

Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

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Introduction

Adopt South West started on 1 October 2018. It is the Regional Adoption Agency that undertakes adoption functions for the local authority areas of Devon, Plymouth, Somerset, and Torbay.

The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is hosted by Devon County Council.

Adopt South West was the 11th regional adoption agency to go 'live' and has been at the forefront of the development of regional adoption agencies. By March 2024 there were 33 RAAs across the country.

An Inter Authority Agreement between the local authorities and Regional Adoption Agency sets out the terms and conditions for the establishment and operation of Adopt South West including:

- the key objectives of Adopt South West
- the principles of collaboration
- the governance structures for Adopt South West

the respective roles and responsibilities the parties have during the currency of the agreement.

The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for an adoption service. Under the Adoption Act 2002 s3, each council must maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, their natural parents and former guardians. These services are referred to as the Adoption Service, (Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1)). An adoption agency refers either to a local authority or to a registered adoption ^{Society} under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1). [Top](#)

Whilst each local authority retains overall responsibility for their adoption services and continues to retain overall responsibility for their cared-for children, most adoption functions are delegated to Adopt South West. The detail of this is outlined in our [Statement of Purpose](#).

(<https://devoncc.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/PublicDocs/ChildSocCare/ERCnf7KZ7ExMk-CZtDwK2qcBsH69O83il5w5Sa3HE3pDCw?e=J9Y20Z>).

Adopt South West has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and for intercountry adoptions. Adopt South West is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans in the Adopt South West region. Adopt South West provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptees, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives.

It is important to note that the data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2024. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read. Our task has been to place children promptly in adoptive families that have been robustly assessed and are well-prepared for the challenges of adoption. We support children and their families throughout their childhood and adolescence.



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Working with Local Authority Partners



Adopt South West is responsible for discharging the local authorities' responsibilities as an Adoption Agency and therefore works closely with the local authority partners. There are processes in place for Adopt South West to support our local authority colleagues in progressing children's plans where adoption is the permanence plan. Team Managers across Adopt South West have established working relationships through attendance at specific local authority meetings, including tracking, permanence and legal planning meetings to achieve best outcome for children and young people who have a plan of adoption. Post adoption order when supporting families we have established working relationships across our partner agencies to enable access to the right support to meet their needs.

Lead managers for adoption from each local authority meet together with Adopt South West Operations Managers quarterly to review and develop regional process and practice. Adopt South West Quality Assurance Managers provide consultation, quality assurance and advice through their agency advisor roles and within the adoption panel advisor roles. Adopt South West provide practice learning and training in specific areas of adoption work across our regional local authorities to support local authority colleagues in their practice.

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Governance and Scrutiny of Adopt South West

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The Operational Board meet as regularly as is necessary to perform its role, but in any event no less than every six weeks.

The Board membership is made up of the delegated Service Director/Divisional Director from each of the five partner local authorities, the appointed Independent chair (non voting) and Adopt South West Head of Service (non voting).

The Strategic Partnership Board meet as regularly as is necessary to perform its role, but in any event no less than six monthly. The core membership of the board is the Director of Children's Services for each of the five partner local authorities, the lead member for children's services for each of the five partner local authorities, the Independent chair of the Operational Board (non voting) and Adopt South West Head of Service (non voting).

Within each of the partner local authorities there is an operational senior manager who takes the lead role for adoption. This group of managers meet with the Adopt South West Operational Managers quarterly to review regional practice.

Cornwall Joining Adopt South West



In 2023, Cornwall Council requested agreement from Adopt South West members and host Devon County Council to join the RAA. The request was to incorporate Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Council Adoption Services, both pre and post order adoption services, into Adopt South West.

Cornwall Council believed that Adopt South West was the best Regional Adoption Agency for Cornwall to join, not just because of its locality but because it is a high performing agency that has developed excellent practice in the four years since it was set up.

Essex Children and Families

Partner in Practice (PIP) have undertaken two Peer Reviews of Adopt South West, the first in December 2020 and the second in February 2022.

They found Adopt South West to be a 'very good, well-functioning organisation producing a large volume of high-quality work' and that they had achieved an enormous amount of progress in a very short timescale. [^](#)

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For the Isles of Scilly a Service Level Agreement will be in place for the provision of adoption services.

The existing partners in Adopt South West gave agreement to this proposal. The decision making process was concluded in December 2023 with final agreement by the host Devon County Council at a full council meeting.

During 2023 to 2024, adoption team members from Cornwall and Adopt South West worked together to align processes and practice to promote consistency to the child and the adopter experience and ensure a smooth transition of adoption services into the RAA.

Over the last year there has been the opportunity to share best practice across the Adopt South West region, encouraging further innovation in the delivery of adoption services.



Map of the Adopt South West region: Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset

We move into 2024-2025 welcoming the inclusion of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to Adopt South West, embracing the opportunities that the expansion to our Regional Adoption Agency will bring.

The Children



In 2023 to 2024, we saw a steady increase in the number of children where the permanence plan was adoption. Nationally, there was a decrease in the number of children with an adoption plan, up to 31st December 2023 (Adoption and Special Guardianship data figures March 2024), however we are now seeing child plans for adoption increasing.

By year end regionally we have had **196** children with a **plan for adoption**, which is an increase of 15.2% and **10** children were granted **placement orders**, an **increase** of 12.5 %.

ASW experienced a reduction in the number of adoption orders, similar to that reported nationally: we saw a **decrease** in our adoption orders made by **13 %**. When considering this decrease we take account that the number of adoption orders made in 2022-2023 was higher than usual with more orders being made following the delays in the courts the previous year as a result of the Somerset ruling.

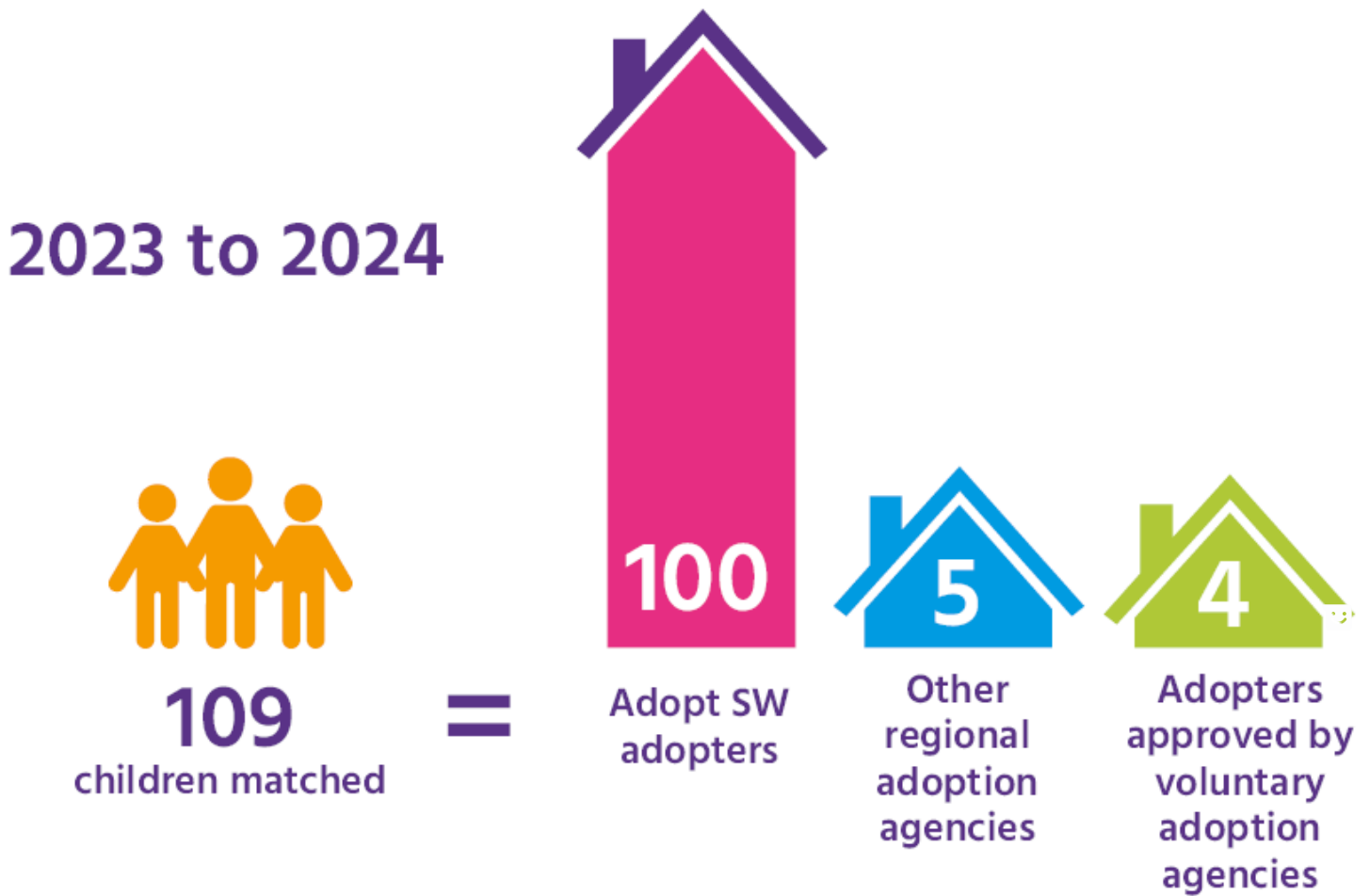
Proportion of children placed with adopters approved by Adopt South West

One of our key aims is to place children from the Adopt South West region with Adopt South West adopters, which supports a child's regional identity and means the provision of adoption support remains within Adopt South West.

