

One Adoption South Yorkshire



One
Adoption
Agency
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2022/2023



FOREWORD

This is the second Annual Report from One Adoption South Yorkshire. We are very proud to share with you all we have achieved in our second year of operation.

Our second year has been one of development and growth, building on learning and observation from year one. Much has been achieved. Key personnel have moved into key development posts. The new Panel structure has been consolidated, and with the help of our excellent Panel Chairs and Panel Advisers has begun to function effectively across all four areas. We are one of the few RAAs nationally which have returned to actual adoption panels, and we believe that actually coming together once again to make such important decisions in children's and adopters' lives is a real achievement in a post-pandemic world.

The compact geography and the easy transport links across South Yorkshire support close, actual working, across the four local teams and work very much to our advantage in creating the new combined agency.

The establishment of a RAA leadership structure with three Service Managers, each leading in at least one geographical area but also leading across South Yorkshire on one of the three key areas of adoption work - Recruitment and Assessment, Family-finding and Adoption Support in September 2022 has enabled the RAA to start moving forward in all these key areas of development.

The appointment of the data analyst in March 2022 and then the Business Manager in August 2022 have also helped the RAA to start to understand much better its areas of strength and those areas which need further development or support. Developments planned for 23-24 will continue to build on what we have learned so far.



Despite the lifting of final covid restrictions in February 2022 we continue to be affected by the impact of the successive lockdowns. Practitioners are returning to working in the office but working patterns have changed significantly. The numbers of children where adoption is the plan remained lower in 22-23 than pre-pandemic and the number of potential new adopters coming forward also remained significantly lower. Although the numbers of both children and adopters seem to have been picking up since December 2022 there is still much to do. In 2023-24 we will be introducing our new case management system so that we can all work together on the same system wherever we are based in South Yorkshire.

We will ensure that potential adopters are supported on their journey in a consistent way from the earliest moment wherever and however they contact One Adoption South Yorkshire and that we recruit adopters to match the needs of the children who need families. We will ensure that children are placed in secure, loving and stable placements at the earliest opportunity and do not remain unnecessarily with short-term carers. We will continue to develop our adoption support services, in conjunction with partner agencies across South Yorkshire, to ensure that adoptive families thrive.

The coming year - 2023-24 is the final year in our initial three-year development plan and our intention is that by the end of March 2024 we will have all the structures and resources in place to take us through to becoming the outstanding Regional Adoption Agency we intend to be and South Yorkshire needs.

STEPHANIE EVANS

Head of One Adoption South Yorkshire



OASY STRUCTURE

One Adoption South Yorkshire was the thirtieth Regional Adoption Agency created in England and is a partnership model RAA. It brings together the Adoption Services from Doncaster Children's Trust, now Doncaster City Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Doncaster is the 'host' agency but in a partnership model, practitioners do not all move to the host agency either through secondment or TUPE. They remain employed by their existing agency. Doncaster hosts a small but growing team of central 'hub' staff who operate across the whole service. Unlike many other partnership model RAAs One Adoption South Yorkshire has a pooled budget. Some of the budget remains with each locality to cover staffing, direct payments to adopters and other local expenses, the remainder is held by Doncaster and covers inter- agency payments, commissioned contracts and other RAA-wide expenses.



Team structures April 2023

Locality	Service Manger	Team Manager	Advanced Practitioner	Panel-Advisers	Recruitment Team	Family Finding Team	Adoption Support Team	Business Support
Barnsley	0.5 FTE (Hub Based, Family-finding lead)	1 FTE	1 FTE	0.4 FTE (Based Sheffield)	4.5 FTE Social Workers 6.5FTE working across recruitment and family finding	2 FTE Social Workers 6.5FTE working across recruitment and family finding	2 FTE Social Workers 0.8FTE Development/letterbox coordinator	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0 FTE Business Support Officer
Doncaster	1 FTE (Recruitment and Assessment lead)	1 FTE	1 FTE	0.6 FTE (Based Doncaster)	3.45 FTE Social Workers 0.5 Social Work Assistant	1.65 FTE Social Workers	3.2 FTE Social Workers 2.5FTE Social Work Assistants (Including letter-box co-ordinator) 0.5FTE Education Support worker	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0 FTE Business Support Officer
Rotherham	0.5 FTE (Hub Based, Family-finding lead)	2 FTE	0 FTE	0.4 FTE (Based Doncaster)	5.7 FTE Social Workers	2.2 FTE Social Workers 1FTE Social Work Assistant	2.0 FTE Social Worker 1 FTE Social Work Assistant (Including letter-box coordinator)	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0FTE Business Support Officer
Sheffield	1 FTE (Adoption Support lead)	2.5 FTE	0 FTE	0.6 FTE (Based Sheffield)	6.5 FTE Social Workers 0.6FTE Interviewing officer	3.2 FTE Social Workers	4.4 FTE Social Workers 2 FTE Social Work Assistant 1FTE Letter-box co-ordinator	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.5 FTE Business Support Officer

Head of Service – Stephanie Evans, employed by Doncaster and based in Doncaster.

Service Managers

Vicky Brooke – Full-time based in Sheffield, RAA lead on Adoption Support

Helen Mangham – currently on a 12-month full-time contract. Manages the Rotherham and Barnsley teams and RAA lead on Family-Finding. Employed by Doncaster but based across the teams in Barnsley and Rotherham

Michael Richardson – currently on a 12-month full-time contract based in Doncaster, RAA lead on Recruitment and Family-finding

Team Managers

Jayne Haywood – Acting Full-time Team Manager in Barnsley

Melanie Johnson – Full-time Team Manager in Doncaster

Jill Stanley – Full-time Team Manager in Rotherham

Wendy Caster – Acting Full-time Team Manager in Rotherham

Jane Sandland – Full-time Team Manager for Recruitment and Assessment in Sheffield

Liz Rowe – Part-time Team Manager for family-finding in Sheffield

Laura Williams – Part-time Team Manager for Adoption Support in Sheffield

Advanced Practitioners

Ellen Holliday – Full-time Adoption Support Lead in Doncaster

Katie Clarke – Acting Advanced Practitioner in Barnsley

Agency-Advisers

Agency Adviser East (Doncaster and Rotherham) – Kim Wilson.

Agency Adviser West (Barnsley and Sheffield) – Samantha Jones.

Panel Chairs

Panel Chair East – Michaela Bass

Panel Chair West – Viv Howorth



OASY GOVERNANCE

OASY Governance Board – currently meets bi-monthly

Riana Nelson, Director of Children, Young People and Families –
Doncaster City Council – Chair

Director of Children’s Services- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough
Council

Assistant Director, Children in Care, Sheffield City Council

Director of Children’s Services – Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Director of Children’s Social Care – Doncaster City Council

Adoption-UK – South Yorkshire Adopter Voice representative

Virtual Head – Doncaster City Council

Yorkshire Adoption Agency – Voluntary Adoption Agency Representative

Head of Children’s Alliance – South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board



PERFORMANCE



Performance data is collected both for the individual authorities and for the RAA as a whole and is split between the adopter data and the children's data. At the present time the RAA is able to produce reliable data based on the requirements of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, now just the Adoption and Special Guardianship data but there are some areas of data collection, particularly around post adoption support and the stability of adoptive families which still need further development. The introduction of a single case management system for the whole South Yorkshire service to meet the needs of an adoption agency which is planned for 23/24 should enable the service to produce all the required data in the future.

