Annual Report

April 2025 – March 2026



ADOPT LONDON NORTH

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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 children 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 a 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.

BARNET LONDON BOROUGH

Camden

ENFIELD Council

Hackney

Haringey LONDON

ISLINGTON For a more equal future



Areas of work progressed by the QA Group this year include implementation of new research and practice models, changing practice around direct contact in adoption, training for children's social workers, life story work, and support for foster carers who adopt. The QA Group has also progressed a significant piece of audit work seeking to understand more about risk factors for adoptive families where children and young people are at risk of re-entering care, and the experiences of children and families when they come into contact with statutory children's services at a point of crisis. You can **read more** about this work in the adoption support section of this report.

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 only three permanent staff members leaving this year, all due to retirement. We successfully recruited to cover all roles vacated. 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.

Training and development for partner boroughs

As adoption is a specialist area of practice, it has been beneficial to work together across ALN and partner boroughs for training and development around emerging priorities.

We have progressed work this year to be able to offer a wider range of in-person training for children's social workers and their managers, following successful launch of joint training over the past few years. We expect to launch the new training areas in late 2026 which will include 'Culturally Diverse Adoption', and 'Preparing Children for Adoption'. This training provides an opportunity for children's social workers to benefit from the adoption knowledge held by ALN staff members, and to share learning across boroughs.

In October 2026 we hosted a whole day workshop focused on the legal aspects of adoption, led by a specialist adoption lawyer. The workshop was attended by in-house legal teams and senior managers from across the partner boroughs and proved to be an important space to talk about recent case law, managing appeals, and complex case examples. Due to strong positive feedback, this is now being organised as an annual event.

Inspections

Adoption inspection regulations have not yet been updated to reflect the creation of RAAs and so there is no permanent direct inspection arrangements in place. RAAs are therefore inspected through the lens of the local authority inspection framework. Themed pilot inspections of RAAs first took place in 2023 and are due to be repeated in autumn 2026.

After five ILACS inspections in 2024/25, only Haringey had a full inspection this year in January 2026. This inspection provided a good opportunity to showcase our positive partnership and work for children with a care plan of adoption in Haringey.

'Relationships with the regional adoption agency (Adopt London North) are strong, ensuring a clear understanding of children's needs and informing targeted recruitment and thoughtful matching, including for early permanence. Training in child permanence reports has improved report quality. Leaders understand national sufficiency challenges and are working proactively to mitigate them. Recruitment is wide-ranging and research-informed, including work to address barriers for Black and Global Majority families.

Adopters report very positive experiences, feeling heard, supported and treated sensitively. They value the breadth of training and research-informed learning, especially the preparation for early permanence and opportunities to hear directly from adopters and adopted adults.'

— Haringey ILACS, January 2026

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. This year we have undertaken recruitment to increase the number of independent members, and social work members from our partner boroughs. This has given us the opportunity to increase the number of panel members from our least represented groups including men and people of Black heritage. For the first time we have also been able to welcome to the panel a birth parent who has experienced the adoption of her children, and two adopted young people age 19 and 24. We are excited about the different perspectives that these individuals will bring to panel, which we believe strengthens panel decision-making and its' quality assurance role.

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 October 2025 – March 2026, the Panel Chair provided the following conclusion:

> *"The adoption panel continues to be a settled, stable and well-functioning body that makes robust recommendations underpinned by a strong commitment to securing positive and timely permanence for children. Standards of practice across Adopt London North remain consistently high and are reflected in the quality of assessments presented to panel, the detailed and well-evidenced matching reports, and the professionalism with which social workers prepare for and participate in panel discussions. The panel membership is diverse, balanced and highly skilled, bringing a broad range of personal and professional expertise that supports rigorous and safe decision-making. The collaborative working relationship between the panel chair, agency adviser and business support team remains a*

significant strength, ensuring panels are well organised, and continue to run effectively despite occasional operational challenges. The new panel coordinator is settling well into the role and is working with the wider team, to review and refine panel processes and administrative systems.

During the reporting period, panel has been pleased to recommend 19 children for permanent adoptive placements. This has included eight children from Black and mixed Black backgrounds, and two sibling groups, reflecting the continued commitment of Adopt London North to securing permanence for children whose family-finding journeys can often be more complex. It is particularly encouraging to see adopters coming forward who are able to meet the diverse identity, cultural, and relational needs of these children and sibling groups, enabling them to achieve permanence within families able to promote their lifelong sense of belonging.

Quality assurance processes remain effective, and there have been notable improvements in several areas of practice. The analytical quality of Adoption Placement Reports (APRs) continues to strengthen, with clearer evidence demonstrating how adopters can meet the identified needs of individual children. The language used to describe children's identity, heritage and lived experiences has become increasingly sensitive and child-centered, and reports more consistently articulate adopters' understanding of trauma, identity development and post-adoption contact. Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) have also shown continued improvement in both quality and analysis; however, further work is needed to ensure that children's voices – both verbal and non-verbal – are consistently represented throughout these reports and remain central to care planning.



Feedback from applicants, adopters and professionals continues to demonstrate that panel is experienced as respectful, welcoming and well organised, with attendees reporting that they feel relaxed and comfortable throughout the process.

Looking ahead, panel looks forward to welcoming eleven new panel members, whose appointment will further strengthen the breadth of experience and expertise available to support high-quality decision-making. Panel also welcomes the forthcoming training session as an important opportunity to consolidate learning arising from recent adoption placement disruptions across Adopt London, while also hearing from operational colleagues about developments and areas of practice within their respective teams. Continued opportunities for shared learning and reflection will help ensure that practice remains evidence-based, responsive and child-centered.

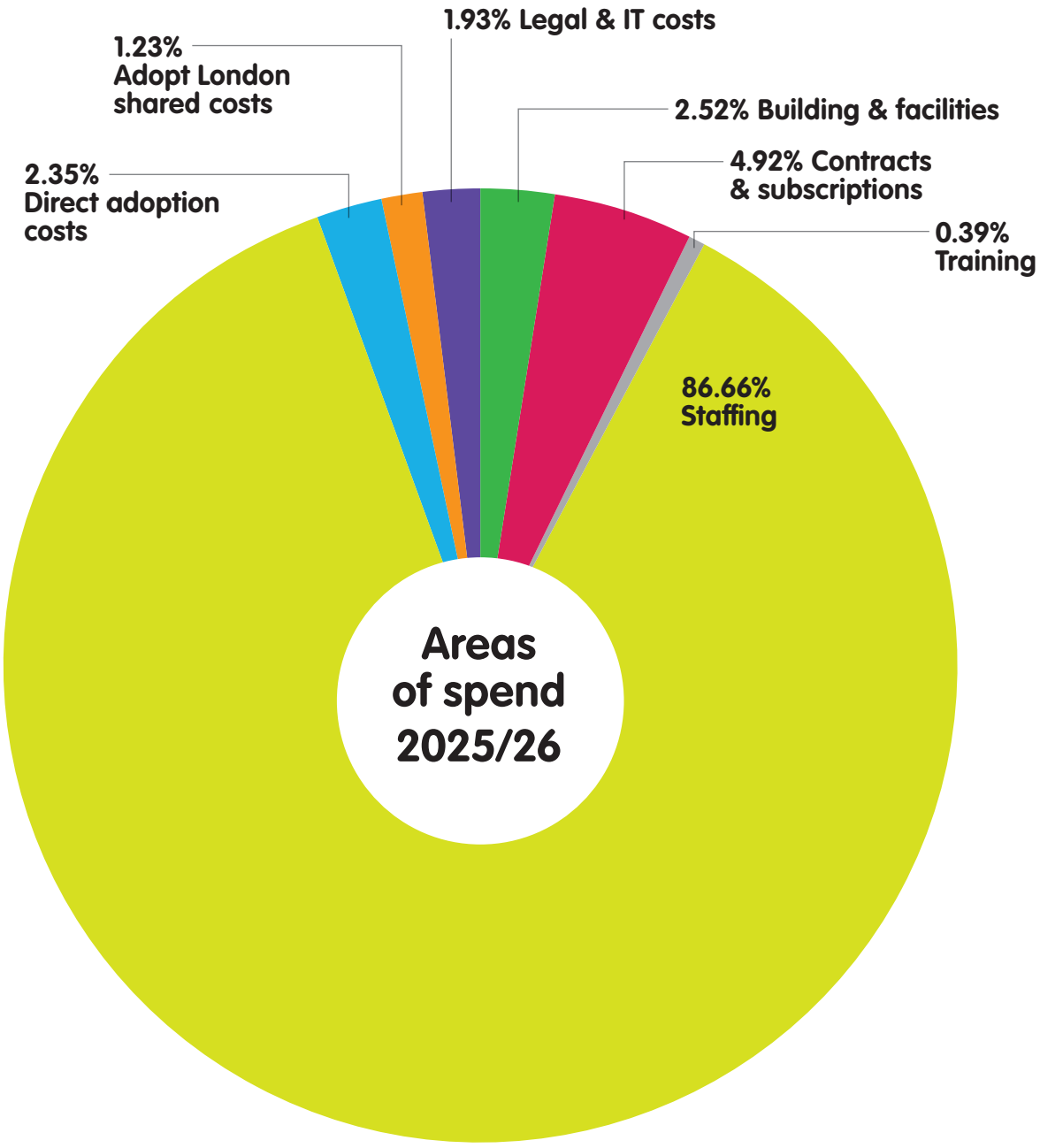
Panel appreciates the consistently high standard of reports presented throughout the reporting period and encourages this standard to be maintained. Practitioners should continue to adopt a consistently child-centered approach, ensuring that analysis remains as strong as description and that children's experiences and voices are clearly represented. Continued attention should also be given to the accurate recording of key timescales for both approvals and matches to support effective quality assurance and regulatory compliance.

Overall, Adopt London North continues to demonstrate strong leadership, clear values and a culture of reflective, high-quality practice. The panel is confident that it is well positioned to continue providing rigorous independent scrutiny while promoting the best interests of children and supporting families to achieve safe, stable and loving permanent homes."

– Josephine Scorer, Independent Panel Chair

Financial spend

The total core budget for ALN in 2025/26 was £3,075,431. Of this, 86.66% was spent on staffing costs – including permanent and agency staffing, sessional workers, Adopt Panel members, and maternity costs. All six boroughs contribute an equal amount to the ALN core budget.



Area of spend	Proportion of budget	Total spend
Building & facilities	2.52%	£77,500
Contracts & subscriptions	4.92%	£151,456
Training	0.39%	£12,000
Staffing	86.66%	£2,665,293
Direct adoption costs	2.35%	£72,217
Adopt London shared costs	1.23%	£37,700
Legal & IT costs	1.93%	£59,265

National adoption landscape

Adoption England

Adoption England oversees the coordinated efforts of the 34 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.

Adoption England

The Adopt London partnership has successfully obtained grant funding to support joint practice development across areas such as the **Black Adoption Project**, and the development of **new adoption support models**, including a new multi-disciplinary clinical team.

This section of the report highlights key areas of national practice development, including those which are supported by Adoption England. You can read more about the work of Adoption England in their **annual report**.





Adoption support national consultation

In February 2026, the Government launched a new public consultation 'Adoption support that works for all', which ran until May 2026. The Department for Education is expected to report on the outcomes from this consultation in late autumn 2026. The current model of delivery for the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) is within scope of the consultation, with the government recommending significant reform of this system. In addition, the consultation focuses on:

- Support for adoptive parents through key stress points such as transfer to secondary school
- Joined up support across social care, education, and health
- Development of multi-disciplinary teams in Regional Adoption Agencies.

Whilst we do not know what specific recommendations will come from the consultation, it is likely they will lead to an overhaul of the way therapeutic and specialist adoption support is provided in the future, with huge implications for the way Adopt London North are able to deliver support. Adoption England are leading co-ordination between Regional Adoptions Agencies nationally to prepare for potential changes and you can read more about the work we are doing across Adopt London to prepare for this with the development of our new **adoption support models**.

Adoption England Community Development Fund

This year Adoption England launched a new grants programme, making awards of up to £5000 to small organisations led by people

PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

Legal tests: The permanency of an adoption order

This year there have been two important cases heard by the Supreme Court which have tested the legal understanding of an adoption order and therefore impact our practice around adoption care planning.

In the first case, an adoptive mother asked for the revocation of adoption orders for her two adopted daughters who are both now young adults. The application was made in line with the wishes of the adopted daughters, who had resumed living with their birth mother some years prior out of choice. All parties involved in the situation were in support of the revocation of the adoption orders on the basis that the orders no longer represented the young women's lived reality.

In judgement, the court refused to revoke the adoption orders. It stated that an adoption order is permanent and can only be revoked in very rare circumstances where the original decision can be shown to be fundamentally flawed, not based on welfare considerations. In making this decision the court also had regard for the impact of the decision on the wider adoption system, stating that revoking adoption orders in a case of this kind would undermine confidence in the adoption system, creating instability for children, adopters, and birth families.



In the second case, the court were considering the revocation of an adoption order finalised only months prior for a 2 year old boy. The adoptive parents had separated, and the local authority had applied to revoke the order after learning that the adoptive mother had failed to disclose a new relationship with a prisoner who had a history of sexual and drug offences. Social workers learnt that the child had been taken to visit the prisoner and exposed to a number of significant risks. The local authority argued that the adoption order had been granted based on 'mistaken' information.

In judgement, the court ruled in favour of revoking the adoption order, agreeing that the order had been made on the basis of fundamentally flawed information. Consequently, the case was returned to the family court to consider the child's welfare and future care plan.



with lived experience of adoption. The aim of the programme is to fund grassroots support for those impacted by adoption to increase the availability of peer support and community. The Adopted Adults Movement, a national campaigning organisation for adopted adults, were awarded a grant to run adoptee events in 5 regional areas of England and partnered with Adopt London to deliver a very successful London event. We are hopeful that we will be able to work in partnership with more local grassroots organisations in 2026/27 as the funding is offered again by Adoption England.

National adopter sufficiency

Over the last couple of years there has been serious concern over a decline in national adopter recruitment and the widening gap between available prospective adoptive parents and children with a care plan of adoption. This year there have been some encouraging signs of improvement, with Adoption England reporting a 20% increase in adopter registrations and a 16% increase in approvals during 2025/26. However, due to the low starting point, adopter sufficiency remains a significant challenge, with Adoption England stating that increasing the number of people entering the adoption journey remains a key priority into 2026/27.

The death of Preston Davey

Preston was a baby in the care of Oldham Council who had been placed with approved prospective adopters in Blackpool and died only a few months after moving into their care in July 2023. In June 2026, following a lengthy criminal trial at Preston Crown Court, one adoptive father was convicted of murder and multiple child abuse offences, while the other was convicted of causing or allowing the death of a child along with other offences. Evidence presented in court showed that Preston had suffered significant abuse while in their care, with the trial judge and police describing the offending as exceptionally serious.

A case as grave as this raises significant questions for professionals and the public about the processes and safeguarding measures that were followed, and whether anything could have been done to protect Preston from experiencing the most awful harm and ultimately death, in an adoptive home which was intended to keep him safe.

A full Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review in Oldham Council had to be paused during the criminal trial and has now resumed but not yet reported. Once published, individual RAAs and Adoption England will consider this in detail so that lessons can be implemented in local and national adoption practice.



Adopt London



Adopt London structure

Adopt London brings together four Regional Adoption Agencies, working on behalf of 24 London local authorities. With this partnership, we recruit adopters through a shared London-wide approach, develop and commission services at scale, and work collectively to strengthen practice, consistency and innovation.

Adopt London collaborative work continues across a range of priority areas, supported by a shared strategic plan, pooled resources, and regular opportunities for practitioners and leaders to learn from one another and shape developments. You will read about many areas of joint Adopt London work throughout this report. As one of the most developed pan-regional partnerships in England, we have been successful again this year in accessing grant funding from Adoption England to support a range of practice development work and are excited by the preventative provision this funding is enabling us to develop.

Adopt London shared areas of work in 2025/26

- Adopt London staff conference
- Development of an adoption support model
- Adult adoptee support
- Transitions to adulthood group
- Telling children about adoption
- We Are Family peer support
- Adopt London choir
- Black Adoption Project

Staff conference

We held our 5th annual staff conference in February 2026. Due to the large size of Adopt London, this conference is the only point in the year where all 160 Adopt London staff members have an opportunity to be together in person. It therefore provides a brilliant opportunity for staff to exchange practice wisdom, build professional networks, and focus on new developments. This year our conference focused on launching the **BUSS Model** in Adopt London, with an

PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

The BUSS Model: Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems in children who have experienced disruption to their early development

The BUSS Model is a trauma-informed intervention developed by Sarah Lloyd, a Consultant Occupational Therapist and Play Therapist. It was originally developed to support children who had experienced early adversity, including neglect, abuse, disrupted attachment, foster care and adoption. The model works from the knowledge that many children who have experienced developmental trauma do not simply have emotional or behavioural difficulties – they may also have underdeveloped bodily regulation systems due to missing out on consistent, attuned care in infancy. These gaps can lead to struggles with attention, regulation, coordination, behaviour, emotional responses, and relationships. BUSS advocates supporting children to close these gaps in their development before trying to provide behavioural or psychological interventions.

