



Adoption Central England

Annual Report 2021-2022



Adoption Central England Annual Report 2021-2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council joined with Warwickshire County Council (the host) on 1 February 2018 to form Adoption Central England (ACE). The service was joined by Herefordshire Council on 1 July 2019. ACE is a local authority shared service and was the seventh regional adoption agency to become operational in the country.
- 1.2 This is the fourth annual report providing a summary of activity and developments within ACE that covers the 4-year period up to 31 March 2022. It can be read alongside the ACE Adoption Panel Annual Report 2021-2022.

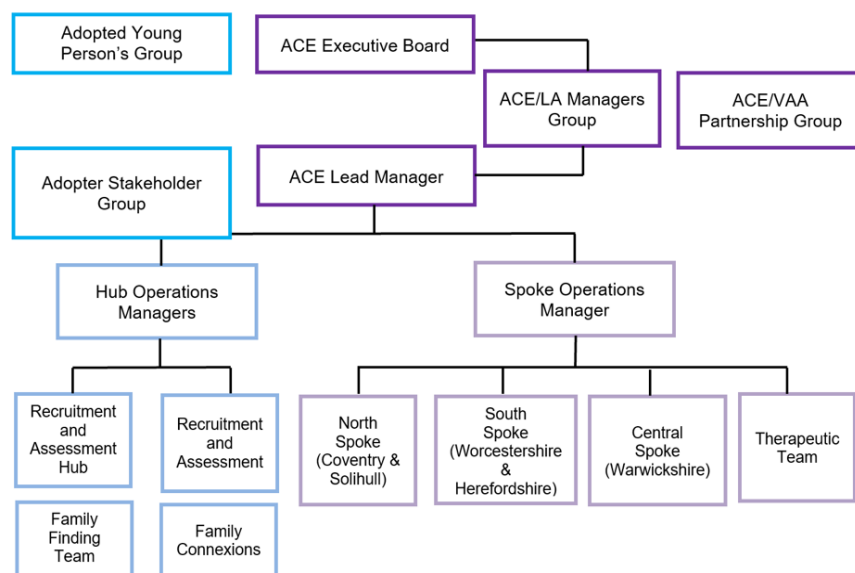
2. Background Information

- 2.1 Following legislation arising from four Department for Education (DfE) policy papers on adoption, the Regionalising Adoption paper published in June 2015 spelt out the government's expectations for all local authorities to be part of a regional adoption agency and 'Adoption: A vision for change' (April 2016) committed to deliver a radical, whole system redesign by regionalising adoption services by 2020. ACE was established with the overarching aim to *'provide an innovative and relationship focussed service for children, adoptive families and others affected by adoption. This is by offering lifelong support, based on up to date practices and interventions and supported by modern technology'*.
- 2.2 ACE works in close partnership with the local authorities and other services to:
 - Ensure that a wider pool of prospective adopters is ready to meet children's need to be loved, nurtured, protected, and understood,
 - Ensure that adopters understand, accept, and can meet children's needs and provide a secure relationship within which they can thrive,
 - Increase the levels of adoption for children waiting to be adopted,
 - Reduce the length of time those children wait to be adopted,
 - Improve/ensure attachment and trauma informed post adoption support services to adoptive families.

- 2.3 In March 2018 the ACE Executive Board supported the recommendation that ACE should become a service underpinned by **Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)**. This approach ensures that relationships and emotional connection are at the heart of services and all aspects of the organisation are informed by DDP principles. In January 2021 ACE became the first adoption service to be DDP certified.
- 2.4 Since 1 November 2019 ACE has delivered the regional adoption support service for birth families – **Family Connexions**. Other services provided include non-agency (stepparent) adoption information, counselling and court assessments and birth records counselling for adopted adults.
- 2.5 The work of the regional adoption agency has continued to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic throughout 2021-2022 that has resulted in staff members working from home and delivering some services online. This has impacted upon adopter recruitment also. It is evident that many more adoptive families are dealing with the impact of the pandemic as it has affected the mental health of their children.

3. Staffing

3.1 The ACE structure is as follows:



3.2 ACE delivers services through a Hub and Spoke model. The Hub activities are concerned with the recruitment, preparation, and assessment of prospective adopters. Staff introduce and model for prospective adopters information about attachment and developmental trauma and the key DDP principles. The DDP attitude of PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy) is

demonstrated throughout this process. The same staff are also involved in matching children with adopters and provide support for 12 months after the adoption order is granted.

3.3 The Spokes, north, central and south are located within the local authority areas. They offer a duty service, undertake assessments of need for adoption support, process and commission therapeutic services through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, work directly with families who require social work services, provide birth records counselling to adult adoptees and complete non-agency adoption assessments for the court. Staff work in ways that focus on maintaining openness with families and enhancing family relationships, safety, and connection. Staff work flexibly across the region according to local need and demand.

