BERKSHIRE ADOPTION ADVISORY SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2013-2014

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement funded by The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Slough Borough Council. It was established in 1998, is hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and operates from a base in Windsor.

Current Team:

Alyson Graham – Service Manager Gill Black – Acting Adoption Consultant

Vacancy - Project worker, contact and birth relative's (part -time)

Mick Bradshaw – Project worker, contact and birth relatives (Full time)

Gemma Bousfield—Administrator (full time)

Denise Bance – Clerical Assistant for training and Information Exchange (part-time)

Dr. Gill Clark – Record Officer for closed looked after children and adoption files (1 day per week from Darwin Close, Reading)

Roles and responsibilities of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS):

- The management, training, recruitment and co-ordination of Berkshire Joint Adoption Panels
- The Management of the Berkshire Information Exchange Service (Letterbox), including undertaking relevant administrative and professional tasks
- The provision of telephone advice on enquiries covering all aspects of adoption
- The provision of quality practice and procedural advice to unitary staff, managers and adoption panel members on complex adoption issues, including the dissemination of information
- The management of the Berkshire database of closed 'Looked After' and Adopted Children's files pre -1992, supported by a limited social work service
- Providing assistance with staff, carer and panel members training needs
- Providing assistance with complaints relating to adoption
- Chairing adoption disruption meetings
- The co-ordination of information regarding waiting adopters and children needing families
- The management of the Birth Relative Service, including undertaking relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption
- The management of post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement

- The provision of support and financial assistance to specific pan Berkshire adoption support initiatives, where each unitary takes the lead on one shared aspect of adoption support. (These initiatives may change according to need and in agreement with the Consortium adoption teams)
- Fund and organise the following:
 - Two years membership of Adoption UK for all prospective adopters approved by Berkshire Consortium of Adoption Agencies
 - o Arrange and fund annual adopter's conference or equivalent

THE BERKSHIRE ADOPTION ADVISORY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

Introduction

The profile of adoption has continued to grow throughout this past year, particularly in the public arena where many changes have been highlighted. The Children and Families Act 2014 (given royal assent on the 13th March 2014) introduces a number of reforms relating to adoption and is intended to enable positive change to all areas of the adoption process, and to prevent delay for children.

The key areas related to adoption include:

- The Act requires local authorities to consider placing children with family and friends carers in the first instance but if this is not appropriate then attempts must be made to place a child in a foster to adopt arrangement with approved adopters
- It repeals the requirement that 'due consideration' is given to children's racial, religious, cultural or linguistic background when matching them with adopters in an attempt to reduce the time that black and minority ethnic children wait for an adoptive placement
- Adoption and Contact register It is now a duty for adoption agencies to refer prospective adopters to the Register within 3 months of approval. There will also be a pilot scheme whereby adopters themselves will be able to access the Register to promote earlier matches for children.
- Post Adoption Contact Contact Orders come into force in April 2014 and deal with change in contact arrangements, both the making and prohibiting of contact, prior to, and after Adoption Orders have been granted.
- From April 2015 adopters can share parental leave around their child's
 placement and adoption leave and pay will reflect the entitlements
 available to birth parents. From 30 June 2014 flexible leave requests are
 also extended to all employees with a duty on an employer to consider
 requests in a 'reasonable' manner.
- Adoption agencies are required to inform adoptive parents about the adoption support services available locally, their right to request an assessment for adoption support and the support the council is required to provide

- Pupil Premium from April 2014, schools in England can receive additional funding through the Pupil Premium Plus for children adopted from care on or after 2005
- From 22 April 2014 the Public Law Outline, introduced in July last year, will come into proper effect to reduce the duration of care proceedings

The implementation of the Act will bring a number of challenges for all local authorities particularly in relation to the foster to adopt agenda. This has been further complicated during the past year with case law (Re:BS) stating that adoption should be 'a last resort' resulting in some tension between the interpretation of the law and the government agenda to increase the use of adoption for children who cannot remain with birth family.

It is against this background that last year the number of children with an adoption plan across the consortium fell for the first time in three years, a decrease of 22% on the previous year. It would appear however that this is consistent with the national picture given that the Department for Education quarterly adoption survey, up to December 2013, identified that overall decisions on adoption had decreased by 21%. Matches with adopters increased by 19% and 25% more adopters were approved across the consortium.