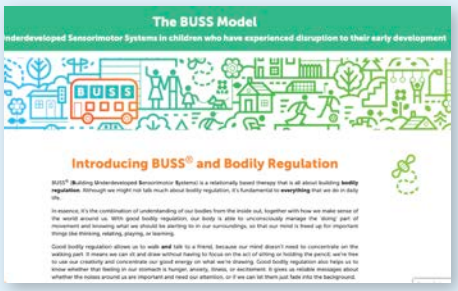
Some of the benefits of the BUSS Model are:

- It is highly practical with easily implemented exercises that can be done at home
- Activities can be turned into games which young children are motivated to take part in
- After assessment and with support, the parent or carer can lead the work with the child
- Relational connection and bonding are reinforced through the child and parent or carer undertaking the activities together
- Children and their families can often see real-world benefits quickly which motivate them to continue.

Adopt London will be working with BUSS in 2026/27 to implement this model into our practice. This will include training staff to deliver BUSS group interventions to pre-school children and their adoptive parents through groups called 'Leaplets'.

You can find out more about the BUSS Model and the research evidence supporting it by viewing these additional resources:







inspiring presentation from Sarah Lloyd, and a presentation about the work of our new **Adopt London Clinical Team**.

When asked what they found most valuable from the day, staff said:

"The presentation regarding the BUSS model was excellent and I'm very keen to hear about how we incorporate this in Adopt London as I think it will be hugely beneficial for families."

"Talking to colleagues in other areas of Adopt London, comparing our day-to-day pressures, techniques that support etc."

"It was great to hear about the work that has been developed and is being planned across London."

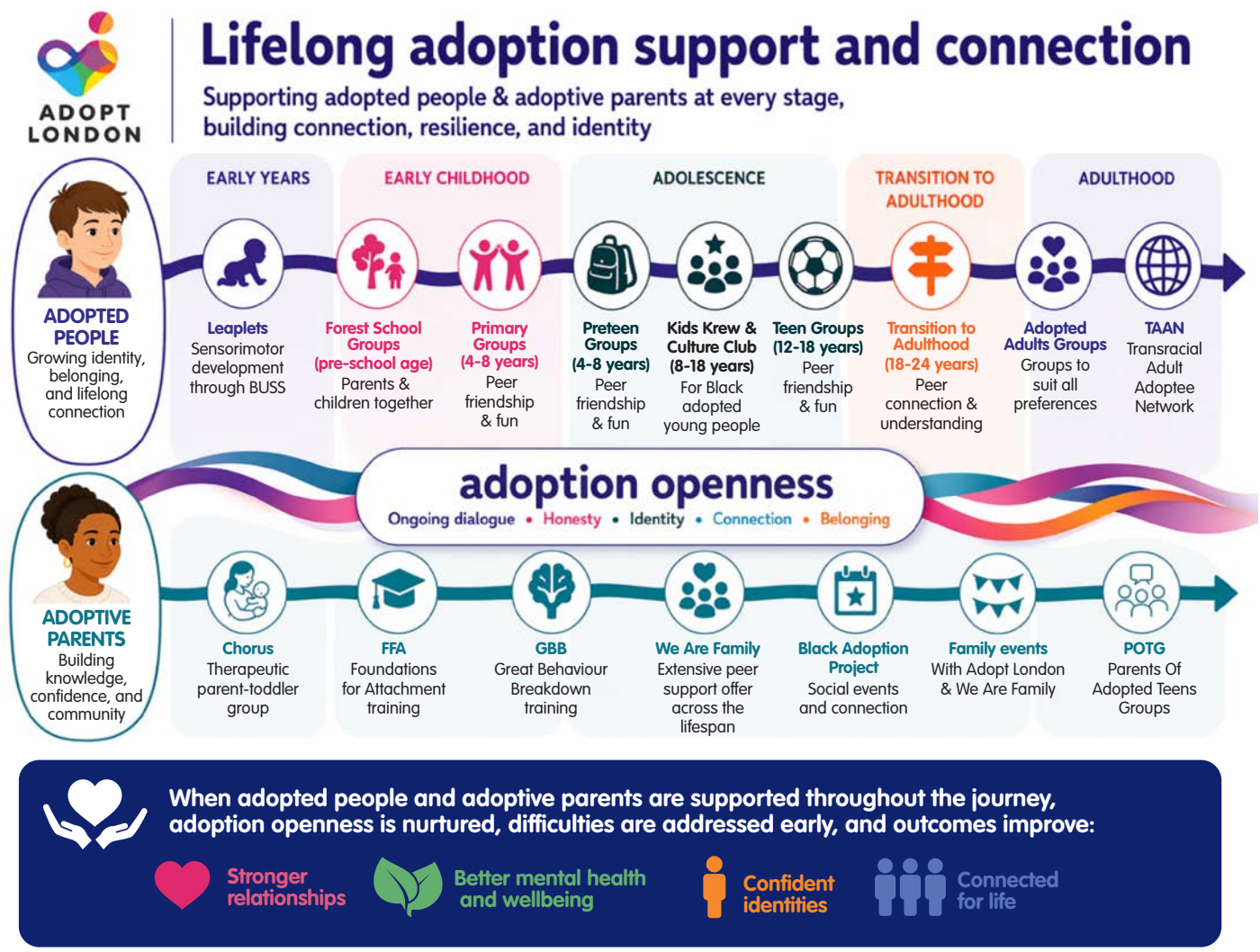
Development of an adoption support model

Since December 2023, Adopt London has been part of the Adoption England National Commissioning Programme, which provides development funding alongside training delivered by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University.

As part of this Programme of work, Adopt London delivered a refreshed needs assessment this year which identified areas of focus including:

- Raising skills in our social work teams
- Enhancing the core support offer to children and to families
- Investing in therapeutically informed interventions.

From this, an Adopt London adoption support vision was developed, bringing together three important elements:



1. **Adoptee spaces**: Social spaces for adopted children, young people, and adults throughout the lifespan.

2. **Specialist parent support**: Therapeutic, peer-based adoptive parent support provided by Adopt London staff.

3. **Clinical team**: Development of a multi-disciplinary clinical team to support practice and reduce reliance on commissioning through external providers.

Together we believe this model will significantly increase family resilience and access to preventative and early support, reducing reliance on long-term specialist therapy delivered at the point of acute family strain. Early development of this model will also help prepare Adopt London for any major **changes to adoption support provision** and funding announced by the Department of Education. Utilising funds available through several Adoption England grants we have started to develop this model and will continue to build this over coming years.

Adoptee spaces

With a number of groups now in place either locally within ALN or pan-regionally across Adopt London, the next phase of our work is to develop provision for age groups where there are currently gaps, focusing on pre-school and younger primary-age children, and increasing the range of provision for adopted adults. Adoptees and parents consistently report the significant positive impact of peer spaces on wellbeing and supporting the development of a secure identity. Many adopted adults attending our groups report this being the first time in their lives they have been in a space (knowingly) with other adoptees, and speak of the profound impact this has. Adopt London aim to build provision so that it becomes normalised for adopted people to have spaces where they regularly meet with other adoptees, from infanthood to adulthood.

You can read about the provision we already have in place for adoptees and the impact of this work in these sections of the report:

- **ALN Kids & Teens groups**
- **Black Adoption Project young people's groups**
- **Transitions to adulthood**
- **Adult adoptee support**

Specialist parenting support

Providing specialist, therapeutically-informed support from the earliest stages of adoption increases all families access to preventative support, and recognises that adoptive parents need to be equipped through advice, support, and training at regular stages through parenthood and not just as part of their preparation to adopt. Providing support in peer-based spaces also reduces isolation and increases opportunities to learn from and support one another. Skilling Adopt London social workers to deliver some of this provision means that it can be offered regularly and to the needs of Adopt London families, making the provision less vulnerable under potential future government changes.

As part of this work, we have identified two therapeutic parenting programmes that have proven reliable – the 'Great Behaviour Breakdown' programme and 'Foundations for Attachment', and one child-and-parent focused intervention – the '**BUSS model**', to integrate into Adopt London practice.

This year we started this development work by successfully training a cohort of social workers and adoptive parents to co-deliver the Great Behaviour Breakdown (GBB) programme. GBB is a practical programme, focussed on supporting love-based parenting and safe behaviour management techniques, working effectively with families of primary and secondary age children. The programme will start to run from early 2026/27 on a regular basis with an aim for the majority of Adopt London families to have access to this as part of their parenting journey over the next few years.

You can read about the specialist parenting support which is already in place and well-established in these sections of the report:

- **Chorus parent & toddler groups**
- **We Are Family services**
- **Targeted support from the Black Adoption Project**
- **Parents of Teenagers group**

Clinical team

Delivered in partnership with West London NHS Trust, our Adopt London grant funding has enabled us to initiate a small Adopt London clinical team staffed by two part-time Clinical Psychologists and a part-time specialist Occupational Therapist. The clinical team offer a range of advice and interventions aiming to upskill and support social workers alongside reducing our dependency on externally commissioned therapeutic provision. Interventions currently include:

- Brief Assessment Early Support programme (BAsES) to support the transition and early placement period for children moving into adoptive families
- Occupational Therapy led sensory approaches and screening
- Complex case consultation
- Co-working cases alongside social workers
- Reflective practice for specific service areas
- Training and workshops
- Co-delivery of therapeutic parenting programmes.

Over the next few years, we will focus on expanding the range of direct interventions our clinical team can offer, and testing out funding models to ensure this delivery approach can be sustainable into the future without reliance on grant funding.

PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

Birth parents experiences of care proceedings and contact

As we concluded our two year Adopt London 'Early Permanence' project, our Project Manager Grace Panayiotou worked with birth parents who had been closely involved to create a lasting record of their views and experiences through this film 'The Other Side of Adoption'.



Grace says:

"The idea for this film came from a simple but powerful place: listening. Over the years, I've heard so many stories – from birth parents, adopters, social workers, and adopted people – and one theme kept coming up again: contact and how birth parents feel during care proceedings. How complicated it can feel, how emotional it can be, and how misunderstood it often is. I realised we needed something that could bring those voices together, something that could help people see and hear the person not just as a task or a policy, but as a deeply human experience.

I wanted this film to open up space for empathy and understanding. For birth parents to feel seen. For adopters to feel supported. For professionals to reflect. And most of all, for children and young people to benefit from the kind of thoughtful, meaningful contact that helps them grow up with a stronger sense of identity and belonging."

The film is now used within Adopt London in the training of staff and prospective adoptive parents, as a tool to start different conversations and reconsider perspectives.

The Black Adoption Project

Project background

The Black Adoption Project is a long-term commitment by Adopt London to address the significant disparities experienced by Black children and families within the adoption system, including lower rates of adoption, longer waiting times for children, and lower retention rates amongst Black prospective adopters. Thanks to Adoption England grant funding for a second year, the Black Adoption Project was able to recruit a Business Co-ordinator to join the existing Programme Lead, increasing our capacity to progress pilot projects and embed changes in Adopt London systems whilst developing evidence about what works. Gradually, the Black Adoption Project is building systems-wide support across the adoption process with the aim of transforming the support available to prospective adopters and therefore the outcomes for Black children with a care plan of adoption. This section of the report highlights some of the Black Adoption Project's key achievements during 2025/26 including:

- Development of Black prospective adopter recruitment and engagement events
- Ongoing delivery and completed evaluation of 'Let's Talk About Adoption'
- Launch of 'Exploring My Black Identity' programme for young people
- Workforce development partnership focused on 'Requisite Black Parenting' research.

Strengthening our community of Black adoptive parents

Through the Project we have developed a community of experienced Black adoptive parents who are passionate about supporting others to adopt and improving experiences. This community grows each year and are available to contribute to different areas of work, give advice as part of our Adoptive Parent Stakeholder Group, and meet to build connection and peer support through our social events. This group are the backbone of the Black Adoption Project and critical to every project we develop. Some of the questions discussed in depth by the Adoptive Parenting Stakeholder Group this year are:

The Black Adoption Project's use of the word 'Black':

When we say 'Black', we use it as a broad and inclusive term. This includes people who identify as Black, mixed-race Black, or have Black heritage through their family background. The Black Adoption Project also welcomes people of any racial background who have a Black partner. We use the term 'Black' to help people quickly understand whether our support is right for them, but we recognise that Black people come from many cultures, countries and lived experiences and we celebrate these differences.

Amplifying the voices of Black adoptive parents

This year the Black Adoption Project's community of adoptive parents came together to develop a short film which features adoptive parent's voices alongside illustrations drawn by their own children. This powerful and fun film shows the wide range of different family types and experiences within the group and highlights their passion to encourage other people to consider adoption.

Please take a moment to watch, and share it with others.



- What gave you the confidence to move from an interest in adoption to an application?
- Were Black adopters or professionals represented in your process? What this important?
- What support did you get during the assessment process and what else was needed?
- How have you supported your child's sense of identity as a Black, adopted young person?
- As an adoptive family, what experiences have you had with friends and family?
- Have you tried to access adoption support and what was this like?
- Were you able to access culturally appropriate support?

"I was relieved to find the details of the Black Adoption Project; relieved the change I seek, is actively sought by others with greater knowledge of the adoption system, expertise, combined resources, and a passion for Black children and thriving Black families. I want in!"

"From the start of our family's adoption journey, if was always clear to me that it is almost impossible to navigate the immense amount of barriers without the support of family and community."

Providing information to those interested in adoption

At the very start of the adoption process we are working to create spaces where Black individuals and couples feel safe and comfortable taking a first step to find out more about adoption. A key strand of this work has been the development and ongoing delivery of Black Adoption Project 'Meet the Adopters' events, which provide a welcoming, low-pressure opportunity for people to hear directly from Black adopters about their experiences and to ask honest questions about adoption.

This approach recognises how important representation is. The events are led by Black adopters and focus on providing visible role models, honest lived experience and culturally relevant discussion. Feedback has consistently shown that prospective adopters value hearing from people 'like themselves', which gives them the confidence to explore further. We have implemented follow-up surveys and interviews to understand what encourages people to move from initial interest into formal enquiry and assessment.

Alongside these events, the Project has developed buddying opportunities, strengthened information available on our website and through social media, and produced community-focused resources.

"It was helpful to learn that our questions were other people's questions. We have been to a few info sessions that were more about the steps in the process so the space being focused on just asking questions was great. As a mixed person in a relationship with a white person, feeling that it is important to me to adopt a mixed child or a Black child, it felt supportive to be in that space."

"It was good to hear from everyday people like us what that process was like for them…We felt like we had pages and pages of notes after the Meet the Adopters because it was just giving us information or nuances that we didn't know before."



"Being able to see people who look like you go through the adoption process, I think it's very beneficial."



Supporting Black prospective adopters

Another of the project's main focuses has been improving the experience of Black prospective adopters once they enter the assessment process. We have done this through:

- Working with experienced parents to co-design a support group for prospective Black adopters
- Training and development of Black adoptive parents as group facilitators
- Launch and ongoing delivery of the 'Let's Talk About Adoption' peer support group
- Completion of a formal evaluation for the group after the first phase
- Expansion of group support beyond approval into the early placement period.

Feedback from participants consistently highlights the value of role models, peer support and having a safe space to discuss experiences of race, identity and adoption with people who share similar lived experience.

We aim to continue to deliver and develop this group to ensure additional support is available for all Black prospective adopters being assessed by Adopt London, with the aim of ensuring more families feel well supported through the process, go on to be approved, and ultimately to adopt a child.

"I don't have to explain myself. They know exactly what I mean."

"Know that you're in a space where you'll be understood, accepted, and people will understand what you're talking about."

"Real-life experience from people that look like myself."



Supporting Black adopted children and young people

Alongside our focus on the recruitment side of the adoption process, the Black Adoption Project aims to create safe, culturally specific support spaces for adoptive families. The creation of these spaces and the commitment behind them both strengthens existing Black adoptive families and gives confidence to those just starting their adoption journey.

Our children and young people's groups launched in Spring 2025 for those age 8–19 years, have worked together to create their own group names and plan future sessions and activities. The groups meet monthly on a Saturday, welcoming adopted young people from across London to a space where they can truly be themselves, with both their adopted and their Black identities welcomed and celebrated.