3.4 As on 31 March 2022 there are **96** people working in ACE as follows:

ACE Managers	9.45 FTE
Hub social workers	15.26 FTE
Family Finding Team - social workers	3.4 FTE
Family Connexions – social workers	3.33 FTE + 0.81 social care worker
Spoke social workers	17.7 FTE
Therapeutic Team – social workers incl. Therapeutic Life Story Work Practitioners	3.93 FTE
Family support workers supporting the Spokes	2.62 FTE
Social Worker – Adopter training lead	0.81 FTE
Business support and related roles	13.25 FTE
Adoption Panel Advisors – social workers	1.49 FTE

3.5 The service has three small specialist teams:

The **Family Connexions Service** has 3.33 FTE social workers and 0.81 FTE family support workers. The aim of the service is to provide a range of support services including information to birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for the child.

The **Therapeutic Team** delivers therapeutic interventions to families who have high levels of assessed needs, and this can be on an individual or group work basis. The workers frequently work alongside other social workers either within ACE or from the local authorities. Two further social workers have been

awarded the Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work which complements the interventions delivered through the Therapeutic Team.

The **Family Finding Team** is a small group of ACE social workers who work very closely with the child's allocated social workers in efforts to secure adoption for children with priority needs.

- 3.6 ACE has dedicated a part time social work post to lead on adopter training. This includes the adopter preparation programme and post approval training, the majority of which is delivered by ACE social workers. The post approval programme covers:
- Introductions and Early Days
 - The First Year – Parenting with PACE
 - Talking and telling about adoption – The importance of identity, and Life Story Books
 - Eat Sleep and Play
 - Psychological Health in Adopted Children and Adolescents
 - Self-Harm Workshop
 - Identity and contact in adoption.
- 3.7 The business support functions are supported by a part time data analyst who works closely with the local authorities, and an Adoption Support Fund finance officer who processes all the financial transactions that underpin the provision of therapeutic interventions to adoptive families across the region. The Contracts Manager supports the arrangements for the Framework Agreement for Therapeutic Interventions.
- 3.8 In October 2021 the service inaugurated its **Clinical Psychology Service** through the appointment of a part time clinical psychologist. This is a 2-year service funded from ACE reserves. The service aims and objectives are to:
- Improve early and longer-term placement stability,
 - Improve adoptive parent/child relationships,
 - Offer timely support to adoptive parents to feel able to manage challenges and risks,
 - Improve prospective adopter understanding of children's need and enhance the matching process,
 - Enhance the confidence and skills of ACE staff to understand and support adoptive families,
 - Contribute to the effective delivery of services through co working and training with ACE staff.
- 3.9 The first report on this service is attached as **Appendix 1**.

3.10 As a DDP certified service the 80% target set for ACE social workers to be trained at DDP Level 1 has been exceeded. As on 31 March 2022, **77** social work and related staff had DDP level 1 training (**96%**). **15** staff are trained at DDP 2 and lead on embedding and mentoring staff within the ACE service on DDP principles and practices, including the adoption panel membership. One social worker is progressing the DDP practicum. The DDP ethos and practice within the service is supported by the commissioned DDP consultant/trainer for 23 days a year.

4. ACE Performance

- 4.1 The performance of ACE against the **ACE Service Improvement Plan 2021-2022** is summarised in **Appendix 2**. This identifies 24 actions of which 16 have been assessed as completed or by their very nature are ongoing. Most notable are the development of the ACE website, the appointment to the ACE Clinical Psychology Service, the ongoing focus on DDP informed practices, engagement of adopted young people, the progress in relation to early permanence – fostering for adoption, low disruption levels and the development of adopter training and support. There are 6 actions to progress further covering practices around contact in adoption, adopter recruitment and assessment timescales, the development of the enhanced support care scheme and engagement with mental health services.
- 4.2 The two areas for ongoing attention are the interagency usage, which is intrinsically linked to the ACE Adoption Sufficiency Strategy, and how to address and support adoptive families more effectively, in a multi-disciplinary way where foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) features.
- 4.3 The performance of the regional adoption service needs to be seen in the context of the overall numbers of children who are coming forward with a plan for adoption. In 2021/22 there was an increase in the number of children with an adoption decision. Whilst there is variation between the local authorities in 2021–2022, **148** children had an adoption decision compared with **129** in 2020-2021 representing a **13% increase**.
- 4.4 Positively of the children with adoption plans **83% (96/116)** have been matched with ACE approved adoptive parents. This is consistent with previous years and positively as at 31.3.2022 of those children subject to a placement order, only **8** children across the region did not have a suitable family identified for them as detailed below:

Children with a placement order (PO) not yet placed	80
PO, matched, awaiting move in date	10
PO waiting, link identified	37

PO waiting, link identified- foster carers with whom child currently living being assessed/applied to adopt	1
PO waiting, link identified, - adopters of older sibling being assessed	
PO waiting, no link, active family finding, open for consideration by other agencies, via Link Maker/other matching tool	8
PO waiting, active family finding, not open to other agencies for consideration	12
PO waiting, no link, FF stopped - 7 private adoptions by foster carers / 4 change of plans / 1 family member came forward	12

4.5 At the same time ACE approved **74** adoption households, consistent with the previous year and many have been earmarked for matching with ACE children. ACE has a subscription to Link Maker – a national database that allows approved adopters to consider children from other areas and vice versa.

