



Southend Adoption Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Welcome from Southend Adoption Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present the Southend Adoption Service Annual Report for 2015. We have had another busy year. The service has continued to place a number of children with new families 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 preschool group has gone from strength to strength and has become embedded in what we do, at times having over 20 children attending at any one time. We have continued to run our own post adoption training and support group and birth parent drop-in, both growing and developing. A therapeutic residential weekend for adoptive families was a great success.

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 2015, placement stability in adoptive placements has been maintained with no disruptions this year whilst timescales have continued to tumble allowing children to be in their new families at an earlier stage.

Highlights

The Christmas party and summer post adoption events have been a great success and were enjoyed by all who attended. A therapeutic residential weekend allowed us to re-engage with families of older children who are struggling with adolescence and adoption.

Looking forward

For 2016 we are committed to building on the success of 2015. 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
- develop further income generating schemes

There are massive changes in the pipeline with the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies and the impact of these on local authorities are as yet unclear.



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 & 2014)
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011 and the
- Adoption minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning, placement & case review 2014

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/ acting Service 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.

With a push by the Government in respect of post adoption services, Southend have developed some innovative programmes to support adopters with children approaching adolescence, where issues of adoption become to the fore and with a rise in social media, the issues have increased.

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

On 1st April 2014, the Partners in Adoption consortium formally ceased, so this is the first report that shows statistics for a full 12 months outside of this consortium. Southend did join the larger East Anglian Consortium during 2014, however with current changes nationally in adoption service delivery, it is likely that this consortium will cease during the coming year as Regional Adoption Agencies are developed.

It continues to be a time of continual change for adoption services, whilst demand for services, particularly post adoption, sees a dramatic increase.

Statistics for past twelve months

(from 1.10.14 - 30.9.15)

- Numbers of adopters approved : 33 (37 in 2014)
- Numbers of children referred for adoption: 37 (36 in 2014)
- Number of children matched with new families: 19 (19 in 2014)
- Number of Adoption orders made: 24 (15 in 2014)

Hi Diane (Bowden)

*Please can I take this opportunity to thank you all for the course.
The way you made me feel; the manner in which you approached all
of the subjects and information in such a warm, friendly way was so
helpful.*

*Thank you seems inadequate really, but you really are an amazing
team! :-)*

I'm looking forward to meeting with you on the 10th.

Best regards

Jenny

(Prospective adopter, 24th October 2014)

The Government in 2012 introduced an Adoption Scorecard to track timescales for children awaiting adoption. This scorecard tracks over a three year average. In the scorecard published in December 2014 (see Appendix

1A) the average time between a child entering care and moving in with adopters was 599 (639 previous scorecard) days. The National Average for the same period was 628 days and for our statistical neighbours was 601 days. By the 1st October 2015, the three year average had dropped to 394 days. The 2015 scorecard will be published in January 2016.

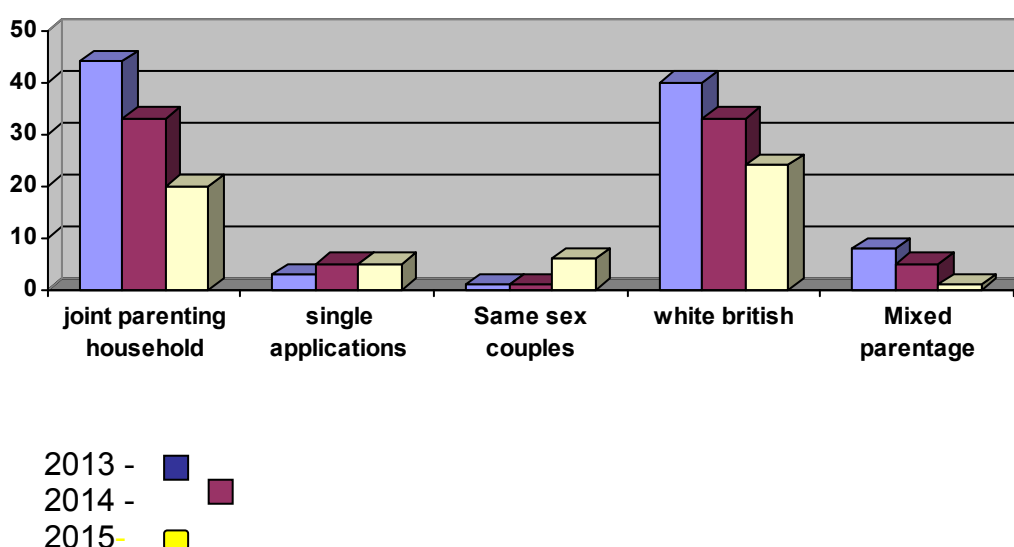
Of those children placed since April 2015 however, who will begin to be reported as part of future scorecards the average time between entering care and being placed for adoption has reduced from 334 to 329 days. This should therefore begin to show in the 2016 scorecard. This is a fantastic achievement 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 103 (*104 in 2014*) requests for adoption information. All packs were sent out within 24 hours of request. Up until 30th September 2015, 35 (*74 in 2014*) families attended information events. 25 (*38 in 2014*) 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 2015 had 13 families under assessment with a further 7 families awaiting workshops.