This year we also invested heavily in launching 'Exploring My Black Identity' – an 8-week Black history education programme for young people aged 14–19 years. Launched in February and running until May 2026, this programme has been running fortnightly on a Saturday across a whole day to introduce young people to Black experts across a range of topics which they have asked to learn more about. Topics include music and pop culture; hair, style and self-expression; Black British and global history; resistance, joy & pride; and the history of Black adoption. The programme is supported by a therapist and is being formally evaluated by the University of East London. We look forward to sharing more once the programme and evaluation are complete.





Challenges and ongoing priorities

Despite significant progress, important and urgent challenges remain. Creating an adoption system which is fair and equitable and in which Black children experience the same outcomes as other children is a long-term commitment. Without this work Black children will continue to experience longer delays before moving into an adoptive family and be less likely to be adopted at all; both factors which have a significant negative impact on a range of long-term outcomes.

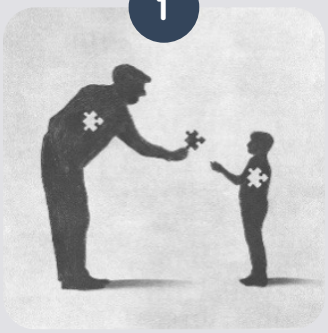
Requisite Black Parenting model

Requisite Parenting is an evidence-informed Black parenting approach developed by Dr Cynthia Okpokiri, University of East Anglia, through research with Black parents and children in England. While it builds on established parenting theories, it extends them by recognising the unique realities of raising Black children in societies where experiences of racism, discrimination and inequality can significantly shape family life. Requisite Parenting was developed in response to concerns that traditional parenting models often fail to account for these structural factors, leaving important aspects of Black families' experiences overlooked.

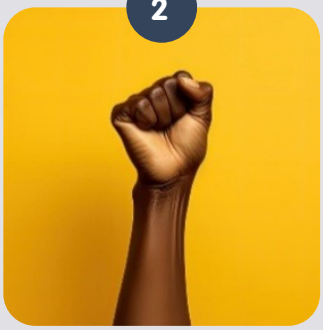
As part of the Black Adoption Project's workforce development strand, in 2025/26 we partnered with Dr Okpokiri to run a series of reflective workshops with our assessing social workers. The workshops provided a space for social workers to think critically about their role in assessing Black prospective adopters, utilising the concepts from the Requisite Parenting model.

Requisite Parenting is underpinned by:

- A strengths-based, culturally responsive framework
- Six core principles that represent essential attributes of positive Black parenting
- Recognition of the impact of structural factors such as racism and poverty on parenting experiences
- Research evidence demonstrating its relevance and credibility among Black children, parents and professionals.



Selfless love



Pride



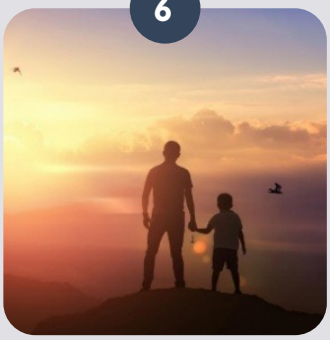
Adaptability



Resourcefulness



Courage



Spirituality

You can read more about Requisite Parenting by following these links:









Key challenges for the Black Adoption Project are:

- **Change is needed urgently**: There are Black children with care plans of adoption now, waiting for us to identify suitable adoptive families, but we do not have enough approved adoptive families waiting. The timescale for these children is urgent.
- **Funding is limited and short-term**: The Project is delivered with the equivalent of 2.2 full-time equivalent staff and there is no funding commitment beyond summer 2027. This greatly limits the pace and reach of work and makes it hard to plan for the future.
- **Challenging context**: The wider societal and global context is making it more difficult for people to commit to adoption at all, and Black communities experience additional barriers to adoption created by discrimination and injustice in wider society. The Black Adoption Project has no control over these factors.
- **Evidencing change can be slow**: Systems change is long-term work, and adoption is a slow process, which means that we will not see miraculous changes quickly. Most people considering adoption take years to think about it and prepare other aspects of their lives before committing to an adoption assessment – this makes it essential that we continue to invest in change now, so that we see change in years to come.

Despite these challenges, the Black Adoption Project has built a strong foundation which is increasingly recognised and trusted by Black individuals and couples considering adoption. In 2026/27 we will continue to build on our existing successful pilot initiatives, focusing on the experiences of those first approaching adoption and identifying ways for the Black Adoption Project to scaffold their journey through the early stages of the process. We also look forward to sharing formal evaluation reports for several of our pilot projects, alongside more informal learning from other areas of our work.

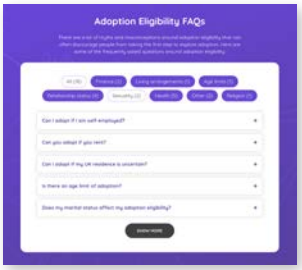
You can find out more about the Black Adoption Project by:

- Looking at our **website**
- Following and supporting us on Instagram or Linkedin @BlackAdoptionProject
- Sign up to our **mailing list**

Adopter recruitment

Advertising and awareness

Our single Adopt London presence online continues to be a great way 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 is constantly updated with rich information for people considering adoption, as well as those accessing support. For adopter recruitment purposes, significant areas of the website include:



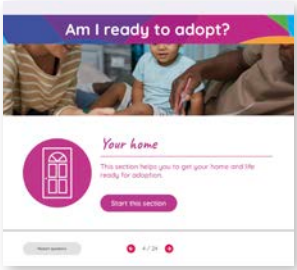
Frequently asked questions



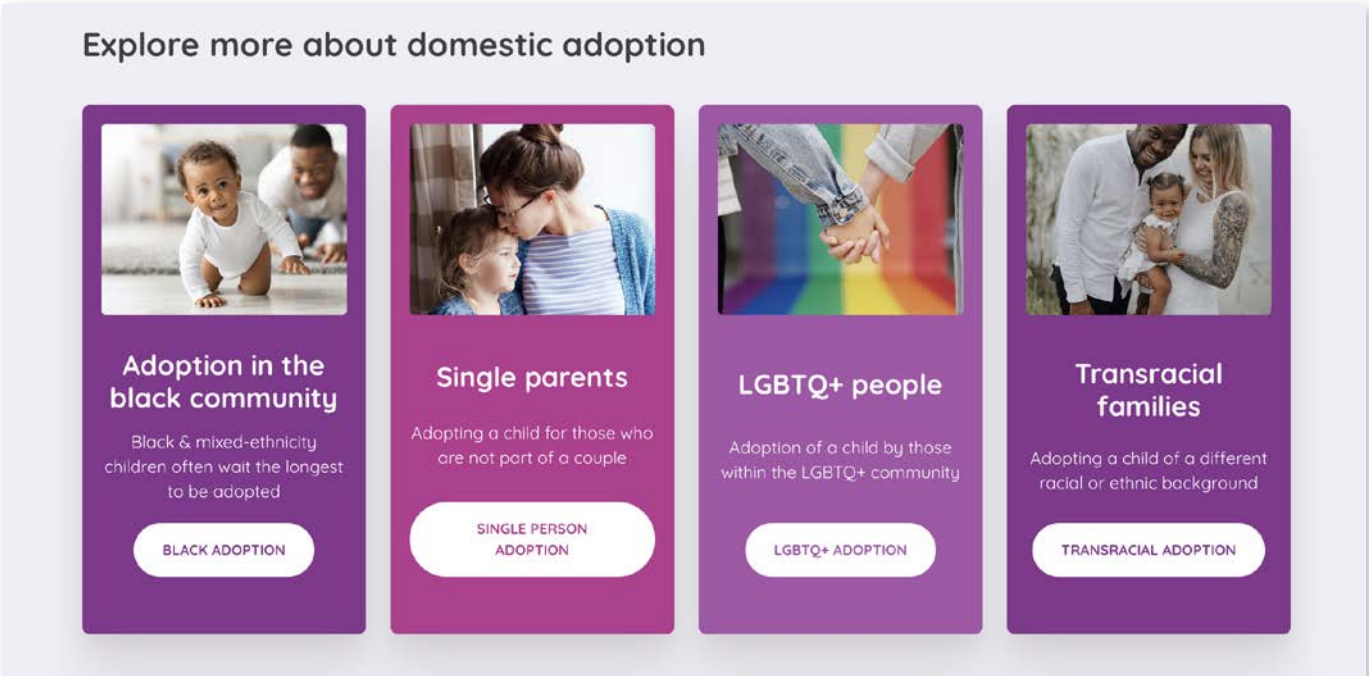
Lived experience case studies



News items



Adoption preparation tool: 'Am I Ready To Adopt?'



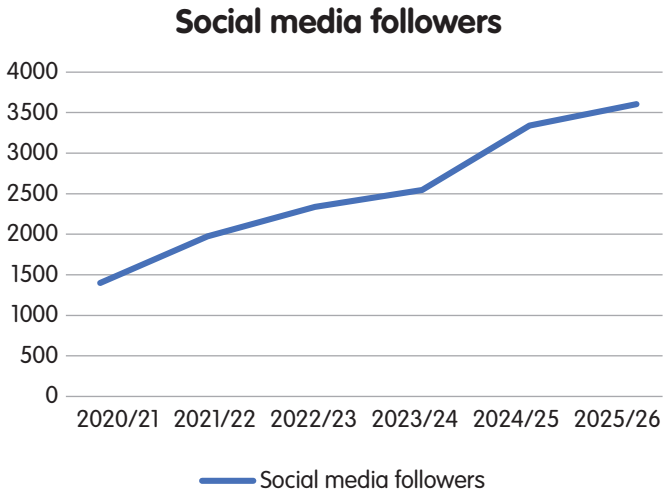
Our accessibility on the internet is an important factor in driving enquiries about adoption and attendance at information sessions, with 38% of attendees at information sessions in 2025/26 stating they chose ALN as a result of an online search for adoption agencies.

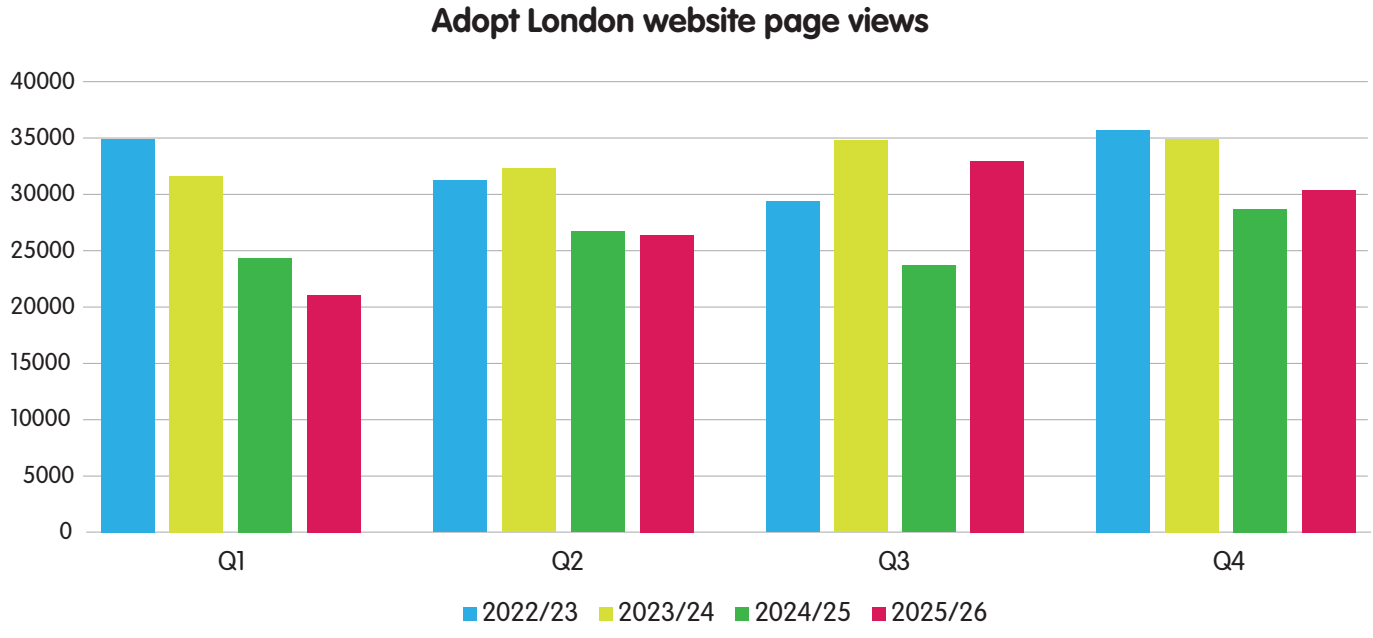
We continue to work closely with our website hosting partner to deliver a programme of continuous digital improvement, ensuring our website remains accessible, user-friendly and responsive to the needs of our audiences. During 2025/26 we undertook work to improve the overall user experience. Key developments included enhanced mobile optimisation, new navigation structures, and improved visual design and content layouts, making it easier for users to find relevant information quickly and efficiently.

Website metrics are tracked to ensure this is reaching the widest possible audience, both for those considering adoption and those accessing support. Adopt London website page views remain very high, with a total of 112,970 page views in 2025/26. This is up 9% from the previous year, with increases seen in the third and fourth quarters, but remains lower than the two years from 2022 – 2024. Our aim for the website as we move forward into the new year is to ensure it is as accessible and helpful as possible for all parties seeking adoption support, and that navigation pathways for those considering adoption are clear.

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. We have seen a significant increase in follower numbers due to the increased following of our **Black Adoption Project** channels across Instagram and LinkedIn.





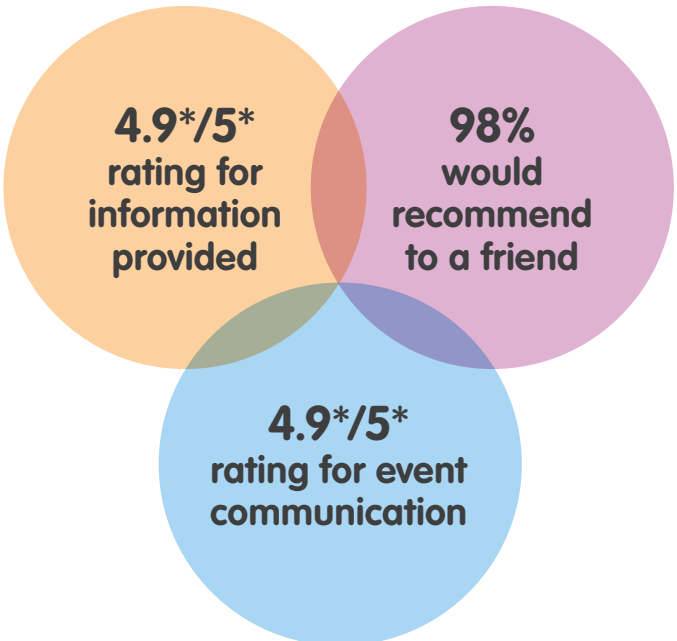


Enquiries and providing information

ALN social work-led Information Sessions are the gateway for prospective adopters into the adoption process. We run virtual and in-person sessions monthly throughout the year. This year 189 households attended an ALN information session, a significant decrease from 248 households in 2024/25 but very similar to attendance the year before (205). This decrease may be part of a **national decline in adoption interest** over the past 2 years however it may also be an indication that 2024/25 was an exceptionally high year. Conversion from event sign up to attendance remains a challenge, with approximately 50% of those who sign up to an event not attending – this figure has been broadly stable since the pandemic. This year we have started to use text message reminders to increase attendance and have analysed sign up data to understand the trends behind attendance. We have found that:

- Organic online searches yield the highest volume of sign ups
- But recommendations yield the best attendance rates
- Social media generates awareness but does not contribute to high event attendance

58 people who attended an Information Session this year responded to our feedback survey, saying:



"We learnt so much, primarily questions around timelines. Was great to see a dynamic group of people on the call too."

"Knowledgeable, warm, clear, and honest."

"It was interesting to understand the process overall, it was super clear."

"[I learnt today] that contact with birth parents, even if they are in difficult personal situations, drug dependency, etc., helps the child emotionally, and that most abuse/neglect is not intentional, it's due mainly to the parents' problems/illness."

"It was so informative and eye opening."

"The most important thing I heard about was] the opportunity to adopt a Black or mixed race child, but also that you don't have to be rich/wealthy, but instead have the love to give to a child who may not have experienced this either not at all or only in small amounts."

"It was really nice having welcoming and friendly folks from ALN run the session, made it very personable."

"Really appreciated all the information and all the follow up info sent through, will make it nice and clear how we can get ourselves prepared."

"The session as a whole was brilliant. I hadn't realised that an adopter could potentially also become a temporary foster carer – I think this is a really fulfilling opportunity and a great initiative."