Of the **109** children placed in the 2023-24 year, **91.3% were placed with adopters approved by ASW.** This is over 8% more than last year and the third year we have seen an increase in our children being placed with adopters approved by Adopt South West.



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2023 to 2024: 109 children matched of those 100 were Adopt South West adopters, 5 from other regional adoption agencies, 4 from voluntary adoption agencies

Family finding



Our family finders have been kept busy this year with the number of children being referred to Adopt South West for family finding on the increase, and an increase in placement orders. All opportunities are taken to know about children as early as possible in order that we are informed of the needs of children and for us to find a family as quickly as possible.

Timeliness

One of our key performance indicators is the time it takes us to find the right family for a child. The data in the table below sets out the amount of time between the placement order being made and the child being formal matched with their adoptive family. The Adoption and Special Guardianship data descriptor for the A2 indicator, is the average time in days between the local council authority receiving court authority to place and deciding on a match, for children who have been adopted.

| Area | Placement order to match 2021 to 22 | Placement to adoption order 2022 to 23 | Placement to adoption order 2023 to 24 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| England average | 202 | 198 | 193 |
| Adopt South West average | 162 | 214 | 206 |
| Devon | 92 | 147 | 269 |
| Plymouth | 196 | 167 | 122 [^] |
| Somerset | 168 | 351 | 206 Top |
| Torbay | 247 | 133 | 135 |

Adoption and Special Guardianship data quarter 3 up to December 2023

Across the region timeliness showed a slight improvement from 214 days in 2022/2023 to 206 days in 2023-2024

Timeliness for Devon children increased. Of the children who waited longest these included four sibling groups, at least three of who had some court delay through residual impact of the Somerset ruling. There were also delays for children where additional assessment of their needs was required to inform an adoption support plan and therefore is deemed to be expected and accepted delay.

Family finding activities

Finding families is achieved through our family finding team's commitment and tenacity, and every year building on their innovative and supportive approach. Their work is centred on partnership working, requiring building good working relationship with children's social worker and foster carers.

“I felt guided, supported by social worker with clear communication throughout.”

“We felt our expectations in the family finding process were well managed.”

“Family finding team were helpful and efficient. Even when our social worker was away, we knew how to get support and they were helpful and friendly.”

— What adopters had to say

Adopt South West Play Days remain a popular and positive way in which we can bring together children and prospective adopters throughout the year in different locations in the South West. Adopters from other adoption agencies will also be invited to these events where there is agreement as they are considering one of

our regional children. Children and their foster families attend, play and meet adoptive families. The aim of the event is for the children to have fun playing alongside adopters and other children in foster care.

We have held 6 events over this period which **36 children** attended. As a result of coming together at these events **4 sibling groups of 2 children, and 5 individual children** have been matched and gone onto be placed with their adoptive families.



We would acknowledge the importance of the time to build relationships and ask questions about a child and from the feedback it shows that the role of children's foster carers are integral to supporting this process.

“Enjoyed meeting a variety of different age and gender children; really enjoyed being able to speak to foster carers and social workers.”

“Enjoyed being able to interact and play with the children on their level and just getting to meet the children.”

“Fantastic set up, lots of toys and safe play areas – great to meet the foster carers too.”

“No pressure; space to interact with the children; discussions with foster carers.”

— What adopters had to say

“Having the support from the staff.”

“Lots of choice of toys and enjoyed the outside area.”

“Good activities.”

“How informal it was with play zones, plenty of space and it did not feel overwhelming for both us and the children.”

— What foster carers had to say

Where the needs of our children require it, we take part in pan regional and national events, both virtual and face to face, where we share our children's profiles and search for the right adopters to meet their needs.

National work: Pan Regional, South West Permanence Project for children with disabilities



Logo for South West Permanence Project

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In conjunction with the regional adoption agencies (RAA) Adoption West and Aspire, Adopt South West received funding from the Department for Education, through the RAA national strategy group, to promote matching for children with disabilities. The project commenced in July 2023 and has funding to continue until September 2024

The aims of the project are separated into three primary areas of work.

Assessment and recruitment

review training to adopters, develop material for training if required

encourage diversity of childcare experience while preparing to adopt

reduce early decision making about children with disabilities by adopters

develop an enhanced family finding model

Matching

create best practice guidance for Link Maker

liaison with Link Maker In about further information being added for children with disabilities onto the system

all children on the project to have a video for their profiles

Individualised information on a child's disability to be provided

Support

network meetings prior to placement to ensure support for the family

Children with Disabilities Team to contribute their knowledge toward support plans

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support plans to include adoption support services and disability services and consider future needs

buddy system to be explored with families who have adopted children with disabilities

Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) to be applied for earlier and explore potential link with support plans

In Adopt South West there are currently five children who our dedicated family finder will be progressing enhanced family finding for, working closely with their local authority child care social workers.

Early Permanence – first placement is the only placement

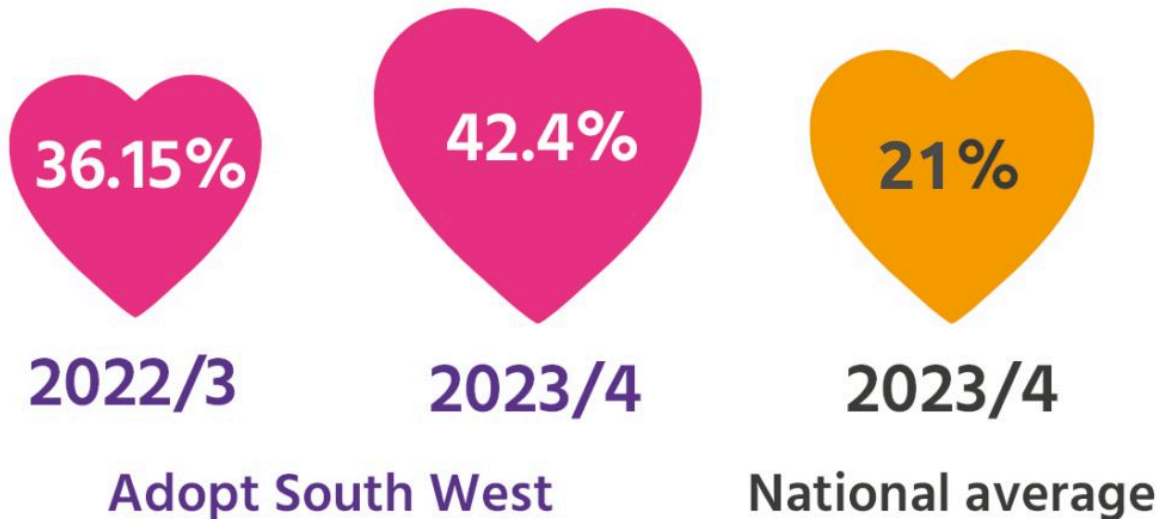
This year saw national adoption focus upon Early Permanence, often referred to as Foster for Adopt or Concurrency following on from the launch of the [Early Permanence National Standards](https://www.adoptionengland.co.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Early%20Permanence%20National%20Practice%20Standards.pdf) (<https://www.adoptionengland.co.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Early%20Permanence%20National%20Practice%20Standards.pdf>) in February 2023. We know that it benefits a child/ren to be placed with their adoptive families at the earliest possible stage.

Over the last two years we have seen a continued increase in our regional Early Permanence Placements.

In 2023 to 2024, 42.4% of children that we placed for adoption, started their placement under Early permanency regulations compared to 36.15 % in 2022-2023 (Adoption and Special Guardianship (ASGB) data Q3 (01.01.23 to 31.12.23)).

For the second year this represents one of the highest rates in the country.

Children placed under Early Permanence Regulations



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Children placed under early permanence regulations:
2022/23 is 36.15%, 2023/24 is 42.4%. National average, is 21%.

Adopt South West was proud to take part in national and regional Early Permanence Conferences, promoting better understanding of the benefits to children of Early Permanence and being part of the drive for practice improvement in this area.

Accreditation of Adopt South West's commitment to Early Permanence being at the centre of our practice was achieved with the award of the [Early Permanence Quality Mark](https://quality-mark.earlypermanence.org.uk/#The-benefits-of-the-Quality-Mark-for-adoption-agencies). (<https://quality-mark.earlypermanence.org.uk/#The-benefits-of-the-Quality-Mark-for-adoption-agencies>).