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



Of the households approved by Southend, there are currently 31 (19 in 2014) households available on the Southend register, with a further 6 families due for approval by the end of 2015.

Adoption Panel

In 2015 we ran 12 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:

(From 1.10.14- 30.9.15)

- PAR's (Prospective adopters report) presented (general approval): 33 *(37 in 2014)*.
- PAR's presented (for a specific child): 0 *(5 in 2014)*
- PAR's presented (Overseas adoption): 0 *(0 in 2014)*
- Children presented to ADM for Preferred option: 29 *(28 in 2014)*
- Children for matching with adopters: 19 *(19 in 2014)*
- Number of disruptions: 0 *(0 in 2014)*

Ruth has helped us through our adoption process. We now have two beautiful children that we waited so long for. Ruth travelled across the country on numerous occasions to support us in meetings and her knowledge and experience has been so valuable. Recently there has been bad press about social workers and the care of vulnerable children but Ruth and Southend borough council have provided an excellent service to us and many of our friends who have also adopted through Southend.

Nicola R

Adoptive Parent – STARS nomination 2015

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 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..

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

Families who have adopted are encouraged to remain connected to the department in order to access continued support and at any time we have between 20-25 cases specifically open where additional post adoption support is being provided in various capacities. During the past 12 months the team have worked specifically with 39 children had 19 further post adoption requests and undertaken 21 specific post adoption assessments.

In 2015 for the first time we ran a therapeutic residential weekend for adopters of older children, which proved a resounding success. The weekend aimed to introduce the "Just Right State" to families which then continued after the weekend.

Previously therapeutic attachment support was only being accessed by a few families and the adoption team saw the opportunity to add value to their existing services by responding to what they believed to be an increasing need and build the service proposition for a support group. The Southend adoption team proactively put forward the proposal and reached out to families to confirm the need and interest for the group. Every family responded with a high level of interest which was further confirmed following a meeting that was arranged to discuss the specific therapeutic support package that was being developed by the adoption team and to be delivered by in-house LA colleagues trained in therapeutic interventions.

The post-adoption therapeutic support service applied for through the Adoption Support Fund was for a support group for adopted children aged 7-12 years of age. This included: a multidisciplinary package of support, creative therapies, therapeutic parenting and short breaks. Therapeutic support groups are being run for both parents and children.

The sessions are being delivered in house by staff trained in DDP/ Theraplay (level 1 & 2) sensory attachment intervention alongside input from external mental health therapists.

To therapeutically support this age group Southend established a club

Appendix 1

fundamentally based on the principles of Sensory Attachment Integration which in turn helps children to develop their own capacity to self-regulate their own emotional responses. The foundation of the group both for the children and in parallel their parents will utilise the 6 session, Just Right State Programme.

The Just Right State Children's Programme uses 'The Scared Gang' books to help children understand the different survival and attachment patterns of behaviour. The aim is to enable children to become more emotionally aware of themselves and of others, to give them simple tools to help them to self-regulate and achieve the just right state. The Parents Programme enhances parents' awareness of their own engagement patterns and how this impacts on their child's emotional states. It also addresses the underlying reasons for behaviour.

Following the residential weekend, parents have said

'It's been a great bonding weekend, seeing smiles on our kids' faces has been a definite winner'

'My son has been able to experience and learn new skills in a secure and safe environment'

'It is easy to think that once adopters have their child everything will be fine, this event validated our feelings and experiences that parenting a child who has experienced loss and separation is not easy, thank you Southend for acknowledging this and supporting us'

'Great to be in a supportive environment with both professionals and peers, I have more strategies now to try when things gets difficult'

'It's great to find out you are not alone, that many of the issues you see mirrored in other children, our son for the first time I believe truly was able to be himself and relax, we have made great friends and got additional strategies'

Children Said

'I loved being with new friends who have all been what I have been through'

'I loved trying new things which were fun and challenging'

'It was great making friends because I knew they all knew how I really feel'

'I got the chance to do things with my dad that I've always wanted to'

'Doing new things made me feel clever and I'm looking forward to seeing my friends again'

'I loved the weekend because it was fun and I now have a new friends'

The weekend was seen as so innovative by the Adoption Support Fund, that it was subsequently publicised by the fund as evidence of excellent practice nationally.