Alongside Information Sessions, we deliver regular ALN Meet the Adopter sessions, with 97 households attending a session this year, a significant drop compared to 218 households in 2024/25. This drop is likely impacted by similar factors to the drop in Information Session attendance, but is also partly a result of running fewer sessions this year due to the introduction of **Black Adoption Project Meet The Adopter** events.

Meet The Adopter events provide an opportunity for attendees to ask a panel of experienced adoptive parents any question they like. 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. We believe these sessions are a crucial part of building trust with prospective adopters, who may have a perception that social workers are trying to 'sell' a particular stance, but are likely to have a high level of trust in adoptive parents speaking about their own experiences.

67% of attendees at information sessions and 72% 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 for Londoners to approach.

Despite drops in the number of people attending events, overall enquiry numbers have remained high at 870, which is similar to the number of enquiries received the previous year.

Of those who attended an information session this year, 26% went on to submit an Expression of Interest application compared to 25% in 2024/25. 40% of those who submitted an Expression of Interest then went on to start a stage 1 assessment compared to 48% in the previous year.

"I am very grateful for the chance to attend and to hear such different perspectives. The seriousness of the process is clear and reassuring, and at the same time I felt encouraged by the honesty of the adopters who shared their stories. These sessions are a real support for prospective adopters, and I think they make a big difference."

"We felt positive and relaxed. We feel really good after the session, reflecting and discussing what we heard."

"The first-hand experience of the adopters was very valuable, with all the different aspects which come with adoption on a daily basis."

"Hearing adopters speak about how therapeutic parenting is essential, and how the needs of adopted children can be very different from birth children, was particularly valuable."

"It was brilliant to have a single adopter on the call - it's the first time that I've seen the single adopter experience represented in what I've listened to / read and I found it really helpful."

"Love to hear that looking after your mental health is important to better look after your child."

Prospective adopter enquiries

Number of households who…	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Made an enquiry	714	827	873	993	878	870
Signed up to an information session	493	516	214	311	444	375
Attended an information session	351	349	143	205	248	189
Submitted an Expression of Interest application	128	136	50	40	64	50
Started Stage 1 assessment	26	18	14	16	31	20

The overall picture is that despite national trends, interest in adoption and adopter recruitment with ALN has remained strong this year. As we go into 2026/27 ALN are focused on:

- Our core prospective adopter events remaining strong and regularly available, whilst exploring ways to increase the proportion of those signing up who attend the event.
- Auditing and improving processes to ensure Black families who first attend a Black Adoption Project event continue to have a positive experience and see themselves represented when attending ALN events or making an application to adopt.



Approval of prospective adopters

The number of adopter approvals made by ALN has been stronger over the last two years. Over 2022/23 – 2023/24 our adopter approval numbers were particularly low due to limited capacity within the assessment team, and the impact of increasing numbers of **non-agency adoption** applications. As a result of these challenges, the ALN Governance Board agreed to increase the size of the recruitment & assessment team with three additional staff members. This increase allowed ALN to re-open recruitment and has resulted in an increased number of adopter approvals. ALN aims to increase this number further over the next two years in order to bring adopter approvals closer in line with the number of ALN children placed for adoption annually.

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.

Adoptive household approvals

2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
19	12	24	13	9	22	23

Prospective adopter preparation

We continue to undertake work to strengthen the preparation and training offered to our prospective adopters, to ensure they feel well equipped and capable of navigating the journey through early parenthood. Everything we learn from delivering adoption support within the service impacts the development of our prospective adopter preparation, which is comprehensive and regularly reviewed.

1 day foundation training
at the start of the assessment process, introduces the main areas of learning and what to expect, along with hearing from people with lived experience of adoption

3 day preparation training
co-facilitated by an adoptive parent. This experiential training covers learning areas in more depth, including the transition period and life as an adoptive family post placement

1.5 day early permanence training
co-facilitated by adoptive parents. Helps adopters make a decision about early permanence and gives more information about care planning and court proceedings, the experiences of birth parents, and supporting contact

1 day culturally diverse adoption training
co-facilitated with a transracially adopted person. It develops an understanding of the identity needs of adopted children and how these can be supported

1 day paediatric first aid training
ensures all those who may go on to have a child placed for early permanence will meet fostering regulation standards, and better equips all adopters for early parenthood

Lunchtime family & friends workshops
for anyone within the prospective adopter's network. These provide an overview of modern adoption and focus particularly on ways in which family & friends can support the new adoptive family

"The training was very thorough, and we felt like we came away much more informed and clearer on our desire to proceed."

"We really loved the training, and it exceeded our expectations. Presenters were great and engaging, the vibe was lovely, open communication and conversation with the rest of the group and all social workers and presenters."

"I found the petal exercise to be particularly challenging, as it required me to symbolically give away important parts of my own life and identity, which at times felt uncomfortable and exposing; however, this discomfort also helped me to reflect more deeply on how significant identity is for every person, and how difficult it can be for children who have experienced separation or loss to hold on to and make sense of the different pieces of who they are."

PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

Co-delivering training with people who have lived experience of adoption

We have always had people with lived experience visiting and speaking at our prospective adopter training, but in the past year we have been moving towards our training being co-delivered with those who have lived experience of adoption. This increases prospective adopters' trust in the adoption process and therefore their openness, and ensures training content remains relevant, practical, and grounded in real experiences.

For the last year, adoptive mum N has been co-delivering our core 3 day adopter preparation training alongside social workers from the assessment team. We asked her some questions to understand what this has been like from her perspective.

Q: What motivates you to be a part of the preparation training?

A: I value the opportunity to be a part of supporting prospective adopters on their journey in any way that I can. I have a background in facilitating training and it seemed like a really good fit in terms of best utilising my skillset to be of use to others.

Q: How have you found the experience, and what have you learnt from doing this?

A: I really enjoy co-facilitating the prep training. At times, it can be challenging sharing lived experience at points when I'm going through adoption difficulties myself, but that's also what drives me to continue wanting to support prospective adopters in understanding the real life complexities of adopting from someone who has actually experienced what they are going through / will experience in the future. It keeps me in the loop and up to date on current adoption practices. It has also helped me to deepen my own skills and practices as an adoptive parent by revisiting exercises that serve as a really useful and important reminder.

Q: What do you think the impact is on prospective adopters of having an adoptive parent involved in leading the training?

A: Overall, I think it has a positive impact. I remember how much I valued having an adopter share their story during my own prep training, which is something that still happens during current training, but ALN have taken it a step further and have allowed me to be present for the whole thing enabling me to share my perspective and lived experience from an adopter's point of view, throughout. I feel very touched by much of the feedback that is left by participants on their view of me co-facilitating. During breaks and at the end of training some have shared with me that they find my input valuable, and I find that they'll pull me aside and ask me questions that they might not have felt comfortable raising in the whole group with social workers present. The sort of things they ask or want to talk about are not things of concern, they're usually things they might feel are too silly to ask in front of a social worker and some are just a little shy and prefer to speak with someone with no authority over their final adoption outcome.

Culturally Diverse Adoption training for prospective adopters

Culturally Diverse Adoption training was originally developed by ALN social workers in response to poor feedback from externally commissioned transracial adoption training. J, an adopted adult with lived experience of transracial adoption, became part of this work at an early stage to help develop material and then co-deliver the programme. The training helps attendees develop their understanding of the identity needs of adopted children, emphasising that all adoption has cross-cultural elements even when the child and adoptive family are from similar racial backgrounds. The group also specifically consider the needs of children whose backgrounds are fully or partially unknown, an experience that is very common for adopted people. Feedback from attendees has highlighted the importance of J being present as a co-facilitator and being able to share his experiences throughout the day, rather than in a limited visitor slot. Following successful implementation in ALN, this training is now being rolled out across Adopt London as a mandatory element of prospective adopter preparation.

"Most valuable: real life experience from J. So many points resonated with personal experience."

"We especially appreciated having someone who was adopted transculturally share their experience, as it provided valuable first-hand insight and added depth to the session."

When asked to identify learning from the training, attendees said:

"We cannot be tokenistic about finding ways to celebrate the child's heritage. It should be something we work into all aspects of life. We need to make sure there are strong role models around them from when they are very young."

"Children need clear, guided, age-appropriate conversations. Avoiding conversation is not an appropriate way to protect children."

"The challenges posed by transcultural adoption will shift and change as the child gets older and learns more about themselves. This felt important as it shows the need to research and be aware of their background, so you can respond to a child's different questions and the different challenges you will face as they develop."

Attendees are asked to look critically at their own context and consider how the friends, family, and community around them will be able to support the identity needs of their adopted child.

"[It was helpful] to really think about our ecomap when it comes to transcultural adoption, as well as thinking about all the different opportunities there would be for that child. To explore the heritage locally in London, whether it is through youth clubs or groups, or even the school environment that they're in."

"It was a really challenging exercise, but it was also rewarding and really helped. This moved us further into the process of thinking about our support systems."

"At this point in our assessment, we've already had many conversations and reflections around transcultural adoption. However, during the matching process, introductions, and beyond, we aim to explore further resources and support networks for families adopting transculturally, so we can stay informed, connected, and better prepared to support our future child."

The training also supports attendees to think more deeply about racism and prejudice, and to consider how they will support their child through challenges they may experience.

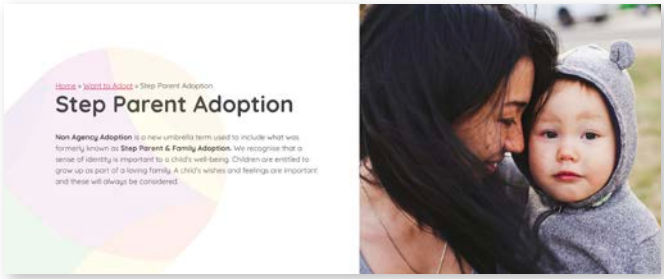
"Thinking about how a child could experience prejudice that we might not be able to relate to was certainly a challenging aspect of the day, as it made us reflect on how we would deal with this. One aspect of this that felt challenging was that this prejudice could take very different forms depending on the background of the child."

"I personally found very useful the practical [examples] or tips about future or potentially daily challenges when it comes to transracial or culturally diverse adoption, especially around language, racism, identity, and handling comments."

Non-agency adoptions

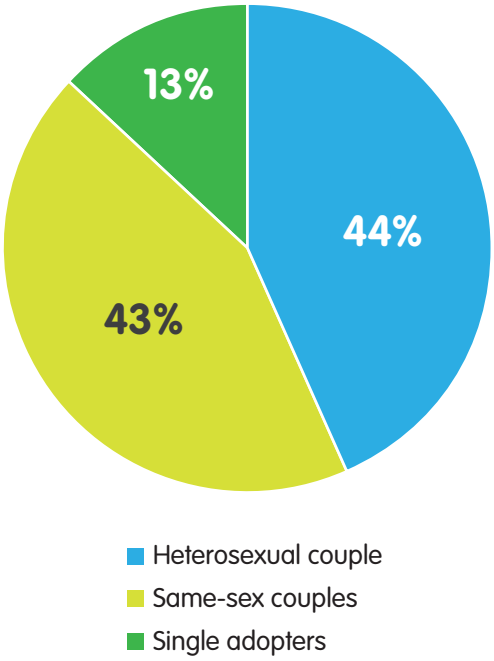
On behalf of partner local authorities, ALN are legally required to provide advice and assess any resident who wishes to privately apply for an adoption order for a child in their care (non-agency adoption) and can be directed by the court to complete an assessment within a specific timescale. The Adopt 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 2025/26 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. To read an example of the issues raised by this kind of adoption case, **follow this link.**



Non-agency cases continue to negatively impact recruitment capacity and ALN are prohibited by law from charging for these services. Following a detailed audit of this work in 2023/24, ALN have presented our concerns to Adoption England and to the Department of Education, and have been invited to participate in further conversations about these issues. Until the government take action to deal with some of the many difficulties emerging from this area of the law, these cases are likely to continue to be an ongoing pressure on ALN, reducing our capacity to assess adoptive families for children in care.

Family structure



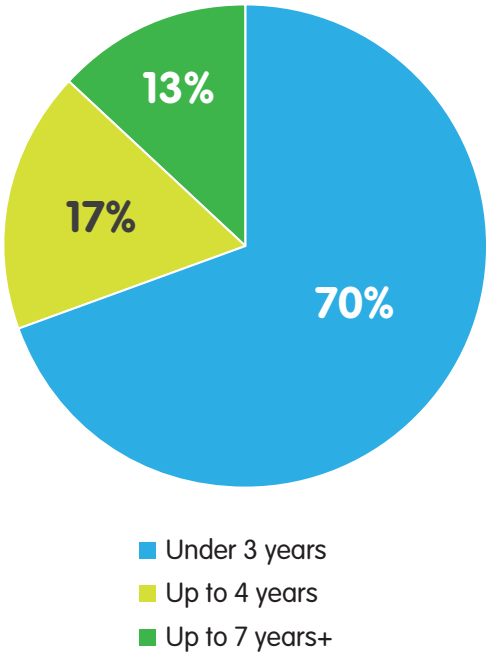
Characteristics of approved adopters

Approved adoptive households continue to be very diverse in terms of family structure, with 43% being heterosexual couples, 43% same-sex couples, and 13% single adopters.

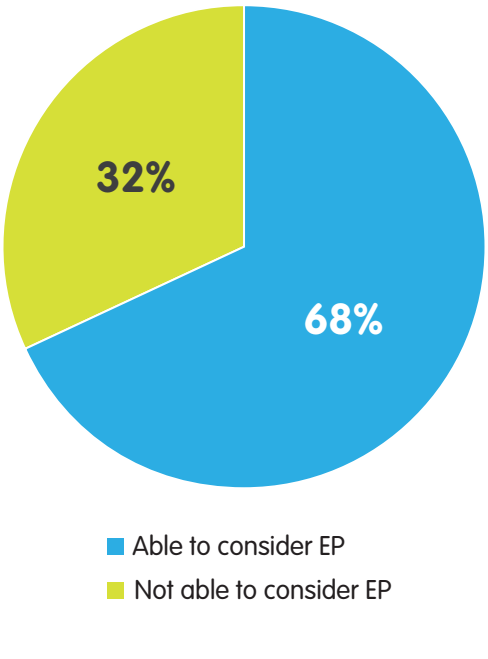
The proportion of approved households only willing to consider younger children (3 years or below) increased significantly this year – with 70% of households this year wanting to adopt a younger child compared to only 14% last year. This means that the proportion willing to adopt older children (up to the age of 7 years) has decreased, from 50% last year to only 13% this year. Some of these figures have been impacted by a number of adopters being approved specifically for young babies who are the biological siblings of their adopted children, however this change remains striking even when these approvals are removed from the figures. Part of the influence on this change may be the increasing number of adopters putting themselves forward for early permanence, which encourages a focus on younger children.

The proportion of adopters being approved who are able to consider an early permanence placement has remained very high again this year at 68% (compared to 71% last year),

Approval criteria – age of children



Approved adopters able to consider early permanence

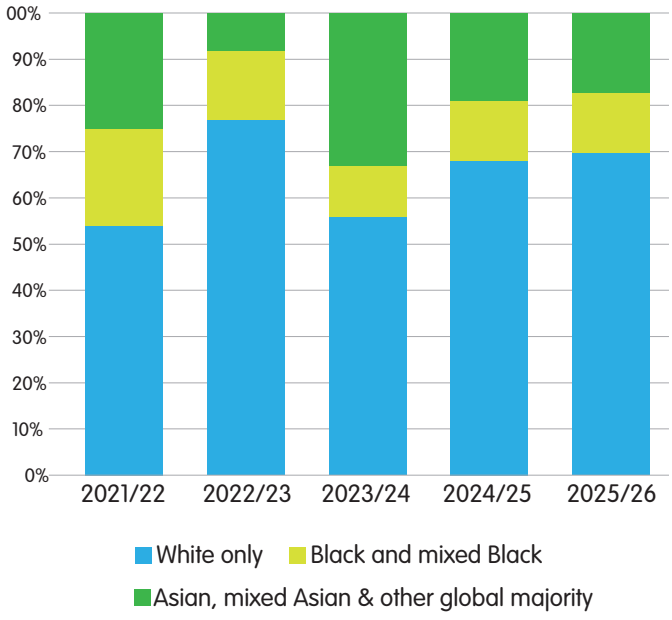


showing that the increase in these figures marks a consistent trend. This indicates that our work focusing on early permanence systems across Adopt London and introducing mandatory early permanence training have led to a significant shift in practice.

Despite this improvement, there are still not enough early permanence carers available for all children who are identified as benefiting from this type of placement. This is partially due to the national shortage of approved adopters, leading to newly approved early permanence carers being quickly matched with children through the mainstream adoption route, rather than waiting for a suitable early permanence match. In addition, there remains a significant challenge to recruit early permanence carers from global majority backgrounds.