The Consortium of Berkshire Adoption Agencies is now in its thirteenth operational year and continues to work collaboratively to support the early placement of children and provide opportunities for joint training and the provision of a range of adoption support services.

Consortium Placements

In the last year panel time was needed for 85 presentations of children for matching with adopters. Eleven matches were withdrawn prior to presentation. This is a high number of withdrawals and what has become clear is that in an attempt to place children quickly matches booked into panels were not ready to be heard. Securely matching children with adopters is one of the most challenging areas of this work and making sure that prospective adopters have access to all the information required, have met the necessary professionals and are ready to take on their role as parents is essential not just in the short term but in relation to the long term stability of adoptive placements.

In all, 74 individual children's matches were considered by the joint panels and agreed by the Agency Decision Makers. This is an increase of 19% on the previous year. No matches were deferred.

Of the 74 children who were matched for adoption, 41 (56%) were matched with prospective adopters approved by their placing agency in comparison to 40% last year and 17 (23%) children were matched with consortium adopters not

approved by their own agency, in comparison to 32% last year. In total (79%) of children were matched within the consortium. 3 (4%) children were matched with adopters from a voluntary agency in comparison to 13% last year and 12 (16%) with adopters from other local authorities, up just 1% on the previous year.

Adopters

During the last year panel time was required for 92 sets of adopters. Two were initially deferred for further information, later returned and were subsequently recommended for approval. Seven sets of adopters were withdrawn before being presented.

In all, 83 sets of prospective adopters were recommended to their agency during the year, an increase of 27.7% on the previous year when 65 were recommended for approval and an increase of 118.4% on 2011-2012 when only 38 were recommended for approval.

Most adopters (84%) were male/female couples, four (5%) were same sex couples, three male and one female, and nine (11%) were single females. Of the single women approved for adoption, 5 (56%) were approved for specific children, 2 for foster children and 3 for related children.

All adopters presented to panel were subsequently approved by their Agency Decision Maker.

Although adopters are recommended only to adopt, panel gave advice to the agencies on the ages, sex, and numbers of children for whom adopters should be considered, consistent with their wishes. This supports the early identification of children for whom they wish to be considered.

The panel advice was as follows:

- 74 (89%) wished to adopt one child, of these:
 - o 5 (7%) wished to adopt a family member
 - o 7 (9%) were foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care
 - 5 (7%) were second time adopters, four of whom wished to a adopt the sibling of their adopted child
- 19 (23%) wished to adopt up to 2 siblings
- 23 (28%) linked the age of the child they wished to adopt to the age of their birth or adopted child or to specific related or fostered children
- 7(8%) wished to be considered for children under the age of 2 years
- 13 (16%) wished to adopt a child under three years
- 19 (23%) wished to adopt a child under 4 years (preschool)
- 6 (7%) wished to adopt children under 5 years
- 8 (10%) would consider adopting children under 6 years
- 3 (4%) would consider children under 7 years

- 3 (4%) would consider children under 8 years
- 1 (1%)would consider children aged 5 to 10 years
- No adopters wished to be considered for more than two children

The ethnicity of prospective adopters was as follows:

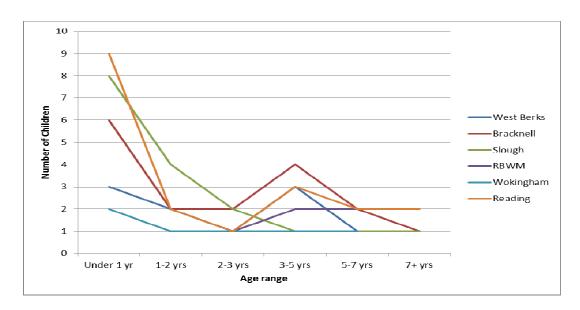
- 66 (80%) described themselves as White, from a British, European or other background including South Africa, America, Germany, France, Italy and Ireland
- 8 (10%%) were from dual heritage backgrounds where one partner was white and the other partner was black or minority ethnic heritage
- 3 (4%)couples were British Black Caribbean
- 1 couple were British Pakistani and 1 couple were British Indian

Children for adoption

A total of 77 individual children were considered by the Agency Decision Makers for a decision that they should be adopted. Only one child was presented to adoption panel. 73 of these children were subsequently made the subject of a Placement Order, one returned home and three were made subject to Special Guardianship Orders at the final hearing.

The following figures relate to the 77 children at the time when a decision on adoption was sought.