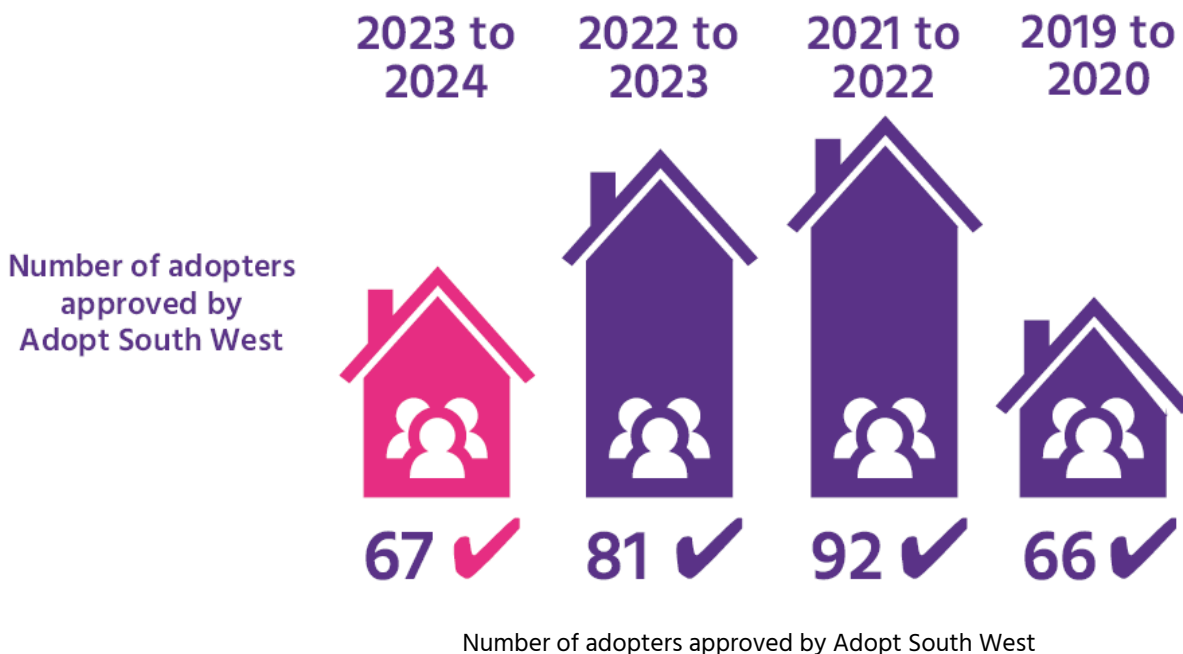


The feedback following our application for the quality mark:

66 'This is a succinct and compliant submission by Adopt South West (ASW), corroborating strong commitment to skilfully deliver early permanence via the route of Fostering for Adoption (FfA). The numbers of children who benefit from FfA placements at ASW are consistently above the national average, indicating the principles of practice of Early Permanence (EP) are embedding alongside a clear authority from senior leadership^{Top} to maintain EP as a preferred route to permanence, wherever possible, to ensure best outcomes for children. It is acknowledged there are significant challenges in integrating a multiagency and holistic EP approach across a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and it is very positive that ASW has pushed this forward while engaging with and learning from RAA partners and others.'

Adopters

Despite active marketing our recruitment of adopters in this year fell below that of last year by 19%.



The national data indicates a falling number of applicants in adoption across England, however at the beginning of 2024 we began to see an increase in people attending information sessions and found a difference of only 6% lower attendance from the last year. It is therefore anticipated that if we can maintain steady attendance at information events we will see an upturn in the coming year in adopter applications.

We know that it can take time for some people to progress with their adoption journey, so there can be a lag between recruitment campaigns and approvals. Figures for quarter 1 of 2024 are showing a slight increase in adopter approval compared to this time last year, and that is without the addition of families from Cornwall.

Despite a lower number of adopter approvals, we have seen the increase in our children being placed with Adopt South West adopters. [See The Children section above]



We have also seen our adopter gap, (the number of children needing families against the number of families available) slightly decrease on last year, from 29% to 27%, with 43% of our children who had been waiting 3 months placed. (ASGB Quarter 3 2023/24 data).

From the beginning of the process of getting in touch with Adopt South West, attending an information event and having a social worker support an enquiry discussion, we have made it clear who our children are and our focus being for prospective adopters who will consider these children.

This focused approach has assisted progressing registrations of prospective adopters who can meet our children's needs as a priority. This continues to be our approach to all enquiries and registrations made.

We have reviewed and revised our adopter preparation training this year, using the practice alignment opportunity with Cornwall to enhance our content and presentation of our training.

Of the 67 adopter households approved this year, over 80% have wanted to consider early permanence. We consider that the information and promotion of the positive outcomes for children which is shared as part of the training and revisited in the assessment stage of the process is therefore having the desired impact.

This year we have seen a birth parent being supported to share their story and the importance for a child of staying in touch with people who matter to them at Stage 2 training for prospective adopters. The presence of this mother at the training is having a profound and positive impact on prospective adopters, assisting them in understanding the reality maintaining relationships.

“I came away with a really positive feeling about contact with birth family, it is not something to be scared of or feared. But something to be embraced.”

“The talk from the birth mother was one of the highlights for us, as it helped demystify a lot of what we didn’t understand about contact.” [Top](#)

“We got a real appreciation of how important contact is for them and also photos that we can send. Particularly letters seem to be such a small sacrifice from the perspective of the adopter which could mean so much to the birth parent. We now understand how important it is to keep writing even if we are not getting a response from them.”

— What adopters had to say

We seek feedback from our prospective adopters at each stage of their adoption journey to inform process and practice development.

66 **“Felt stage 1 was efficient, empathic, timely, child-led.”**

“Our ASW social worker was fantastic and answered any questions that we had.”

“We really enjoyed stage 2 with our social worker, we loved reminiscing about our childhood.”

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“Great experience and really comfortable and easy.”

“Our social worker was very supportive all the way through this process & always kept in touch.”

“Our social worker was absolutely fantastic and we were sad to see her go after we got the adoption orders! The sessions with her were long and in depth but they always felt comfortable and never nosy for no reason. The workshops were fine and we moved through it on the expected timeline.”

“Stage 2 was a very enjoyable and exciting process. We loved having our social worker come round and chatting to her.”

“The training was so useful and really put your mind at ease about any behavioural challenges we might encounter in adopted children and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder ([FASD \(https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd-friends-south-west/\)](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd-friends-south-west/)).”

“We are third-time adopters and were worried that we would have to go through lots of stuff that we have already done or are very familiar with. Our Social Worker was able to give us enough support to ensure we were up to date with the world of adoption but not so much that we had to repeat lots of things that were not relevant to us.”

“We appreciated our social worker’s wealth of knowledge, experience, and practicality with our particular situation.”

Marketing and recruitment

Since 2022, Adopt South West has developed an in-house campaign that focuses on the concept of time and the urgency to find families for the children that wait the longest, and to put the target audience in the child's shoes. We have used the voice of the child to highlight the positives and communicate what the children are looking for in their forever families.

Our theme is 'Think Again'. We look to appeal to those prospective adopters who may have previously considered adoption but had decided that it wasn't the right time. We're trying to encourage this group to act now, through the tagline 'now is the time to adopt' because the longer they wait to decide, the longer these children will have to wait.

Now is the time to adopt brothers and sisters



Watch our campaign videos: Now is the time to think again about adoption and change all of your lives. Now is the time to adopt brothers and sisters.

Adopt South West has an active presence on social media, local radio and television, and the number of potential adopters is increasing.

Throughout the year, we have shared life stories, interviews and short films featuring adoptive families and members of the adoption team. We also share national news and resources from trusted adoption organisation such as PAC-UK and Adoption UK. We also promote our own branded content on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/AdoptSouthWest/) (<https://www.facebook.com/AdoptSouthWest/>), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/adopt_south_west/) (https://www.instagram.com/adopt_south_west/) [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/adopt-south-west/) (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/adopt-south-west/>) and [YouTube](https://youtu.be/HbJ4D8lhWqg?list=PLlhApjcvpNRY3taDKRUFDNKDLg6mN9eJ) (<https://youtu.be/HbJ4D8lhWqg?list=PLlhApjcvpNRY3taDKRUFDNKDLg6mN9eJ>), with links back to our website.

“Adopting has changed our life for the better” Lizzy ...



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“Adopting has changed our life for the better” Lizzy and Lillybelle’s story

In this video, Lizzy shares her family’s adoption story: Lizzy is Lillybelle’s adoptive mum. She and her husband are also mum and dad to two other adopted children. They adopted with Adopt South West.

News and media exposure throughout 2023 and 2024 was supported by [local press coverage](#) (<https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/stories/bbc-spotlight-featuring-luke-and-adopt-south-wests-amanda-national-adoption-week/>) and the [news section of our website](#). (<https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/news/>).

Regionally, we are critical friends with marketing and communications peers at bordering regional adoption agencies (RAAs) Adoption West RAA and Aspire RAA and collectively promote the national adoption campaign through local media and social media channels to be part of the consistent national ‘voice’ for adoption.

Adopt South West helps to shape the national focus on adoption. Adopt South West continues to support the national campaigns and measure the impact, bringing together best practice, and testing out new, innovative approaches to recruitment.