This year 30% of approved households had at least one person of a global majority ethnicity and 70% of households had adopters only of white British (39%) or other white ethnicities (31%). The number of adopter households approved who have at least one Black or mixed Black parent remains very low at 13%. This is compared to an average of 49% of children matched for adoption by ALN annually who are from global majority backgrounds, with 79% of these being from Black & mixed Black ethnicities. These figures highlight the urgent work that still needs to be undertaken to ensure our approved adoptive parents reflect the backgrounds of children who have a care plan of adoption.

Ethnicity of approved households



Family finding 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 provides 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, and we have good escalation processes in place to manage concerns.

PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

Telling children about adoption

Written by two Adopt London North family finding social workers, this practical guide for children's social workers and foster carers was officially launched in October 2025 with a large conference for local authority leaders and 'champions'. In the morning the conference heard from Rachel Staff, a specialist therapeutic social worker, on how to support and understand the needs of children during placement transitions. After lunch, a live panel made up of the social workers, adoptive parents, and foster carer who worked together to enable the transition of a brother and sister, reflected on their experiences of preparing and supporting the children before and after they moved to live with their adoptive family. The presentation was powerful in highlighting how many people need to be involved in careful reflection and strong team work to support positive moves for children, and inspired the audience to consider how to make space to do this work well.



Rachel & Steph who wrote the guide said:

"We recognise that life story conversations can be complicated for children and those initiating the conversation, and that often we – as professionals – feel apprehensive about telling children difficult and painful things, however, it's really important that this work takes place for all children. The quality of early adoption conversations, and preparation for children will have a life-long impact on

their sense of identity, self-esteem, and relationships with others.

The goal is for all children to understand what is happening in their lives as decisions are being made by the grown-ups. This helps them to make sense of their world, to experience their feelings being held and validated, and to know why and when things are changing. It creates an environment where children feel safe to talk about anything and know that there is no topic that is off limits.

As social workers in the family finding team, it was important to create a book that helped our colleagues deliver some really important messages in a step-by-step guide that provided advice, suggested wording and resource suggestions."

When asked how useful the Guide would be to participants in their work, attendees said:

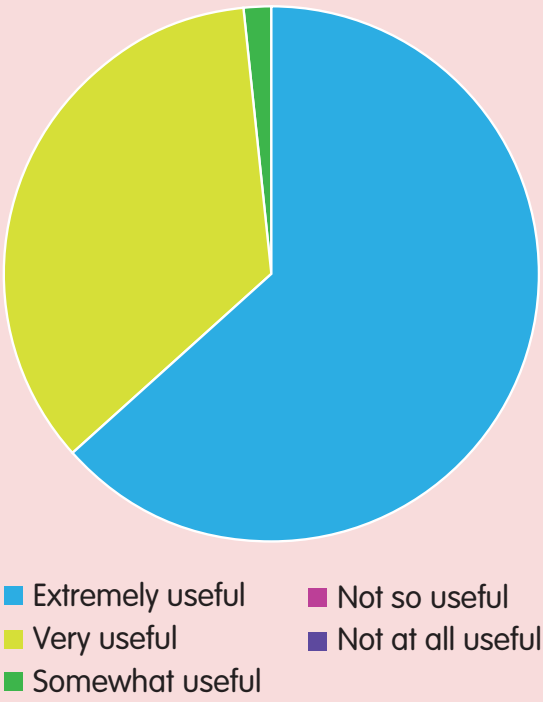
"It genuinely all was brilliant!"

"Hearing from the panel of different professionals and adopters was really captivating. Hearing how all the different roles interconnect and support each other."

"The keynote speaker was very informative and insightful. The panel discussion was very powerful and lovely to hear."

"Thank you for this learning experience, I feel very lucky to have attended today and will ensure I take this back to the local authority."

"What an excellent event. Really insightful and well put together. Really valued some honest and transparent conversations and feedback from participants. It was a pleasure to be a part of this event!"



Work now continues to embed this guide into family finding practice across Adopt London North with the provision of a regular Practitioners Forum and presentations to service and team meetings. Following requests from Adoption England, the guide has also now been offered to other Regional Adoption Agencies and is therefore having a national impact on improving practice in preparing and supporting children for transitions.



Children with a plan for adoption

Figures in this section of the report are taken from boroughs' own data reports to the Department for Education. Exact figures may contain inaccuracies which are amended by later data reports.

Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Best Interests Decisions for adoption have been consistently high over the last 4 years, with 2024/25 an exceptionally high year. Illustrating this increase, the 4-year average of 77.5 Decisions compares to a 5-year average of 69.2 Decisions. This was reflected in placement orders this year, with a huge increase to a reported 93 placement orders, compared to a 5-year average of 58.8 orders. Adoptive placement numbers however have remained broadly stable, at 36 placements compared to a 5-year average of 37 placements. There are several key factors likely to be impacting these figures:

- There has been a genuine significant increase in placement orders, however the figure in the ASG data may be over-reported, exaggerating the effect. Our own ALN data has captured 71 placement orders over the same period.
- An impact on adoption placements will be delayed due to the time it takes from a placement order to complete family finding and transitions, therefore higher adoption placements are likely to be observed in 2026/27. Higher placement figures over the first quarter of 2026/27 support this likelihood.
- National adopter sufficiency challenges over the last few years are impacting on availability of adopter placements which means that a higher number of children will wait longer for an adoptive placement and may not be adopted, despite the court granting a placement order. This means that there is unlikely to be the same level of increase in adoption placements as in placement orders.

The percentage of children taken into care before turning 5 who go on to have an adoption plan has gradually increased over a 4-year period and is currently at 35%, meaning that 1 in every 3 children taken into care across north London under the age of 5 go on to have an adoption plan. Again, this figure varies considerably between boroughs, with Barnet's 4-year average at 42% compared to Hackney's 4-year average at 17%. A higher or lower rate is not necessarily positive or negative, but is an important opportunity for boroughs to look at permanency planning outcomes for children under 5 who did not have an ADM decision, and reassure themselves that these decisions were appropriate.

The figures also show that a significant number of placement order applications 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, 18% of Best Interest Decisions made in ALN boroughs resulted in care proceedings concluding without a placement order compared to a 12% England average.

Overall, the picture is of increasing numbers of adoption plans for children across north London, with these increases being seen particularly (but not exclusively) across Barnet and Enfield.

1 in every 3 children who came into care before the age of 5 across north London had a care plan of adoption



Best Interests Decisions

Data provided by borough's own ASG national data collection returns
Data for previous years may differ from previous reports if later amended by the borough with the ASG
*This data can only be reported a year in arrears

	Total ADM Best Interests Decisions					% children taken into care before turning 5 with a Best Interests Decision*			
Borough	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Barnet	5	14	20	30	21	28%	49%	46%	45%
Camden	4	9	10	8	7	22%	36%	37%	24%
Enfield	11	17	18	21	28	34%	26%	37%	59%
Hackney	2	4	12	11	5	5%	19%	25%	19%
Haringey	7	16	8	10	4	19%	18%	32%	21%
Islington	7	9	11	10	7	35%	16%	33%	26%
Total	**36**	**69**	**79**	**90**	**72**	**26%**	**28%**	**36%**	**35%**

Placements and placement orders

Data provided by borough's own ASG national data collection 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	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Barnet	8	4	9	11	16	5	5	18	18	29
Camden	3	5	5	3	2	5	5	6	4	11
Enfield	12	15	8	9	5	11	11	12	8	28
Hackney	10	3	3	2	4	3	2	7	8	8
Haringey	10	6	10	9	5	8	16	8	4	12
Islington	3	5	1	5	2	2	3	5	4	5
Total	**46**	**38**	**36**	**39**	**34**	**32**	**42**	**56**	**46**	**93**

Family finding process

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

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).

We have strong links across Adopt London which support efficient family finding for children. Our work together includes Adopt London play sessions held at London Zoo where prospective adopters can informally meet and play alongside children and their foster carers. Our ALN family finding team also run regular 'stay & play' sessions locally to introduce prospective adopters

to a small number of children and give space for direct interaction. These sessions are particularly effective at supporting in-house matching as they give prospective adopters a chance to connect with children in real life, in contrast to reading paper-based profiles. The national family finding data base Link Maker is also used by family finders to search for external placements where suitable ALN or Adopt London placements are not available.

In-house placements

We prioritise placing children with ALN adopters wherever this is possible for a number of reasons including:

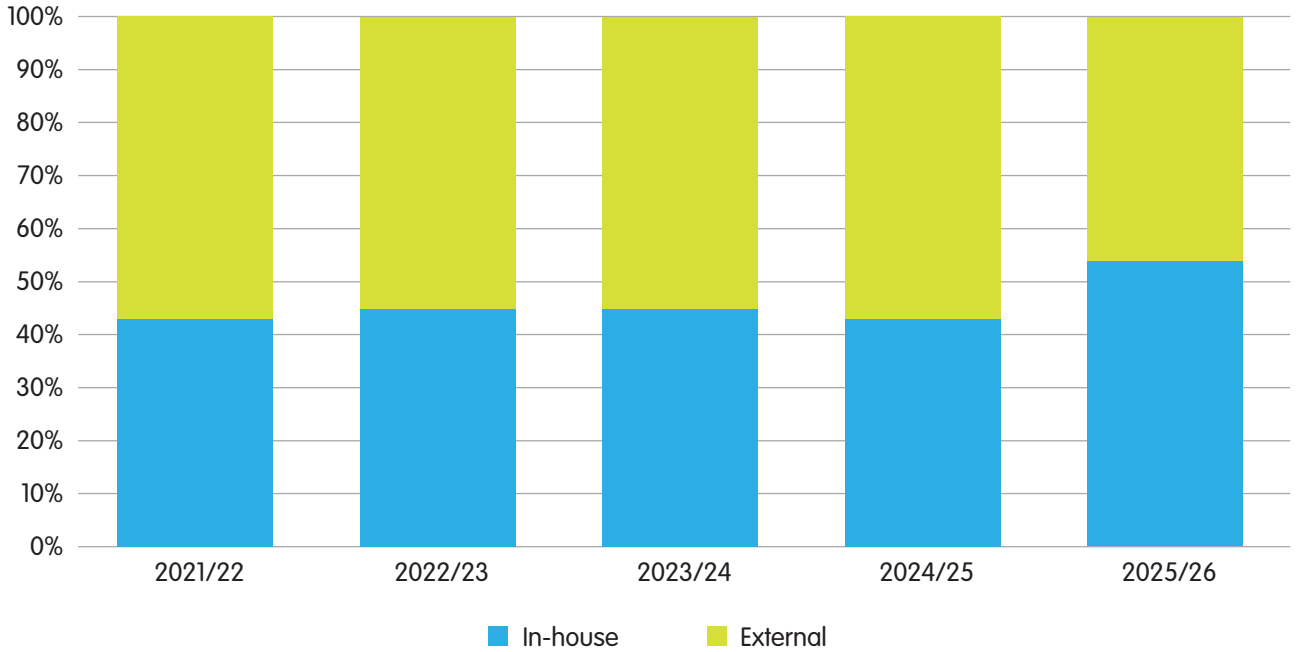
- We know the prospective adopters and the children's needs really well, which increases confidence in making the right match.
- Our assessment social workers work closely with the adopters to support them in the early placement period, and we can identify quickly if there are concerns emerging.
- We are confident in the high quality of training and preparation that our in-house adopters receive which prepares them well for parenting, including some areas of training that other agencies do not provide.
- An in-house placement means that only ALN and the child's borough are involved with the match, limiting the number of professionals involved and ensuring we have good escalation processes that work well if concerns arise.
- Although the risk of placement breakdown pre-Adoption Order is already very low, this risk is even lower for in-house placements.

However, every child's needs are different, and we do not compromise on the needs of the child if a suitable in-house adoptive family are not available. In these situations, we search within Adopt London, with other agencies in London and the South-East, or nationally to ensure we identify the best possible match for the child.

We have a long-term goal to increase the number of children placed in-house. This requires us to increase the number of approvals (through expansion of the recruitment team), and to ensure those adoptive families approved are able to meet the needs of ALN children. This year we have been able to increase in-house placements to our highest proportion yet, at 53%, compared to a five-year average of 46%.

Not every ALN 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, many adopters understand the benefits of an in-house placement and are prepared to wait for this.

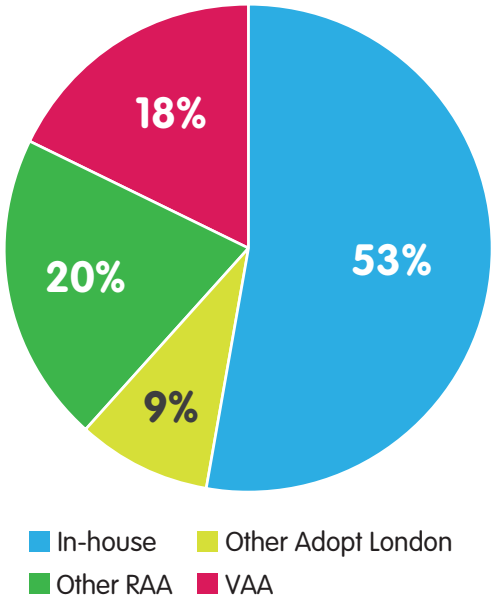
Type of adoptive placement for children matched



In addition to these overall figures, we continue to see a significant reduction in the use of Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) placements used, which historically made up around 50% of all placements. This figure has now reduced to just 18%, supported by our work to strengthen links across Adopt London and an increase in placements with other Regional Adoption Agencies.



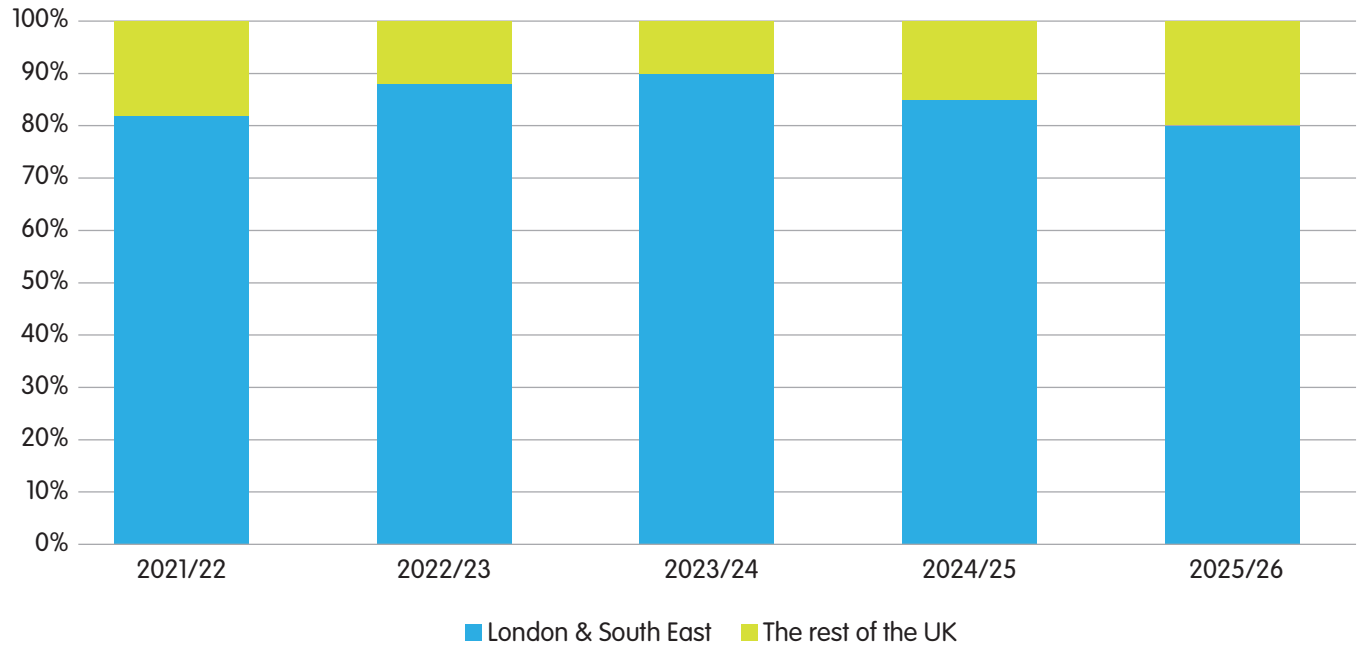
Breakdown of placement type for children matched



Location of placements

We to aim to place as many children as possible within London and the South-East, as this enables ALN and the child's social worker 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 80% of children matched for adoption went to live with adoptive families in London and the South-East, with 20% of children moving further afield to live with their adoptive family. This figure is a slight decrease from the five-year average of 85%, being impacted by the national adopter sufficiency challenges.

