



Adopter Engagement

Mapping and best practice across
Regional Adoption Agencies

2024-25



Adoption
England

regional adoption agencies working together

Prepared by

AdoptionUK

Contents

Introduction

Part One

Mapping Adopter Engagement across Regional Adoption Agencies.

- Section 1: Quantitative Comparative Data.
- Section 2: Summary of Data.

Part Two

Adopter Focus Groups

- Section 3: Successful engagement with adopters

Part Three

Case Studies / Examples of good practice.

- Section 4: RAA Case Studies
- Section 5: Engagement work across England

Part Four

Barriers to Adopter Engagement.

- Section 6: Key Limitations and Challenges.

Part Five

Summary of The Adopter Engagement Programme.

- Section 7: Key Recommendations.
- Section 8: Conclusion



Introduction

Adoption UK is the leading charity for adoptive families, and others parenting children who can't live with their birth families such as kinship carers. Our aim is to give children who have had an unfair start in life an equal chance of a bright future.

We connect families through an active community of adopted people and adopters; provide direct support through membership and community events, therapeutic services, advice and training; and campaign to influence government adoption policies and adoption practice.

The programme

Adoption UK were commissioned by Adoption England with mapping adopter engagement across the RAA's in England. The goal was to identify effective practices and provide recommendations on how successful methods could be implemented to influence RAAs, the wider system, and the DFE Adopter Reference Group. This was achieved by interviewing RAA's and identifying Adopters in some of those agencies to ascertain how this happened and what the outcomes were but also to feedback any challenges and limitations they faced.

This was delivered in two distinct stages:

- Phone / video interviews
- Adopter focus groups

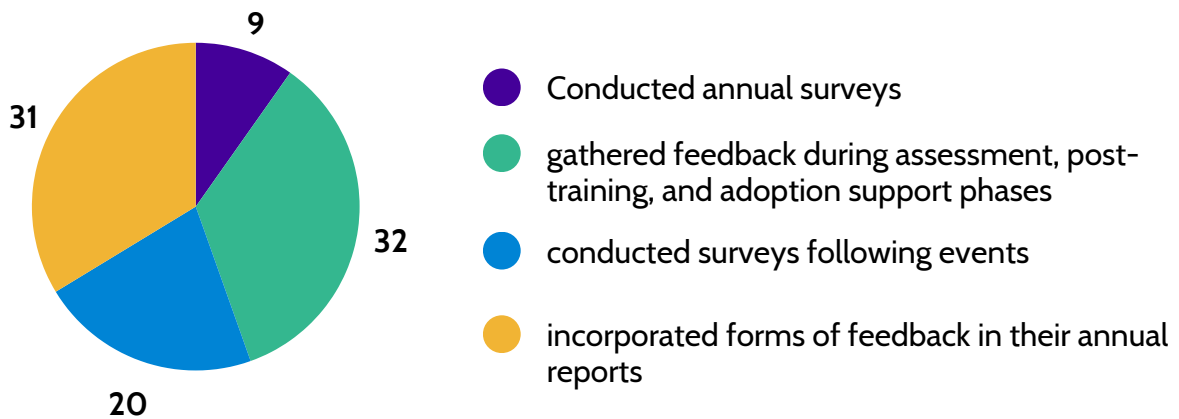
Part One

Mapping of Adopter Engagement
across Regional Adoption Agencies.

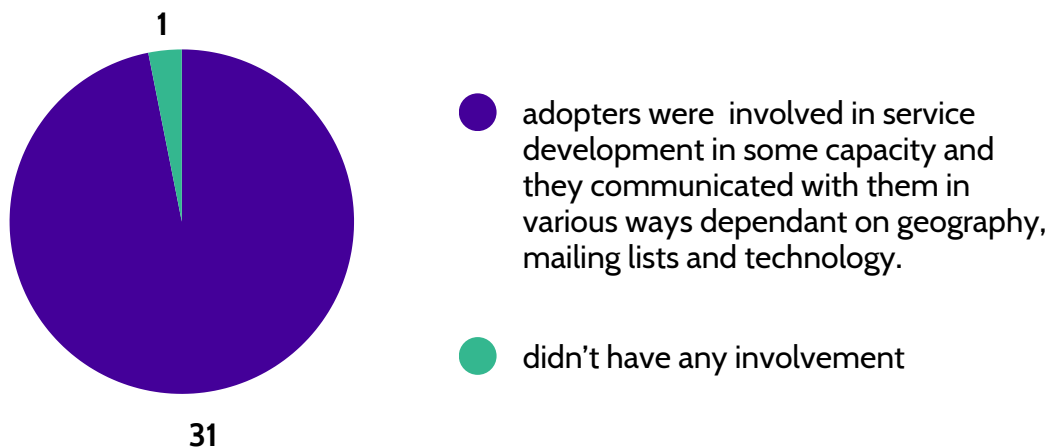
Section 1: Quantitative Comparative Data