Going forward into next year, we are aiming to attend more events, setting ourselves the challenge to attend as many Pride events as we can, including extending our visibility at events in Cornwall.

While we find many families for children where there are high levels of uncertainty, we’re aware that children with disabilities are among the children who wait the longest for an adoptive family. The experience of the RAAs in the south and west is varied when finding adoptive families for children with disabilities or complex health needs. Their traditional approaches to adopter recruitment identifies very few adopters who feel they can provide a family for a child with a disability or complex health needs.

We know our children waiting are often children with additional needs which include health complexities and potential life limiting illness. Therefore, we are going into 2024 to 25 with a focus in our marketing to map regional diverse communities and reach people with work/life experience with children with additional health needs and disabilities.

An overview of our activities and news in 2023 to 2024

2023 saw us getting ourselves back out there at events across the region.

During **June 2023** we were been part of a [new national 'You Can Adopt' campaign](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2IkljoxMDQsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpbGjJayIsbnVyYbCl6lmdh0dHBzOi8vZXVybMDluc2FmZWxpbnRpdWVudDk1b3ItYS1wZXJtYW5lbnQtaG9tZSUyRiZkYXRhPTA1JTdDMDEIN0NtYVyaS5oYW1pbHRvbiU0MGRldm9uLmdvdi51ayU3QzAxYTBjZWVjNDA5NzRmYzY5ZDk0MDhkYjc3MGU0NGYzJTdDGRhMTM3ODNjYjY4NDQzZmJiNGI5OTdmNzdmZDVhZmlIN0MwJTdDMCU3QzYzODIzNDY3NTUzODQxMTMwOS3Q1Vua25vd24IN0NUV0ZWYkdac2IzZDhleUpXSWpvaU1DNHdMakF3TURBaUxDSIFJam9pVjJsdU16SWIMQ0pCVCNklrMWVhV3dpTENKWFZDSTZNbjAIM0QIN0MzMdAwJTdDJTdTdTdJnNkYXRhPUY3cGpjTUUyOXB4NXFsbnUyZ2FibDRNVm5DaHFxS2glMkl1UmZueXhZRIRjcyUzRCZyZXNlcnZlZD0wliwiYnVsbGV0aW5faWQIiOiIyMDIzMDYyOS43ODk1MTQ1MSJ9.-sQzMPQvD9MrjORHnLj_tV5iRPckRXnuE5jgLntmm-%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F211850759073-)

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Also in **June** we joined Fostering Devon to celebrate Pride month, we met some amazing people who were keen to find out about the value of adopting and we loved meeting some familiar faces who shared their adoption stories with us.

In **October 2023** we celebrated the generations of adopted people during National Adoption Week (Monday 16 to Friday 22 October) and we highlight adoption and celebrate the good that it brings, not just for children who are adopted, but also for parents who adopt and their extended families.



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Luke, 27, was adopted when he was three years old in the 1990s

BBC Spotlight news featured Luke and Adopt South West's Amanda White. Luke, 27, was adopted when he was three years old in the 1990s.

He says "I feel proud to be adopted." Luke now lives in Devon and was adopted with his younger brother while his three older siblings were adopted by another family.

BBC Spotlight news featuring Luke and Adopt Sout...



Watch Luke and Adopt South West's Amanda White. on BBC Spotlight news (YouTube)

Parents like Debbie, in Devon. She adopted her six-year-old daughter, Bo, with Adopt South West (pictured here). [Read Debbie's and Bo's adoption story on our website. \(https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbI9saW5rX2IkljoxMDYsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9pLWNvdWxkbnQtc2VILWxpZr](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbI9saW5rX2IkljoxMDYsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9pLWNvdWxkbnQtc2VILWxpZr)

[td2l0aG91dC1oZXItZGVlYmllcy1hZG9wdGlubi1zdG9yeS8iLCJidWxsZXRpbl9pZCI6ljlwMjMxMDIwLjg0MzYyNTYxI0.CfN2jfWm7q6GFKazA81J6ImvykYES182Ar1B28oywBo%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862504929%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=zkhW8BJPUAMK%29cmcBY1VqcmhpFbGjXUNe5gcpQhN2M%3D&reserved=0\)](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDcsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9uYXRpb25hbC1hZG9wdGlubi13ZVrLyIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoimjAyMzEwMjAuODQzNjI1NjEifQ.JzZz5CiXnStt700liNgozKbW2mXgXN_xP5CFK6L_i4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862504929%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=zkhW8BJPUAMK%29cmcBY1VqcmhpFbGjXUNe5gcpQhN2M%3D&reserved=0)

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Debbie and her daughter Bo playing outside a supermarket

Through the stories of adopted people from across the decades, the [national You Can Adopt campaign](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDcsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9uYXRpb25hbC1hZG9wdGlubi13ZVrLyIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoimjAyMzEwMjAuODQzNjI1NjEifQ.JzZz5CiXnStt700liNgozKbW2mXgXN_xP5CFK6L_i4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862513847%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=sbGk0hDItEgF5IT7uKWMgm2hSBFiar4BMq8%2BWdrmw%3D&reserved=0) (https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDcsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9uYXRpb25hbC1hZG9wdGlubi13ZVrLyIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoimjAyMzEwMjAuODQzNjI1NjEifQ.JzZz5CiXnStt700liNgozKbW2mXgXN_xP5CFK6L_i4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862513847%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=sbGk0hDItEgF5IT7uKWMgm2hSBFiar4BMq8%2BWdrmw%3D&reserved=0) explores how adoption has changed over the years and what it looks like today in [this short film](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDgsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8veW91dHUuYmUvREJlOTVZlhwT2ciLCJidWxsZXRpbl9pZCI6ljlwMjMxMDIwLjg0MzYyNTYxIn0.Xlxc9oipYTXRq0iWNxTs-os-tRWzjQimRyuB4WoR8M4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862520337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kVo95dvkUr%2FU86lQA9KHtVfzkhB6lyhH3PI2g9tWhBE%3D&reserved=0). (<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDgsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8veW91dHUuYmUvREJlOTVZlhwT2ciLCJidWxsZXRpbl9pZCI6ljlwMjMxMDIwLjg0MzYyNTYxIn0.Xlxc9oipYTXRq0iWNxTs-os-tRWzjQimRyuB4WoR8M4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862520337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kVo95dvkUr%2FU86lQA9KHtVfzkhB6lyhH3PI2g9tWhBE%3D&reserved=0>)

In March 2024 we supported [LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering Week 2024](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDIsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9uYXRpb25hbC1hZG9wdGlubi13ZVrLyIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoimjAyMzEwMjAuODQzNjI1NjEifQ.JzZz5CiXnStt700liNgozKbW2mXgXN_xP5CFK6L_i4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862520337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kVo95dvkUr%2FU86lQA9KHtVfzkhB6lyhH3PI2g9tWhBE%3D&reserved=0)

(https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDIsInVyaSI6ImJwLjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9uYXRpb25hbC1hZG9wdGlubi13ZVrLyIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoimjAyMzEwMjAuODQzNjI1NjEifQ.JzZz5CiXnStt700liNgozKbW2mXgXN_xP5CFK6L_i4%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F228658768181-|&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862520337%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kVo95dvkUr%2FU86lQA9KHtVfzkhB6lyhH3PI2g9tWhBE%3D&reserved=0)

[pjbGljayIsInVybcI6Imh0dHBzOi8vbmV3ZmFtaWx5c29jaWFsLm9yZy51ay9hZncyNCIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyNAzMDguOTE0OTMyMjEifQ.dk8smsLSoEIBLb4TcdlkJmNfbh34xnrj1Qd6een122w%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F238467393370-](https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370)

[l&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862607103%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4wjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ku348LmqyoErqGZfp6zkP6YoQO912D3pwdzFunpU%2Fw%3D&reserved=0\). This year's theme, 'Different Together', called on more LGBTQ+ people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to consider adoption and fostering. Throughout the week, members of the LGBTQ+ community and people from global majority are sharing their stories and personal clip about their journeys to parenting and caring. \[Find out more on our website.\]\(https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370)

[https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpb9saW5rX2lkIjoiMjAyNAzMDguOTE0OTMyMjEifQ.Mfm5GY17pcSu1VL-IYsk3r5jL9iC796yqhalNOqn3c%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F238467393370-)

[url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpb9saW5rX2lkIjoiMjAyNAzMDguOTE0OTMyMjEifQ.Mfm5GY17pcSu1VL-](https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370)

[IYsk3r5jL9iC796yqhalNOqn3c%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F238467393370-](https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370)

[l&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862612558%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoimC4wjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=t3yFz1HNOqp5MwGaNv1zgAQdUYna1DPz0meaYqc5us%3D&reserved=0\).](https://www.devon.gov.uk/infocentre/record.aspx?recordid=67393370)

Non-agency adoptions

Adopt South West processes enquiries regarding partner adoptions. Our process and practice in relation to partner adoption has been reviewed and revised this year, taking into account feedback from those who have used the service. This has included giving clearer information on our web page, as well as, clearer guidance following notice of intention to adopt of when we will start checks, references and any court report.