Adopter Data

National Adoption Regulations have specific expectations regarding the length of each element of the journey to approval for adopters. Stage 1 - Should be completed within 2 months and Stage 2 - Should be completed within 4 months.

Numbers at stage one - 22-23 compared with 21-22

1. No. at Stage 1 (Start date and no end date)

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	8	4	4	5	8	7	4	5	5	6	7	8
Doncaster	15	12	12	14	8	7	5	7	6	6	4	6
Rotherham	9	4	5	7	7	7	8	7	8	8	8	3
Sheffield	3	4	4	4	2	3	5	5	7	10	13	11
One Adoption SY	35	24	25	30	25	24	22	24	26	30	32	28

No. at Stage 1 (Start date and no end date)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
Barnsley	9	6	6	5	4	5	7	8	8	7	8	7
Doncaster	6	7	7	5	5	5	7	8	10	12	17	17
Rotherham	5	3	8	9	7	7	2	2	4	5	6	8
Sheffield	7	8	7	5	9	9	7	7	6	3	3	3
One Adoption SY	27	24	28	24	25	26	23	25	28	27	34	35

Numbers at stage one remain broadly consistent over the last 2 years with some teams seeing higher numbers for some periods but over the period numbers even out across the teams. In 22/23 what has been most noticeable has been the number of potential adopters dropping out at stage 1.

Adopters who withdrew from the process before stage 2 started	
Barnsley	7
Doncaster	6
Rotherham	8
Sheffield	5
Total	26

This is an unprecedented number of adopters dropping out of the process after submitting a Registration of Interest but before the full assessment process has begun. Many adopters dropping out have cited concerns about the cost-of-living crisis and the impact on their finances meaning that they did not feel that the time was right for them to be starting a family.

During the pandemic temporary adjustments were made to the regulations regarding the checks and particularly the medical checks required at stage 1 prior to the commencement of the full assessment at stage 2. These adjustments enabled adoption services to begin the stage 2 assessment before the medical checks were completed. These adjustments have now been withdrawn. But what we are finding, in common with RAAs across the country, is that local GPs are increasingly reluctant to undertake the medical assessments, citing the increased workload post pandemic and the fact that these medicals are not intrinsic to the national GP contract. Letters have been written to the National College of GPs at national level but we are still negotiating at local level to get prospective adopters an appropriate medical report provided by someone who knows them well. The recent Serious Case Review regarding the death of a child placed for adoption has drawn attention to the importance of an accurate and detailed medical assessment.

2. No. at Stage 2 (start date and no end date)

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	7	6	6	6	4	3	5	4	4	6	6
Doncaster	9	8	8	10	8	7	8	5	6	5	6	5
Rotherham	4	3	5	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	6
Sheffield	7	4	2	1	4	5	4	5	6	6	5	5
One Adoption SY	24	22	21	20	21	19	16	17	18	17	20	22

No. at Stage 2 (start date and no end date)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
Barnsley	10	12	9	5	6	6	4	1	2	4	5	6
Doncaster	7	9	8	11	8	7	9	6	7	6	7	7
Rotherham	11	12	9	8	5	3	5	7	7	8	6	6
Sheffield	8	11	9	9	10	6	8	12	10	9	8	8
One Adoption SY	36	44	35	33	29	22	26	26	26	27	26	27

Stage 2 is the period during which the full assessment of potential adopters is undertaken by a qualified and experienced social worker. As can be seen from the tables above there was a substantial drop in overall numbers by the end of 2021/22 and this continued into 2022/23 with the biggest decline in the autumn of 22/23. This would tie in with the decline in enquiries and the number of withdrawals at stage 1 highlighted earlier. This would seem to be linked to the cost-of-living crisis and the political uncertainties of last year. But there are also suggestions nationally that potential adopters may be aware of the drop in the number of children where adoption is the plan during the pandemic, and this is having an impact on them coming forward.

The number of enquiries has started to pick up again from January 2023 and with the combined numbers at stage 1 and stage 2 we are expecting to approve a similar number of adopters by September 2023 as we approved in the whole of 22/23.

4. No. of enquiries in month

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	6	4	5	4	4	11	3	4	4	4	3
Doncaster	1	4	8	4	2	2	4	4	3	12	7	6
Rotherham	3	3	6	5	2	2	2	7	4	5	5	10
Sheffield	10	12	11	8	8	8	11	10	10	12	17	15
One Adoption SY	18	25	29	22	16	16	28	24	21	33	33	34

Overall number of adopters approved 22/23

5. No. of Adopters Approved in month

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	1	1	3	0	1	2	3	1	2	0	0	1	15
Doncaster	0	4	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	19
Rotherham	2	1	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	11
Sheffield	1	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	12
One Adoption SY	4	8	8	6	3	6	5	2	6	3	2	4	57

Overall number of adopters approved 22/23

No. of Adopters Approved

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	17
Doncaster	0	0	3	0	4	2	1	3	1	2	0	1	17
Rotherham	2	1	3	2	2	4	0	0	2	4	0	0	20
Sheffield	3	0	3	3	0	4	1	1	3	1	2	4	25
One Adoption SY	7	2	12	8	8	11	4	4	8	7	3	5	79

The target set in the original business case for the SYRAA was 92 adopters per year. In 2021/22 and again in 2022/23 the RAA output is below the set target and there is a marked sudden decline in performance from 2020/21 when the target was exceeded. The reasons are likely to be as outlined above with some adopters dropping out of the process and others not coming forward due to the circumstances around the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis which has impacted on family finances.



The challenge facing One Adoption South Yorkshire is to return to previous high levels of performance in respect of adopter recruitment but also to recruit more adopters who can meet the specific needs of the current children who need families. This means recruiting more adopters who could provide a home for older children, for brothers and sisters together, for children with complex health needs and for children with a more diverse cultural heritage. The Service has begun to do this since coming together as a RAA with recent national and local campaigns for adopters for older children and sibling groups. Practitioners have been working with adopters and local communities to try to spread the message that adoption can be for people from all backgrounds.

The service is connecting with faith groups and with people employed in the caring professions who may feel able to adopt older children and children with complex health needs. The RAA is currently exploring with local colleagues in Fostering Services, colleagues in the other 'One Adoption' RAAs and local VAAs, the possibility of developing a 'concurrent planning' service where parents are dually assessed as both foster carers and adopters with the understanding that the initial plan is to return the children to birth parents or their extended family but if this proves impossible the children would be adopted by the concurrent carers.