- 31 (40%) were children aged under one year, a decrease of 1% from the previous year. For the second year running the number of children under one year has been maintained at this level.
- 11 (14%) children were aged between 12 and 24 months, down 1% on the previous year
- In all 42 (54%) children were under 2 years, a slight decrease on the previous year
- 14 (18%)were children aged between 3 and 5 years
- 74(75%) of the children were aged 5 years
- 9(12%) were children aged 5 to 7 years
- 4 (5%) of the children were aged over 7 years
- The oldest child with an adoption plan was aged 8 years 2 months
- There were 5 sibling groups of four children and 3 sibling groups of two
 including one set of twins. This is a considerable change from the previous
 year when there was one sibling group of 4, 4 sibling groups of three and
 8 sibling pairs.



In terms of ethnicity and heritage 69% of the children, where both parents were known, were described as white British. 28%% of the children were from a dual heritage background, 38% of these children had at least one parent who was white British, 24% had one Asian Pakistani parent, 10% had an Asian Indian parent, 19% had one parent from another European heritage (Polish, Portuguese, Traveller), 29% had a black African Caribbean parent. One child had parents who were British Pakistani, and one had Black African Caribbean parents. Other children came from a diverse range of dual heritage and black and minority ethnic backgrounds including Jamaican, Afghani and Anglo Indian.

The adoption panel gives quality assurance feedback on every case presented and this is sent to the Agency Decision Maker for comment and for sharing with individual workers and their managers as appropriate. Comments on the feedback from the Agency Decision Maker are subsequently shared with the panel when these are returned. Individual reports are sent to the six local authorities on a six monthly basis.

On the whole, the standard of reports presented to panel has been of a good standard and the reports are evidence that in the vast majority of cases there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach to the assessment of the suitability of prospective adopters and proposed placements. Only 2 sets of adopters were deferred for further information during the year but were subsequently recommended when they returned to panel. No matches were deferred.

The requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 were met in all cases.

For children in care proceedings, these cases are considered by the Service Manager (Agency Adviser) at the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) and the Legal Adviser, both of whom prepare a short report for the Agency

Decision Maker who makes the decision whether the child should be a child for adoption.

Despite the reduction in the number of children with an adoption plan the quality of Child Permanence Reports (CPR) has been extremely variable and considerable work has been needed to ensure that they are suitable for submission to the Agency Decision Maker. Improving the standard of these reports has proved a challenge given need to produce the CPR report in a shorter timescale following the implementation of the new Public Law Outline, the consequent timetabling of cases in care proceedings and the difficulties in staff recruitment and retention. It is anticipated that the introduction of the new CPR from May 2014 and further training planned to support this will result in improvement over the next six months.

Relinquished children 2013-2014

Reading	Wokingham	W. Berks	Slough	RBWM	Bracknell
0	0	0	1	0	0

There was 1 relinquished child across the consortium area. Children who are considered to be relinquished are those whose parent/parents agree to adoption AND there are no Care Proceedings in process.

Relinquished children account for just 1% of the children for adoption.

Details of panel activity can be found in Appendix A.

Matches that did not proceed to Adoption Order

2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	2010 - 2011	2011- 2012	2012- 2013	2013- 2014
3	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	3	2

In previous years this has been reported as a 'disruption'; however the only recorded figures are those that do not proceed to the adoption order. Disruptions post Adoption Order are not routinely reported to BAAS. They can occur many years after the granting of the Adoption Order. Disruption meetings are held on matches that do not proceed to placement so that lessons can be learnt. In both cases the child was not placed and the decision not to proceed with placement came from the prospective adopters during the introductions. One child returned to her foster carers and was subsequently adopted by them, for the second child, a foster placement is being considered.

Birth Relative Support Service

Mick Bradshaw, Project Worker

Introduction

The Birth Relative Support Service offers an integrated yet independent approach alongside consistent support and information to significant birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for the child. In the main most referrals come from social workers but the service will also accept self referrals, or referrals from other professionals such as Children's Guardians, legal professionals, probation and health.

The last year has seen a significant change in personnel with the retirement of the Adoption Consultant and the Project Worker who both initially helped to establish the birth relative support service. Taking these factors into consideration we have managed to offer support and advice to a record number of birth relatives with an increase of 63% in referral rate this year, compared to last year.

Referrals

Area	2012- 2013	2013-2014
Slough	9	4
RBWM	6	12
Bracknell	4	16
Wokingham	1	8
Reading	14	19
West Berks	7	8
TOTAL	41	67

There are a number of contributing factors for the increase.