Workflow of partner adoptions has significantly increased in the last year.



Adoption orders granted for partner adoption assessments: 10 in 2022/23 and an increase to 28 in 2023/24

In 2022 to 2023, 10 Adoption Orders were granted for partner adoption assessments.

In 2023 to 2024, 28 Adoption Orders were granted for partner adoption assessments.

Currently we have an individual dedicated social worker for non-agency adoption work, with the support from the recruitment and assessment social workers where it is needed. There have been times where this has required careful management to ensure we balance this workflow with the priority of agency adoptions. Going forward and with the addition of Cornwall in our agency, we will be continually reviewing workflow and how we respond to this area in order to meet the core requirements of the work.

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Adopt South West Adoption Panel Annual Report 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 executive summary

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[Adoption Chair Annual Report 2023 – 2024](https://devoncc.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/PublicDocs/ChildSocCare/EYxw11FUiyVKvLgrKQkBrdsB7553xyAbeb3tR2PGnAMqQ?e=iJw670&xsdata=MDV8MDJ8QW1hbmRhLldoaXRlQGRldm9uLmdvdi51a3xmYmY0NmI4YTUwNTg0NTliNzZDA4ZGM5OWE1M2RjNHw4ZGExMzc4M2NiNjg0NDNmYml0Yjk5N2Y3N2ZkNWJmYnwwfDB8NjM4NTU0MgyMTc4MjE5Nzk0fFVua25vd258VfdGcGJHWNiM2Q4ZXIKV0lqb2lNQzR3TGpBd01EQWIMQ0pRSWpvaVYybHVNeKlpTENKQIRpSTZJazFoYVd3aUxDSlhWQ0k2TW4wPXwwfHx8&sdata=WUVXaVhRNEFPtL2JDdUFNTjHT0dOUzdVZFB4M0FsdWIGalJObkZxQkIJST0%3d)

<https://devoncc.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/PublicDocs/ChildSocCare/EYxw11FUiyVKvLgrKQkBrdsB7553xyAbeb3tR2PGnAMqQ?e=iJw670&xsdata=MDV8MDJ8QW1hbmRhLldoaXRlQGRldm9uLmdvdi51a3xmYmY0NmI4YTUwNTg0NTliNzZDA4ZGM5OWE1M2RjNHw4ZGExMzc4M2NiNjg0NDNmYml0Yjk5N2Y3N2ZkNWJmYnwwfDB8NjM4NTU0MgyMTc4MjE5Nzk0fFVua25vd258VfdGcGJHWNiM2Q4ZXIKV0lqb2lNQzR3TGpBd01EQWIMQ0pRSWpvaVYybHVNeKlpTENKQIRpSTZJazFoYVd3aUxDSlhWQ0k2TW4wPXwwfHx8&sdata=WUVXaVhRNEFPtL2JDdUFNTjHT0dOUzdVZFB4M0FsdWIGalJObkZxQkIJST0%3d>

There has been no change to the model for holding panels virtually and it is now accepted practice amongst panel members and Adopt South West. Feedback from attendees is positive overall; further scrutiny of feedback is planned later in the year to influence a review of the panel process.

The Adopt South West central list continues to have a wide range of panel members with a wealth of experience and skills, new members joining bring with them a range of professional and personal experience of adoption. Some panel members from the Cornwall adoption service central list have transferred to Adopt South West. In preparing for the transition, Cornwall panel members had the opportunity to observe Adopt South West panels, and chairs and vice chairs from Adopt South West have observed Cornwall panels.

Panel advisors have been active in engaging with local authorities to promote social worker participation as the social work representative, successfully in recruiting 5 social workers; 2 from Somerset Council, 1 Devon County Council and 2 from Plymouth Council. A social worker from Torbay is currently being appointed and conversations with Cornwall council are on-going as part of the transition arrangements.

Recruitment to the central list continues to strive to promote a diverse mix of people.

Medical advisors have been present/available for all scheduled panels with Somerset NHS providing medical advisors from April 2023.

Medical advisors from Cornwall NHS will continue to provide the role with Adopt South West, ensuring all scheduled panels going forward will have access to a medical advisor.

Panel Focus for the year (2024/2025) will be upon:

Reducing the length and number of panel members identified strengths, potential vulnerabilities and recommendations ensuring all areas are covered and that they are evidence-based and that the questions asked provide gaps in information or to seek clarity.

Using identified themes from feedback and panel appraisals to inform future learning events.

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Scrutinising feedback from panel attendees to build good practice.

Chairs with panel advisors and Adopt South West agreeing the reporting data set for year ending 2025 by end of May 2024, which will be routinely reviewed throughout the year to include timeliness of prospective adopters application for approval and proposed placements for a child with prospective adopters.

Adoption – family breakdown

We have had **five** post-order family breakdowns from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 of children aged between 1 and 16 years, two less than last year.

| Year | Devon | Plymouth | Somerset | Torbay |
|--------------|-------|----------|----------|--------|
| 2020 to 2021 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| 2021 to 2022 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 2022 to 2023 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2023 to 2024 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Year by year chart of adoption breakdowns per count 2020 to 2024

When adopted children do come into care, most adoptive families wish to continue to be significantly involved with their child, and this can be supported with therapeutic work accessed through Adopt South West.

Adoption support

[Adoptive parents – support and advice for as long as needed. \(https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/adoptive-parents/\)](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/adoptive-parents/)

Our services are structured and co-ordinated to meet different levels of need.

There is a wide range of universal services: we provide a monthly newsletter and activity events for children and families and an annual conference. There is also access to the Children and Trauma Community Hub (CATCH) website (formerly The Adopter Hub), hosted by Parents and Children Together (PACT), which offers an online community of support including live web chat, email communication, and an adopter forum. There is access to webinars and for example, e-learning on attachment and special materials to help an adopted child in school and to share with schools.



There is a range of support groups both face-to-face and virtual and an adopter-led Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) support group. A psychologist and an adoptive parent lead a monthly virtual support group. Adopters also facilitate 'stay and play' type groups. These groups are in different areas of the region.

After a brief assessment, adopters are able to attend various training such as therapeutic parenting, sensory regulation, Theraplay, mindfulness, and how to manage child-to-parent violence (eight-week course). For these groups, funding is drawn down for the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), although the 'graduate' group for those who have attended the therapeutic parenting course does not attract ASF funding. Some groups have remained virtual whilst others such as therapeutic parenting are face to face as well as some virtual.

Therapeutic Parenting feedback:

“It has particularly helped with dealing with tricky moments and understanding behaviours.”

“In a small way but it hasn't had the impact I had hoped it would have.”

“Overall a very positive experience and will be useful for us. Thank you so much.”

— What adopters had to say

General feedback:

“I’ve always had excellent communications with Adopt South West staff about many different matters. They have always listened and tried very hard to address my concerns or have provided excellent advice/guidance when needed.”

“Everyone I spoke to during the process was very kind and listened to our concerns. Our worker was very good and asked throughout what we thought and felt about things.”

“The family practitioner and team were helpful in sorting sessions and kept us updated with emails and everything.”

“Our social worker was excellent and made our whole family feel supported during a very difficult time.”

— What adopters say

Devon families have access to consultation with an educational psychologist. All families across Adopt South West (ASW), can have a consultation with the psychologist who is funded by ASW on a part-time basis.

Adopt South West is working to provide a consistent support offer so that every adoptive family can receive the same level of services irrespective of where they live. Practice standards are in place for responding to requests for support and Adopt South West has put in place a range of training courses and support groups across the region. Adopters have asked for advice and support on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and Adopt South West has accessed therapeutic services across the region for this.

Adoption support referrals

There is a continued increase in the need for adoption support across our region and this year we have again seen a higher number of referrals.



Introduction of Triage team

The main significant development in adoption support this year has been the creation of a Triage team. This service was born out of a working group with the aims to:

reduce the time families wait for an assessment of need

reduce workers workflow and increase capacity

increase capacity for trained staff to do more direct work with families based on techniques such as Dyad Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Theraplay and lifestory work.

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The team has evolved during 2023/24 to a point where we now have a team of social workers and family practitioners with a designated manager. They are the first point of contact for people referring to us for support and the team manage the advice and support line and deal with emails into the support mailbox. Adopters can approach us at any time through the [referral form on our website](#). (<https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/adoptive-parents/>). The team complete assessments of need of children/young people and families to facilitate and progress short term intervention based support and/or to recommend if further assessment is required.

Going forward in line with the [national agenda](https://adoptionengland.co.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/Adoption%20England%20Strategy%202024.pdf) (<https://adoptionengland.co.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/Adoption%20England%20Strategy%202024.pdf>) and our own strategic plan, we will continue to be working to reduce the time families have to wait for an assessment of need.

Birth relative support

[Birth families and the adoption process](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/) (<https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/>).

Support for our birth parents is important to us as we know how important it is to their adopted children. We run four birth parent support groups across the region and birth parents have been active in influencing the agendas for these groups and their format (virtual or face-to-face).