Despite the decrease in the number of adopters approved in 22-23 South Yorkshire still has an excess of adopters over children, although this excess is declining rapidly as more children are starting to come through from the children's teams needing adoptive families



Children's data

There are national targets for the completion of certain stages in the child's journey from coming into the care of the local authority to an Adoption Order being made and their becoming a permanent member of their new family. Since the beginning of the pandemic these targets have become impossible to achieve due to the inevitable delays in planning for children, delays in court proceedings and then low priority being given to the making of the final adoption order once the child is placed for adoption. The Somerset judgment, which led to delays across the country in early 2022 as local authorities reviewed their practice in respect of available medical reports at the point of the 'Should be Adopted' decision, has also had a significant impact on the timeliness figures.

At national level questions are being asked about the usefulness of the adoption timeliness targets and in particular the usefulness of the 3-year scorecards which showed adoption trends in local authorities but were at least 12 months out of date by the time local authorities received them. All RAAs are now able to consider their individual data on a month-by-month basis and Coram-BAAF provide aggregated data on a quarterly basis.

The A1 indicator is the length of time between a child coming into care and being placed with their adoptive family. The target time is 426 days.

8. Average time from entering care to being placed (A1 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 22_23	Qtr 2 22_23	Qtr 3 22_23	Qtr 4 22_23	Full Year
Barnsley	557.3	497.6	663.0	688.7	542.5
Doncaster	369.5	590.8	646.2	508.5	578.1
Rotherham	522.0	584.0	701.0	-	594.8
Sheffield	352.8	482.6	455.3	486.8	428.4
One Adoption SY	480.9	541.2	620.1	532.6	540.1

The table shows the average length of time for the children adopted by each team in 22-23. As these are all children, where the Adoption Order has been made these will mostly be children placed for adoption in 21/22



9. Average time from Entering Care to being placed (A1 indicator)(for those children adopted) by Age at Adoption

	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+	Full Year
Barnsley	-	543.2	685.7	-	-	542.5
Doncaster	-	559.9	472.5	-	-	578.1
Rotherham	-	545.6	863.5	-	-	594.8
Sheffield	189.3	471.5	639.5	-	-	428.4
One Adoption SY	189.3	531.3	703.2	-	-	540.1



This table shows the impact of age on waiting times for children.

If the service were only placing children under one year old, the national target would easily be achieved. For many children under a year old adopters are more readily available, many are placed subject to an early permanence placement where the adopters are dually approved as foster carers, and the children are placed with them before the court has made a Placement Order. Care proceedings have always taken longer than required and the 26-week target was rarely achieved before the pandemic. In the last three years care proceedings have taken longer and longer meaning that unless the child is placed in an Early Permanence Placement before the Placement Order is made, they are becoming older and older at the point of placement with their adoption family. Older children always take longer to find suitable families but the impact on the timeliness figures of finding a suitable placement for older children should not mean that the service ceases family finding for older children.

South Yorkshire courts have recently issued an announcement of their intention to get care proceedings back within the 26-week limit. This would bring considerable benefits both to children in early permanence placements as well as children waiting for permanent parents in foster care. Although a child in an early permanence placement does not need to make a further move to their adoptive family, until the adoption order is made there remains the possibility that the child may have to leave the foster carer/adopter and return to their birth family. In such circumstances the move becomes more traumatic for all concerned the longer the child has remained with the foster carer/adopter without a decision being made.

To adjust for the practice of some older children being adopted at a later stage often by their previous foster carers the National Targets have a relatively new indicator – A10.

On this indicator two of the four locality teams are under the national target, but the RAA overall exceeds the target by 44 days.

10. Average time from entering care to moving in with adoptive family (adjusted for FFA) (A10 Indicator) (adoption order date within quarter)

	Qtr 1 22 23	Qtr 2 22 23	Qtr 3 22 23	Qtr 4 22 23	Full Year
Barnsley	465.3	295.8	663.0	494.7	415.3
Doncaster	326.0	417.8	545.2	463.9	452.7
Rotherham	523.0	504.6	701.0	-	546.8
Sheffield	277.2	453.6	455.3	406.0	391.1
One Adoption SY	426.5	418.0	588.5	448.9	460.2

This target is not one the RAA can deliver against as a single service. The achievement of this goal, to place children as quickly as possible with permanent families, is a shared activity involving colleagues in Children’s Services making assessments and plans and implementing them as promptly as possible and the Courts ensuring that decision- making is prompt in the interests of the child. As detailed above in the last three years there has been considerable delay in care proceedings and in setting dates for hearings because of the Covid crisis. Despite the recent pronouncement from the Sheffield Courts and efforts being made to get care proceedings back within the 26 week target we still have some children to place where care proceedings have continued for more than three years. In most cases these are children who are placed in early permanence placements so the finalisation of the placement order should not result in a further move for the child, but the Early Permanence carers have been living with a level of uncertainty for several years.



12. Average time from Placement Order to Matching (A2 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 22 23	Qtr 2 22 23	Qtr 3 22 23	Qtr 4 22 23	YTD
Barnsley	64.0	88.0	264.0	145.3	88.7
Doncaster	91.0	220.7	322.4	192.6	239.8
Rotherham	207.6	217.2	237.5	-	210.4
Sheffield	59.8	133.4	189.5	145.5	123.1
One Adoption SY	113.4	171.5	253.7	167.6	170.7

The National A2 indicator is one where the main responsibility for achieving this target lies with the RAA. The speed with which this is achieved depends on the early allocation of a family-finder and the availability of adopters to meet the needs of the child. If the child is allocated early enough to a family-finder and if there are suitable adopters available, the target of 121 days is easily achieved. For older children, sibling groups and for children with complex health needs adopters are not always immediately available and there has to be more lengthy searches both across the RAA's own resources and even nationally, involving adopters from other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Sometimes unnecessary delays can occur at the stage where a case is transferred from one children's social worker to another or where there are a number of possible adopters and there are delays around making a choice of where to place a child. Close and effective working with colleagues in the Children's Teams can speed up the process for a child.

Again, this table shows the data for children already adopted so it reflects activity from back in 2021/22 or even 2020/21 at the height of the pandemic when all activity was delayed and opportunities for early working with colleagues in the children's teams were more constrained.



1. No. of Adoption orders in month

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	3	4	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	16
Doncaster	1	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	21
Rotherham	4	1	3	4	1	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	19
Sheffield	1	2	2	2	3	0	1	2	1	1	5	0	20
One Adoption SY	6	6	10	8	10	3	5	7	4	4	9	4	76

No. of Adoptions

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	8	7	3	1	1	3	2	1	0	1	1	3	31
Doncaster	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	9
Rotherham	3	5	1	1	4	3	2	1	1	4	0	8	33
Sheffield	4	6	9	5	1	0	3	1	0	6	3	4	42
One Adoption SY	15	19	13	8	8	6	8	3	1	11	5	18	115

The number of children adopted in 2021/22 compared favourably with numbers in pre-pandemic years. However, the number in 2022/23 shows a significant decline, possibly reflecting a reduction in activity during the pandemic.

