

# Annual Report

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April 2024 – March 2025



Lydia Samuel, Head of Service

# Contents

Adopt London North .....	3
Financial spend .....	7
National adoption landscape .....	9
Adopt London .....	12
The Black Adoption Project .....	17
Adoption Panel .....	20
Finding prospective adoptive parents .....	22
Preparing and approving adoptive parents .....	26
Planning for children .....	31
Placing children with adoptive parents .....	34
Providing support to adoptive families and others .....	41
Recommendations .....	50

## Key

 **Link to page within this report**

 **Link to an external web page.**

# Adopt London North

## Context

Adopt London North (ALN) is a Regional Adoption Agency run in partnership between the six London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. The service is hosted by the London Borough of Islington, with legal and financial terms covered by the ALN Partnership Agreement, and shared oversight through the ALN Governance Board.

Adopt London North has responsibility for all adoption-led services, delivering these on behalf of the boroughs. These include:

- Recruitment and assessment of adoptive parents
- Family finding for children with an adoption care plan
- Adoption support to adoptive families, adopted adults, and others impacted by adoption

Corporate parenting responsibilities for the child remain with the borough – these include care and adoption planning decisions, and court processes.

## Governance

The ALN Governance Board meets quarterly and has Director representation from each of the six partner boroughs. This Board 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. Thanks to the commitment of partner boroughs, the Board has been effective in jointly making critical resourcing decisions and agreeing priorities.

The Quality Assurance Group (QA Group) has membership at Head of Service and Service Manager level from each partner borough. The QA Group 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 Group also consider emerging information about differences in practice between the six boroughs, and where best practice can be implemented across all partners.



## 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 Business Manager. ALN has a stable staff group, with no one leaving a permanent post this year. We successfully recruited to one vacancy in adoption support which had been harder to fill, and made permanent appointments to three new posts in the recruitment and assessment team as part of our goal to increase adopter recruitment. In addition to our core staff, we manage a small pool of specialist sessional social workers, primarily focused on 'access to records' work with adopted adults, and non-agency (private) adoption assessments. Our sessional staff have experience in these complex areas of work and provide additional capacity in a flexible way.

This year we welcomed an adopted young person from one of our boroughs for a college work experience placement, as part of our commitment to increase the involvement of those with lived experience of adoption in all areas of our work. She worked alongside our communications & marketing officer to support ALN's work, and also contributed her personal experience within training provided for children's social workers. Her contribution to the work was highly valued and she provided very positive

feedback about her experience of the placement. We aim to offer similar placements in future.

## Training and development in partnership with boroughs

Over the last few years we have been developing a social work training programme for our partner boroughs, which supports the development of adoption knowledge and expertise in children's social work teams and is also applicable to work with other cohorts of children, such as those living with special guardians and in other long-term placements. We have heard from social workers that this is particularly important because adoption is not an area of work they undertake frequently, and many feel ill-equipped when progressing an adoption care plan for a child. This training provides an opportunity for children's social workers to benefit from the specific adoption expertise held by ALN staff members, and to develop personal connections across agencies. Social workers have also provided feedback that they appreciate learning in person together across the ALN six partner boroughs – gaining from the different practice models and knowledge held across our boroughs.

To date ALN has developed and delivered training in the following areas:

- The role of the Child Permanency Report (CPR)

"I really enjoyed the training. It was important to remember language matters and the children do read their reports. This can sometimes be forgotten when caseloads are heavy."

"This was a very powerful training that brought to light the importance of the information that we write in our CPRs. The language we use, the detail to input, and reflection of what needs to be in the CPR."

"It really, for me, just brought home the critical importance of the document that I write as a social worker. I think the training is well structured, interactive and reflective. Very engaging."

"Great overview of everything. Feel much more confident about the [permanency planning] process – parallel planning, contacting and including parents, documents required."

"Direct work [with children] can be simple and does not have to take too much time. [The training gave me] lots of practical activities I can use."



- Adoption legal, court, and permanency planning processes
- Completing life story work
- Transitions to adoption

Capacity dependant we aim to run the existing training programme regularly and develop further training areas that have been requested by boroughs.

## Inspections

In 2024/25 ALN was involved in supporting Ofsted inspections in all 6 boroughs through 5 ILACS inspections and 1 focused visit, working closely with partners to evidence the positive adoption work and collaboration taking place.



‘Barnet is part of a regional adoption agency... Early permanence is a strength due to effective, strong and collaborative working with Barnet Children’s Services, which has an effective specialist adoption worker. The adoption service is ambitious for children and has successfully sought to create a wider choice of adoptive homes through a more inclusive recruitment approach. Children benefit from the availability of adopters from a range of backgrounds. Adopters report receiving very helpful adoption support provision both for them and their children.’

**– Barnet ILACS, June 2024**

‘The working relationship between the local authority and the regional adoption agency... is strong. There is a comprehensive offer of support available to those who require it, including birth relatives and adopted adults, as well as adoptive parents and their children.’

**– Islington ILACS, December 2024**

‘Adoptions...are timely, with PPMs and independent reviewing officer (IRO) oversight supporting progress.’

**– Haringey focused visit, February 2025**

‘Adoption services in Hackney are provided through Adopt London North... While adoption numbers are low...timely and appropriate decisions are made to secure permanence through adoption. Practice in this area is strong, including support for parents to engage with indirect contact arrangements, ‘wishing you well’ visits, and writing letters to their children.’

**– Hackney ILACS, July 2024**

‘Partnership working with the regional adoption agency...is effective in its arrangements to achieve adoption for children. For a very small number of children where there has been delay, this is attributable to delayed court proceedings or the complexity of children’s needs.’

**– Enfield ILACS, July 2024**

‘Close collaboration and regular communication between Camden and the regional adoption agency...is helping achieve successful adoptions for children. Monthly tracking meetings bring teams together to discuss all children allocated for family finding, including early permanence. This works well to address issues and prevent delays. Adopters are positive about their experience of Camden, with social workers described as strong advocates for children. The local authority works closely with ALN on family contact and on important links for children, including with their brothers and sisters. Children being placed with adopters receive services promptly to support their transition to their new families and ensure their needs are met. Ongoing support for children through the adoption support fund helps them to address previous trauma and to manage time with their birth family.’

**– Camden ILACS, March 2025**

Adoption inspection regulations have not yet been updated to reflect the creation of RAAs. Currently RAAs are therefore inspected through the lens of the local authority inspection framework, with ILACS requirements recently updated to include consideration of adoption support casework. Themed pilot inspections of RAAs took place in 2023 and the Department for Education have said they are considering how they might implement full and routine inspections of RAAs in the future. In the medium term they

expect to ask Ofsted to carry out further themed pilot inspections in the next few years.

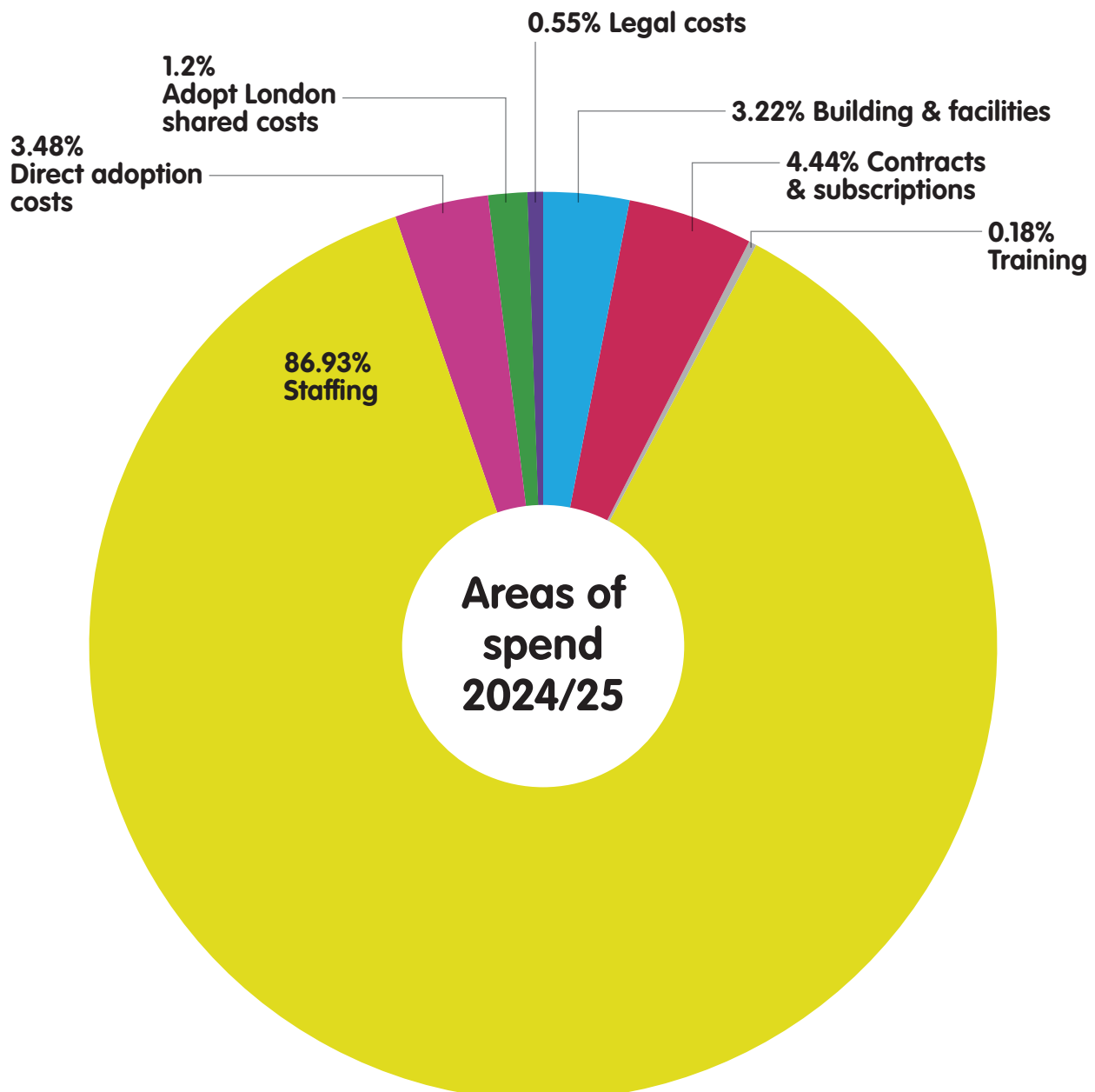
## Outcomes

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. The linked sections in this report provide more information about the work that is happening in these areas.

<b>▢ Finding prospective adoptive parents</b>	Increase the proportion of prospective adopters who are of Black and mixed Black ethnicity, in line with the needs of our Black and mixed Black ethnicity children in north London.
<b>▢ Preparing and approving adoptive parents</b>	<p>Improve timeliness and effectiveness in matching in-house approved adopters with children.</p> <p>Assess, prepare, and support prospective adopters to a high standard so that they are fully equipped to successfully parent an adoptive child.</p>
<b>▢ Planning for children</b>	<p>Ensure all children who would benefit from adoption are identified appropriately during permanency planning processes.</p> <p>Ensure that children who would benefit from an early permanence placement are identified early and matched with adoptive parents who have been prepared for early permanence.</p>
<b>▢ Placing children with adoptive parents</b>	<p>Ensure effective and time-sensitive family finding for children with a plan for adoption.</p> <p>Increase the proportion of in-house and local adoptive placements.</p>
<b>▢ Providing support to adoptive families and others</b>	<p>Improve consistency and timeliness in providing support for adoptive families and adopted adults.</p> <p>Increase awareness and uptake of support services amongst adoptive families to build resilience and reduce the need for crisis support.</p> <p>Provide specialist and targeted support to adoptive families with the most acute needs to reduce family breakdown.</p>

# Financial spend

The total core budget for ALN in 2024/25 was £3,152,783. Of this, 86.93% was spent on staffing costs – including permanent and agency staffing, sessional workers, Adoption Panel members, and maternity costs. All six boroughs contribute an equal amount to the ALN core budget.



Area of spend	Proportion of budget
Building & facilities	3.22%
Contracts & subscriptions	4.44%
Training	0.18%
Staffing	86.93%
Direct adoption costs	3.48%
Adopt London shared costs	1.20%
Legal costs	0.55%





# National adoption landscape

## Adoption England

Adoption England oversees the coordinated efforts of the 33 Regional Adoption Agencies in England, focusing on key areas identified in the [Adoption England Strategy](#). The Department for Education provides funding for Adoption England through a centrally funded staff team and grants available to Regional Adoption Agencies collaborating in pan-regional partnerships.

In recent years, the Adopt London partnership has successfully obtained grant funding to support joint practice development across areas including the **matching of children with adoptive families**, **early permanency practice**, the **Black Adoption Project**, and the development of **new models for adoption support**.

This section of the report highlights key areas of national practice development which are supported by the work of Adoption England. You can read more about the work of Adoption England in their [annual report](#).



## Modernisation of contact in adoption

In November 2024, the adoption subgroup of the Public Law Working Group published their final report, [‘Recommendations for Best Practice in Respect of Adoption’](#), following an interim report and sector consultation launched in September 2023.

The report makes a range of detailed recommendations about adoption practice and court procedures, particularly in relation to the use of direct contact in adoption. These recommendations have significant implications for local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies if implemented by courts, however the Department for Education has to date not committed to making any changes to the law or statutory guidance to support the court’s agenda.

Research and insights from lived experience support the need for adoption plans to more frequently recommend direct contact between adopted children and their birth families, and for this to be more robustly supported on a long-term basis. However, due to models of adoption contact being historically based on indirect communication, most Regional Adoption Agencies (including Adopt London North) have not been set up with the capacity to provide the type of contact service that this change in practice would require. Whilst further national support and / or statutory guidance is awaited, ALN are monitoring contact recommendations and plans and the costs related to these, to inform future decisions.

### Maintaining relationships: learning from research & lived experience

- Everyone's experience is unique – there can be no single model for maintaining relationships that fits for every adopted person, and different forms of contact may be best for different children
- When adopted people do have some kind of contact, it can help them:
  - Understand why they were adopted
  - Provide information about their birth family
  - Reassure them that they have not been forgotten
  - Let them know that their birth family accepts their dual connection to two families
- Contact needs change over time based on the views of the adopted person and the situation in the birth family – even if it is not right at the beginning, it might be later on
- Being involved in decisions about contact provides young people with a sense of control over their lives
- Having safe and supported contact reduces the likelihood of risky unplanned online contact
- Contact can support adoptive families to feel closer to their adopted child through learning more about their history together
- Even when contact cannot happen consistently or directly, conversations about contact within the adoptive family support wider discussions which help young people make sense of their story

Learn more about this topic and hear directly from those with lived experience by following these links:



This year ALN has started to pilot the use of a digital 'letterbox' system, facilitating indirect contact for adopted children and their birth families through a digital app which is a more familiar and accessible way of communicating for children and young people. An early evaluation of the platform known as 'Letter Swap' has found that it has the potential to open up more meaningful and fulfilling communication in some situations, with the potential for reduced dependency on the adoption agency, so that more agency time can be invested in relational support. ALN will continue to test its use on a small-scale throughout 2025/26 whilst assessing the potential to move more contact arrangements onto this platform in future.

