

## **Adopt Coast to Coast 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023**

### **Marketing Activity**

In this year we have had some periods of time where we have been less-visible which has in-turn affected enquiry numbers. Marketing activity was reduced during the criminal trial in Cumbria, when the verdict was announced and when the safeguarding review report was released. This was the appropriate action to take but the impact of this can be seen on the enquiry numbers. We also faced challenges in the later part of the year, firstly due to the passing of Queen Elizabeth II where we were unable to do marketing activity at a key 'back to school' time. Secondly, we believe the cost-of-living crisis has had an understandable detrimental effect on incoming enquiries. We are aware this is also the experience of other RAAs and VAAs across England.

### **Learning from marketing activity carried out to date**

- Real stories resonate with people
- Videos are engaged with the most
- Profiles of real children increases engagement
- Social media activity about post-adoption support such as events significantly helps engagement with adopters and target audience
- Google ads are essential to maintaining incoming enquiries
- Social media and digital activity support awareness raising
- Sponsored content with local publications is successful
- Our website remains our biggest recruitment tool
- Targeted campaigns e.g. sibling adoption throughout the year works well
- Adopter 'type' specific recruitment activity is well received e.g. LGBTQ+ and single parent adopters

Going forward we will focus activity on the following areas and key messages (general themes listed below not exact content):

### **General recruitment**

- We are here to support you to take the first step
- There isn't a set list of credentials for prospective adopters
- We are the RAA for Durham County Council and Together for Children (Sunderland)
- Adopt Cost to Coast offers early permanence and mainstream adoption
- We work within Government timeframes

### **We are the experts on adoption**

- We have well established adoption services
- Adopt Coast to Coast is involved in regional and national activity
- We are innovative and always looking to improve

## Children and families

- We find families for children who wait the longest
- Decisions are made at the best interest of children
- We support prospective adopters from enquiry, to approval, match and once a new family is formed
- Post-adoption support is tailored to family needs

## **Adopt Coast to Coast and spokes' performance**

	<b>Adopt Coast to Coast</b>	<b>Cumbria</b>	<b>Durham</b>	<b>Together for Children</b>
Enquiries 2022/23	456	157 - *34%	178 - *39%	115 - *25%
(2021/22)	(558)	(186 - *33%)	(216 - *39%)	(156 - *28%)
Approvals 2022/23	86	18 - *21%	41 - *48%	27 - *31%
(2021/22)	(78)	(11 - *14%)	(40 - *51%)	(27 - *35%)
Matches 2022/23	125	34 - *27%	58 - *46%	33 - *26%
(2021/22)	(122)	(28 - *23%)	(65 - *53%)	(29 - *24%)
In year conversion from number of enquiries to approval 2022/23	19%	11%	23%	23%
(2021/22)	14%	6%	19%	17%

\*percentage of RAA performance

## Durham County Council's Adoption Performance

### Children's Journey

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Analysis
Waiting with PO	14	10	11	This year has seen a reduction in the number of children who have waited over 6 months for a match and this is a very positive development. The adoption team are proactive in considering possible links utilising Link Maker.
Waited over 6 months	1	4	0	
Matched	60	65	58	
Interagency use	18 (30%)	34 (52%)	*17 (29%)	