- Every team member of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service actively promotes the service at every opportunity to social workers and other professionals.
- Between April 2013 and March 2014 we visited social work teams across
 Berkshire to raise the profile of the service and explain the level of support
 and advice we can offer birth relatives.
- We have distributed hundreds of birth relative leaflets over the year to a
 variety of places including social work teams, probation, support centres
 and services for women, housing support departments and drug and
 alcohol centres. We have designed a new poster that has been circulated
 to the social work teams.

As a non-statutory service we are dependent on how our service is initially promoted to birth relatives by the referring social worker. Therefore, it is fundamental that social workers have a good understanding and accurate knowledge of how our intervention can support the birth relative and how this may ultimately help the child through the adoption process with gathering information for 'life story work', support with 'wish you well' visits, promoting engagement and supporting contact arrangements.

Engagement

The engagement rate between April 2013 and March 2014 was 77% which meant 52 of the 67 people referred to us engaged with the service. This was an increase of 6% from April 2012 and March 2013. This is due to a number of factors.

- Good communication/engagement systems in place and therefore when a referral is made we always endeavour to take the details over the phone there and then.
- Birth relatives are contacted at the earliest opportunity. For the majority of the referrals this has proven to be the best way of setting up that initial contact as they may have recently given their consent to be called and therefore we are fresh in their mind.
- We are tenacious in relation to contacting them either by telephone or letter. If appropriate, we contact them through other family members.
- We always endeavour to do what we say we are going to do. This is in relation to being on time for appointments and getting back to them when we said we would.
- We are flexible in our approach and do not give up trying by offering several opportunities to engage.

Groups

In March 2014 a birth mothers group was started. A number of birth mothers from all unitary authorities were consulted over the preceding three months, in order to obtain their views and ideas on starting a group.

It is hoped that the group will give people the opportunity to talk to other birth mothers in a safe and confidential environment. Areas covered will include; contributing to the letterbox (indirect contact); the adoption process and available services and support from guest speakers. It is anticipated that group members will also contribute to the development and monitoring of the birth relative service

The current birth fathers group will come to a natural conclusion in May 2014. Most of the group members have moved on with their lives and several credit the group with helping them to do so. During its operation group members contributed to research, met with OFSTED inspectors and gave their views on service development. A birth fathers 'drop in' service is planned for 2014 and it is hoped that the group will follow the same format as the women's with guest

speakers and information sharing on support and advice services across the Berkshire area and the opportunity to contribute to service development and monitoring.

Evaluation

Feedback forms are sent to birth relatives after the initial visit and an evaluation form is sent when the work is coming to an end, leading up to their first letterbox contact. Comments can be anonymous by choice or people can include their name. A stamped addressed envelope is included and all responses are sent directly to the Service Manager. Any suggestions for service improvement or development are acted upon. A recent comment suggesting that everyone should know about the service at an earlier stage has prompted consideration of the social work referral process. As a result Independent Reviewing Officers will be supplied with further information and leaflets about the service which can be given to birth parents at the Child Care Review in an effort to encourage earlier referral and engagement.

The aim is for continuous improvement of the service offered and to shape it using the views of the people who use the service. To increase feedback responses, a questionnaire that can be texted and numerically scored on set aspects of the service is being developed, as it is recognised that a majority of the birth relatives would rather text as a means of communication.

Comments from Service users

Brilliant listener, they were calm and reassuring. It was good to have an intermediary between myself and Social Services".- Birth mother

'It was very helpful when I needed someone to talk to. "-

Birth mother

'It was very nice to chat about what has happened and about the adoption process. It has helped me understand a bit more".-Birth father

"I was very pleased with the information and I found the Project Worker to be very pleasant and easy to talk to".-Birth grandmother

All the questions I asked I got an answer for......The service was very helpful considering I was very much against accepting any help to begin with. I was very happy with the approach."- Birth father

CONTACT SERVICES

Gill Black, Acting Adoption Consultant

This year saw the completion of a major and extensive longitudinal research project *Contact After Adoption; A follow up in Later Adolescence* ¹ which provides welcome up to date findings and conclusions regarding contact after adoption. It explored both direct and indirect contact, and gathered information from children and young people, their adoptive parents and birth family members over an extensive time scale.

