

**Annual Report for**  
**Adopt Coast to Coast**  
**1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

**Marketing Activity**

During 2023/24 there was a period where our brand and presence has been less-visible which in-turn has had an impact on recruitment. Marketing activity was reduced between 1 March and 12 June 2023 due to a vacancy within the role of marketing and communications officer. This was further delayed while the new post holder settled into the role. Paid for advertising recommenced in September 2023. The impact of this was a significant reduction in the number of enquiries during this period and beyond.

We also faced challenges throughout the year with the continuation of the cost-of-living crisis and the understandable detrimental effect it is having on incoming enquiries. This picture is evident across the nation, with most RAAs and VAAs identifying similar concerns about a drop in enquiry numbers; particularly in the North East.

**Learnings from marketing activity carried out to date**

- Google ads are essential to maintaining incoming enquiries and remain our biggest recruitment tool
- Real stories resonate with people
- Videos are engaged with the most
- Profiles of real children increases engagement
- Social media and digital activity support awareness raising
- Sponsored content with local publications is successful
- Targeted campaigns e.g. brother and sister groups adoption throughout the year works well
- Adopter 'type' specific recruitment activity is well received e.g. LGBTQ+ and single parent adopters

Going forward in 2024-25, our **target audience groups** will be:

- Members of the public aged over 21 years and living in the UK
- Members of the public who live in our region and Scottish borders/Scotland, up to and including Edinburgh.
- LGBTQ+ community
- Affluent postcode areas

**Key messages** for 2024-25 will be aligned to the following:

### **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 Coast 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

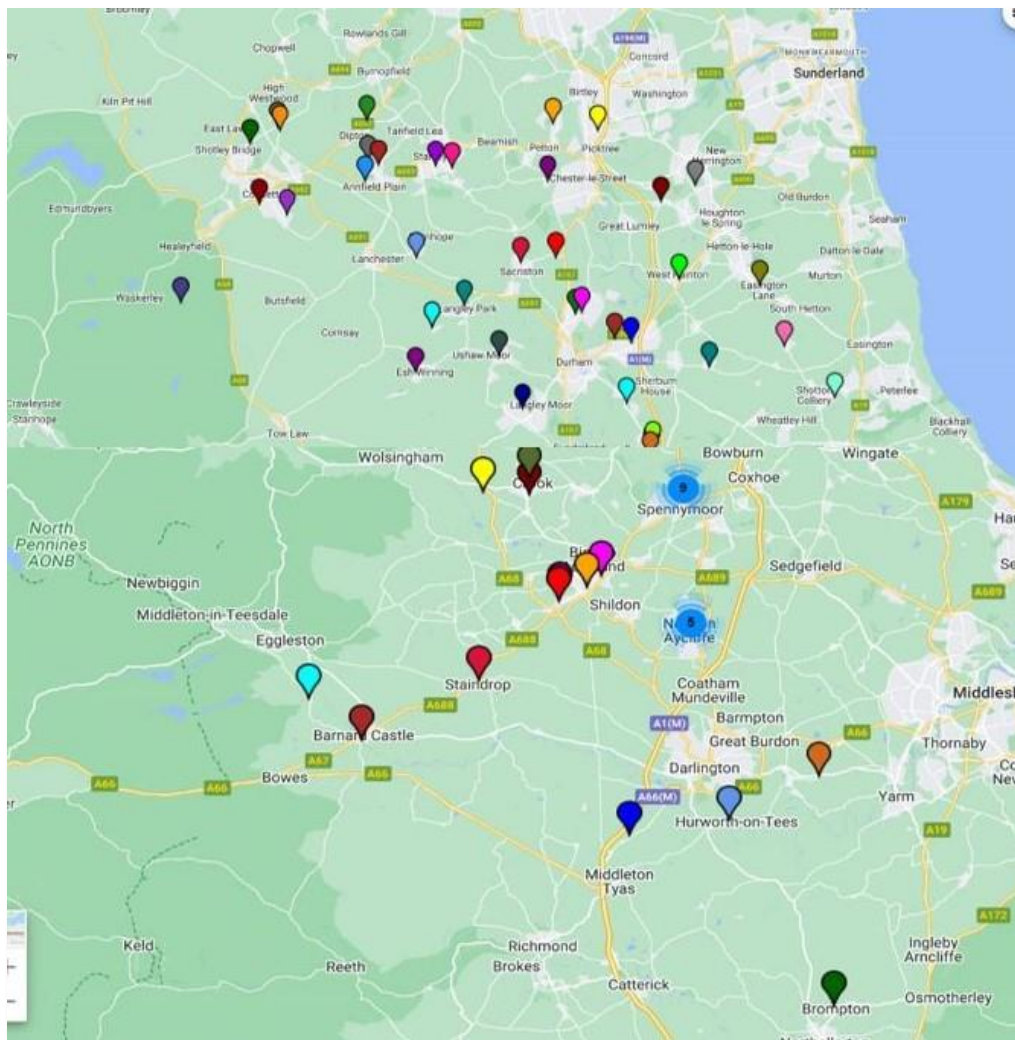
|  | Adopt Coast to Coast | Durham     | Together for Children |
|--|----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Enquiries<br>2023/24   | 227                  | 115 - *51% | 112 - *49%            |
| (2022/23)  | 293**                | 178 - *61% | 115 - *39%            |
| (2021/22)  | 372**                | 216 - *58% | 156 - *42%            |
| Approvals<br>2023/24   | 37                   | 15 - *41%  | 22 - *59%             |
| (2022/23)  | 68**                 | 41 - *60%  | 27 - *40%             |
| (2021/22)  | 67**                 | 40 - *60%  | 27 - *40%             |
| Matches<br>2023/24   | 70                   | 40 - *57%  | 30 - *43%             |
| (2022/23)  | 91**                 | 58 - *64%  | 33 - *36%             |
| (2021/22)  | 94**                 | 65 - *69%  | 29 - *31%             |
| In year conversion from<br>number of enquiries to<br>approval<br>2023/24 | 16%                  | 13%        | 20%                   |
| (2022/23)  | 23%                  | 23%        | 23%                   |
| (2021/22)  | 18%                  | 19%        | 17%                   |