Online interviews were conducted with 32 out of 34 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) across England:

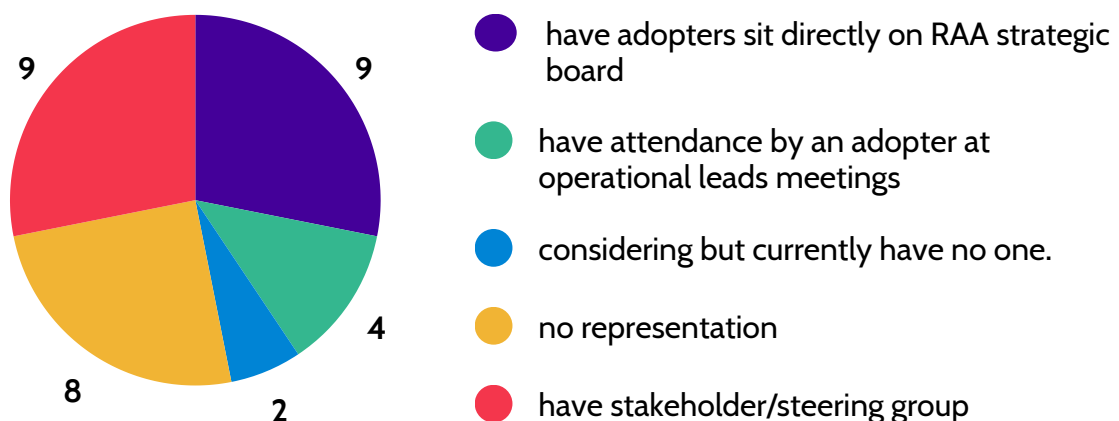
Do you survey your adopters if so what's your response rate?



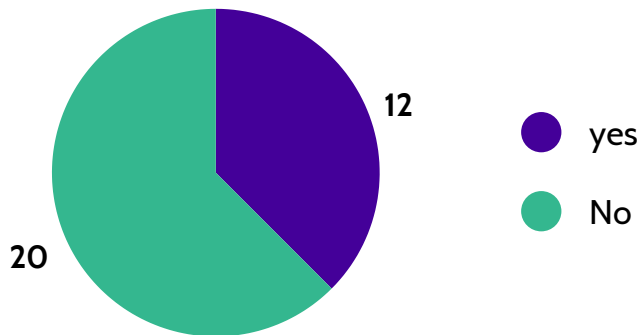
Are there opportunities for adopters to be involved in any service development? If so how do you communicate with them? (face to face, virtual, email)



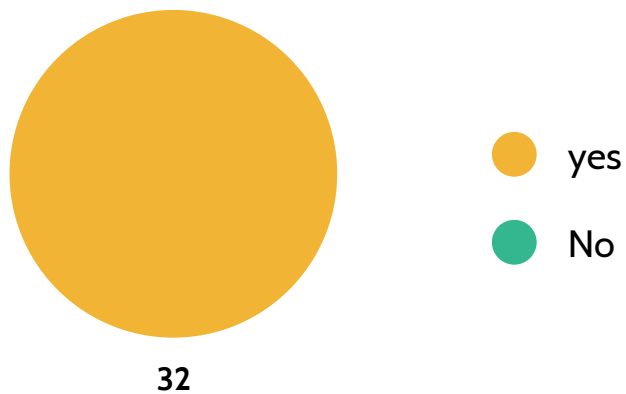
Do you have adopter representation on Boards or in strategic/operational meetings? If so which ones?



Have you any commissioned services to gather adoptive feedback?



Do you gather views in an informal way e.g. through groups or events?



Other ways feedback was gathered:

- Some used partner organisations to gather feedback through peer support
- Some surveyed specific groups like Black Adoption Project
- One agency conducts mini surveys throughout the year on specific subjects
- Agencies mentioned using the barometer as feedback and had commissioned the regional barometer if they achieved the numbers.
- One agency mentioned they specifically gather feedback for dropouts in assessment

Section 2: Summary of data



1/3

conduct annual surveys

Surveying of Adopters

About a third of agencies conduct annual adopter surveys. All agencies collect formal feedback, such as via email or written communication. Feedback is gathered at various stages, including preparation training, following the adoption panel, workshops, and adopter training. Most Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) include feedback and adopter engagement in their annual reports, though the level of detail varies. Response rates were often low, and agencies stressed the importance of meaningful and not tokenistic feedback.