The number of adoptions in a given year usually reflects activity by an adoption service in the previous year to eighteen months. As Adoption Orders are usually made some months after the child is placed. During the pandemic there were periods when the Courts greatly reduced the making of Adoption Orders as these were seen as non-essential work. At other points during the pandemic there were flurries of activity as the Courts got back to something like normal for a brief period as is seen in May 2021 and March 2022

The first table mostly reflects RAA activity in 21/22, the first year of the RAA and a period of significant lockdowns. The second reflects activity in the previous year 20/21 which although it had even more significant lockdowns probably included the adoptions of many children where the proceedings had taken place pre-pandemic.

The RAA placed all the children it was asked to place but in that first year of operation the number of children with plans for adoption was very low and where children did have plans for adoption this was often changed to either return to family or even long-term fostering.

Current Activity by the RAA is more accurately reflected in the following tables showing the number of children 'placed' for adoption.

19. Children who were placed during month (includes those later Adopted or no longer placed)

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	2	10
Doncaster	4	1	1	1	4	0	0	1	3	0	0	2	17
Rotherham	5	1	0	0	2	3	2	2	1	4	0	2	22
Sheffield	3	2	1	3	2	0	3	6	1	1	4	0	26
One Adoption SY	12	5	3	5	8	4	6	9	5	8	4	6	75

Children who were placed during (includes those later Adopted or no longer placed)

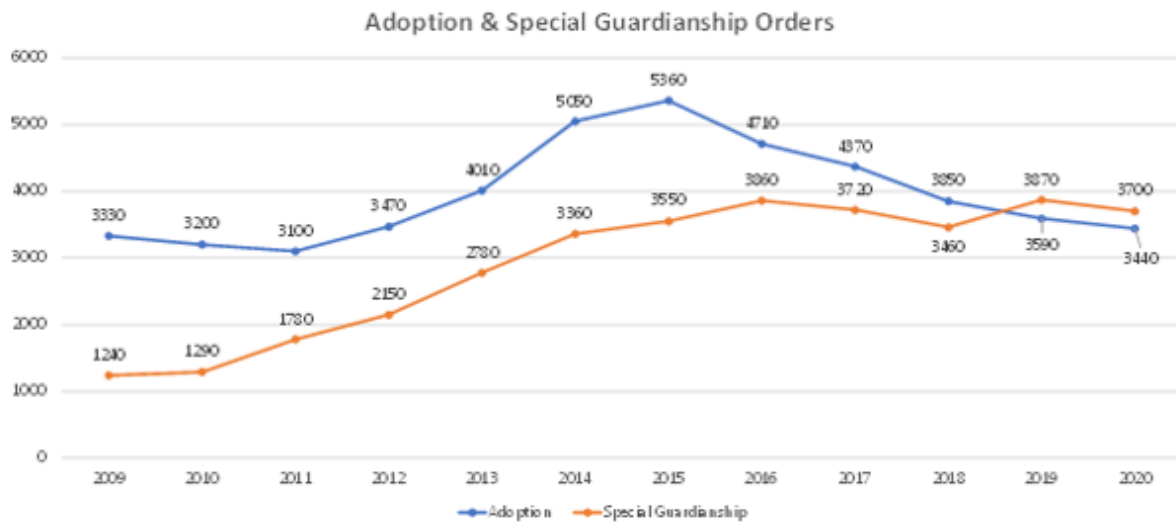
	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	1	1	1	3	3	2	0	4	0	0	3	1	19
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	14
Rotherham	3	3	3	0	4	2	0	6	0	1	0	0	22
Sheffield	5	1	6	1	2	2	2	2	0	1	1	3	26
One Adoption SY	10	5	11	4	10	10	3	14	1	3	5	5	81

This table shows a reduction in adoption activity across all four local authorities in 2021/22 and again in 22/23. However, during this period there were also a significant number of children placed with EPP carers who will ultimately be added to the children placed for adoption figures.

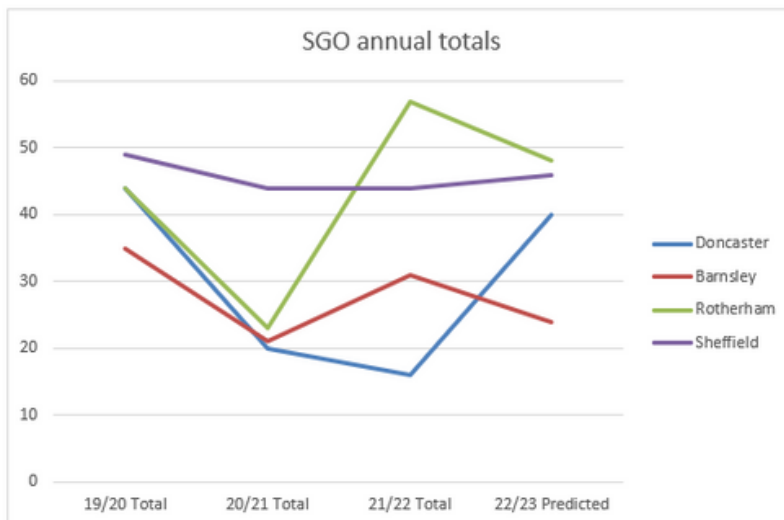
18. No. who are currently placed FFA as at end of month

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	4	4	4	4	8	7	7	8	6	6	7
Doncaster	5	7	8	10	6	6	6	6	4	5	5	4
Rotherham	4	3	3	6	5	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Sheffield	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1
One Adoption SY	16	17	17	21	16	18	18	18	17	15	14	14

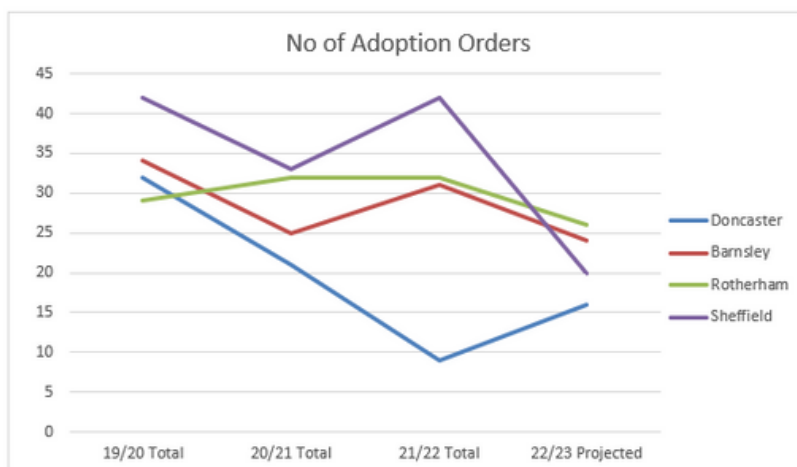
A reduction in adoption activity has been shown right across England and Wales over the last three years. At this point any explanations for this can be only speculative. Covid and the delays in the Courts, including the delays linked to the Somerset judgement are believed to be a significant feature as this has slowed down the adoption process right across the country. Many children have ultimately either been placed with relatives following lengthy assessments or have remained in care for so long that they are now considered too old to be adopted and are likely to remain in long-term foster care. More children are now being placed subject to Special Guardianship Orders rather than Adoption Orders, the crossover point came at the end of 2018. However, in the last two years under Covid there has been a decline in the number of both SGOs and Adoption Orders being made. This is believed to be due to the reduction in Court activity. (See graph below)



John Simmonds, Coram-Baaf for the Public Law Working Group Jan 2022



These graphs show local activity in recent years in respect of both SGOs and Adoption Orders and indicate significant variation across the four LAs and also significant highs and lows in the number of both.



