, although thought needs to be given to supporting [borough] social workers to attend panel meetings from rooms or offices that are confidential.

To conclude, there is a strong sense of the ethos and culture of the agency, with evidence of respectful, collaborative working between professionals who at all times keep the best interests of the child at the forefront of all planning and decision making. It is apparent that Adopt London North is an organisation that places value on valuing people; it is also apparent that it is an organisation that knows its families and its children extremely well.



FINDING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

9. Adopt London brand

A single brand identity and entry point for prospective adopters covering the 24 Adopt London boroughs remains central to the approach of Adopt London. It is crucial in reaching prospective adopters from all London boroughs and surrounding home counties, and means we are more likely to be considered by prospective adopters who are also looking into Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Pooling communications resources means we have a greater budget to maintain a professional, creative and up to date online presence.

We have a shared annual marketing strategy. Through the Adopt London brand we aim to celebrate the diversity of London, to demonstrate that London children are central to our agency, and to consistently highlight a range of voices impacted by adoption.

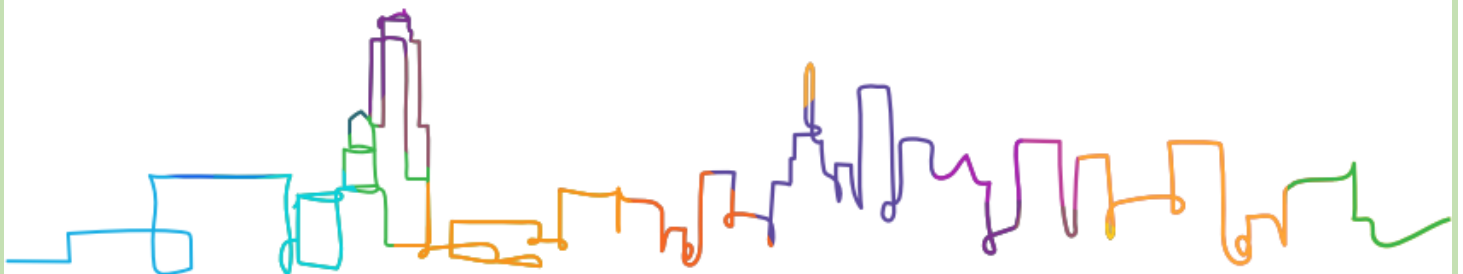


10. Adopt London website

This year we have focused on building the range of support resources available through the Adopt London website and increasing the number and variety of personal blogs and stories about adoption that are available to those researching adoption.

We have undertaken a project to prepare for the transfer of our website to a new provider to ensure that it remains compliant with local government standards and enables us to expand our use of the site in the future – such as using it as a digital gateway for adoption support requests. This move will take place at the beginning of the 2022/23 period and will pave the way for a broader update of the site during the year to ensure it equally serves all those who might need to access it, not just prospective adopters.

Website views have continued to grow this year, with a **2% increase** in all website users and a total of **58,696** website sessions taking place during the period. Most initial enquiries and information session bookings are made through the website, with **2144** prospective adoptive households booking to attend an information session this year through the website.

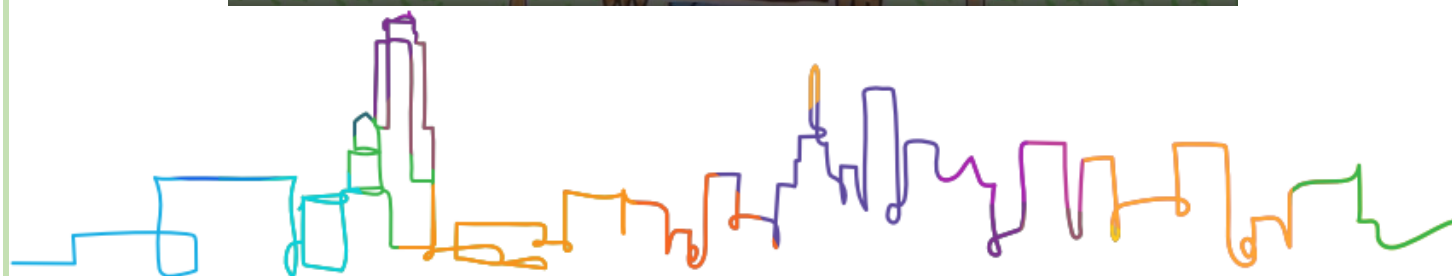


11. Adopt London social media

Adopt London has successfully developed an identity and following on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We have **over 2000 followers** across social media platforms, an increase from last year (1400 followers in 2020/21).

Growth in new followers and engagement has dropped this year, believed to be due to a reduction in capacity within the Marketing & Communications group as they lost one member of staff and were required to focus on the website transfer. A social media advisor has undertaken an audit of our activity and is now providing regular advice to the group to improve social media engagement. Developing content for social media and posting regularly is a challenge with the capacity available to the team however it remains a priority as an important way for prospective adopters to develop a connection and sense of loyalty to Adopt London whilst considering their plans to adopt.

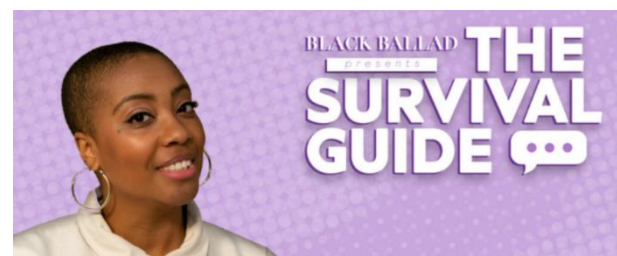
Rather than paying for advertising, the Adopt London strategy is to create original content that will be viewed and shared online with the aim to build our social media reach and the numbers of individuals visiting and revisiting our website. Content that people want to share with others is most successful at reaching our audience. This year we created a new original animation entitled 'Our Children' which aims to communicate a sensitive, warm, and realistic message about the needs of our children who are waiting for adoptive families. The **video has been viewed over 5000 times**, demonstrating the potential reach of this type of accessible content. You can click on the image below to watch the video, and [click here to read the story behind the poem in the animation](#).



12. Adopt London podcasts

This year we broadened our communications approach through the use of podcasts. In partnership with We Are Family adoption peer support community we released the first series of 'Adoption Shared'. This podcast offers a range of perspectives on adoption from adoptive parents and professionals and is designed to be accessible to existing adoptive parents and those currently considering or preparing for adoption. By offering resources that provide a wide range of perspectives on adoption we hope to increase the readiness and resilience of prospective adopters as they enter the assessment process.

There have been **over 1500 downloads** of the podcast during season 1. [The Adoption Shared podcasts can be accessed by following this link](#), or in any podcast app.



This year we also supported Black Ballad, an online lifestyle community for Black women in the UK, to produce a podcast focused on Black adoption. They interviewed Adopt London adoptive parents and an adopted adult, and produced an accessible and informative podcast episode that now forms part of our resources. [You can access the episode here.](#)



13. Enquiries and providing information

We have continued to deliver virtual information sessions throughout this period due to their success during the pandemic and the positive feedback we have received from prospective adopters about how accessible these sessions are. During the 2021/22 period we ran **22 information sessions**. We have built on the success of Meet the Adopter sessions which we trialled during the pandemic, and now permanently run these events monthly throughout the year. We ran **11 Meet The Adopter sessions** this year. Meet the Adopter events allow prospective adopters to ask any question of our panel of experienced adoptive parents from a range of backgrounds and with diverse experiences. These sessions highlight to prospective adopters that there is not just one valid 'adopter experience' and provide a realistic and balanced view of the joys and challenges of adoption. A number of our prospective adopters have attended sessions regularly throughout their assessment and this has enriched their preparation.

"The session was excellent – the information was presented succinctly, and the presenter was very knowledgeable."

Information Session feedback

"Both members of the ALN team were warm, personable and informative. This is quite a daunting process for most people so having that level of support and being heard is really important at the very start."