We are aware that at present these groups are only for mothers but there remains an aspiration to offer groups for birth fathers and increase the number of birth mothers attending these groups.

A birth parent who attends the support group in the South of the region is part of the National Adoption Reference Group. This group was set up to inform the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group work and advise upon work around the recruitment and preparation of prospective adoptive parents.

National Acknowledgement: Sharing experiences of being a birth parent

Recently, "Susan" a birth mother we support attended the 'Openness in Adoption – time to change the approach' conference in London.

Susan was supported by a Family Practitioner from Adopt South West to feed into the national picture of improving adopter preparation. She was able to share her experiences and give some insight into the adoption process, from meeting her birth children's adoptive parents, to making and managing arrangements for contact

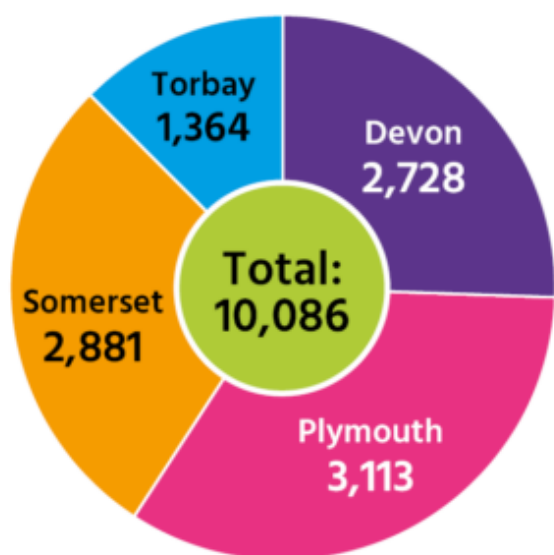
Susan attends our training events for prospective adopters and provides the attendees with a first-hand experience of meeting a birth parent and helping to dispel a lot of the myths about meeting birth parents, and future contact.

Adopt South West has been committed to engaging with birth relatives and gaining their feedback of the support that has been provided and how we can improve our service. Involving birth relatives in our training events has reduced the anxiety for many adopters about meeting birth parents and maintaining contact, which has in turn been of benefit to many adopted children.

Maintaining relationships

A substantial amount of support is provided to adopters and adopted children/young people to keep in touch with their birth families through adult-to-adult exchanges mediated by Adopt South West. [Letterbox](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/contact-with-a-birth-child/letterbox-service/) (<https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/contact-with-a-birth-child/letterbox-service/>) can make a significant difference for children and young people to understand their life story.

Adopt South West coordinated 3,113 exchanges between birth and adoptive families throughout the year. These contacts were for a total of 453 children, 338 adopters and 858 birth relatives.



10,086 letterbox exchanges for children; Devon 2,728, Plymouth 3,113, Somerset 2,881 and Torbay 1,364

Seven years later we got a letter

A local adoptive parent has shared their experience when they received their first letter from the birth father, who they have been writing to for seven years. The birth father stated he loved reading the letters but had not known what to write until now. [Read their story on our website. \(https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/contact-with-a-birth-child/letterbox-service/seven-years-later-we-got-a-letter/\)](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/birth-families/contact-with-a-birth-child/letterbox-service/seven-years-later-we-got-a-letter/)

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We know from research that direct contact for adopted children and young people with their birth families supports understanding of their own identity, often providing reassurance to the child and birth relatives. Direct contact can help a child with issues of identity and loss and can support them to manage their feelings around dual connection to the birth and adoptive family.

We have supported direct contacts for over **35** children across the region these are with members of the birth family (including siblings).

In addition to those we continue to support, we are aware that positive relationships have been established between some adopters and birth family members and meeting up has become part of their usual family life events.

In 2024-2025 we have a plan to review direct and indirect contact service to continue the theme of promoting direct contact between adopted children and their families.

Newsletters

Every month we send an informative detailed newsletter to over a thousand (1,109) adoptive families. Content is provided through a newsletter steering group with adoptive parents from the Co-Production Group and members of the team. It details news, events, post-adoption support workshops and training. [A version of the March 2024 newsletter can be found here.](#)

[\(http://a%20version%20of%20the%20march%202023%20newsletter%20can%20be%20found%20here/\)](http://a%20version%20of%20the%20march%202023%20newsletter%20can%20be%20found%20here/)

Panel Matters newsletter is sent to the independent adoption panel members, four times a year.

Adoption [information and event alerts \(https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/events/\)](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/events/), are sent regularly to over 3,000 potential adopters and members of the public. [Sign up to receive our Adopt South West emails alerts. \(https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKDEVONCC/subscriber/topics?qsp=UKDEVONCC_DevonAdoption\)](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKDEVONCC/subscriber/topics?qsp=UKDEVONCC_DevonAdoption)

September 2023 – Adopt South West Conference

We marked our annual celebration of adoption a little earlier in the year, in **September 2023**, with a conference **Communication Around Adoption – Learning from the experiences of adoptive families**, with guest speaker [Julie Young \(https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbI9saW5rX2lkjoxMDIsInVyaSI6ImJwIjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vZXVybMDIuc2FmZWxpbmtzLnByb3RlY3Rpb24ub3V0bG9vay5jb20vP3VybyD1od](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbI9saW5rX2lkjoxMDIsInVyaSI6ImJwIjpbGjJayIsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vZXVybMDIuc2FmZWxpbmtzLnByb3RlY3Rpb24ub3V0bG9vay5jb20vP3VybyD1od)

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Crqnf5ZoWByoXPshsnd6RHE%3D&reserved=0), Senior Researcher in the Centre for Research on Children and
Families at the University of East Anglia. Julie spoke about the crucial role of adoptive parents in family
communication around adoption, and helping young people to manage contact with their birth family and mak
sense of their adoption story in a safe and beneficial way. We also welcomed birth mums and a grandmother to
share their stories and resources were shared for all [Adopt South West Family Practitioner, Karen, attended our annual conference in September, along with many
adoptive parents. Since the conference, Karen tells us:](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbi9saW5rX2lkjloxMDMslmVyaSI6ImJvMjpbGjJaylslmVybC16Imh0dHBzOi8vZXVyMDluc2FmZWxpbmtzLnByb3RlY3Rpb24ub3V0bG9vay5jb20vP3VybdD1dHRwJTNTBTJGJTJGY29udGFjdC5yaXAub3JnLnVrJTJGJmRhdGE9MDUIN0MwMSU3Q21haXJpLmhbbWlSdG9uJTQwZGV2b24uZ292LnVrJTdDZjJjMTQwNGYwYjhiNDdmNmM4OTgwOGRiZDE1NWUwYWIIN0M4ZGExMzc4M2NiN0NDNmYml0Yjk5N2Y3N2ZkNWJmYiU3QzAIN0MwJTdDNjM4MzZmOTM3OTI5Mzg4MTkwJTdDVW5rbm93biU3Q1RXRnBiR1pzYjNkOGV5SldJam9pTUM0d0xqQXdNREFpTENKUUIqb2IWMmx1TXpJaUxDskJUaUk2SWsxaGFXd2IMQ0pYVvKJNk1uMCUzRCU3QzMwMDAIN0MIN0MIN0Mmc2RhdGE9YkVvWHIIMkZ1VGfudTEIMkZE0Up4WIRaa3dlWVZJTJGUHRxWDVwUTMza29qc0pKVSUzRCZyZXNlcnZIZD0wliwiYnVsbGV0aW5faWQiOilyMDIzMDgxNS44MTE0MzY3MSJ9.UT1NTQxMSJ9.cAumkC9v6k8EPwNeLETnG9p04-ExgLMNeYp-aFLSQDI%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F231292164813-1&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783c68443fbb4b997f77fd5fbf%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862572977%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoic4vLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=TyCrACQ4iTNGgd3ulqOeeNvP6HqNNDOTrzF%2BNSdJNo%3D&reserved=0). This conference gave us the opportunity to promote the
need to help children stay in touch with people who matter to them and saw the start of our agency focus on
maintaining significant relationships being central to our work going forward.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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66 **“I think the conference really had an impact on many adopters. -“As part of my role, I check letters that come from adopters and birth families. After hearing the stories of the guest birth parents, some adoptive parents have looked at their own letterbox agreements ([— Karen, Family Practitioner, Adopt South West](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2F%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbm9saW5rX2lkjoxMDQsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpbGjIjYsInVybCI6Imh0dHBzOi8vd3d3LmFkb3B0c291dGh3ZXN0Lm9yZy51ay9iaXJ0aC1mYW1pbGllcy9jb250YWN0LXdpdGgtYS1iaXJ0aC1jaGlsZC9sZXR0ZXJib3gtc2VydmVjZS8iLCJidWxsZXRpbm9pZCI6ImJwMjMxMTIxLjg1OTU1NDExIn0.d6LswFAzfGTDzmNVdQbuYtdHE-c5heYVOgYbhmTKY-g%2Fs%2F172372590%2Fbr%2F231292164813-l&data=05%7C02%7CAmanda.White%40devon.gov.uk%7C0faca0294d4e42884f5208dc8ec78830%7C8da13783cb68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638542234862579452%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=178RcZ5uhj8CGjG1iqOxjbErODA9eNrehnToUwoRUjs%3D&reserved=0), and felt more empathy for birth parents. As a result, many adopters have reviewed their agreement and have now agreed for birth families to keep their photos rather than viewing only.”</p></div><div data-bbox=)**

Feedback from the conference included;

66 “I had no idea about different types of contact or that we had any influence over it. I assumed what was stated by court was what we had to do until they were teenagers/adults. I knew we could stop if it was in child’s best interests but didn’t know we could increase.”

