



## Report of: Susanna Daus Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Contact

Meeting of	Date	Agenda Item	Ward(s)
Corporate Parenting Board	14 Sep 2016		

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt



**NORTH LONDON  
ADOPTION  
CONSORTIUM**

# Adoption Recruitment Strategy Islington Adoption Service 2016/2018

### Summary

This strategy sets out how Islington recruits adopters, in partnership with the North London Adoption Consortium. Our objective is to find adopters without delay for the children who need new families. A good balance is needed to ensure careful recruitment messages target families who can adopt the children waiting and those children who will need adoption in the near future. This ensures families who are approved can be matched with a child as soon as possible.

Due to the uncertainty and reduction in children needing adoption, it is difficult to predict how many families will need to be recruited, but a pool of adopters, who can meet the needs of the sort of children whose plans are adoption, can be created in the first instance, alongside a rich resource from within the Consortium.

### Introduction

Islington's Adoption Service is part of the North London Adoption Consortium (NLAC) and builds on 14 years of collaborative working. The Consortium recruits adopters and jointly delivering successful preparation groups, training and support for a number of children and their new families. However, Islington undertakes the full assessment with the families as a single agency and presents the report to Islington's panel.

Following on from the Adoption North London Recruitment team pilot scheme (November 2013 to November 2014), recruitment in the Consortium team now operates from two offices; the South team (Islington, Camden and Hackney) and the North team (Enfield, Barnet and Haringey). The collaborative working is designed to improve the adopter journey, enabling effective compliance with timescales in the Adoption Regulations, 2013. Collaborative working in this way is in advance of the way the government envisaged.

The aim of the Consortium members is to work together with local authorities and voluntary agencies to place children into new families within the 121 day timescale. Recruiting families within the consortium significantly reduces delay in the critical time between Court authority to place and deciding on a match for a child. The number of children whose plan it is for adoption has decreased by around 45% since 2014 resulting in the reduction of children available for adoption. As of March 2016:

### **Consortium**

14 children waiting

37 families waiting

### **Islington**

No children waiting

4 families waiting

By 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016, there were two sibling groups waiting, for families who were available and one child for whom family finding has started.

Many of the children waiting:

- have an African or Caribbean (including mixed heritage) background.
- need to be placed with siblings.
- are children with complex needs requiring families.

Publicity and recruitment remains as one team and aims to attract the right adopters to match the children needing families in the six Consortium boroughs. There are currently more adoptive families waiting than children waiting across the six boroughs. They feel unable to adopt the children who currently have a Placement Order, preferring to wait for a child more suitable to their family. This situation is repeated around the London area, with local authorities having many more families than children.

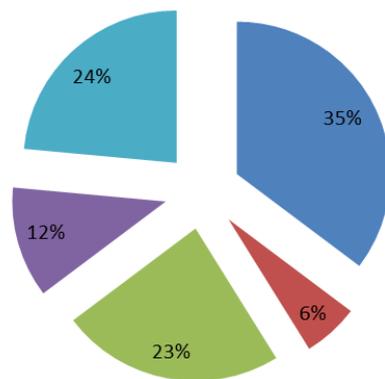
Recruitment needs to focus on the actual children waiting, from the first conversation with prospective adopters – at enquiry stage, at the information evening and throughout the process so families know it is these children that are available for adoption.

### **Islington Statistics 2015-2016**

From April 2016, 17 children were matched (16 placed). Eight children were adopted, including triplets, the rest are single children.

## 17 Children Matched 2015-2016 - Islington

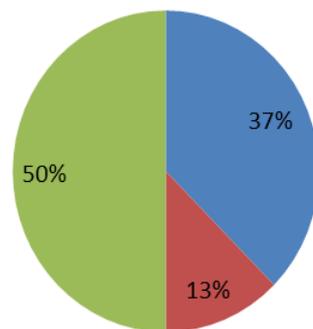
■ white uk ■ white polish ■ black african ■ mixed parentage ■ black caribbean



Nine children were adopted in 2015-2016, which includes one sibling group of three the rest were single children.

## 8 Children Adopted 2015-2016 - Islington

■ white uk ■ mixed parentage ■ black caribbean



**Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 5<sup>th</sup> August 2016, 11 children were adopted.**

### **Recruitment Marketing Strategy**

**OBJECTIVE: to place six children (within 121 days) for adoption in Islington by March 2017.**

To achieve the objective:

- Islington/Consortium to identify the target audience based on the demographics of the children waiting.
- Plan integrated recruitment campaigns:
  - Add content to the website landing page/home page that outlines our message of finding families for specific children.
  - Social media advertising via Facebook directing interested families to the landing page.
  - Apply service engine optimisation (SEO) techniques to the website to achieve a higher search engine ranking.