Information Session feedback

"It was very informative and encouraging. The presenter's enthusiasm, experience and care for the children was evident."

Information Session feedback

"We appreciated the candour of the adopters and felt very moved and hopeful after the session."

Meet The Adopter feedback

"Each speaker had a very different experience / story to tell. You just want to go and listen to other adopters because each case is so unique."

Meet The Adopter feedback

"I found it particularly nice the fact that both adopters and people interested in adopting came from so many different backgrounds, contexts and possibly motives. It is inspiring to be exposed to such diversity, and truly encouraging."

Meet The Adopter feedback



We have had good levels of response to our Information Session feedback surveys this year. 141 attendees (40%) completed a survey, and **98% would recommend the session** to a friend or family member. **99% gave us the highest rating** when asked how informative the session was. 77% told us that they live in one of our six partner boroughs, with other attendees telling us they live in other boroughs close to north London, and in Essex and Hertfordshire.

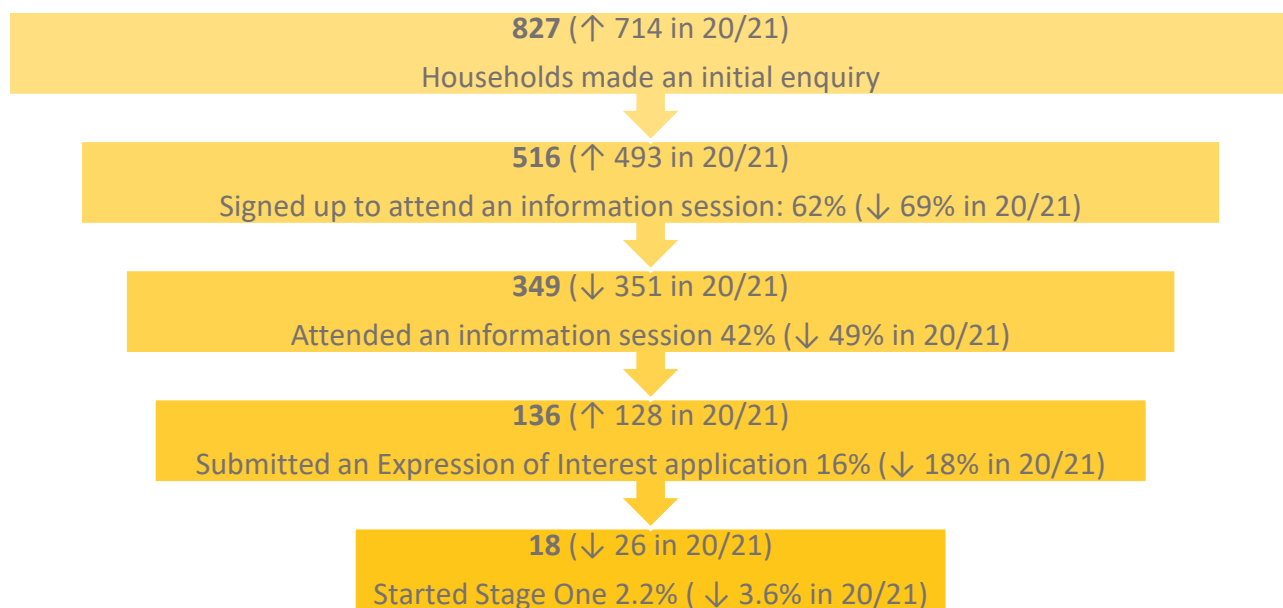
2021/22 enquiry levels have remained high, with a **15% increase in the overall number of enquiries** received. This represents a **70% increase** in the number of enquiries received by the six boroughs in the last full year prior to the RAA forming (486 enquiries received in 2018/19 compared to 827 in 2021/22). This is likely to be largely due to the visibility of the Adopt London website and branding, ability to compete with VAA communications, and reduction in the confusion experienced by many prospective adopters when trying to identify an adoption agency. The Adopt London website makes it as easy as possible for those considering adoption to sign up to attend an Information Session to find out more.

The screenshot shows the Adopt London website interface. At the top left is the Adopt London logo. A search bar is located in the top center. To the right are links for 'CONTACT US', 'ABOUT US', and social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Below this is a navigation menu with the following items: 'WANT TO ADOPT', 'OUR CHILDREN', 'EVENTS', 'SUPPORT', 'ADOPTED ADULTS', 'BIRTH FAMILY', 'SPECIAL GUARDIANS', and 'NEWS & BLOG'. The main content area features a purple card for an event: '06 September 2022' at '7:30 pm'. To the right of the card is the text: 'Adopt London North Virtual Information Session'. Below this text is a paragraph: 'Come and join the Adopt London North team and find out more about adopting a child. We'll answer your questions in the session.' To the right of the text is the Adopt London North logo and a button labeled 'Virtual Online Meeting'.

Despite the numbers of enquiries, there has been a small decrease in the proportion of households who make an enquiry and then go on to book and attend an information session (although the actual number attending has remained almost the same). This may indicate that increased enquiries are primarily due to the increased visibility of Adopt London online but do not necessarily represent an increase in the number of those enquirers who are currently ready to seriously consider adopting.



When compared to pre-pandemic, there continue to be a high number of those who sign up to a session but do not go on to attend (32%). This is likely to partially reflect generally lower levels of commitment to events that are virtual compared to events that are in person. We are considering new ways to reduce this drop-off rate, for example by increasing the reminders that we send to those who have booked, and providing the option of joining a mailing list to anyone considering adoption who is not yet ready to start an assessment.



Despite these trends there has been a slight increase in households who go on to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) after attending a session, with **39% of those who attended an information session this year submitting an EOI**, compared to 36% last year. However there has been a further drop in the proportion and number of those households submitting an EOI who go on to enter into stage 1 of the assessment process (13% of those submitting an EOI in 2021/22 compared to 20% in 2020/21). This in part reflects our experience that increasing numbers of applicants need further time to prepare for adoption after meeting with social workers and discussing their readiness in detail. It is possible this trend may be further impacted by the 'cost of living crisis' in 2022/23, as prospective adopters potentially consider cautiously whether they are economically ready to start the assessment process. We are considering ways to better keep in touch with those who need more time to prepare so that we can ensure they return to ALN when they are ready to start their assessment. The figures could also reflect that although we are effectively reaching a high number of people through the Adopt London brand and communications approach, we need to do more to reach those who are most likely to progress all the way through to adopt a child.



PREPARING AND APPROVING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

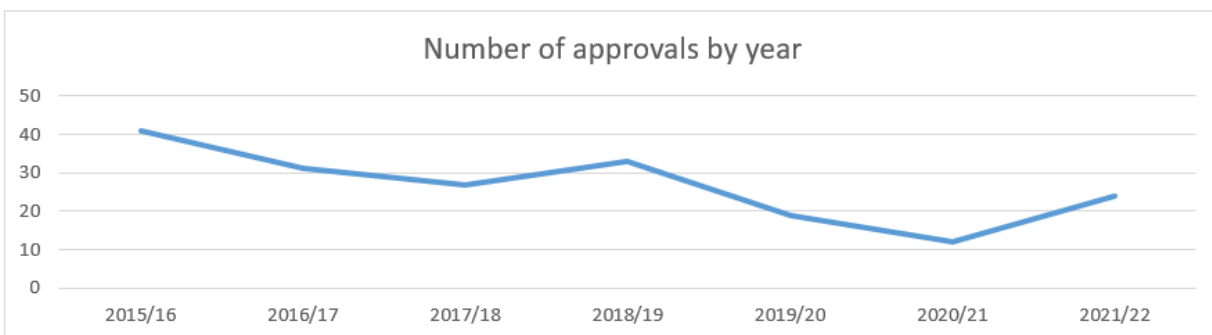
14. Assessments of prospective adopters

The number of approvals of new adoptive families has risen to 24 from the low number (12) seen in 2020/21, returning closer to the level of recruitment taking place in the six boroughs prior to the RAA. We have gradually increased the face-to-face time we have with prospective adopters during assessments and preparation training again but continue to use some virtual sessions for efficiency. Assessments continue to be of a high standard as evidenced by the quality assurance feedback from our Adoption Panel.