50%

have adopter representation on their boards

Adopter Representation on Strategic/Operational Boards

Around 50% of RAAs have adopter representation on their boards. While some RAAs have considered this approach, they emphasise the importance of selecting a representative who can effectively express the views of all adoptive families. There was also concern around whether adopters needed to be aware of some of the more financial aspects of the RAA that would be discussed at these meetings.



75%

have adopter/stakeholder groups

Adopter Consultation/Stakeholder Groups

Adopter consultation/stakeholder groups are present in 75% of RAAs. These agencies have established adopter reference groups/stakeholder groups to consult and gather perspectives, seeking their views on service development such as training, support groups, services, procedures, documentation, website content and navigation, and newsletter content.



1/3

commission specific adopter engagement services

Commissioning of Services by RAAs around Adopter Engagement

Just over one third of agencies commission services specifically focused on adopter engagement. The agencies that commission these services highlight the benefits they provide in engaging with the adoption community. Some of these involve having a specific worker in each region, co production groups, running forums and peer support groups.



1/2

felt peer services play a crucial role

Peer-to-Peer Support & Peer Mentoring Schemes

Over half of the surveyed agencies felt that peer support groups and peer mentoring services play a crucial role in adopter engagement and as well as wider emotional support and guidance.



8

agencies employ adopters in engagement roles

Agencies Employing Adopters in Paid Roles Focused on Adopter Voice or Involving Adopters in Recruitment

Several agencies employ adopters in various roles within the agency, focusing on adopter voice and engagement. Additionally, some agencies involve adopters in the recruitment process for positions within the agency, particularly in adoption support roles, to ensure adopter perspectives are considered during interviews. This practice is observed in eight agencies.

Part Two

Adopter Focus Groups

Section 3: Successful engagement with adopters

Adopter perception of successful engagement:

Key findings:

- When adopters were consulted about their involvement with the RAA, they expressed it made them feel valued and heard. They felt they got the opportunity to make a meaningful difference. They expressed how engagement work provides a genuine understanding of adopters needs.
- Adopters perceive their relationship with the Regional Adoption Agency overall as positive, characterised by a two-way communication process that provides a personal connection to the organisation.
- They felt they were making a difference when they were involved in decision making at a strategic level or when developing work. Particularly being involved in the development of training for adopters. They also appreciated being involved in recruitment of social work staff.
- Where agencies had invested in peer services, adopters interviewed felt that this made a big difference to the number of adopters that RAA's could get feedback from and that it felt like the agency were listening to their need to talk to someone who understands from their perspective.
- Adopters felt they had a clearer understanding of the challenges and limitation RAA's face, leading to a more realistic view of what the RAA can offer. Though there was a frustration expressed that things didn't always move as quickly as they would like.
- It was also noted that adopters did feel that there needed to be a balanced view from adopters and from people at different stages of their family's life.
- They also stated that it was sometimes hard to get people to attend the groups they are in due to the difficulties of committing to it with the challenges that can happen when parenting a child with a background of trauma.
- Adopters also stated that they didn't always hear about the good work that was going on in the agencies as accessing communications from some agencies often was not clear.



Part Three

Case Studies / Examples of good practice

This section includes four case studies of Agencies engaging with adopters from the perspective of the agencies and the adopters involved, along with examples of good practices from other agencies.

Adoption Central England



Adoption Central England (ACE) is certified as a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) service. This involved upskilling staff in the principles of DDP, emphasising the importance of emotional and psychological support. By integrating DDP throughout its services, ACE aim to ensure that both staff and adoptive families benefit from a compassionate and supportive environment.

Stakeholder Group's Role in Service Development and Feedback

Background

ACE has established a stakeholder group to engage with adopters and gather feedback for service development. This group's role is to try to ensure that the organisation's procedures, initiatives, and resources are aligned with the needs and experiences of adopters. Adopters involved felt they were listened to in these meetings and were able to contribute successfully.

Quarterly meetings

The stakeholder group meets quarterly. Five or six members participate in these meetings and there is a desire for more adopters to attend. Nevertheless, adopters feel these discussions are impactful and offer an opportunity to influence new procedures and initiatives.

