

adoption west



April 2023 to March 2024

Annual Report

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Bath & North East
Somerset Council



Wiltshire Council



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Introduction

This is Adoption West's fifth Annual report and provides the agency's performance data across family finding, adopter recruitment, adoption panels and adoption support services. An important aspect of the report is the focus on the practice of the agency and experience of people who have been involved with Adoption West in the year.

Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Wiltshire Council. The agency is a local authority company wholly owned by the aforementioned local authorities. As a separate legal entity from the local authorities Adoption West is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency.

This report is produced in accordance with National Minimum Standard 25.6, which details that the Voluntary Adoption Agency Board Members should:

- Receive a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency, every six months.
- Monitor the management and outcomes of the services provided, in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.
- Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

It is also a requirement of the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF): voluntary adoption agencies, that the six-monthly reports are shared with Ofsted on an annual basis.

Appendix A provides details the governance, commissioning, and local government scrutiny arrangements.

It is important to acknowledge that Adoption West has been operating for 5 years on 1st March 2024. There have been significant events in this time. Most notably the pandemic only a year into the agency being established; this changed the way in which Adoption West now operates. Adoption West is a relatively small service covering a large geographical area, the changes to hybrid working and the use of virtual meetings which has been a significant benefit to the service and would not have been achieved in the same way in different circumstances. The "Somerset Ruling" and implications for children's and adopters' medicals across the region occurred as we were inspected by Ofsted, we still achieved a Good in the inspection. Importantly we worked effectively and quickly to address the impact the medical issue had on adopters.

In these five years

427 children have been adopted

124 children placed with early permanence carers

390 adopters approved.

4945 applications made to the ASF for children and families to access therapeutic support

In addition, more birth parents are accessing support with more children having arrangements in place to enable them to maintain contact with their birth family.

We have established good working relationships with our local authority partners and other partners across the sector pan regionally and nationally.

Re- Structure of Adoption West

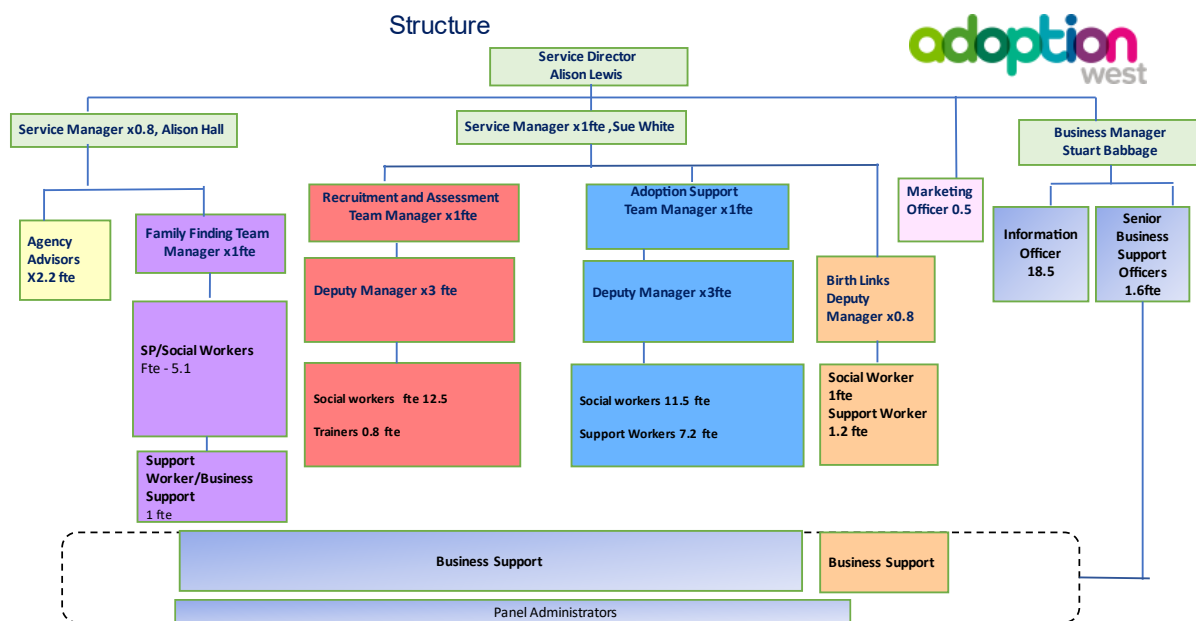
In April 2023 Adoption West started the process of moving from a hub based model, in which three hub offices provided the adoption service to two specific local authorities each. A review of the agency identified the following reasons to move to regional service specific teams:

- Unequal and variable workflows and needs for services across the 3 hubs
- Management of the work in specific service areas across hubs not always effective and could lead to an inequitable service in the region.
- Inconsistency of processes
- Hub managers having a focus on recruitment and assessment of adopters
- Reflecting the national position, the need for adoption support services were growing year on year, the service needed additional management capacity to adapt ways of working and delivery
- Regional teams had been introduced for family finding and birth links and were working well across the six local authorities
- Having a focus on the retention and succession of staff the new structure provided more opportunity to progress to first management level deputy team manager roles

The transition has been gradual over a few months with the appointment of the additional deputy team managers and the transition of work. The new teams are:

- Adoption Support – Anjali Gupta, Team Manager
- Birth Links – Claire Jarvis, Deputy Team Manager
- Family Finding – Kate Worthington/ Jen Brennan, Team Manager (job share)
- Recruitment and Assessment - Jane Priborsky/ Jen Brennan, Team Manager (job share)

Adoption West Structure Chart



Working with our Local Authority Partner - (Please see appendix Governance and Scrutiny Arrangements)

Adoption West works closely with the six local authorities at all levels, social workers, team managers, service managers and the Adoption West Board. These relationships strive to ensure joined up working for individual families, development of consistent processes and a shared strategic direction and vision.

In March as part of national social work week three Adoption West Board Directors spent some time observing practice.

"I just wanted to write to say how much I enjoyed my observation of practice. I thought you were really great, sensitive, compassionate and focused on how to really support the family with tangible outcomes, as well as the holistic assessment. Was lovely to see in practice how Adoption West are supporting families." (LA Assistant Director)

We continue to have monthly tracking meetings with each, to support our local authority colleagues to progress plans for children who are unable to live with their birth parents and adoption is being considered as a permanence option for them.

Through bi monthly Adoption Lead Managers meetings the group have:

- Reviewed Disruptions
- Considered consistent approaches for managing requests for adoption allowances
- Reviewed and agreed the guidance for managing adoption by foster carers
- An Adoption Lead Manager was involved in an Adoption West audit of supervision

In 2024/25 the group is continuing to work on:

- Adapting practice regarding adopter medicals following the Leiland James Serious Case review and subsequent Coram Baaf briefing
- Establishing a working group to develop practice around maintaining relationships in adoption
- Progressing the Early Permanence action plan and the work of the South West Permanence project
- Developing processes for families that need the involvement and support of both adoption support teams and children’s social care



The Children

There has been a significant increase in all aspects of adoption activity relating to children. This year, **132** children have had **plans for adoption**, an increase of 7 from the previous year. This is the third year in a row that ADMs have increased.

Placement orders were granted for **123** children an increase of 23% and **105** children have been placed for adoption, which is a significant increase from 2022-23. **86** children were **adopted** in this period, which is slightly higher than last year and it will be significantly higher in 2024-25 due to the increase in children placed for adoption this year.

The number of **early permanence** placements has fallen this year with **29** children placed compared to 36 the previous year. This reflects the fall in adopter recruitment numbers which will be discussed in this report. It is positive that referrals from the local authorities are remaining consistent reflecting the work across the region to increase the understanding of early permanence as a positive placement option for children.



Adoption West Adopters 78



External Adopters 27

The number of **children placed with Adoption West adopters** reverted to levels seen in 2020 – 2022 at 74%. This was anticipated due to the increased number of children needing placements at a time of reduced adopter availability in the region. However, there continues to be a far greater number of children placed within the region

Family Finding

Children with a Placement Order currently waiting for adoption at 31/03/24.

	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-12 Months	12 -18 Months	18+ Months	Total by LA	Q4 22/23 By LA
Number of Children	36	25	14	8	1	84	76
Q4 23/24 Number of Children	40	19	13	2	2	76	

There were **84** children **with Placement Orders** without a match at 31/03/24. This is higher than the 66 children at the same period last year for reasons given previously in the report. This figure does not include children with a placement order who had a 'change of plan away from adoption' which is being progressed by the local authority, with regards to a rescission of the plan and revocation of the placement order.

Of the **84** children with placement orders yet to be placed at the end of Q4, **40** were already linked with adoptive families. This includes 10 children who were matched in Q4, two children whose matches went to panel in late Q4 with a decision made in early Q1 2024-2025, 22 children who are linked to adopters and five foster carer applications/assessments, one of whom was adopted in early April 2024.