4.6 To increase potential placement opportunities, ACE has developed a collaboration with regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies in the Midlands forming the **Midlands Together Collaboration**. More children have secured families regionally which allows easing of arrangements for adoption support in the longer term.

4.7 The Executive Board receives a quarterly performance management report that outlines performance against key criteria including:

- Overview of children - numbers, adoption decision and adoption orders made and timeliness of actions against national scorecard measures,
- Number of early permanence – fostering for adoption placements,
- Number of children placed with ACE adopters,
- Enquiries about adoption and prospective adopters at each stage of the process,
- Timeliness of adopter assessments,
- Interagency placements made and number of placement disruptions.

It is the intention that the performance report will be extended to monitor the timescales between placement order and matching and the completion of life story books.

4.8 The **ACE Business, Performance and Service Improvement Plan** has several measures aligned with service priorities to ensure that a wider pool of prospective adopters is ready to meet children’s needs, to reduce the length of time those children wait to be adopted, and to improve/ensure attachment and trauma informed post adoption support services to adoptive families.

The following provides a summary of performance against these measures:

Measure	Performance 2021 - 2022	3-year average 2019 - 2022
To place 90% of ACE children with ACE approved adopters.	83%	82.6%
To move children more quickly to early permanence through the development of fostering for adoption (FfA).	17	21
To recruit 40 households who are able to meet the needs of older children, sibling groups and harder to place children including fostering for adoption. Note: some households meet more than 1 criteria.	81	70
To increase the number of households who enquire about adoption through ACE – target 660.	531	566
To approve 125 households.	74	80
To improve the assessment timescales for prospective adopters – stage 2 assessments within 4 months. Note: 51% completed within 6 months.	8 (11%)	12.3%
To reduce the number of children who experience an adoption placement disruption.	2 households (3 children)	2 households

4.9 This shows that during the year, consistent with previous years, ACE can place more than 80% of children with ACE approved adopters. During the period of coronavirus pandemic there has been a decline in the number of adopter enquiries and approval timescales continues to be an area for attention. Adoption disruption levels remain low.

4.10 The following summary shows performance against national measures and England average scores:

Measure	DfE scorecard – 3 year	2021-2022 ACE average	ACE 3 year average

		England average		
A 10	For children adopted in the year, average length of time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family	426 / 367 days	412 days	385 days
A 2	The average time between placement order and deciding the match to an adoptive family	121/175 days	180 days	183 days

4.11 During 2021-2022 more children were adopted across the region at **132** an increase from 92 children 2020/21. Their average timescale from becoming looked after to moving to their adoptive families was within the national target timescales but below the England average.

4.12 Other key performance highlights during this period are:

- Embedding early permanence – fostering for adoption for children continues to be relatively strong with local authorities demonstrating greater confidence in this option for children where rehabilitation is considered unlikely. However, this remains an ongoing area for awareness raising and training. All ACE adopters are required to consider fostering for adoption with the option to ‘opt out’.
- The number of children placed with ACE approved households remains high evidencing that ACE is successfully recruiting adoptive families for children needing placement. More prospective adopters can consider children in specific harder to place groups.
- Despite an apparent reduction in enquiries to adopt the number of households proceeding through the process has remained consistent.
- Adopter approval timescales have slightly deteriorated. There has been some delay in obtaining the required references and due to coronavirus and the impact of online working has necessitated additional visits to the applicants thereby extending timescales.
- Adoption placement disruptions are lower than the previous years but there has been a corresponding increase in Learning Reviews which take place where the child is matched but not placed for adoption or when a fostering for adoption arrangement does not continue to adoption matching. See separate report – **Annual Report from Disruption and Learning Reviews 2021-2022**.

- Adoption timeliness from receipt of the placement order to matching (A2) has improved and is 5 days out of line with the England average, whereas A10 performance has deteriorated possibly due to a multiplicity of factors including court timescales.
- 4.13 Another area of achievement has been the successful placement of children for adoption including sibling groups of brothers and sisters together. The Executive Board continues to support the initiative of a guaranteed settling in allowance for ACE adopters of sibling groups of 3 or more children. This is used flexibly within the first year of placement thereby providing a financial cushion for the adoptive household as they make the necessary adjustments and changes to their lifestyle.
- 4.14 Areas for attention during 2022-2023 will be:
- To increase adopter enquires, approval and assessment timeliness.
 - To reduce the reliance on interagency adoption placements from 17% to 12% of placements
 - To maintain low levels of adoption disruptions.
 - Continue to focus on fostering for adoption and the development of services and support around such arrangements.
 - Continue to attract prospective adopters from under-represented groups and diverse communities.
 - To understand and explore areas where adoption timeliness for children could be improved.