- Aim to add blogs/articles to websites also targeting our audience and provide links to the landing page.
- Consider traditional (small scale) advertising for recruiting families for BME children and hosting an event
- Consider introducing specific 'sections' in the information session that focus on:
  - Placing BME children (and their specific needs) and how families from a different ethnicity can help them develop their identity.
  - the impact for adoptive parents of children where their future development is uncertain.
  - adopting siblings
  - fostering for adoption.
- Introduce the concept of Fostering for Adoption (and/or concurrent planning) to encourage more families to consider this option, highlighting the benefits and negatives of this type of permanency. A section should be added on the Consortium website and the Islington webpages and a flyer will be needed. All to outline the positives for children and parents.
- Follow actions for family finding for specific children under 'Islington Children'.

The Consortium team is building on research<sup>1</sup> that marketing should be integral to the agency plan;

- the growing importance of the agency website and web presence (e.g. social media and geo targeting) in recruitment
- the need to cherish and support enquirers on their journey towards adoption; what can be done to encourage adopters to consider more complex children.

All communications with the public and potential adopters will ensure that the following messages are given:

- We are open to everyone that can meet the needs of our children.
- We will help you every step of the way.
- In 2015-16, 17 children were placed, with eight children adopted.
- We approved four adoptive families in 2015-16 in Islington.

These messages are given because we know that the very people we are trying to reach may rule themselves out, thinking that they may not be accepted. The Consortium has a successful record of attracting Lesbian and Gay adopters, single adopters and attracting adopters from BME backgrounds. We have customer care standards that set out how we will work with enquirers. Adoption North London welcomes all adopters who want to adopt our children and who can meet their needs. We deal with each enquiry based on individual circumstances and do not use blanket policies to rule enquirers out.

The current website is modern and up to date and is consistent with the Consortium branding. The features include a list of the upcoming information sessions, frequently asked questions, support available and blogs. Further work is needed on our systems to improve Google ranking and Google Analytics to identify the visitor trends and behaviour.

---

<sup>1</sup> Success Factors in adoption recruitment, BAAF/university of East Anglia 2013

Consideration could be given for Google AdWords to further increase search engine ranking but this is at a cost. A Facebook page has been introduced in the last 12 months and provides another form of communication and recruitment. A social media action plan provides a list of possible subject matters to message to our followers.

Marketing and publicity is delivered by an experienced Consortium marketing group and has an established logo and brand. The team are continually learning new skills to implement and ultimately strengthen the brand.

### **Adoption enquiries**

The south team have taken 544 enquiries (Camden-175, Hackney-142 and Islington-227). Despite minimal publicity, each information session has been very well attended with a regular flow of enquiries via the free phone number and online enquiry form.

### **Websites**

We aim to raise awareness of children needing adoption by promoting our service using our website/webpages, following our signposting from internet and community advertising and presence at community events. Most of the enquirers view our website before enquiring, with all attendees of the information evenings visiting the Events page (to select a suitable information session date and book their place).

It is critical to keep improving the Consortium website and the adoption council webpages. A film was added in 2015 and another film has recently been completed focussing on the adoption journey for prospective adoptive families. This film can be added in short clips or as one full film. The Adoption North London Website is able to be more direct in marketing the service to adopters, than the traditional Islington local authority webpages - although this is currently undergoing an upgrade. Our online presence should be user-friendly and interactive.

### **Action Plan for Islington Children**

As soon as a Placement Order is granted, Islington children require photographs and/or a promotional film made. Cost is around £300-£400 for both. If the child has additional needs or is part of a sibling group to be placed together (or are considered harder to place), then a more professional film will be made with costs around £1500-£2000.

If a child cannot be matched with Islington or Consortium adopters waiting, we need to ensure we work quickly to find a family outside of these areas. We use:

- Adoption Register, a national database registering the children and adopters waiting. See statistics below.
- AdoptionLink – online site for adopters and social workers to search for a child (annual membership approximately £4600 for each borough). See statistics below.
- Adoption UK Children Who Wait magazine and website (monthly feature approximately £500). Multiple inserts may be needed for full coverage (costs up to £1500 for three months) for harder to place children.
- Profile sheets emailed out or posted or family and worker attend an Exchange Day or the child attends an Activity Day.
- Family finding meetings amongst the consortium workers to discuss early notifications (anonymous profiling of children) and the adopters approaching the end of Stage 2.
- External press advertising, using publications such as Pride magazine, The Voice and local press in areas outside the borough (£300-£500 per insert).