Location of adoptive placements



Disruptions of adoptive placements

None of our adoptive parents have been involved in a disrupted placement since ALN begun in 2019 and there have been no adoptive placement disruptions of an ALN child since April 2023. Overall, 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.

Unfortunately, it is very hard to track disruptions that occur after an adoption order because it is the local authority in the area that the family lives who takes responsibility for a child who comes back into care at this stage. Large national research studies have shown that disruption rates in adoption over the long-term are low, but are very complex when they do occur **(see practice highlight on the Family Routes study)**.

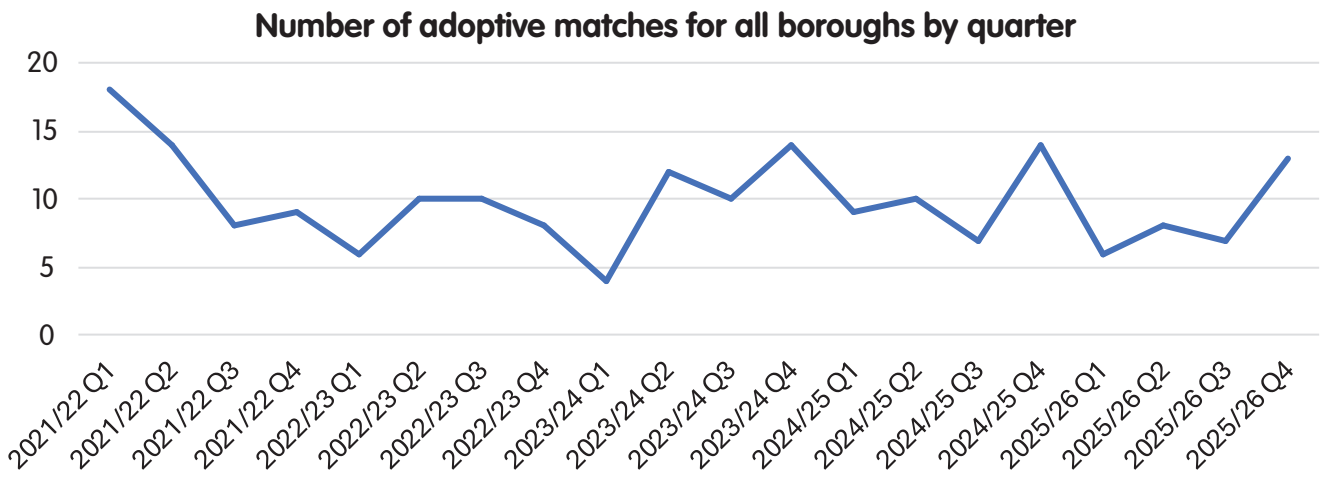
We are undertaking work locally in partnership with our boroughs to understand more about the local picture and what we can do to **support adoptive families who reach a crisis point**.

Adoptive matches made

The number of children matched with adopters has slightly dipped this year but overall remains stable. 34 children were matched for adoption in 2025/26 compared to a five-year average of 39. The data indicates that although there are annual variations and volatile quarterly figures, the number of children being placed for adoption across the ALN partnership is reasonably consistent and is not in decline. Adoptive matches this year have been impacted by the national adopter sufficiency crisis, but 2026/27 is expected to see an increase due to the exceptionally high number of placement orders granted in 2025/26.

Number of adoptive matches for all boroughs

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
49	34	40	40	34



Number of adoptive matches

Borough	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Barnet	10	4	8	16	13
Camden	4	6	6	1	2
Enfield	12	14	7	11	4
Hackney	8	2	4	1	6
Haringey	13	5	12	8	4
Islington	2	3	3	3	5
Total	**49**	**34**	**40**	**40**	**34**

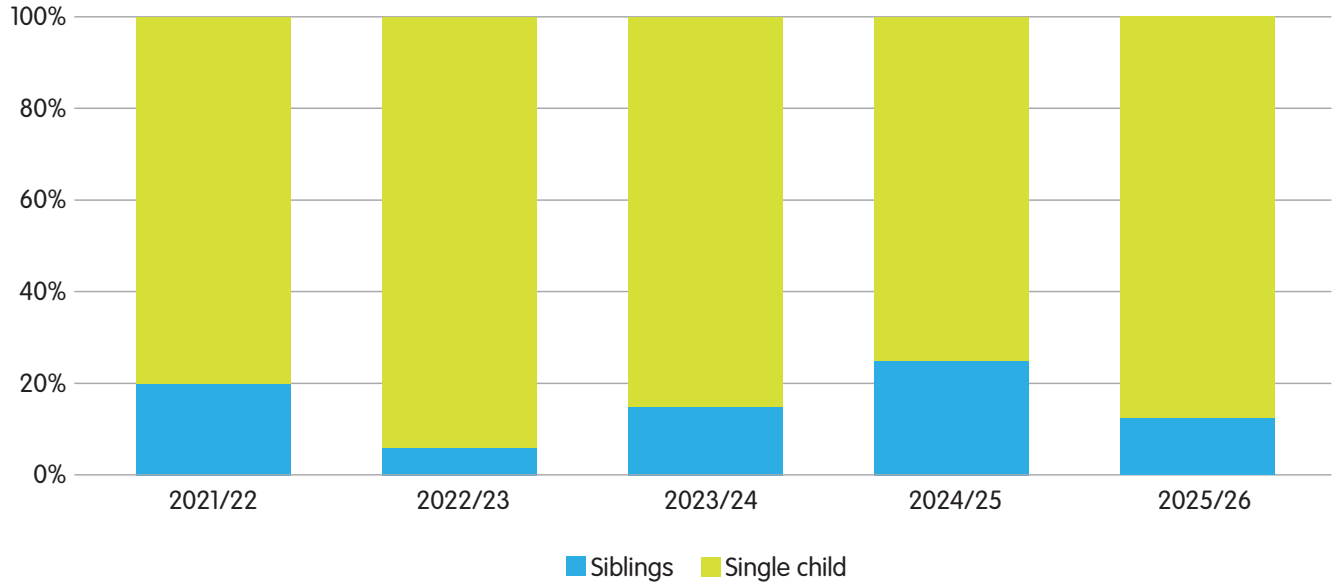
Characteristics of children matched for adoption

The number of children placed for adoption at the same time and in the same placement as their sibling decreased this year and remains a minority of all children placed for adoption (2 sibling groups accounting for 4 children, compared to 30 children not placed 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. In the context of a national shortage of adopters, family finding for sibling groups can be much more challenging.

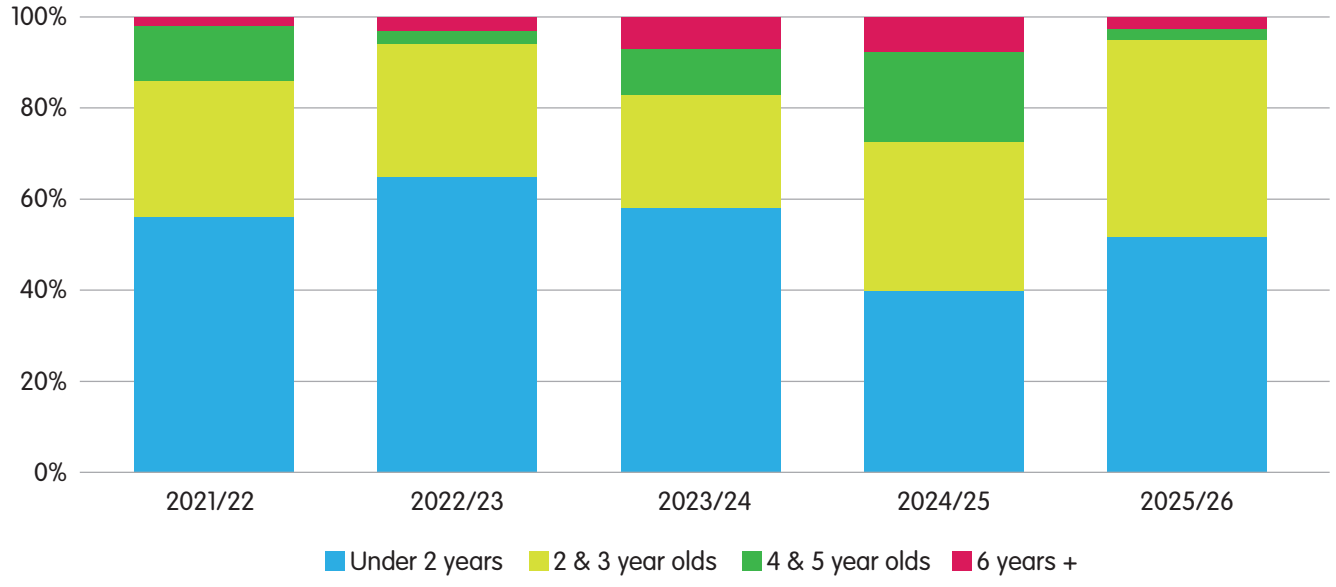
On average children have been placed for adoption at a younger age than last year, with 94% of children being 3 years or younger when moving to live with their adoptive family, compared to 72.5% in 2024/25. Only two children were aged 4 or over, with the oldest child being 6½ years.

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, 49% of the children matched for adoption were from global majority backgrounds this year, consistent with a five-year average of 48.7%. ALN have been

Children matched for adoption in sibling groups



Ages of children matched for adoption

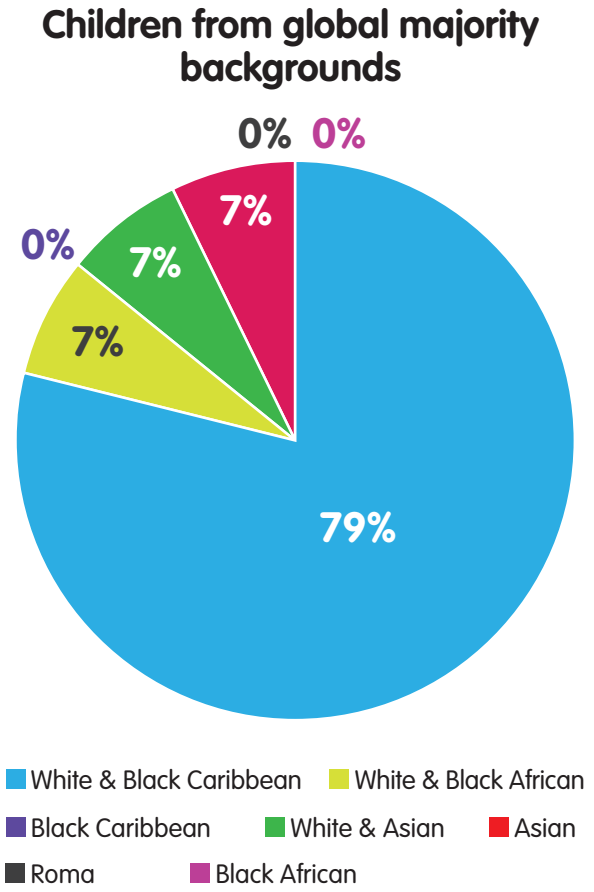


79%
of all children from a global majority background matched for adoption have mixed Black Caribbean and white heritage

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, 86% of these were from Black and mixed Black ethnicity backgrounds. Looking further demonstrates that the largest group are children from mixed white & Black Caribbean backgrounds, making up 79% of all global majority children and 92% of all children from Black and mixed Black backgrounds.

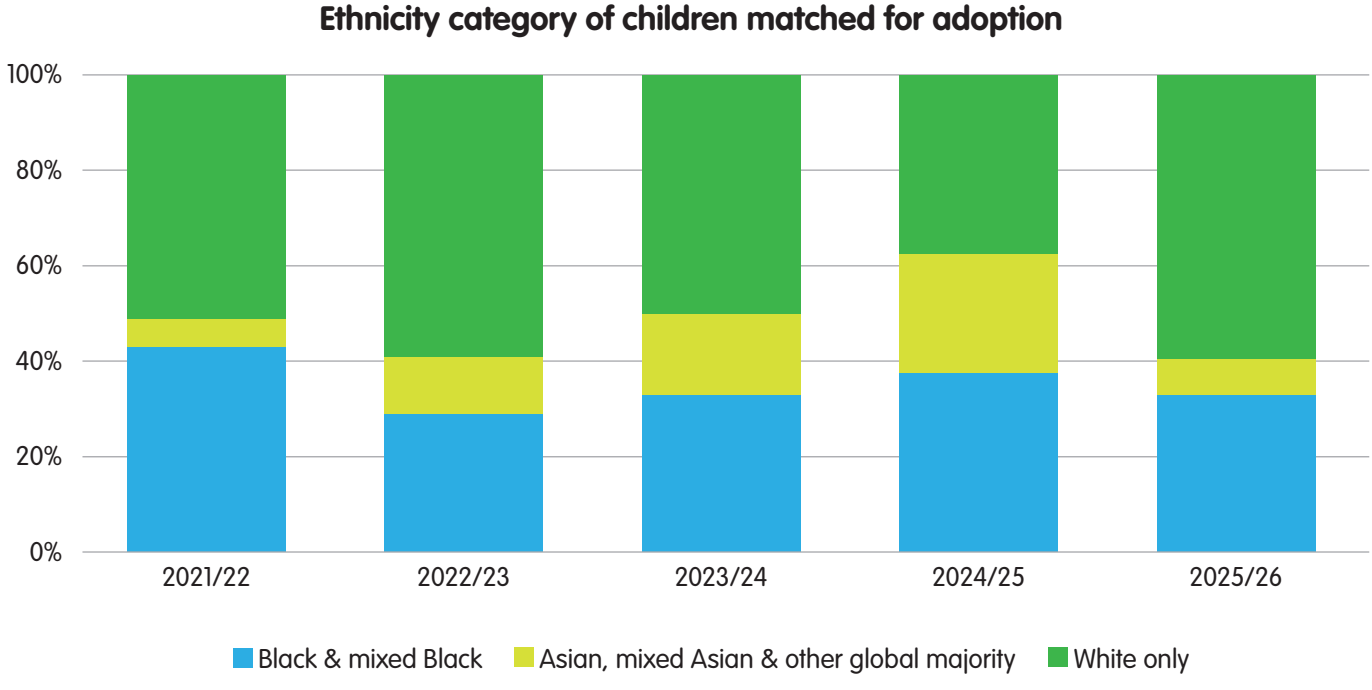
Although it is important to categorise ethnicities to provide an understanding of the broad picture and inform adopter recruitment, children's ethnic backgrounds in reality are complex, with many children matched for adoption having 3 or more immediate ethnic backgrounds, and uncertainty around many children's heritage. 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 11 children placed for early permanence with prospective adoptive parents during 2025/26 compared to a five-year average



of 8.4 children. 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**. The proportion of adopters approved by ALN who are open to an early permanence placement remains high, 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. 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, and we aim for the availability of early permanence placements to increase as overall adopter recruitment increases.

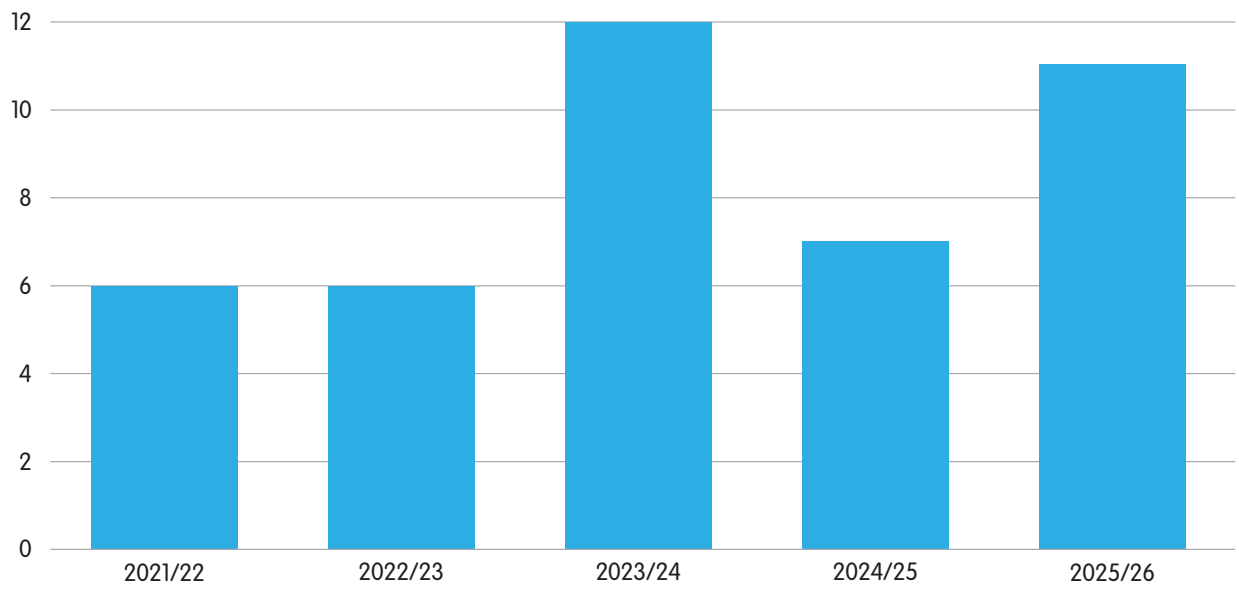
On average, **49%** of children matched for adoption are from global majority backgrounds and **51%** are from white backgrounds

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.

