

One Adoption South Yorkshire



One
Adoption
Agency
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

SIX MONTH REPORT
Jan 2021 - June 2021



FOREWORD

This is the first Formal Report from One Adoption South Yorkshire. We are very proud to share with you what we have achieved in our first six months in operation.

We came into being in very inauspicious circumstances. Having worked together for some time developing a Regional Adoption Agency structure which would work for South Yorkshire everything was finally agreed for a 'go-live' date of 1st January 2021.

As Head of Service I arrived for my first day in Doncaster and had just enough time to pick up a laptop and a mobile phone before we went into the most serious lockdown of the Covid-crisis at the end of that very same day.

The RAA teams across South Yorkshire have been fantastic in coming together and creating new structures and new ways of working from their bedrooms and attics.

We also would like to thank all our partners, adopters, locality teams, virtual school head teachers, medical advisers, panel chairs, finance and commissioning teams for supporting us and bearing with us as we created a brand new agency with microphones on mute and IT equipment and Wi-Fi signals crashing all around us.

Well done to everyone involved. Things will only get better from now on.

Stephanie Evans
Head of One Adoption South Yorkshire



Who Are One Adoption South Yorkshire?

LOCALITY	SM	TM	AP	PANEL-ADVISE R	RECRUITMENT	FAMILY-FINDING	POST ADOPTION SUPPORT	TOTAL NUMBER OF SW STAFF (NOT FTE)
BARNSELEY	0.2	1	1	0	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding 4.5	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding 2	1 SW FTE 0.8 Dev Worker – letter-box	14
DONCASTER	0.8	0.2	1.8	0.6	3.45 FTE 0.5 SCA	1.65 FTE	3.2 FTE 2.5 SCA (incl letter-box) New shared post 0.5 with SGO – Educ Supp	16
ROTHERHAM	0.2	2	0	0	5.8 FTE 1 Support Worker	2.6 FTE 1 Co-ordinator	1.5 FTE 1FSW 1 contact co-ordinator	18
SHEFFIELD	1	2.5 FTE	0	0.6	6 FTE 1 Interviewing officer	4 1 SCA	3.8 FTE 1.5 SCA 0.6 Letter-box co-ordinator	25

Service Manager – Barnsley – Sharon Wood
 Service Manager – Doncaster – Claire Holmes
 Service Manager – Rotherham – Lindsey Knight
 Service Manager – Sheffield – Vicky Brooke

Team Manager – Barnsley – Michael Richardson
 Team Manager/Advanced Practitioner – Doncaster – Mel Johnson
 Team Managers – Rotherham – Helen Mangham and Jill Stanley
 Team Managers – Sheffield – Liz Rowe, Jane Sandland and Laura Williams

Agency Adviser – Doncaster – Sue Carroll
 Agency Adviser – Sheffield – Gary Wilson

Advanced Practitioner – Barnsley – Jayne Haywood
 Advanced Practitioners Doncaster – Mel Johnson and Sam Parkey

RAA Governance Board – meets monthly

Riana Nelson, Director of Learning Opportunity, Skills and Culture, DMBC – Chair
 Director of Children’s Services – RMBC
 Assistant Director Children in Care, Sheffield City Council
 Director of Children’s Services, Barnsley
 Director of Children’s Social Care, Doncaster Children’s ServicesTrust
 Adoption-UK – Adopter Voice
 Virtual Head, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
 Yorkshire Adoption Agency – Voluntary Adoption Agency Representative



How Does One Adoption South

Yorkshire Work?

One Adoption South Yorkshire is a 'partnership' model, Regional Adoption Agency. There are now 31 Regional Adoption Agencies in England rather than the 180 original adoption agencies and only 5 or 6 local authorities remain unaligned and all of them have plans to join a RAA in the not too distant future. The partnership model is used by many of the more recently created RAAs.

As a partnership model all the teams remain employed by their previous employing authority and for the moment they all remain in their original sites. Obviously since the beginning of the RAA everyone has been working from home and the different authorities currently have very different approaches to staff returning to offices but most staff are very keen to get back to 'actual' working as soon as it is safe to do so.