National data would suggest that the percentage of Permanence Orders made is currently around 57% SGOs and 43% Adoption Orders but the overall number made each year of both has dropped since the start of the Pandemic. The concern is

that children have been remaining in care due to the delays in the courts and the challenges to services in progressing care plans during the period of the pandemic.

The original Business Case for One Adoption South Yorkshire set a target of 154 children adopted per year, although this was a relatively arbitrary figure, based on levels of adoption across South Yorkshire in previous years including a 'stretch' target. The RAA can only find placements for the children the local authorities ask it to find placements for, so together we need to explore whether the recent downturn in numbers reflects a permanent change in practice or is just a reflection of the impact of the recent pandemic or other temporary factors. For 23/24 this target has been reviewed to 120 children adopted each year. This seems to be more realistic and more in line with recent requirements. Given the number of children 'placed' in 22/23 this is unlikely to be achieved in 23/24 as children adopted but is reasonable target for children 'placed for adoption' within the year. At the time of writing this report in June 2023 there is a real indication that the number of children placed is likely to be significantly higher than the previous two years.

Central to the ethos of One Adoption South Yorkshire is the aim of placing South Yorkshire children with South Yorkshire Families. The rationale for this being that by placing local children with the RAA's own adopters, practitioners know both the children and the families well and can be more confident that good matches are being made. If children are placed with local families, the RAA is in a much better position to support those families into the future and ensure that the child remains secure within that family. The current legal requirement is that the placing authority provides adoption support to the family for the first three years. Post placement, if the RAA has placed a South Yorkshire child anywhere in England or Wales, this could result in practitioners travelling long distances to support families, who will not have the knowledge about local facilities and services that they would need to be able to provide useful advice and support. Furthermore, support for local children's sense of identity can be better provided by maintaining them within familiar communities rather than placing them very far away from 'home' and in what can be an unfamiliar environment in terms of sound, smell and feel.



20. Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or no longer |

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	1	9
Doncaster	3	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	11
Rotherham	3	1	0	0	2	3	2	2	1	4	0	2	20
Sheffield	2	2	0	3	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	1	17
One Adoption SY	8	5	1	5	7	4	6	3	4	7	1	6	57
% Barnsley	-	100%	100%	100%	-	100%	100%	-	-	100%	-	50%	90%
%Doncaster	75%	100%	0%	100%	50%	-	-	0%	67%	-	-	100%	65%
%Rotherham	60%	100%	-	-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	-	100%	91%
%Sheffield	67%	100%	0%	100%	150%	-	100%	17%	100%	0%	25%	-	65%
% One Adoption SY	67%	100%	33%	100%	88%	100%	100%	33%	80%	88%	25%	100%	76%

Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or no

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	1	0	1	3	2	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	14
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	8
Rotherham	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	16
Sheffield	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	0	3	15
One Adoption SY	6	4	4	4	7	5	2	12	1	2	3	3	53
% Barnsley	100%	0%	100%	100%	67%	0%	-	100%	-	-	100%	0%	74%
%Doncaster	100%	-	100%	-	100%	50%	0%	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	57%
%Rotherham	100%	100%	33%	-	50%	50%	-	100%	-	0%	-	-	73%
%Sheffield	20%	100%	17%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	-	100%	0%	100%	58%
% One Adoption SY	60%	80%	36%	100%	70%	50%	67%	86%	100%	67%	60%	60%	65%

The table for 2022/23 shows a significant increase in the percentage of children being placed within the RAA, up 24% from the first year 20/21 when most of the activity took place pre-RAA and only 52% of children were placed within South Yorkshire. In 22/23 76% of children were placed with South Yorkshire families. Although with 24% placed externally the RAA is still some way from where we would want to be.

As an adoption agency we would never want to insist that all children are placed with RAA adopters as there always has to be the consideration of the needs of the child and the avoidance of delay. If the right adopter at the right time happens to live elsewhere in the country, we would still make the placement with the external adopters. But at the present time a number of children are placed externally because there are no adopters who could take a sibling placement or have the required cultural background to support a child's identity needs within South Yorkshire. Over time, the RAA will seek to ensure that it is able to provide such placements in- house wherever possible. South Yorkshire is a large conurbation of 1.4 million people, from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures and if suitable adopters can be found anywhere in the country, we ought to be able to find them here.

In terms of disrupted adoptions, that is placements, which have ended before the Adoption Order is made, OASY had only one disruption in 2022/23. Disruptions are very difficult for everyone involved but are thankfully very rare. Lessons can be learned but often the circumstances are quite specific and relate to the characteristics of the individuals involved and how they relate or do not relate to each other.

As we develop as a Regional Adoption Agency and especially once we have the new case management system which will focus specifically on adoption practice, we would like to start to gather information on adoptions where the child leaves home early, that is before they reach 18 years. We would want to use this information to improve practice in all three areas of adoption practice in recruitment and assessment, matching and adoption support to ensure that adoptive families thrive, and children don't leave home early. At the moment some of this information may be known to colleagues in other services, such as the Safeguarding Services who might be asked to find foster carers or a residential placement following an adoptive family breakdown but there are no existing systems for collating this information across the four authorities and no opportunities for all services to consider the learning and improve practice.

Back in 2021/22 as part of the first-year service development all staff within One Adoption South Yorkshire service received specific transition training from the University of East Anglia based on research they had been undertaking in respect of making good transitions for children from foster carers to adoptive parents using the Secure Base model. This is the model currently employed in South Yorkshire for all children transitioning to their adoptive families and we intend to continue to deliver the training to colleagues in the Safeguarding Teams, the Children in Care teams and Fostering Teams and foster carers to ensure that all services are working together in the best interests of children.



FINANCE

The South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency was created under a Section 101 agreement on the 1st January 2021.

The four partners who signed up to the agreement are Doncaster City Council (Lead Authority), Sheffield City Council, Barnsley MBC and Rotherham MBC.

The 2022/23 annual combined budget is £5.172m, of which £952k relates to interagency payments. £270k carry forward from 2021/22 was approved by The Board in March 22. Details of budget, spend and carry forward are set out below:

South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (SYRAA)	2022/23 £000
Rotherham RMBC	1276
Sheffield CC	1680
Barnsley MBC	1008
Doncaster CDC	1208
2021/22 Underspend Retained	270
Total Gross Income	5442
Capital Expenditure	0
Revenue Expenditure	4503
Total Gross Expenditure	4503
Underspend	938
Underspend Retained for 2023/24	317
Balance Reimbursed to Partners Pro-Rate to Original Contributions	621

The Board agreed at the March 2023 meeting to rollover £317K of the 2022/23 underspend to provide for a new case management system (£100k), additional interagency placements (£150k), adopter training (£42k) and a 0.5fte Communications and Marketing Officer (£25k). The remaining portion of the 2022/23 underspend (£621k) is to be returned to the partner authorities as a one-off payment pro-rata to the original contributions.