5. Adoption Support

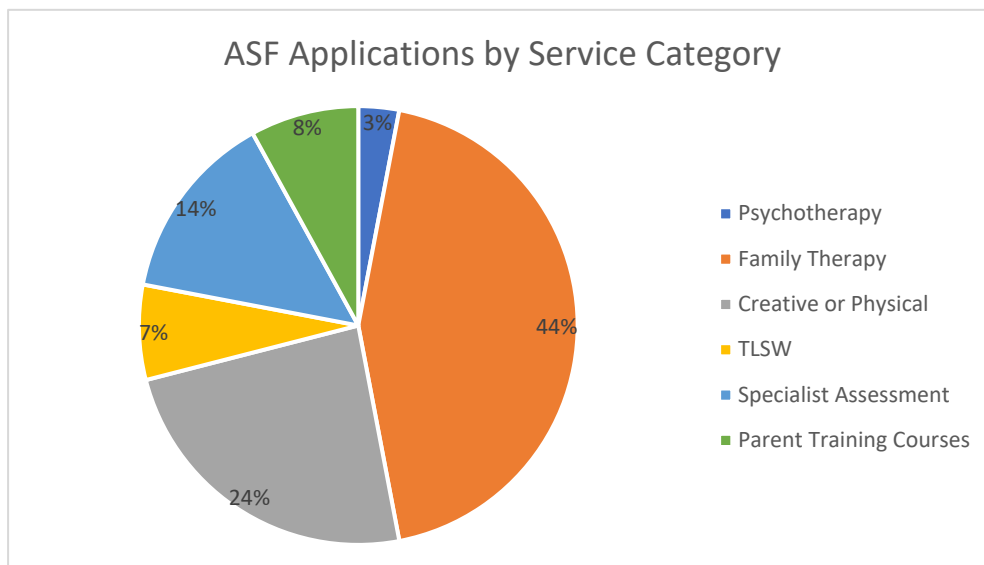
- 5.1 Adoption support remains an area of importance within ACE and an increasing area of work. As on 31.3.2022 of the **735** allocated support cases, and where these related to direct support to adopted families, **254** were supported at tier 3/4 and **327** families at the lower-level tiers 1/2 where intervention and support is primarily delivered from an external therapeutic provider.
- 5.2 The service also provides Birth Records Counselling to adopted adults and the significant number of enquiries resulted in **128** applications for counselling.
- 5.3 There has been a gradual increase in non-agency adoption notifications following a decline in 2020-2021.
- 5.4 The Spoke adoption support teams have observed an increase in adoptive families presenting with concerns for the mental health of their children. Also, the service, in collaboration with Family Connexions, has become more involved in supporting adopted young people to re-establish contact with birth family members.

5.5 Applications to the national Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund have remained high, reflecting the ongoing needs of these families, some who have struggled significantly over the past 2 years. During 2021-2022 the following were made:

Type of application	Amount	Number of applications	Number of children	Number of families
Individual family applications	£1,416,811.00	480	572 children	437 families
ACE Therapeutic Team	£109,205.00	47	192 children	136 families
Therapeutic Group applications	£57,572.00	12	133 children	97 families

5.6 The ACE **Framework Agreement for Therapeutic Providers** was extended during this period and now has an approved list of **40** accredited providers.

5.7 The types of support most frequently required by adoptive families have been:



These interventions are mainly aimed at helping their children settle and build security within the family, dealing with developmental trauma and how to parent therapeutically. Addressing child on parent violence has also featured and a programme of intervention is delivered by the ACE Therapeutic Team.

- 5.8 The Therapeutic Team offered the following interventions during 2021-2022:
- Therapeutic parenting and sensory integration
 - Non Violent Resistance - NVR
 - Parent child attachment play- PCAP.
- 5.9 The **Adopters Newsletter** has been produced on a quarterly basis and sent to over 750 households and ACE managers continue to meet with the Adopters Stakeholder Group at quarterly intervals.

6. Services to birth relatives – Family Connexions

- 6.1 Family Connexions provides a range of services to birth family members who can be supported in the following ways:
- 1 to 1 emotional and relational support, offering opportunities to have their experience accepted, understood and to have access to advice during and after the adoption process.
 - An explanation of the adoption process.
 - Support with the practical aspects of the adoption process, including support with letterbox contact and/or meeting with adopters. Practical guidance is combined with support around emotional impact.
 - Advice regarding future life planning including signposting to other universal support services.
 - Group sessions for birth parents and extended family members across the ACE region.
 - Support with any direct contact or reunification plans requested by the adopted child and their adoptive parents.
- 6.2 The service is well embedded as at year end 2021-2022 the following number of referrals was received representative of the 5 local authority areas:

Local authority	No. of referrals	No. of current cases being worked
Coventry	13	92
Solihull	6	21
Warwickshire	9	95
Worcestershire	14	70
Herefordshire	5	49
Out of ACE	1	4
Total	48	331

7. Quality assurance and inspection

- 7.1 ACE has a range of quality assurance arrangements in place that includes:

- Case file auditing by managers introduced February 2021.
- Learning from complaints and representations.
- Robust staff recruiting practices including induction.
- Regular supervision and annual appraisal of all staff.
- Opportunities for staff exit interviews.
- Quarterly performance management reports presented to the ACE Executive Board.
- Feedback to ACE and local authorities on the quality of reports presented to the adoption panel - see Adoption Panel Annual Report.
- Framework Agreement for external providers delivering therapeutic services to adoptive families.
- User feedback through the Adopters Stakeholder Group, training events, adoption panel.
- Managerial oversight of reports and countersigning.
- Feedback from local authority partners and other stakeholders through various forums.
- Follow up of all adopter enquirers who do not proceed through the process.
- Timescales for key activities in the adopter journey from enquiry to approval.
- Observed practices.
- The Adoption Support Fund Review Panel.
- Regular reviews of the DDP Action Plan including staff surveys.
- External validation through local authority OFSTED inspections.

