

One Adoption South Yorkshire

Agenda Item 12



One
Adoption
Agency
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2021/2022



FOREWORD

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

It has not been an easy year in which to establish a new organisation. For much of the time the country has been in a significant lockdown with government advice to work from home wherever possible. Fortunately, everyone has become much more adept with the IT and the capacity of TEAMS to adapt to meet our needs has been vital.

As we start to emerge from the covid crisis and people return to actual face to face working, even if now most of us are hybrid working with a mix of working from home and working from the office, new challenges are emerging for the RAA.

Do we return to actual adoption panels? Do we get the teams together actually? What is the trade-off between travelling time and being able to work together directly?

The covid crisis has left all of us, including adoptive families and prospective adopters in a very different place to where we were two years ago. There have been some significant changes in the number of adopters and the number of children being adopted. Are these significant and permanent or will the picture change again? The use of on-line services has changed all of our lives in the last two years and many practices will be changed for ever.

Despite and in some cases because of the above we have been able to create a new identity as One Adoption South Yorkshire and start to deliver as a single unit rather than four separate teams. There is still lots to do but as this report will show – we have made an excellent start.

STEPHANIE EVANS

Head of One Adoption South Yorkshire Page 66



OASY STRUCTURE

One Adoption South Yorkshire was the thirtieth of the Regional Adoption Agencies to be created in England and is a partnership model RAA. It brings together the Adoption Services from Doncaster Children’s Trust, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. DCST 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 DCST and covers inter-agency payments, commissioned contracts and other RAA-wide expenses.

Team structures April 2022

LOCALITY	SM	TM	AP	RECRUITMENT	FAMILY-FINDING	POST ADOPTION SUPPORT	TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF (NOT FTE)
BARNESLEY	0.2	1	1	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding 4.5 SW	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding 2 SW	2 SW FTE 0.8 Dev Worker – letter-box 2 SW	14
DONCASTER	0.8	1	1	3.45 FTE SW 0.5 SCA 3.45 SW	1.65 FTE 1.65 SW	3.2 FTE 2.5 SCA (incl letter-box) 3.2 SW New shared post 0.5 with SGO – Educ Support	15
ROTHERHAM	0.2	2	0	5.1 FTE SW 1 Support Worker 5.1 SW	2.2 FTE SW 1 Co-ordinator 2.2 SW	2 FTE SW 1FSW 1 contact co-ordinator 2 SW	17
SHEFFIELD	1	2.5	0	7 FTE SW 1 Interviewing officer 7 SW	4 FTE SW 1 SCA 4 SW	3.8 FTE 2.5 SCA 0.6 Letter-box co-ordinator 3.8 SW	28



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

Service Managers

Vicky Brooke – full-time Service Manager based in Sheffield, current agency lead on Recruitment and Assessment

Lindsey Knight – 0.2 Service Manager with the RAA, based in Rotherham

Sharon Wood – 0.2 Service Manager with the RAA, based in Barnsley

Claire Holmes – 0.8 Service Manager, based in Doncaster, current agency lead on Post Adoption Support

Helen Mangham has been appointed as a 12 month full-time Service Manager to manage the Rotherham and Barnsley teams and be the agency lead on Family-Finding

Team Managers

Michael Richardson – Full-time Team Manager in Barnsley

Melanie Johnson – Full-time Team Manager in Doncaster (this is a new post created by the RAA in April 2022, previously Melanie was 0.2 Team Manager and 0.8 Advanced Practitioner)

Vacancy – there is a 12 month Team Manager vacancy in Rotherham which is currently under-recruitment following Helen’s appointment to the Service Manager post

Jill Stanley – 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

Agency-Advisers

During the first year in operation the RAA has re-configured the Adoption Panels into East and West Panels and appointed a full-time Agency-Adviser to each area:

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

RAA Governance Board – currently meets bi-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 Metropolitan Borough
Council

Director of Children’s Social Care, Doncaster Children’s Services Trust

Director of Children’s Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough
Council

Adoption-UK – South Yorkshire Adopter Voice representative

Virtual Head, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

Yorkshire Adoption Agency – Voluntary Adoption Agency
Representative

As yet an appropriate representative from the local Health Services
has not been identified and after a year in operation this would be a
timely opportunity to review the membership of the Board in
general.