Whilst a budget has been discussed for adoption publicity in Islington (around £11k), there needs to be some flexibility if more children than expected require adoption, or the children have extreme complexities and additional publicity is required.

## Adoption Register Statistics

2014-2015

Number of Children Registered	850	Number of Families Registered	1993
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Background</b>	
Male	57%	Hetrosexual	78%
Female	43%	single females	12%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		Male couples	5%
White	73%	Female Couples	4%
Black/Ethnic Minority	27%	Single males	1%
		<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Single children	45%	White	80%
Siblings	55%	BME	20%

Islington are part of the project to reintroduce a revamped Adoption Register, now managed by First4Adoption.

## AdoptionLink

36 children have been matched with 24 new families			
Number of profiles of children added in the last 30 days	161	Total	893
Number of families registered in the last 30 days	206	Total	2517

## Reducing Delay

As well as placing children, it is important to place the children within the timescale of 121 days. This is imperative to ensure there is limited delay for each child and therefore matching and placing with the right family should take place as soon as possible. The strategy outlined will ensure there is a pool of families ready and able to take on these children, and by recruiting them with the message that they need to adopt those waiting, they will already have an in-depth knowledge and be prepared, so matching is speedier.

The action plan for Islington children will ensure there is a close link with the Consortium partners in finding links, as well as Exchange Days and mail outs will allow workers to identify suitable families nationwide.

The Adoption Link service will encourage families to take the initiative in finding their own child through the interactive website and by attending the CoramBAAF Exchange and Activity days, allowing them to they can take even more responsibility for looking for their family.

## Advertising Adoption North London Adopter Recruitment

Building on experience and research, it is important to deliver multi layered campaigns so different people see the advertisements in different places. Advertisements are carefully targeted to attract a diverse range of adopters using the following methods.

1. The Consortium and Islington need a clear message to ensure the most appropriate people come forward to adopt the children waiting. Care must be taken when encouraging families to come forward particularly as there are so many families waiting.

## **2. Internet advertising**

Internet advertising is a growing way of communicating with the public. Social media campaigns need to be targeted as the reach on Facebook and other methods can be widespread. The publicity team will plan a social media strategy to ensure that all the new initiatives for general recruitment are covered rather than using external organisations.

First4Adoption Campaign (early May and avoid Fostering Fortnight)

This pilot campaign is in partnership with First4Adoption and will focus on children with complex needs, siblings and those with BME backgrounds. The campaign will use images via social media platforms to inform and call the audience to think about adopting these children. The campaign will be targeted and on-going and all potential enquirers will be passed to the NLAC teams. Web chats, vlogs and blogs will be used.

## **3. Local advertising**

From time to time, Adoption North London will advertise at transport stops and stations within the area and in those local newspapers with proven evidence that they generate enquiries. Businesses and organisations may also be included

## **4. Community events**

The Adoption North London marketing and publicity group will attend a range of community events such as the New Family Social (NFS) event. This well attended event takes place during LGBT Week (February) which promotes adoption and fostering in the gay community. Targeting appropriate communities with good links to ethnic minority groups will also be explored. In partnership with The London Central Mosque, NLAC will promote an introduction to adoption and fostering event to a Muslim audience.

## **5. Existing Adopters**

Word of mouth is an important way of recruiting adopters and specifically recruiting adoption champions; approved adopters from the six Boroughs, to spread the word about adoption and encourage people to come forward and adopt and spread the Adoption North London message through blogs and storytelling. Promotion of excellent support networks like We Are Family (WAF) is another way to promote our service.