Table & graph: Adoptive family approvals by year for all six boroughs / ALN

Approvals by year						
2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
41	31	27	33	19	12	24



This year we have observed how the pandemic has an ongoing impact on many applicants' lives, often delaying their readiness to adopt and complicating assessments. For example, we have noticed more frequently; recent employment changes or unstable work, bereavement or illness of close family or friends, infertility treatment that was halted prematurely, and emotional / mental health



difficulties that were exacerbated by lockdowns. A higher number of applicants have needed more time to prepare before they start their assessment, and we have offered pre-adoption professional counselling during stage 1 of the assessment process more frequently. In addition we expect to see the 'cost of living crisis' impacting on whether some people feel financially able to consider adoption. As a result of these factors there is uncertainty in whether approval numbers will increase further in 2022/23.

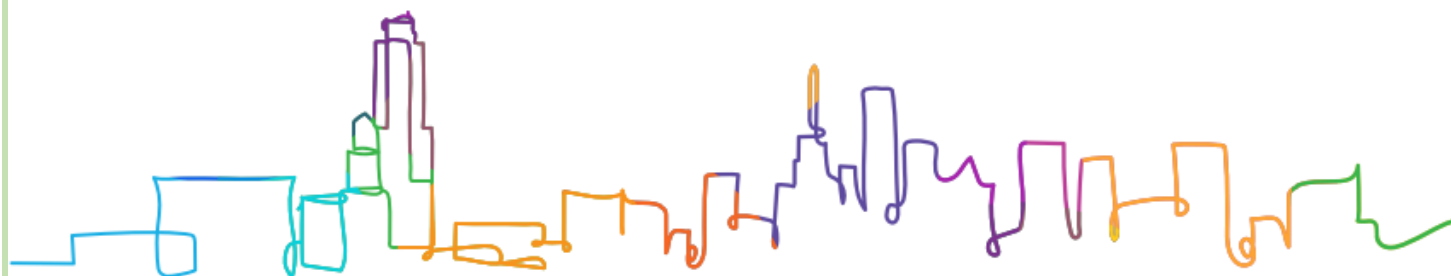
"We cannot express in words how much we have appreciated your guidance through the early parts of the process, and we would like to say that your dedication to us and our process has been unparalleled by any other person ... Also, you really helped us gain insight that made the later bumps much more manageable for us not just as parents but also as a couple."

Feedback from new adoptive parents about the work of their assessing social worker

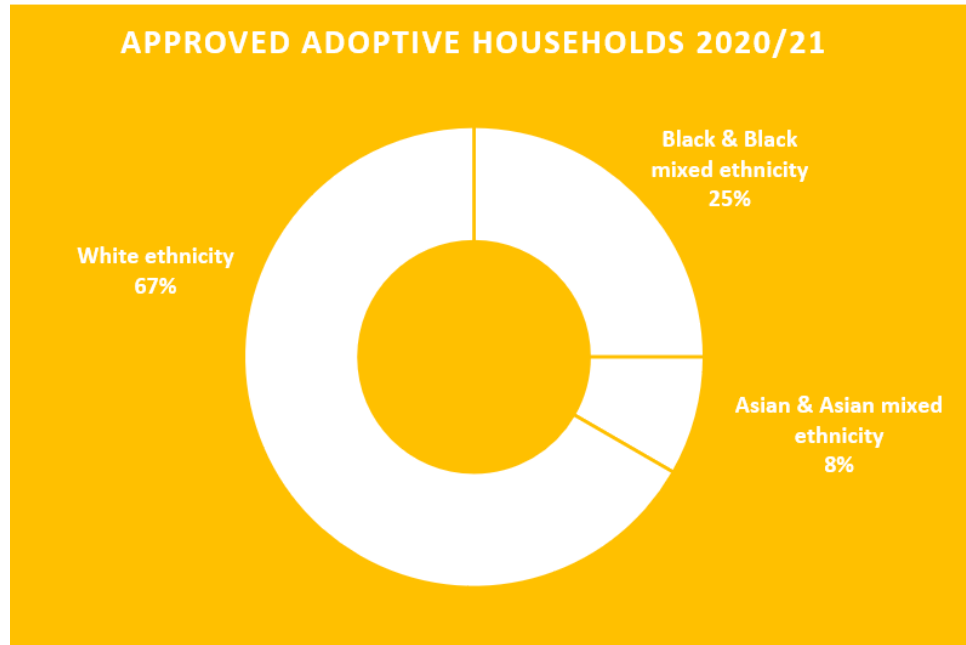
Referrals from boroughs for **adoption assessments of foster carers and connected people (who wish to adopt children known to them or already in their care) have increased every year** with indications this will increase further. A process for referral and joint decision making between the borough and ALN for foster carer assessments has been agreed and is being used well.

15. Proportions of Black and mixed Black ethnicity prospective adopters

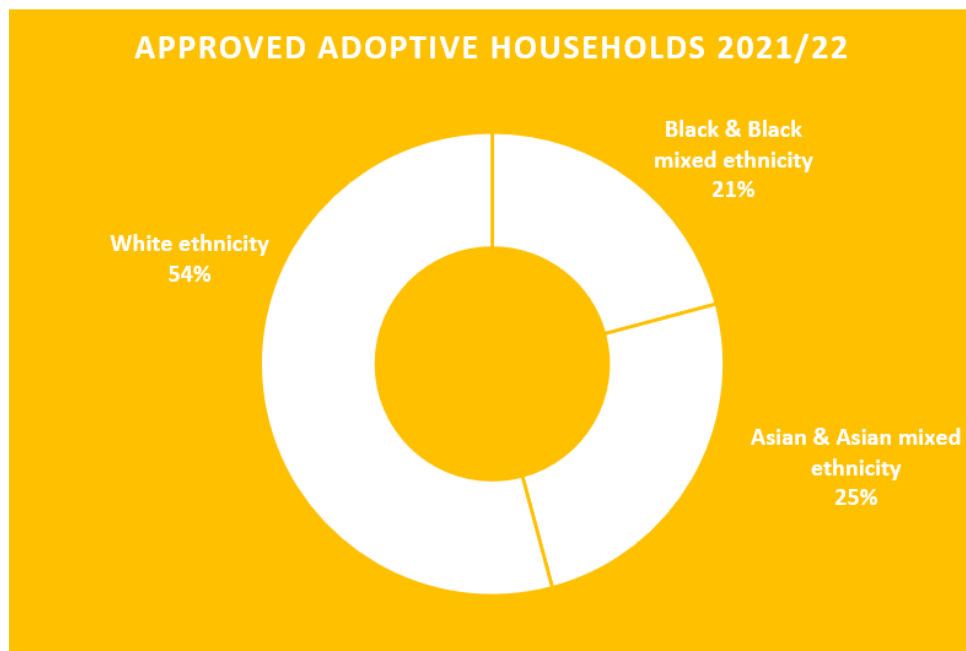
We have looked at ethnicities of the 24 households approved to adopt in 2021/22 compared to last year. Ethnicities have been grouped into broad categories to better illustrate the proportion of households who might be able to adopt a child of Black or Asian ethnicity without the placement being fully trans-racial. Adequate availability of adoptive placements where at least one parent is from a Black or Black mixed ethnicity are crucial to reduce long-standing delays for Black children in care. The figures illustrate where an adoptive household has at least one parent of Black, Asian, mixed Black, or mixed Asian ethnicity and how many households had only parents of white ethnicity.



The figures show that although the number of Black households approved to adopt this year has been higher than last year (5 households compared to 3), there has been a drop when these are considered as a proportion of total approvals, from 25% to 21%. Asian households have increased from 8% to 25%, and white ethnicity households have dropped from 67% to 54%.