A distinct key message from the research, from all parties, was that all concerned should think about contact "from the child's point of view"

Adoptive parents felt that for arrangements that have been agreed efforts should be made to ensure they are maintained, to prevent feelings of loss and rejection being triggered again for children. Young people also felt it would be helpful to have answers and reasons why contact had ended.

The report also identified that preparation of prospective adopters would benefit from more specific input regarding contact. Young people reflected that it was better to be open about their past and the information known to adoptive parent. They felt letterbox helps adoptive parents be prepared when they ask questions later in life. They also said they wanted to be reassured that their birth family still cared about them and indicated that they would like some discussion regarding their options when they reach 18.

This report will be disseminated from July 2014.

As a service we will be considering carefully the issues this report raises and are already planning a specific workshop to help prepare adopters regarding contact issues.

INDIRECT CONTACT (LETTERBOX)

The table below shows the number of new letterbox files opened in each area for the last 6 years.

Area of	New LB 2008/2009	New LB 2009/2010	New LB 2010/2011	New LB 2011/2012	New LB 2012/2013	New LB 2013/2014
Origin						
Bracknell	5	2	2	1	4	8
RBWM	3	8	2	7	3	8
Reading	7	13	15	12	11	19
Slough	10	7	7	8	6	11
West Berks	8	8	5	5	6	5
Wokingham	2	6	6	4	6	2
Other	1	-	-	-	-	
TOTAL	36	44	37	37	36	50

The table below shows the total number of Letterboxes.

Year	Total number of Letterboxes	Total number of active Letterboxes	Total number of closed Letterboxes
1994	28	28	
1999/2000	172	172	
2000/01	202	202	
2001/02	254	254	
2002/03	279	279	
2003/04	310	310	
2004/05	333	333	
2005/06	378	378	
2006/07	423	423	
2007/08	454	402	52
2008/09	499	436	63
2009/10	543	480	63
2010/11	582	487	95
2011/12	619	524	95
2012/2013	655	560	95
2013/2014	705	524	181

No Letterbox files have been closed this year.

The table below shows the total number of letterbox files in each area and includes the closed files as there are times when these files need to be reactivated.

	Total LB in 2011/2012	Total LB in 2012/1013	Total LB 2013/2014
Area of Origin	in each area	in each area	In each area
Bracknell	57	61	69
RBWM	80	83	91
Reading	164	175	192
Slough	123	129	140
West Berks	103	109	113
Wokingham	89	95	97
Other	3	3	3
TOTAL	619	655	705

This service has continued to grow adding 50 new 'letterboxes' this year. Given the numbers of children for whom the plan is adoption the number of new 'letterboxes' should be higher but they sometimes take time to be established, so there is a delay in sending them to BAAS.

Again this year has seen a significant increase in the numbers of arrangements that have been set up without the inclusion of photographs. Facebook appears to be a major factor in influencing the decision regarding photograph inclusion. Concern that Facebook poses a risk and will assist birth parents to trace adopted children has influenced social workers and adopters.

The inclusion of photographs in the letterbox exchange will remain a difficult decision. The view on whether photographs promote the desire to search and gain more information about a child or children, or whether having photographs reassures birth parents and lessens the desire to trace, is problematic in assessing. Whilst there are always some birth family members who pose a risk to the confidentiality of the adoptive placement, there are many that would not want to unsettle or distress their child or the placement.

Mediation regarding the letterbox exchange continues to grow and takes significant social work time. This includes the content of letters, the way letters are written and the understanding of the purpose of letterbox. Social networking sites, in particular young peoples' use of Facebook promotes enquiries from adopters and the need for information regarding the management of these issues continues.

DIRECT CONTACT

For the period 1st April 2012 - 31st March 2013 the direct contacts are as follows:

Area	2011-2012	2012 - 2013	2013-2014
Slough	3 (*3)	0	0
RBWM	2	2	1
Bracknell	2	2	2
Wokingham	1	1	1
Reading	9 (*1)	4	2
West Berks	0 (*1)	1	1
TOTAL	17 (*3)	10	7

The direct contact arrangements that we do facilitate appear to work well but continue to need a lot of social work time for preparation, mediation and review. Those contacts that have been suspended have been in relation to older children for whom the plan for direct contact no longer meets their needs. These have all been reviewed and plans made that are as flexible as possible. In one such case where the child no longer wishes to see their birth parents face to face the adoptive father meets with the birth father to share information and photos and this means that the child gets the additional information but in a safe and contained way, this has proved very successful. In another case one of the sibling pair no longer wishes to participate and his sibling has suspended her contact in order to concentrate on exam work. Contact arrangements are reviewed after each contact to continue to ensure that the contact meets the needs of each child and plans are adapted accordingly.