\*percentage of RAA performance

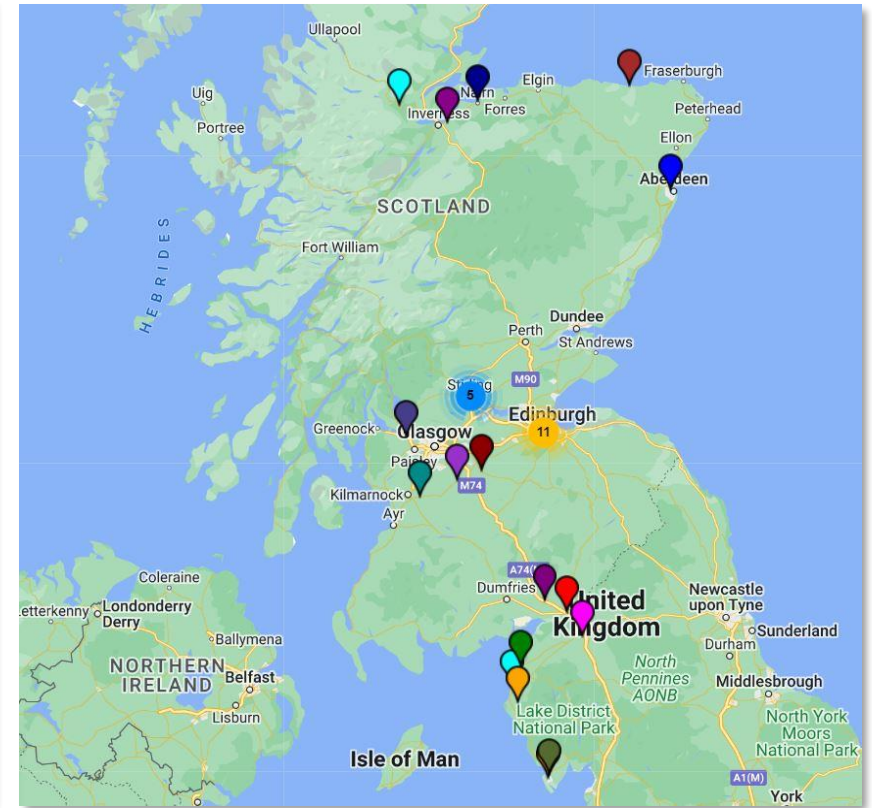
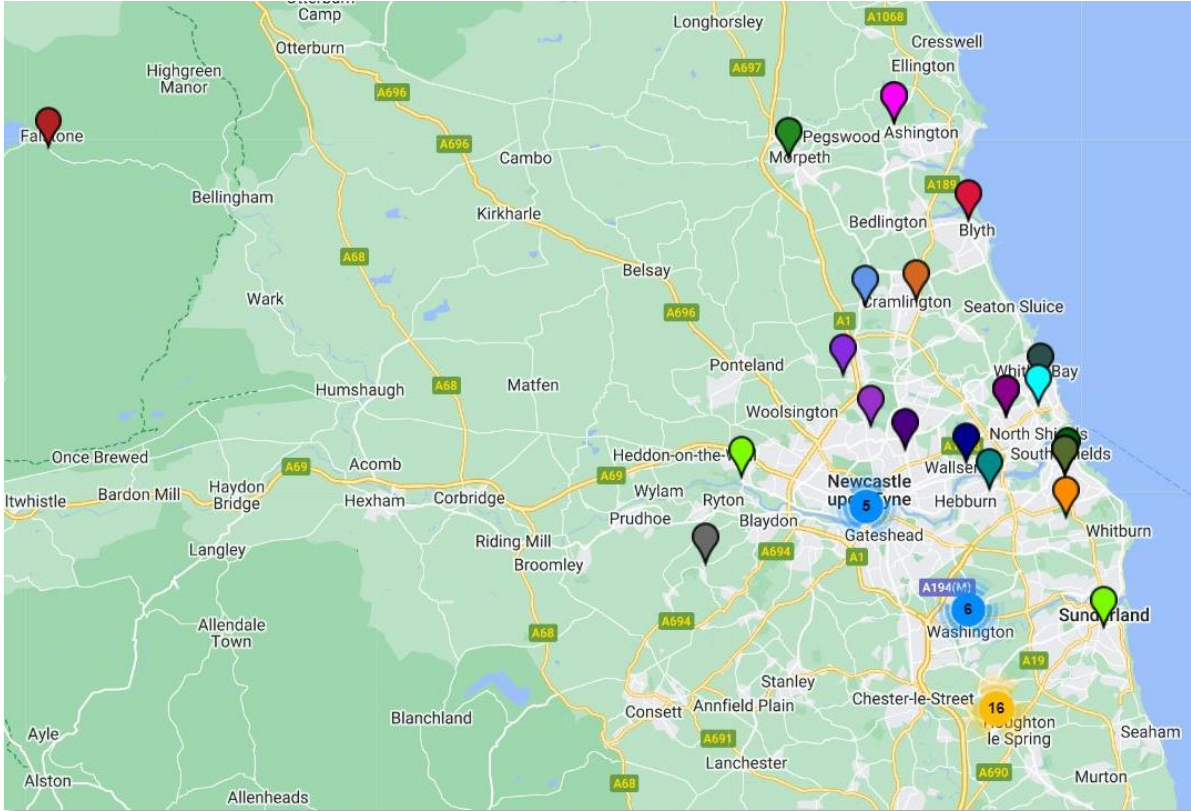
\*\*minus Cumbrian figures