Over the last 3 years 56% of children matched for adoption in north London have been from global majority backgrounds, with the majority being Black or Black mixed ethnicity. This demonstrates that there is still significant work to do to improve the approval rates of Black households, whilst also increasing overall numbers of adopters approved of all ethnicities.



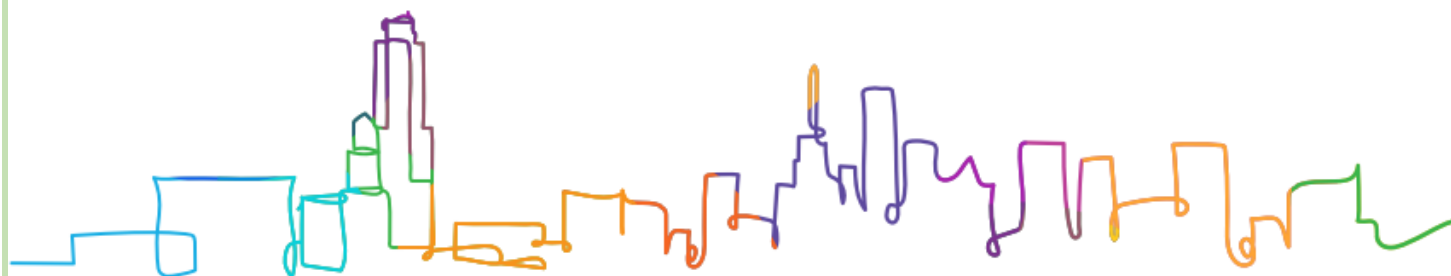
16. Increasing the number of black adoptive families

As part of Adopt London, ALN has launched a new long-term project this year – The Black Adoption Project, in partnership with Laurelle Brown training & consultancy. The project recognises that there is a persistent gap in London between the number of Black adoptive parents and the number of Black children for whom an adoption plan is made. This gap has a significant impact on Black children, who may experience more delay before they move to live with their adoptive family, or who may remain long-term in foster care if an adoptive family cannot be identified. Whilst some adoptive parents of other ethnicities are strongly placed to adopt and support a Black child, and whilst this is right for some children, we need to have as much choice as possible in identifying the best possible adoptive family for every child.

We recognise that Black people may face more barriers to adopting and have more challenges to overcome when they become adoptive parents. We therefore need to take steps to remove obstacles and provide the support that's needed to Black adoptive parents before and after adoption, and to walk alongside and support parents of other ethnicities who have adopted Black children.

We know that many people who are not Black also face barriers to adoption, or don't receive the support they need, for a wide range of reasons. We want to address inequalities and improve our practice across all of these areas. However, the disparities that exist within Black adoption are particularly persistent and we know that we need co-ordinated focus to bring about change.

Our aim is to understand the many complex factors that impact the adoption of Black children. The project began with an analysis of the current situation across Adopt London, including a data analysis, focus groups, survey, and learning from practice examples and contexts. The initial analysis from this work will provide the basis for the project strategy for the coming year. A Steering Committee made up of those with personal and professional experience of adoption has been initiated, and stakeholder groups are being established to ensure we have input from those with a wide range of lived experience of adoption. Staff training and development are also an integral part of the plan for the project.



PLANNING FOR CHILDREN

17. Arrangements for adoption permanency planning

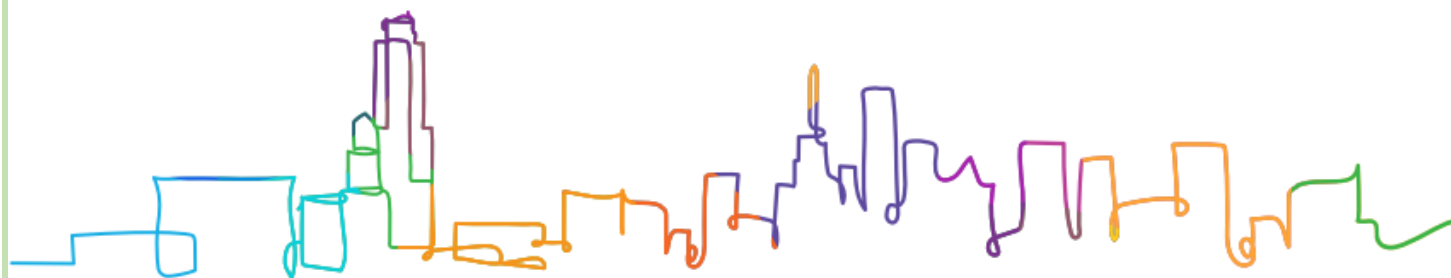
Each partner borough is responsible for permanency planning and tracking of their children. A lead Family Finder from ALN for each borough attends planning meetings and is able to provide advice and guidance about adoption plans. Referrals for children are made to ALN when the plan is likely to be adoption and the case is allocated at the point that early Family Finding work can begin, usually around the time the Best Interests Decision is made by the borough Agency Decision Maker.

Not all referrals result in a Placement Order and therefore a final adoption plan for the child, however referral levels can be indicative of increases and decreases in the amount of new family finding work that ALN will be undertaking. The table shows that ALN experienced a significant dip in all referrals in the first half of 2021/22, partially due to unusually high referrals at the end of 2020/21. Referrals increased and remained high in the second half of the year however overall there were 19% fewer referrals across the year than in 2020/21. As ALN still only has two complete years of data and these were impacted by the pandemic, it is not yet possible to know confidently what a 'normal' level of activity is.

It is worth noting with all placement figures that overall numbers for ALN provide a stronger indication of a trend in the data, as individual borough's figures alone are low and therefore do not indicate trends reliably.

Table: Family Finding referrals into ALN, by borough

	2020/21 Q1	2020/21 Q2	2020/21 Q3	2020/21 Q4	2021/22 Q1	2021/22 Q2	2021/22 Q3	2021/22 Q4	Total by borough
Barnet	4	7	4	10	3	5	4	7	44
Islington	2	0	7	3	1	5	10	14	42
Camden	6	6	7	2	5	3	6	4	39
Enfield	5	5	6	10	7	3	3	11	50
Hackney	2	2	4	14	0	1	10	4	37
Haringey	15	13	8	13	2	1	9	7	68
Total for Q	34	33	36	52	18	18	42	47	280



18. Numbers of children with a plan for adoption

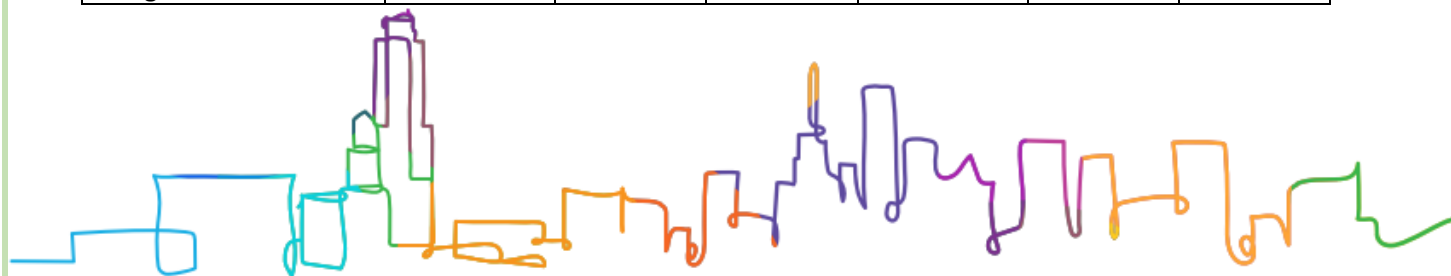
Overall, this year there have been **45% fewer care plans for adoption** that were formalised by the borough Agency Decision Makers (ADM), and **43% fewer Placement Orders** made by the court. A high proportion of the Placement Orders made in 2020/21 were in the final part of the year due to significant court delays as a result of the pandemic, therefore the number of children **placed for adoption during 2021/22 increased from the previous year by 30%**. Provisional data for the first quarter of 2022/23 indicates that ADM decisions for adoption have increased again to 2020/21 levels, making it hard to predict the number of Placement Orders that will be made in 2022/23. Partner boroughs have advised there are a high number of children for whom they are beginning to consider adoption however the data indicates there is an overall trend in adoption numbers decreasing across north London. During 2022/23, as court processes settle after the impact of the pandemic, there will be a better indication of whether this reduction is an established trend.