Role as Critical Friends

The stakeholder group acts as "critical friends," offering honest and constructive feedback on various aspects of the service. This collaborative approach is aimed to help ACE refine its services to better meet the needs of adopters.

Website development

The stakeholder group were involved in the development of ACE's website. Their feedback on usability and functionality ensured that the website is user-friendly and meets the needs of adopters.

Education Course Development:

In response to common themes and needs identified by adopters, the stakeholder group has played a key role in developing new education courses. For example, they have collaborated with virtual schools to create training events that address key issues faced by adopters.

Feedback Integration:

Feedback from the stakeholder group is integrated into ACE's newsletters and annual reports.

Adopters were interviewed about their involvement with ACE

Interview Insights:

An interview with an adopter involved with ACE provides additional insights into the stakeholder group's impact. J's engagement with ACE began with a mentor program that evolved into a space for discussion during COVID-19. They appreciate that ACE has listened to their feedback, particularly regarding the value of support programs for parents.

J also highlighted the importance of addressing sensory issues, which were brought up in support group discussions and have since been incorporated into ACE's resources. Additionally, they emphasised the need for more diverse voices among adopters to ensure balanced feedback and insights.

Key Initiatives and Practices:

- **Empathy and Support:** ACE places a strong emphasis on empathy and support for adoptive parents. Staff members are trained to be more empathetic, which in turn leads to better outcomes for adopted children. The agency actively seeks feedback from adoptive families to continuously improve its services.
- **Innovative Learning for Adopters:** In response to feedback from adopters, ACE has developed new ways of learning, including lunchtime webinars and online workshops. These bitesize training sessions are designed to accommodate the busy schedules of working adoptive parents, ensuring they have access to valuable therapeutic training.
- **Collaborative Training:** The agency delivers bi-monthly training sessions in partnership with Adoption Focus and Barnardo's. These sessions, aimed at the friends and family of adopters, help keep the support network informed and engaged. This was developed in response to feedback from the stakeholder group, highlighting the importance of maintaining strong family connections.
- **Senior Leadership Team Involvement:** The senior leadership team at ACE plays an active role in connecting with adoptive families. They are involved in information evenings, newsletters, and the agency's website, ensuring that adoption support is visible and accessible. This hands-on approach helps adopters feel more connected to the agency.
- **Resourceful and Innovative Practices:** Despite budget constraints, ACE works collaboratively with other agencies to find resourceful and innovative ways to support adoptive families. This includes leading a Department for Education (DFE) pilot focused on enhanced care and support, offering respite for adoptive parents, and organising coffee mornings for parents of teenagers.
- **Post-Adoption Support:** ACE provides ongoing support to families even after the adoption order is finalised. A dedicated social worker remains with the family for 12 months, offering a more formalised approach to post-adoption support. This includes helping families navigate life story work and other important aspects of the adoption journey.

Conclusions:

The stakeholder group, ongoing surveying of adopters and informal feedback gathered by ACE is a vital component of the organisation's efforts to engage with adopters and continuously improve their services. Through quarterly meetings with the stakeholder group, acting as critical friends, contributing to website and education course development, and integrating feedback into organisational communications, the group ensures that adopters' voices are heard, and their needs are met. Adoption Central England's have made a commitment to empathy, innovation, and collaboration through using their DDP approach. Trying to be 'a little bit creative' with no additional funding has led them to work jointly with other RAA's and organisations and be able to offer more to support adopters and their families.

Adoption West Adopter interview

"It Takes a village" is Adoption West's peer to peer support organisation. The model operates in all the RAA's 6 local authorities to support adopters in various ways.

ADOPTION WEST ADOPTER PERSPECTIVE

The discussion focused on the experiences of adoptive parents and the support they receive through a peer-to-peer support group called "It Takes a Village." The conversation emphasises the importance of community connections and the organic growth of support networks among adopters.

Community Support and Organic Growth:

The discussion begins with the acknowledgment that many prospective adopters often feel nervous and uncertain. The group encourages them to take the first step, highlighting that connections formed within local areas can significantly benefit their experience. As members share their experiences, such as planning meetups, they find local support and reassurance, which fosters a sense of community. This organic growth of relationships is a key aspect of their approach.

Importance of Peer Connections:

Participants in the discussion note how having a range of experiences among members, from seasoned adopters to prospective ones, facilitates relationship building. This allows for sharing of practical advice and emotional support, as seen in instances where members discuss common challenges, such as managing dietary needs of children. This peer support is central to the ethos of the group, which aims to create a welcoming and understanding environment.