There are currently **23** children **waiting longer than six months**, 9 are matched with adopters and in the process of transitions, 2 are linked and 2 in the process of being adopted by their foster carer.

There have been **10** children for whom family finding has stopped as their **plans have changed a way from adoption**. This is slightly higher than 8 last year but remains substantially lower than 19 (2020-21), 18 (2021-22).

The national CORAM I Q3 2023-24 data for children adopted, available at the time of writing, shows that the average time in the Adoption West region between the six local authorities for the child's journey (A 10) continues to be quicker than the England average 462 days compared to 505. The time between placement order and match (period of family finding activity) at **193** days, slightly quicker than the England average of 196.

The family finding team held six virtual family finding events for children during the year, as well as attending adoption exchanges both locally and further afield. Some children were also supported to attend external activity days – a sibling group of two children have since been placed with adopters, and two single children with additional needs have been linked and are proceeding to matching panel. The family finding team didn't proceed with their own activity day during the year due to not having enough children to make the day viable but are planning

an activity day for October 2024 providing there are enough children who might benefit from this nearer the time.

The family Finding Team were asked about their key highlights for the year

"We successfully placed a little girl with complex health needs in December 2023. Given her needs a national search was undertaken to enable us to access the full reach of available adopters and family finding opportunities. Alongside the national search the child's social worker and family finding social worker retained a consistent focus and commitment to proactively exploring new and available adopters within Adoption West. Positively the adopters she has been placed with were assessed & approved by Adoption West, she has thrived in their care and her adoption order was granted in May 2024.

We also successfully matched and then placed her brother; he has a diagnosis of autism and attends a special educational provision. He too has thrived in his placement and his adopters are committed to making their application soon. This is an external placement however within the Adoption West region. The two families were supported to meet and the children are now having positive sibling contact supported by their respective adopters."

"In August 2023 we matched a sibling group of three with adoption west adopters, they were placed for adoption at the end of September 2023. The adoption order applications have been submitted and we are now waiting for a court hearing to be listed. Despite the evident challenges in moving 3 children to adoption, the foster carers and adopters worked commendably well together to ensure that the transition remained child focused at all times."

Early Permanence

This year **29** have been placed in Early Permanence placements. The slightly lower number is due to the impact of the overall reduction in available adopters.

In 2023-2024 an EP Lead senior practitioner role was created from the existing family finding team, in recognition of the growing number of referrals and placements of children in early permanence placements. The purpose of the role is to have a dedicated person to respond to the local authority social workers managing EP referrals which includes liaising with Recruitment and Assessment social workers and adopters. The EP Lead also takes a crucial role in progressing the actions identified by the Early Permanence project. We appointed to the role in September 2023 from the existing family finding team and the successful candidate has significant experience in respect of both early permanence and adoption.

With more children placed with approved adopters as temporarily approved as foster carers, it is inevitable that there will be a corresponding rise in the number of children whose long term plan is to grow up with a member of their birth family. The example below demonstrates how this can be managed keeping the child at the centre and supporting both families involved.

A - was placed with early permanence. Through the care proceedings it became evident that the plan was likely to be reunification to father's care. The EP carers were supported to meet with the child's mother and father, and they were able to get to know father; they took A to his father's house to spend time with him as part of the transition plan, which also included exchange of photos and video calls. The day A returned to his father's care the Adoption West social worker travelled with the EP carers to take A home and say goodbye. The father spoke very positively about the EP carers and expressed his gratitude to them and has since given them updates on how A is doing.

Therapeutic support was quickly set up for the EP carers who took some time out. Initially they thought they would not wish to return to family finding, however with their social workers support and encouragement they have made use of the therapeutic support available and they plan to return to family finding June 2024.

Following the conclusion of the Early Permanence Project (Adoption England Funds) in September 2023 and with the developments in EP Practice that we have been working on across Adoption West, a submission was made in March to Coram Baaf for the EP Quality kite mark. We have now heard that this was successful.

Congratulations. I am delighted to say that your submission has been viewed by external moderation and Adoption West are awarded the EP Quality Mark. Thank you for an excellent submission.



This is a great achievement and we remain committed to not only sustaining but continually improving this practice. We have some current challenges with a slight fall in the number of EP carers and we have already started to review the practice across the agency to ensure we understand the reasons for this change and address them. The approach that the agency has previously taken, as endorsed by this Kite Mark, will ensure that we continue with the positive recruitment we have had.

To increase the number of children placed in Early Permanence placements (NMS 13)

Recruitment and Marketing

Recruitment activity during this period focussed on social media, a return to community events and updating the website content, centred around these objectives.

- To recruit enough adopters willing to consider children who wait the longest for adoptive parent/s (specifically siblings, Black children, and those children with complex needs).
- To recruit adopters willing to explore Early Permanence as a route to their family.
- To provide and promote support to enable people to adopt.

Which are framed within and reflect the National Campaign objectives.

- **AWARENESS:** Drive awareness and continue to reshape attitudes about what adoption looks like today
- **RECRUITMENT:** Address barriers and drivers to people considering adoption, to encourage the right individuals and families to consider beginning their journey. Additionally, to keep those already in the funnel warm, engaging and influencing their attitudes and expectations throughout the journey

Adoption West Online Coffee Mornings



We ran an online chat for anyone interested in adoption these are advertised on the Adoption West website and via social media. Each event is hosted by Becky Myers Recruitment and Marketing Officer and another member of staff. These events ran approximately every six weeks during the 2023/24 period.

National Recruitment Campaigns

Where the emphasis was placed on the 2023 digital campaigns

- Priority children
- Child-centred
- Digital first (for targeting/agility)
- Inclusion of 'support' messaging
- Two equally weighted campaigns

1. The June 2023 campaign focussed on real-life experiences centred on the support theme.
2. The October NAW 2023 campaign highlighted the positive impact adoption has had on adopted people's lives and the strides made in the sector to put children and their sense of identity at the heart of the adoption journey.

For NAW the local marketing enhanced the recruitment focus of the national campaign, with a specific press release highlighting the need for more adopters in the region. This provided the opportunity to be involved in two radio interviews on local radio.

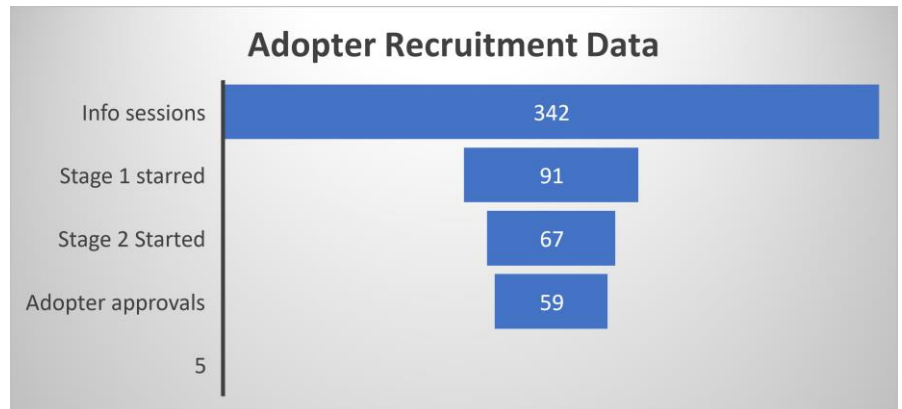
Digital activity during NAW 2023, led to some targeted PR work in the Bristol area.



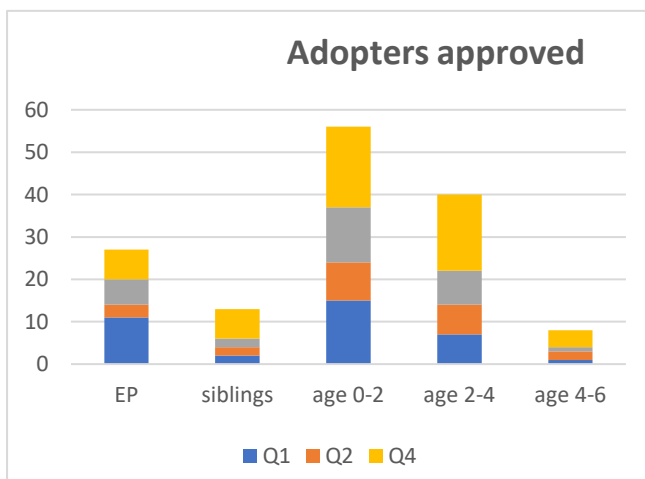
This year has been very challenging for adopter recruitment, we have experienced a fall with lower than average numbers of people coming forward to start the process since early 2022. This has resulted in low adopter approval numbers from the end of 2022 to end of 2023. 59 households have been approved which is a decrease of 21 from the previous year. It is encouraging that the numbers of applicants starting the process has risen since September 2023 and from January to June 2024 we anticipate 40 approvals which will take the agency back to the levels of 2022/23.

The national data continues to show that there are more children needing adoptive families than adopters available.