### Changes to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

The ASGSF provides access to funding for essential therapeutic support for children living in adoptive and special guardianship families. As the end of 2024/25 approached, there was significant uncertainty about the future of the Fund as the Department for Education delayed making a commitment to the 2025/26 financial year. Early in the 2025/26 financial year an announcement was made by the government that funding allowances for each family would be reduced significantly (from a £5,000 cap to £3,000 cap), with additional restrictions

including the end of specific funding for specialist assessments and 'match funding' for particularly complex needs or families at risk of breakdown. The government have also announced a review into the future delivery of the Fund, with no commitment yet made for 2026/27 and beyond.

Significant changes to the ASGSF model will have major implications for the way RAAs deliver adoption support services nationally, and will impact the fragile adoption support provider market. In response to this uncertainty RAA leaders came together through Adoption England to publish an [options appraisal](#) setting out the views of RAAs on potential alternative models for the Fund. The Department for Education have indicated that further announcements about the Fund may take place in autumn 2025.

## 'Becoming a Family' framework

Adoption England have led work to develop a national framework to support the early stages of adoptive parenthood. The framework is designed to provide a consistent level of good practice in early placement support across England and support parents to build confidence and begin to put into practice what they have learnt in their preparation training. The framework is built around five key principles:

- Be preventative and support foundational building blocks of parenting in adoption
- Enable adoptive parents to begin developing confidence as therapeutic parents
- Build resilience through strong social networks and peer support
- Respond to individual needs with access to a wide range of multi-agency services
- Offer consistency in support across England, particularly for families adopting a child from another region.

The framework is currently being piloted until April 2026 before being rolled out to RAAs nationally.

## National adopter sufficiency

Over the last 18 months there has been a significant drop in adoptive parent sufficiency across England. Starting in the north of England but spreading across most regions, RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) have seen the impact of economic conditions play a particularly prominent role in preventing people coming forward for adoption, alongside housing difficulties and a broader sense of global insecurity. Adoption England are supporting some regions to pilot various approaches for providing economic support to prospective adoptive parents, with learning shared nationally.

In London we have not seen such significant challenges with the recruitment of adoptive parents however we continue to monitor this closely and observe changes as it is possible these may impact us later than other areas of the country. Even with stable adopter recruitment locally however, the national picture does impact London RAAs through a shortage of available inter-agency placements for London children.





# Adopt London



## Adopt London structure

Four Regional Adoption Agencies collaborate under the Adopt London umbrella, collectively serving 24 boroughs across all regions of London. Adopt London stands out nationally for its close partnership among such a large number of local authorities.

This partnership provides a London-wide platform for the recruitment of adoptive parents, enables the delivery of some support services at scale, and allows for sharing and standardisation of practice. Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Panel Advisors, and Marketing & Communications leads collaborate with their counterparts throughout Adopt London to develop shared services and establish common practice standards, and Adopt London increasingly provide regular opportunities for practitioners to meet to share practice and specialist knowledge.

Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Directors of Children's Services meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board, which oversees the joint project work of Adopt London and considers issues that need the support of other senior leaders to resolve. 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; operational and practice development of priority areas including opportunities to access national funding; marketing and communications arrangements; and the voice of adopters, adopted children, adopted adults, and birth family members. A pooled budget is held to fund shared activity.

## Adopt London shared areas of work in 2024/25

- Adopt London staff conference
- Adult adoptee support
- Matching project
- Telling children about adoption
- Early permanence project
- We Are Family peer support
- Adopt London choir
- Adoption support commissioning
- Black Adoption Project





## Adopt London staff conference

Our annual Adopt London Staff Conference was held in February 2025, bringing together 160 staff in an event that helps develop ownership of the partnership working within Adopt London, and gives a chance to learn about new areas of work and visions for the future.

The first half of the conference this year focused on a new research model designed to support decision-making about the placement of global majority children in **'transracial' adoptive families**. Dr Tam Cane from University of Sussex presented her research to staff with the support of a young person with lived experience of transracial adoption.

During the second half of the conference people with lived experience from the **Black Adoption Project** updated attendees on new



Minister Daby with some of the Black Adoption Project team



One of the speakers at the Conference

### PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

## The AFDiT model for decision-making in transracial adoption

- Supports social work decision making around moving children to placements which do not reflect their heritage or ethnicity
- Highlights the lived experiences of those who have been transracially adopted
- Provides firm examples of the types of support transracially adopting parents can offer their children to mitigate the challenges they face
- Encourages the assessment of both the 'racial and cultural consciousness' and the 'race intentionality' of prospective carers – emphasising that carers need to have a strong commitment to support their child's heritage, as well as a strong understanding and awareness of their likely needs
- Provides guidance on applying the principles of the model to the decision-making period, during transitions to a new carer, and within the support period after a child has moved.

**"Sometimes I hated my skin. I wanted to peel it off... The risk of racialised trauma, as I now know it, really needs to fully be considered."**

– Adoptee, page 52 AFDiT framework

**"Don't expect them to be mini 'mes'; let them pursue what they want and who they want to be, even if it means challenging white-dominant environments to let your child fit in."**

– Adoptive parent, page 60 AFDiT framework

Learn more about this topic and hear directly from those with lived experience by following these links:



developments and opportunities arising from the project and spoke powerfully from their own lived experience about the changes that are needed and how staff can be a part of this. We were honoured to be joined for part of the day by Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children & Families, who held a roundtable discussion with Black Adoption Project representatives during the lunch break and gave a speech to the conference stating her commitment to support this work.

At the end of the day staff expressed how inspired they had been by the lived experience speakers and renewed their commitment to supporting these practice areas in their own work.

## Adult adoptee support

Our peer support group for transracial adoptees offered in partnership with the adoptee-led 'Transracial Adult Adoptee Network' (TAAN) has continued to grow and strengthen, hearing from a range of interesting speakers and building their relationships with one another. This group

**Transracial  
Adult  
Adoptee  
Network**

is offered to any transracial adoptee willing to travel to London for meetings and has members who regularly travel from other parts of the country to attend, ranging in age from 20s to 70s. The opportunity to meet in person with other transracially adopted adults often has a profound, life-changing impact on adoptees who attend meetings. This year facilitators from the group led a workshop at the national Adoption England conference, encouraging other Regional Adoption Agencies to initiate their own peer support groups for adult adoptees and sharing their blueprint for doing this in partnership with adopted adults.

## Matching Project

The Adopt London matching project, supported by funding from Adoption England, has concluded this year after successful work to increase family finding between Adopt London RAAs and develop regular 'stay and play' events at London Zoo which provide prospective adopters with an opportunity to meet children who have a plan for adoption and their foster carers.

## PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

### The needs of neurodivergent children in adoption transitions

Our clinical psychologist, Dr Megan Hollett, worked with family finding teams and Professor Beth Neil at the University of East Anglia to develop her work on transitions planning for children ([Moving to Adoption](#)) and consider how plans could be adapted for neurodivergent children. She produced a guide which supports practitioners' understanding of the relationship between neurodivergence and trauma, including the impact on the 'window of tolerance' a child may have to manage significant changes and stress – such as during adoption transitions.

Key areas identified for practitioners to focus on providing additional support include:

- Increasing predictability in the transition. This includes the use of visual support such as visual timetables and photographs, and the use of routine, ritual and familiarity to help children feel safe and secure.
- Supporting social interactions for the child such as providing additional 'scaffolding', reducing demands, and allowing for extended introductory periods.
- Supporting regulation including emotional and behavioural presentation but also sensory needs and special interests.

You can find out more about the Moving to Adoption model at this link:



In the final period of the project, we benefited from the expertise of a clinical psychologist, Dr Megan Hollett, who was available to support more complex matching decisions and transitions planning. Social work teams working with many children placed for adoption through ALN benefited from this additional reflective support, and Adopt London now aim to build on this learning to develop an ongoing clinical support offer focused on the transitions and early placement period.

## Telling children about adoption

Two Adopt London North family finders, supported by their team and Dr Megan Hollett, have developed a booklet for children's social workers and foster carers to support the difficult task of talking to children about their care plan of adoption. The booklet talks through the stages of care proceedings and key messages that can be given to children at each stage, with ideas for specific language to use and resources to support this crucial work. The booklet will be launched in autumn 2025 with a conference for local authority social workers who will become 'champions' in this area.



- between children and their birth parents prior to adoption
- Introduced Paediatric First Aid training for all Adopt London prospective adoptive parents and developed separate safeguarding training for early permanence carers
- Moved to standardise early permanence training for all Adopt London prospective adopters to support an increase in families available to provide these placements (previously the training was only for those who opted into this)
- Introduced the co-delivery of early permanence training by adoptive parents with experience of early permanence
- Developed guidance for practitioners on meeting fostering standards in early permanence placements.

## We Are Family peer support

We Are Family (WAF) is an independent peer-to-peer support charity that was founded by adoptive parents for adoptive parents. Adopt London support



We Are Family through an annual grant, to provide formal peer support to adopters along with access to a range of expert resources. All prospective adopters are encouraged to join We Are Family for free during stage 1 of their assessment, and the range of support available increases as they progress through to approval and have their adopted child/ren move in with them. Currently over 1500 adoptive parents are members of We Are Family through Adopt London, with 390 specifically affiliated to the north London group.

## Early permanence project

Also supported by Adoption England funding, the early permanence project has been working towards its planned conclusion in September 2025. Much of the work developed within the project will transition back to RAAs so that these new services continue to be offered into the future.



In the past year the project has:

- Delivered over 20 training courses for practitioners across all London boroughs
- Filmed a new video about the perspectives of birth parents in early permanence
- Worked with stakeholders to develop guidance on supporting final contact meetings

*"I felt very alone dealing with the challenges of adopting children that experienced so much trauma, meeting experienced adopters [through WAF] gave me more confidence and helped me feel I was not a rubbish parent. The support provided by other adopters was inspiring."*



83%

of members agree or strongly agree that since joining WAF, they have access to more resources, information and support to manage the challenges of adoptive parenting.

"I was lucky that I found We Are Family early into our placement, my husband & I were struggling with no family or support close by and being part of We Are Family changed that. I don't believe we would have the relationship with our children that we have now if it were not for the help, support and understanding that other WAF members gave to me."

In addition to locality-based support groups and specialist groups for single adopters, early permanence carers, and parents of teens, We Are Family regularly support family meet ups, summer picnics, and access to London-based cultural events. This year WAF delivered 63 events in Adopt London areas including 27 parent support meet-ups, 13 playgroups, and 15 family meet-ups.

In partnership with Adopt London, We Are Family also provide a range of accessible digital support through 'WAF Talks', a programme which has now delivered over 100 webinars available for adoptive parents to join live or watch back on demand, and through 'Adoption Shared', a specialist podcast designed to deepen understanding of the lived experience of adoption.



## Adopt London choir

Adopt London's choir, established in response to the pandemic in 2020, has continued to thrive, providing an accessible and fun way to build social connections between adoptive families. Families meet weekly online to learn specially selected songs, and have occasional social meet-ups or performances in person.



"I have been happier due to the love of singing and having something to look forward to, and bond with my son more as we listen and sing songs together, it has helped me with my emotions and self-doubt."

## Adoption support commissioning

Following background work and development of a regional needs assessment in the last year, Adopt London have received further funds from Adoption England to develop our capacity to undertake joint commissioning, and to test out the provision of an Adopt London clinical hub to bring some commissioned services in-house. As well as testing out potential clinical models in 2025/26, we plan to train Adopt London staff to deliver some of our own specialist therapeutic parenting programmes, as part of a long-term goal to increase access to these programmes and reduce reliance on commissioning from providers with limited capacity.

To support this work, an Adopt London legal partnership agreement needs to be developed which will enable shared commissioning and service provision.



# The Black Adoption Project



## Background

The Black Adoption Project is delivered by Adopt London in partnership with Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy, aiming to reduce long-standing disparities for Black and mixed Black heritage children in our adoption system. It is a long-term project focused on creating change across all aspects of the adoption system to better meet the needs of Black prospective adopters, families, and children.

The project was awarded Adoption England grant funding in 2024/25 to help mobilise a range of pilot projects developed in response to our **phase 1 research**, and in partnership with those with lived experience of Black adoption. We highlight progress with some of these pilot projects in this section of the report.

- Black children who have a plan for adoption agreed by the court are around 20% less likely than other children to go on to be adopted, often because suitable adoptive families cannot be identified.
- Black children who are adopted wait an average of 6½ to 8 months longer than other children to move into their adoptive family.
- Black prospective adopters are 5–6 times more likely to drop out during the adoption assessment process and not go on to adopt a child.

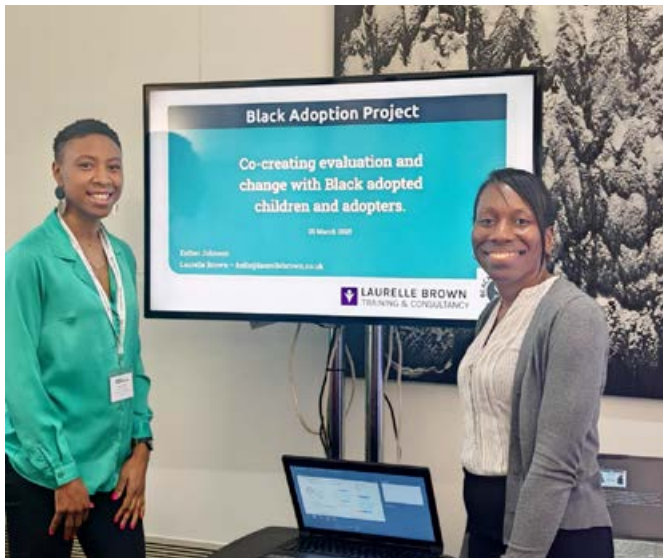
A key project principle is to support wider change through dissemination of learning, and therefore regular webinars are being held and are available after the event to watch on demand.

The work of the project is supported by a Steering Committee made up of those with personal and professional experience of Black adoption, co-chaired by an adopted person and children's services Directors. An Adoptive Parents Stakeholder Group and Research & Evaluation Advisory Group provide additional insight, challenge, and support.



Members of the Black Adoption Project Steering Committee

Many of those with lived experience of adoption have spoken at national events this year on behalf of the Black Adoption Project, including presentations to the Department for Education, Adoption England's national conference, and Children & Young People Now conference.



You can find out more about the background to the Black Adoption Project at [this link](#), or sign up to receive regular updates at [this link](#).