Approval for 2023/24 from The Board was also agreed for an additional £20k towards the Adopter Engagement Contract and £2.5k to be passported from each LA towards a central training budget. Changes in RAA staffing had previously been agreed by the Board to take into account the development needs of the new service.

Posts agreed in 2022/23 included a 12-month Service Manager (Barnsley/Rotherham), 2 Agency Advisor posts, a 12-month Advanced Practitioner, a Clinical Psychologist, a Business Manager and an additional Adoption Support Post based at Barnsley. All these posts are funded from the original agreed budget due to the reduction in the number of inter-agency placements required.

In March 2023 the Board agreed to the 12-month Service Manager post becoming permanent and to the 12-month Advanced Practitioner post, which was only appointed to in January 23 continuing to January 2024 and then being reviewed.



Adoption Support Fund

The funding provided by the Department of Education through the Adoption Support Fund has become a significant aspect of the Adoption Support service provided by RAAs across England and Wales and One Adoption South Yorkshire is no exception.

APPLICATION NUMBERS 22/23

	Claims	Remittance	Total
Barnsley	70	25	95
Doncaster	84	20	104
Rotherham	78	30	108
Sheffield	116	9	125
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS	348	84	432

£ AMOUNT APPLIED FOR

	Claims	Remittance	Total
Barnsley	£197,208.79	£110,461.29	£307,670.08
Doncaster	£307,717.29	£78,717.50	£386,434.79
Rotherham	£269,515.05	£142,194.25	£411,709.30
Sheffield	£460,603.71	£37,964.86	£498,974.60
TOTAL £ AMOUNT APPLIED FOR	£1,235,044.87	£369,337.90	£1604,382.77

CLAIMED AGAINST APPLICATIONS 22/23

	Claims	Remittances	Total
Barnsley	£185,978.43	£86,420.86	£272,399.29
Doncaster	£261,276.35	£68,758.96	£330,035.31
Rotherham	£231,244.13	£113,098.00	£344,342.13
Sheffield	£387,299.23	£37,399.86	£424,699.09
TOTAL AMOUNT CLAIMED AGAINST APPLICATIONS	£1,065,798.14	£305,677.68	£1,371,475.82

SURRENDERED FUNDS

	Claims	Remittances	Total
Barnsley	£28,531.50	£20,040.43	£59,571.93
Doncaster	£45,440.94	£9,258.54	£63,399.48
Rotherham	£33,770.92	£23,296.25	£72,867.17
Sheffield	£71,809.34	£565.00	£83,675.51
TOTAL AMOUNT SURRENDERED	£179,552.70	£53,160.22	£232,712.92

The funding from the ASF is not a grant to the agency. Each application is specifically linked to a child and a provider. The funding comes from the Department of Education and must be used on the specific agreed intervention. If the funding is not fully used any unspent funds must be returned to the DofE. As of 1 April 2021, the RAA become the administrator for the ASF across all four teams and the funding is now paid directly to Doncaster City Council and the central business support worker pays all the provider invoices and oversees the claiming and surrendering of funds. As can be seen above the amounts involved are substantial and are increasing every year.

The number of applications relates to individual children and each adopted child is entitled to apply for up to £5000 in therapeutic support each year. A substantial portion of the Adoption Social Workers' time is spent applying for commissioning and monitoring these funds.



ADOPTION SUPPORT

Adoption support is a key developmental area for the South Yorkshire RAA and for all RAAs. An adoption does not end with the adoption order and the commitment of the South Yorkshire RAA is to be there for our adopter families throughout the years as their children grow and become young adults, ensuring that our children grow to adulthood in secure and stable families and achieve their full potential.

At the point of the One Adoption South Yorkshire 'go live' in January 2021 the teams were all in very different places in respect of adoption support. Sheffield and Doncaster had small-dedicated teams, Barnsley had one full-time worker equivalent and Rotherham had one full-time worker who had just transferred across from the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. Each authority had a different approach to grant and expenses for adopters and post adoption training.

Initial meetings with adopters in 21/22 established that adoption support was their number one priority. It also became clear that some of the support they were expecting needed to come from partner agencies, particularly Education and Health and couldn't be provided by the adoption support teams alone. While the Adoption Support teams had a key signposting and co-ordination role, they were not the key deliverers of some post adoption services.

As a result, adoption support development for One Adoption South Yorkshire has concentrated on two main themes:

Firstly, consistent support to adopters in the early stages after a child joins their family. The Initial Support Offer for all new adopters has been implemented across the RAA from April 2022. This offer includes the identification of an assessor as the key point of contact in the first-year post order to ensure that adopters feel they can contact someone they know if they have any issues or want to enquire about support of any kind. The offer includes one-year's



membership of Adoption-UK and the Institute of Therapeutic Parenting, link with a peer mentor and access to any of the support groups, post adoption training or activities provided for adoptive families. Initial grants are also available to adopters where children may have additional needs such as when two or more children join a family at the same time.

Adoption Allowances are not the responsibility of the RAA, but OASY has adopted a consistent approach in terms of recommending adoption allowances for adopters in specific circumstances consistent with the criteria for initial grants. In 22/23 we have undertaken further work with the decision-makers across the four local authorities and we are confident that a shared South Yorkshire policy in respect of adoption allowances will be available in 2023.

The aim of the initial offer is to ensure that all South Yorkshire adopters are properly supported in the initial stages of family-building and that they become a part of a South Yorkshire adopting community where they can feel supported by practitioners, fellow adopters and partner agencies across the Region throughout their children's childhood and into early adulthood. Secondly, the RAA is working with adopters and partners to develop the provision of multi-disciplinary support to adoptive families.

In 22/23 the adoption support teams were re-configured to ensure that there were no teams with only one adoption support worker. Sheffield and Doncaster have small teams of post adoption workers, one led by a part-time team manager and one by an Advanced Practitioner; Barnsley and Rotherham each have two workers. In Rotherham we have been able to re-configure the responsibilities of the two team managers to ensure that there is an Adoption Support lead but in Barnsley the single team manager is responsible for the full range of adoption activity. It will be an aim in 23/24 to ensure that each locality has a dedicated lead on adoption support.

Since the creation of the Adoption Support Fund in 2015 the main task for all Adoption Support workers has been to complete applications to this central



government fund commissioned external services to deliver specific pieces of therapeutic work with individual children and families. Most adoption support workers have caseloads of between forty and seventy families and as a result they have limited capacity for other work beside ASF applications. Nevertheless, the vision of adoption support for South Yorkshire is to broaden the offer away from just ASF applications. OASY adoption support workers will ensure that adopters are able to benefit from peer support, from adopter support groups, from meeting other adopters and being part of an adoption community, from support to negotiate access to other key local services such as education or health assessments. The ASF money will be used for specific, time-limited pieces of therapeutic work to meet a specific assessed need.