The number of people attending information sessions and starting stage 1 is higher this year than in 2022/23 and is now starting to convert to improved adopter numbers.



The chart below shows we have seen a fall in the number of adopters considering being matched with siblings, however as recruitment numbers improved in Q4 and Q1 2024/25 this has returned to a 1/3 of approvals. **46%** of adopters were approved with matching advice for early permanence which is a fall from 56% last year



The number of adopters approved and not yet matched for adoption (including those on hold and with EP placements) is **68**, this figure is decreasing each quarter as adopters get matched more quickly due to the current lower number of approvals. Currently there are 38 adopters waiting more than 6 months to be matched, however 15 of these adopters are providing an early

permanence placement and a further 3 previously had EP placements that have ended and are now on hold.

There has been an increase in placement performance with **74** Adopters having been matched and **92** children. The number of placements in quarter 4 is consistent with last quarter and is an increase of 16% on the previous year. There has been an increase in sibling placements with 18 children having been placed with their brother or sister compared with 12 last year. The percentage of adopters providing homes for children within the Adoption West region is **85%**.

Adopter Assessment and Placement Support

Recruitment and Assessment team has been adapting to the new structure with a number of new deputy team managers and social workers in post. Often social workers join the team with little or no direct experience of adopter recruitment. To add to the induction programme, we have been rolling out a series of mini workshops run by workers in the team with a particular area of knowledge and expertise; positive feedback has been received. Following the restructure, we recognised the need for improved liaison between Family Finding and R & A workers and as a result implemented 6 weekly liaison meetings between the two teams to offer an opportunity to discuss children, approved adopters and those coming through assessment.

Alongside the challenges in recruitment and transitioning to a new structure, the team have been developing practice in the adopter assessments.

The new Adopter Assessment Report (AAR) was developed by Barnardos funded by the DfE through Practice Improvement Funds. Some staff had attended a briefing session and felt positive about both the assessment format and the accompanying assessment tools. A decision was taken to ask three workers to use the AAR with an adopter assessment. These have all been completed, considered by the adoption panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker. The feedback about the AAR from the Panel, ADM, family finding and children's social workers has been mainly positive so far. Therefore, we are now extending the use of the AAR across the team with more prospective adopter assessments. The intention is a decision will be made next year as to whether Adoption West will use the AAR for all assessments. The stage 1 workbook has been adapted to fit with the AAR.

An example of adapting an assessment to include a child in the family

"I was working with a family who have a birth son (7), he was fixated on wanting to read what I was writing about his family – a fair point considering how many times I was visiting! He obviously couldn't read the entire AAR and so I made him his own mini AAR with subheadings of Information about Me, School, Family Home, Being an older brother and then Shelley's thoughts, where I summarised what a great big brother I thought he would be. This was sent to him recorded delivery and for him to add his signature.

The information I shared with him included an overview in age appropriate terms of my assessment of his family and his relationships with family members and school, with a positive outcome."

The Introduction of Family and Friends Network Meetings

Adoptive families need a good network of support from family, friends and other adopters. Part of the assessment is to consider the strength of the network, also to support the adopters in preparing their family and friends for a child joining the family. The Family and Friends training has been a key aspect of this for many years and this year Adoption West social workers have started to introduce Family and Friends Network meetings.

“Network Meetings – These meetings have been held virtually and have been useful in terms of providing a brief overview of adoption and the needs of adopted children, in addition to gathering information from everyone who’s attended, about the kind of support they will be able to offer the prospective adopters. They have provided an opportunity for friends and family to show their willingness to help and to provide extra details about what this might involve, for example, sharing relevant professional experience, highlighting their daytime availability and one colleague offering to provide work cover. The adopters have been very positive about the experience, feeling that the commitment of their network to supporting them in their adoption journeys, has been brought to life by seeing them all in one place.”

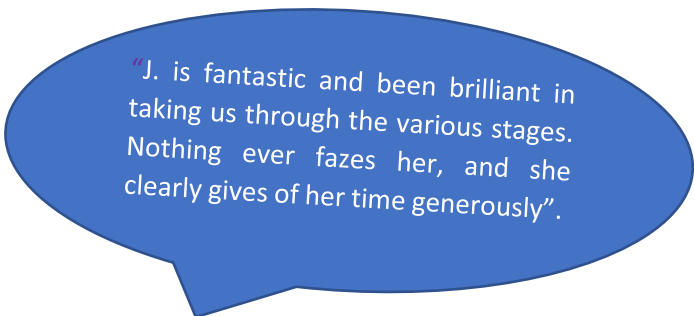
The Recruitment and Assessment team have worked to imbed the new structure and has also been introducing the new AAR (Adoption Assessment Report) and started planning for participating in an Early Support pilot project and planning changes to improve the front door.

The following compliments have been given to staff and reflects the relational aspect of the work between social workers and adopters as they progress through their journey:

“She put us at ease and explained everything very clearly. She was friendly open and approachable. She was great with the children, they enjoyed talking with her. I felt i could talk openly with her without judgement. Her support was excellent and made the process so much easier to cope with.”

“Thank you doesn't come close enough, you have been truly amazing the last two years. You have supported us so amazing. A massive personal thank you as you really have been my shoulder to rant on and really helped me.”

“We really appreciate everything you’ve done for us and for E. As we mentioned yesterday, we were so close to giving up on the whole process after what happened and it was only your support and understanding that kept us going.”



“J. is fantastic and been brilliant in taking us through the various stages. Nothing ever fazes her, and she clearly gives of her time generously”.



“N has been a sensational support to us through the process and simply we don't feel we would have been a family without her support”.

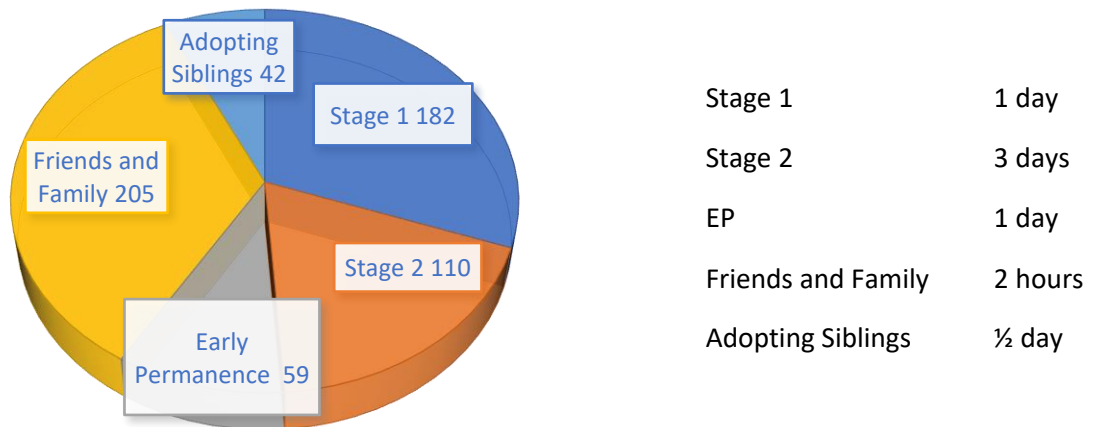
“My wife and I did our adoption through Adoption West, and G was pre-adoption SW. Now we have the L, post-adoption, who is helping us navigate secondary school and ASF and more. We are very grateful for the support that we have received as a family.”

The assessment process is clearly explained to prospective adopters (ibid) (NMS 10.3)

Agencies respond to requests for detailed information (following initial enquiries either to the National Gateway for Adoption or directly to an adoption agency) within ten working days, through an information session, a visit, pre-planned telephone call or similar arrangement with the prospective adopter. (NMS 10.4)

To implement an effective recruitment strategy, meeting the needs of children with a plan for adoption in the AW region (NMS 10.1)

Adopter Preparation Training



For those adopters who want to provide an Early Permanence placement, they are asked to attend an additional 1-day training course during Stage 2 of their assessment. Those adopters wanting to be matched with siblings should complete the Adopting Siblings Workshop, prior to matching panel.

Stage 1,2 and EP training have an average evaluation score of 9.4/10

"A huge thank you to the trainers for sharing their expertise as social workers and adopters - the training was very informative and engaging"

"We never realized how the early years of your life could affect a child's development, and cause trauma, before we started the adoption process. We really enjoyed all the training days."

"Excellent training. Have both come away from the training so excited to continue the process and feel more committed than ever to providing a loving and supportive home to some amazing children."

"Twilight Sessions"

Bringing together the work with the birth parent groups and the preparation of adopters three Twilight Sessions have been held this year. This provides the opportunity for birth parents and prospective adopters to talk together. This enables birth parents to share their story with the intention of helping prospective adopter to gain insight and understanding to,

the circumstance of many families, the experience of children and long term implications for the birth family, adoptive family and importantly the child.

Next year we are considering how these sessions can be supported so that more adopters can attend and have this opportunity.