## Improving support for Black prospective adopters

One of the pilots launched this year is co-designed with Black adoptive parents to improve the support and advocacy available for Black prospective adopters (including racially diverse couples) during the assessment process. The pilot aims to reduce some of the additional barriers Black households often face coming into the adoption process, and increase the proportion who complete the assessment and go on to adopt a child. Following the design process a support group called 'Let's Talk About Adoption' was launched, run directly by adoptive parents. The group aims to provide a space away from professionals where prospective adopters can ask questions, access support to escalate issues within the RAA if needed, and meet role models who reflect their own racial heritage. The support available from the group also provides an additional incentive for Black families considering adoption to choose Adopt London as their agency. Positive feedback has already been received by those accessing the group and its importance recognised in Prospective Adopter Report assessments and at approval panel meetings. The impact is being independently evaluated by a research partner.



## Supporting Black adopted children & young people

Black and mixed Black heritage adopted children who participated in our theory of change process identified several key areas where the Black Adoption Project could help to improve their wellbeing. These included opportunities to socialise with other Black adopted young people, and support to better understand their Black identity and Black history within the context of their adoption. In response to these messages and through a co-design process for young people, a social group was launched in spring 2025. Meeting in a youth centre on a Saturday, the group aims to provide young people with an opportunity to build friendships with other Black adopted young people, and provide creative ways for them to share their views and experiences with others. Although not the initial motivation for the group, it also provides an opportunity for parents to meet, network, and provide mutual support – including white parents who have transracially adopted.

Further to the successful launch of the social group, a second pilot has been developed for launch in autumn 2025 aimed specifically at older young people called 'Exploring my Black Identity'. This is a 16 week programme run by an experienced Black history youth worker and a therapist, designed to support young people to learn and reflect on Black UK and global history and Black identities within an adoption context. Topics identified with the young people will include: music and pop culture; hair, style, and self-expression; Black British and global history; resistance, joy & pride; and Black adoption. The therapist will support the young people to integrate emotional regulation practices and will provide 1:1 reflection points within the programme. Young people will be encouraged to keep a reflective journal and use photography to highlight their insights, both of which will contribute to an evaluation being undertaken by our research partner.



## Specific information & advice to Black prospective adopters

Through the Black Adoption Project, Adopt London have started to offer specific sessions for Black and mixed Black heritage families considering adoption. Run in a similar format to our regular **'Meet The Adopter'** events, these provide an opportunity for households to hear from a panel of Black adoptive parents and be provided with information about the additional support available through the Black Adoption Project, including the offer of 1:1 discussions with an experienced Black adoptive parent for anyone



considering adoption. These events give us an opportunity to target our advertising specifically at Black households, including through social media and personal connections. We will continue to run these sessions through 2025/26 in different formats to evaluate the most effective model and impact on adopter recruitment.

*"Thank you so much for organising this meeting and for creating a space where Black prospective adopters like myself can share, connect, and contribute. This was my first time attending, and I found it incredibly helpful – a lot of valuable insights to keep in mind for when I'm eventually matched with children."*



# Adoption Panel

## Structure of the Adoption Panel

Adopt London North run one central adoption panel which oversees all:

- Matching decisions relating to the choice of adoptive family for a child
- Best Interests Decisions for adoption by consent
- 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 child's borough for a decision. 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 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. The panel have regular training and there is a programme of annual appraisals. The panel provide quality assurance feedback to ALN and the relevant local authority for every case they consider.

## Views of the independent Adoption Panel Chair

The independent Panel Chair, Josephine Scorer, provides a report of panel business every six months. The report covers the activity of the panel, a summary of quality assurance feedback, and areas for improvement and development. Recommendations arising from Panel Chair reports are reviewed in quarterly meetings between the Panel Chair and Head of Service.

In her most recent report covering the period September 2024 – March 2025, the Panel Chair provided the following conclusion:

*"The adoption panel is settled and stable, and the panel membership is diverse and well balanced, containing broad and wide-ranging personal and professional expertise. Panel members are focused, collaborative, and mutually respectful, and clearly able to use critical thinking to robustly scrutinise cases being presented to the panel, make safe recommendations, and to feedback on and appropriately challenge standards of practice."*

Gaps in panel membership identified are being addressed, particularly in relation to increasing the number of independent members and recruiting an additional





vice chair to the central list. The working relationship between the panel chair, panel advisor and panel coordinator continues to be strong.

There is a clear training program for the panel with future training dates and themes under discussion. Annual reviews of panel members are up to date with no major concerns identified so far.

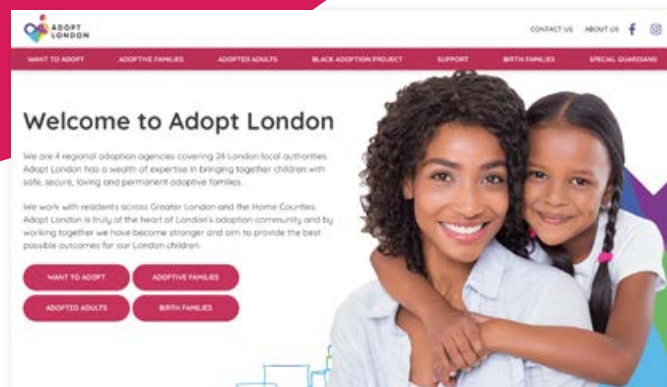
Panel business remains steady overall, and the quality assurance process is effective.

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 in particular still need some work, the overall standard of reports is extremely high. The presentation from social workers is also consistently high, and social workers are well supported by team managers who attend every panel."

# Finding prospective adoptive parents

## Adopt London brand

Our single Adopt London presence on the web continues to maximise opportunities for anyone considering adoption in London to easily find us. We have a shared recruitment and communications strategy which focuses on recognising and championing the diversity of the London region and the needs of London children. Our online presence is spearheaded by the Adopt London [website](#) which provides rich information for people considering adoption in a range of formats, from [frequently asked questions](#) to [lived experience case studies](#) and relevant [news items](#). Our accessibility on the internet is an important factor in driving attendance at information sessions, with 38% of attendees at information sessions in 2024/25

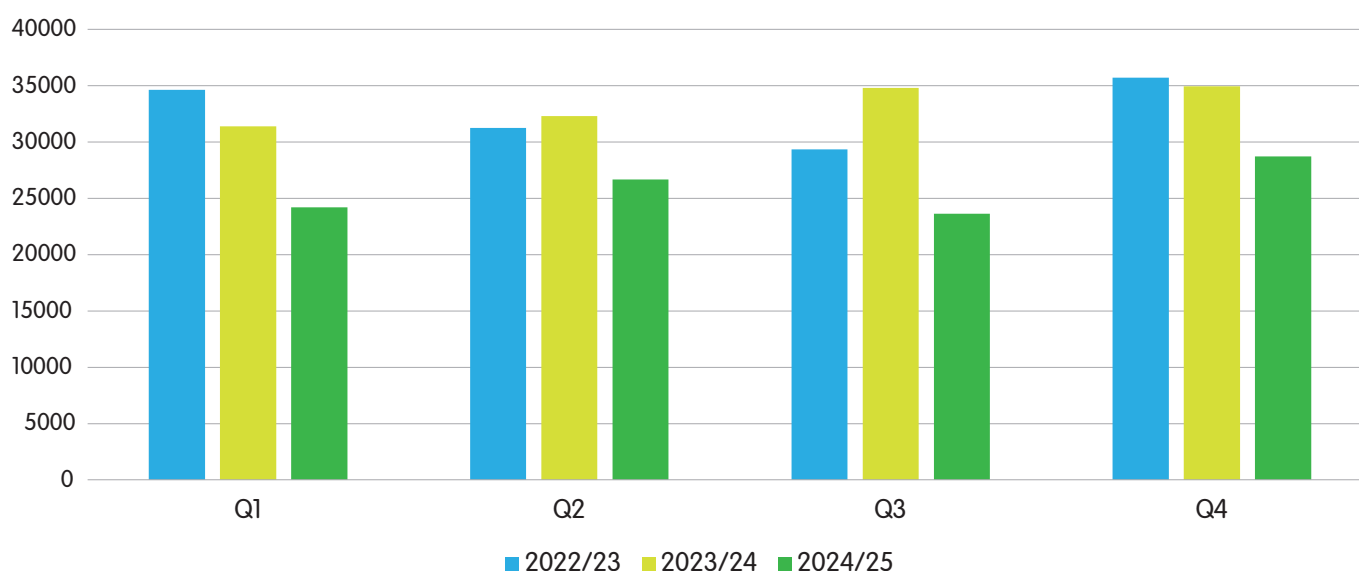


stating they chose ALN as a result of an online search for adoption agencies.

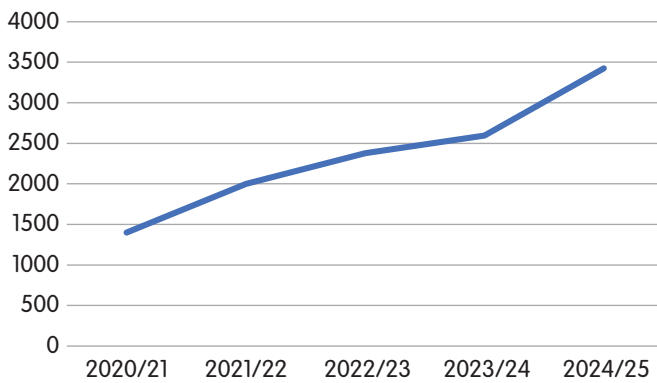
This year we have undertaken a significant move to a new website hosting partner who is more able to support our future planned developments. The website has been updated to provide a clearer pathway for other groups seeking information from Adopt London, such as adoptive parents and adopted adults, and we have completed work ensuring the website is accessible.

Website metrics are tracked to support our work in targeting recruitment and to ensure those who need to access support can do this. Adopt London website page views remain very high,

Adopt London website page total views

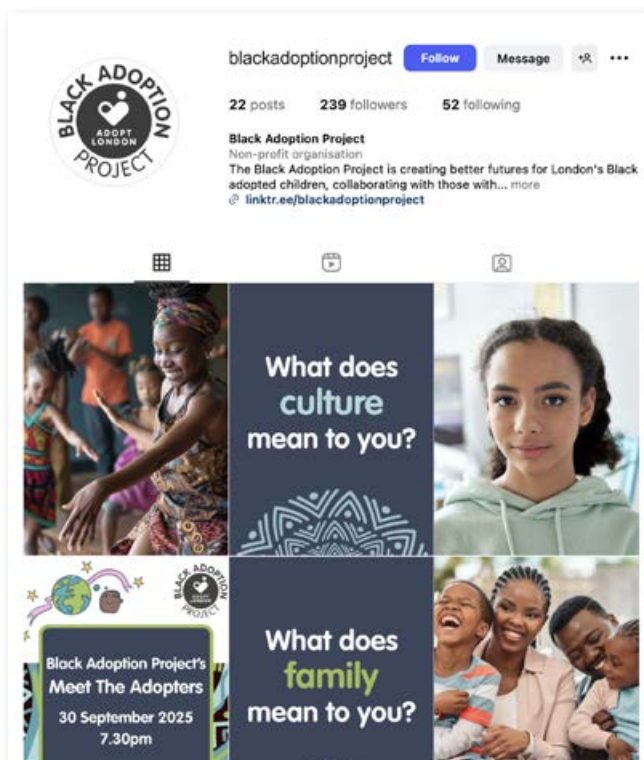


## Social media followers



with a total of 103,245 page views in 2024/25. However, there was a drop this year from the previous two years which may reflect **national trends** around a reduction in adopter recruitment but may also in part be attributed to the website hosting changes made this year. Website data will be monitored through 2025/26 to gain a better understanding of these changes.

The Adopt London social media channels post regularly to communicate and inform a range of audiences impacted by adoption. Our social media followers continue to organically increase and using these channels can be an effective way to engage people in London who are considering adoption but not yet ready to begin an assessment. This year has seen a significant increase in follower numbers due to the introduction of new **Black Adoption Project** channels on Instagram and LinkedIn.



## Enquiries and providing information

Our virtual information sessions have run monthly throughout the year, and we have reintroduced some in-person sessions to provide attendees with different ways to engage with ALN. This year 248 households attended an ALN information session, an increase from 205 households in 2023/24.

From those who attended and provided feedback after an information session this year, 99% rated the session as highly informative, and 98% would recommend the session to a family or friend who was interested in adoption.

*"The willingness to try to help every potential adopter – not the wrong fit, just the wrong time – really reassured me. Not judgmental and very open to trying to make things work."*

*"Hearing about the processes, and the utmost care and diligence you do for children and society. It was beautiful and touching to hear. For example the way in which you will probe us to uncover vulnerabilities to ensure we are resilient."*

*"Very informative and useful session. Great to get so much detail about both the process, and the children needing adoption. Lots of time for questions too. What I found most interesting as a single person was that I could be considered for types of adoption I would have told myself is not possible."*

*"We have attended other information sessions with a VAA and we found the detail of information was much clearer. Clarity around the steps for the adoption process were really useful."*



"You were all very open, honest, caring and patient. I felt safe on the call even though I had been nervous."

"We found it very informative. We have attended welcome sessions with [two VAAs in London] earlier this year and found your session to be far clearer and concise in the information given."

We have continued to deliver our popular monthly ALN Meet the Adopter sessions virtually this year (in addition to our new Black Adoption Project sessions), with 218 households attending a session, a drop compared to 271 households in 2023/24 but still a very strong level of attendance. Our adoptive parent speakers have a wide range of experiences and share these openly with attendees in response to questions during the event. The rotation of speakers at events and their different backgrounds and pathways into adoption highlight to prospective adopters that there are many different and valid adopter experiences. The sessions provide a balanced view of the joys and challenges of adoption, with very realistic experiences shared of the hardest parts of adoptive parenting.

"The one struggle I had before coming to the session was erased as I was worried about if I will feel a sense of belonging towards my adoptive children, but both adoptive parents clarified that tonight, so thank you."

"I found the part about post-adoption depression really powerful. It's not something that's often talked about, and it was comforting to hear honest reflections on what that experience can be like."

"I felt the adopters were approachable, open and insightful. It gave me a real insight into the process and what to expect and in short gave me hope being that I will be a single adopter and they were both single adopters."

"The session was great and very informative. It was great to hear about the experience of the adoption process and the role of the foster carers. Also, hearing the real story about how it might get hard was really good. It was great, and I will definitely come for more sessions."

"This session was really helpful, moving and inspiring - thank you. The email reminders were really helpful, and the informal personal style of the meeting was great, it made it feel like a safe space to ask questions."

"I found the real stories from the parents as an eye opener, my perception was that everyone has to be perfect before they can adopt but the vast experiences really helped."

67% of attendees at information sessions and 55% at Meet The Adopter events live in one of the six ALN boroughs, whilst other households attending live in other London boroughs and bordering areas, which is a positive indicator of ALN being an attractive adoption agency to approach.


Overall enquiry numbers have remained high, although lower than the exceptionally high number in 2023/24 – likely due to many adoption agencies in London not taking on new assessments in that period. Of those who attended an information session this year, 25%



## Prospective adopter enquiries

Number of households who...	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Made an enquiry	714	827	873	993	878
Signed up to an information session	493	516	214	311	444
Attended an information session	351	349	143	205	248
Submitted an Expression of Interest application	128	136	50	40	64
Started Stage 1 assessment	26	18	14	16	31

went on to submit an Expression of Interest application compared to 20% in 2023/24. 48% of those who submitted an Expression of Interest then went on to start a stage 1 assessment compared to 40% in the previous year, an consequence of increased adopter assessment capacity.