Table: Best Interest Decisions – data provided by borough's own ASGLB national returns

Agency	Total ADM Best Interests Decisions			ADM Best Interests Decisions per 10,000 people under the age of 18		
	2019/2020	2020/21	2021/22	2019/2020	2020/21	2021/22
<i>Adopt London North</i>	85	65	36	2.05	1.55	0.86
Barnet	27	13	5	2.76	1.31	0.51
Camden	9	5	4	1.63	0.87	0.70
Enfield	13	15	11	1.47	1.70	1.25
Hackney	18	12	2	2.70	1.80	0.30
Haringey	13	16	7	2.07	2.57	1.12
Islington	5	4	7	1.12	0.88	1.54

Table: Placements & Placement Orders – data provided by borough's own ASGLB national returns

Agency	Total adoptive placements			Total Placement Orders		
	2019/2020	2020/21	2021/22	2019/2020	2020/21	2021/22
<i>Adopt London North</i>	50	30	39	54	46	26
Barnet	15	3	7	11	8	3
Camden	4	8	3	7	2	4
Enfield	7	3	8	11	9	3
Hackney	9	5	9	14	9	3
Haringey	9	8	9	9	17	6
Islington	6	3	3	2	1	2



PLACING CHILDREN WITH ADOPTIVE PARENTS

19. Family finding

The Recruitment team and the Family Finding team have continued to focus this year on developing strong and regular communication about potential in-house adoptive families and the needs of children. By the time a Placement Order is made the team will know whether an in-house family can potentially be considered for the child, which means there is no delay in using all other available methods to identify a family from a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) or another RAA if needed.

Working with Adopt London we have created closed groups on our national digital family finding platform so that we can start earlier conversations with other Adopt London social workers where there is potential for an Adopt London match.



With the ending of pandemic restrictions, the team have been able to use more face-to-face family finding methods as well as maintaining some of the most helpful virtual methods. We have organised professionals networking meetings which provide an opportunity for social workers to meet and discuss potential families for children across agencies. Learning from the success of our virtual activity

mornings during the pandemic we have also been running in-person 'soft play mornings'. These are an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet with children who have a plan for adoption and their foster carers in a low-key soft play environment within a Children's Centre. Running these ourselves means that we are able to intentionally invite the right prospective adopters for the children who will be attending, keep the events local to avoid long travel times for foster carers and children, and organise the event specifically to suit the cohort of children that we are focusing on.

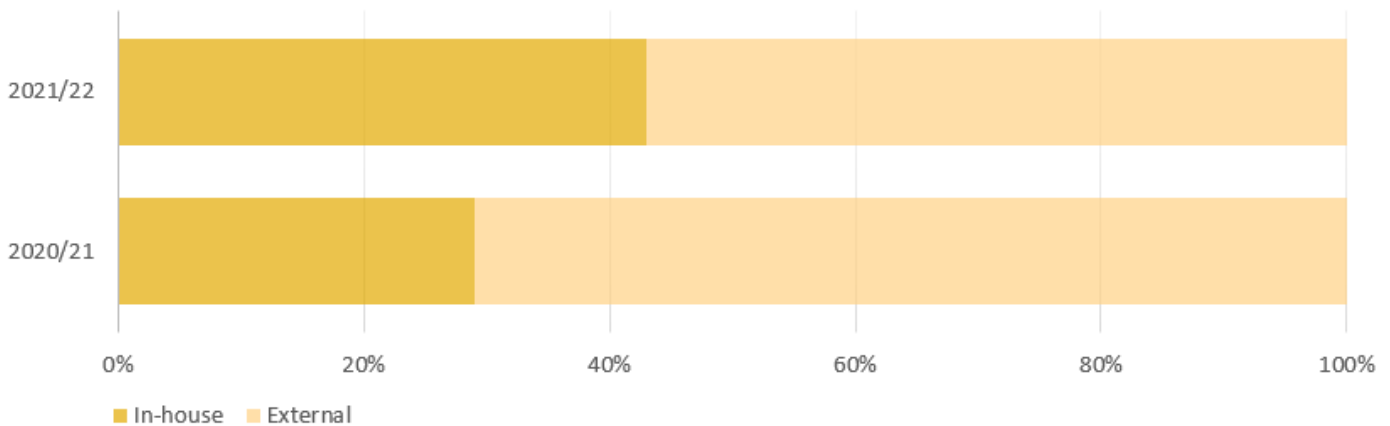


20. In-house placements

It is a priority to place as many children with our own adoptive parents as possible. We really understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of the adopters we have approved ourselves, there is clearer and faster communication between the different parties involved, and we can effectively and quickly escalate difficulties if they arise. All of these help to ensure that the match is appropriate, the right early support is in place, the transition is as careful as possible, and the child can maintain contact with their foster carer. In order to grow our in-house placements it is important that we assess the adopters who are most likely to be matched with our children, and that we talk to them from the earliest stages about the benefits of waiting for a link internally. We know that not every adopter will be matched in-house and we support adopters who are ready to begin family finding on a wider basis. We have been successful in continuing to grow the use of in-house placements this year. All of our in-house adopters who were matched in 2021/22 were matched with a child/ren from one of our six boroughs.

43% of children matched during 2021/22 went to live with an in-house family (21 children). This compares to 29% of children matched during 2020/21 (9 children).

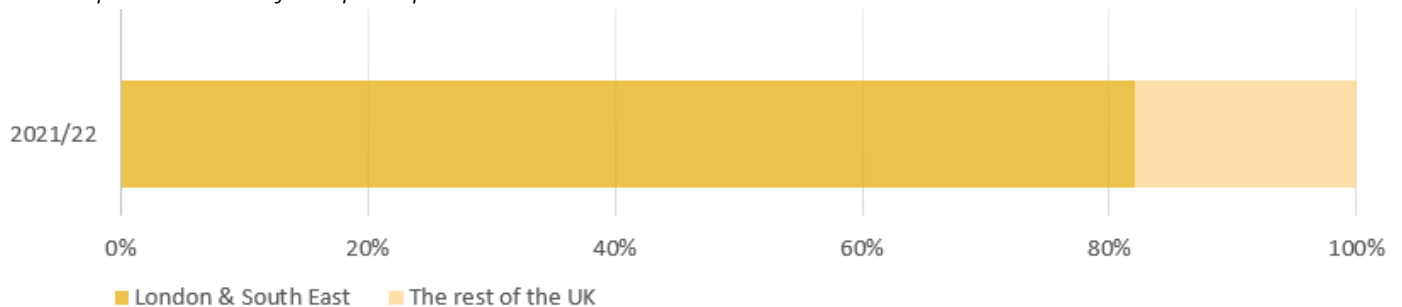
Graph: Type of adoptive placement



21. Location of placements

Where an in-house placement is not possible, we aim to still place as many children as we can within London and the South East as this enables ALN and the child's social workers in the borough to provide the best possible support and to quickly pick up any difficulties that arise post-placement. We do not create delay for children by only considering local placements, however we consider the location of a placement when weighing up the strengths or vulnerabilities of potential adoptive families. **This year over 80% of all children went to live with adoptive families in London and the South East.**

Graph: Location of adoptive placements



22. Children waiting for an adoptive family

The family finding team and children's social work team in the borough meet regularly for Family Finding review meetings for each child to closely monitor progress, provide updates, and to ensure the plan for adoption remains right for the child. ALN are also invited to attend tracking meetings in the borough to provide information for senior managers who are monitoring permanency planning. ALN and borough senior managers speak regularly to escalate delays or concerns.