7.2 The first **Case File Audit Report** identified the following areas for attention:

- More timely recoding and sharing of post placements.
- To improve recording of managerial oversight/decisions.
- The completion of quarterly summaries.
- To comply with recording in the MOSAIC workflow as opposed to case notes.
- To show greater evidence of the adopter's voice/child's views and wishes.

Further work is required on the audit form to ease completion and relevance.

7.3 During the past year ACE has been part of one **OFSTED** inspection that took place in Warwickshire County Council and was published in February 2022. The overall assessment was good and reported:

'Warwickshire is the host authority for the regional adoption agency. Strong quality assurance processes, operating in conjunction with the authority's own

internal monitoring systems, provide regular opportunities to reflect on and develop practice. This supports positive outcomes for children and adopters’.

- 7.4 The ACE **Adopter’s Annual Survey** 2021 was sent out in June and ACE was delighted to receive **74** responses – approximately 10% of people who receive the ACE **Adopter’s Newsletter**. Survey respondents were from across the ACE region with the majority from Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Approximately half of the respondents (38) were families currently receiving an adoption support service, 13 households were with the hub teams and 23 families were not receiving services at the present time.
- 7.5 Positively half respondents access the ACE **website** and majority found the specific information they were seeking. Respondents were asked to rate the relevance, usefulness and appearance of the website and the average score across these areas was **3.64** out of 5. Whilst a lower number of respondents were prospective adopters, **the Adoption Preparation Groups** were rated on average **4.25** and the assessment process as **4.2**.
- 7.6 Six families had had a child placed with them since 1 April 2020 and 5 reported the process to be ‘*very good – it went well,*’ this was despite the arrangements we put into place due to the coronavirus pandemic. All six reported the relationship with their social worker as ‘*very good*’ as was attendance at the Adoption Panel Matching meeting, transitions and the support received once the child was placed. Arrangements for contact and letterbox could be improved as could life story books.
- 7.7 The survey asked about **DDP – Therapeutic Parenting** and 49 adoptive parents felt that they had enough information about DDP, and examples were provided on how this approach had helped them to parent in a PACE-ful way. 25 respondents required further information.
- 7.8 Most respondents (43) had contacted ACE for an adoption support service in the period 1.4.2020-31.3.2021 reporting their key concerns as:
- Child on parent violence
 - Educational issues
 - Attachment and relationships with their child
 - Concerns about their child mental health/self-harm
 - Child’s social relationships
 - Contact and letterbox.
- 7.9 The areas for development that are the joint responsibility of the local authorities and ACE are around the areas of:
- (i) Contact and Letterbox

- (ii) Delays in receiving an adoption support services
- (iii) Training
- (iv) Across agency working.

7.10 Some improvements have already been put into place such as the ACE **Training Programme** that has been accessible from the ACE website since 1 April 2022 and the **Spoke Review of Duty Processes** that should improve efficiency. Contact and cross agency working remain priority areas for attention in the coming year.

8. Practice Improvements

8.1 ACE supports adoption practices through the **Adoption Checklist** and associated practice guidance developed and shared with local authority teams. These serve to complement existing procedures and outline approaches to adoption work based on current best practice and research.

8.2 Practice Guidance is available on:

- Early Permanence – Fostering for Adoption
- Name changes for children placed for adoption
- Foster carers who wish to adopt
- Preparing children for adoption
- Supporting transitions to an adoptive family
- Relinquished babies
- Later Life Letters.

8.3 Other more recent developments have included work led with the local authority Special Guardianship Teams in producing preparation training modules and an information leaflet.

9. Diversity and Inclusion

9.1 ACE continued to give attention to diversity and inclusion and maintains the **Black Lives Matters Conversation Group**. The service has developed its inclusivity statements of intent and have encouraged training and development opportunities and team discussion, learning and awareness. The guidance notes aligned with the Adopters Assessment Report have been amended to ensure that cultural sensitivity is addressed and further changes to assessment formats are planned.

9.2 The service will be reviewing how diversity is reflected on its website and will make changes. ACE subscribes to **New Family Social** a specific organisation that supports same sex couples wishing to foster or adopt and has membership to **Intercountry Adoption Centre** that supports overseas adoption.