Birth family members, in particular, find it hard to accept a change in arrangements that they feel they have been 'promised', and sometimes struggle to accept that this is in the interests their child.

Adoptive families too can struggle as they feel they have made a commitment to the birth family and even when they can see it has a damaging effect on their child they can feel guilty when asking for the arrangements to be reviewed. The social worker and the formal review have, therefore, an important role to play for all parties in such situations. The needs of the child must come first whilst acknowledging that these needs may change over time, however, support and advice still needs to be offered to others who remain affected.

The service has also facilitated the renewed contact between birth family members and young people and their adopters, in consultation with the Local Authority. This has required careful preparation and reviewing which have taken place very successfully. Workers from BAAS continue to be willing to offer advice and guidance to social workers during the care planning stages.

TRAINING

From April 2013 to March 2014 the BAAS delivered 19 days of training for the Berkshire Consortium of Adoption Agencies:

Involving the wider family and Friends 20.5.13, 19.7.13, 23.08.13 & 6.12.13

Life Journey work 22.11.13
Explaining Adoption to Children 8.7.13
Panel Induction 29.11.13
Trauma & Recovery 6,7&8.08.13
Contact in Permanent Placement 7.6.13
Consortium Induction Day 19.3.14
Panel training (adoption reform) 29.4.13

Adoption Forum – training for staff and panel members (new assessment process, update,& foster to adopt, wish you well DVD& post adoption contact)

22/5/2013, 27.6.13,12/8/13,12/11/13, 20.1.13 & 20.3.14

All the feedback from the attendees was analysed and any suggestions for improvement were considered and implemented if thought to be appropriate or if a similar number of people made the same suggestion.

Overall all the courses were rated good, very good or excellent with no courses being rated as average or poor.

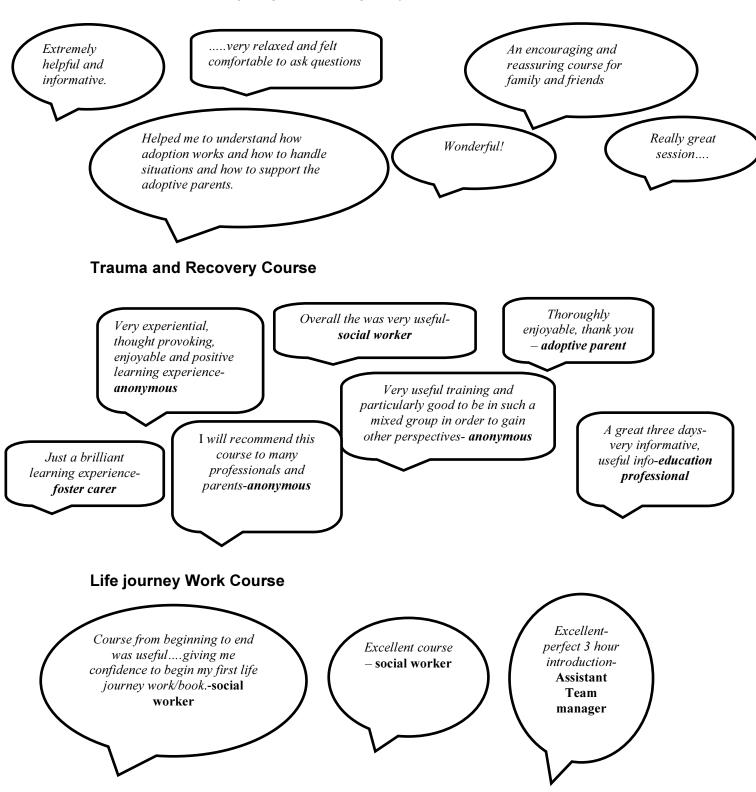
The adoption forum has proved a useful training event. Adoption workers and panel members are invited and this opportunity for joint training is valuable. The course for the wider family and friends of prospective adopters is increasingly popular and additional courses have had to be put on to meet demand.

This year's Adoption Conference speaker will be Julie Hudson a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapist, who has been trained and is supervised by Dan Hughes.

Feedback and comment

Feedback and comment is requested on every course in order to improve the service offered and to ensure that courses are providing what is needed by attendees, below is a sample of the feedback received over the past year.