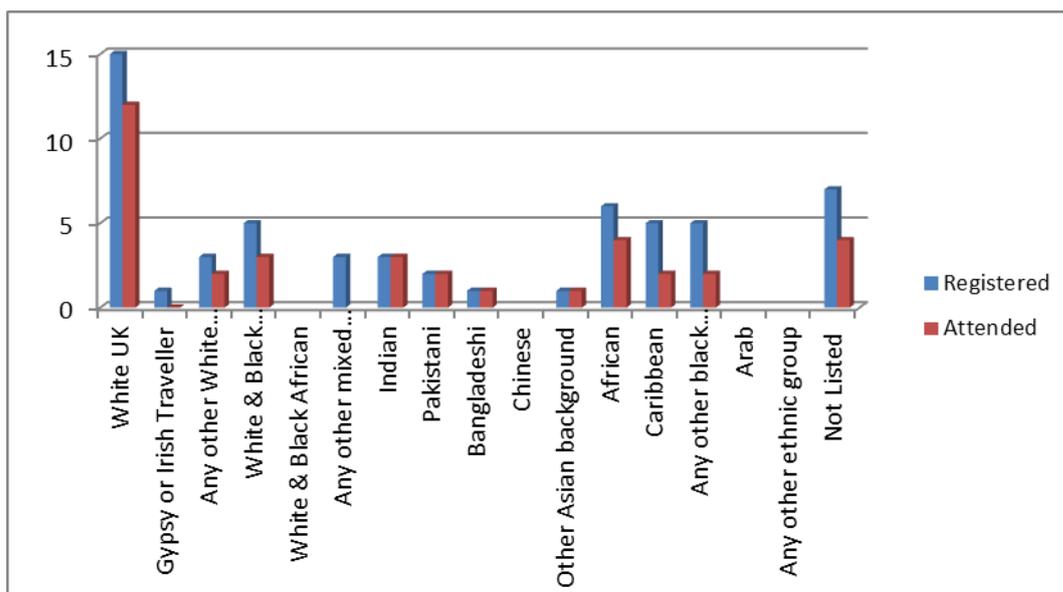
## **6. Fostering for Adoption**

A campaign will be needed to promote this service. It encourages prospective adopters to foster a child before applying to adopt them. This can be a complex and emotional route to adoption, but it does mean children are placed quickly and families can adopt young babies. Initially, leaflets can be produced, information on the website and discussion at each information session.

## **7. National Adoption Week Event**

The Consortium also runs a high profile annual recruitment event, which showcases the positives in the Consortium and is well attended. The event on 22 October held in Hackney to coincide with National Adoption Week. Fifty-seven households registered

to attend with 35 families actually attending (56 members of the public). The event enhances the reputation of the service and raises the profile.



Statistics/graph taken from Adoption Evening Event Evaluation

From the event we received 11 Expressions of Interest forms split between the North and South teams. These events raise the awareness of adoption, particularly the need for adopters from minority ethnic backgrounds. Adoption North London is reviewing the balance between this and other advertising to ensure a more even level of enquirers through the year.

## 8. Islington Literature

Reproduce the Statement of Purpose and other literature used within the service for adults and children.

## Conclusion

Islington and its Consortium partners are aware of the importance of responding well to potential adopters and promoting excellent customer care. A good balance is needed to ensure careful recruitment messages target families who can adopt the children waiting and those children coming through the system. This ensures families who are approved can be matched with a child as soon as possible.

Due to the uncertainty and reduction in children needing adoption, it is difficult to predict how many families will need to be recruited, but a pool of adopters, who can meet the needs of the sort of children whose plans are adoption, can be created in the first instance, alongside a rich resource from within the Consortium.

There is uncertainty about how many adopters will be needed due to past and recent court decisions which have favoured Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) with family and friends over adoption. The recently published new guidance for SGO could have an impact on the Courts decisions and increase the number of children with Placement Orders. There still needs to be a focus on attracting adopters for BME children (BME and non BME families), and continually ensuring we use inclusive images and copy to ensure we are addressing their needs. We need to build on the promotion of siblings and identify families who can understand the needs of children with a complex early life experiences and feel able to take on this uncertainty for the future.

The growth of social media has required a new approach to marketing and publicity to attract the right adopters for North London children, giving new messages about our openness to a diverse range of people and a new approach to internet advertising, social networking and website management. We do still need some traditional posters and publicity in all Consortium partner boroughs and some community engagement, and to develop our 'word of mouth' recruitment.

### **Recommendations**

1. Continue to improve the website including the adoption support pages.
2. Develop a social media strategy for the Consortium.
3. Develop a marketing and publicity detailed plan.
4. All Heads of service to ensure that there is even input from all six members to the marketing and publicity group and that community advertising for adopters takes place on council and community sites in their boroughs and local NHS facilities.
5. Revise and update Islington literature.
6. Further develop adoption champions to promote word of mouth recruitment.

**Linda Charles Adoption marketing and publicity officer  
and Susanna Daus  
Service manager Adoption Fostering and contact**

**August 2016**