10. Disruptions

- 10.1 An adoption disruption is where the child has been matched and placed with adoptive parents and where the placement did not proceed to the making of an adoption order. During this period there were 2 adoption disruptions concerning 3 children. One was an interagency placement for 2 children, the other concerned a single child with an ACE approved adopter.
- 10.2 During this period 5 **Learning Reviews** took place. Three reviewed circumstances where transitions ended prior to placement and two related to fostering for adoption when the court determined an alternative plan for the child. See **Annual Report of Disruptions and Learning Reviews 2021-2022**.

11. Complaints, compliments and representations

- 11.1 There was one complaint during this period relating to the delay a family experienced in accessing a specialist assessment for their child. During the same period 53 compliments were received, a summary is attached as Appendix 3.

12. Staff Development and Support

- 12.1 The Workforce Development Plan covers the period 2020 - 2023 and during this period has primarily focused on:
- Working with adopters who are professionals – 25 June 2021 – full-service event
 - Safeguarding children living with foster carers, adopters and special guardians: Learning from Case Reviews 2007-2019.
 - Why We Need to Talk About Neglect? - Mandatory for all social workers.
- 12.2 There have been occasional training and development opportunities for some staff members which have been subject specific, and staff have been encouraged to observe and learn from each other.
- 12.3 Teams and individuals also have regular consultation with a DDP Consultant to focus on incorporating DDP into practice and since October 2021 training plans have been developed as part of the ACE Clinical Psychology Service.

13. Overall impact and future plans

- 13.1 ACE is an established regional adoption agency now entering its 5th year. It has:
- A brand identity and has relaunched its website in 2021.
 - Achieved DDP certification, maintains and promotes DDP informed practices.
 - Embedded early permanence – fostering for adoption.
 - Continued to place most children with ACE approved adopters.

- Widened the range of support services available to adoptive families including the ACE Clinical Psychology Service.
- Maintained diversity in its recruitment of adoptive families.
- Developed a comprehensive post approval training package for adoptive parents.
- Continued to engage with adopters as key stakeholders including an annual survey.
- Strengthened quality assurance through revisions to the governance arrangements and the introduction of file auditing processes.

13.2 During 2021/2022 the service was delivered over the allocated budget and reserves were drawn upon. The financial demand and costs were in respect of interagency placement budget and a strategy going forward is to be addressed by the ACE Executive Board. This will be an ongoing area of pressure.

13.3 Areas for further development in 2022-2023 are:

Service level plans

- To explore opportunities for adoptive parents to support the training and development of prospective and approved adopters.
- To implement a range of measures to capture the views of children and young people about the services received and to facilitate their contribution to service delivery.
- To support measures that change the approach to contact in adoption including Practice Guidance on Contact. To consider skills-based training on assessing and implementing contact plans for social workers.
- To extend and deliver a range of training and learning opportunities for local authority social workers on:
 - (i) Permanence through adoption (regional training)
 - (ii) Child Permanence Reports (local authority specific training)
 - (iii) Contact and identity in adoption (regional training)
 - (iv) Preparing children for adoption and life story work and books (regional training)
 - (v) Care planning - considering the permanency options (regional and LA specific)
 - (vi) Supporting foster carer to prepare child for adoption and understanding the adoption process (local authority specific training)
 - (vii) Early Permanence through Fostering for Adoption (LA specific training)
 - (viii) Family finding, matching and supporting children in their adoptive home (regional training).
- To work with local authority partners to achieve the Early Permanence Quality Mark. **See Appendix 4.**

- To consider how our DDP approaches are inclusive and respect cultural sensitivity and differences.
- To use opportunities to innovate practice around fostering for adoption to include training and support around parental contact.
- Implementing mandatory training for Fostering for Adoption applicants and those considering priority children.

Recruitment plans

- To implement the Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency Plan looking at recruitment from diverse communities, for sibling groups and children with health/developmental needs.
- To receive 600 enquiries about adoption and assess 100 households within improved timescales.
- To reduce reliance on interagency placements to 12%.
- To introduce measures to monitor the timeliness between the adoption decision for a child and matching – the National minimum Adoption Standards introduce a 6-month timescale.
- To work across the West Midlands in further embedding and raising standards of practice around fostering for adoption.

Support plans

- To maintain adoption disruption levels to below 2% of placements.
- To put in place support through the provision of the **Enhanced Support Scheme** and extending support and training family and friends.
- To explore assessment, support and services where foetal alcohol syndrome is or may be evident, are enhanced including the provision of information for adoptive parents.
- To strengthen relationships and partnership working to ensure that the mental health needs of adopted children are recognised and considered in service planning and delivery.
- To pilot the use of outcome assessment tools in the delivery of therapeutic interventions.
- To introduce the revised Spoke Duty process.
- To extend adopted young people support groups across the region.
- To extend birth parents support groups across the region.

14. Conclusion

14.1 The most significant achievements during the past year have been ongoing recruitment, matching and placement of children for adoption during coronavirus restrictions that have required a flexible approach to working practices. The service has met its targets in many areas (See **ACE Service**

Improvement Plan 2021-2022). The service has responded to heightened needs of adoptive parents whose children are showing greater levels of mental health needs. Relationships with virtual schools across the region are well established and the ACE Clinical Psychology Service adds to the range of support services available. ACE has supported staff to develop greater expertise in sensory integration therapy and this will be incorporated more widely into practice, alongside the support available from the two staff who have achieved their Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work.

