



Southend Adoption Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2013

Welcome from Southend Adoption Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present the Southend Adoption Service Annual Report for 2013. We have had another busy year. The service has continued to place a number of children with new families both within the Partners in Adoption consortium and outside and has also been very successful in selling more of our adopters to raise income which can then be used to better support Southend children, moving to adoption. Our commitment to quality and the best outcomes for children remains our priority focus. The SPARKLES parent and toddler group has gone from strength to strength and has become embedded in what we do, often having over 20 children attending at any one time. We have continued to run our own post adoption support group in response to consultation which is again going from strength to strength.

Our Ethos

We strive to provide opportunities for children and young people to have secure futures and to find safe, high quality adoptive placements where this is required for children who cannot return to their birth families.

We work closely with our partner agencies and birth families to ensure that we achieve the best outcomes for all young people.

I am pleased to say that throughout 2013, placement stability in adoptive placements has been maintained with no disruptions this year.

Highlights

The Christmas party and summer post adoption events have been a great success and were enjoyed by all who attended and have really helped to build on the joint initiatives with Havering & Thurrock, our consortium partners.

Barnardos becoming members of the Consortium has been a great asset.

Looking forward

For 2014 we are committed to building on the success of 2013. We will continue to offer a quality service which is value for money with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for Southend Looked after Children.

We aim to:

- Develop further post adoption support work
- develop further family intervention work
- continue to develop the adoption consortium.
- develop further income generating schemes



Diane Keens
Group Manager
Placements & Resources

Southend Adoption Service

Purpose of this report

The provision, standard and operations of the Adoption service are governed by:

- The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 (Updated 2005 & 2013)
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011 and the
- Adoption minimum Standards 2011

National Minimum Standard 25.6 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority

- a) receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency
- b) monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users

The aim of this report is to provide the information required to enable the Executive side of the Council to fulfil its duties in this respect.

Overview

The past year has seen further developments in the adoption service, leading to increased income generation.

Jo Hines, Team Manager, has continued to encourage and support innovation and training, leading to staff being equipped to support adoptive families in Southend in a more proactive way.

Staffing has remained very stable, but there has been a temporary addition of two qualified staff, funded by the adoption grant, which has enabled an increase in the number of prospective adopters being approved by Southend.

Southend have continued to work closely with the Department for Education, looking at recruitment of adopters and reviewing new adoption processes.

The move to Civic has proven to be a fantastic opportunity for closer working with the children's social workers and has allowed the adoption team to be

fully involved at a very early stage with decisions affecting children and has contributed to timescales for placing children for adoption to be greatly reduced this financial year.

Statistics for past twelve months

- Numbers of adopters approved : 27 (*23 in 2012*)
- Numbers of children referred for adoption: 38 (*36 in 2012*)
- Number of children matched with new families: 25 (*13 in 2012*)
- Number of Adoption orders made: 14 (*17 in 2012*)

Dear Aimee

Words cannot explain how grateful I am. Thank you so very much for bringing Megan into my life. I am such a happy mummy. Thank you so much for your support and care.

Prospective adopter February 2013

Dear Faye

Thank you so much for all your help and support over our adoption process. We don't know what we would have done without you and we will be forever grateful.

Thank you

Adoptive parents August 2013

The Government in 2012 introduced an Adoption Scorecard to track timescales for children awaiting adoption. This scorecard tracks over a three year average. In 2012/13 the average time between a child entering care and moving in with adopters was 605 days, by the September 2013 scorecard, this had increased slightly to 639 days.

Of those children placed since April 2013 however, who will begin to be reported as part of future scorecards the average time between Placement

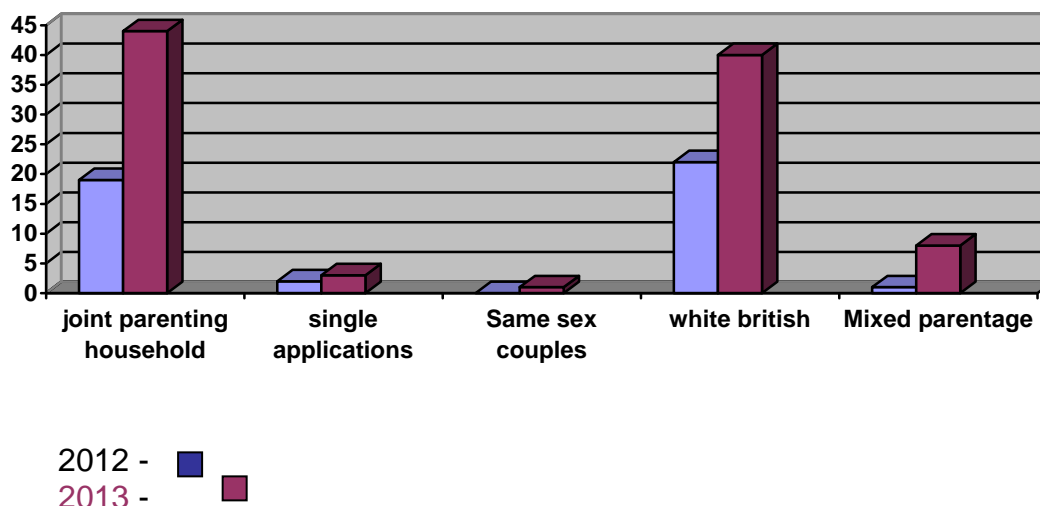
Order and Matching with adopters has reduced from 220 days to 95 and between entering care and being placed for adoption, from 639 to 569. This should therefore begin to show in the 2014 scorecard. This is a fantastic achievement by all involved and means that Southend children are being placed into their new families much quicker, preventing undue delay.