“If deemed safe by ASW may consider proactively investigating direct [^][Top](#) contact with birth family as our daughter grows up (earlier than I thought, it may be likely to naturally occur requested by daughter).”

“I came away with a lot to think about in how often we bring up the conversation around birth family, we will be reviewing what we do.”

“I will revisit my child’s life journey book .”

“I really like the birth mother’s description of what she really liked as content in the letters, and I will make changes based on this.”

“I found the birth Mum talks really helpful – that was so brave of them. I was never planning to stop writing our annual contact letters, despite never getting a response; but it was interesting to hear that that could possibly change at some point – that we might get an answer one day.”

— What adopters told us

“Greater awareness of the importance of contact for the emotional stability of adopted young people. Julie Young’s evidence was very convincing – my feeling is that if ASW doesn’t take action to put her suggestions into place, then we are letting down our adopted young people.”

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“I will feel more confident about discussing contact with adoptive families.”

“It really was so helpful to hear about the lived experience of adopters and birth families. Reminds me of the importance of challenging contact plans.”

— What Adopt South West professionals said

Social events during 2023 to 2024

We rely on feedback from our children/young people and families about our organised events. These are some views shared this year, we will be developing our events this year with the feedback in mind.

Photo collage from the scrap store and play activities

April 2023 Teen outdoor events in Somerset

An outdoor activity centre offering a variety of activities for all ages.

Photo collage from the outdoor woodland events for teens

What did families most enjoy?

“Fire and cooking.”

“He liked making pizzas and building a fire.”

“Easter Egg Hunt, making pizzas.”

Although she was a bit apprehensive my daughter really enjoyed the activities.”

It was a shame there weren't many other kids there – and the weather was cold!”

“More kids! The weather!”

— What families told us they loved about the event

Walk and talk events for families take place across our region

May 2023 Family walks

Families most enjoyed:

“Decorating the rocks”

“They found it tricky due to small number of people on the walk – it was quite intense.”

– What adoptive families told us

Summer holidays 2023



Adoptive families enjoying summer activities on a local farm

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Over the Summer our activities included Equine Family Fun Days, Longrun Meadow walk, Haldon Forest walk and picnic and a Dawlish beach walk:

“It was good, a little awkward to begin with, but good to get to know some other adopters.”

“It was a pleasant walk with nice people.”

Children young people said they most enjoyed:

“It was good, a little awkward to begin with but good to get to know some other adopters.”

“It was a pleasant walk with nice people.”

“Children young people said they most enjoyed:

“Making some new friends.”

“Exploring the woods.”

“The walk through the forest picking up sticks!”

Peer Mentoring Scheme

Adopt South West are progressing with support for adopters through Peer Mentoring.

Every adoptive parent has exceptional experience which enables them to offer support and encouragement to adopters as they move through the adoption journey. And we know there's nothing quite like talking to another adopter whose lived experience means that they 'get it'. This is not a substitute for the professional advice that new parents will receive; it's about being a supportive and reassuring mentor, providing new perspectives and approaches, and signposting services and resources.

Our focus will begin with mentors for adopters at the early stage of a child moving into their family.

We are at the stage of interviews for peer mentors and we are very excited about moving into next year with progress. Mentors will undertake online learning and attend online workshops. Mentors will receive regular supervision and support as required. This is a volunteer role, but appropriate expenses for travel will be reimbursed. Checks and references will be undertaken, including DBS checks and applicants will be expected to attend an informal interview.

Positive feedback from people who have previously worked as peer mentors includes:

“It's a good way to support others.”

“Building relationships and sharing experiences.”

“Allowed me to reflect on my journey.”

“I have been able to develop my skills which has helped me to get back into work.”

— Peer mentors

The development of a Peer Mentor group will support our work going forward.

Finance

In 2023/24, Adopt South West received funding from the four councils it provided adoption services for. The funding formula was based on historic spend on adoption services, plus adjustments for additional responsibilities. The existing funding formula has been in use since the creation of Adopt South West, and during 2023/24 was revised to refresh the data and to include Cornwall Council who joined the partnership from 1 April 2024.

| Partner | % Proportion | Contribution |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Devon County Council | 37.04% | £2,011,331 |
| Plymouth City Council | 22.46% | £1,219,614 |
| Somerset County Council | 23.55% | £1,278,803 |
| Torbay County | 16.95% | £921,412 [^] |
| Total | 100.00% | £5,430,160 Top |

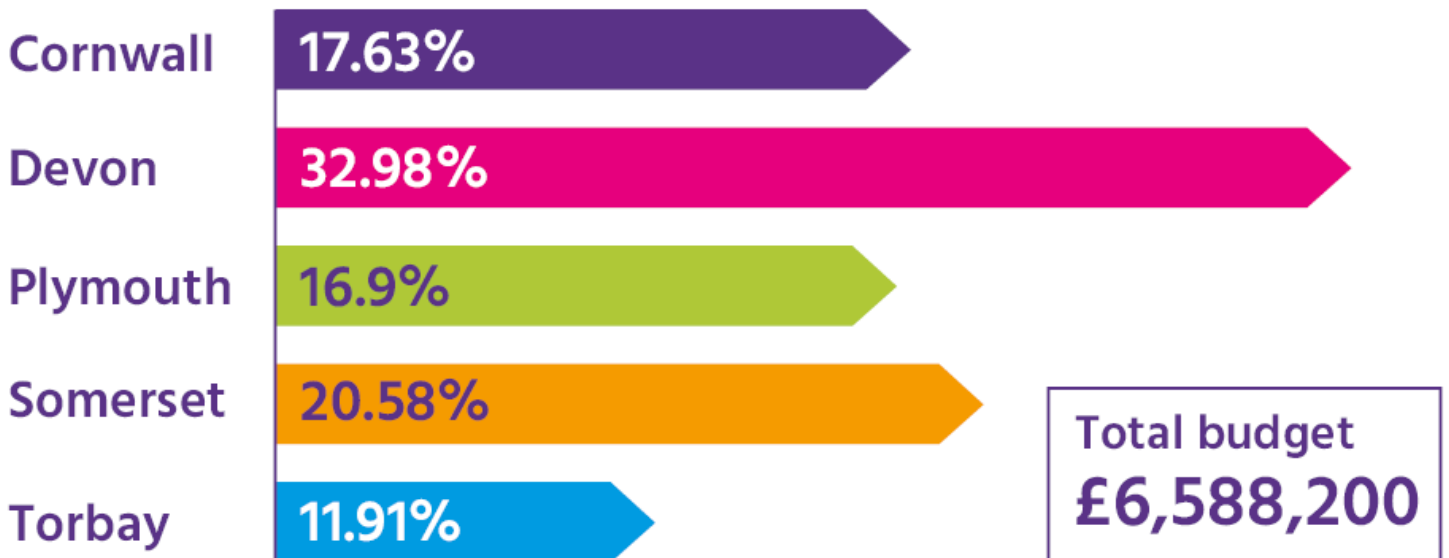
Total annual budget and the budget framework percentages agreed for 2023/24

Adopt South West held no reserves at the beginning of the year. In 2023/24, the out-turn position for the ASW Operational budget was an underspend of £45,629. This underspend mainly arose due to staff vacancies during the year, partially offset by increased recharges from Devon County Council reflecting additional ICT and Insurance charges. However, the most significant underspend was within the inter-agency fees budget which was £506,175 under budget.

The net underspend of £551,804 was returned to the four local councils according to the percentages shown in the table above.