In 22/23, in addition to the two additional adoption support workers, we have been able to create capacity for a Service Manager to lead across the four teams and together the adoption support service has been able to create a strong offer around post adoption training, adopter support groups in each area and support for adopted young people in each area. The RAA has been able to employ an adopter engagement officer in addition to the Adoption-UK Adopter Voice worker and the adopter engagement officer has been involved in creating WhatsApp groups in each locality to enable faster and more effective communication with and between adopters. In addition, the adopter engagement officer has been able to co-ordinate a series of adopter events and activities which have brought families together and enabled parents to make supportive links but also allowed adopted children to meet up and appreciate that their situation is not unique.

'I wanted to pass on some feedback from a family I am working with. They recently attended the adoption event at Ice Sheffield and they said during the event their young person commented:

"I didn't know so many other people were adopted!". They also said she met a few other young people who are adopted from her school, and none where aware of each other. T has come home and said she feels less alone and knows there are other people like her.'



The RAA has also appointed an Advanced Practitioner for Adoption Support on a twelve-month basis to assist in identifying local adoption support links across the RAA, establishing good working links with partner agencies across all 4 areas and supporting those localities with fewer adoption support workers to develop the groups and local activities adopters need in these areas.

In 22/23 we have:

- Created the adopter engagement post creating capacity to develop communication with adopters through the WhatsApp groups and the RAA Adopter Pages on the website. Create a stunning activity offer throughout the year to being adopters and adopted children together around a series of fun events including football and ice-hockey matches, ice-skating, theatre events and local animal sanctuaries
- Filled The Adopter-Voice post with Adoption-UK in early 2022 and the new worker has established themselves well with local families. This post is about ensuring adopters views are embedded in service development plans and in 22/23 they have been working with adopters in South Yorkshire but also Regionally and Nationally to create a 'toolkit' for adopters around access to services for older adopted young people
- Improved working relationships have been established with the Adoption-UK commissioned service for peer support and peer supporters are increasingly available both for all adopters and more recently specifically for adopters providing early permanence placements
- Finalised the Education Plan for Adopted Children and with the help of local adopters and the 4 local Virtual Heads we have presented it to education colleagues across South Yorkshire with a view to making it a 'live' document for use in schools and other local educational settings from September 2023
- Continued to support the concept of 'trauma-informed' schools to meet the needs of adopted children. Many schools in South Yorkshire would already see themselves as offering a trauma-informed approach but there are still many where this is an unfamiliar concept. We will continue to work with adopters and partner agencies to promote a trauma-informed approach for all adopted children.



- Delivered training sessions for adopters through the Virtual Heads to ensure that adopters can get the best for their children from local education services
- Completed the bid for the FASD project and been successful in obtaining the two-year funding. The RAA is already taking the lead on bringing colleagues together across South Yorkshire to create a South Yorkshire FASD pathway.
- Supported Adopters and Practitioners to meet with leaders of the new Integrated Care Board to begin to devise more effective ways of working together to the benefit of adopted children
- Established Groups for older adopted children in all four locality areas
- RAA Practitioners are being trained to deliver Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Therapy and Non-Violent Resistance training so that we can offer these services in-house wherever possible.
- The RAA Clinical Psychologist post to assist with the referrals to the ASF and undertake initial specialist assessments has not yet been filled despite our best efforts and we are now exploring other ways of recruiting to this post alongside local partner agencies.

For 23/24 the RAA has created a sub-group of the RAA Governance Board to focus on bringing adopters and services together to consider how adoption support should be delivered.

This sub-group will meet for the first time on 22nd June 2023.



DEVELOPMENTS IN 22/23

2022/23 has been a year of consolidation and implementation of developments identified during the first year of operation as a Regional Adoption Agency:

- The work of the Performance Analyst appointed in March 2023 has helped the RAA understand itself better and begin to identify where the information gaps exist. The data from the existing Local Authority case management systems, which is required for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, (now just the ASGO data collated by Coram-baaf as the ASGLB ceased to exist in December 2022) is sufficiently reliable to give some guidance around performance in respect of recruitment and placements. However, there is much missing information particularly in respect of Adoption Support that we are still unable to gather from existing systems.
- During 2022/23 a new case management system has been commissioned which will focus entirely on adoption services and will provide appropriate support for practice around adopter recruitment and assessment as well as family-finding and adoption support work. The new system will provide insight into those areas which are currently un-reported and yet are significant areas of work for One Adoption South Yorkshire. These areas are particularly around adoption support but also partner adoptions, access to records for adopted adults and post adoption contact. The new CHARMS system is already used by several other RAAs and will be installed across One Adoption South Yorkshire during 23/24.
- The existing contract for a number of externally commissioned adoption services is due to end in December 2023 so during 22/23 we have been considering how these should be delivered in the future and planning for a new tendering process. These services include access to records for adopted adults and birth families, direct work with birth families and some voice and influence work with adopters and adopted young people.



- There has been ongoing work around the communications and marketing strategy for One Adoption South Yorkshire as the original agreement was for use of the One Adoption Website and access to regional marketing through a commissioned service with Leeds City Council combined with an 'in kind' offer of communication and marketing support specifically within South Yorkshire from each of the four partner authorities. This operation of the in-kind offer has been challenging and not entirely successful in getting the new service the recognition it needs to recruit new adopters and at the last Board meeting in March 2023 it was agreed that OASY would employ a half-time Communications and Marketing Officer on a one-year basis to pilot a more focused approach.
- By August 2022 the three Service Managers were in post and this structure has paid off significantly in that we now have identified leads in each of the three operational areas as well as all 4 geographical areas to bring the 4 teams together to deliver high quality consistent services across the RAA. By June 2023 we are well on the way to delivering fully joined up services and the 2 temporary service manager posts will be recruited to permanently by August 2023.
- Preparation training for adopters had been a joint South Yorkshire undertaking for several years before the RAA came into being, but the RAA is now able to deliver a comprehensive programme of training to adopters at both pre and post adoption levels. The training programme is delivered by practitioners from all 4 teams working together and the RAA is able to ensure a consistent experience wherever an adopter might live in South Yorkshire.
- Adoption Panels across South Yorkshire now operate as RAA Adoption Panels with a consistent approach across all four authorities. There are four panels per month, one based in each local authority and administered by the local business support team and considering a mixture of matches between children and adopters and new adopters for approval. The RAA was established with no central administrative support for Panels as the intention was that each local authority would continue to support their local adoption team with their usual in-house business support offer. This has proved a challenge since becoming a RAA, as we have to provide a consistent service wherever the Panel is taking place and different teams previously had different practices.