\*outside of RAA approved prospective adopters

### Prospective Adopter's Journey

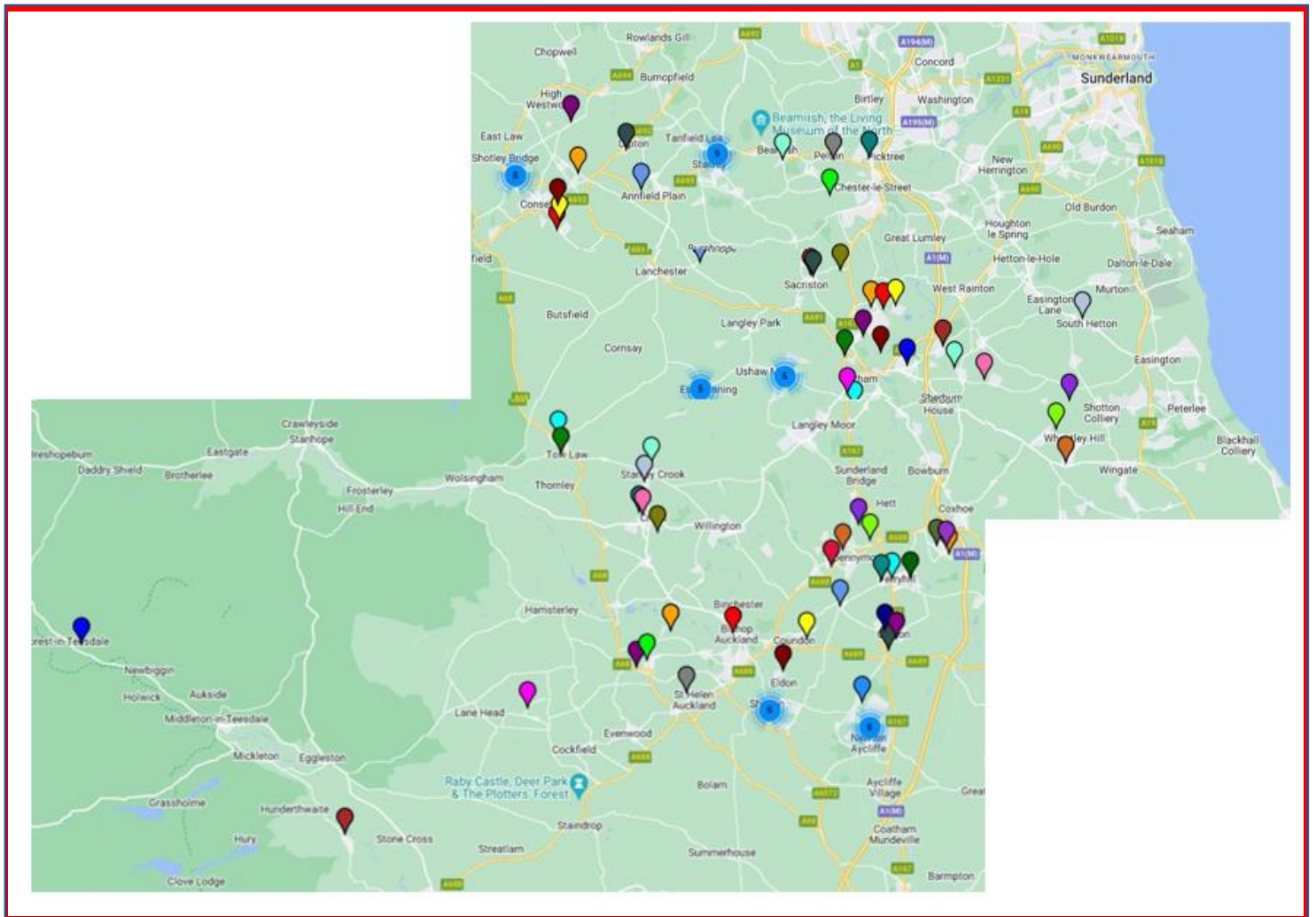
Durham's adoption team are responding to enquiries promptly. The team cover Durham and all areas South. Unlike other RAAs we do not operate within a geographical limit, rather all enquiries are dealt with on a case by case basis which ensures Adopt Coast to Coast does not exclude enquirers who may be wishing to adopt a child whose needs would result in it taking longer to secure a match. The attached maps show the enquiries and stage 1 applications received from within the areas covered by Durham County Council.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Analysis
Enquiries	141	216	178	Durham's adoption team continue to demonstrate strong and consistent performance. They work diligently to meet statutory timescales which both secures adoptive families for children with plans of adoption and supports recruitment messages.
Stage 1	*13	*17/**11	*14/**2	
Stage 2	*9	*8	*6	
Approvals	41	40	41	