14.2 ACE is pleased with the ongoing engagement of adoptive parents in the service, the respectable response to the annual survey and the launch of the website which has been positively received.

14.3 As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has lessened ACE is moving towards more face-to-face engagement with prospective and approved adopters and their children. ACE is embracing the philosophy of agile working for ACE staff, at the same time as encouraging regular and meaningful engagement with each other. These provide important opportunities for supporting and motivating each other to deliver the best possible service and response to all the various ACE service users and stakeholders.

Brenda Vincent - Lead Manager
Adoption Central England

Clinical Psychology Report



Phoenix%20Psychology%20ACE%20Feedback:

Appendix 2

Report against the Service Improvement areas for 2021 - 2022

Action	Update	Rating
To launch the updated ACE website incorporating podcasts illustrating different areas of the service and experiences and reflecting the ACE ethos.	The ACE website has been updated and relaunched	Completed
To act on the findings of file auditing processes across the service.	Case file auditing has been introduced and the first report received. Further amendments are required to the auditing templates	Ongoing
To use recruitment opportunities to establish a more diverse workforce if possible.	ACE has enjoyed relative staff stability so there has been limited recruitment opportunities. This requires ongoing attention	Progressing
To update the Equality Impact Assessments.	Separate EIAs have been completed for the Hub and Spokes	Completed
To appoint a clinical psychologist to the service.	The ACE Clinical Psychology has been in pace since 1.10.2021	Completed
To progress the BLM action plan.	ACE continues to review, monitor and review the progress of its BLM action plan	Ongoing
To disseminate our learning about the DDP certification process.	ACE has offered opportunities to provide advice and support both within the region and within the wider adoption sector	Ongoing
To explore opportunities for adoptive parents to be recruited as trainers within the service.	Adoptive parents support training events, and this action is under review	Progressing
To implement measures to gain the views of children and young people about the services received.	Connections have been made with adopted young people and their support groups are re-establishing post covid. Also changes to the assessment of need processes will be placing a stronger emphasis on the views of adopted children and young people.	Ongoing
To support measures that change the approach to contact in adoption including Practice	Tools have been introduced and this remains a focus of attention within	Progressing

Guidance on Contact and to give consideration to skills-based training on assessing and implementing contact plans for social workers	ACE and with local authority partners. Training is due to be delivered to social workers and practice guidance is still be developed.	
To implement the Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency Plan looking at recruitment from diverse communities, for sibling groups and children with health/developmental needs. To receive 600 enquiries about adoption.	The recruitment strategy has focussed on priority areas and most ACE children have had families identified for them. However, ACE has received fewer adopter enquiries during this period.	Ongoing
To recruit 100 household and improve adopter approval timescales	ACE did not meet the recruitment set - the impact of the coronavirus is a factor, coupled delays in receiving references and complex issues to be addressed within adopter assessments.	Progressing
To continue to work with the local authorities in reducing delay in placing children from the point that the placement order has been granted by the court.	Effective arrangements are in place for tracking children and progressing adoption plans. Timescales have been affected by court delays and issues arising in the planning for children	Ongoing
To further increase and embed fostering for adoption setting targets for both ACE and local authorities	In partnership with the local authorities ACE has successfully placed an increasing number of children on a FfA basis	Ongoing
To extend placement choice for children by working with regional partners through the Midlands Together Collaboration.	The Midlands Together Collaboration arrangements have become embedded and there is evidence that interagency placements are more likely to be secured within the Midlands region.	Ongoing
To reduce reliance on interagency placements to 12%.	Interagency usage increased during this period – however positively more children with priority needs have secured families. The impact of this is to be considered in the 2022-2023 Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency strategy	Requires attention
To offer a surgery style service to adoptive parents about 'talking' about adoption and life story books.	This service is available to adoptive parents by the Therapeutic Life Story Work trained social workers	Completed
To publish the updated Adoption Support Offer.	Completed and on the ACE website	Completed
To reduce adoption disruption to below 2% of placements	Achieved – 2 disruptions concerning 3 children. One interagency placement of 2 children and a single child placed with ACE adopters	Achieved
To put in place support through the provision of respite/day care support drawing upon the potential of family and friends	Strategy in place to develop training and support for family and friends and enhanced support care for adoptive families.	Progressing

<p>To draw together and produce and publish the ACE training programme for adopters that will include a range of training opportunities including webinars and podcasts e.g. Principles of PACE</p>	<p>A comprehensive training programme is now available through the ACE website</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>To act on the findings of the ACE Annual Adopter Survey.</p>	<p>The survey identified 4 main areas for attention that have all progressed well during this period. The areas for attention were contact/letterbox, timeliness of adoption support, training opportunities and across agency working</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Practices around assessment, support and services where FAS is or maybe evident are enhanced including information for adoptive parents.</p>	<p>This has not progressed due to the interagency nature of the activity and will need to be considered further with health partners</p>	<p>Requires attention</p>
<p>In partnership with other services, to explore how support for families where mental health issues feature can be improved.</p>	<p>This in part has been achieved through the ACE Clinical Psychology Service. However, the mental health needs of adopted children still need to be more recognised within CAMHS provision</p>	<p>Progressing</p>