The  **'Am I Ready To Adopt'** tool is an online questionnaire which helps prospective adopters to begin early preparation. The tool provides on-the-spot information, advice and guidance to people considering adoption and also provides a bespoke action plan based on the individual's responses as to how best to prepare.



In addition to the work of the **Black Adoption Project**, ALN has been working in partnership with Adoption Partnership South East (APSE), an RAA covering Kent, Medway and Bexley, to understand whether Black prospective adopters from their region would consider being assessed by Adopt London North. APSE have identified a number of enquiries from Black prospective adopters who have previously lived in London and relocated to Kent, however they have a small proportion of Black children in their adoption system. By entering an assessment with ALN instead of APSE, Black prospective adopters will receive more specific advice and support and are likely to be matched to a child more quickly. As part of this scheme, ALN offer additional financial support with travel and overnight accommodation if attending training over multiple consecutive days, so that APSE adopters are not disadvantaged financially from choosing to be assessed by ALN. This pilot will be ongoing with reviews across both agencies to understand the impact.



# Preparing and approving adoptive parents

## Approval of prospective adopters

Over 2022/23 – 2023/24 our approval figures were particularly low primarily due to limited capacity within the recruitment & assessment team and the need to suspend recruitment as a result. Capacity in the team was impacted by increasing numbers of **non-agency adoption** applications, and a greater number of complex prospective adopter assessments requiring longer and more resource intensive assessment periods.

As a result of these challenges, the ALN Governance Board agreed to support a pilot to increase the size of the recruitment & assessment team with three additional staff members as an investment to reduce the increased spend on inter-agency placements that occurs when approvals are low. This pilot meant that recruitment could be reopened and waiting lists reduced as a greater number of prospective adopters were allocated for assessment. With the success of the pilot, the three additional posts have been made permanent and approval numbers have risen significantly this year. A further increase is projected for 2025/26.

Assessments have continued to be of a high standard as evidenced by the quality assurance feedback from our **adoption panel**, and most adoptive parents are matched quickly, with social workers identifying potential in-house links prior to the adopter's approval. At the end of March 2024 although 12 approved households had not yet been matched with a child at panel, only 1 of these did not have an active link with an ALN child under consideration. This evidences how successfully our adopters are matching the needs of our children, but also highlights the urgency for adopter recruitment to increase further.

## Prospective adopter preparation

This year we have undertaken work to strengthen and develop our prospective adopter preparation to ensure our approved adopters continue to be suitable and fully equipped to meet the needs of ALN children. Preparation training for all prospective adopters now covers the following areas:

- 1 day foundation training introduces the main areas of learning at the start of the assessment process and highlights personal learning and development that prospective adopters need to complete.

## Adoptive household approvals

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
31	27	33	19	12	24	13	9	22

- 3 day preparation training is now co-facilitated by an adoptive parent and has been fully reviewed this year. This experiential training covers learning areas in much more depth including children's emotional & psychological needs, understanding the journey through care and impact of children's experiences prior to adoption, supporting children's identity and links with birth family, managing behaviour and therapeutic parenting, preparation for the matching, transitions, and post-placement periods.
- 1.5 day early permanence training co-facilitated by early permanence adoptive parents. This training provides the information needed for prospective adopters to decide whether they could support an early permanence placement themselves, but also gives a greater understanding of the care planning and care proceedings process, views and experiences of birth parents, and supporting contact.
- 1 day culturally diverse adoption training has been developed and introduced for the first time, replacing an optional transracial adoption training run by an external agency. This training is co-facilitated with a transracially adopted person and helps prospective adopters develop their understanding of the identity needs of adopted children and how these can be supported. The training recognises that all adoption has cross-cultural elements even when the child and adoptive family are from similar racial backgrounds, it supports adoptive parents to think more deeply about racism and prejudice, and to consider how they will support identity challenges their child may face.





- 1 day paediatric first aid training has been introduced this year following learning from serious case reviews and to ensure that all those who may go on to have a child placed for early permanence will meet fostering regulation standards.
- Evening family & friends training workshops are now available for anyone within the prospective adopter's network. These workshops provide an overview of modern adoption and focus particularly on ways in which family & friends can support the new adoptive family.

## Assessments of foster carers and connected people

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 not changed significantly this year and remain low compared to the 2021–2023 period, however there are indications of higher referral numbers towards the end of 2024/25 and start of 2025/26. Our processes for referral and joint decision making between borough and ALN remain embedded but there are significant pressures around assessments of foster carers in proceedings due to the views of courts and Children's Guardians, and difficulties with foster carers asking to be considered for adoption at a very late stage of care planning. Foster carer assessments in general tend to be particularly complex and often encounter delays, and therefore further impact recruitment capacity. It is however important to note that adoption by a foster carer can be a very positive care plan for some children in the right circumstances.

## Non-agency adoptions

On behalf of partner local authorities, ALN are legally required to provide advice and assess any resident who wishes to privately apply for an adoption order for a child in their care (non-agency adoption) and can be directed by the court to complete an assessment within a specific timescale. The Adopt London website provides comprehensive information and advice on this subject, and ALN offer meetings to advise on the suitability of an adoption application and in many cases to suggest alternative ways of gaining the legal security needed.

In 2024/25 these assessments have continued to be requested at a high frequency and are of a legally complex nature, with many raising ethical issues in relation to international adoption and surrogacy. They continue to negatively impact recruitment capacity and ALN are not permitted in law to charge for these services. Following a detailed audit of this work in 2023/24, ALN have presented our concerns this year to the RAA Leaders network and in a meeting with Adoption England and the Department of Education, with the hope of influencing wider change.



### Referrals for foster carers & connected people to be assessed as adoptive parents

Borough	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Barnet	1	1	2	3	2	1
Camden	0	0	1	1	1	3
Enfield	0	3	4	3	0	1
Hackney	1	2	3	2	1	2
Haringey	0	0	2	2	0	0
Islington	0	0	5	6	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

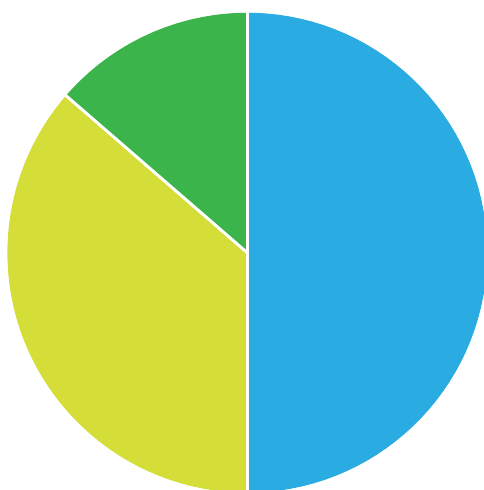


## Characteristics of approved adopters

Approved adoptive households continue to be diverse in terms of family structure, with 50% being heterosexual couples, 36% same-sex couples, and 14% single adopters.

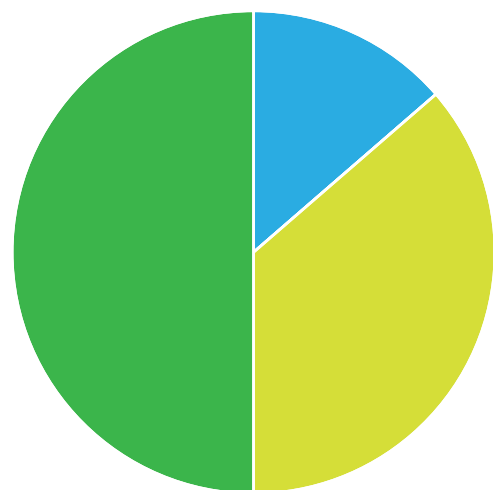
The proportion of approved households considering older children up to the age of 7 years (and 1 household up to the age of 8 years) remained high this year, with 50% of approved households being open to consider children within this age category. 36% were open to considering children up to 4 years, and only 3 households, 14% limited their consideration to children under 3 years.

**Family structure**



- Heterosexual couple
- Same-sex couples
- Single adopters

**Approval criteria – age of children**

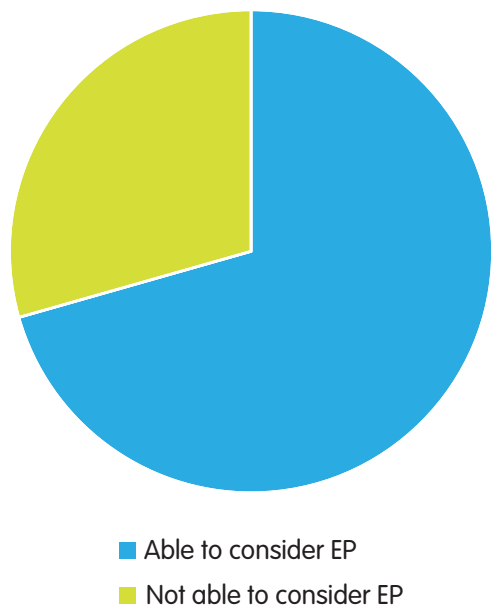


- Under 3 years
- Up to 4 years
- Up to 7 years+

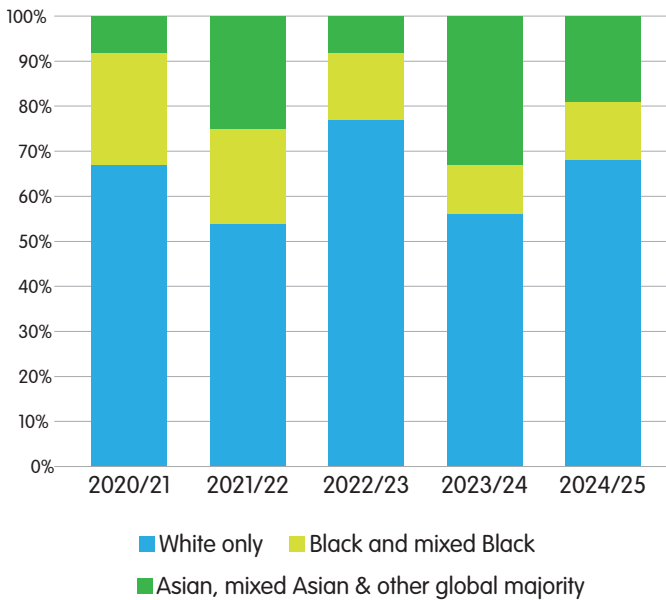
5 of the approved households were foster carers or connected people to the child they hoped to adopt as so were not eligible for early permanence. With these households removed from the figures, a significant increase of 71% of approved households were able to consider an early permanence placement this year. This shows an annual increase from 40% in 2022/23, and 57% in 2023/24, at the same time as overall approval numbers have increased. These figures indicate that our work with Adopt London on the **early permanence project**, and a move to make early permanence training a mandatory element of **adopter preparation**, have helped us to increase the number of approved households available for early permanence. Despite this success more work needs to be done to increase the overall number of approved adopters available at any one time for early permanence, and particularly those from global majority backgrounds, so that we can ensure early permanence remains a possibility for all children identified as benefiting from this.

This year 31% of approved households had at least one person of a global majority ethnicity and 68% of households had adopters only of white British or other white ethnicities. Whilst we have had success in increasing the overall numbers of approved adopters and further progress in this remains essential, it is also critical for our Black and mixed Black ethnicity children that the learning and pilots from the **Black Adoption Project** described in this report are utilised to ensure the proportion of approved Black adopters increases significantly in coming years. **Children’s data** shows us that on average, at least 50% of children matched for adoption by ALN annually are from global majority backgrounds, with 60% of these being from Black & mixed Black ethnicities. This highlights the work that still needs to be undertaken to ensure our approved adoptive parents reflect the backgrounds of children identified for adoption.

Approved adopters able to consider early permanence



Ethnicity of approved households





# Planning for children

## Adoption permanency planning

Each partner borough is responsible for permanency planning and tracking of their children. A family finder from ALN 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. Shared permanency planning and referral arrangements are working effectively.

## Children with a plan for adoption

Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Best Interests Decisions for adoption have increased further this year up to a high of 84 decisions compared to a five year average of 66 decisions. The number of decisions however resulting in placement orders made by the court has not increased overall, with 40 orders made this year compared to a five year average of 43 orders. Adoptive placement numbers have also remained stable, at 36 placements compared to a five year average of 37 placements. In all cases, time does elapse between the Best Interests Decision, the placement order being made, and the child being placed for adoption; therefore it is possible that the increasing level of Best Interests Decisions is an indicator of increased placement orders and adoptive placements in 2025/26.



## Best Interests Decisions

Data provided by borough's own ASG national returns

Data for previous years may differ from previous reports if later amended by the borough with the ASG

	Total ADM Best Interests Decisions					% children taken into care before turning 5 with a Best Interests Decision*			
Borough	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Barnet	13	5	14	20	29	24%	28%	49%	40%
Camden	5	4	9	9	11	12%	22%	36%	30%
Enfield	15	11	17	18	18	23%	34%	25%	35%
Hackney	12	2	4	12	11	12%	5%	19%	23%
Haringey	16	7	16	8	5	44%	19%	18%	32%
Islington	4	7	9	11	10	22%	35%	16%	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>32%</b>

\*This data can only be reported a year in arrears

## Placements and placement orders Best Interests Decisions

Data provided by borough's own ASG national returns

Data for previous years may differ from previous reports if later amended by the borough with the ASG

	Total adoptive placements					Total Placement Orders				
Borough	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Barnet	2	8	4	9	11	10	5	5	18	18
Camden	8	3	5	5	3	2	5	5	6	4
Enfield	3	12	15	8	7	9	11	11	12	3
Hackney	5	10	3	3	2	9	3	2	7	8
Haringey	8	10	6	10	8	17	8	16	8	3
Islington	3	3	5	1	5	1	2	3	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>40</b>

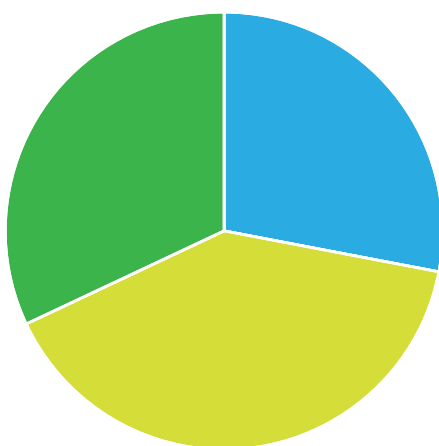


The figures may also be an indicator of an increasing number of placement order applications which are unsuccessful in court, resulting in a different care plan for the child than originally intended by the local authority. Over the last 3 years, 17% of Best Interest Decisions made in ALN boroughs resulted in care proceedings concluding without a placement order compared to a 12% England average. Of these change of plans, the data tells us that 28% of plans for adoption did not proceed due to a change in the child's needs (suggesting potential consensus between the local authority and court about the adoption plan ending), where as 40% changed because the court did not grant a placement order. These figures are almost identical to England averages.