Doncaster Children's Services Trust is the host agency. There is a very small 'Hub' team comprising the Head of Service, a full-time Business Support Officer and a planned, but not yet available, half-time Data and Performance Analyst. The Business Support post has just been appointed to and the Performance Analyst post is expected to be filled by August. As host agency DCST is responsible for employing the Hub staff and supporting the management of those aspects of the budget which are held centrally.

Practitioners and Business Support staff remain locally based as do the Panel Advisers and the Panel Administrators. The Adoption Panels were re-configured in May 2021 into East and West panels. The East panel covers Rotherham and Doncaster and the West panel covers Barnsley and Sheffield. There are a minimum of two panels per month in each area and each Panel has a Chair and two Vice-chairs to ensure there is sufficient capacity to cover all the expected approvals and matches each year. The intention is to engage both Chairs centrally through DCST and have a 'central list' of panel members comprising all RAA panel members but the Panels will continue to meet at least once per month in each of the 4 localities.

Each local authority has also made a 'contribution in kind' for support services such as Human Resources, Finance, Communications, Business Intelligence and Commissioning.

At National level the Regional Adoption Agencies are well supported with regular leadership meetings and developmental opportunities for practitioners and adopters.



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 we are able to produce reliable data based on the requirements of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board but there are some areas of data collection, particularly around post adoption support and the stability of adoptive families that we will need to develop further 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

Stage 2 – Should be completed within 4 months

No. at Stage 1

	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Barnsley	5	8	7
Doncaster	8	7	9
Rotherham	5	4	7
Sheffield	11	9	6
One Adoption SY	29	28	29

No. at Stage 2

	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Barnsley	11	14	10
Doncaster	4	5	4
Rotherham	9	5	9
Sheffield	7	9	13
One Adoption SY	31	33	36

Ave days between Application (Stage 1 Start)/(Stage 2 Start) and Approval

	Qtr 1 20_21	Qtr 2 20_21	Qtr 3 20_21	Qtr 4 20_21	Full Year
Barnsley	170.9	207.0	212.6	260.3	209.3
Doncaster	230.9	194.8	198.0	238.3	214.9
Rotherham	227.4	226.8	241.3	143.9	207.0
Sheffield	244.3	197.4	253.3	338.3	239.1
One Adoption SY	212.4	205.2	228.5	226.3	217.5

The annual average across the RAA is longer than the expected target of 186 days from Registration of Interest to Approval and the table shows that, in some months, specific adopters in specific teams have taken longer than the average. This kind of individual variation is very hard to avoid due to the specific circumstances of individual adopters but the table shows an acceptable level of performance across all teams, although there remains scope for improvement.

No. of Adopters Approved

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	4	1	3	3	3	1	2	0	3	3	1	2	26
Doncaster	3	0	4	0	2	2	2	1	3	0	1	2	20
Rotherham	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	0	4	3	24
Sheffield	0	2	2	4	5	1	3	4	0	1	0	2	24
One Adoption SY	9	4	11	9	11	6	9	7	9	4	6	9	94

As you can see the four offices have been very similar in performance over the last year. This has been consistent with their performance as individual agencies in previous years. The business case for the RAA indicated that there would need to be 92 adopter approvals per year to meet the needs of the children needing families across South Yorkshire. Last year's performance would therefore indicate a positive performance against this target.



However there are early indications that one of the challenges for OASY, as for many RAAs, is to recruit adopters who will be a good match for the children needing families.

A very basic illustration of this is if we compare this table of the ethnic characteristics of adopters within the RAA with the ethnic characteristics of children needing families.

Ethnicity of adopters

	ABAN	AIND	AOTH	BAFR	CHNE	MOTH	MWAS	NOBT	WBRI	WIRI	WOTH	Total
Barnsley	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	89	1	1	92
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	68	0	2	70
Rotherham	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	76	0	3	82
Sheffield	3	2	0	2	1	1	0	3	112	0	2	126
One Adoption SY	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	345	1	8	370
% Barnsley	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	97%	1%	1%	
%Doncaster	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	97%	0%	3%	
%Rotherham	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	93%	0%	4%	
%Sheffield	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%	2%	89%	0%	2%	
% One Adoption SY	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	93%	0%	2%	