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 but there are some areas of data collection, particularly around post adoption support and the stability of adoptive families that will need further development 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

Numbers at stage one – 21-22 compared with late 20-21

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

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





Numbers at stage one remain broadly consistent across the last eighteen months and are shared fairly equally across all four teams. The reasons for the sudden jump in numbers at stage one in Doncaster in recent months are not clear but it is likely to be that on the website the information events that adopters sign up for may be weighted in Doncaster's favour as Doncaster were the only service delivering actual information events. The agreed RAA procedure is that adopter assessments are allocated in the area where the adopters live regardless of which information event they attend unless the adopters themselves have an expressed preference for being assessed by a particular team. But often adopters from outside the One Adoption area who have chosen to approach OASY rather than their local RAA are allocated to the team delivering the information meeting they attend.

Stage One of the adopter approval process begins when the adopter has submitted a 'Registration of Interest' form which has been accepted by the agency and at this stage background checks and medicals are completed.

Ave length of time at Stage 1 (if greater than 2 months (61 days) then shaded orange)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Ave
Barnsley	88.8	121.5	130.3	140.6	169.3	56.0	60.9	52.9	71.3	85.1	84.5	99.1	113.5
Doncaster	79.8	80.7	89.4	98.6	82.6	64.4	28.7	53.9	49.2	63.0	84.1	115.1	83.3
Rotherham	87.8	137.3	107.1	129.4	165.4	111.3	196.5	227.5	158.3	133.2	81.2	91.1	110.8
Sheffield	50.1	72.3	94.1	116.8	92.7	79.1	63.4	68.0	82.2	96.7	62.3	20.3	72.2
One Adoption SY	76.6	102.9	105.3	121.4	127.5	77.7	87.4	100.6	90.2	94.5	78.0	98.3	94.9

This table shows the average length of time the adopters currently at stage 1 have been in stage 1 on a month by month basis. In order to demonstrate whether the teams are making any progress in moving adopters through stage 1 more quickly the RAA needs to know the average time spent at stage 1 for those who have fully completed stage 1. However what this table does show is that some people spend far more than 61 days in stage 1.

This can be for a variety of reasons, which might include the service not progressing them quickly enough, but mostly, at this point in time, it is due to delays in obtaining the statutory checks particularly the medical examinations due to the pressures on GPs during and after the covid crisis. There are often other built in delays due to background checks not being progressed quickly enough or even some adopters' information not being immediately available. In 22/23 a dedicated case management system will allow the RAA to more effectively identify any delays in the process.

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 table above there has been a substantial drop in overall numbers by the end of 21/22 from earlier in the year. The teams are reporting higher numbers of adopters than usual dropping out either between the enquiry and the registration of interest stage or during stage 2. Some of the expressed reasons from drop out at stage 2 in the last year have been the couples becoming pregnant and either wanting to delay adoption until sometime after the child is born or even giving up on the adoption process altogether but another common reason for the increased number of drop-outs is becoming financial reasons, the uncertainty after COVID and the inflationary pressures on family incomes are making some potential adopters reconsider their decision.

Ave length of time at Stage 2 - days between Stage 2 start & end of month (if greater than 4 months (121 days) then shaded orange)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Ave
Barnsley	63.5	71.0	103.7	79.2	97.8	53.5	55.8	50.0	35.0	39.8	31.8	51.7	79.4
Doncaster	49.8	61.9	88.8	100.6	92.0	74.1	70.8	100.3	93.9	73.5	67.4	98.4	66.8
Rotherham	50.1	59.1	107.1	132.5	123.0	65.0	66.6	75.4	95.9	113.1	67.3	98.3	72.1
Sheffield	54.1	66.7	166.0	82.6	92.9	54.5	58.3	52.8	58.8	84.4	95.4	54.8	95.6
One Adoption SY	54.4	64.8	117.2	100.2	98.9	61.9	63.8	69.7	76.4	83.9	69.2	75.1	78.8

There are the same problems with this table as with the stage one table and the RAA needs further work on a specific adoption case management system to ensure the required information becomes available to take the Service forward. However as with the stage 1 table it does show some adopters taking longer at stage 2 than the national target. Again this is likely to be due to a number of factors similar to those at stage 1.