The number of children placed for adoption has been much higher this year and there have also been fewer Placement Orders. For these reasons at the end of March 2022 ALN were only **actively family finding for 9 children with a Placement Order** (this excludes children who are already linked, children whose foster carers are being assessed as adoptive parents, and children whose plan for adoption has been changed or put on hold). If Placement Orders rise again during 2022/23 we would expect to see this increase.



Table: Children with a Placement Order where there is active family finding taking place on 31 March

Agency	2020/2021	2021/22
<i>Adopt London North</i>	37	9
Barnet	2	1
Camden	4	1
Enfield	8	0
Hackney	11	1
Haringey	11	6
Islington	1	0

23. Moving children to adoptive families

Moving children into their adoptive families has gradually become easier during 2021/22 with the ending of pandemic restrictions. We have continued to establish the use of 'Moving to Adoption', the University of East Anglia's (UEA) research-based model for transitioning children to adoptive families, which emphasises an extended 'soft' getting-to-know-you period prior to the more intense main introductions, and an extended and planned goodbye period with the foster carer after moving to the adoptive home. The model has been well supported by children's social workers, fostering teams, and foster carers.

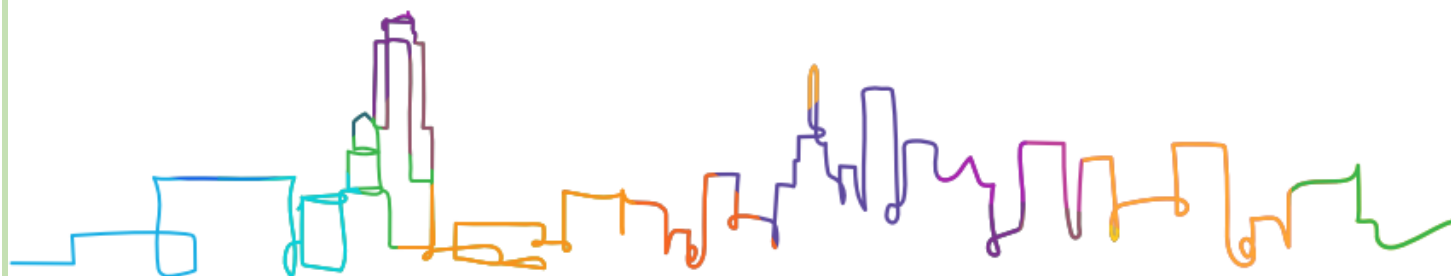


24. Placements made

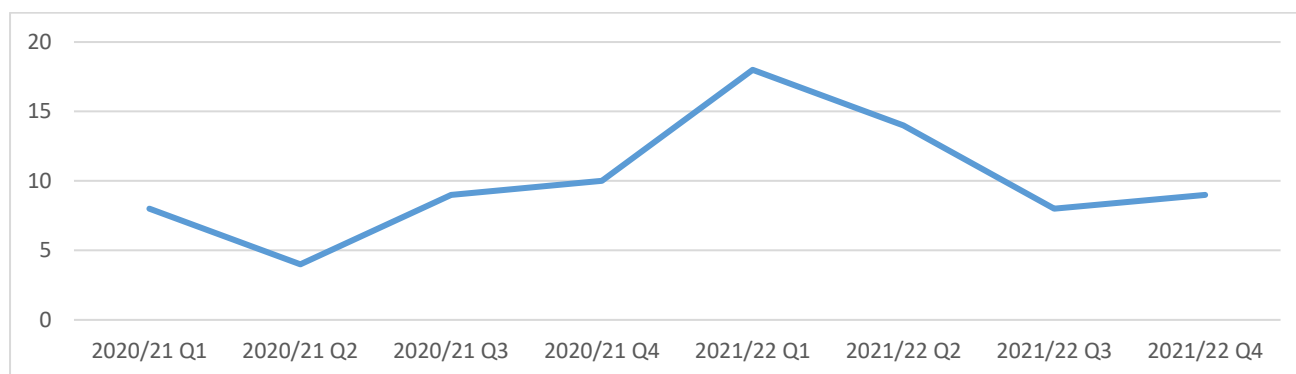
There has been a significantly higher number of matches of children with adoptive families during 2021/22 than in the previous 2 years. The first half of the year was particularly busy due to a high number of Placement Orders made at the end of 2020/21. 65% of matches this year took place before the end of September 2021.

Table: Number of matches for all boroughs by year

2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
55	50	29	31	49



Graph: Number of matches for all boroughs by quarter



The overall number of matches for ALN provides a better indication of placement trends than the number of matches in each borough, which can seem volatile due to small numbers when viewed for a single year. As there were only 26 Placement Orders made across the boroughs in 2021/22, it is likely that the number of matches will decrease in 2022/23.

Table: Number of matches by borough

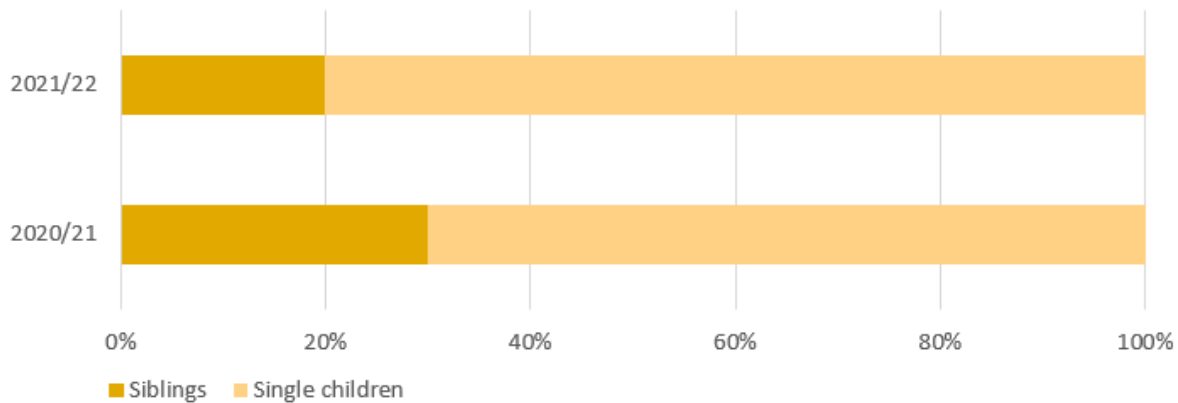
Borough	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Barnet	2	10	12
Camden	7	4	11
Enfield	4	12	16
Hackney	8	8	16
Haringey	6	13	19
Islington	4	2	6
Total	31	49	80

25. Characteristics of children matched

20% of children matched for adoption in 2021/22 were in sibling groups and moved to their adoptive placement together, compared to 30% in 2020/21. All sibling groups placed were 2 children together. Although the proportion is lower due to a higher number of matches this year, the actual number of siblings matched together was the same as the previous year (5 sibling groups). Being a sibling group of 2 does not appear to be one of the primary factors indicating that children will wait longer to be matched for adoption however there are few prospective adopters nationally who are able to consider siblings groups of 3 or more.



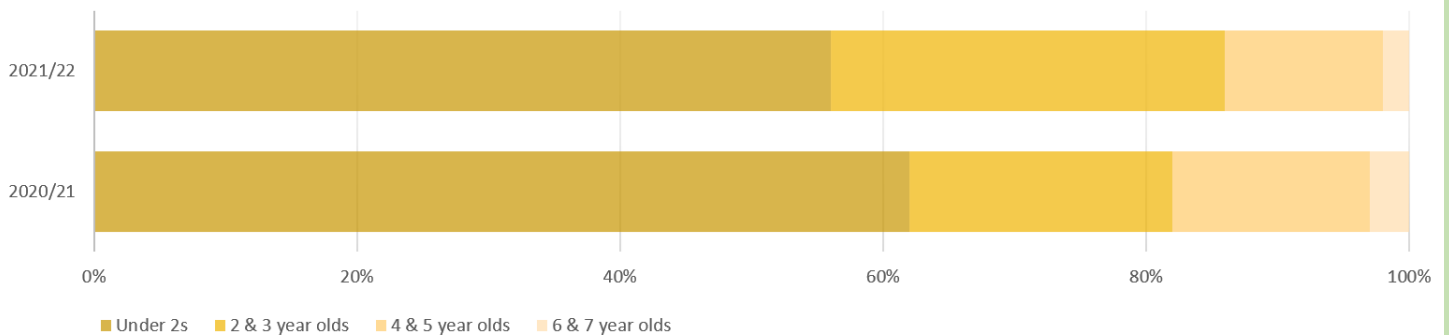
Graph: Number of children matched for adoption in sibling groups



There has been no significant change in the ages of children matched for adoption this year. The **majority of children matched for adoption have been under 2 years** of age. Some of these children had been placed in Early Permanence placements from as young as 1 week old and matched with their Early Permanence carers for the purpose of adoption after a Placement Order was granted.