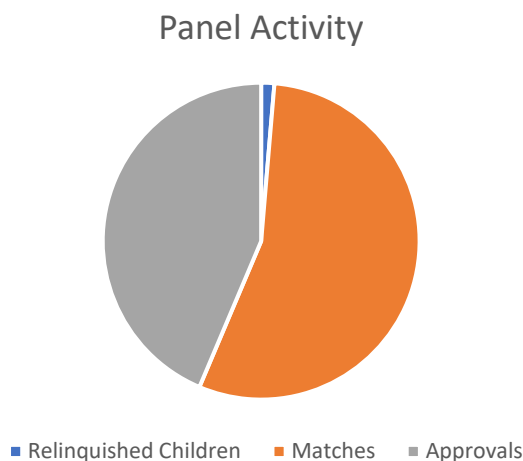
Applicants are given the opportunity to talk to approved adopters, adoptees and birth parents whose children were adopted. (NMS10.7)

Preparation courses are held and made available to all prospective adopters, including foster carers who wish to adopt the child (NMS10.8)

Prospective adopters are prepared to become adoptive parents in a sensitive way, which addresses and gives them skills knowledge and practical techniques to manage the issues they are likely to encounter (NMS10.9)

Adoption Panels

The Adoption West Panel Chairs Report has been completed for this period, meeting National Minimum Adoption Standards 17.2 and 25. This report includes full details of the panel's process, membership, appraisals, quality assurance, training and activity, with recommendations to the agency.



Panel business this year has included:

2 relinquished children,
82 matches for 106 children
65 approvals considered.

Adoption West continues to run on average 4 panels a month with 33 active panel members as follows:

- 3 panel chairs
- 7 social worker representatives (including 1 vice chair),
- 13 independent panel members (including 3 vice chairs)
- 10 medical advisers

Adoption West is committed to expanding the diversity of panel members and is actively seeking to recruit new panel members from a diverse ethnic background. One of the new panel members recruited is from a global majority background. We are currently developing a focused recruitment campaign.

We continue to provide two training days a year for panel members one of which includes staff from across Adoption West. The training days covered the following items:

- Update on Adoption West staffing, structure and practice
- Presentations on post-adoption support
 - Working with birth parents, presented by support workers of the Birth Links Service
 - Supporting adopters. A presentation of the work of the post adoption support team
- Thinking about the adoption support plan
- A reflection about the aim of the panel feedback forms
- Presentation from Medical Advisers regarding Adult Health Reports
- Presentation of the AAR pilot
- Learning from adoption disruptions
- Positive adoption stories
- A summary of feedback from attendees at panel
- Discussion of the Chair's Annual Report

Feedback is requested from all those attending panel. It is important that the panels understand how they are experienced by those attending so that changes and improvements to practice can be made where required.

Adopters Comments:

"We think the panel ran well. We had some level of anxiety, as expected, but the panel members were warm and kind. Overall, it was a positive experience."

".....It was reassuring to be given [before panel] the information about how the panel would work on the day and it was useful to test the online connection."

".....Panel was running late and started later than scheduled, however my social worker was informed of this and she told me. I appreciated this because it could have been a more anxious wait without knowing this for certain."

"Thank you for making what could have been an uncomfortable situation a very positive and efficient experience. We appreciate all your time, excellent communication and advice."

Social workers Comments

"This was my first time attending panel and it was a very positive experience"

"I felt it was a well-balanced panel, panel members warm and appropriate questions were asked."

"The Chair has a lovely way of making people feel comfortable"

"Really like X's panel format as she gives me the time for contributing and I'm specifically asked for input – it can be hard to speak when panel is in full flow and at pace so its good time is given."

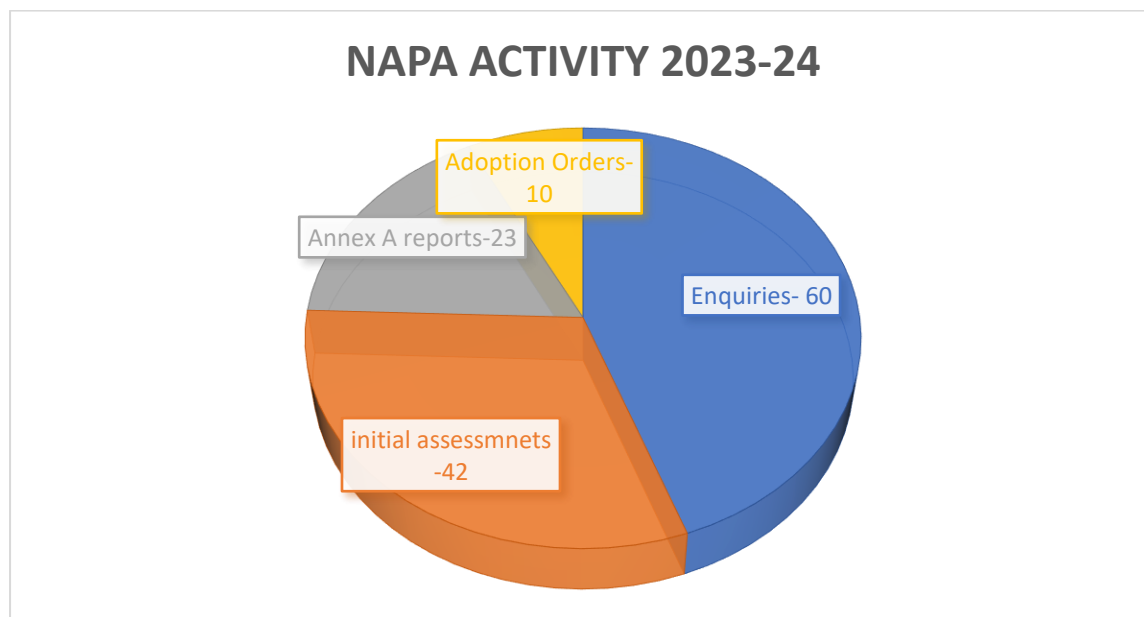
Adoption Disruptions

There have been no adoption disruptions this year

Non-Agency Partner Adoption (referred to as Step-Parent Adoption)

Adoption West manages enquiries regarding partner adoptions via a triage process. Applicants are required to submit their notice of intention to adopt to the local authority and Adoption West then completes the checks, references and court report.

This work is completed by social workers in the Recruitment & Assessment Teams in each hub, enabling the flow of this work to be managed at a regular pace and appropriately balanced with the priorities of agency adoptions.



Adoption Support

The adoption support service is now one team covering the region which includes three deputy team manager teams in Bristol, Gloucester and Trowbridge. In June 2023 agreement was given by the local authorities for additional funding for 1 additional social worker and 3 support workers full time posts for the adoption support services. This enabled a temporary social worker to become permanent; 2.5 additional support worker in the adoption support team and a 0.5 post in Birth Links to work with birth family members. All posts are now recruited to and new workers are settling into their roles and the organisation well. Despite holding vacancies during this time, the adoption support service has still managed a high turnover of work and provided support to a large number of families and children. The increased funding means that they can now improve the offer with lifestory support, education issues, direct work with children and young people and therapeutic parenting advice.

2023/24	Enquiries /Contact	Enquiries resulting in an assessment	Assessments not started	Av time enquiry to Assessment start	Assessments completed
Adoption West	819	157	41	12.5	167

The above table gives the data for enquires to assessment. In the last eighteen months, there has been a steady increase in the time families are waiting for an assessment. Families are provided with a keeping in touch call and will be prioritised outside of this system if the family is in crisis. However, this wait time is considerably outside of the target of 6 weeks which the agency had been able to operate within until this period. We are working to address this in the short term using the additional capacity of recruited independent social workers.

As part of the re structure we immediately changed the duty system to offer a specific adoption support service to adoptive families. This has provided some challenges and has led us to identify and move towards a new front door service which will offer more consistency and early intervention/support. A task group have completed some initial work on the shape of this service. We have 2 Senior Practitioner roles and a support worker who will run this service which is planned to start in September 2024.

31/03/24	Children receiving a service	Children rag rated red	Children rag rated amber	Children rag rated green
Adoption West	914	41	206	692

The level of support required by families can vary significantly and the rag rating is an attempt to identify this. This year up to 10% of the children have been referred to children's social care due to concerns about risk in the community and risk to the stability of the family.

Service Developments

An Adoption Support Strategy based on a Theory of Change model has been written and focuses on the development of our 3 tier adoption support model and in particular aiming to expand services at the universal and targeted level to have a wider support offer this includes peer support groups focused groups/training and social events.