Overall number of adopters approved 2020/21

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

Overall number of adopters approved 2021/22

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 so in 21-22 the RAA output is below the set target and there is a decline in performance from 20-21 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 covid and the current impact on family finances. However there may also be an awareness amongst potential adopters of the current position regarding children seeking adoptive families. In December 2021, the last time figures were collated, OASY had 63 approved adopters awaiting children and only 45 children for whom we were seeking adoptive families. This picture is replicated nationally with the number of approved adopters outstripping the number of children to be placed.

The challenge facing One Adoption South Yorkshire is not necessarily to recruit more adopters but to recruit more adopters who can meet the specific needs of the children who need families. This will mean 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 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 a wide range of backgrounds. The Service aims to connect 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. In the future the RAA will develop 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 family or extended family members wherever possible, but if that proves impossible the children would be adopted by the concurrent carers. This service would need to be developed alongside colleagues in the local authority fostering service and colleagues in the Children's teams.

In order to address the current excess of adopters over children OASY has established links with other Regional Adoption Agencies who are not in the same position and there are a number of external matches for OASY adopters coming through in the near future. This will ensure that local adopters are not dropping out of the process due to waiting times and children from elsewhere in the country are placed with the families they need.

Children's data

As with adopters 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.

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.

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

	Qtr 1 21 22	Qtr 2 21 22	Qtr 3 21 22	Qtr 4 21 22	Full Year
Barnsley	373.4	401.6	477.0	436.6	398.2
Doncaster	437.0	478.7	524.0	442.5	463.0
Rotherham	563.8	549.6	581.3	726.1	621.5
Sheffield	521.5	535.7	760.3	580.0	564.4
One Adoption SY	471.1	502.5	610.1	594.3	528.0

The table shows the average length of time for the children adopted by each team in 21-22. As these are all children where the Adoption Order has been made the ones earlier in the year will mostly be children placed before the RAA was created.

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	173.5	395.4	660.0	-	-	398.2
Doncaster	-	466.3	437.0	-	-	463.0
Rotherham	206.0	527.5	977.0	1276.0	-	621.5
Sheffield	177.4	537.1	763.5	-	-	564.4
One Adoption SY	182.9	481.4	789.0	1276.0	-	528.0

This table provides balance to the previous table as it shows the impact of age on waiting times for children.

If the service was only placing children under one year old the target would easily be achieved, as for many children under year old adopters are more readily available and 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 been lengthy and the 26 week target was rarely achieved before covid. In the last two 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 between 5 and 9, or as shown here where Rotherham placed a child over 10, should not mean that the service ceases family-finding for older children.

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

Average time from entering care to being placed with foster carer (A10 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 21 22	Qtr 2 21 22	Qtr 3 21 22	Qtr 4 21 22	Full Year
Barnsley	315.1	401.6	477.0	436.6	364.3
Doncaster	437.0	389.7	524.0	272.8	357.9
Rotherham	475.4	506.8	316.8	352.1	418.9
Sheffield	341.3	535.7	731.3	568.2	476.5
One Adoption SY	359.0	474.8	512.3	437.8	420.4

On this indicator three of the four locality teams are under the national target and the RAA overall is within the 426 days.

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 we are all aware in the last two years there has been considerable delay in care proceedings and in setting dates for hearings as a result of the COVID crisis.

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

	Qtr 1 21 22	Qtr 2 21 22	Qtr 3 21 22	Qtr 4 21 22	Full Year
Barnsley	142.6	57.0	88.0	119.8	119.8
Doncaster	220.0	149.0	53.0	93.8	121.7
Rotherham	282.3	174.1	401.8	341.8	292.2
Sheffield	193.9	200.8	158.5	152.3	179.0
One Adoption SY	191.7	151.4	213.2	209.2	191.2

The National A2 indicator is one where the main responsibility for achieving this target lies with the RAA, as 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. However for older children, for sibling groups and for children with complex health needs adopters are not always immediately available and there have to be more lengthy searches both across the RAA’s own resources and even nationally, involving adopters from other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. However sometimes unnecessary delays can occur at this 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. Even here closer and more effective working with colleagues in the Children’s Teams can speed up the process for a child.