Course feedback- Involving the wider Family and Friends (for relatives/friends of prospective adopters)

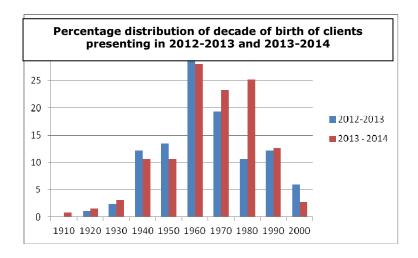


Requests for access to records 2013 – 2014

Dr Gill Clark

Enquiries

Activity during the last twelve months has been higher than last year but distorted by a bulk enquiry for 60 files from Bracknell in September in connection with a data sorting exercise. The total of 337 reflects this (319 last year, 283 the previous one). Enquires from bodies other than the six authorities, the joint legal team and the police for example, were 58 of the total and reflect the attention that has been focused recently on allegations of abuse. This focus may also explain the 195 enquiries for children who were in care compared with the 127 who were adopted this last year. Again media attention to adoption stories has lead to enquiries based on minimal information being sent out widely in the hope of tracing files. Inevitably with such an approach there were no records for more than half the enquiries this year.



For a second year a note has been kept of the decade of birth of the people whose records are requested across both adoption and in care enquires. Once again demand comes from right across the age range. The chart differs from that of the previous report in that figures represent percentage distribution of the data and is therefore a better comparison with one another. Again the figures justify the long retention periods the files are given.

Procedures

In recent months the quality of listing and of packing of boxes, the knowledge of where to send them and how to arrange this, all suggest that the procedures written and distributed are not reaching those who actually do the work. Some revision of documents is needed and also a rewriting of the one concerned with searching for birth relatives.

Storage space

The quantity of records deposited was high this year (51 boxes) and by even half way through the year the storage space in the warehouse at Darwin Close was full. Fortunately space had become available on another floor, a secure cage formed by a metal hinged door across a corner of the building. It is in an area used only by the museum service for storage of artefacts not currently on display and it is protected by the same standard of security as the current storage area. It is close to the lift connecting with the upper floor, lighting and temperature control are adequate. Only museum staff have access and then though a separate entrance. Four rows of shelving run round the three side of the space and provide space for 180 standard computer boxes.

The need to move to new storage had been under discussion and it remained to plan for a review of the children's homes financial records to create space and to submit it to the heads of service of the other authorities. With agreement a work schedule was set up to look at the contents of each box individually, alongside the original deposition sheets, and to dispose of all financial documents that reached their disposal date, recording each such decision.

Help in lifting down boxes from high shelves, taking them down and re-shelving them was given by the Records Management Centre staff and two lidded skips were provided by them alongside the store room for secure disposal. These were filled with the contents of 117 boxes that were ready to go. Any financial document where a child's name appeared, even just a first name, was put aside for in-house shredding. There were only sufficient papers of this kind to fill just four boxes and the shredding company loaded them and shredded them in full view.

This left 255 boxes whose contents required further attention because of their age and some because of poor listing and packing. Every box was checked against its deposition sheet. Where all the contents were to be kept the disposal date of the most recent item was written on the outside of the box. Overfilled boxes were repackaged. Others were thinned or individual items re-boxed. They too were marked with disposal date. Most of them needed to run the remainder of 50-years and for a small number for the rest of a 75-year retention time.

Since there was shelving for 180 boxes only, use was made of the corners and stacks were built in front of each wall and in the centre. Some financial records will not complete their 15 year limit until 2016 and 2018 and these are accessible in the centre stacks to be removed in due course. A master list of all decisions made and destruction dates was printed out and charts have been created with consignment and box numbers for each wall and stack so location of items should be straight forward. The cage is secured with a padlock whose number is known only to BAAS staff. The new location of these records has been added to the disaster recovery plan/business continuity plan.

Conclusion

The greatest challenge over the next year will be the embedding of foster to adopt (fostering for adoption) across all agencies. The complexity of this area of work should not be underestimated. Earlier identification of children who will require adoption, a focus on the quality of assessments and training for social workers will help to support the foster to adopt agenda but there is still a reluctance on the part of adopters, who struggle with the perceived risks and without support and training for them it will be a challenge to increase the number of children who are placed in this way.