- Advice/helpline/duty We have dedicated social workers available every working day: 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 4pm on Fridays.
- Support with maintaining relationships face to face contact and Letter Box
- Events for adopters and children – summer parties x3 and Christmas parties x3
- Regular Newsletter and social media post to provide information from across the region and nationally
- Support groups- contract with CCS Adoption
- Connections to Peer Support across the region, WANDS , ITAV
- Access to Virtual School Lead for support and signposting regarding education issues – range of webinars on education topics including transitions
- Early Permanence Support Group monthly from August 2024

1

- Catch – Adopter Hub (PACT)- web platform of resources and webinars – licences for prospective adopters from stage 1 for a min of 1 year
- National Association Of Therapeutic parents – membership for adopters
- Therapeutic Parenting courses – for adoptive parents with a child placed x 3 a year
- Using Theraplay skills in parenting - for parents with young children x1 a year
- NVR – for parent experience child to parent violence x1 a year
- Cathedral School Group – pilot group for adopter teens in collaboration with FACE – Sth Glos Youth Service
- Lifestory work Course
- Birth Parent Support groups – x2 Bristol and Gloucester meets monthly
- Early Placement Support Core Offer – Pilot from June 2024

2

- Currently provided by the Adoption Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)
- The ASGSF provides funding to help adoptive parents pay for therapeutic services following adoption.
- Assessment of a family's adoption support needs.
- Application and all administration of the grant monies
- Accreditation of private providers of therapeutic support who can be funded via application to the ASGSF

3

Peer Support Groups

Adoption West had worked with Wiltshire Adopters Network for Development and Support (WANDS) to put a proposal to the Adoption West Board for the development of peer-to-peer support across all six local authorities, which was agreed in April 2023.



The aim is to develop an adopter led network of peer support across the Adoption West region. Two adopters from WANDS have been networking with adopters across the six areas and have connected with other adopters who have been keen to develop groups in their areas, this includes 3 groups in Bristol and two groups in Gloucestershire. Their medium/ long term plan is to create a charitable organisation called “It Takes a Village” which will be an umbrella organisation of peer support groups.

Groups/Training

NVR group for adopters who were struggling with their children’s behaviours including child to parent violence. The group was funded by ASF and facilitated by an Advanced, Accredited NVR Practitioner & parenting specialist and Lead Clinical Specialist (Placement Support Therapist), Wiltshire CAMHS In-Reach Team. Eight parents completed the evaluation report demonstrated the positive benefit to them.

Theraplay group aimed at families with children aged 2-3 years, was run for eight weeks April to June 2023, facilitated by two Adoption West social workers. The focus of the group was to provide and practice theraplay activities with the aim of building attachments. Five parents and their children attended the course. This is some of the feedback:

Practical ideas that have become part of our everyday lives

Most enjoyed seeing the bond grow between the children and enjoyment of all the activities

Really useful to attend great idea

More sessions/activities like this would be great

Therapeutic Parenting Courses are provided on line three times a year facilitated by Adoption West social workers. This is some of the feedback:

Online experience?

- ***Couldn’t have done the course if it wasn’t online but connection problems made it difficult sometimes and we missed some information***
- ***Online experience was very good***
- ***If it had been face-to face I couldn’t have attended***
- ***Still felt like we were a group and everyone was happy to chat***

What has been most useful?

- ***Being reminded of things you know but have forgotten***
- ***I couldn’t cope with the tantrums and dysregulation, being reminded about their emotional age rather than their chronological age has been really helpful***
- ***The whole course was helpful to understand my child’s behaviour***

- *The advice to regulate ourselves, to slow down and think and to think about ourselves. I've read a lot of therapeutic parenting books but they haven't mentioned us*
- *It's helpful to talk to each other and for people to bring different things to the table each week*

Cathedral School Group is an example of innovation and joint working as described by Kay Adoption West support worker -

It had been recognised by this school in Bristol and the adoption support team that there were a number of adopted children attending the school. After discussions between Adoption West (AW), Cathedral School and the Foundation For Active Community Engagement (Face) it was agreed that all adults believed that bringing together a number of adopted young people (YP) to form a group would be a good idea. The school recognised that these YP were naturally gravitating towards one another, AW recognised that nationally adopted groups were becoming established and that there was a high population of adopted YP in one setting that were expressing themselves in various ways, FACE had experience of running different types of youth provision for a range of YP and were interested to get the views of adopted YP about what they felt they needed or wanted. In March 2022 we got to work arranging a consultation with YP. Dawn an employee of FACE and Kay and employee of AW met with Miss Stevens from Cathedral and a number of selected adopted YP to seek their views.

Dawn and Kay had come armed with some activities and questions. The YP had come armed with break time excitement and nerves about meeting us. The room was full of chatter and the YP shared with us their thoughts about the school and when we introduced ourselves some YP shared aspects of their adoption stories, we spoke about boundaries and identified different YP's desire to identify as adopted or their desire for this not to be a talking point. After consultation agreed that a focus needed to be how difficult YP had found it to come together and be part of a group and felt that that should be the priority.

Face wrote a bid and secured funding from the two organisations, John James and Quartet. The funding was to run sessions with YP around the topic of identity, the bid included resources, trips and staffing of a FACE employee.

In September 2023 Miss Stevens arranged a coffee morning with the parents of students that the school had identified to introduce Kay and Debbie. Parents generally felt the group was a good idea.

On the 27th September 2023 we held our first session. Sessions are held monthly at the school and attendance has been high. We have done a lot of forming and storming as a group and identified that our end goal of performing together as a group will come in time. We have seen relationships develop and evolve both between YP and more recently parents. We quickly noticed that unlike the consultation group, this group were not so determined to share their adoption stories. In fact, it became apparent from week one not all YP knew that their peers were adopted, with H announcing "oh so your adopted", with clear surprise and delight in his voice. Adoption as a topic has been lightly touched upon in sessions. However, most of the sessions have been about relationship building and boundary setting. We began with a programme that has needed to be adapted as we go along. Understanding the impact of the group is in the small details, hearing YP's comments within the session "oh so they are just like me", "Sir, we are the adopted kids" seeing how much of a struggle coming together and behaving in a considerate way can be, testing the boundaries with

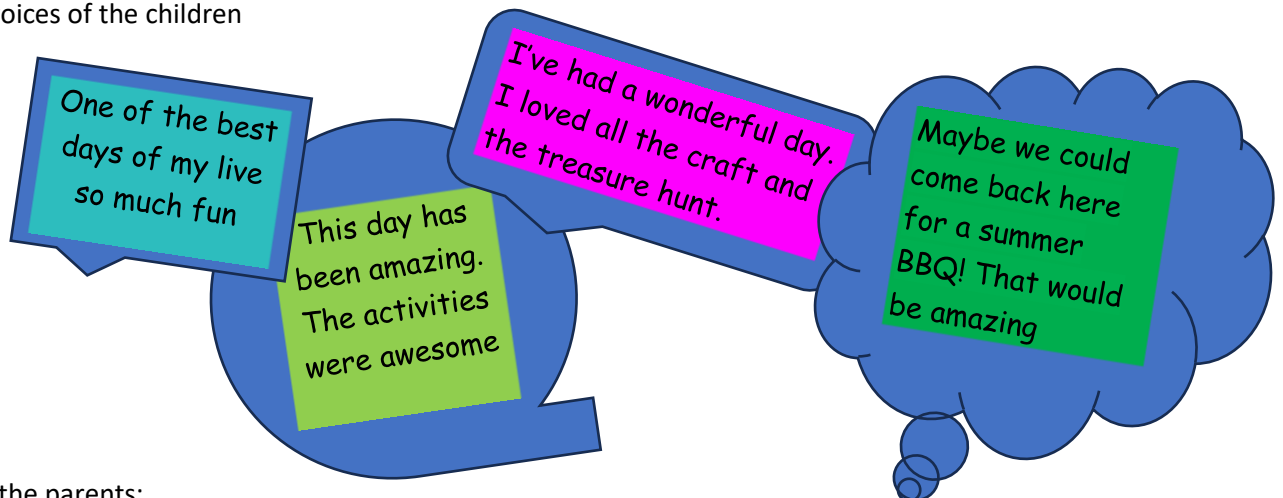
each other and making sure staff can hold their feelings, seeing the pain a YP can feel when they sense their actions were not well received can be really difficult but seeing YP introduce their new “friend” to parents and asking to arrange playdates, having YP want to share with you parts of their life story and seeing YP encourage each other and accept and even embrace one another can at times be very moving. The group has its challenges and it has many strengths. I am aware that at times, to the untrained eye we look like organised chaos, I see the relationships and growth and it inspires me. I look forward to seeing what the future brings.

Events

This year summer parties were arranged in two areas and Christmas parties which were held in 3 locations across the region. These were well received with positive feedback and requests to have more events like these.



The voices of the children



Now the parents:

We all had a great time, caught up with some familiar faces and made some great new contacts too.

Nice to have a Gloucester local event. Been a long time since last.

My oldest didn't want to come but once there he recognise a boy, took the initiative and went to talk to him and they entertained themselves for the whole evening. This is quite rare. And as parents we were so amazed!!

This is a social event we are really looking forward to. Maybe could we have other parties during the year? I might ask too much. but definitely it was a success.