Recruitment; training and assessment

In the past twelve months we have received over 76 (*69 in 2012*) requests for adoption information. All packs were sent out within 24 hours of request. Up until July 2013 we had undertaken 20 initial visits. The Government then introduced new procedures and since then we have had 41 families expressing an interest in adoption. 48 Families have attended workshops in the past twelve months.

Since the introduction of a new 2 stage process, Southend have been exceptionally busy and in October 2013 had 14 families under assessment with a further 11 awaiting workshops. Between April & October 2013, 15 adoptive families were approved (*only 22 were approved in the whole of 2012/13*).

Of the households who have proceeded to workshops the following breakdown is found:



Of the households approved by Southend, there are currently 5 households available on the Consortium register, with a further 10 families due for approval by the end of 2013. During 2012, Southend set up it's own post adoption group outside of the consortium. This was in response to consultation with our adoptive families who were not attending the post adoption group held in Thurrock by the consortium. Southend adopters asked for a local group and since it was set up, this has been very well attended and has received excellent feedback. This group has gone from strength to strength in 2013.

Adoption Panel

In 2013 we ran 13 Adoption panels. The role of the panel in Preferred Option decision making changed in late 2012 and is now undertaken solely by the Adoption Decision Maker, outside of the panel remit. The following statistics are available from the work of these panels:

- PAR's (Prospective adopters report) presented (general approval): 24 in 2013 *(20 in 2012)*.
- PAR's presented (for a specific child): 3 *(3 in 2012)*
- PAR's presented (Overseas adoption): 0 *(0 in 2011)*
- Children presented to ADM for Preferred option: 34 to end October 2013 *(20 in 2012)*
- Children for matching with adopters: 25 *(13 in 2012)*
- Number of disruptions: 0 *(0 in 2012)*

To our dear Jo

We feel very blessed to have 3 fantastic children and to have such a lovely, hardworking and loyal family friend by our side once more. Thanks for your continued loyalty and support over the years.

Love and friendship and big respect.

Warren & Stuart (adopters following placement of a daughter third time around) September 2013

Post Adoption Services

Post adoption services have continued to develop during the past year. This continues to be a growing area of work.

We continue to run two post adoption groups. One is our post approval group, for all approved adopters who have not yet been linked with a child. This is run jointly across the consortium and allows us to offer ongoing training and to share profiles.

The Southend post adoption group continues to go from strength to strength and is very much adopter led with training and speakers as requested.

The post adoption group continues to allow us the opportunity to identify stresses within certain placements at an earlier stage and to pick up and undertake direct work with the family before breaking point has been reached.

Where preschool children are placed for adoption in Southend we encourage families to attend SPARKLES. SPARKLES is a group in which adopters are shown and encouraged to play with their own child using theraplay techniques, a therapeutic approach that promotes the development of attachment relationships. This group continues to grow and has recently had to be split into two groups due to the demand for this.

SPARKLES has added benefits as adopters who meet each other have often gone on to develop supportive relationships and networks.

The letterbox contact system continues to develop and we are currently supporting over 170 contact plans, in several cases this includes direct contact.

At Southend Adoption Service we recognise that when a child joins an adoptive family it is not only the immediate family that are impacted, but also their extended families and networks. In 2011 we piloted an information sharing evening for this group which also focused on how they could in turn provide practical support. We have continued to run this group which is well attended and has already proven a great success in supporting a placement where difficulties did arise and we were able to tap into the extended support who felt that the training had given them the understanding to help. Some families have such large support networks that a whole meeting for one family has been arranged.

Birth Parent Support Group

We have through 2012/13 continued to run the group which directly supports birth families who have been affected by adoption. The Birth parent group meets on a monthly basis in a local community centre. We have found that the quantity and quality of letters received has continued to improve and has allowed some children to receive contact with birth families that they otherwise would have missed.

The group remains small but we have come to recognise that this is viewed more as a drop in. We advertise the group in local community areas to ensure that as many families as possible can be supported. We have been able to support several young mums through a second pregnancy and have been able to continue to support several very vulnerable parents, post adoption.

These simple words of thanks have been written just for you, for you have shown such kindness and have helped me so much too. Simply saying thank you fails somehow to convey how the caring you have shown. It sometimes isn't easy to express how someone has touched our lives and brought such happiness.

From an adopted adult who was reunited with their birth parent (April 2013)

Schedule 2 & Birth Relative Initiated Contact

Possibly influenced by all the media interest and TV programmes like 'Who do You Think You Are' this is an area of work that continues to grow. BRIC (Birth Relative Initiated Contact) is where birth families express an interest in making contact with an adopted adult, whilst Schedule 2 is where an adopted adult requests their adoption records and often support in tracing their birth family.

In 2013 we have so far worked with over 27 people who were trying to trace information about their own adoption. 13 birth parents tracing an adopted adult and continue to work with 19 families who have adopted and require additional support. We have successfully reunited a number of people and continue to support many as they develop long lost relationships and make sense of their past.

Other work

During 2013, Southend have looked at a number of ways to increase potential income generation. Through the sale of adoptive families on the National Register, the adoption team have managed between April and October 2013 to generate nearly £100K. The estimated income for 2013/14 is over £177K. This is expected to increase further over the next 12 months, due to an increase in the interagency amounts charged nationally and the number of adopters currently being considered by external agencies.

Appendix 1

This enables the adoption service to where necessary purchase specialist placements for some of our harder to place children and to purchase additional support as required.

Work was undertaken to look at the possibility of creating a Public Service Mutual Private Adoption Agency, but following evaluation it was agreed that this would not benefit the local authority and other routes to continuing the current successful income generation are currently being pursued.