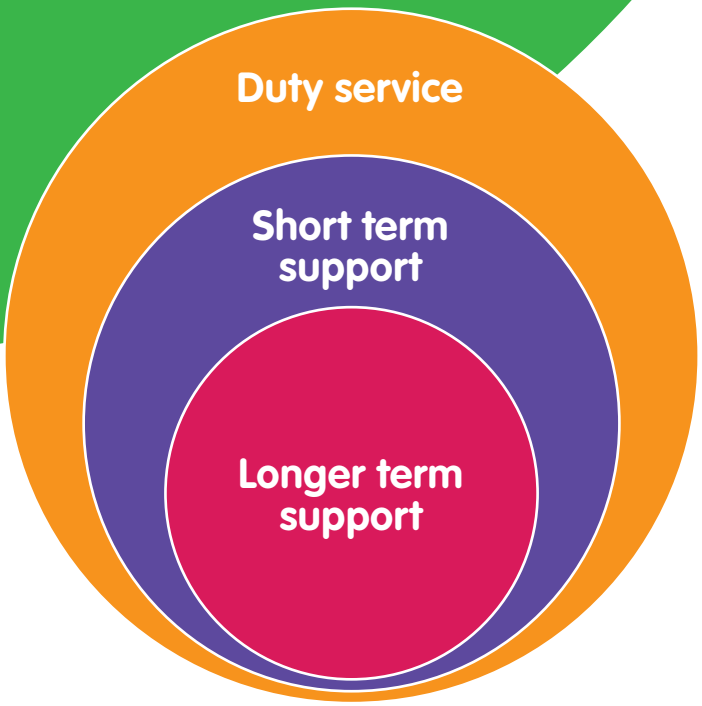
Early Permanence placements made

Borough	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Barnet	0	6	3	4	6
Camden	2	0	3	0	1
Enfield	2	0	1	2	0
Hackney	0	0	1	1	0
Haringey	1	0	2	0	1
Islington	1	0	2	0	3
Total	**6**	**6**	**12**	**7**	**11**

Number of early permanence placements made



Adoption support



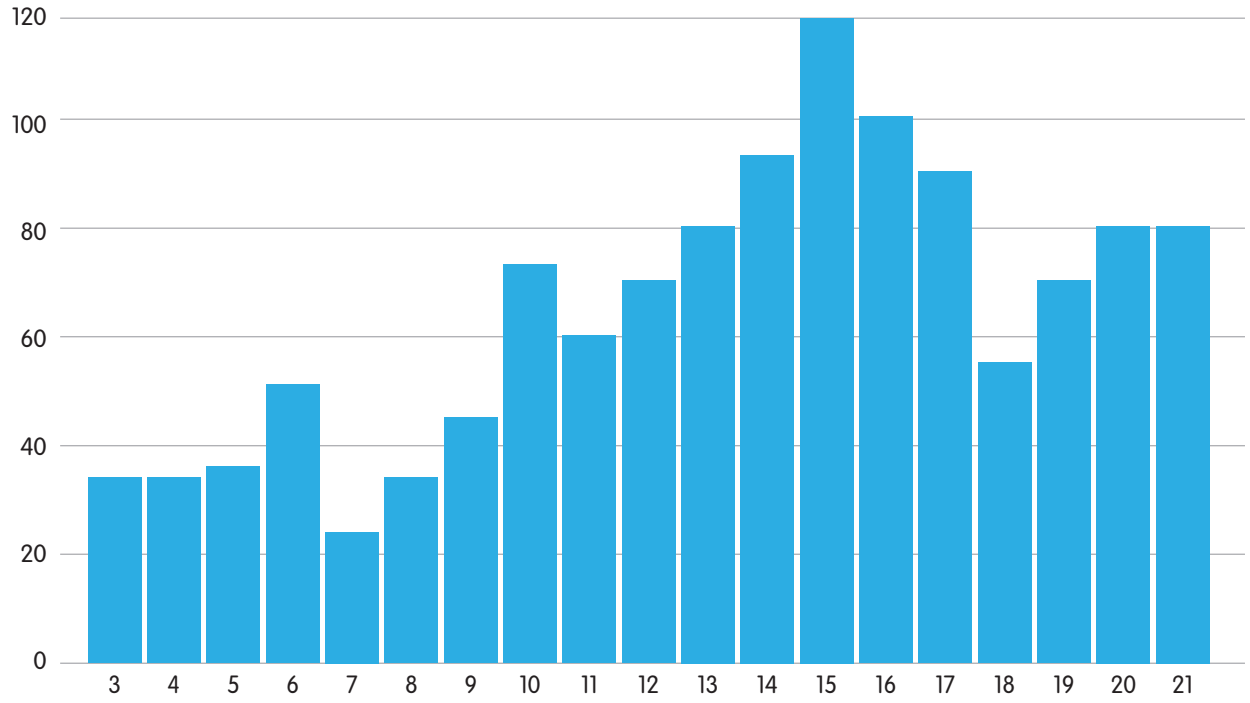
Social work support

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 advice and guidance, signposting, standalone applications to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) and access to specialist training. The duty service also supports families who contact ALN at a point of crisis, ensuring support is co-ordinated until a dedicated social worker is allocated. 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. Families requiring longer-term social work support and coordination are often at risk of experiencing family breakdown.

Demand for support has remained consistently high, with a lot of pressure on the capacity of the adoption support team. Adoptive families are impacted by acute pressures on other specialist services such as CAMHS, specialist mental health support, and SEND services, which means that they may be dependent on the support they can access through the ASGSF to fill gaps. Families have been particularly impacted by governmental delays and funding changes for the ASGSF, leading up to the **national review of adoption support** which is expected to report in autumn 2026.

Modelling shown in the chart 'age profile of adopted children in Adopt London North in 2026' shows data produced by Adoption England which helps develop additional context around the current pressures in adoption support. Excluding historic practices, adoption was most common in England around 10 years ago, with numbers peaking in 2015 at 5,360 adoptions nationally, compared to 3,040 adoptions in 2025 (a 43% decrease). When mapped against local adoption figures, this graph estimates the current age of children adopted over the last 23 years who may be entitled to adoption support. The peak of adoptions 10 years ago can be seen represented by a peak in young people who are now aged 15 years. It is therefore unsurprising that a greater number of families have been accessing support as their children enter adolescence. These high numbers are likely to be seen over the next 4 – 5 years before the demand for adolescent support may start to decrease; however, the needs of families with young people transitioning into adulthood is likely to increase over the same period.

Age profile of adopted children in Adopt London North in 2026

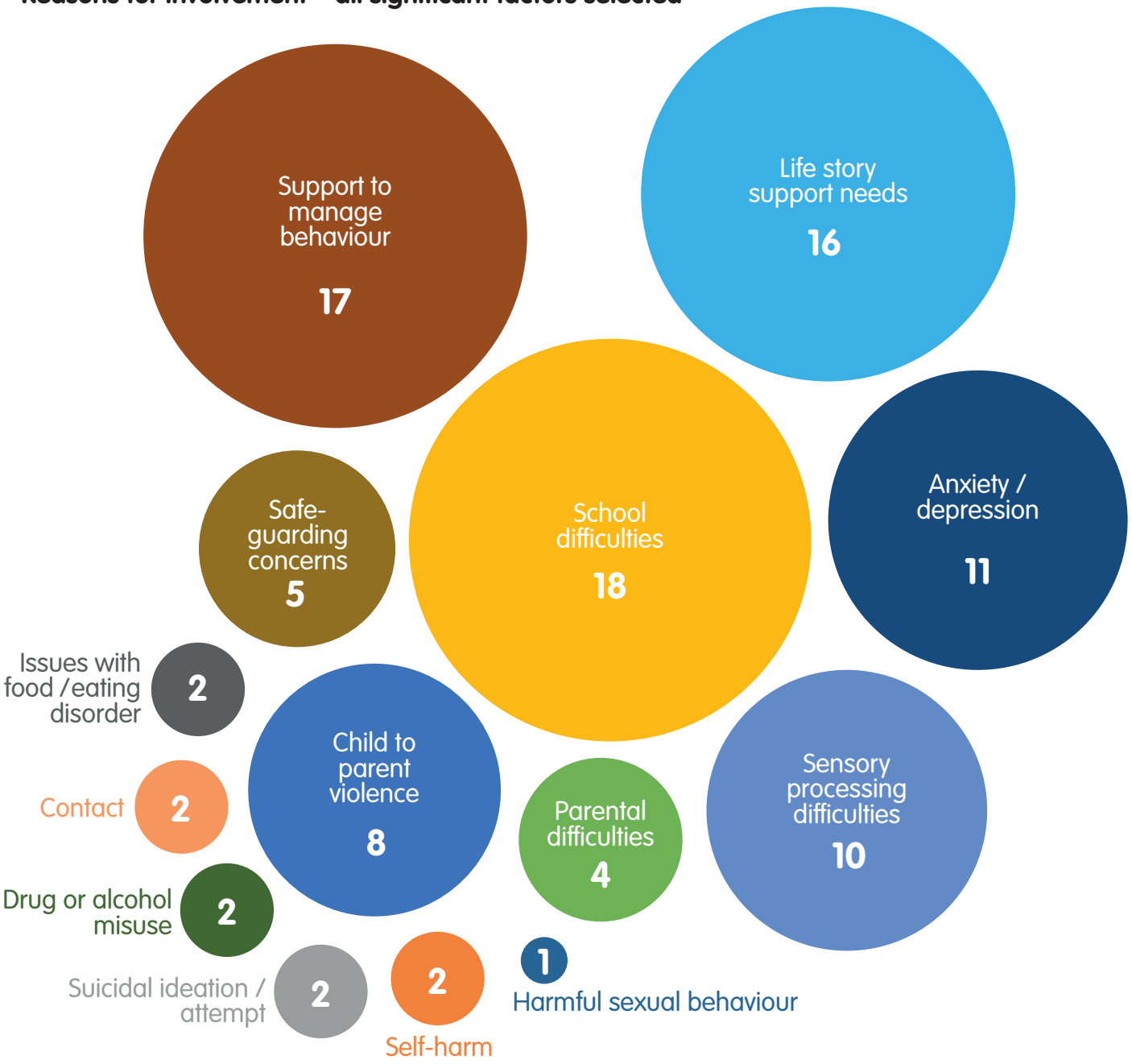


As a result of the level of demand for support there is a wait for families to have an assessment of need completed by a social worker. Waiting times are monitored closely. We manage waiting lists for non-urgent forms of support including reviews of contact and access to records for adult adoptees. Adoptive families with immediate support needs are allocated as quickly as possible to prevent family breakdown, and may also be referred to the relevant borough services if thresholds of need are met. Age profiling data helps us to plan future service developments, recognising the need to build **support for the adolescent period** and develop more services for those **transitioning to adulthood**.

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 building a **new model of adoption support** which aims to increase preventative and early help support, increase peer-based programmes for parents, children and young people, and adopted adults, and develop in-house clinical services which can be more responsive to need. Many of the new services being developed are outlined in detail in this section of the report.

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. On average, 40% of family support cases require significant social work support in addition to ASGSF therapeutic provision and signposting. The reasons for involvement reveal a wide range of complex difficulties that adopted children and their families are facing. The most 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, including child to parent violence, self-harm, and safeguarding concerns. The wider programme of support groups and training being developed are influenced by the needs identified within our casework monitoring.

Reasons for involvement – all significant factors selected



Adoptive families with children on the edge of care

Through the Quality Assurance Board, we have initiated a piece of work this year to develop our understanding of the needs and experiences of adopted children & young people and their families when serious concerns arise and children are at risk of re-entering care. **National research** along with local practice experience told us that although adoption breakdown is relatively rare, when adoptive families do experience acute difficulties, these can very quickly escalate to a risk of the child re-entering care. When adopted children do re-enter care, research and experience also suggest they are more likely to result in a residential care placement due to the difficulties the young person has managing family life.

The QA Board set out to undertake a manual snapshot audit of children currently open to statutory borough services who had previously been adopted. This piece of work is still underway, and we hope to consider recommendations for additional support and other service developments in response to the findings.

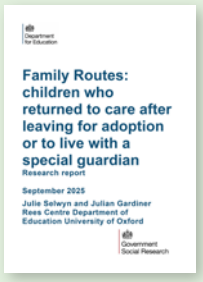
PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT

Family Routes: Outcomes for children placed for adoption & special guardianship

This national longitudinal study led by Professor Julie Selwyn and commissioned by the Department for Education has released several reports this year, with more due to be released as analysis is completed. These reports are significant due to the scale and scope of the research.

- **Most adoption & special guardianship arrangements remain stable for children long-term.** Around 95% of adopted children and 89% of special guardianship-placed children did not experience a disruption over the 8–12 year period seen in the study.
- **Permanent placements are much more stable than remaining in care.** Although there are no directly comparable national figures over the same period, over a 2 year period, 46% of children in care nationally had more than one placement.
- **Age is the strongest predictor of disruption.** Children who are older when they leave care on one of these orders are more likely to experience a disruption later.
- **Delays matter for children's long-term outcomes.** Longer periods between first entering care and moving to a permanent placement are associated with an increased risk of disruption.
- **Early instability has a lasting impact.** Multiple moves in care and unsuccessful reunification attempts before permanency are linked to poorer stability long-term.
- **The impact of ethnicity is complex.** Black children are more likely to experience an adoption disruption, but this can be explained by their older age at the time of placement. In special guardianship, this disparity cannot be explained by age alone.

You can find out more about this study by following these links:





Parent-toddler therapeutic groups

As part of the development of our **new adoption support model**, this year we launched specialist therapeutic parent-toddler groups in partnership with an organisation called Chorus. These groups are designed for adoptive parents and their pre-school children aged 1 – 4 years to attend soon after children have joined the family. For children, the groups run similarly to a regular parent-child play session with toys, songs, games, and a snack time. However, the sessions are run by expert psychologists who use an attachment-based and trauma-informed lens to provide tailored support and advice to parents as the relationship with their child develops. Families attend sessions weekly over a 16 week period along with some individual family sessions with a psychologist. Families who would benefit from additional support can sign up to join a further series of sessions, making this a flexible and child-focused early support model. The impact of the group is monitored through psychological outcome measurements and recommendations made for any future support.

Chorus
Children & parents together

Adopt London North's first cohort ran from December 2025 – May 2026 with 5 families (6 children). All families attended every session, showing a high level of commitment and engagement in this model. All children saw an improvement in outcome measurements across the programme and 2 children who saw some areas of ongoing struggle were recommended to continue to access the programme.

The model has proven to be particularly effective for these reasons:

- Expert support in the earliest placement period when parents may struggle to differentiate between normal developmentally appropriate behaviour in their child, and behaviour that warrants concern. Hands-on support at this stage builds parental confidence and helps to identify specific areas where the family may benefit from additional early support.
- Support is provided in a peer-based setting for adoptive parents at a time where they may feel most isolated and alone. Most families in this cohort had one parent who was just returning to work at the start of the programme, whilst the other parent adjusted to being the main caregiver throughout the week. The peer environment normalises emotions adopters may be experiencing and gives opportunities to build strong peer support networks of families living locally with similar age children.
- Adopted children socialise together from the earliest possible stages, normalising adoption experiences. As parents build peer networks, this makes it more likely that adopted children will grow up with friends who are adopted and more likely to access social spaces for adopted children and young people.

This model is now being embedded in all four Adopt London regions, providing local availability for families who might live closer to a different group (e.g. several ALN families living in north-east London have been able to attend an Adopt London East group in Leytonstone). We aim to run this programme regularly throughout the year, encouraging all local families to access this support in the first year of placement.

"I can't state enough just how much this group meant to me - and to my son. I didn't realise before adopting how much I would need this group and a place to feel so authentic and not so alone. As you go through the process of adopting it's so exposing but you soldier on through knowing that at the end is all you've dreamt of for years. But you don't realise how isolating it can feel when it finally comes and how you can feel like a fraud at events designed for birth mothers. This group gave us and our children the space to be unapologetically ourselves and be supported by professionals who felt like friends. Thank you to all of you."