Three summer parties and three Christmas parties are planned for 2024

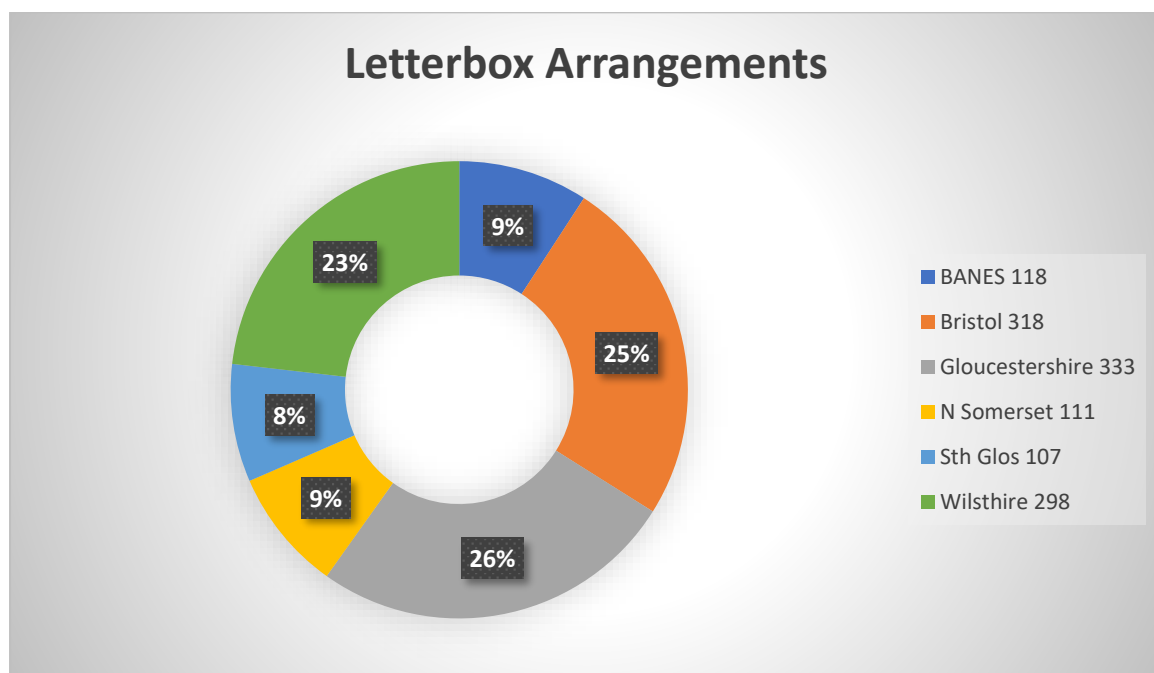
In addition to these groups and events Adoption West continues to provide funds to CCS Adoption to enable adopters in the region attend groups run by CCS Adoption Bristol, which includes a parent and toddler group, holiday activities and activity groups for teens and

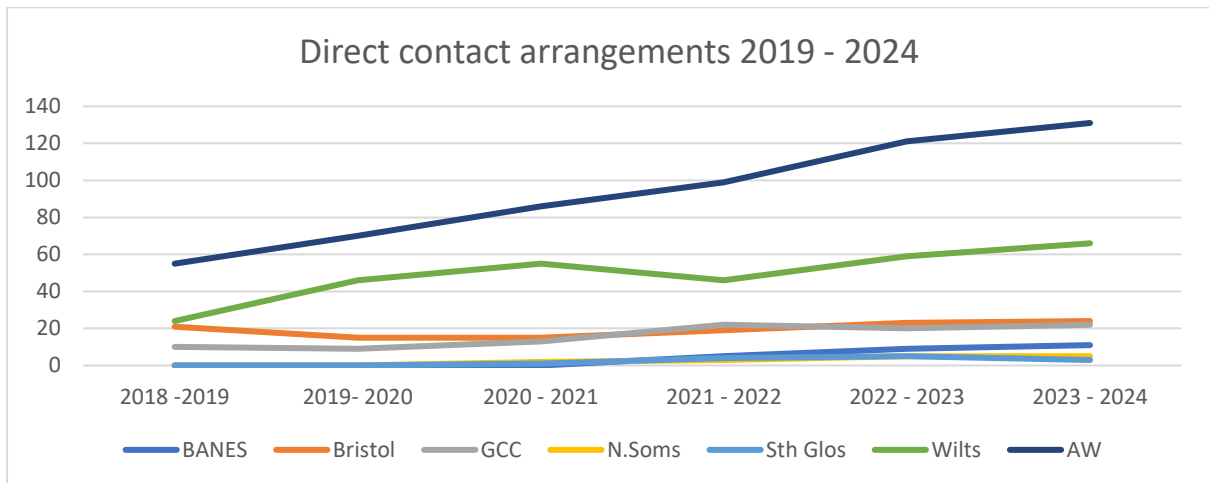
Maintaining Relationships

The maintaining connections service has been working hard to manage and support letterbox contact and meeting up times between birth family members, adopted children and their adopters. The number of meeting up times is increasing and the support workers are managing these well. We have had a number of young people and birth family members making contact with each other via social media and have provided support to mitigate and manage risks here possible and ensure that concerns are addressed. 3 members of the team presented a workshop on maintaining connections at a national conference held by Adoption England in 2023. Adoption West manages 1,285 letterbox arrangements.

I wanted to thank you all for being part of the conference last week. Without your support, valued input and workshops we couldn't have made the day as great as it was

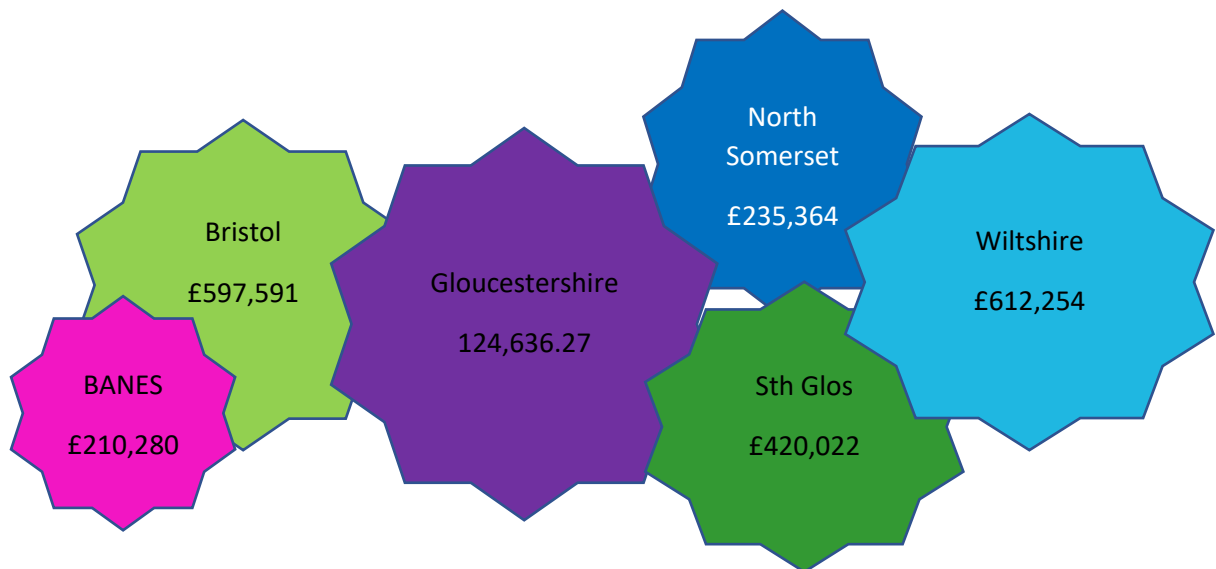
Vicky Swift - Project Manager National Adoption Strategy Team





Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund provides funds to pay for therapeutic services for adopted children and young people. The Adoption support teams must complete an assessment of need with the child and family to identify the appropriate support and provider. **1008** applications were approved for families in the Adoption West Region with **1151** recipients accessing therapeutic support. This is a further year on year increase in the number of families accessing the fund. We accessed **£3,673,231** to provide therapeutic support to children and families.



“he is doing really well at school; we are very proud of him and doing everything we can to support him. So far so good! the therapist been a fantastic support, not just to Kayden but also me and he really likes her so I think it's a great fit and positive all round!.....”

Feedback and Compliments

“Thank you very much for so efficiently sorting all this for both our boys, it’s much appreciated. Thanks also for becoming our named support worker, that’s really very helpful.”

“Thank you so much for dealing with the allowance and for suggesting we apply for DLA. We have heard back from both places in the last 5 days and basically it will change our lives. Also thanks for recommending I do the online course with the Belay Foundation”

“Thank you for all your support, we are, as a family, in such a different place than we were last year. Long may it continue!!!”

“We’re in an OK place at the moment- mostly thanks to your team!..Many thanks as ever for all the help and support. I honestly don’t know how we would have survived the last few years without your team! “

Adoption National Minimum Standard 15

Adoption support

Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs.

Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met or are meeting their assessed needs. (NMS 15)

Contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others is arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child. (NMS 8)



Adopted Adult Service

Provides counselling and access to records for adopted adults this also includes advice about how to access intermediary services if people wish to trace birth family members.

The waiting time for adopted adults to access their records and to receive Sch2 counselling session has increased over the last three months, please see below. This has been due to the small service being impacted by health related absence issues which are now resolved, so this should improve in the next quarter.

Number of referrals:

Total	Adopted Adult (Sch 2)	Adopted adult (Access to records)	Intermediary advice	Birth family	Adopted adult (post commencement)
Total 2023/2024	45	76	29	104	5
Total 2022/2023	39	75	35	103	1

Birth Family Support

There have been some changes in the team with an additional 18.5-hour support worker post has been created and provide support to birth families in the Wiltshire area. It not only means the team have more available support time but the reduction in travel time across the region also means further increased availability. A new member of staff was appointed in the Gloucester area after someone left the agency and started in March. These new appointments have enabled the service to provide a more equitable and efficient service across the region. In Q1 2024/25 the waiting list has reduced and the team are now meeting the 6 week target from referral to allocation of support.

The Bristol and Gloucester Birth parent groups continue to run not only supporting each other but also sharing their lived experience with Adoption West. This has been invaluable and helped to improve wording of the letterbox leaflet, giving feedback about value of direct contact & the benefit of maintaining relationships and feedback re: content of adopters' letters.

“Birth Links’ Seed of Hope Tree”

Bristol City Council are working in partnership with *Trees for Streets* as one of a number of innovative strategies to plant trees across the city. They offer the opportunity to sponsor a celebration tree in one of the city's parks to mark an occasion, celebrate or remember someone special. Sallie Turnbull support worker writes about the Bristol Groups involvement with this initiative:

Our Birth Links’ Support Group heard about this scheme and felt it would be a great idea to have a tree planted to celebrate and remember their children and all children who have been adopted. They hoped it could be a place where birth relatives whose lives have been changed by adoption could visit and spend time to think and reflect and remember special dates and anniversaries. A place where at times they could find comfort and peace.

*They wrote a letter to Alison Lewis, Service Director in August 2023 asking if Adoption West would agree to sponsor a tree and when this was agreed, Birth Links arranged for a tree to be sponsored on their behalf in an area of parkland chosen by them. It's a small-leaved lime tree (*Tilia cordata*) and is planted on Ladies Mile, Durdham Downs, Bristol.*

A plaque has been attached using words chosen by them - “Birth Links’ Seed of Hope Tree”.

The Group have visited the tree, and a summer picnic is planned. They are working on a leaflet with our Marketing Service which can be included with letterbox information when new letterbox exchanges are set up, signposting birth families to the tree as a place to visit.

It means so much to them, more than you can imagine!



Birth Links Support Workers with a flourishing Birth Links Seeds of Hope Tree

Adoption West is committed to promoting the voice of birth family members and this year support workers have delivered information sessions to adoption panel members and to Councillors from Scrutiny Panel. Going forward we are working towards increasing their voice at Adoption Panel ideally with a birth family member of panel and also by the groups developing a selection of questions that panel can ask from the birth family perspective.

In June 2024 the first ever adoption support map for birth families launched by the Family Rights Group. This is an interactive map of support services for birth families looking for information and support before, during and after adoption. This map is the first of its kind in England and will help thousands of families find the critical support they need.

“Too often, birth families affected by adoption struggle to access the support they need. It can also have a significant impact on the outcome for the children involved. Our new interactive map will, for the first time, create a go-to resource for families to find support at this critical time.”

Pam Ledward, Principal Social Work Adviser at Family Rights Group

The Birth Links team provided information and details of the service is now included and accessible via the map which is hosted on Family Rights Group’s website

<https://frg.org.uk/birth-families-map/>

Adoption National Minimum Standards 12.3 Birth parents are given access to, and are actively encouraged to use, a support worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. The support worker is independent of the child’s social worker. (NMS12.3)

Adoption National Minimum Standards 12.6 Birth parents are helped to work through their concerns through the counselling they receive and understand what is proposed for their child and how the child will benefit if they take an active part in their child’s adoption. (NMS12.6)

Adoption National Minimum Standards 16 Intermediary services - Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption, where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want

Adoption National Minimum Standards 23.9 Birth records counselling and disclosure of adoption information

National and Regional Developments

The National Adoption Team is led by the Strategic Adoption Lead Sarah Johal, allows for RAA leaders to work collaboratively on developing and improving practice and delivering improved outcomes for children and families as part of the government's national adoption strategy- achieving excellence everywhere. The 3 year programme has 3 key priorities, recruitment of adopters, the child's journey and adoption support.

South West Permanence Project

The aims of the project are:

- To increase aspirations of permanence for children with disabilities throughout the system. With improved and speedier permanency opportunities for children with disabilities.
- Reduce delays for children by diversifying the regional pool of adopters.
- Greater placement stability through earlier placement and better understanding of children's support needs. Earlier attachments, reducing impacts of trauma and loss and improving life outcomes.
- Greater placement stability from tailored, informed adoption support packages secured at the point of placement.
- Adopters more aware of the needs of children waiting and better prepared to meet them.



The project lead Claire Downes has been working with Alys Bates a social worker from Adopt South West to establish the project. A management and advisory group has been established which include Andrew Brown a researcher from the Oxford University Rees centre who will be evaluating the project.

The project will be looking at improvements in the assessment recruitment, matching and support for adopters adopting a child with a disability.

A unique aspect of the project is the enhanced family finding model which involves:

- Develop in-depth understanding of the child/ren, and their support needs.
- Working where possible with birth families as well as foster carers and social workers to create a detailed ecomap showing the child's current and historical networks of support. Projects show genograms can need to include between 30-100 identified people before successful permanence options can be identified. These include members of family, social and professional networks.
- Locating and contacting people within the network through phone calls, emails, social media, visits etc. to identify those who have an interest in supporting the child/ren.

- Discussions to identify who would be able to meet the child/ren's needs and how permanence would present for the child within the family. Including development of a support plan.
- Refer to adoption team or local authority for full assessment of family as adopters/special guardians or long-term foster carers.

The project has been working with the local authorities to ensure information sharing agreements cover its approach. Children have now been referred to the project and the enhanced family finding approach has started to be used with a small number of children. The project has already worked with LinkMaker to improve the quality of children's profiles and has made connections with the Maudsley hospital in relation to the support adopter need.

Early Support Core Offer Pilot – from June 2024

Adoption West have been working as part of National Task and Finish groups to develop a core offer for early placement support from linking for adoption to the Adoption order. The working groups have defined what support should be provided to adopters and children during this period and developed the following guidance and tools:

- Core Offer to families
- Core Offer and guidance for practitioners
- The Purple Book – a new workbook for adopters for them to be able to record and store information about the child, but also record their reflections and understanding about the child's needs
- The Purple Book – Guidance

Adoption West will be involved in the pilot to trail these new initiatives.

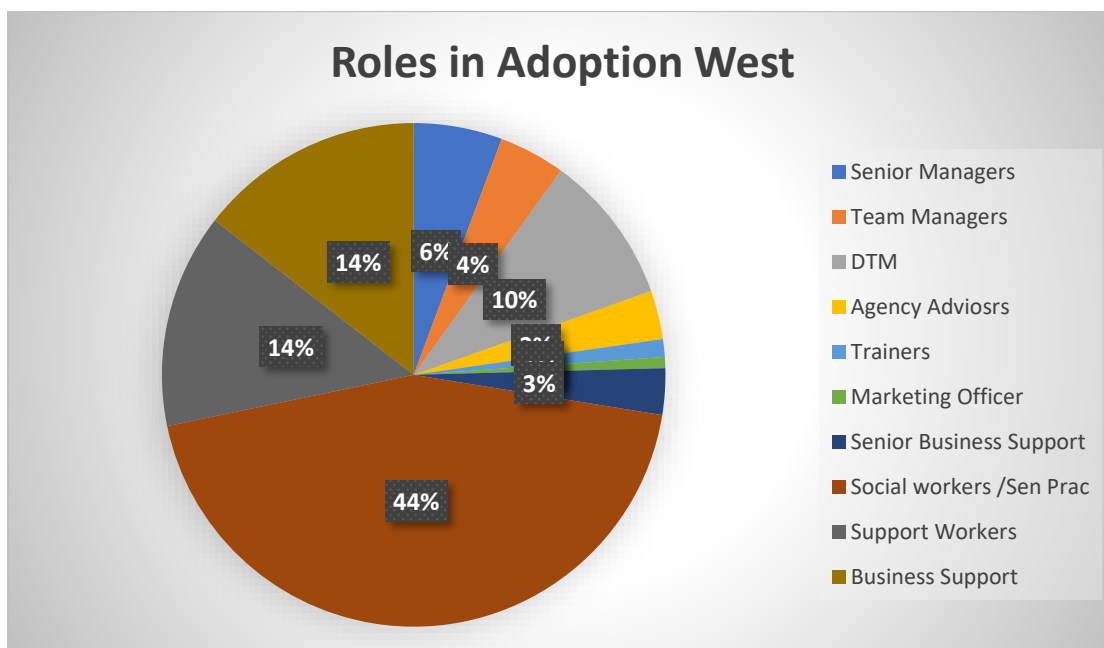
Adoption Support Plan Pilot

The same task and finish groups have revised the Adoption Support plan which Coram Baaf are now taking forward to pilot. Adoption West will also be trialing this with a small number of children as they are matched with adopters

People

The average number of staff employed by Adoption West is 93 with 67 fte.