- The appointment of the RAA Business Manager in August 2022 has made a significant contribution towards establishing shared procedures and a consistent service which can be replicated across all RAA Panels. The creation of a shared RAA site on TEAMS, which can be accessed by staff from all four authorities has also contributed significantly to more efficient, shared practice South Yorkshire-wide. Practitioners and business support teams can book onto Panels and submit paperwork directly on the Hub without the need for e-mails which can be easily missed or mis-directed. There are now two RAA Panel Chairs, one for the Panels in the West - Barnsley and Sheffield and one for the Panels in the East - Doncaster and Rotherham. The Panels are supported by two RAA Agency Advisers, again one for the West and one for the East. The Agency Decision-maker for decisions around adopter approvals is the RAA Head of Service. The Agency Decision-makers in respect of the children, for 'Should be Adopted' (SHODPA) decisions and matches remain the four ADMS previously identified, one in each partner authority. (The report of the Panel Chairs on Panel activity in 22/23 is attached as an appendix to this Annual Report)
- In 22/23 One Adoption South Yorkshire was part of a pilot project called Letterswap. Link-maker, the organization which provides links between all prospective adopters and all children waiting for families developed and additional on-line module to support virtual contact between adopters and birth families post adoption moving away from the traditional actual letters set-up known as Letter-box. The project was evaluated by the University of East Anglia and is part of the national agenda on developing post adoption contact.
- In 22/23 an application was made for the National Adoption Strategy Centre of Excellence funding to support a South Yorkshire wide Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Project. This application was successful and One Adoption South Yorkshire has two-years of funding to support adopted children and by association children who are not adopted but are affected by FASD across the Region.
- In October 2022 we held an open day for RAA Board members and partners from across South Yorkshire to consider future development for the RAA. The original partnership agreement runs to December 2025 and we are already



half way through the initial term. This is something we will be reviewing over the next two and a half years with recommendations to be made regarding the arrangements from January 2026.

- In March 2023 the second RAA Conference was held with the focus on After Adoption Support. The event involved RAA practitioners, RAA adopters and colleagues and partners from across South Yorkshire coming together to consider the way forward in respect of ongoing support to families after the adoption order is made and especially how we might ensure that contact between adoptive and birth families might become more meaningful than the current letter-box contact. The key-note speech was provided by Professor Julie Selwyn, always an excellent, thoughtful promoter of effective adoption work and there were some very powerful presentations particularly around FASD and work with birth parents and the adopter-led sessions were particularly effective and something we would want to repeat more often.



Future plans



Almost all local authorities across England are now part of a Regional Adoption Agency. At the last national up-date, there were only one or two statutory adoption services, which were still part of stand-alone local authorities. The National Adoption Strategy published in July 2021 sees the RAAs at the heart of adoption activity and 2021 saw the creation of a National Strategic Lead for Adoption with a coordinating role to promote best practice across the country. The National Adoption Team is now well established with leads on most areas of adoption practice such as Early Permanence Placements, matching, adoption support and post adoption contact.

One of the key objectives of the Adoption Strategy is speeding up the time it takes to find suitable adopters for children. This is invariably linked to the availability of families for children who are older, are from a minority ethnic or mixed heritage background; need to be placed with brothers or sisters or who have complex health needs. As a RAA, we are engaging with the national drive to reach more diverse communities of adopters who have the skills, abilities and motivation to provide homes for children with more diverse needs. As we emerge from the isolation and restrictions imposed by the pandemic, we are committed to reaching out into our local communities, challenging the beliefs around who can adopt and raising the profile of the kinds of children who need families. We ask all the readers of this Annual Report to assist us with this project and promote adoption for all children who need alternative permanent families wherever and whenever they are able.

Adoption Support will be a key element in increasing people's confidence that they can provide a family for brothers and sisters, for older children and from children with complex needs. Families come in all shapes and sizes and family support comes from a broad range of sources, from appropriate and effective services in the local community, from the extended family of fellow adopters, from the Regional Adoption Agency and its support services from the Adoption Support Fund and from all partner agencies all the way from placement to adulthood.

Key Developments in 23/24

Final Year in the RAA 3-year development plan – by the end of March 2024 all key structures necessary to support the RAA will be in place:

- The staffing structure will be complete with posts recruited on a permanent basis which will allow post-holders to confidently put plans into action.
- Recruitment and Assessment – ensure consistency of initial response across the RAA, ensure all enquiries are followed up in a timely way – new on-line video to replace information meetings and be followed up by a home visit.
- New part-time communications and recruitment officer to assist teams with recruitment and engaging with local communities who may be new to adoption
- Ensure that we have sufficient adopters with the right skills and experiences to meet the needs of children
- Family-finding – Scoping exercises on Early Permanency and Concurrency are currently underway exploring the possibility of an additional service linked to local fostering services around concurrent placements
- Ensure that we are making the best matches possible for children and supporting those families in the best way possible once the match is made
- Scope our capacity for supporting additional contact between adopters and birth families and how we would work with the Children's Workers to deliver this.
- Adoption Support – OASY is currently exploring the possibility of becoming DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) accredited adoption agency. All staff to be trained in DDP by the end of March 2024
- Work to continue with adopters and partner agencies to ensure effective working together across the Regional Adoption Agency and local education, health and children's services to ensure children's needs are met and no child falls between services or is passed between services ineffectively
- Establish the FASD Service for adopted children across South Yorkshire.
Continue the work with partner agencies to create a South Yorkshire Pathway for FASD open to all affected children and young people.
- Consistent Policy and Procedures covering all 4 teams will be available as RAA policies and procedures on the South Yorkshire Tri-x system from October 2023
- The Hub structure will be complete allowing teams in different localities to work together on booking panels, making inter-agency placements, delivering training to adopters
- The new Case Management system will be in place by April 2024 so the RAA will be able to understand allocations and case-work activity across all four services. Record retention around adoption will be clear for the future.

- There are many areas of adoption practice which the RAA still needs to develop further, some alongside partner agencies:-
- Ongoing support for birth families – the RAA has a contract with PAC-UK to provide some birth family support and there are some areas of good practice across South Yorkshire, some areas have PAUSE projects and others do not. This is an area we need to understand better and work with birth families themselves so that we can make best use of our resources
- Post adoption contact- this is very much an area for further development at national and local level and would involve a culture change across Children’s Services and local courts as well as across the RAA. There are some new projects such as Letter-swap that are already under development but current thinking about the importance of post adoption contact with birth family could initiate major changes right across the sector
- Access to records for adopted adults and other relevant persons. Currently the arrangements are very confusing across the country. The move to RAAs has made it even more unclear who holds the records and how adopted adults could access them.
- Partner Adoptions – post Covid this has become a large part of the RAA’s work, as families seem to have reviewed their situations and decided that this is something they want to take further. The allocation of stepparent adoptions has a significant impact on our capacity to allocate assessments of adopters for children who do not have families and can pose real dilemmas around the allocation of limited resources.
- There is still much to do and the first two years of One Adoption South Yorkshire have been particularly challenging as a result of the pandemic and the distortions it seems to have made, and is still making, on practice and on the understanding of the needs of children across all services. Nevertheless, the managers, the practitioners, the adopters and the partners of the new RAA have made a fantastic effort to make the new agency a success and we are well on target to implement the 3-year development plan and meet the needs of the partner agencies and South Yorkshire children who need adoptive families into the future.