Ethnicity of Children

	ABAN	AIND	AOTH	BAFR	BOTH	CHNE	MOTH	MWAS	MWBA	MWBC	NOBT	WBRI	WIRI	WIRT	WOTH	WROM	Total
Barnsley	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	0	44
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
Rotherham	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	0	46	0	0	0	7	62
Sheffield	0	0	7	0	4	0	1	0	4	3	0	43	0	2	4	5	73
One Adoption SY	0	0	9	2	4	0	2	7	4	4	0	154	0	2	4	12	204
% Barnsley	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	91%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
%Doncaster	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
%Rotherham	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%	2%	0%	74%	0%	0%	0%	11%	
%Sheffield	0%	0%	10%	0%	5%	0%	1%	0%	5%	4%	0%	59%	0%	3%	5%	7%	
% One Adoption SY	0%	0%	4%	1%	2%	0%	1%	3%	2%	2%	0%	75%	0%	1%	2%	6%	

At the outset of the RAA in January 2021 we had 20 more adopters available than we had children to place. Early analysis would suggest that this was partly due to adopters having different characteristics and different expectations about the children they felt able to care than the children needing to be placed. But this was also possibly due to the impact of covid on both the courts and social work practice meaning that care proceedings were taking longer and fewer children were available for adoption. In the early months of the RAA many of these adopters were matched with children from within the RAA and in some cases externally so the current position is much improved.

Children Placed for Adoption – 20-21

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	2	3	1	1	7	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	32
Doncaster	2	0	1	3	3	5	1	2	0	0	1	1	19
Rotherham	0	3	3	2	3	3	5	4	4	0	0	3	30
Sheffield	5	0	4	4	1	5	2	2	1	6	1	4	35
One Adoption SY	9	6	9	10	14	16	10	11	6	9	5	11	116

The RAA Business Case expected that across South Yorkshire 154 children would be placed for adoption each year. So these figures would indicate that the figure last year was lower than expected. Again as you can see the four areas are very similar in the number of children placed. The Doncaster figure is slightly lower than in previous years and this is something the RAA will be working on with colleagues in Doncaster as there could be several reasons for why this would be the case.



Children Placed within the RAA

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	2	1	1	1	6	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	15
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	9
Rotherham	0	1	3	1	2	3	1	0	4	0	0	2	17
Sheffield	2	0	4	1	0	3	0	1	1	4	1	2	19
One Adoption SY	5	2	9	3	9	8	3	5	5	4	2	5	60
% Barnsley	100%	33%	100%	100%	86%	0%	50%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	47%
%Doncaster	50%	-	100%	0%	33%	40%	100%	50%	-	-	100%	100%	47%
%Rotherham	-	33%	100%	50%	67%	100%	20%	0%	100%	-	-	67%	57%
%Sheffield	40%	-	100%	25%	0%	60%	0%	50%	100%	67%	100%	50%	54%
% One Adoption SY	56%	33%	100%	30%	64%	50%	30%	45%	83%	44%	40%	45%	52%

This is obviously a key area of interest for the new RAA. The aim would be to place as many children as possible with our own adopters. There is a financial element to this as every external placement incurs a cost. The local authorities have maintained the cost of an adoption placement at the same level for several years but the Voluntary Adoption Agencies have been increasing their charges in recent years. However the aim to place as many children with in-house adopters is not just about costs. We know our own adopters much better than those from other agencies so we can more confidently match them with our children. We are in a much better position to support adoptive families when they are within our own area rather than hundreds of miles away and a key aim of the SYRAA is to create a local adoption community where we can support our adoptive families, our adopters can support each other and we have good relationships with partners in education, health and community services which can offer additional support where needed.

In order to support good matching within the RAA one of the very first actions back in January was to set up a monthly matching panel where any child needing more careful consideration for matching or where we may have to search externally for a family could be considered. At the same time we began negotiations with Link-maker, the national matching agency to re-configure the four agencies into one on their system. As everyone is on different recording systems and different communication systems the single area on Link-maker has been the key to successful matching. Across the RAA everyone can see all the adopters' profiles and all the children's profiles at any time. Even at this early stage practitioners have made real efforts to move away from familiar ways of working such as looking first at what adopters are available within their own locality and are now looking much more broadly across all four teams from the earliest opportunity. The South Yorkshire RAA is a good size, with a total population of 1.4 million to give sufficient choice and a broad enough geographical sweep for us to find the right families for our children.