ALISON - I really appreciate your support and guidance, thank you for talking over the possible issues with me this morning before my meeting with the family - it would have been far less productive. As you have less contact with the families you may not always feel the positive impact/intervention but you do make a positive difference thanks for your time and wisdom

HANNAH - We couldn't have asked for a better social worker. You are fantastic at your job, so kind, thorough and supportive - thank you for making our dreams come true, we will be forever grateful to you

LOUISE AND MELISSA - Thank you for the presentation last night. It was the perfect balance of information and professionalism but with a lot of passion and emotion, we came away knowing so much more about the process and what the team is like and how deeply you feel about adoption

RUBA - Thank you for allowing me to call if I ever need to and for offering that support to me, also for understanding my frustrations and the fact I do find things difficult to deal with at times. You done more than enough to help me and that means a lot Thank you

H shared how supportive GAYE has been and how 'she is always there and responsive'

KATIE - I just wanted to thank you for the sensitive way you dealt with my enquiry

'A' shared with me the many challenges she is having accessing support and how Leah has been her 'rock' and really doesn't know how she would have got through these last months without her consistently advocating for her family and getting to know them. They feel seen and heard

I want to compliment Danielle on sorting a Mosaic query for me when I was on duty. Despite Danielle being busy all day she took the time to respond to my query and sort it out as soon as possible which then helped to save any unnecessary delay for the next duty worker

Feedback in a meeting today about how RAJ's intervention had been (or at least attempted, female adopter not willing to engage) with the adopters on her case that is about to disrupt, both in terms of how quickly she got on board and her intervention

NICKI - S has written o me to highlight the invaluable help and support you have recently provided and I wanted to thank you and your colleagues so much on both his and my own behalf. It is clear you have offered a compassionate, caring and professional service which has enabled the experience of contact through the Letterbox scheme - Jesse Norman, Member of Parliament

SHAIFALI - We as a family wanted to thank you for supporting us through the process. We appreciate all the hard work you have done in the report and making this adoption possible. You have shown great kindness and understanding towards us

Extremely helpful and considerate SALLY is great to go through the documents with . she is both professional and encouraging and interested in the information

JESSICA - is the most competent social worker we have ever met, she was always professional, understanding, caring and friendly. We felt in good hands with her. She understood our family and was able to help us improve as adoptive parents, we always felt she had our back. She has outstanding communication skills and in our view Jessica is one in a million.

We are just so glad we entered the journey however bumpy and we are so so privileged that you chose us for T. We appreciate all the steps you took to protect us given our previous heart ache and loss. We have no regrets. With all our thanks for what you do. Katie and Alison and the service of ACE - you are all stars in our eyes

I am not sure how many of your team stay well past 5pm on a Friday but this is exactly what Melissa H did - she is a real asset to your team, and I wanted to formally record this fact

ROSIE - went out of her way and was very supportive. There were details in my birth records which I was unaware of which was most helpful. The follow up call was so important to me. This is a very good service

'A' speaks very highly of LEAH, she feels understood, supported, and connected to Leah, she trusts her and appreciates everything she does for her

I observed ACE Panel yesterday and it was useful, firstly there were discussions about DDP questions - which was really interesting and would be good to discuss with ADMS generally at the regional meeting, as we need to understand this more to support my questioning within ADM

SHARMAINE - is brilliant her help is much appreciated

KAREN has been amazing over the last 2 weeks. Her support has kept us going. She understood where we were emotionally and ensured that we were looked after. She checked in with us frequently. We often had no words to describe how we were but she was just 'there' supporting us and seemed to understand. We took great strength from her support

This is from the adoptive father after the meet up with birth mum..... Thank you so much for organising the meet up with J. It went well and was better than expected. The way in which it was possible for us all to interact with each other in a very natural way shows great sensitivity on the part of both of Beth and Michelle. I am sure there are always uncertainties with such matters but in fact it was a very successful visit

From ACE we have received support and advice via LARA who has great understanding of the boys difficulties, school support and the demands this puts on us emotionally, physically and financially. The availability to have Lara available to talk through situations has been invaluable.

AMANDA B - has been unfailingly helpful and we really appreciate the way she has supported us. She's a great listener and we value her input and experience

I was very impressed by the way panel works, with empathy to support the prospective adopters, sensitive preparation with framing and asking questions and deciding if they would be directed at the applicants or social works. I think the thorough and in-depth exploration and examination of aspects of the assessment of the adopters and of the match between the adopters and the child helped the panel members to make well informed balanced recommendations.

EMILY - once we are over the line as approved adopters we really look forward to sharing our journey with you. We couldn't have hoped for a better social worker to take us on

SHAIFALI - has been brilliant and we find her support invaluable

<https://quality-mark.earlypermanence.org.uk>