Relationship with Adoption West:

The support group has developed a positive relationship with Adoption West, which has provided grants to help establish a more structured approach. The funds are utilised for various activities and community events, allowing adopters to meet without financial burdens. The group emphasises that while they receive support from Adoption West, they maintain their independence as a peer-to-peer network. Adoption West have seen the benefit to working with an independent group of adopters and have helped them to expand and supporting them financially has helped them achieve this. They have strong relationships with the adopters who run the peer support and utilise this well. The adopter interviewed felt that Adoption West saw that need for peer support and appreciated the help they received.

Feedback Mechanisms:

The participants express that they have opportunities to provide feedback to Adoption West, indicating that their voices are being heard. They discuss how recent changes in the organisation, such as improvements to their front door system, reflect the feedback from the community. The conversation also touches on the importance of post-adoption support, which has gained more focus over the years.

Future Directions:

Looking ahead, the group is eager to improve communication strategies to ensure that all members are informed about developments and resources. They aim to gather feedback from adopters to understand their needs better and enhance their involvement in the support network. This proactive approach is seen as vital for creating a stronger community among adopters.

CASE STUDY: Adoption East Midlands (AEM)



Overview:

Adoption East Midlands (AEM) have established several co-production groups that feed into different areas of support, ensuring that any changes in service offer or processes are consulted with adoptive families first.

- **Co-Production Groups:** AEM runs multiple co-production groups that contribute to strategic and operational goals for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). These groups are integral in shaping the agency's approach to adoption support and services. They have also helped shape how they operate the help desk, run groups, and make changes to prep training.
- **Strategic and Operational Goals:** Feedback from co-production groups is used to inform the strategic and operational goals of the RAA. This ensures that the agency's initiatives are aligned with the needs and experiences of adoptive families.
- **Adopter Involvement:** An adopter sits on the strategic group for the multi-disciplinary team, providing valuable insights and perspectives. AEM has also employed several adopters in various roles within the organisation to support adoptive families. These roles include education support workers who are part of the multi-disciplinary team, empowering parents to advocate for their children in schools.
- **Peer Support Service:** AEM offers a peer support service, including an adopter-led full-day workshop for new adopters in the first 12 months. This workshop, called "Coming Home," is designed and delivered by adoptive parents and focuses on connection in the early stages with peer support from those with lived experience. It is very well attended by adoptive parents.
- **Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT):** AEM is one of the Multi-Disciplinary Team sites, working collaboratively with four virtual schools as part of the MDT team. Feedback from co-production groups has influenced the development of the MDT.
- **Education Support:** Education support workers consult adoptive parents who are facing challenges in education, empowering them to advocate for their children in schools. Peer network coordinators also play a crucial role in the peer support service.
- **Impact:** The feedback from co-production groups has led to changes in the adoption support plan, making it more in-depth and rooted in child development, addressing both current and future needs of the child. The "Coming Home" workshop is a direct result of one of the co-production groups, highlighting the agency's focus on connection in the early stages with peer support from those with lived experience.

Interview with adopters involved in co production work:

Participants found the sessions valuable for establishing connections with others, identifying gaps, and highlighting needs. They developed resources with AEM to be utilised within the region. The sessions facilitated an understanding of the challenges faced by RAAs in meeting adopters' expectations. Through the structured co-production process, relationships were formed where adopters felt equal to RAA staff and were encouraged to have input in the decision-making process. Topics covered included complex trauma, education, and teens.

Conclusion:

Adoption East Midlands have embraced the need to have best practices in adopter engagement and co-production by involving adoptive families in service development and delivery, AEM aim to ensure that their initiatives are relevant, effective, and supportive of the needs of adoptive families.

CASE STUDY: One Adoption Y&H



Overview:

One Adoption Yorkshire and Humber have commissioned a service pan regionally to employ a worker in each region to gather the views of adopters and feed them back into service delivery.