"We feel very strongly that everyone who adopts should be able to access this support."

"The team were extremely professional and expert – they gave very thoughtful advice in a gentle and empathetic way. They also helped us to learn from each other as parents - we felt particularly fortunate in this respect because our son was the youngest in the group."

"The environment was warm and welcoming. My daughter seemed to like the attention she received, and it allowed me to fully relax knowing that whatever the behaviour they were well equipped to handle it. Although issues raised within the group varied it was very helpful to hear that we were all experiencing challenges and the safe space made us all feel at ease to speak openly about them without judgement. The sessions were well run, and I know both of us looked forward to attending each week."

"Just a big thank you for creating such a fantastic group and space for supporting adopted families. I think the difference this will have made to all of us so early on in our journeys cannot be underestimated. I will be forever grateful for this experience."

Adopted adults' peer support

ALN is unique nationally in 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. Adoptees attending are different ages from mid-20's to 70's and have a wide range of experiences of adoption but all 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 meeting. When asked what they value about attending these groups, adoptees said:

"Being with other adoptees with the knowledge you won't be judged."

"It is interesting to tackle some of the thorny issues around the adoptees' experience and the common traits that have affected us. There is a power in a support group, and the facilitators do an excellent job in helping nurture discussions."

"The most helpful aspect of the Adopted Adults group is having a regular, confidential space where I can be with other adopted people who 'get it' without having to explain the basics of adoption over and over. I value the sense of belonging and recognition, and the opportunity to share experiences across different ages and backgrounds."

"Feeling acknowledged; the issues adoptees have to address & as a group [of] all adoptees, [it] helps with the isolation & loneliness felt that many do not understand."

"Shared experience, instant understanding."



One of the groups supported by Adopt London is run in partnership with the 'Transracial Adult Adoptee Network' (TAAN), and has continued to grow and strengthen, hearing from a range of interesting speakers and building relationships. This group 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. The opportunity to meet in person with other transracially adopted adults often has a profound, life-changing impact on adoptees who attend meetings.

Transracial Adult Adoptee Network

This year Adopt London hosted a special event at Hackney Picturehouse for adopted adults, screening a short film by adoptee and photographer Philip Sinden about his experiences of tracing his birth family, with a Q&A led by Lemn Sissay, poet and advocate for people who have experienced adoption and care. The event was attended by over 100 adopted people from across London and provided a safe and welcoming environment for adopted adults to network and experience peer connection and support.



Transitions to Adulthood group

Adopt London identified a significant gap in provision for those growing out of young people's support but feeling out of place in general adult groups. In adoption particularly, young adults can struggle with the transition to independence and may be facing additional challenges other young adults do not experience such as accessing their records and making decisions about relationships with their birth family. For these reasons, Adopt London established 'Transitions to Adulthood', a group for 18 – 24 year olds to access peer relationships and support, and have a safe space to talk about their adoption-specific experiences. Whilst still a new and developing space, in the six months the group have covered many topics including:



- Complex feelings about birth parents
- Sibling relationships
- Complicated relationships with adoptive parents
- The power of a name
- Expectations around reunions with birth family
- Impact of being adopted on other relationships.

As the group develops into 2026/27, the facilitators hope to support the young adults to consider how they want to shape the group and to think about ways to safely share their views and experiences in order to build understanding and influence change within Adopt London.

We Are Family peer support for parents

We Are Family (WAF) is an independent peer-to-peer support charity that was founded by adoptive parents for adoptive parents and has partnered with Adopt London since our formation in 2019. We support We Are Family through an annual grant to provide adopter peer support and a wide range of additional resources and events. Over 2000 adoptive parents are members of We Are Family through Adopt London (an increase from 1500 in the previous

year), with 430 specifically affiliated to the north London group (an increase from 390 in the previous year).

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 158 events for members, with 45 events exclusive to Adopt London members, with over 900 members taking part. In July 2025, 180 members met for an adoptive family day out at London Zoo, and 100 members enjoyed a panto trip together in January 2026. These events are a vital lifeline for many families, providing community, connection, and informal support.

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 125 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.

45%
of members confirm they have made a new peer connection within 6 months of joining We Are Family

"Monthly adopter groups have been the best support to keep me sane, during and after the legal process of adopting. In the longer term, I think it is more beneficial than the ASF funded therapy."

"[Support groups] helped to normalise my experience in a gently empathic way, in a way that a therapist could not hope to."

2000
Adopt London WAF members

45
exclusive WAF Adopt London events

158
WAF events in 2025/26

Attended by **900**
Adopt London members

Sample of expert topics offered to adopters this year through WAF Talks

"Finding out I was adopted at 26"

Executive functions in neurodiverse children

Adoption in the digital age

Supporting transracial adoptees

An adoptee perspective on learning

Why bright children with SEN fall through the cracks

Helping adopted boys feel seen

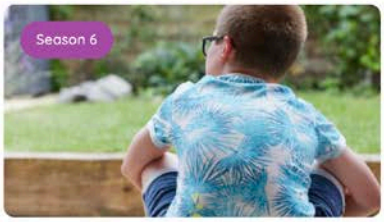
Parenting an adopted neurodiverse teen

How cultural narratives shape identity

"I have been a member of WAF for many years and the people have been a great support. I have made valuable friendships and had so much support through my adoption journey. I volunteer as well, which I find very rewarding."

"Our circle is almost entirely WAF members and fellow adopters, people who don't just 'get it', but live it alongside us. We never have to explain ourselves or brace for insensitive questions. We babysit each other's kids, laugh (and occasionally cry) over coffee, and genuinely show up when it matters. Recently, when I had to be rushed to A&E, it was a WAF friend who dropped everything and came to the rescue. That's family."

70%
of members report finding We Are Family's digital resources and content helpful



Understanding Birth Families and Identity

Listen on buzzsprout



Navigating school as both adoptee and adoptive parent

Listen on buzzsprout



Preparing for adopting a child with additional needs

Listen on buzzsprout

"The other volunteers and parents in our WAF group have been an immense support over the years. Sharing experiences and supporting each other has been so important for myself as an adoptive parent. A lot of us share the same struggles and heartache and to share them has been so helpful."



Adopt London choir

The Adopt London Choir is a community choir with around 30 members, established to provide an additional avenue of support to adoptive parents.

Unlike a traditional performance-focused choir, its primary purpose is wellbeing, peer support, social connection, and emotional resilience. The choir brings together approved adopters, adoptive parents, and some adopted children and young people from across Adopt London. Members rehearse together and learn popular songs, while building supportive relationships with others who share similar experiences.



"As adoptive parents… many of us live with experiences that can feel isolating and difficult for others to fully understand. Within this choir, we have found something precious: a space where we can be ourselves without explanation, where joy and sorrow can sit side by side and where we are met with understanding rather than judgement. Singing together is powerful in itself, but what makes this choir truly special is the community that has grown around it. We lift our voices together and, in many ways, we lift one another too. I can honestly say that it is one of the most meaningful groups I have ever belonged to. It reminds me that none of us has to carry our challenges alone. The support, compassion and understanding found here are invaluable and I am deeply grateful that Adopt London has made this possible."

"The impact on my mental health has been huge. It's made me appreciate how powerful singing and connecting with people who truly understand can be for our wellbeing. Choir is so much more than just singing songs. It's a place of support, understanding, and connection. It's a space where parents and children come together, not because life is easy, but because we're all doing our best to navigate the challenges life throws at us. [Some of the] songs resonate so deeply. They connect with our experiences as parents and with the emotions our children carry too. Singing them together creates a release that is difficult to put into words. There have been times when I've arrived feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, or emotionally drained, and left feeling lighter, stronger, and more hopeful… Choir has become more than an activity – it's a lifeline, a source of comfort, and a reminder that none of us have to face life's struggles alone."

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 16 years. The group meets on a Saturday and focuses on the impact of parenting adolescents who have experienced 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. We have an ambition to replicate this group so that a greater number of parents can benefit in future and we're working with an independent therapist in 2026/27 to undertake a detailed review to support this aim.

The group provides a chance for parents to reflect and gain support from other parents who are having similar experiences. The group is facilitated with a therapeutic lens by ALN social workers and an independent therapist, and is co-produced and guided equally by the members and facilitators.

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

- Recognising when we are triggered or activated as parents and how we settle ourselves
- The Drama Triangle
- Boundaries and self-care
- Navigating masking in your child as adoptive parents
- Violence and living in high conflict homes
- Self-compassion in parenting
- Parenting in the context of complexity and diagnoses: including neurodivergence, executive functioning difficulties, and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- Navigating independence and parenting in young 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.

"You don't always get the answer from the group, but what you do get is an understanding that there is no one answer, and as you listen to the other parents and think about the topics, you can get perspective. Listening to other parents you learn other ways of managing things, and you can measure how you are getting along alongside them in a warm friendly supportive way."

"Our monthly meeting is a concentrated positive experience that you look forward to the month before. I bring ideas to the group, and different things come into your mind the weeks before, because the group is there. You always get something new and different from the meeting. I always go away inspired and refreshed, more confident and more capable and happier."

"The support of a group means that you have the emotional space to think and focus on really difficult issues. In that space, solutions often bubble up, or you find actually you are not doing as bad as you thought. The group is like a breath of fresh air, or a pause in busy, difficult and challenging times that we often have with our children. It gives you perspective and space to think. This means that you go back for the next month feeling much more comfortable and confident about the challenges."



Adopted children and young people's social groups

In January 2025 ALN launched our own 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. This work is part of our efforts to build a **new adoption support model** which promotes regular peer social and support opportunities for adoptees of all ages. 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. We aim to create:

- An adoption-only social space for young people
- A space where adopted young people can develop friendships with each other
- An inclusive space regardless of need, where many young people have experienced repeated exclusions from other spaces
- A space that is safe to share views and experiences of adoption – positive & negative
- A space where young people are set up to succeed and are celebrated
- Impact that continues at home by encouraging 'adoption openness' in families
- A break for parents with an opportunity to connect with peers.

Over 40 young people from all partner boroughs are now signed up as group members and come along to access lots of different activities including games, crafts, challenges, snacks, sports, and campfire activities in the adventure playground. In the future we hope to involve the young people in a more structured way in sharing their views on a range of topics and influencing service development.

This year we were able to hire a second room at the venue and opened this as a parent space. This has been popular with parents who have utilised this to support each other informally whilst their children are happily taking part in the sessions.

In March 2026 we completed a piece of work collecting detailed feedback from parents and young people to support the future development of the group. Their feedback highlights the significance of this space and the need for us to develop these areas of work further.

"I like the playground, the campfires, the hunts, and activities inside. It's really fun playing and hanging out with kids who are adopted."

9-year-old boy

"The session was great! My daughter felt welcomed straight away… It's fantastic to have a space where the staff are so knowledgeable and experienced with our children and you don't need to explain yourself or your child, they just understand. The nextdoor room for parents means that parents can chat and support one another while children know their parent is nearby (and if your child is fine to be left, you are free to go and have a walk or a coffee too and come back later!). My child loves speaking with other adopted children and even in the past day since the session has sparked more conversations about adoption."

Parent of 8-year-old





"This is the second time we've been able to attend and my teenage daughter really, really enjoys these sessions. The graffiti session was brilliant. She adored that – thank you so much. And the opportunity for parents to have a space to sit and just talk and exchange is truly wonderful. I cannot tell you how valuable these sessions are for the children and the parents. We are both very grateful."

Parent of 16-year-old

"Our daughter started to attend the group at age 8 when it first started and at the time was the youngest in the group. I didn't think she would want to go as she has always found adoption meet-ups difficult, but she really wanted to give it a go. It coincided with therapy she was receiving where she started to gently explore her identity as an adopted child. She loved the fact that all the children were also adopted. It was like a special place for her where she had a sense of belonging. She loves coming and looks forward to it. She enjoys exploring new activities with the support of the lovely staff who are always so attentive and supportive to her needs. The activities are always so engaging. She has really grown alongside the group. It is really important to her - she loves how birthdays are celebrated and other special touches. I also find it to be a great support, especially as there is now a parents' room which is really popular and allows parents to connect and is a good source of local support."

Parent of 9-year-old

















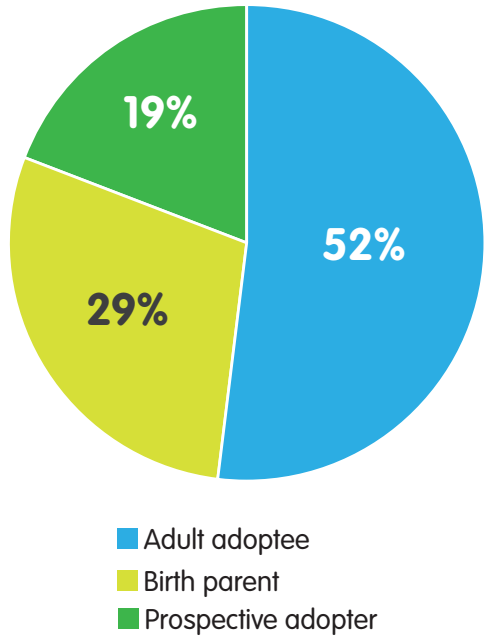


Specialist counselling support

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 six 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 extend this. 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 longer-term form of support for individuals.

Clients accessing PAC-UK counselling contract



"PAC-UK helped me with therapy and are supporting me through court also. I'm really grateful for this service."

"PAC-UK have been most helpful, caring and professional. I cannot think of any aspect of my interaction that could have been any better."

"I gained knowledge about my past and was able to know something of my birth parents which has helped me to resolve concerns I previously had."

"I'd like to thank [my PAC-UK therapist] for her understanding and trying to help me navigate my loss, grief, and profound sadness and still try to move forward in some way. She's amazing and I'd highly recommend her."



Recommendations

Review of 2025/26 recommendations

Adopter recruitment

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.**

The work of the Black Adoption Project has grown significantly this year, becoming more established within Adopt London practice and creating new opportunities for Black families to consider adoption and access bespoke support throughout their assessment process.

2 **Maintain higher proportion of in-house adopters able to consider an early permanence placement.**

The high proportion of in-house adopters able to support an early permanence placement has been maintained this year.

3 **Develop recruitment-focused communications plans with partner boroughs to increase adoption awareness in local areas.**

Unfortunately, this is an area that has not been significantly progressed this year due to limited staff capacity. This remains a **goal for future work**.

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

A higher **number of approvals** has been maintained this year, however more work is needed to extend this number further. A high **standard of assessment** and preparation has been maintained.

Family finding for children

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

Specific work with boroughs has been maintained this year and is now part of ongoing processes. **Early permanence** placements have been strong, despite a national adopter sufficiency crisis.

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

We have achieved our highest proportion yet of children placed with **in-house** adoptive families, and maintained a high proportion of all children placed within **London and the South-East**.

Adoption support

7 **In partnership with Adopt London, test out models for developing adoption support provision which respond to identified needs of families.**

We have made substantial progress this year in mapping out and starting to develop a new **Adopt London model of adoption support**, with a clear plan in place for this work to advance over the next few years.

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.**

The **ALN groups** have expanded and become embedded this year, however we have not yet been able to develop firm opportunities for young people to contribute their views and experiences, and this remains a target.

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.**

Despite ongoing discussion, this work has not significantly progressed and is unlikely to do so. There are considerations of alternative ways to protect and support Adopt London on a long-term basis and to enable shared commissioning.

Recommendations for 2026/27

Adopter recruitment

1. Further website development to ensure the pathway for those considering adoption is clear and coherent, and to improve the experience of those using it to access support.
2. Develop recruitment-focused communications plans with partner boroughs to increase adoption awareness in local areas. Explore small-scale in-person events as part of this work to test impact.
3. Achieve a further increase in the number of adopter approvals whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.
4. Through the Black Adoption Project, embed practices and processes to support the increased recruitment of Black prospective adopters.
5. Expand co-delivery of training alongside people who have lived experience of adoption across all key training programmes.

Family finding

6. Continue to focus on increasing the number of children who move to in-house and local adoptive families.
7. Work with boroughs to embed the 'Telling Children About Adoption' guidance and support practice in preparing children for adoption.

Adoption support

8. In partnership with Adopt London; continue to pilot and develop new models of adoption support, including introduction of the GBB and the BUSS models to our support offer.
9. With the Quality Assurance group, complete the audit of adoptive families with children on the edge of care and develop responses to the findings across the ALN partnership.
10. Embed the new Chorus parent-toddler group offer following successful role out of the first cohort in 2026.
11. Further development of the ALN Kids & Teens groups, including opportunities for young people to share their views and experiences to influence service planning.
12. Complete the planned independent review of the Parents of Adopted Teenagers Group and consider recommendations regarding expansion of this offer.

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