### Reasons for changes to Best Interest Decisions in the last 3 years



- Child's needs changed
- Court did not grant a placement order
- Other reason (data does not specify)

The ASG national adoption data collection has provided data showing the proportion of children taken into care before turning 5 who go on to have a Best Interests Decision made (this data is not yet available for 2024/25). These figures suggest that the proportion of children within ALN who come into care under the age of 5 and go on to have a Best Interests Decision has been increasing slightly, and it is noted that the most recent figures show greater consistency across boroughs than in previous years. A higher or lower rate is not necessarily positive or negative, but provides an opportunity for boroughs to look at permanency planning outcomes for children under 5 who did not have an ADM decision, and to reassure themselves that these decisions were appropriate.



# Placing children with adoptive parents

## Family Finding

Strong connections between the recruitment & assessment team and the family finding team mean that by the time a placement order is made we can establish whether there is a potential in-house adoptive family available. If an in-house family may be a good match for a child, they will be considered initially before the search is broadened to look for prospective adopters from other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs).

Within the Adopt London **matching project** we have now established stronger and quicker family finding links between the four RAAs – this

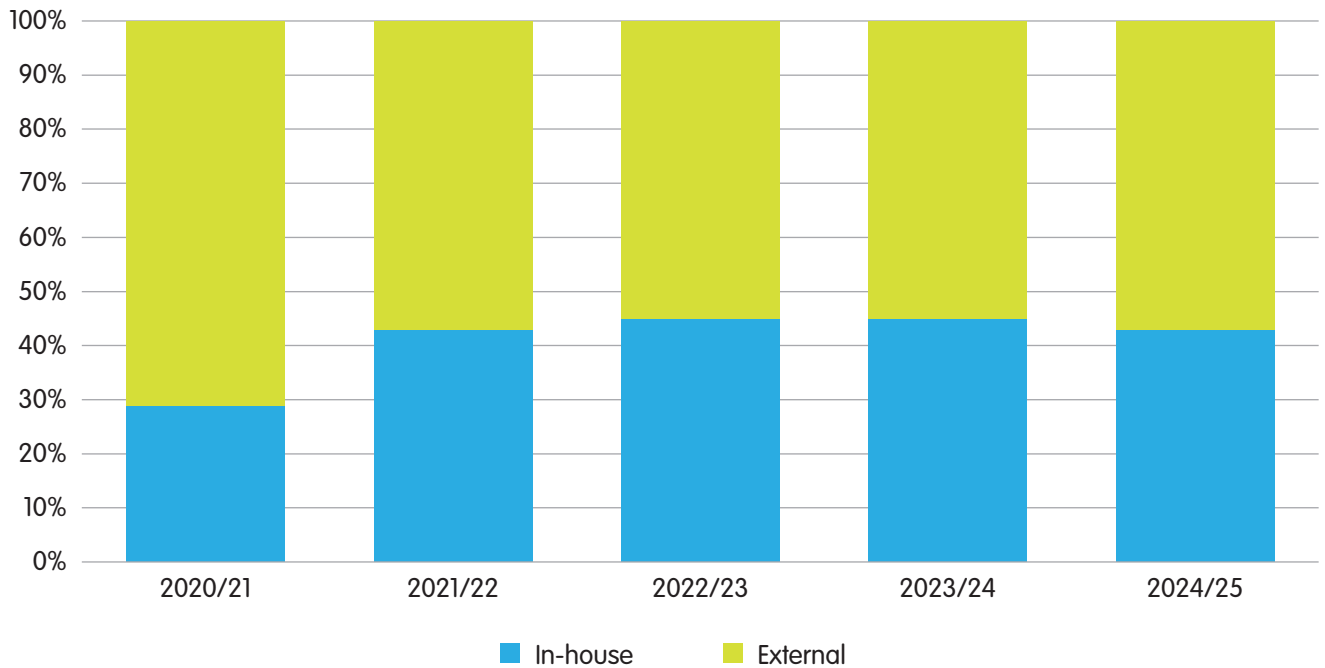
includes Adopt London play sessions where prospective adopters can informally meet and play alongside children and their foster carers, and enhanced Adopt London profile booklets to ensure information about potential Adopt London adopters is readily available to family finders.

Regular family finding review meetings are held between the family finder and the borough social work team after a placement order is granted to monitor and progress family finding decisions.

The national family finding database Link Maker is used by family finders to search for external placements where suitable ALN or Adopt London placements are not available.



## Type of adoptive placement for children matched



### In-house placements

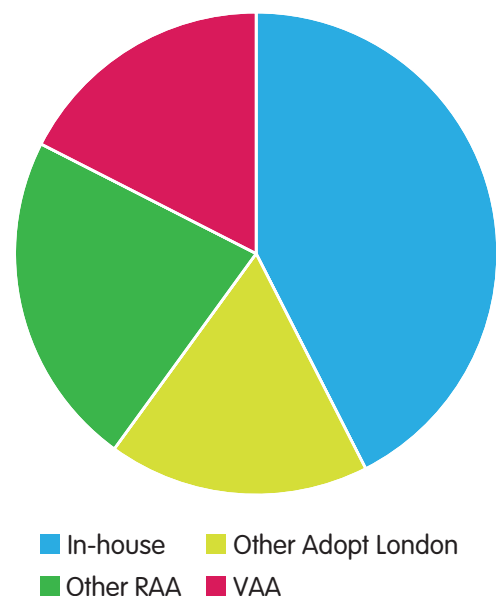
A number of strong reasons why it is a priority for ALN to place as many children with our own adoptive parents as possible have been outlined in previous reports. We continue to find in-house placements more stable and less likely to experience early disruption, and it is easier to quickly establish robust and appropriate support to in-house placements when difficulties arise.

We have been successful in maintaining a high proportion of in-house placements this year, despite a predicted drop due to adopter approval levels being very low in the last few years. 43% of children matched during 2024/25 went to live with an in-house family. This compares to 45% in 2023/24. As we increase our adopter approvals further over coming years we expect to see this proportion increase, and for us to be less reliant on external placements – particularly those with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs).

Not every adopter will be matched in-house and we therefore support adopters who are ready to begin family finding on a wider basis, particularly where they have very specific matching requirements. However most adopters appreciate the benefits of an in-house placement and are prepared to wait.

In addition to these overall figures, we have seen a significant reduction in the use of VAA placements overall, which had historically made up around 50% of placements. This has been due to an increase in other Adopt London placements (18%) supported by the work of the Adopt London **matching project**, and a gradual increase in the number of other RAA placements (23%) particularly across the wider South East in the Kent, Essex, and Hertfordshire areas. A combination of these factors has meant that VAA placements made up only 18% of matches this year.

### Breakdown of placement type for children matched



## Location of adoptive placements



## Location of placements

We continue to aim to place as many children as possible 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 before looking at placements further afield, however we consider the location of a placement as an important factor when weighing up the strengths or vulnerabilities of potential adoptive families. This year 85% of children matched for adoption went to live with adoptive families in London and the South-East, with 15% of children (6 individuals) moving further afield to live with their adoptive family.

## Disruptions of adoptive placements

None of our adoptive parents have been involved in a disrupted placement since ALN began in 2019 and there have been no adoptive placement disruptions of an ALN child in 2024/25. A decision about a placement of two brothers from Barnet which had been considered at panel and agreed by the ADM was rescinded during the very early stages of introductions as

the professional network involved had emerging concerns about whether the adoptive parents could meet the children's complex emotional needs. This case was an example of strong collaborative working across the borough and ALN to identify concerns efficiently and have open and honest discussions so that a decision could be made quickly.

The number of children whose placements disrupt prior to an adoption order remains extremely low. Arrangements are in place to track all disruptions across Adopt London and to share themes and learning from these.

## 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.



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

Borough	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Barnet	2	1	1	11	11
Camden	4	1	2	3	4
Enfield	8	0	4	11	3
Hackney	11	1	1	6	6
Haringey	11	6	10	13	2
Islington	1	0	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>29</b>

This year the number of children waiting with active family finding at the end of March 2024 has reduced from a particularly high figure in 2023/24. These figures exclude children who are already linked / where a link is being prepared for matching panel, whose foster carers are being assessed as adoptive parents, and whose plan for adoption has been changed or put on hold. Of the 29 children with active family finding, 38% of children had a placement order very recently or within the last 6 months.

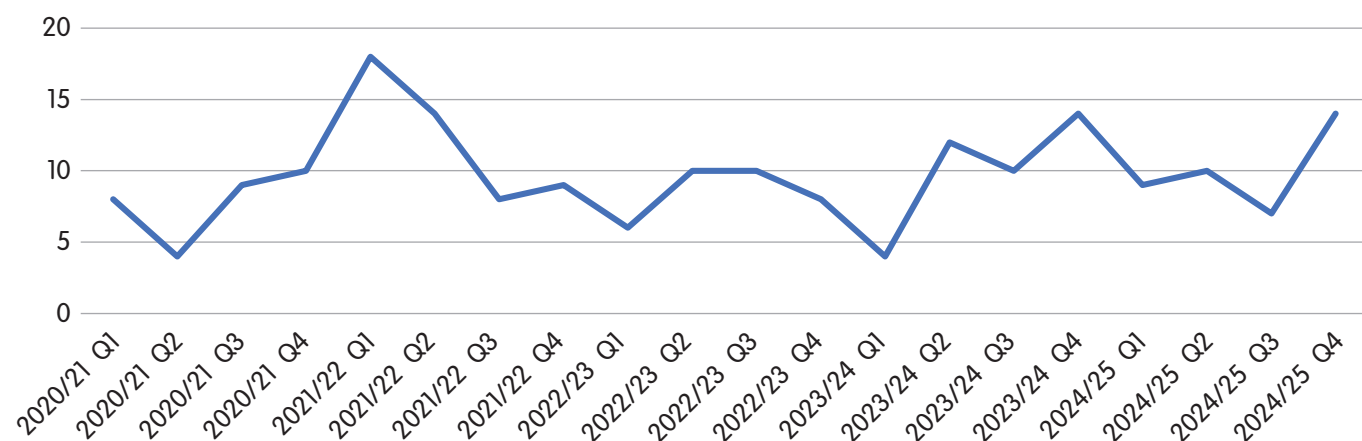
## Adoptive matches made

The number of children matched with adopters has remained stable this year. Overall the data indicates that although there are annual variations and volatile quarterly variations, the number of children being placed for adoption across the ALN partnership is reasonably consistent and is not in decline, with an average of 39 children matched for adoption annually.

## Number of adoptive matches for all boroughs

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
50	29	31	49	34	40	40

## Number of adoptive matches for all boroughs by quarter



## Number of adoptive matches

Borough	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Barnet	2	10	4	8	16
Camden	7	4	6	6	1
Enfield	4	12	14	7	11
Hackney	8	8	2	4	1
Haringey	6	13	5	12	8
Islington	4	2	3	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

## Characteristics of children matched for adoption

The number of children matched for adoption at the same time and in the same placement as their sibling increased again this year but remains a minority of all children matched for adoption (5 sibling groups accounting for 10 children, compared to 30 children not matched in a sibling group). These figures do not include children who were matched with the adoptive parents of a sibling who had already been earlier placed for adoption.

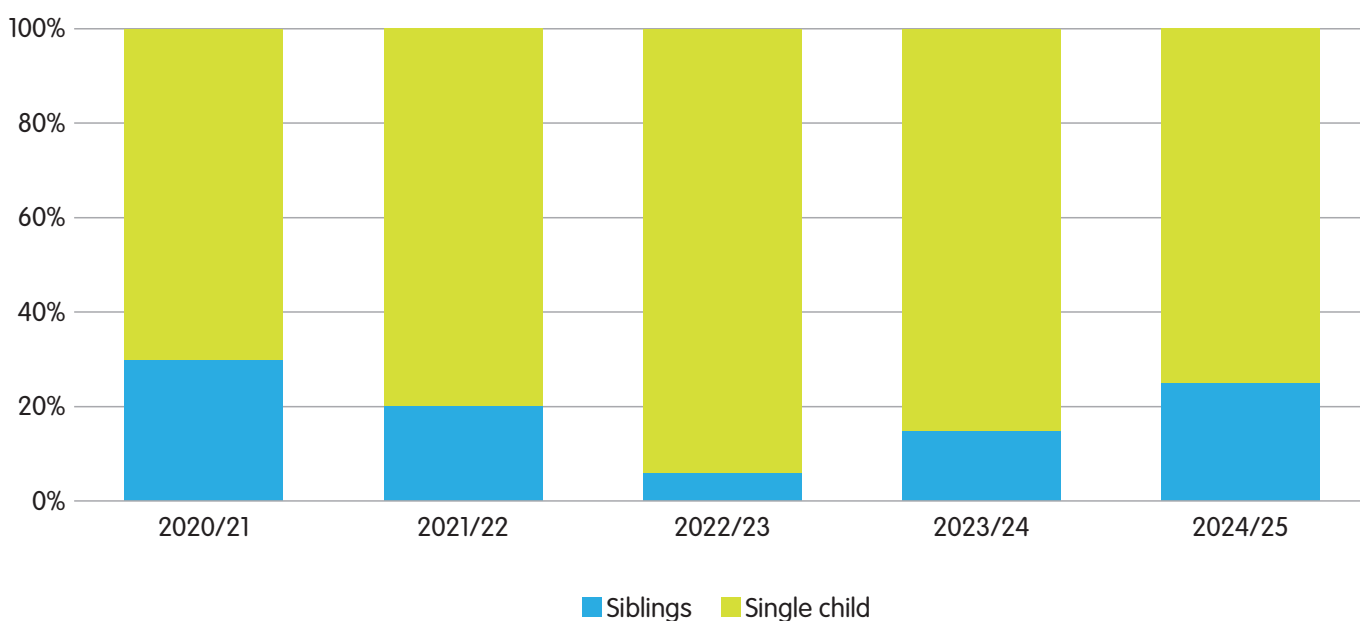
However there also continue to be a high number of sibling groups waiting for adoptive placements, with 41% of the children with active family finding being in a sibling group (12 children in 6 sibling groups of 2), reminding

us of the additional challenges in identifying suitable adoptive families for siblings and the need to continue to focus on this area of adopter recruitment.