A record number of adopters were recruited and a record number of matches made during the last year. Since 2011/12 there has been a 68% increase in the number of children matched, reflecting the high number of children with an adoption plan during the preceding three years. Approved adopters have increased by 118% since 2011/12, no doubt influenced by the use of adoption reform grants. For the first time the number of approved adopters overtook the number of children with a plan for adoption across the consortium area. It is hoped that the number of matches will continue to rise and that the Berkshire consortium agencies will have the opportunity to contribute to the early placement for children both locally and nationally over the coming year.

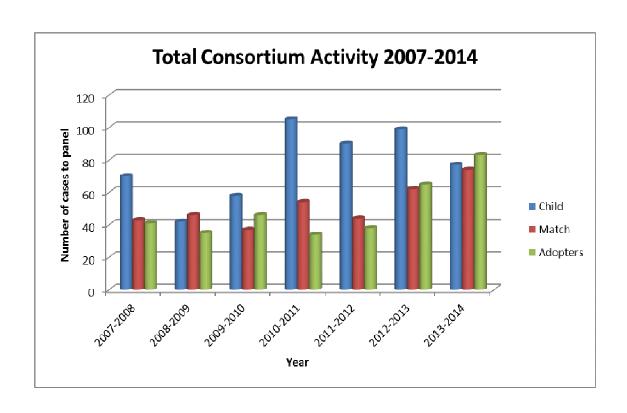
Alyson Graham Service Manager BAAS May 2014

APPENDIX A

Total Consortium Activity 2013-2014

(figures in brackets for includes cases presented more than once and cases withdrawn after papers were submitted)

Year	2007-	2008-	2009-	2010-	2011-	2012-	2013-
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Children for placement	70 (83)	42 (56)	58 (67)	105 (119)	90 (108)	99 (103)	77 *1 presented to panel
Matches	43 (45)	46 (52)	37(43)	54 (58)	44 (48)	62 (65)	74(85)
Adopters	41 (43)	35 (43)	46(53)	34 (38)	38 (43)	65 (70)	83(9)



Summary of Placements made 01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014

	Adopters									
		Brack- nell	RBWM	Reading	Slough	West Berks	Woking- ham	VAA	Other LA	
	Bracknell	6		1			1		2	
en	RBWM	2	5			1		1	2	
Children	Reading	2		14		3		1	3	
S	Slough	2			11		1	1	4	
	West Berks		1			4	1		1	
	Wokingham	1				1	1		1	
	TOTALS									

Activity per Individual Agency

Numbers in brackets are deferred and withdrawn cases in addition to number approved

Children for Adoption between 01/04/2013and 31/03/2014

Reading	Wokingham	West Berks	Slough	RBWM	Bracknell
19	4	10	17 *1 presented to panel	8	17

Children Matched Between 01/04/2013 and 31/03/2014

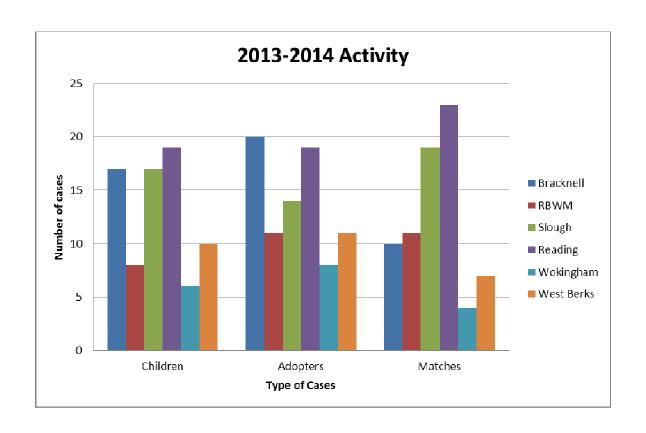
Reading	Wokingham	West Berks	Slough	RBWM	Bracknell
23(5)	4 (1)	7(1)	19(2)	11(1)	10(1)

Approval of Prospective Adopters between 01/04/2013 and 31/03/2014

Reading	Wokingham	West Berks	Slough	RBWM	Bracknell
19 (2)	8	11(2)	14(2)	11(3)	20

Matches not proceeding to placement/AO between 01/04/2013 and 31/03/2014

Reading	Wokingham	West Berks	Slough	RBWM	Bracknell
1	0	0	0	1	0



1

Beth Neil, Mary Beck and Emma Ward. <u>Contact After Adoption: A follow up in Late Adolescence</u>. University of east Anglia: The Centre for Research on Children and Families, 2014.