## Maps of enquiries received

### Durham

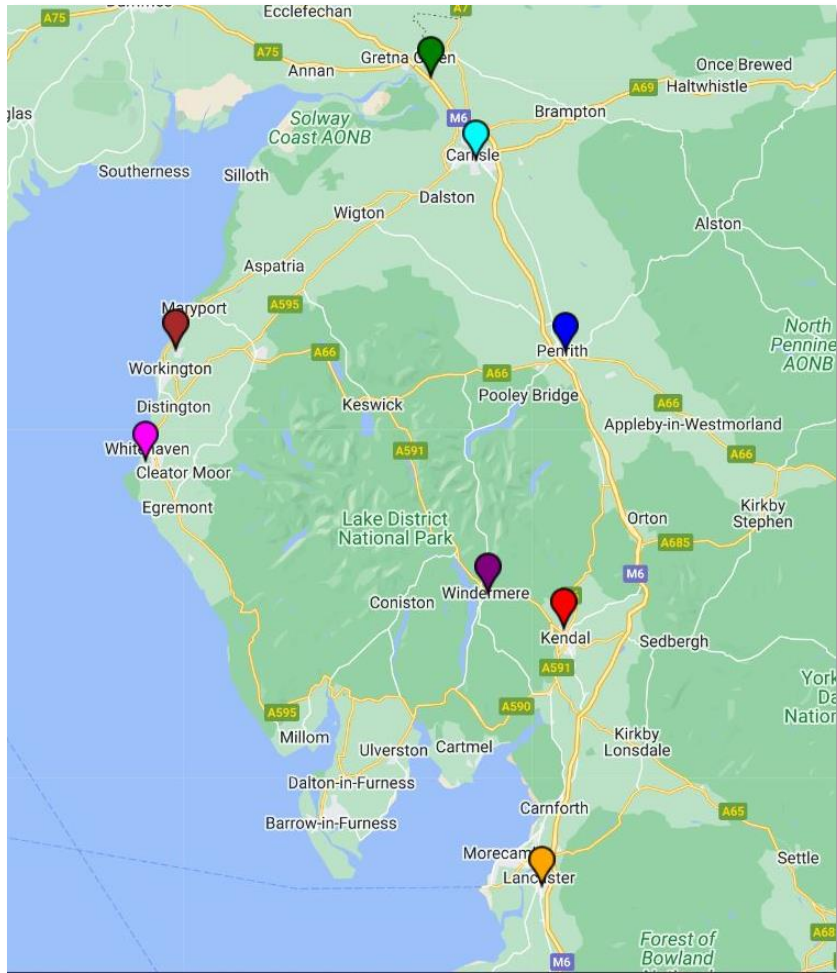


TfC



## Cumbria

It was agreed that any online enquiries received between 1<sup>st</sup> April and the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 would still automatically go to Cumbria Adoption to give them a period of grace in developing their online presence on behalf of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furniss.



## Spokes position at 31<sup>st</sup> March

|   | Durham    |           |           |           | Together for Children |           |           |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|   | 31/3/2021 | 31/3/2022 | 31/3/2023 | 31/3/2024 | 31/3/2021             | 31/3/2022 | 31/3/2023 | 31/3/2024 |
| Approved adopters without a link/match in progress<br>*waited over 6 months from approval | 4         | 6         | 11/3*     | 2/0       | 6                     | 5         | 7/3*      | 5/1       |
| Prospective Adopters in Stage 1   | 13        | 17        | 14        | 12        | 10                    | 8         | 10        | 7         |
| Prospective Adopter in Stage 2 pending  | 0         | 11        | 2         | 0         | 2                     | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Prospective Adopters in Stage 2   | 9         | 8         | 6         | 5         | 8                     | 10        | 11        | 9         |

## Spokes Adoption Performance

### Children's Journey

|  | Durham    |           |           |           | Together for Children |           |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|  | 31/3/2021 | 31/3/2022 | 31/3/2023 | 31/3/2024 | 31/3/2021             | 31/3/2022 | 31/3/2023 | 31/1/2024 |
| Children with ADM/SHOPA but no Placement Order   | 27        | 18        | 9         | 27        | 14                    | 7         | 15        | 7         |
| Children with Placement Order/number without a link/match  | 31/14     | 32/10     | 28/11     | 44/30     | 27/14                 | 21/9      | 17/10     | 22/10     |
| Children who have had a Placement Order for over 6 months  | 1         | 4         | 0         | 6         | 5                     | 5         | 7         | 4         |
| Children in EP placements (Fostering for Adoption/ Concurrency) from 1 <sup>st</sup> April - cumulative throughout the year. | 3         | 6**       | 3         | 7         | 7                     | 4***      | 4         | 10        |
| Children matched since April   | 60        | 65        | 58        | 40        | 39                    | 29        | 33        | 30        |
| Children placed outside RAA with interagency fees from 1 <sup>st</sup> April -cumulative throughout the year.                | 18<br>30% | 34<br>52% | 17<br>29% | 12<br>30% | 28<br>72%             | 14<br>48% | 10<br>30% | 3<br>10%  |