It is still too early to be able to demonstrate whether we are placing more children within the RAA as the available data still relates mostly to placements planned before the RAA began. The next report for the end of the year 21/22 will show the full impact of the changes made. For the moment there is anecdotal evidence of more placements planned within the RAA and fewer external placements being explored.

Timeliness

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

	Qtr 1 20 21	Qtr 2 20 21	Qtr 3 20 21	Qtr 4 20 21	Full Year
Barnsley	154.5	192.9	89.0	92.4	130.4
Doncaster	54.5	215.7	247.5	197.4	193.2
Rotherham	-	158.2	220.1	292.4	217.0
Sheffield	133.5	191.3	94.4	136.3	151.4
One Adoption SY	114.2	186.2	164.7	178.3	173.9

The national target for the A2 indicator is 121 days. As is evident from the table above there have been periods where this target has been achieved by most of the partner agencies and there has been one quarter where the RAA average was below the national target. This is because there are relatively small numbers of children involved and for most very young children this target can be achieved by most agencies. So the months where an agency has only placed babies will be the ones under target. The months where an agency has placed older children they are likely to exceed the target. The aim is always to reduce the waiting times for all children and the RAA will continue to do work on the timeliness of placements.

Average time between entering care and being placed with adoptive family

	Qtr 1 20 21	Qtr 2 20 21	Qtr 3 20 21	Qtr 4 20 21	Full Year
Barnsley	262.7	404.6	301.0	350.7	347.4
Doncaster	241.3	442.9	384.0	520.0	437.9
Rotherham	180.0	404.5	515.0	525.0	471.7
Sheffield	451.5	437.3	399.9	402.3	421.6
One Adoption SY	288.3	423.8	437.3	447.9	423.3

The national target for this measure is 426 days and as this table demonstrates the full-year average for the RAA is under this target and there are some quarters where many of the individual teams are well under it. As above this depends on the ages and characteristics of the children whether they are very young or not, whether they are part of a sibling group or not, whether they have complex needs or not. However as with the A2 measure improvements can always be made and this particular target is a measure of how well the RAA is working with the local authorities as they are the ones responsible for initiating care proceedings and making the decisions in respect of the children.

This table shows all the children where an adoption order has been made in the last year but does not show the improved timeliness figure for those children adopted by foster carers. Where this happens the time period is reduced to the date the child was first placed with the foster carers which obviously results in much shorter period between entering care and being placed with a permanent family.



POST ADOPTION SUPPORT

Ultimately the key to any Regional Adoption Agency's success will be the quality of its post adoption support. The aim of any RAA is to provide permanent loving and supportive homes for children and supporting families into the future will be necessary to ensure their success. Potential adopters will choose the agency they wish to go with according to what they have heard about the quality of the assessment, the success in placing children but also according to what they have heard about the support for families after the adoption order has been made.

The OneAdoptionSouthYorkshire vision is to contribute towards making South Yorkshire a great place to raise children in general but in particular to create a supportive community for adopters and adopted children. For this vision to become a reality requires commitment from all partners as well as the ongoing efforts of RAA practitioners.

Many of the teams are already providing excellent post adoption services with activity groups for children and support groups for parents readily available but as can be seen in the early staffing table capacity is uneven across the teams and this is an area where we need to develop more consistency as we start to work together as a single service.

The RAA needs to work closely with the four virtual heads and local schools to ensure that children's needs are recognized in schools, staff are well prepared to respond to individual need and the pupil premium is well spent. We need to work closely with colleagues in children and young people's mental health services right across the spectrum, public, private, school-based, community based, supported by the Adoption Support Fund, provided by voluntary agencies or free from the NHS. We need to work closely with adopters and adopted children so we know what works and what they think would best meet their needs. We need to get involved with our local communities so that adopted children are involved in universal activities such as local sporting and cultural activities. We need to work with colleagues in Children's Social Care and local Youth Services to ensure that where these specialist services are needed adopted children get the support they need.

The RAA has existing commissioned services which support the Post-Adoption offer and in the first year we will be reviewing these and considering whether they meet the needs in their current form or whether we might want to think about using these services differently.