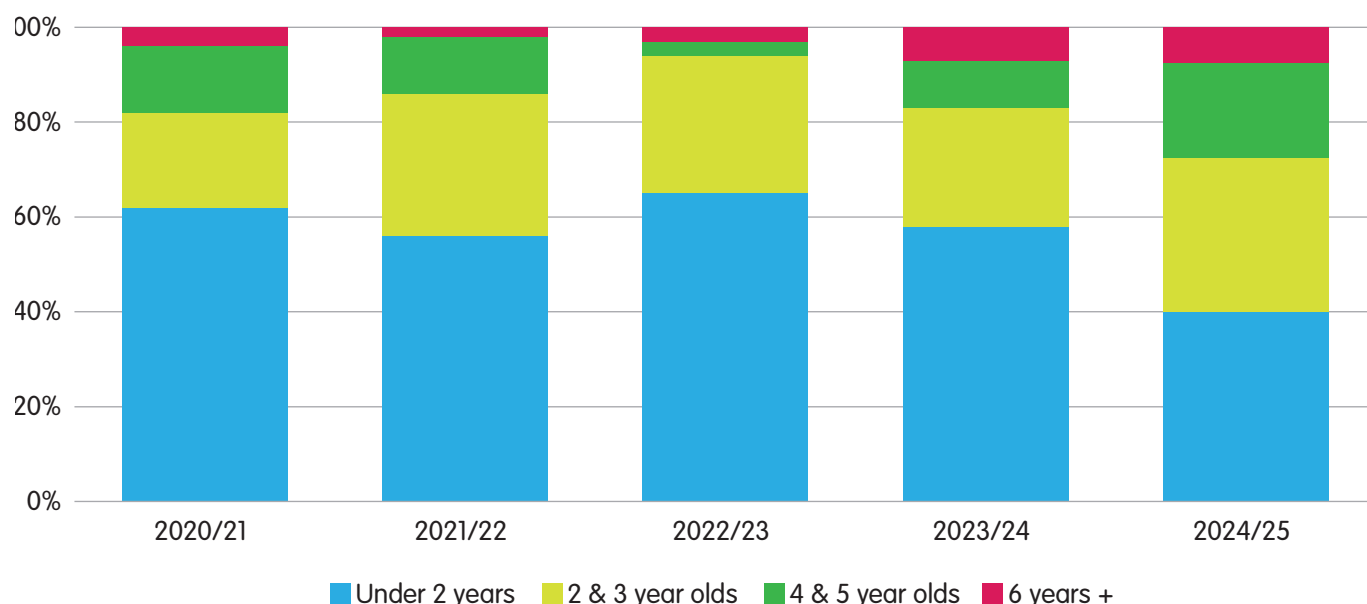
There has been a slightly higher proportion of children matched at older ages this year, with 40% matched under the age of 2 compared to 58% in 2023/24. The most significant increase has been in children matched at ages 4 and 5 years old, with this making up 20% of children matched. 3 children were matched at 6 years or above, with the oldest child matched at 7 years.

In this data children's ethnicities have been grouped into broader categories to illustrate the types of adoptive placements that are needed for us to be able to consider placements for children that are not fully transracial. Overall, 62.5% of the

### Children matched for adoption in sibling groups



## Ages of children matched for adoption



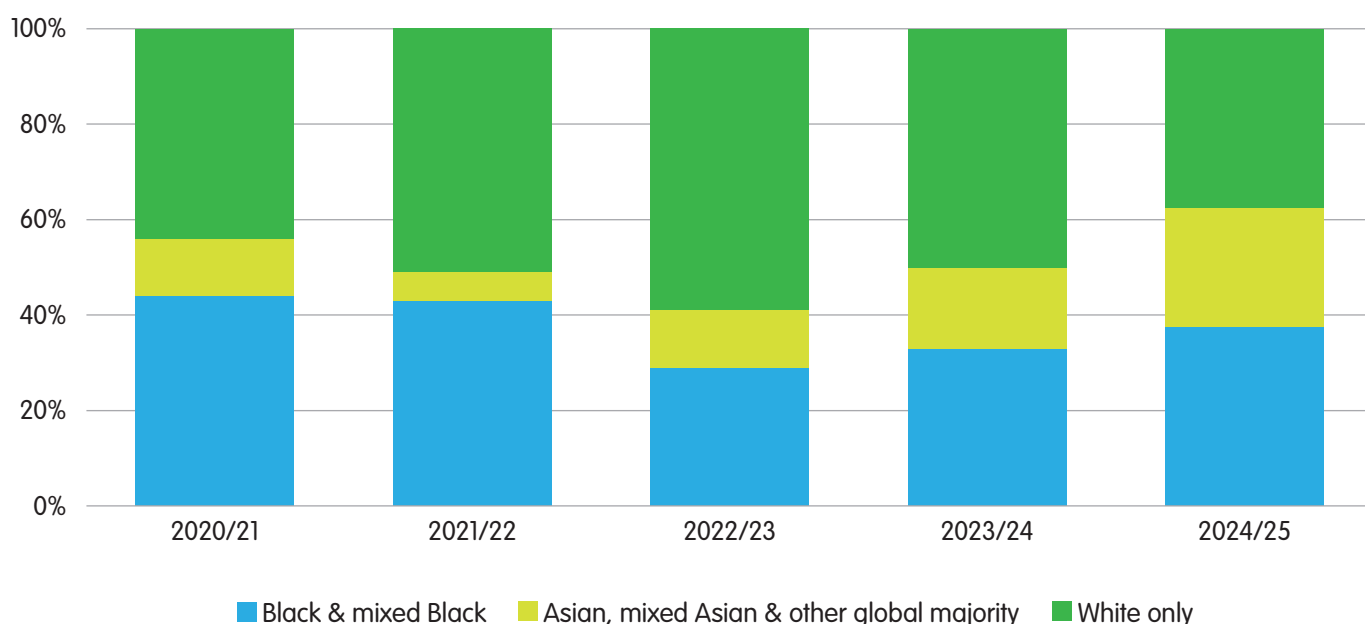
children matched for adoption were from global majority backgrounds this year, an increase from 50% in 2023/24. This is the highest proportion of global majority children matched by ALN in the last 5 years, with global majority children on average making up 52% of children. ALN have been identified by Adoption England as being the RAA with the highest proportion of global majority children in England.

When considering all children from global majority backgrounds, 60% of these (15 out of 25 children) were from Black and mixed Black ethnicity backgrounds. Looking at the breakdown

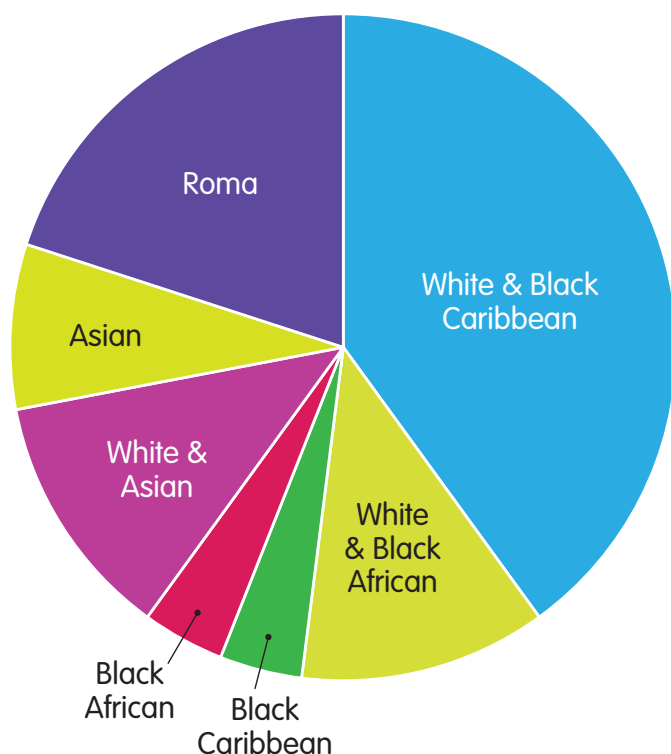
of children's ethnicities further shows us that the largest group are children from mixed white & Black Caribbean backgrounds, making up 40% of all global majority children and 67% of all children from Black and mixed Black backgrounds.

Although it is important to categorise ethnicities to provide an understanding of the broad picture and inform adopter recruitment, children's ethnic backgrounds in reality are complex, with many children matched for adoption having 3 or more immediate ethnic backgrounds, with uncertainty around some children's heritage.

## Ethnicity category of children matched for adoption



### Children from global majority backgrounds



Our new **culturally diverse adoption training** aims to provide all prospective adopters with a greater understanding of the rich racial and cultural heritage of children placed for adoption, and their enormous responsibility to support and nurture a child's understanding of this as they grow up.

### Early permanence placements

There were 7 children placed for early permanence with prospective adoptive parents during 2024/25, a reduction from the significantly higher figure of 12 last year. Availability of approved early permanence adopters, particularly for children from global majority backgrounds, remains a challenge and a key area of focus in adopter recruitment. Progress has been made this year in increasing the proportion of adopters approved by ALN who are open to an early permanence placement, but due to overall shortages of adopters this is not yet enough to ensure a suitable early permanence placement is available for every child identified as benefitting from this. It is important that work still continues to spread awareness with social work teams in boroughs and ensure early permanence is considered as part of early care planning for children where adoption is a likely outcome of care proceedings.

All of the ALN early permanence placements that have concluded their court processes have resulted in the children remaining with their early permanence carers for adoption. However, all adoptive parents are trained and prepared for the possibility that the outcome of care proceedings may be for the child to return to live with birth parents or a connected person.

### Early permanence referrals and placements, by borough

Borough	Early permanence placements made				
	Placed for EP in 2020/21	Placed for EP in 2021/22	Placed for EP in 2022/23	Placed for EP in 2023/24	Placed for EP in 2024/25
Barnet	0	0	6	3	4
Hackney	2	0	0	1	1
Camden	1	2	0	3	0
Enfield	0	2	0	1	2
Haringey	3	1	0	2	0
Islington	0	1	0	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

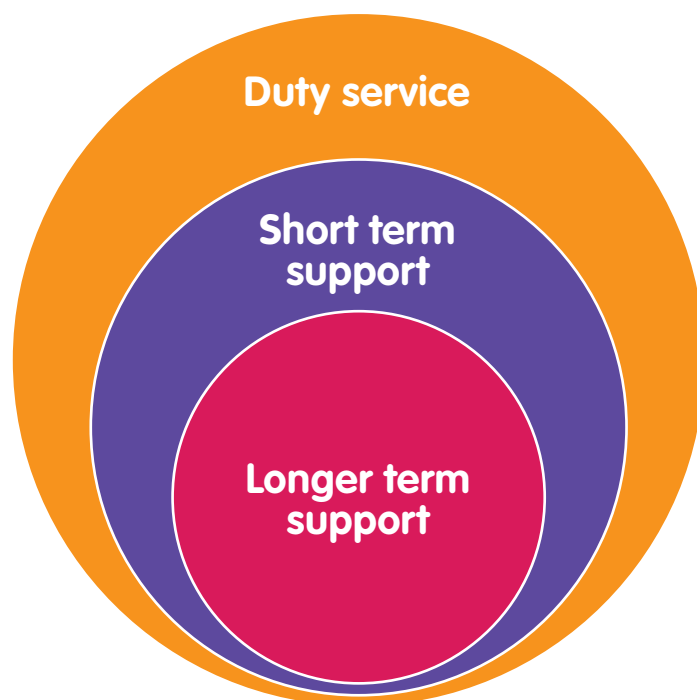


# Providing support to adoptive families and others

## Support to families and adopted adults

The adoption support team provide support to adoptive families and adult adoptees living in our boroughs, and provide 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 & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) and access to specialist training. Families requiring longer-term or more complex social work support are allocated to a social worker 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.

Demand for support has remained consistently high, with a lot of pressure on the capacity of the adoption support team. Families continue to be impacted by pressures on other specialist services such as CAMHS and specialist mental health support, which means that they are increasingly dependent on the support they can access through the ASGSF. Families have been particularly impacted by governmental delays in decision making over the future of the ASGSF, leading to an announcement at the start of 2025/26 that the amount of funding families can access will be significantly reduced whilst a wider **review of the fund is awaited.**



As a result of the level of demand for support, there is a waiting time for families to have an assessment of need completed by a social worker which is constantly monitored, and we have created waiting lists for non-urgent types of support including reviews of contact and access to records for adult adoptees. Every attempt is made to prioritise responding to adoptive families with immediate support needs as quickly as possible to prevent family breakdown, which means that waiting lists for adult adoptees (access to records requests) and contact support are hard to reduce. Families in urgent need of support are also referred to the relevant borough where appropriate. We are in the process of undertaking a full review of casework to confirm consistency across the service and ensure we are appropriately targeting the provision of longer-term support.

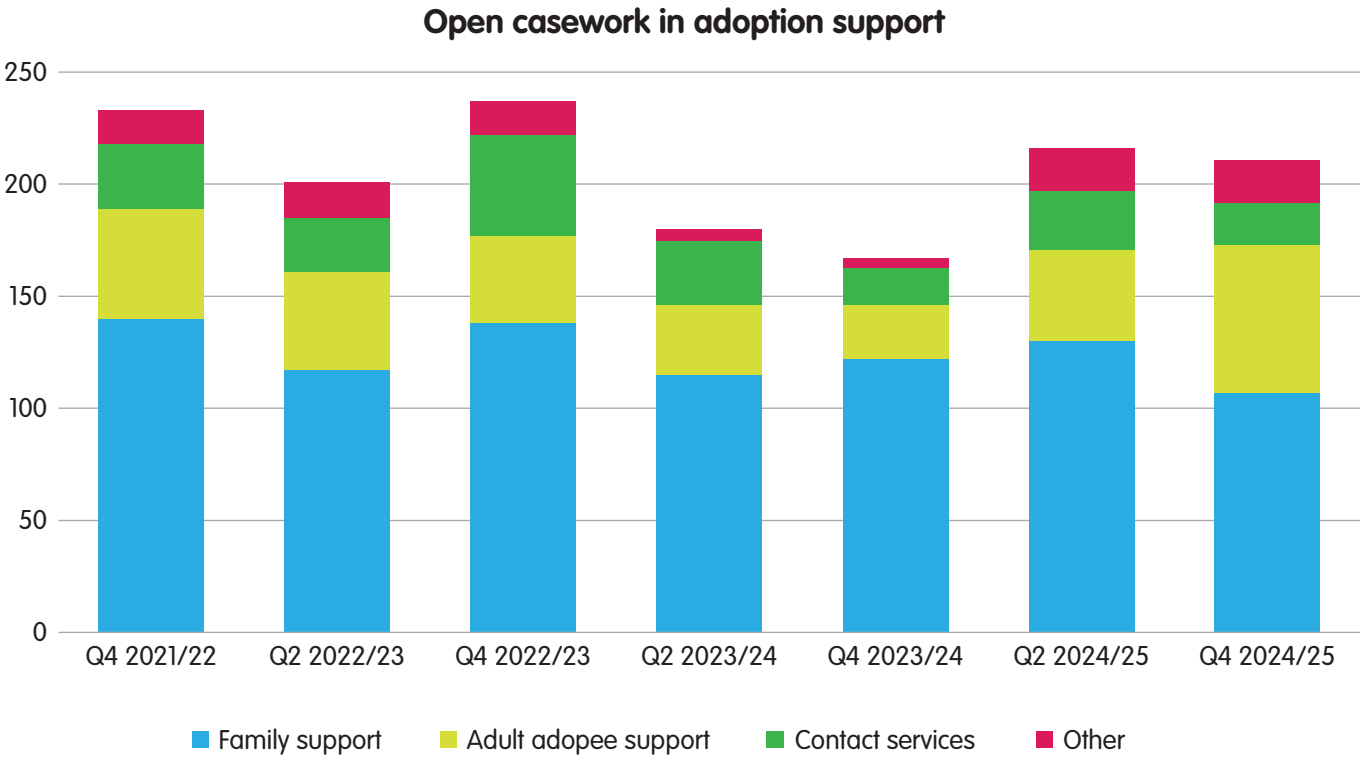
Despite pressures facing our adoption support team, families value having an adoption-informed approach to support, and the team work hard to build supportive, trauma-informed relationships with families that increase their ability to manage the difficulties they face. As part of **our work with Adopt London**, we are striving to grow the early targeted support available to all adoptive families and other groups impacted by adoption through the expansion of group support, specialist parent training programmes, and an Adopt London clinical offer.