## Adoption Support

In recognising the national increase in adoption support, the monthly data collection was extended in November to include adoption support referrals, assessments of support needs and adoption support cases. As the table below shows, Durham is on an increasing trajectory across all 3 areas of practice; to understand this trend, the management team are planning a review of all support cases to ensure that it is appropriate for them to remain open.

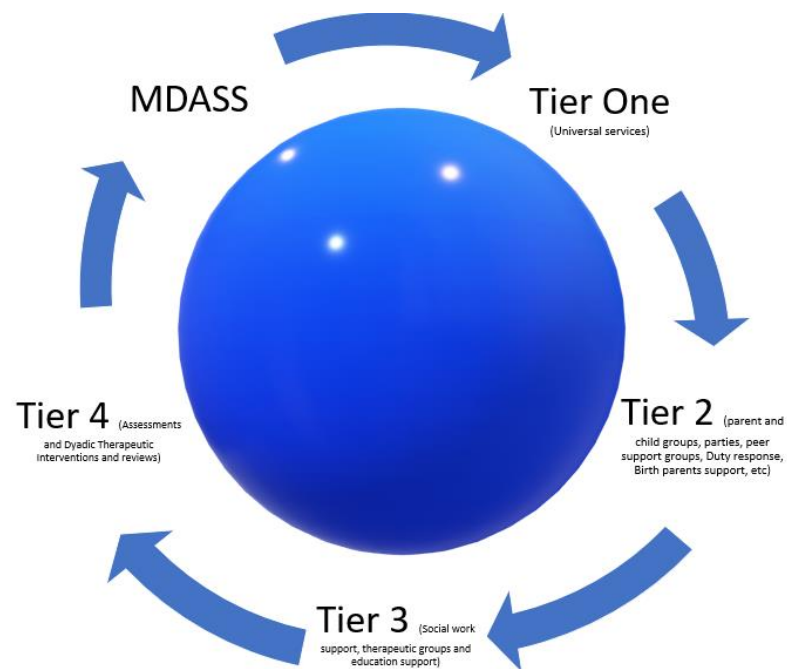
For Together for Children, except for a slight increase in adoption support requests in Feb 2024, all other areas of practice across the period of recording shows a decrease in activity. An annual review of all open support cases is already embedded in TfC and their learning from these has been utilised in developing their support offer.

| Spoke                 | Post Adoption Support Requests |     | Post Adoption Support Assessments |               | Support cases |          | Post Adoption Support Requests |     | Post Adoption Support Assessments |     | Support cases |     | Post Adoption Support Requests | Post Adoption Support Assessments | Support cases |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|--------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
|                       | Nov                            | Dec | Nov                               | Dec           | Nov           | Dec 2023 | Jan                            | Feb | Jan                               | Feb | Jan           | Feb | March                          | March                             | March 2024    |
| Durham                | 5                              | 5   | Not available                     | Not available | 124           | 132      | 4                              | 5   | 4                                 | 5   | 130           | 135 | 16                             | 16                                | 151           |
| Difference            |                                | -   |                                   |               |               | + 8      | -1                             | +1  |                                   | +1  | -2            | + 5 | + 11                           | + 11                              | + 16          |
| Together for Children | 2                              | 2   | 5                                 | 5             | 94            | 94       | 2                              | 5   | 3                                 | 2   | 90            | 87  | 0                              | 2                                 | 82            |
| Difference            |                                | -   | -                                 | -             | -             | -        | -                              | + 3 | -2                                | -1  | -4            | -3  | -                              | -                                 | -5            |

In recognising the increasing needs of adoptive families and to achieve a consistent support offer across the RAA, an adoption support strategy has been developed. For 2024/25 there is a focus on increasing the universal offer (tier 1) with the aim of engaging with adoptive families sooner and developing services that provide a step-down from the highest level of need. This development is timely as Adopt Coast to Coast are part of a national development across RAAs.