- **Involvement:** Each worker has a connection with the RAA and has developed a network of adopters by participating in established independent support groups. They then attend each areas board meeting to feed in on what issues adopters are facing and input into developments within the RAA. Adopters involved have stated that this helps them to see how the feedback is being used and feel they can represent a larger group in those meetings as they have the collective voice of adopters in those regions. The openness of the agency to have them in these meetings makes them feel valued. The adopters interviewed involved in this work spoke about it being important to be representing the voice of a wide range of adopters and not just their own story. They also expressed the importance of reaching those less engaged adopters and getting their thoughts. Also making sure they engaged with different demographics of adopters within the region. One Adoption also commission a successful peer mentoring service which allows them to gather views in a more informal way. Staff in the mentoring service report back to the RAA themes they hear during the mentoring process.
- **Social media:** The coordinators have built up a large pan regional Facebook group with over 1200 members. This group is used to share events coming up in the RAA, feedback on specific asks, general themes emerging from conversations and building that sense of community. The team have also established online support sessions for One Adoption called “Together on Teams” and are running monthly sessions.
- **Meetings:** They attend operational meetings in the RAA for example FASD meeting, Education groups, Managers meeting and Virtual school heads meeting.
- **Interviews:** Adopters stated that they get asked to sit on interview panels for RAA staff from Heads of service to social support staff and Panel members.
- **Conferences and speaking opportunities:** The coordinators have been asked to speak at Annual conferences about the work they do and to feedback on specific topics.
- **Opportunities for other Adopters to be involved:** One Adoption Yorkshire and Humber have adopters at all their training and One Adoption West have adopters co deliver their training for prospective adopters.

Conclusion:

One Adoption Yorkshire and Humber has demonstrated a model for engaging adopters in service delivery and development. By employing workers to gather and relay adopters' feedback, the program has created a sense of community and representation among adopters. The involvement of adopters in board meetings, social media groups, online support sessions, operational meetings, service delivery, interviews, and conferences has ensured that their voices are heard and valued. There is a commitment by the coordinators to reach diverse demographics and less engaged adopters.

Section 5: Engagement work across England

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Adoption Partnership South East (APSE)



- APSE gather feedback from adopters at each point of the adoption journey.
- The agency has an established Parent Reference Group which meets quarterly before board meetings. Chaired by an adoptive parent, this group conveys the views and feedback from its members to the RAA's board.
- The agency has established several parent-led community groups in response to feedback from adoptive families. These groups are led by parents rather than professionals, focusing on strengthening peer support within the adoption community.
- Acknowledging the significance of peer support, APSE offers a service where each adopter is assigned a peer mentor before a child is placed. This peer mentoring service, known as Peer Connectors, is facilitated by a paid adopter who manages the service and coordinates community groups.
- Development around the innovation fund. The agency is involved in a pan-regional collaboration of 3 RAAs. The work includes a dedicated social worker for regular catch-up calls with adoptive families. The agency engaged with parents to gather feedback and identify crucial times for intervention. The checking-in scheme provides early adoption support at 12 months post-placement, before primary school, and during other school transitions. This initiative is in collaboration with Adopt South and Adopt South East.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption



- The RAA host a series of podcasts featuring adopters who share their experiences – Topics covered include early permanence, sibling groups, and children with additional needs.
- The agency conducts surveys with adopters to review specific aspects of the service when considering changes to their practice.
- The agency has established an Adopter Ambassador Group to consult with adopters around specific areas of work to inform and enhance service development.
- Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption has a well-established Early permanence support group. This group provides valuable informal feedback that guides workers leading early permanence initiatives.
- An adopter support group has been created by the agency co-facilitated with an adopter.
- The RAA collaborates with adopters through various channels providing opportunities for meaningful involvement. Adopters participate in adopter preparation training, panels, information sessions, support groups, and podcasts.

Adopt North London



- Adopt London North are part of Adopt London – 4 Regional Adoption Agencies that work in collaboration. Adopter engagement activity is shared across the London partnership.
- As part of the Black Adoption Project Adopt London North has established a Black Adopter Stakeholder Group to reduce disparities in the system for black children and increase the recruitment of black adoptive parents. The agency maintains ongoing communication with the group involving them in the design and development of various work streams. Expansion of the group recently has included in-person workshops, specifically designing projects and significantly influencing the work. This approach has been instrumental in shaping and leading initiatives.
- Conversations for Change Project – An Adopter Voice group established across Adopt London to gain insights into the lived experience of adopters.
- The Adopt London partnership has appointed an adopter who leads on developing adopter engagement across The Conversations for Change Project. The work consults with adopters collating their views and experiences to identify key themes. Liaison work can then be conducted with the RAA's on various projects.
- Adopt London North hosts regular coffee mornings and informal events providing informal contact spaces for adopters to meet and share their views. Each event has a specific topic focus. The events offer the opportunity for adopters to feedback informally to social workers and influence the development of work within the agency.