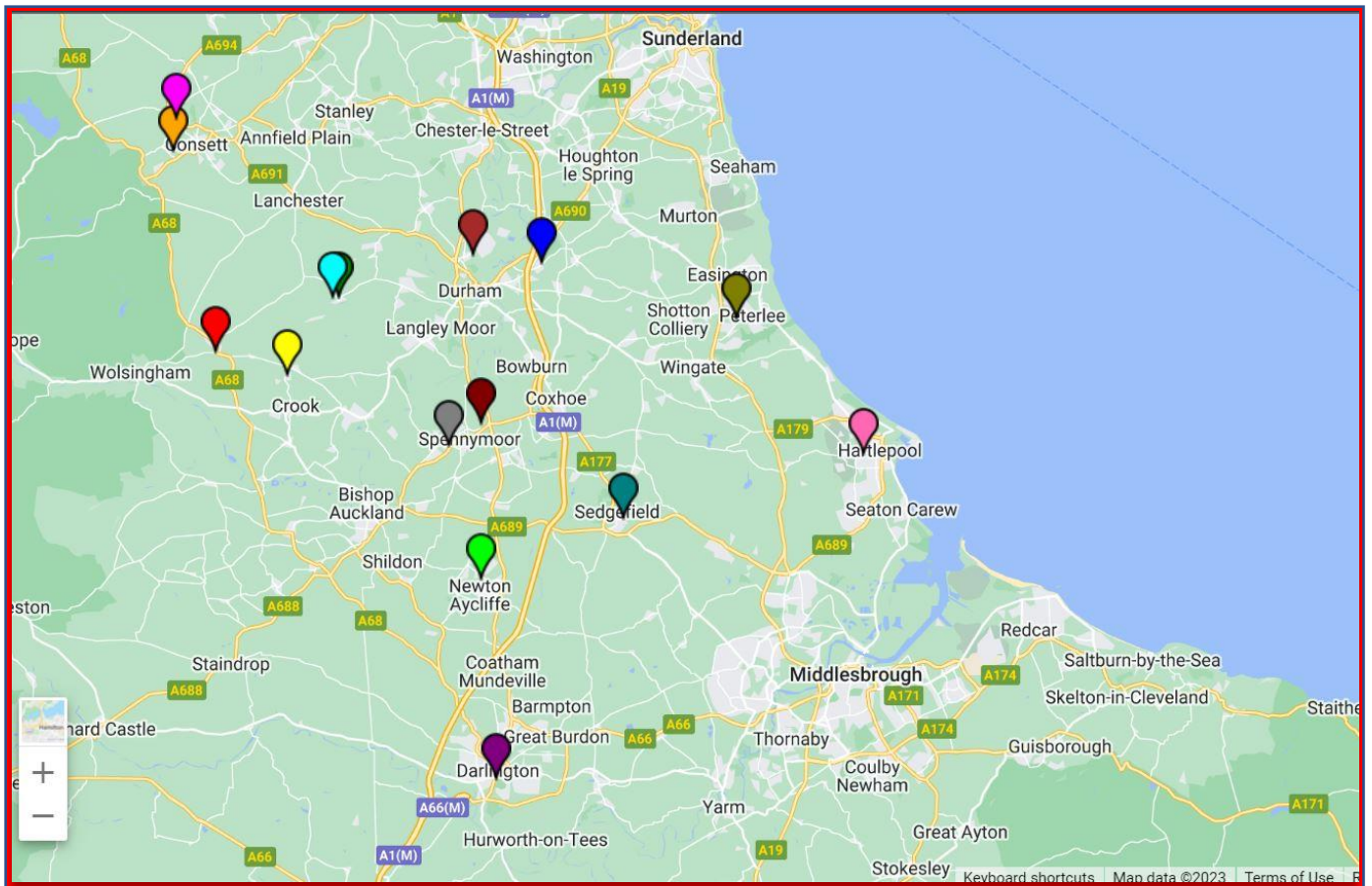
\*at 31<sup>st</sup> March

\*\*pending – successfully completed stage 1, yet to move into stage 2

## Map of Enquiries received



## Map of Commenced Stage 1



## Prospective adopter journey

### Natalie and Oliver adopted Reuben and Isaac now aged 6.

Unlike many people who start researching adoption, Natalie and Oliver always thought that they would like to adopt more than one child, with Natalie saying: “We chose to adopt siblings because it can be quite an onerous process to adopt. It was fairly painless for us because as adopters we were pretty straight-forward, but it’s still a process we had to undertake. We knew we wanted two children and we thought that if we could keep two children together by adopting them together, then that would be the best thing for them, and the best thing for us. At one point I remember us saying that our ideal scenario would be to have twins. It really was because they would do everything at the same time, and they’d always have their closest family member with them too which was important to us. We were very lucky in that we were matched with twins, and it was a bonus that we only went through the process once.”

Oliver added: “Going from zero children to multiple children is something that’s probably more challenging for the first couple of years, but once they start to interact and play with each other the tables turn and you feel like you’re having an easier time.”

Like all brothers Reuben and Isaac have their small fall outs. When asked what the most annoying thing about his brother was, Reuben was quick to say: “He fights with me”, and Isaac was just as quick to reply with “He fights with me too”. But when asked about their favourite thing they do together the boys really lit up and were quick to reel off a collective list of “Football, rugby, tennis, basketball, canoeing, paddleboarding – lots of sports. We like baking in the house together – we like chocolate brownies, biscuits, and cookies. Mummy is better than daddy at cooking, but rugby is daddy’s favourite sport.”

For parents, Natalie, and Oliver they couldn’t agree more. “The best thing about having the two boys is the way they play together and the way they entertain each other, and just the fun that they have. The way they make us laugh. It’s great.” said Oliver.

Even the boys agree, with Isaac said: “I like having a brother because I like playing games and sport with him. I love my family.” Echoing his brother Reuben added: “I love my family because they play with me and because I love my mummy and daddy, and I love Isaac.”