We currently use a snapshot audit monitoring system to understand the level and types of adoption support casework in the service,

providing us with greater insights into the types of need that are most prevalent.

At the time of the most recent audit in January 2025, 40% of family support cases required significant social work support in addition to ASGSF therapeutic provision and signposting, consistent with findings from January 2024. Through a pool of specialist sessional workers (mostly retired adoption support social workers) we have been able to increase the number of adopted adults cases that we can allocate, with 66 cases being supported in January 2025 compared to 24 cases at the same time the previous year.

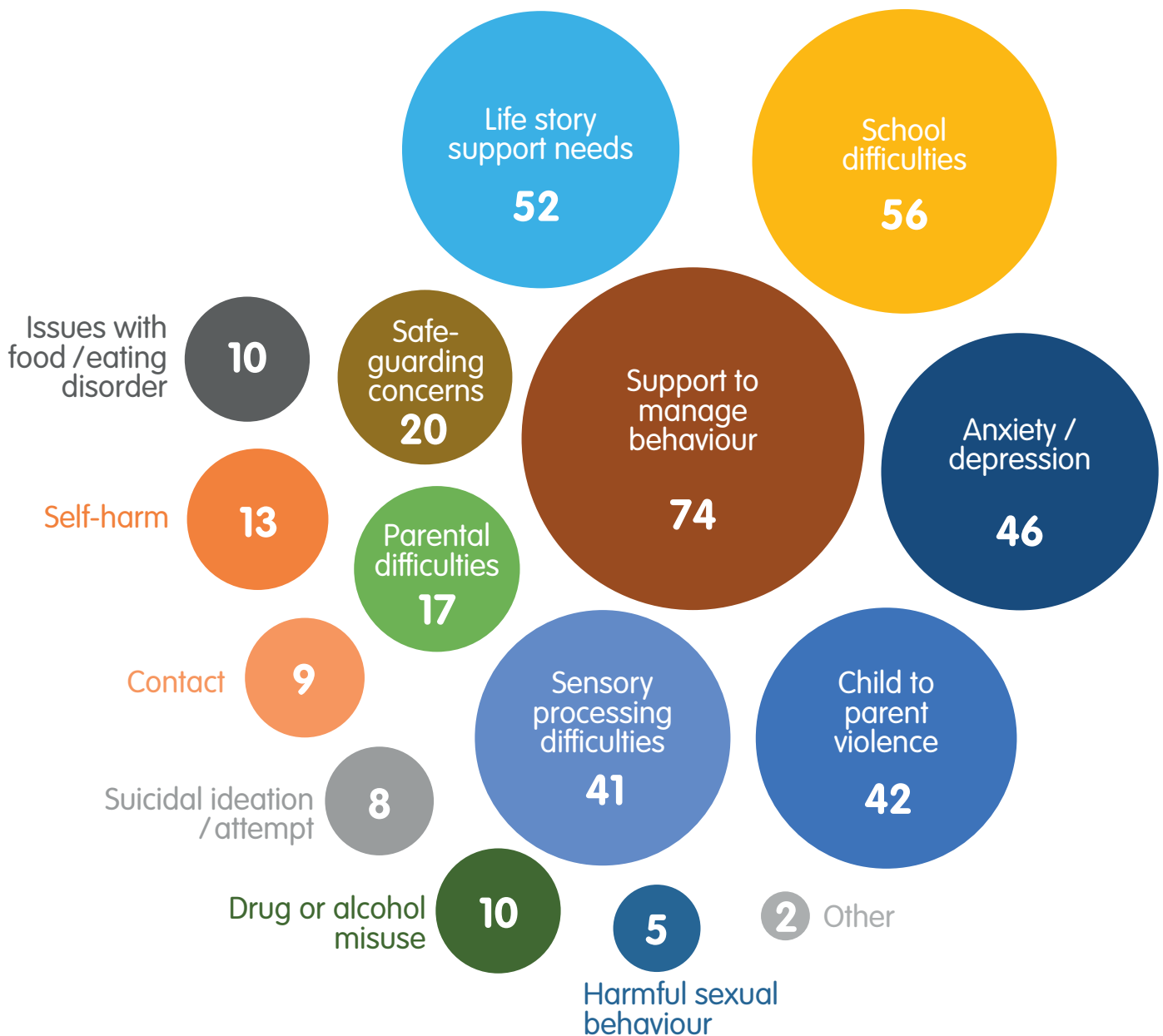
The reasons for involvement reveal a wide range of complex difficulties that adopted children and their families are facing. The most



**Open casework in adoption support**

Type of support	Q4 2021/22	Q2 2022/23	Q4 2022/23	Q2 2023/24	Q4 2023/24	Q2 2024/25	Q4 2024/25
Family support	140	117	138	115	122	130	107
Adult adoptee support	49	44	39	31	24	41	66
Contact services	29	24	45	29	17	26	19
Other	15	16	15	5	4	6	19

## Reasons for involvement – all significant factors selected

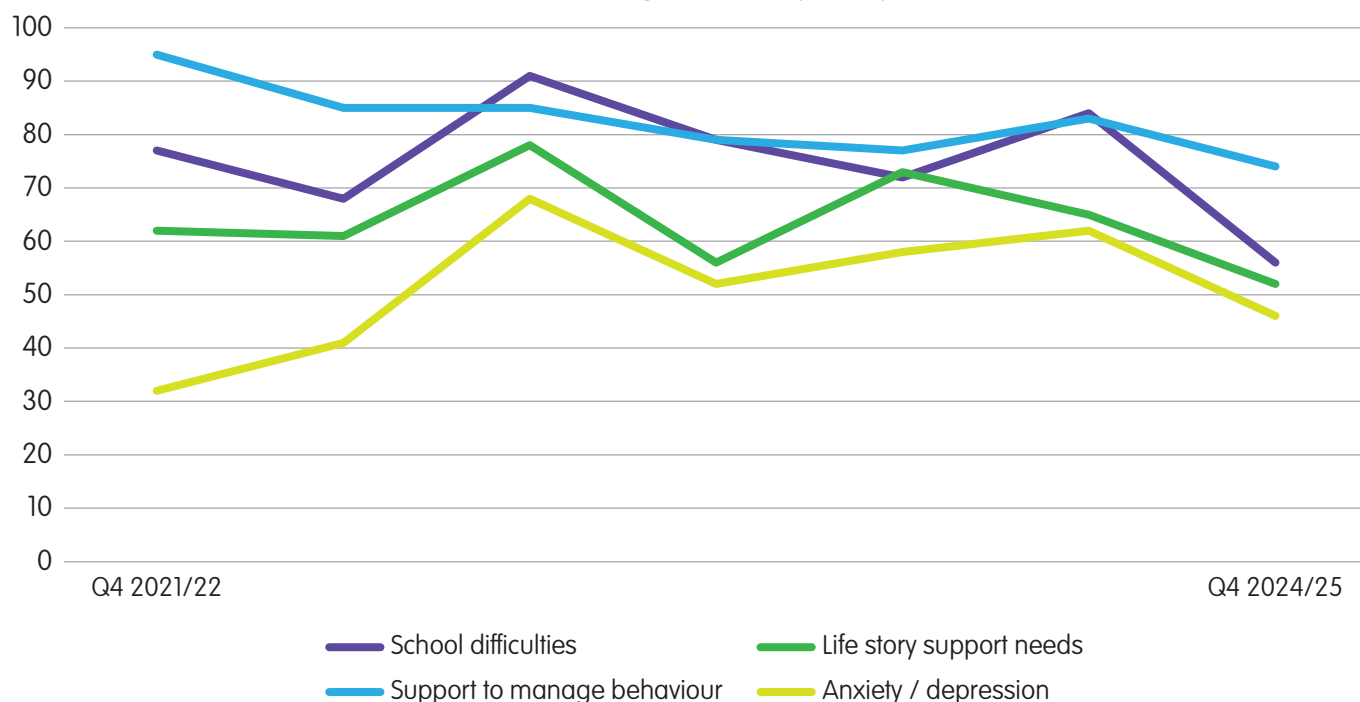


frequently identified factors are school difficulties, life story support needs, support to manage behaviour, and anxiety or depression in the young person. Concerningly some of the most acute factors have remained high over the period of monitoring, with 42 cases of child to parent violence, 13 cases of self-harm, and 20 cases with safeguarding concerns open in the most recent audit. Of the most acute concerns, only suicidal ideation / attempt has seen a consistent reduction in the last few years, with 8 open cases in the most recent audit, compared to 22 in July 2022.

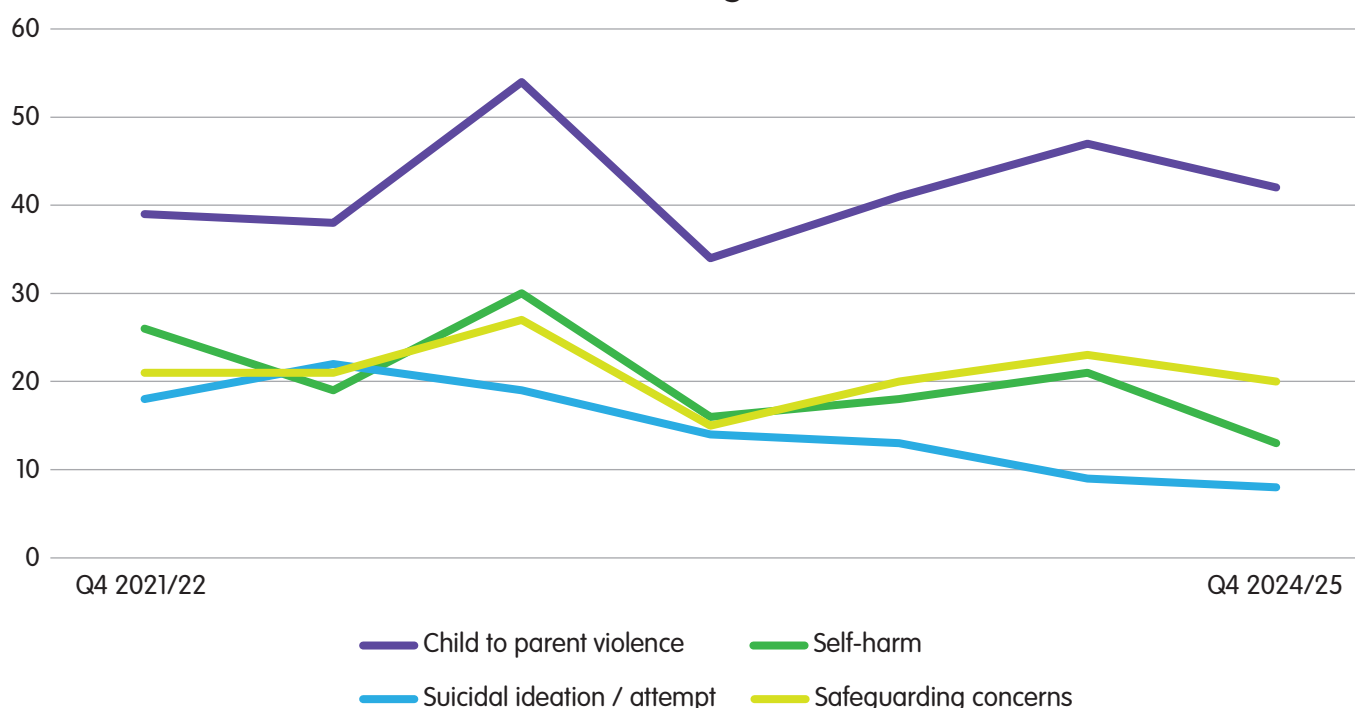
The information identified in these snapshot audits support decision making about areas for service development, such as the provision of a life story advice service, and highlight the need to develop clear referral pathways with specialist organisations such as CAMHS who need to be involved in cases with the most acute difficulties where needs or risk levels cannot be managed through the ASGSF.

Our wider programme of support groups and training are influenced by the needs identified within this data, with examples of the support provided given in the next sections of this report.

### Number of cases featuring most frequently named factors



### Number of cases featuring most acute factors



## Adoptive parent training

Along with extensive peer support, we provide expert webinars to our adoptive parents twice a month through our partnership with **We Are Family**, aimed at providing accessible support in the areas most commonly experienced by

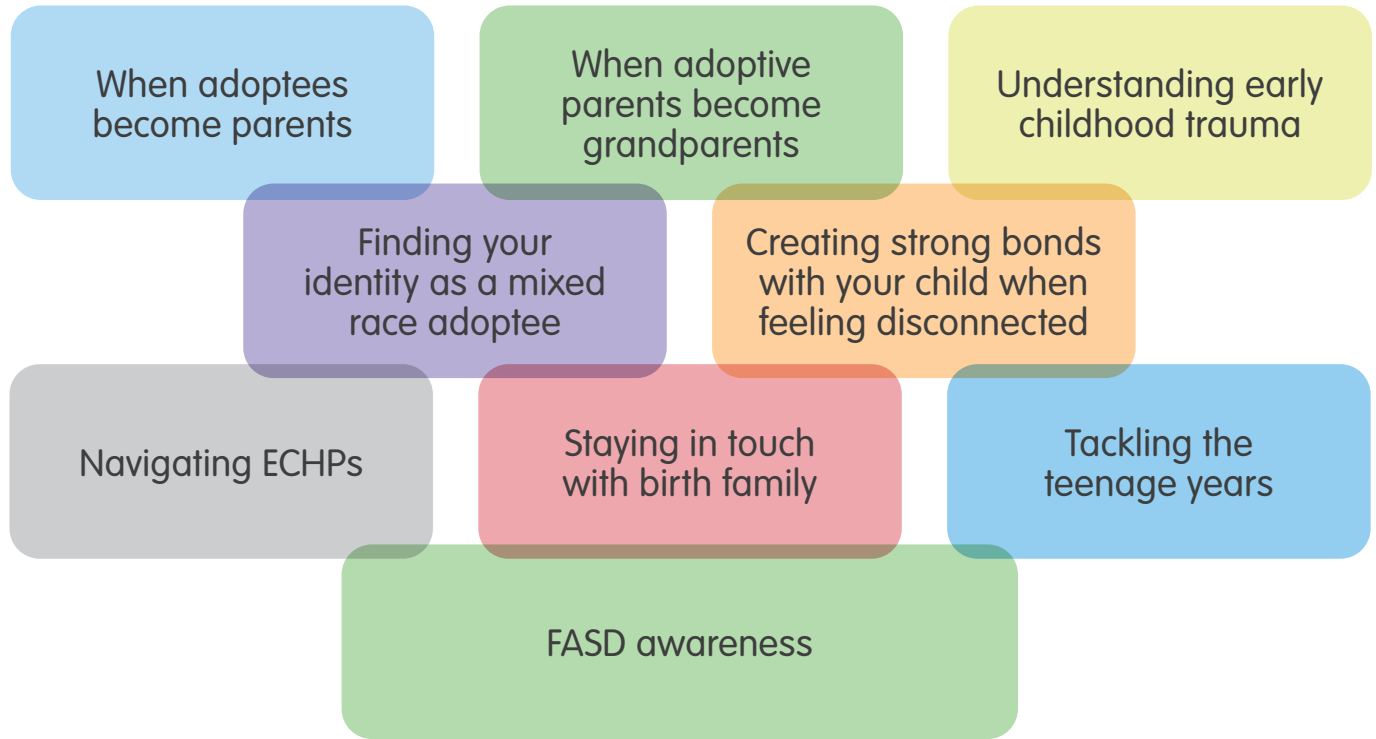
families. Adoptive parents can choose whether to attend webinars live and have the opportunity to ask questions, or whether to watch on demand in the member hub after the event. This way of offering learning, development, and support has been popular with adoptive parents who need flexibility to manage childcare demands.