Adoption Tees Valley



- Adoption Tees Valley conducts a comprehensive annual survey of adoptive parents.
- The survey has been restructured and developed over time through collaboration with their adopter forum group. Reviewing the survey, identifying appropriate questions, and collecting pertinent information ensures it remains relevant and effective. As a result, the agency has successfully gathered valuable new information and achieved a higher response rate from participants. The survey informs and shapes the direction of service.
- The agency has an Adopter Forum Group whom they consult with. A member of the forum is an adopter representative at board ensuring that adopters views are communicated from the forum to the RAA board.
- Adoption Tees Valley collects extensive feedback on various aspects of its service. Adopter feedback is gathered after preparation training, panel sessions, informal events, and specific training sessions. Feedback is integral to the RAA, guiding the direction of services and ensuring they meet the needs of adopters.
- The agency shares the analysis and results of the annual survey with the adopter forum. This collaborative approach helps identify key thematic issues, areas for improvement, and informs change to the service.
- ATV developed and created The Adopter Pathway. An enhanced adopter passport to support adopters from approval to 12 months post adoption order. This demonstrates how a key theme identified in the annual survey was addressed and further developed by the RAA to effectively meet the needs of adopters.

Part Four

Barriers To Adopter Engagement

Section 6: Key Limitations and Challenges.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

Key limitations and challenges that RAA's encounter to deliver engagement activity.

Operational Structure

The diverse operational models of Regional Adoption Agencies across England can influence the extent of adopter engagement work to some degree. The various models include hosted models, partnership models, and collaborations between RAA's and VA's.

Each model has its unique advantages and challenges, and the choice of model can influence the effectiveness and efficiency of engagement work. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies that maximise the benefits of each approach.

Resource & Budget Constraints

The financial limitations and budgetary constraints faced by RAAs can somewhat restrict their capacity to engage with adopters. Limited funding impacts the availability of resources, staffing, and the ability to implement comprehensive engagement programs. Notably in many RAA's employees undertake the planning, implementation, and development of adopter engagement initiatives alongside their primary role/ responsibilities. Engagement work while of significant importance, is not a core statutory service delivery. Allocating sufficient focus and time for adopter engagement work can therefore present a challenge to some RAA's.

Representation of adopter views

A proportion of RAA's highlighted the difficulty in ensuring the perspective of all adopters are adequately represented. Often, only the most vocal individuals are heard, which may not accurately reflect the broader adoption community's views. This selective representation can skew engagement efforts and hinder the development of inclusive policies and practices that address the needs of all adopters.

Geographical Limitations

The diversity of geographical regions can present significant challenges with adopter engagement. RAA's operating across extensive geographical regions, particularly those encompassing rural areas, face substantial hurdles in engaging adopters. The vast distances and dispersed populations complicate the establishment of a central, accessible location for all adopters. In densely populated urban areas, the absence of such a central hub accessible to all can further impede effective engagement, as adopters may struggle to access services and support.

Reaching Non-Engaged Families

Engaging families who do not interact with agencies post-adoption, particularly those who adopted long ago, remains a persistent challenge. These families may lack awareness of critical issues such as trauma, prenatal trauma, developmental trauma, and access to support services and social events. Consequently, outreach efforts to these non-engaged families are often met with difficulties, as they may not recognise the importance or relevance of continued engagement.

GDPR Limitations

Adherence to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements poses significant challenges for RAAs. Compliance can lead to the loss of vital mailing lists, thereby obstructing efficient communication efforts with adopters. Maintaining clear, consistent communication with adoptive families becomes problematic, potentially undermining the effectiveness of engagement.

Overall benefits to the RAA & adopters of engagement work

RAA:

- Structured engagement often reinforces what an RAA is hearing in informal ways, it strengthens the sense of what an agency needs to prioritise.
- Agencies evaluate factors from a professional perspective. Engaging with adopters can influence and direct resources accordingly to provide the most appropriate and relevant support/ services.
- Adoption is ever evolving; engagement work ensures an agency maintains continuous relevance. Agencies address support and communication by learning from adopters.
- Promote a meaningful voice of the adoptive parent and engage with the adoption community in a positive way.
- Agencies indicated that feedback offers a comprehensive overview of adoption, shedding light on key trends and issues.
- Regional Adoption Agencies highlight the importance of adopter engagement in shaping their strategic and operational objectives.