Last year **14% of children matched for adoption were over 4 years old** at the point of match, compared to 18% in 2020/21. Children over 4 years of age make up a very small proportion of the referrals ALN receive. The oldest children matched for adoption in both of the last two years have been 6 years old.

Graph: Ages of children matched for adoption



There were 6 children placed for Early Permanence with prospective adoptive parents during 2021/22, the same number as the previous year. All of the Early Permanence placements that have concluded their court processes have resulted in the children remaining with their Early Permanence carers for adoption, however a number remain ongoing in court.



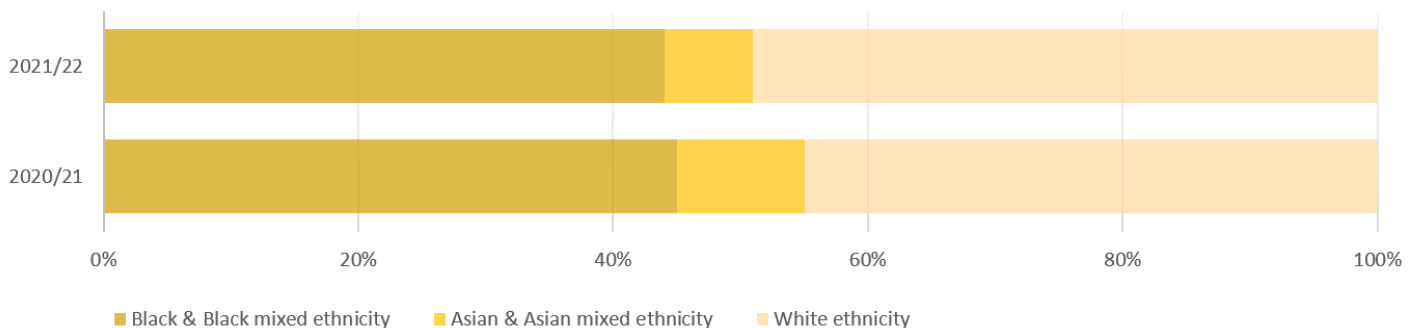
Due to pandemic-related care proceedings delays some of the children have remained in their Early Permanence placements prior to a Placement Order for up to 18 months, highlighting the benefit to the child of using these placements wherever possible to minimise the impact on the child of a change of placement after proceedings are concluded. Referrals for Early Permanence placements have been gradually increasing and a project group with leads from each borough has started to focus on improving early identification of potential referrals.

Table: Number of children placed with Early Permanence carers

Borough	Placed for Early Permanence in 2020/21	Placed for Early Permanence in 2021/22	TOTAL
Barnet	0	0	0
Camden	1	2	3
Enfield	0	2	2
Hackney	2	0	2
Haringey	3	1	4
Islington	0	1	1
TOTAL	6	6	12

Children’s ethnicities have been grouped into broader categories in order to illustrate the types of adoptive placements that are needed for us to be able to consider placements for children that are not fully trans-racial. There has been no significant change in the proportion of children of different ethnicities over the last two years. Most children are either Black or Black mixed ethnicity, or white ethnicity.

Graph: Ethnicity categories of children matched for adoption

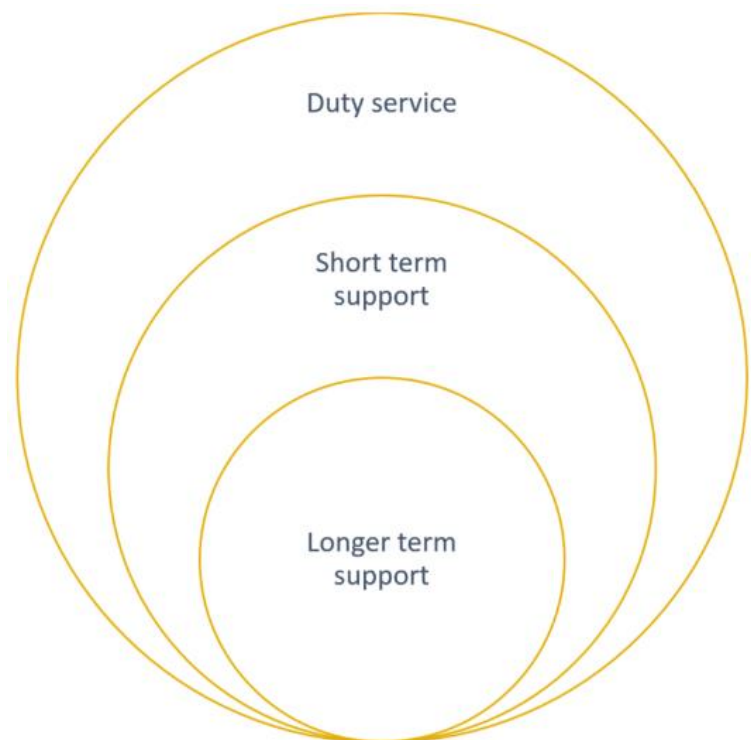


PROVIDING SUPPORT TO ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND OTHERS

26. Support to families and adopted adults

The Adoption Support team provide support to adoptive families and adopted adults living in our boroughs, and contact support between adoptive families and birth families for all adoptive children and young people that were previously placed by one of our boroughs. Access to support is through the duty service who are also able to offer short-term support such as standalone applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) and access to specialist training. Families requiring longer-term or more complex social work support are allocated to a social worker in the main team, who completes an assessment of their needs and recommendations for support. Many of the situations requiring longer-term social work support and coordination are at risk of family breakdown.

The duty service that we introduced in 2020/21 to support with managing increases in demand has worked well to enable us to provide an initial response and triage, however the number of requests for support and complexity of needs has continued to increase, particularly since the last national lockdown in early 2021. This has created a waiting list for non-urgent types of support such as reviews of contact and access to records requests and introduced waiting times for Adoption Support Fund application initial meetings. We have noticed the impact of other non-adoption services being under strain as many families who previously sought their primarily support from elsewhere (for example specialist CAMHS services) have said that the waiting lists they face are too long or they no longer meet the services' thresholds. Every attempt is made to prioritise responding to adoptive families with immediate support needs as quickly as possible in order to prevent family breakdown, which means that waiting lists for adopted adults (access to records requests), and contact support are hard to reduce.



Despite pressures facing our Adoption Support Team many families value the adoption-informed approach to support, and the team work hard to build supportive, trauma-informed relationships with families that increase their ability to manage the difficulties they face.