### Proposed Adopt Coast to Coast Adoption Support Model

MDASS (Multi-disciplinary adoption support service) is a shared service across Adopt Coast to Coast, Adopt North East and Adoption Tees Valley; the 3 RAAs providing adoption services on behalf of the 12 North East local authorities. Part of the funding, provided through a DfE grant, included a seconded social worker from each RAA as the conduit to their RAA, for Adopt Coast to Coast the successful post holder was recruited from frontline social work in TfC as there was no capacity or interest across the adoption social workers in either spoke. The national funding is also providing specialist training and Adopt Coast to Coast had 7 social workers across the spokes complete DDP level 1 in February 2024. Further specialist training will be commissioned including DDP level 2 and Theraplay. To access the enhanced training packages, each spoke will need to commit to supporting these staff to utilise their skills and learning within a therapeutic environment. The intention is to enable the spokes to draw down Adoption Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for therapeutic work carried out by their staff.



National Funding has also been secured for a pan regional concurrency planning project which includes an RAA in the West and 3 VAA partners. Each spoke is receiving funding equivalent to a day a week for a social worker as the lead on the Project Team. A shared approach to developing all early permanence options in our region is key to increasing the opportunities for children to live with a family who can become their forever family should the Court approve a plan of adoption.

TfC have seen a 150% increase from 4 children in 2022/23 to 10 in 2023/24, Durham have also had an increase in the same periods from 3 to 7, a 133% increase. In terms of children matched who were previously living with EP carers, TfC achieved 33% in 2023/24 and Durham was 17.5%, both are significant increases from the previous year of 12% and 5% respectively. Though these are positive developments, the pan regional project continues to manage the sufficiency challenges as requests for an EP carer increase but availability across all the partners is not meeting this demand.

Matching grant – national funding has enabled up to explore child specific recruitment with a VAA partner. 3 children have been featured and in 2024/25, 1 or 2 children from TfC will also be featured. The learning from this project will be utilised locally and nationally to offer other matching options for children who wait the longest to be matched. The outcomes of this project will be evaluated along with the other funded matching projects through the academic partner the Institute of Public Care Oxford Brookes University.

### **Marketing activity objectives for 2024/25 are:**

- To return enquiry numbers in line with 2022/23 enquiries
- To recruit a pool of suitable prospective adopters from within and beyond our geographical footprint who are able to adopt our children. Prospective adopters who have a range of skills and experiences to provide the loving homes needed amongst the children cared for across both spokes, for whom securing permanency via adoption is the preferred outcome.
- Recruitment will balance the continued need for prospective adopters seeking to adopt a younger single child against child specific recruitment and key campaigns for children with the following characteristics which are more likely to result in them waiting longer to be matched and subsequently adopted:
  - Single children aged five years and over.
  - Brother and sister groups of two or more children.
  - Children who have developmental uncertainty due to either possible genetic or environmental factors.
  - Children who have identified health/medical problems and/or developmental delay and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care or learning support.
  - Children whose background histories include having a parent(s) diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties and/or a personality disorder
  - Children who are at a higher risk of having complex needs relating to their experiences in utero and in the birth family.
  - Children with a plan for Early Permanence.
- Continue to build brand recognition and awareness through activities in areas both inside and outside of our geographical footprint via suitable regional and local media outlets.

## Practice Priorities for 2024/25

- Developing and delivering consistent training for family and friends across the RAA
  - Agree and implement practice change to update an assessment of support needs prior to the Adoption Order being granted or a year after child/ren are placed (whichever is soonest)
  - Develop engagement opportunities for children and young people as we work towards a comprehensive voice and influence offer
  - Develop an adopter reference group
  - Increase the universal adoption support offer and extend this to adopters living in our area who adopted from another agency.
  - The practice and cohesion of the staff working across the RAA will be kept under review within the strategic and service managers meetings.
- Adopt Coast to Coast will continue to work closely with the neighbouring RAAs through sharing best practice and supporting the development and delivery of adoption services across our region beyond the shared regional developments.

**Paula Gibbons**

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