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

No. of Adoptions

	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	0	1	0	3	5	4	1	0	0	3	6	25
Doncaster	1	0	2	2	2	4	1	1	0	4	0	4	21
Rotherham	1	0	0	1	1	9	7	5	2	2	1	5	34
Sheffield	2	0	0	3	2	11	2	3	3	4	0	3	33
One Adoption SY	6	0	3	6	8	29	14	10	5	10	4	18	113

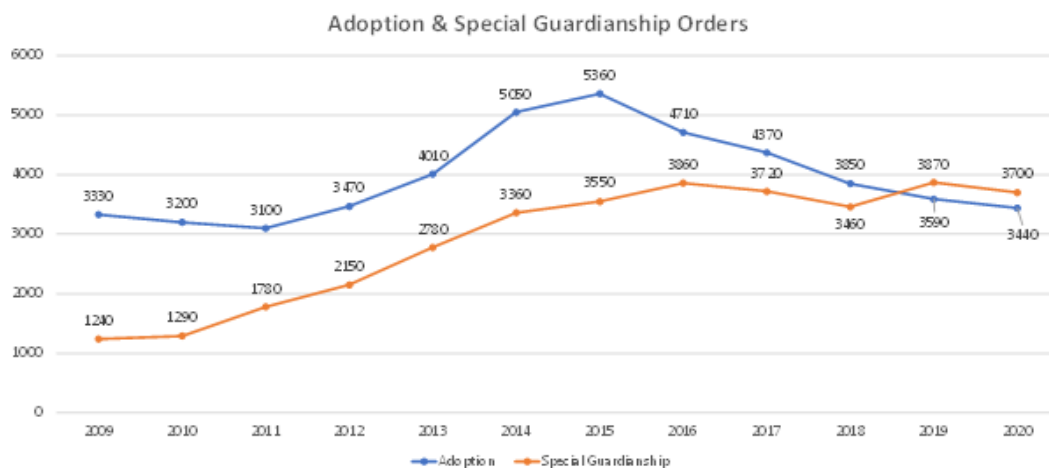
The number of children adopted in 21/22 compares favourably with the figures for 20/21. The number of adoptions in a given year largely reflects the activity of the previous year as Adoption Orders are usually made some months after the child is placed so the first table will mostly reflect activity in 19/20 and the second activity in 20/21.

Activity by the RAA in 21/22 is more accurately reflected in the number of children 'placed' for adoption.

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 21/22 from the two previous years. A reduction in adoption activity has been shown right across England and Wales over the last three years. At this point the reasons for this are largely speculative. Covid and the delays in Court are believed to be a significant feature as this has slowed down the adoption process across the country. Many children have ultimately either been placed with relatives following lengthy assessments which should be a positive thing 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 than Adoption Orders – the cross-over 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. Again this is believed to be due to the reduction in Court activity. (See table below)



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

The original RAA Business Case 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. 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 this down-turn reflects a permanent change in practice or is just a reflection of the impact of the recent pandemic or other temporary factors.

Central to the ethos of One Adoption South Yorkshire is the aim of placing South Yorkshire children with South Yorkshire Families. There are two main drivers behind this aim. Firstly by placing local children with the RAA’s own adopters practitioners know both the children and the families much better and can be more confident that good matches are being made. Secondly 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 which means that if the RAA places a South Yorkshire child anywhere in England or Wales practitioners will be travelling often long distances to support families and they won’t have the knowledge about local facilities and services that they would need to provide useful advice and support.

Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or nc

	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%	88%	100%	67%	60%	60%	65%

Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or not)

	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%

The table for 21/22 shows a significant increase in the percentage of children being placed within the RAA, up 13% from the previous year. However 35% placed externally is still some way from where the RAA would want to be. As a RAA 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. However a number of children are placed externally because there are no adopters who could take a sibling placement or who don't have the required cultural heritage 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 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 has had 2 disruptions in 21/22, one involving a sibling group, so 3 children in all. Disruptions are very difficult for everyone involved but are thankfully 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 don't relate to each other.