Looking forward to 2024/25, the budget for Adopt South West is £6,588,200 and includes the cost of the functions that Adopt South West has taken over from Cornwall Council. For this year the costs will be charged partners in the following proportions:

Local Authority



Local Authority budget split: 17.63% Cornwall, 32.98% Devon, 16.9% Plymouth, 20.58% Somerset, 11.91% Torbay. Total budget for Adopt South West is £6,588,200

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

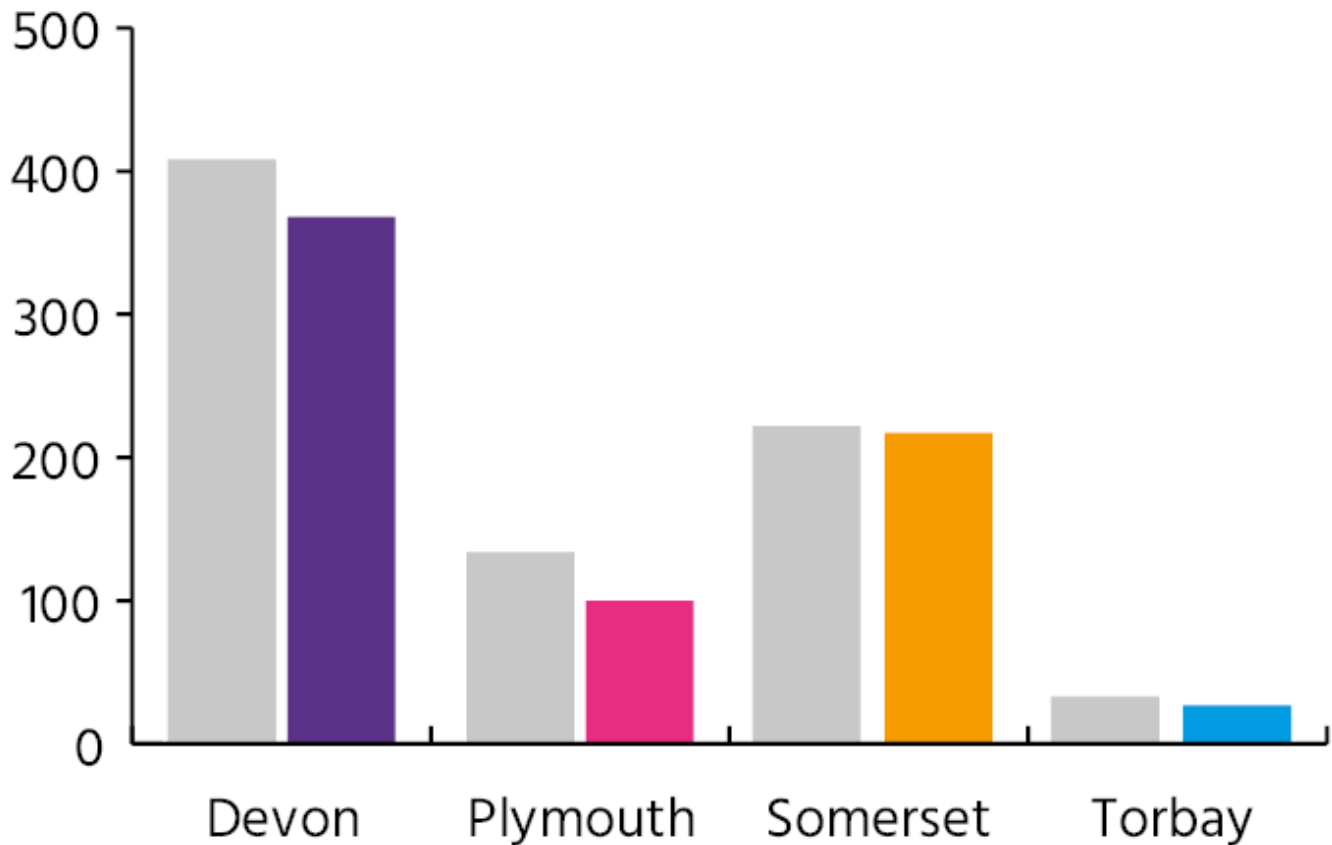
Adopt South West supports applications being made to the ASGSF fund to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive families.

We are continually reviewing our Adopt South West processes to respond to changes centrally to the ASGSF so that we can access adoption support funding more efficiently and more promptly.



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712 applications were approved by the Adoption Support Fund from April 2023 until the end of March 2024. This compares to 797 in the previous year and 713 successful applications in the 2021/22 year.



Number of applications 2023/24



Number of applications 2022/23



712 applications were approved by the Adoption Support Fund from April 2023 until the end of March 2024. This compares to 797 in the previous year and 713 successful applications in the 2021/22 year.

This demonstrates staff's commitment to complete assessments of need and applications to the Adoption Support Fund in order to ensure that families receive the therapeutic support they need.

The average spend for the applications is £2,336.84.

In the full year, we were able to access £293,740.80 to provide therapeutic support for families in the ASW region.

Commissioning and procurement

The 12-month period from March 2023 to March 2024 has been a period of two halves for the commissioning of adoption support services. We started the year building on the improvements that had been embedded during the previous period and ended the period with a brand new refreshed Flexible Purchasing System and the integration of Cornwall into Adopt South West.

As mentioned in the previous period's report the original purchasing system for adoption support expired in 2023, this was replaced with a revised and updated version which went live on the 1st December 2023. The transition was a sensitive period as the original structure had taken many years to embed and develop to a successful state. There was a risk that providers having to reapply to the new structure may prompt a loss of providers. Great effort was put into allowing an expedited process that would incur the least disruption possible. This has proved to be very successful as most providers transferred and there were a number of brand new providers added to the purchasing system as well.

The other significant development during this period was the preparation for Cornwall joining Adopt South West. A significant amount of work was carried out including various events to welcome Cornwall's providers onto the new purchase system. This has also proved to be successful with many new providers from Cornwall joining as well as some existing providers expanding into Cornwall.

The processes under the purchasing arrangement for expressions of interest and referrals is continuously developed as well meaning that the whole service continues to improve and become even more successful. With the ongoing success of the Purchasing System this has allowed focus to be moved to embedding the new outcomes regime, improving financial arrangements and shortening the period before families receive support.

All of the above is helping Adopt South West to continuously develop and improve the support we are able to provide to our adoptive families.

National work

RAA leaders are working collaboratively on developing and improving practice and delivering improved outcomes for children and families as part of the government's national adoption strategy. The work programme has been agreed by RAA leaders nationally and is supported by the Department for Education.

Recruitment and Adopter Journey: Adopters from diverse communities feel welcomed to adoption. They are helped to build their skills and strengths enabling them to support their children. Adopt South West has contributed to the work undertaken in development of [national practice standards for the Adopter's Journey \(https://adoptionengland.co.uk/leaderships-and-management-ep/national-practice-standards-early-permanence\)](https://adoptionengland.co.uk/leaderships-and-management-ep/national-practice-standards-early-permanence).

, launched in June 2024. Adopter preparation is a focus of this work with Adopt South West practitioners engaging in sharing and reviewing adopter training packages.

Journey of a Child: A strong Regional Adoption Agency/Local Authority partnership improve matching practices and children move to live with the families without unnecessary delay, many through Early Permanence placements.

Operations and Team Managers have been part of focus groups to develop the national practice standards for matching. The National Practice Standards launched May 2024:

[National Practice Standards for Matching | Adoption England](https://adoptionengland.co.uk/matching/national-practice-standards-matching).

(<https://adoptionengland.co.uk/matching/national-practice-standards-matching>).

Work is continuing with representatives of all sectors of the **care planning** system to improve consistency and quality of permanency planning for children where there is a likely plan for adoption. An area focus which Adopt South West Quality Assurance managers are engaged within is the quality of Child Permanence Reports and training for practitioners.

High quality **adoption support** is available to all families. The support meets the needs of the children and families and is offered whenever it is required. During this year consultation regarding an adoption support plan has taken place, with CoramBAAF progressing a pilot of the revised document and guidance in 2024. The desired outcome will be to have an adoption support plan which is recognised and understood by adopters and used consistently across the country. In addition, a model for early placement adoption support is being developed, the pilot progressing in 2024 to 2025. Inclusive to the model is a workbook which is intended to support adopters in their reflection, learning and understand of their child.

In addition Adopt South West are part of one of the Adoption Support projects which is focusing on the development of **adoption support data sets**. System development is being progress with the plan for a phased implementation.

Maintaining Relationships: Evidence based practices that enable children to understand their life history and stay in touch with the important people in their lives are being developed and piloted. This includes digital platforms for letter swaps (Letterbox).

As part of the National Adoption Commissioning Programme, Adopt South West is working pan regionally with Adoption West and Aspire exploring the potential of **pan-regional commissioning arrangements for adoption support**: [National England website \(https://adoptionengland.co.uk/\)](https://adoptionengland.co.uk/).

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Focus for 2024 to 2025

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“ Embedding our cultural identity as the Regional Adoption Agency for our five Local Authorities

We move into 2024-25 with our Regional Adoption Agency's expansion in undertaking the adoption functions on behalf of the local council for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, alongside our existing local councils of Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay.

There has been an extensive plan in place which included practice and process alignment between Cornwall and Adopt South West, however this first year will be a year of reflection, reviewing, redefining and embedding change.

In this first year there will need to be a focus on revisiting our identity, values and vision with Cornwall having joined our agency.

Voice and influence

We will be looking at improving ways in which children and young people, adopters, birth families and adoptee adults are able to share their views and feedback with us to inform what we do and how we do it.

Maintaining significant relationships

We will be working together with our regional partner agencies to make sure that all children and young people are supported to stay in touch with the people that are important to them.

Timely adoption support

Our Triage team will further embed to provide timely adoption support for families.

Contributors:

Mark Berry – Operations Manager

Lucy Hextall – Operations Manager

Helen Atkinson – Family Finding Team Manager

Vanessa Dove – Adoption Support Team Manager

Matthew Woolley – Adoption Support Team Manager

Mairi Hamilton – Marketing and Communications

Andrew Simkin – Procurement

Paul Carter – Finance

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Published 10/07/2024 1:04pm

Last Updated 18/07/2024 10:02am