In 2023/24 67% of the staff in Adoption West worked part time, this includes hours ranging from 18.5 to 30 hours a week. 58% of social work staff are part time and 19% of those in a management role are part time. Whilst this does enable Adoption West to attract new staff, there is an impact on management time with a higher number of people to be supervised.



The Senior Management Team, as detailed below, remains stable.

- Alison Lewis, Service Director- Agency Decision Maker (Adopter Approvals)
- Stuart Babbage, Business Manager
- Sue White, Service Manager – Recruitment, Assessment & Adoption Support
- Alison Hall, Service Manager (30 hours) – Family Finding and Panels, Agency Decision Maker (Adopter Approvals)

Finance

Adoption West received a commissioned contract income of £4.036 million in 2023/24 from its 6 local authority partners to deliver adoption services. The breakdown of budget allocation is shown below:

Category	Budget (£'000)
Employee Salary, NI & Pensions	3,416
Other employee related spend	127
Commissioned Services, subs & adopter recruitment activity	156
Post Adoption Support activity	96
ICT & Office Costs	155
Other Support Services	88
Total	4,036

Adoption West has also received Adoption Support Fund grant income and manages the related expenditure on behalf of the 6 local authority partners. As a Voluntary Adoption Agency, Adoption West operates on a not-for-profit basis and any surpluses are returned to the local authority partners that control the organisation.

Adoption West has managed its finances effectively to deliver services within budget under the added pressures of inflationary increases and various other organisational challenges. The financial processes and systems in place have proved effective and are being continuously improved to meet requirements, increase efficiency and enable Adoption West to realise new opportunities.

Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity. The Voluntary Adoption Agency/Adoption Support Agency is financially sound. (NMS20)

Complaints & Data Breaches

Adoption West has received seven complaints this year, four of which were resolved at local resolution level and two progressed to stage 2. One was on hold due to an investigation being in process and was not reinstated. The stage 1 and 2 complaints were partially upheld with apologies provided learning about practice and relevant processes taken forward.

There have been two data breaches this year. All incidents were reported to the Data Protection Officer, and none were reportable to the ICO.

Concluding Remarks

Adoption West's fifth year has been one filled with challenges and new opportunities.

This year the service has successfully managed a transition to a new structure. This has involved undertaking the necessary recruitment to address staff changing roles as well as the additional staff that were possible due to the additional adoption support funds.

The recruitment of adopters has been at its lowest level for many years while in this region the number of children needing an adoptive family is increasing. It is difficult to be sure why these two things have been happening. Nationally we know that the number of adopters has fallen and consider that the cost of living crisis could be a factor in peoples own individual decision making. However, it is important that we continue to scrutinise this issue at a local regional level, so we will be working with the local authorities to understand the changes for children leading to increased numbers with a plan for adoption. At the same time locally, we will continue to promote the need for people to consider adoption. It is positive to see that the numbers of people coming forward to adopt are starting to turnaround.

We are operating in a time of limited resources that impact on the lives of the birth families, adopted families, adopted adults and children with whom we work. To provide permanence for those children who need adoption and support them and their families long term, Adoption West is working well with other organisations at both a local and national level. I hope that this report demonstrates the creativity and desire to address the challenges and do as much as we can for our service users. This year there have been positive steps toward the provision of a consistent adoption support service across the region.

The report indicates areas of development that we are taking forward for next year as follows:

- At a time of fewer adopters, we will strive to ensure that the timeliness for children achieving permanence by adoption is not impacted. To do this we aim to recruit 80-85 adopters this year and work with our local authorities to develop a longer term plan for meeting the needs of children locally.
- The Adopter Assessment Report (AAR) pilot will be concluded alongside taking part in the national pilots for the Adoption Support Plan and Early placement support core offer.
- Plans will be progressed to improve the experience for applicants at the front door from information session through to the completion of stage 1.
- We will continue to develop the diversity of Adoption Panels including the involvement of those with lived experience.
- Our commitment to ensuring early permanence placements are available for those children who will benefit will continue, with a re-focus of the EP support group and review of the training provided.
- Birth Links aims to establish a support group for birth parents in the Wiltshire area, thereby provide additional support across the region.

- Working across the service we will refine the Twilight sessions to ensure more prospective adopters can have the opportunity to attend. This will enhance the work we are committed to ensure adopted children have a clear and supported plan for maintaining relationships.
- The provision of adoption support services will build on the start made this year by continuing our work with It Takes a Village to expand peer to peer support, the provision of regular events and groups as well as working with CCS adoption to ensure the offer meets the needs of children and families.
- Adoption West will work with Adoption England to improve the voice and influence of those affected by adoption in our local planning.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who works for Adoption West for positively working with the changes that have been made this year. Adoption West is reliant on the commitment, creativity and desire of the staff to do their best for all those whose lives are impacted by adoption. Adoption practice is about relationships with people this report includes a few examples of this just to show what is happening every day. Thank you all for going the extra mile time and again



Alison Lewis
Service Director

Contributors:

Sue White: Service Manager

Alison Hall: Service Manager

Sue White: Service manager

Stuart Babbage: Business Manager

Anjali Gupta: Team Manager Adoption Support

Jane Priborsky/Jen Brennan: Team Manager recruitment and Assessments

Kate Worthington/ Jen Brennan: Team Manager Family Finding

Rebecca Myers: Marketing and Communications

Claire Jarvis: DTM Birth Links

Kay Jones: Support Worker

Sallie Turnbull: Support Worker

Appendix 1

Governance Arrangements:

As a local authority company, Adoption West is owned by the six partner local authorities through the Joint Committee of Directors of Children's Services. The management of Adoption West is delegated to the Adoption West Board of Directors and to the Service Director.

Adoption West Board of Directors:

Voting members:

- Sheila Smith – Director of Children's Services, North Somerset Council (Chair and Responsible Individual until June 2023)
- Mary Kearney-Knowles – Director Children and Young Peoples Service, Bath and North East Somerset Council (Chair and Responsible Individual from June 2023)
- Andy Dempsey – Director of Partnerships and Strategy, Gloucestershire County Council
- Jen Salter - Director Families and Children's Services, Wiltshire Council
- Fiona Tudge – Director of Children, Families and Safer Communities, Bristol City Council
- Shanti Eaves – Head of Service, Localities, Corporate Parenting and Fostering, South Gloucestershire Council
- Carolyn Fair – Director of Children's Services, From June 2023 to December 2023)/Jane Anstis Assistant Director North Somerset Council

Non-Voting members:

- Mustafa Salih – Head of Financial Management and Business Support, South Gloucestershire Council
- Emma Simpson – CEO, CCS Adoption from September 2022

Commissioning Arrangements:

Adoption West is commissioned by the six local authorities to provide adoption services. The Lead Managers group is responsible for oversight of the commissioning arrangement and developing shared practice between Adoption West and the Local authority children's social care teams.

Local Authority Adoption Lead Managers Group:

- Elliot Davies – Interim Head of Service: Care Outcomes, Bath & North East Somerset Council

- Amanda Braund – Service Manager, Placements Team, Permanency and Specialist Services, Bristol City Council
- Tammy Wheatley – Head of Service, Permanence, Gloucestershire County Council
- Shelley Caldwell – Service Leader Service Leader Resource Service, North Somerset Council
- Sue Applegate/Lorraine Lawson/ Kerry Seaton – Service Manager, South Gloucestershire Council
- Pier Pritchard – Service Manager, Children in Care and Placement Service, Wiltshire Council

Scrutiny Arrangements:

As an adoption agency that is funded by public finances to provide statutory adoption services it is crucial that there is effective scrutiny of Adoption West. The Joint Scrutiny Panel has been established to provide this function. The panel meets quarterly, and each meeting includes a briefing about adoption issues. In this period adopters have met with councillors and shared their experience of support via the ASF and being an Early Permanence carer.

Joint Scrutiny Panel: 2023-24

Elected Voting Members:

- Cllr Michelle O’Doherty Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Cllr Christine Townsend Bristol City Council
- Cllr Becky Hoyland Gloucestershire County Council
- Cllr Joe Tristram North Somerset Council
- Cllr Sandra Emms South Gloucestershire Council
- Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman) Wiltshire Council
- Cllr Carole King Wiltshire Council