There was an additional situation where children were placed subject to an Early Permanence Placements which did not work out as planned and there is learning to be had from this as well.

In 21/22 the whole service received 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. In the light of the 3 breakdowns the importance of making good transitions has been emphasized and in 22/23 the Regional Adoption Agency would want to ensure this training is rolled out to colleagues in the Children's Teams and in the Fostering Service as well as more adopters and foster carers to ensure that we are all operating together in the child's best interests.

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 Children's Trust (Lead Authority), Sheffield City Council, Barnsley MBC & Rotherham MBC.

An annual combined budget of £4.964m was agreed, of which £1.644m relating to interagency, contracts and marketing is managed by Doncaster as the Lead Authority.

South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (SYRAA)	2021/22 £000
Rotherham RMBC	1,241
Sheffield CC	1,626
Barnsley MBC	976
Doncaster Children's Trust	1,175
Total Gross Income	5,018
Capital Expenditure	0
Revenue Expenditure	3,975
Total Gross Expenditure	3,975
Underspend	1,043
Underspend retained for 2022/23	270
Balance Reimbursed to Partners Pro-Rate to Original Contributions	773

The Board agreed in the March 2022 meeting to roll-over the underspend (£270k) in 21/22 to provide for a new case management system, additional training and start-up events for RAA practitioners, adopters and RAA partners and for additional adopter-voice work. The remaining portion of the 21/22 underspend (£773k) is to be returned to the partner authorities as a one-off payment pro-rata to the original contributions.

Changes in RAA staffing have been agreed by the Board to take into account the development needs of the new service. Posts relating to 22/23 include an Advanced Practitioner and Finance and Administrative Manager in the central team and an Adoption Support post for the Barnsley team. This follows approval at previous Board Meetings for the acquisition of Agency Advisor x 2, Clinical Psychologist and 2x Service Managers for 22/23. After a year of operation, we now have a good understanding of the resources in each team and the capacity to meet demand both locally and across the RAA.

The circumstances of 21/22 have been exceptional due to covid, the anticipated recurrent underspend has been re-allocated to extend the service and it is not anticipated that there will be a similar underspend in 22/23.



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.



In 21/22 the funds drawn down on behalf of families were as follows:-

Total Applications - 432	
Barnsley	£279,937.73
Doncaster	£318,947.36
Rotherham	£371,936.25
Sheffield	£506,162.03
TOTAL AMOUNT CLAIMED	£1,476,983.37
Barnsley	£51,331.67
Doncaster	£70,679.20
Rotherham	£84,340.28
Sheffield	£87,187.00
Total Returned to ASF Fund	£293,538.15

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 DoE. As of 1st April 2021 the RAA became the administrator for the ASF across all 4 teams and the funding is now paid directly to DCST. As can be seen above the amounts involved are substantial and are increasing every year. The full-time business support post with the RAA is fully occupied in administering the payments to providers and a substantial proportion of the Adoption Support workers' time is taken up in writing applications and commissioning and reviewing interventions. In 22/23 the Adoption Support Fund is changing its payment processes in that funding will no longer be released in advance of the work taking place with any unspent funds being returned at the end of the year. Instead the RAA will only be able to drawdown funding as invoices are received from providers as confirmation that the work has taken place.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 21/22

During 21/22 the main focus of the RAA has been to maintain the previous high level of performance of each of the four constituent teams while gaining a good understanding of resources and capacity across South Yorkshire as a whole with a view identifying future development opportunities and creating structures which will enhance the service for children and adoptive families and deliver a consistent, high quality Regional Adoption Agency into the future.