In 2024/25 we provided 17 new expert webinars on a wide variety of topics, with over 100 past webinars available for members on demand. Over 450 adoptive parents attended webinars

live in 2024/25, an increase from 350 the previous year. Since the programme started over 7000 webinars have been watched on demand.

### Topics covered in adoptive parent webinars this year



"I love everything about the Hub. It is easy to find what you need, and I like knowing it's there for when I might need it. I'm not sure if there is anything else out there like this, it's the first place I go for support."

"Brilliant talk. The guest speaker touched on a few areas that impacted greatly for me – such as the teen struggles to demonstrate their love for friends & family equally. Now I know this isn't personal it makes me feel a great deal better."

"Absolutely everything was unbelievably helpful! My 'tree of supporters' at the start was in full bloom, 5 years down the line it's more like a twig with only a couple of very precious baubles. Please do another Talk with your knowledge, understanding and thoughts – honestly I feel less alone from listening to you. Thank you!"

Bite-sized clips from our webinar programme with WAF are available by clicking on the titles below:



## Parents of adopted teenagers' therapeutic group

Our group for parents of adopted teenagers and young adults has been providing a specialist therapeutic and peer support space for 15 years. The group meets on a Saturday and focuses on the impact of parenting adolescents impacted by trauma. The families who attend the group currently have children ranging in age from 13 to 24 years and have some of the highest levels of need, with risk of family breakdown and parental burnout. Due to the therapeutic nature of the group membership numbers are limited and involvement can be for between 18 months and 5 years. When resources allow, ALN has an ambition to replicate this group so that a greater number of parents can benefit in future.

In the last year some of the topics covered in the group have been:

- Children's difficulties with friendships and the impact on parents
- How it feels as parents navigating the journey to independence and parenting adults
- Self-care for adoptive parents
- Trauma and secondary trauma
- Birth family contact and how this feels for adoptive parents
- Supporting your child navigating romantic relationships
- Identity in adoption

"This group is a lifeline. It's become more important to me than therapy because it's the only place I feel genuinely seen, heard and understood as a single parent of an adopted teenager. Thank you."

"The group provides an invaluable safe space to talk about the reality and impact of parenting traumatised children. I've been here for four years, and every session provides me with a space to learn, reflect and receive support to help me be the best parent I can be."

Some of the themes emerging from the group highlight the challenge of the parental role with this group of young people:

- Vulnerability: Apart from one, all the female children represented by parents in the group have experienced sexual assault, some on multiple occasions and from a young age.
- Education: Most children have struggled extensively with school, have had long periods out of school and / or attend alternative educational provision.
- Neurodivergence: Around 80% of the young people have a diagnosis of ADHD and many use cannabis to self-medicate.
- Friendships: All the young people struggle with friendships and social isolation.
- Birth family: Around 85% of the young people have had contact with their birth family and there are wide variances in how they have experienced this but it has had a fundamental impact on all of them.
- Maturity: There seems to be a consistent experience from parents that around the ages of 21/22 young people develop in maturity and difficulties lessen in all areas – highlighting the importance of support which extends into early adulthood.

Members of this group provide incredibly moving feedback about the impact it has on supporting them to continue parenting in the most difficult of circumstances.

"Just knowing that I have this group in the weeks ahead lightens every load. I always leave the group lighter, happier, optimistic and with new ideas and thoughts. There is nothing like sharing a difficult experience with people who've been there – we are all united in the same struggle to love, care, support our children. We often express how adrift we are from our families and friends who do not have adopted, challenging children, so we do not have the usual sources of parenting support most other parents have."



"This group is invaluable. There's no place else you can get this support. It can be really lonely being an adoptive parent of a particularly challenging child. Very few other parents understand. Friends often try to minimise it to be kind "oh all teenagers are like that..." (no, they're not) or they can get a bit judgemental – of you or your child. I've been told I am too "soft" or 'over parenting' or even that I might be creating my child's 'bad behaviour' in order to feel needed and that all he needs is a simple, tough boundary in place. This group is one of the only places where you are able to express exactly what's happening, knowing you will be understood and get support – from the other parents, the leaders, the incredibly helpful guided discussions and exercises that have taught me so much. Literally a life line – for me, my adopted child and my birth son too."

"The importance of shared connection that underlines that we are not alone, that solutions/ideas are out there. This group is essential for repair and holding."

"I know I speak for the whole group when I say we are so appreciative of the thought, care and attention that our facilitators put into this group. They always think about really important topics, some to stretch us, to give us new understandings, to support us. The way they've run this group is incredible. I don't know any other adoptive parent who has such an amazing group to support them. We are a group of very different parents united by our very individual struggles. Our facilitators, by the way they run the group, have given us the space to express our thoughts and feelings, sometimes for the first time. You get new understandings from the group that would not have come in any other way. We are supported and encouraged. We come away from the group ready for the month ahead. Often, I have arrived under a weight of unbearable pressure. And by the time I leave, I feel ready for the challenges of the month ahead, with a spring in my step."





## Adopted children & young people's social groups

In January 2025 we were excited to launch ALN adopted children and young people's groups for the first time, following feedback from children about the importance of developing friendships with other adopted young people. The groups are run by ALN staff on a Saturday from an adventure playground in north London, and open to all adopted young people living in a partner borough aged between 8 – 19 years old.



Many of the children have said that they don't have any adopted friends outside of this group and find it incredible to be in a space where all of their peers, and some of the facilitators, are also adopted. The young people have enjoyed games,

crafts, challenges, snacks, exploring the adventure playground, and sharing their views about the development of the group. As we get to know the young people better we hope to support them to share their views on a range of topics and to influence service development.

**"They loved it! They were nervous about coming at first but they had a great time and are very keen to come again!"**

**"The staff were inviting, not telling everyone what to do but encouraging in a nice way. Good equipment / activities inside and outside. Snacks were good."**

**"We think it's a wonderful opportunity for our daughter to make friends with other kids, within a supportive environment"**

**"My son says he had a lot of fun. He really enjoyed it."**

**"Really great! The kids loved the adventure playground and making new friends."**



## Adult adoptee peer support groups

ALN is unique nationally in now supporting three adult adoptee groups across north London, working in partnership with different adoptee-led organisations with the aim to provide a variety of different group structures and times to suit every adoptee who would like to be part of a group. Adoptees attending are different ages from mid-20's to 70's and have a wide range of experiences of adoption. Adoptees highly value having a space where they can meet with other adoptees and share experiences without judgement. The groups are facilitated by adoptees and assisted by ALN social workers, who provide coordination and take responsibility for supporting anyone in the group who is vulnerable or needs additional assistance outside the group meeting. Some meetings are left open for group reflection whilst others are led by a speaker of the group's choice.



## Specialist counselling support for adult adoptees and birth family members

ALN have a long-standing contract with PAC-UK, a specialist adoption and permanency support agency, to provide an advice line and independent counselling on our behalf. This contract is used to provide counselling services to prospective adoptive parents, adult adoptees, and birth family members impacted by adoption. The contract currently offers 6 sessions of counselling to an individual, although where there is a high level of need and a good use of counselling, ALN can agree to a second set of 6 sessions. Many clients find the counselling sessions supportive and helpful, although some feel that the limited number of sessions is not adequate to meet their need. Effective use of the contract is reviewed quarterly by ALN and PAC-UK.

PAC-UK also run two birth parent support groups, one virtually and one in person. Birth parents who access support from PAC-UK advice line or counselling service are invited to join one of the groups and this can become a more sustainable form of support for individuals.

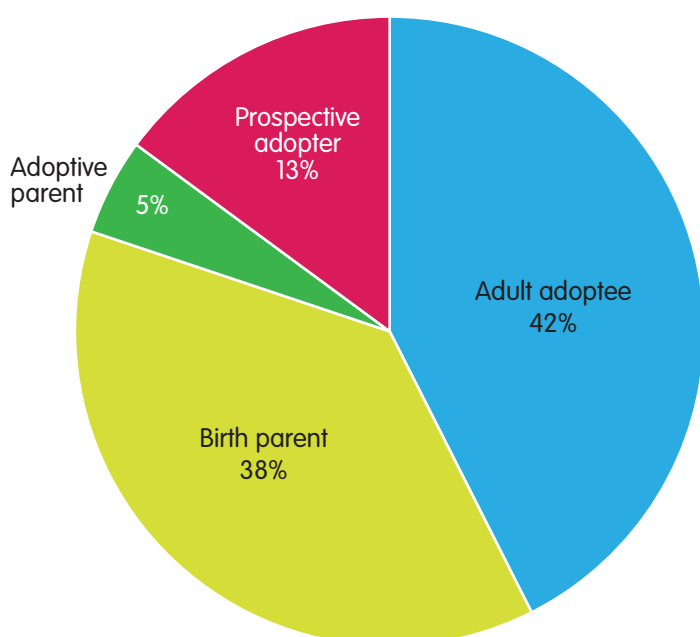


“Your kindness, wisdom, insight, knowledge and depth of experience allowed me to share freely and learn much along the way. I am very grateful indeed and can’t thank you enough. It seems to me that the positive benefits from these sessions will last for a long time to come.”

“With the support of PAC-UK counselling I felt able to re-visit the difficult emotions and decisions of my son’s adoption without being afraid. Exploring those feelings has helped me come to a better understanding of what happened and what it has meant for both of us. I am more at peace with myself and full of appreciation for my son. This would have been too daunting a journey without the help of PAC-UK.”

“The sessions have really helped me to understand and explore my feelings about being adopted and how this has impacted me.”

**Clients referred to the PAC-UK counselling contract**



# Recommendations

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## Review of 2024/25 recommendations

### Finding prospective adoptive parents

- 1** Establish the identified range of pilot projects within the **Black Adoption Project**, with the aim to provide services that better meet the needs of Black children and families.

**OUTCOME:** A range of pilot projects have been successfully launched this year with the support of grant funding and are already having a positive impact.

- 2** Manage **enquiry numbers** effectively to ensure waiting lists do not develop again, whilst maintaining a strong pipeline of prospective adopters for assessment.

**OUTCOME:** More prospective adoptive parents are now entering the adoption assessment process in a timely way with the help of additional staff capacity. Pressures on the recruitment team from other areas of work, including non-agency adoption, remain significant and will continue to be monitored.

- 3** Further test our local communications plan with ALN boroughs to support **adopter recruitment**.

**OUTCOME:** We have maintained connections with communications teams in boroughs, and some have supported by sharing recruitment information publicly, however we have not been able to make the significant progress in this area that we hoped due to limited capacity in both ALN and borough teams. This remains an area of focus for 2025/26.

### Preparing and approving adoptive parents

- 4** Through greater capacity in the assessment team, increase the **number of approvals** whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.

**OUTCOME:** We have achieved a significantly higher number of approvals in 2024/25, and processes are working effectively to achieve a further increase in 2025/26.

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## Planning for children

**5** Embed work through the **early permanence project** to build better relationships with local authority legal teams and others involved in court proceedings for children.

**OUTCOME:** The early permanence project has provided 21 in-person and virtual training events to boroughs in 2024/25 to support awareness and understanding of early permanence, supported by new procedures and guidance.

## Placing children with adoptive parents

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

**OUTCOME:** The proportion of children moving to live with in-house adoptive families and / or remaining local to London and the South-East has remained strong this year. If we are able to achieve further improvements in adopter approvals in 2025/25 we expect the proportion of in-house placements to increase again.

## Providing support to adoptive families and others

**7** Implement changes to the **website** which make it more accessible to all those accessing support, including adult adoptees, birth parents, and families with adopted children.

**OUTCOME:** The website has been updated to ensure it is more accessible to all groups impacted by adoption, although further work is needed before these changes are complete.

**8** Develop use of audit data for Adopt London to compare and understand different levels of demand and models of **adoption support** to improve services across Adopt London.

**OUTCOME:** The audit model for adoption support used in ALN has been implemented across other Adopt London RAAs so that data comparisons can start to be made.

## Working as part of Adopt London

**9** Consider sustainable arrangements for the end of several Adoption England project grants in March 2025 so that the best parts of practice development can be maintained.

**OUTCOME:** Work has been undertaken to support the planned ending of both the **matching** and **early permanency** project, ensuring handovers are in place to RAAs to maintain elements of the work that will continue long-term.



# Recommendations for 2025/26

## Finding prospective adoptive parents

1. Continue to support and develop the Black Adoption Project pilots, including a focus on specific recruitment processes for Black prospective adopters, with the aim of increasing the number of Black and mixed Black households approved for adoption.
2. Maintain higher proportion of in-house adopters able to consider an early permanence placement.
3. Develop recruitment-focused communications plans with partner boroughs to increase adoption awareness in local areas.

## Preparing and approving adoptive parents

4. Achieve a further increase in the number of adopter approvals whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.

## Planning for children

5. Work with boroughs who refer children for early permanence the least to develop targeted plans to increase identification of cases.

## Placing children with adoptive parents

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

## Providing support to adoptive families and others

7. In partnership with Adopt London, test out models for developing adoption support provision which respond to identified needs of families.
8. Embed and grow the new ALN Kids & Teens groups, including opportunities for young people to share their views and experiences to influence service planning.

## Working as part of Adopt London

9. Work with other Adopt London RAAs towards an Adopt London legal partnership agreement which will support the growing need for shared commissioning and service provision. .

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