The letterbox contact system continues to develop and we are currently supporting approximately 220 contact plans, in several cases this includes direct contact.

As young people are themselves approaching maturity we recognise that the need for them to consider how their own history integrates with their experience of adoption is more prominent. In response we contact all our young people and their adoptive parents and offer additional support, in terms of how they would like their letterbox contact to develop and whether any mediation / tracing support is required. In response to the feedback received we now offer a service to continue to facilitate letterbox contact for young people to 21yrs of age when requested.

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. We regularly hold information sharing evenings for this group, to raise their awareness of the challenges adoption can bring and to explore practical support they may in turn be able to offer. The groups are well attended and have already proven a great success in supporting placements where difficulties arise and allows us to tap into the extended support with training to give them the understanding to help. Where families have large support networks or where a child being placed brings additional complexities individual events for families are arranged.

Birth Parent Support Group

We have through 2015 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 seeks to offer birth parents a nurturing experience, eg they are offered warm drinks and toast and in turn they present as less defensive and more open to receiving support.

The group remains small, but growing. 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.

Denise Burgess, our letterbox co-ordinator now takes a lead role in this group and is regularly contacted by some of the more isolated birth parents for advice and support.

Hi Jo,

I wished to send my thanks to you and your team for the activity weekend. I have not laughed like that for a long time!!

Both the kids love seeing Aimee, she is the most constant social worker in their lives and they see her in a positive light. So again for my children the weekend was a very therapeutic space for them to enjoy themselves with people who know about them and understand them so they did not have to worry.

I particularly liked that Ruth was around for the parents during the day and I noticed she provided some practical support on the spot which I hope helped that particular family. Oh and I owe Anna thanks for her own tenacity to get me up and over the bouncy castle steps, she showed great team spirit. I believe she is an asset to your team.

I have an enormous amount of respect for you and believe that you are an inspirational leader for your team and for the children with whom you work with.

Very kind regards to you

*Linda B- adoptive parent
21st September 2015*

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 seek support in tracing their birth family.

In 2015 we at any one time continued to have approximately 20-30 cases open supporting individuals who are trying to trace information about their

own adoption and 10 birth relatives seeking to trace an adopted adult. We have had the privilege of facilitating several reunions and continue to offer support to individuals for as long as they require as they seek to establish new relationships and make sense of their past.

Other work

During 2015, Southend have developed joint projects with education regarding the “Just Right State”. Training has been undertaken with schools so that a number of teachers across the Borough are now trained to run the programme.

Several programmes were initiated in local schools where children both adopted, in foster care and some placed with their birth families joined together in the programme. Schools saw a real benefit in this for the children concerned. In 2016 it is hoped that we will run similar programmes through Marigold for foster carers and develop the project further.

In addition a Non Violent Resistance (NVR) course was run in October 2015 including adoption, IYSS, fostering and schools and it is intended that this programme will also develop further into 2016.

Mindfulness Meditation Training in which students will learn about the importance of being in the present moment (the now), bringing about feelings of acceptance and not judging analysing experiences so much in our day to day life, and not always feeling the need to have answers, and instead just being in the moment. It is learning to feel connected with everything and balancing your emotions and body systems.

They will learn breathing techniques that help quieten and still your mind, and then learn how to actually listen to your own body sensations by performing a body scan technique.

They will learn daily exercises to practise each week to start to reap the benefits of a calmer, more still mind, a happier more contented mind, balanced feelings and emotions and have more quality time in their lives, more meaningful life and to be more in tune with their actual body sensations and tensions, and therefore learn techniques to relax muscles and release tension in both mind and body.

This course recognises that in order to manage the continuous challenge of being parents the parents themselves need to be valued and develop strategies and this is something we have made an opportunity for.

The Adoption future

In June 2015 the Government released a document entitled Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA). This was produced without warning or consultation and was generally a total shock to the adoption community nationally.

This paper introduced the idea of large Regional Adoption Agencies, running adoption services for a number of local authorities.

The impact of these changes, should they occur, could transform the way that adoption services are run nationally. At the time of writing this report, it remains unclear as to the structure and governance of any potential RAA and will be monitored closely throughout 2016.