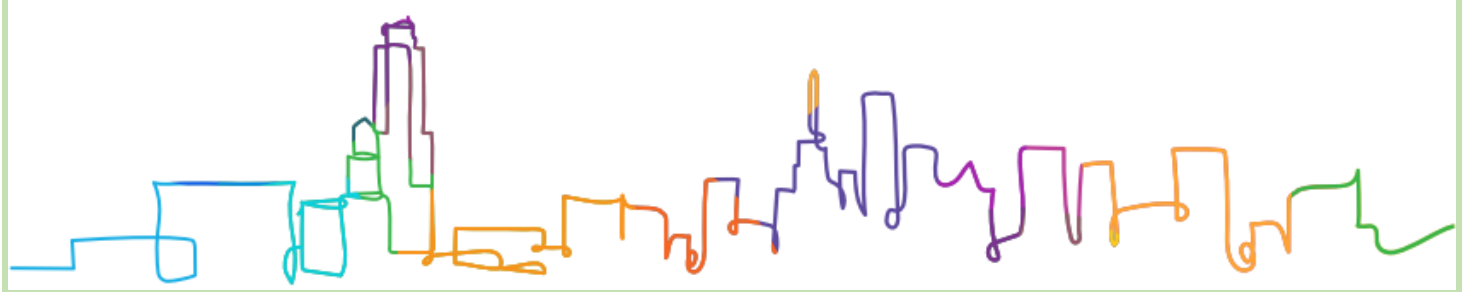
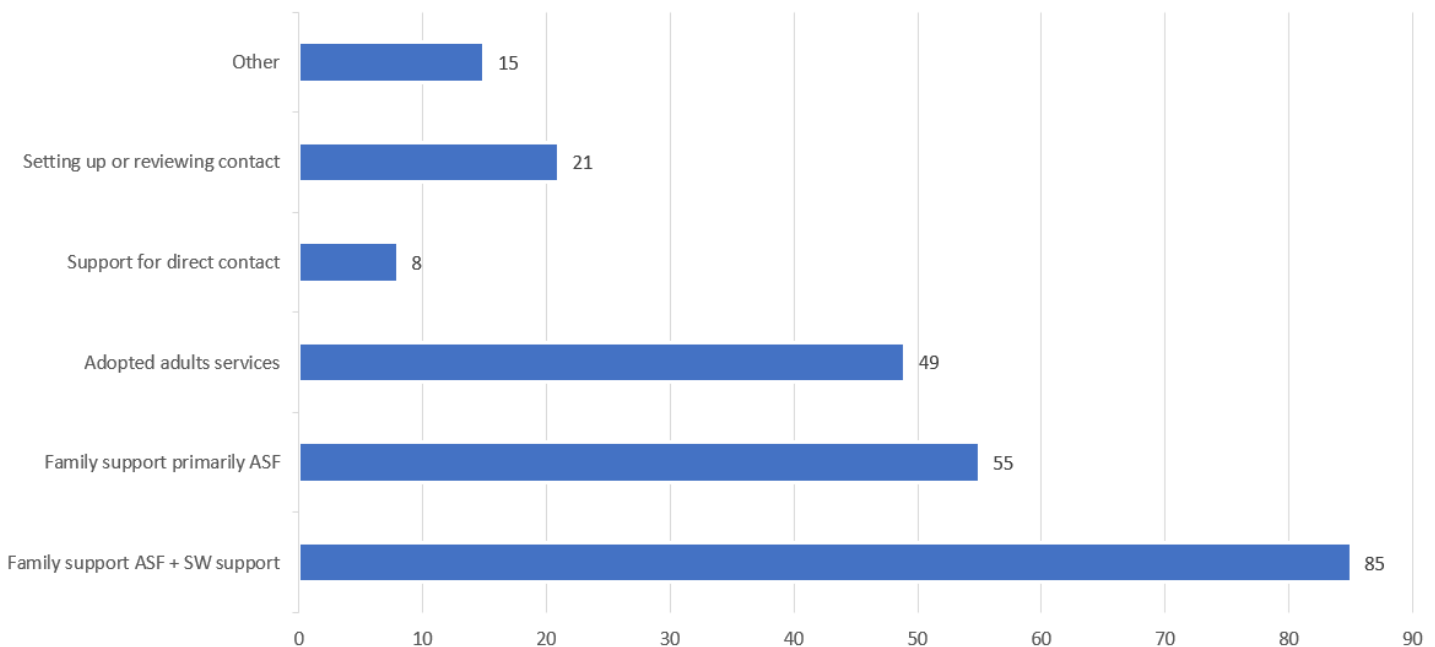
“Thank you...for going above and beyond...and then all the way back!”

Feedback from adoptive parent for support reinstating contact between birth and adoptive family

An audit we completed this year shows the types of casework support the team is providing. The audit showed that **60% of family support cases required significant social work support** in addition to ASF therapeutic provision and signposting. **25% (35 families) had active CAMHS involvement** and **13% (18 families) were open to the borough’s social work teams** in addition to ALN.

Adoption Support demand and levels of need are being monitored by the service and by the Governance Board.

Graph: Types of casework open to Adoption Support, January 2021



Increases in demand for support are illustrated further through Adopt London North's access to the Adoption Support Fund. **Our use of the Adoption Support Fund increased in value by 24%** in 2021/22 when compared to the previous year. It is positive that as many families as possible are making use of the funded therapeutic interventions available through the Fund, however the number of requests and administrative requirements of the Fund also increase pressure further on the capacity of the Adoption Support Team.

Table: Adoption Support Fund applications and spend

	# applications	Total spend	Average spend per application
2020/21	294	£864,649.62	£2941
2021/22	361	£1,069,975.31	£2964

Adopt London North also provide specialist group support for parents of adopted teenagers, and for adopted adults. These groups are effective at providing support and reducing the need for crisis intervention. The Parents of Adopted Teenagers group is therapeutically facilitated and provides support for a number of families who may otherwise be at risk of family breakdown.

"The group has helped me so much. Just to feel that I am not alone, that I am being supported by people all going through the same thing. It's hard but much needed each month."

Feedback from attendee at the Parents of Adopted Teenagers group

27. Peer support for adoptive parents

Through Adopt London we have continued our partnership with adopter peer support organisation We Are Family, who provide a comprehensive range of support to over 1000 adoptive parents and prospective adopters throughout London. This year We Are Family have restarted in-person local parent groups and family meet ups, as well as continuing to provide the virtual specialist support groups and specialist webinars that they introduced during the pandemic.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022/23

Finding prospective adoptive parents

1. Grow and further establish the Black Adoption Project to better understand the needs of Black and mixed Black ethnicity adopters, and to improve our services to them for the long term.
2. Build Adopt London reach and engagement levels on social media.
3. Work further with borough communications teams to improve our reach in our local communities.
4. Increase the rate at which those submitting an Expression of Interest go on to start their assessment.

Preparing and approving adoptive parents

5. Increase the number of approvals whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.

Planning for children

6. Increase awareness of Early Permanence in children's social work teams.

Placing children with adoptive parents

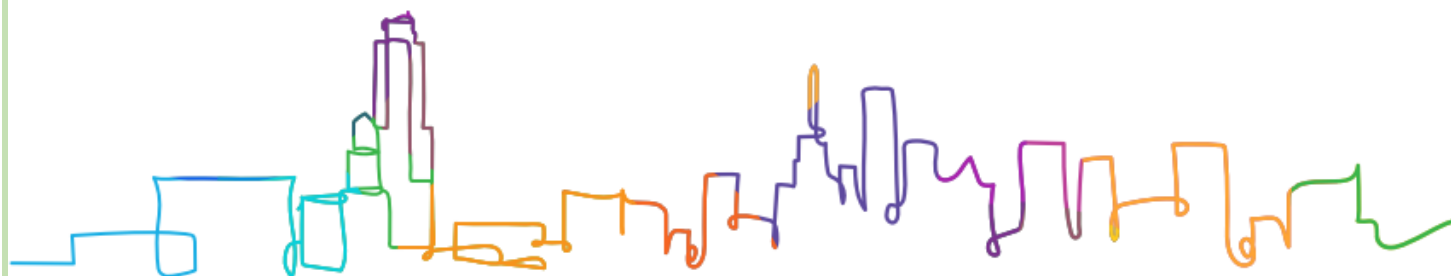
7. Continue to focus on the number of children who move to in-house and local adoptive families.

Providing support to adoptive families and others

8. Increase access to support resources for everyone impacted by adoption through development of the Adopt London website.
9. Implement regular monitoring of Adoption Support work so that changes in demand can be reported.

Working as part of Adopt London

10. Strengthen arrangements through a legal partnership agreement for Adopt London.





ADOPT LONDON NORTH

REPORT END