Natalie noted, “They settled in very quickly. With retrospect it took a little longer for one of the boys, but the other settled in immediately. We didn’t realise it at the time because they slept 12 hours the night we brought them home, but a lot of that was probably down to the fact that they were together. They had always slept next to each other in cots and even though one-year olds don’t interact very much, they are taking comfort from having the presence next to them. I really hope their closeness lasts.”

Speaking about the impact of adoption on their lives, Oliver said with a smile: “It’s made me realise that all of those times that you thought you were busy, was actually free time. It’s been great adopting kids – there’s a lot of rushing, toing, and froing, buying food and doing the laundry but it’s all great. It opens your perspective to a new kind of enjoyment. They are bundles of energy – with good appetites and grazed knees – all of that good stuff.”

“To sum it up – we’ve never been busier, but we wouldn’t change it for the world.” Concluded Natalie.

Final word goes to the boys who summed it up perfectly, by saying: “If I didn’t live with my brother, I would be sad. Really, really sad.”



#### **Marketing activity priorities for 2023/24**

- The change in partnership model could appear that we have access to less children and therefore prospective adopters will wait longer to be matched. We need to tackle this potential threat by counteracting it with positive stories, releasing figures on timescales for matching and using figures about the number of children waiting (to show there are always children available).
- Stories about increasing costs continues to dominate the media and impacting families of all incomes. Whilst this may ease towards the latter part of the year, we need to reiterate messages surrounding the support available to adopters and remove any other perceived barriers which may add to uncertainty about applying. Some marketing activity could also be targeted towards higher earners.
- There will always be groups of children who wait longer to be matched in their forever homes, targeted marketing activity needs to be run alongside general recruitment focused on recruiting prospective adopters for these children. To do this we need to continue to create video, profiles, press releases and website articles which show the reality of life for these children and take away some of the fear.

**Paula Gibbons**  
**Head of Service - Adopt Coast to Coast**