The overall perspectives of adopters regarding their collaboration with RAA's and the resulting impact –

- Adopters maintain positive relationships with regional adoption agencies. Adopters feel acknowledged, with their feedback being valued and heard.
- Overall adopters expressed that they felt supported by their RAA when they have sought help and support.
- Adopters feel they get to know the personal face of the organisation through the engagement work they are involved with.
- There are certain barriers to effective communication. Adopters feel that communication channels could be improved. For example, ease of accessing information on websites and newsletters. Being informed about what is available in terms of core offer, support groups, social events.
- Adopters want to understand how their feedback shapes policy and practice. The consistency of updates on implemented developments including “You said we did” feedback from RAA's, can vary.
- Adopters believe that incorporating lived experience is essential in shaping strategic and operational goals.
- Adopters expressed the benefits of being engaged and actively involved in the development and delivery of adopter training programs.
- Adopters highly value the peer-to-peer relationships formed with other adopters as a direct result of some of their engagement work with the RAA.
- Adopters feel they have seen direct changes because of their work as part of a consultation group for the RAA.



Part Five

Summary of The Adopter Engagement Programme

Section 7: Key Recommendations

Key recommendations from the adopter engagement mapping programme allows us to highlight those effective elements of the work that address adoptive family's needs. It is important for Regional Adoption Agencies to ensure that engagement work is meaningful and if possible integrated into the service.

Adopter stakeholder/reference group – Agencies that consult with stakeholder groups in the first instance help shape the agencies strategic and operational goals. This approach proved effective for both Adopters and RAA's. It was particularly beneficial when they had direct input into the strategic/governing boards, and it was observed this was most successful when a representative from that group was also a board member.

Peer support groups and mentoring services are essential components of adopter engagement for approximately half of the agencies surveyed. These agencies indicate the importance and benefit of this peer-to-peer support for adopters. Agencies find it is often a useful way to hear directly from families and to feed that into any service development or to understand the issue adopters are facing at that moment in time. Having a clear feedback mechanism in place in any peer support program is useful. This is done in agencies by regular meetings with group coordinators or reports from those who run the peer support programmes.

Commissioned Services – where Agencies commission services that directly work on specific topics e.g. co production work, we saw that adopters felt they were integral to any changes being made in the Agency and could see tangible results from co-producing directly with them. These groups continue to feed into the workstreams and have meaningful relationships with the RAA's.

Employing a worker either directly or commissioned provides a good opportunity to develop engagement successfully, this works well where whoever is in the role can provide a rounded view and have a network to gather views from and feedback to.

To address some of the challenges posed by geographical regions, some RAAs have created roles focused on adopter engagement. Individuals in these positions build relationships with groups of adopters, thereby extending their geographical reach.

Some RAA's have looked at ways of overcoming challenges with resources by working collaboratively with other agencies. Pan regional working. Either commissioning services together or by pooling resources to relieve the burden on one agency. When adopters can engage in a variety of ways, including through adopter-led training courses, community groups, support groups, and podcasts. This involvement is both positive and impactful.

Some RAAs involve adopters in the recruitment process for agency positions, especially in adoption support roles, to ensure their perspectives are considered during interviews.



Section 8: Conclusion

All 32 agencies gathered feedback at various points in their involvement with adopters this was in various ways and there wasn't a consistent approach. Survey data was mainly gathered in the assessment process, this varied in response rates and agencies reflected that it may not be a true reflection of how prospective adopters were feeling as they were in the process of being assessed. They saw the benefit of trying to engage with them after assessment to ascertain their views.

Agencies did see the benefit to engagement, but it varies on how useful they felt it was and whether they were using it to their best ability. They didn't want to take it for the sake of taking it and felt that it should be done in a meaningful way. They also expressed the need to make sure they were getting a representative view and not just listening to the loudest voices.

When an agency included adopters who have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by adoptive families into the structure of their Regional Adoption Agency, such as developing and running training, sitting on interview panels, attending operational or strategic boards, delivering a service (peer mentoring), or commissioning a service, it demonstrated effectiveness for both the adopters and the agency.

It wasn't necessarily money invested but time and a willingness to engage that seemed to make the difference. Where Heads of Service or Senior staff placed it as a high priority seemed to have better results in engagement. This wasn't always due to a lack of willingness to prioritise it but other things needing to take priority at this time.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) across England operate under diverse organisational models. Throughout the programme and discussions with all RAA's, it has been concluded that comparing these models in terms of engagement work is not always feasible due to their inherent diversity. While it may not be feasible to propose best practice examples that are universally applicable to all there are notable examples of successful engagement work that demonstrate good practice across England.



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