- All previous contracts and commissioned services which were held across the four authorities in respect of adoption were consolidated and novated to the RAA.
- A single website and a single communications and marketing service working alongside the two other RAAs comprising the Yorkshire and Humber-wide One Adoption Service; One Adoption West Yorkshire and One Adoption North and Humber were established and the previous local adoption websites were closed down. A central point of contact for adopters was established which continues to allow adopters and potential adopters to contact their local area teams where required.
- Quarterly newsletters have been produced on a rotating basis by the four teams and the 'in kind' Communications support provided by each partner provides the local lead alongside the central One Adoption Communication service on an aligned quarterly basis.
- The first RAA-wide survey of adopters was undertaken in February 2022. This will assist the service in planning future activity and will be repeated every year.
- OASY came together on Linkmaker, which is the nation-wide system for linking adopters and children who need families. Within Linkmaker it is possible for details of local adopters and local children to be shared across all four teams to establish whether we have a local match before we open up either adopters or children to consideration by other agencies. Alongside monthly matching meetings to consider those children who might wait longer because they are older, part of a sibling group or have complex health needs this move to a single agency site on Link-maker has enabled the RAA to place more children within South Yorkshire where we can better support families as the children get older.



- Preparation training for adopters had been a joint South Yorkshire undertaking for several years in advance of the RAA but during 21/22 a RAA wide training programme has been produced and alongside a RAA wide post adoption training plan.
- A 3 year development plan on a page has been created to ensure practitioners, adopters and partners have a shared understanding of the RAA direction of travel.
- The first of the planned annual conferences bringing together RAA practitioners, adopters and partners was held in March 2022 and was a great opportunity to bring people together actually for the first time since the RAA went live. The theme of the conference was 'E-safety' a topic which has become a source of particular concern with families and young people confined to the home and living life online as a result of the pandemic.
- Adoption Panels have been stream-lined within the RAA. Although the same number of monthly panels take place and they are still loosely aligned to the 4 authorities. The RAA now has 2 Chairs and 2 full-time Agency Advisers, one for the East Panel (Doncaster and Rotherham) and one for the West Panel (Sheffield and Barnsley). With fewer people involved the RAA has been able to move to more consistent and more effective practices and procedures. Alongside the standardised panels and practice we are also moving to a single share-point site – the RAA Hub - where practitioners can book onto panels and up-date the panel reports from any of the 4 localities across South Yorkshire.
- Progress has been made towards aligning practice on recruitment and assessment, family-finding and adoption support. Information events are coordinated and there are single protocols for recruitment and family-finding. ASF users come together on a regular basis to agree shared approaches. However there is still a great deal of work to do which will be further advanced in 22/23 by the creation of the 3 full-time Service Manager leads. Each Service Manager will be responsible for bringing together RAA practice in one of the 3 key areas of adoption work.
- The reduction in external placements has freed some funding to facilitate the creation of new structures and essential support posts to ensure the future development of the RAA. In 22/23 these posts will be created and their impact on services monitored.



Adoption Support



Adoption support is a key developmental area for the South Yorkshire RAA and indeed for all RAAs. An adoption doesn't 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 '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. Prior to becoming part of the RAA the Rotherham adoption team had no responsibility for Adoption Support at all as this had been provided entirely by the Rotherham Therapeutic Team supplemented by applications to the ASF. Each authority had a different approach to grants and expenses for adopters and post adoption training.

Early meetings with adopters established that adoption support was their number one priority but it also became clear that some of the support they were expecting needed to come from partner agencies, particularly Education and Health and while the Adoption Support teams had a key sign-posting and co-ordination role they were not the key deliverers of some post adoption services.

As a result adoption support development in 21/22 concentrated on two main themes. Firstly consistent support to adopters in the early stages after a child joins their family. There is a new 'offer' to adopters including membership of Adoption-UK and the Institute of Therapeutic Parenting, linking with a peer mentor and regular ongoing contact with their assessing social worker through the first year of placement to ensure they are accessing any support they need. Initial grants are available to adopters where children may have additional needs such as when two or more children join a family at the same time.

The RAA has adopted a consistent approach in terms of recommending adoption allowances for adopters in specific circumstances consistent with the criteria for initial grants. However adoption allowances are not the responsibility of the RAA. The decision regarding the payment of an allowance rests with the Authority who are responsible for the child.



Secondly the RAA is looking to work with adopters and partners to further develop the provision of multi-disciplinary support to adoptive families.