In the early stages of the RAA we intend to focus Post Adoption Support development on two key areas:-

- The initial post placement offer to new adopters – at the moment this is very different in each of the 4 areas. In the coming months we will be consulting with practitioners, with adopters, with partners and with colleagues in Finance to develop an appropriate and consistent offer.
- The longer-term multi-disciplinary offer which could, if required, support a family and a child into early adulthood.

We intend to put together both offers using a combination of in-house RAA resources, commissioned services, support from local authority colleagues and support from partner agencies.



Finance

One Adoption South Yorkshire was created by bringing together the Adoption budgets from the four partner agencies.

These budgets have now been configured into 3 sections:-

The Staffing budgets – all staff continue to be employed by their previous employing authority. There have been no secondment arrangements or TUPE arrangements. The staffing complement remains exactly as it was and the budgets remain with the local authorities with recruitment and other employment activities managed through the respective Human Resources teams. The staffing budgets are managed locally and no overspends are possible. However any underspends can be re-cycled into the RAA staffing arrangements with the agreement of the employing Local Authority.

The Locality Budgets – each of the four localities has retained an element of their original adoption budget which covers staff mileage, local Adoption Panel expenses, support funds for adopters and adopter expenses.

The Central Budget – included within the central budget are the employment costs of the very small group of hub staff, the Head of Service, a full-time business support officer and a part-time data and performance analyst. There is no additional funding for these posts, the cost has to be found through underspends on the existing budget. The Central budget includes the inter-agency budgets for all 4 areas, the budget which covered the commissioned services for all 4 areas and a small central marketing budget for local events and activities.

The main marketing and communication strategy is managed through a commissioned service from Leeds City Council which covers the management of the OneAdoption web-site on behalf of all 3 of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Adoption Agencies.

The Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund was transferred from the 4 local agencies to the Central RAA portal on 1.4.21. This has been a substantial piece of work involving setting up new contracting and payment processes and could only have been achieved with the exceptional support of the agency business support officer assisted by the Finance Officers and social workers from all the teams.

The Adoption Support Fund is a substantial funding commitment by central government to adoptive families and the management of this fund is a substantial undertaking. In 20/21 the area now covered by OneAdoptionSouthYorkshire claimed around £1.5 million for therapy for individual families.

Currently the funding is agreed from year to year which makes forward planning extremely difficult but there are already clear opportunities arising from bringing the arrangements together under the RAA as it is much easier to oversee the kinds of therapies being sought and the range of providers and in the future it should be much better planned and better coordinated enabling us to make the best use of the funds available.



Future Development

There are so many opportunities for future development that it is a challenge to know where to start.

The basis of the South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency was to set up with everything as it was, with minimal disruption to staff, to agencies, to adopters and most importantly to children. There were clear benefits to working together but these had not been translated into practice at the point of implementation.

Now that matching is well-established across the RAA and everyone is using Link-maker to identify suitable matches across the sub-region rather than just within their own team children are being placed more quickly and the reduction in waiting times for adopters is beginning to be evident. The central web-site and the electronic expression of interest has seen a significant increase in the number of adopters coming forward. Training has been offered centrally for some time and now the service is now offering joint marketing and joint introduction meetings. With the basic service functioning well we can now move on to consider those areas where we need to improve:-

- Recruiting a more diverse range of adopters to meet the specific needs of many of the children we are family-finding for. There are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities in South Yorkshire and as a RAA we need to be promoting ourselves, making ourselves more approachable if that is the issue and finding the right families for children
- Post Adoption Support – the quality of our post adoption support is key to adopters having confidence to adopt with us in the first place and key to keeping families together as the vicissitudes of life take their course. At the moment each area team has its own approach to settling in grants, allowances, training and initial support – we need to come together with a consistent offer right across the RAA.
- Support for birth parents and more direct approaches to post adoption contact. At the moment most arrangements for post adoption contact is via the letter-box scheme but with the advent of social networking and the increased use of Early Permanence Placements where adopters have more contact with birth parents we need to be considering and refining our approach.

Over the rest of this year we need to continue to review our performance, review the budgets, receive feedback from adopters and consider what changes we can and should be making to produce the outstanding service we envisage.



OASY plan 21 -
24.pdf

If you are able to open this link this is the One Adoption Three
Year Development Plan