Current areas under development:-

- Trauma- informed services in schools. This is an approach already embraced by many schools across South Yorkshire, although there are still many where it would be a new concept. There is a specific coordinating project across South Yorkshire led by Sheffield Hallam University and the Virtual Heads in all 4 partner authorities are supporting the development of trauma-informed approaches in all their schools. In 2022/23 the RAA will continue to work with adopters and partners to ensure the approach is introduced in ever more schools across South Yorkshire.
- The introduction of a consistent education support plan for adopted children across South Yorkshire. A team from the RAA, the virtual heads group and adopters are working on a single plan to be introduced to schools across South Yorkshire from September 2022
- Work with the virtual heads group to develop an introduction to education services for adopters and RAA practitioners, ensuring that everyone understands the key stages, the SEND processes and ongoing processes for student assessment and support.

Future adoption support development work:-

- RAA practitioners and adopters to engage with SENDIASS, local Academy Trusts, local SEND teams, local virtual heads teams to ensure a coordinated approach to adopted children in local schools
- RAA practitioners and adopters to engage with local health services, particularly the new Integrated Care System which will be South Yorkshire wide, to ensure adoptive children are able to access pathway services such as those for ASD and possibly a potential FASD pathway and local CAMHS and other physical health services in a timely way
- The RAA has funding to create the nucleus on an in-house multi-disciplinary team to support the adoption support workers in supporting families across South Yorkshire. In 22/23 we will recruit an additional adoption support worker in Rotherham and one in Barnsley and an advanced practitioner who will be Hub based to co-ordinate adoption support across the RAA. Funding has also been identified for a RAA Clinical Psychologist who will also be Hub based and support adoption support workers across South Yorkshire Their remit will be specifically to undertake psychological assessments of adopted children which will inform our applications to the ASF. In the future there may be some possibilities of using ASF funding in one form or another to increase the membership and range of services within the RAA multi-disciplinary team.
- RAA adopters, adopted children and practitioners to work together on developing additional services such as support groups for older children and young people.

Future plans



Adoption is always changing and the coming years could be the period of greatest change for a generation. Almost all local authorities 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 co-ordinating role to promote best practice across the country.

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 Regional Adoption Agency 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.



There are many areas of adoption practice which the RAA still needs to develop further 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 don't. 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 which 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. At the moment the arrangements are very confused 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 step-parent adoptions impacts significantly on our capacity to allocate assessments of adopters for children who don't have families and can pose real dilemmas around the allocation of limited resources.

In year two One Adoption South Yorkshire will still be an agency in its infancy. At the end of year one we have identified a number of significant changes we need to implement in 22/23 to help us move forward.

- We will recruit to several key posts and there is likely to be a subsequent need to recruit to vacancies elsewhere in the service as existing staff step into new roles. So this is likely to be a busy year in terms of recruitment and changes in staffing.
- Post covid we will make good our intention to reach out and recruit a more diverse range of adopters to meet the needs of our children
- Together with colleagues in South Yorkshire and those in One Adoption West and North and Humber we will further develop the use of early permanence placements, specifically we would be planning to work with colleagues in the fostering teams to explore the joint recruitment of concurrent carers. In concurrency foster carers are also approved adopters who could adopt the children in their care if plans to return the children to birth family are not successful.

- We will commission a new adoption specific case management system which will assist the RAA teams currently spread across 4 authorities and 4 different IT systems to come together and understand its current commitments and its capacity to deliver against expected performance.
- We will introduce Letterswap, initially as a pilot, but if successful as the main form of indirect communication between adopters, adopted children and birth families. With Letterswap delivering the in-direct contact this could free up resources to support other services such as Life-story work and even actual contact where appropriate. We will take the next steps to move away from the previous operating as four separate agencies and move further towards working as one. This will involve more shared practice across the three areas of adoption services. It will involve shared recording systems and shared information storage systems. It will involve practitioners in each of the three areas of practice and the four localities coming together regularly on an actual basis.
- We will continue to work with the three local authorities and the Children's Trust in Doncaster to ensure that allowances and other financial support for adopters is aligned and equitable across South Yorkshire
- We will continue to take steps in partnership with adopters and other agencies to ensure we have an effective and consistent adoption support offer across all four areas. A single case management system which includes adoption support services will help us plan better and deliver more effective work with families.



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