

Briefing regarding Adoption Activity days and the Family Finding Strategy for the Corporate Parenting Board

Background Information and Context

Lancashire County Council's Adoption service has held one Adoption Activity day since these were developed and rolled out across the Country as part of the wider agenda led by central government as a way of tackling delay. This Adoption Activity day was held on 8th March 2014.

Adoption activity days are held throughout the country by various Local Authorities and are seen as a helpful way of finding families for children. In fact these are so well embedded now within Local Authority Adoption services that the only areas where these activity days have yet to be fully rolled out are Wales and Scotland. Adoption Activity days provide an opportunity for approved and assessed adopters to meet face to face with the children, this has often led to some matches that would not have occurred otherwise because of this face to face contact.

The day itself is facilitated by the British Association of Fostering and Adoption, BAAF. A representative from BAAF chairs the steering group and co-ordinates the day, booking activities, the venue, catering and ensuring volunteers from the Local Authorities are briefed appropriately. BAAF send out all the invites and provide volunteers for the day who have significant experience of supporting Activity days. They provide briefings if required for adopters, social workers and foster carers, including reading material and preparation books for the children. The children's profiles are collated by BAAF and distributed on the day. They offer guidance on the preparation of these to ensure they meet the standard required for the Activity Day. The feedback is collated by BAAF and presented in a feedback meeting.

Preparation for an adoption activity day

Before taking part in an Adoption Activity day the children have to be carefully selected via discussion with the child's social worker and foster carers. Lancashire had 15 children who attended the Day in March 2014. They are children where the usual family finding strategies have not provided positive links and we need to consider other options. The children have to be emotionally able to cope with an event, and any children who are identified as vulnerable and may be upset are not put forward. The manager makes the final decision regarding who is attending. The children are sensitively told about the purpose of the day and what it involves. Briefings are set up for social workers and foster carers and the foster carers' supervising social worker in order to provide information and guidance about the event and to ensure the children are fully prepared. Social workers and foster carers are tasked at preparing the children for the event by using the resources and guidance from BAAF as well as their own knowledge and skills. It is very much a joint approach between foster carer, child's social worker and supervising social worker to ensure the child has the appropriate level of preparation and support prior to and after the event. The preparation process is handled honestly and sensitively and it provides an opportunity for children to shape their own plan to permanence. If during the preparation with the child, the staff decide that it may not be helpful for the child to attend the activity day, then the child will be informed and will

not be made to attend. For those children that do attend, they are supported throughout the day by their foster carer and social worker.

Activity Days have a theme, like Super Heroes or Pirates, and the day is based around this in order to make the day as easy as possible for the children involved. For those children who attend, like any party or fun event, it is exciting to choose a costume to go along with the theme. It enhances the fun aspect of the day, which is important to children who have suffered difficulties already in their lives. It also provides opportunities for children to use their imaginations and dress up which most children thoroughly enjoy and this can support the interactions between the children and the adopters at the event.

The feedback about the first activity day held in Lancashire back in March 2014, stated:

"The feedback showed clearly that the children really enjoyed the day and it was interesting to note how the fancy dress (which many of the adopters felt apprehensive about) worked and facilitated conversations and discussions between the children and the potential adopters"

How the adoption activity day works

Activity days are an innovative addition to the range of family finding and matching practices and allow for adopters to directly meet a range of children waiting to be adopted in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment. Adoption activity days are a themed day full of child centred activities. Detailed information is circulated to attendees before the event.

Structure of the day:

- Volunteers arrive first and are given a briefing on how the day will progress.
- Adopters then arrive and are provided with a profile booklet of the children attending and have a briefing about the purpose of the day and the support that is provided for them.
- Children then arrive with their foster carers and social worker and they have the opportunity to engage in fun filled activities. Adopters are then encouraged to engage with the children through play.
- Party tea for all attendees usually with some type of show eg a magic show.
- The event ends with the adopters completing an expression of interest form in the children they wish to gather more information about. All children who attend the event are given a party bag to take home with them.

What happens after an adoption activity day?

If an interest is expressed by an adopter what happens?

Social workers who have children attending the day have to be available to follow up any potential interest. They would be contacted by the supervising social worker for the adopters. Additional information is then exchanged and where appropriate the formal matching process is undertaken.

What happens if a child has had no interest from an adopter and are old enough to understand this?

If the child is old enough to understand this then they are aware that their care plan is one of adoption. It is explained to the child by the social worker that their new special family wasn't identified for them at this event, however family finding will continue and that the activity day is only one of the ways of finding a family. It is reinforced to the child that we are looking for the right family for the child; however, the right family was not at that particular event.

What outcomes have we seen for the children from the Adoption activity days held so far either by ourselves or other Local Authorities?

*Linking refers to an adoption agency exploring a possible link between a child and an adopter at the earliest opportunity (during the assessment process for adopters).

*Matching occurs when a link is made and adopters are then provided with all the relevant information about a child in order for the match to then be approved by the adoption panel.

Outcomes from the activity day March 2014

Cumbria – 1 match

Salford – 1 match/linked

Lancashire – 3 matches plus a further sibling group of 2

In addition, there was also interest in our sibling group of three. Although the adopters are cautious of adoption they may be interested in a Special Guardianship Order with a package of support.

This equates to 8 children matched/linked

Additionally 2 of our adoptive families were linked with the other Local Authorities where we cannot find a match ourselves. Likewise, Salford, for example, do not have any children awaiting adoption but have adoptive families who we may be able to link to children at the next activity day.

Manchester – had some initial interest from the day but none progressed.

Adopters came from;

- Isle of Man
- Manchester
- Havering
- Kirklees
- Cumbria

Why Adoption Activity days are an important part of Family Finding?

Adoption Activity days are one aspect of family finding and they have been able to facilitate matches for some children who have not found an adoptive placement through other routes

such as profiling events, and through Be my Parent. Adoption Activity days are also a valuable opportunity for adopters to meet children with a care plan of adoption so that they can have a realistic understanding of a child's personality rather than discounting a child because of what may be in the written information (child's profile). There is also the opportunity and the potential for that instant 'spark' or connection between a child(ren) and adopters which cannot always come about by reading information on the child.

Children also have the opportunity to meet other children with a care plan of adoption and in very difficult circumstances can have fun and enjoy themselves. Their participation can improve their sense of self and improve their understanding of their life story. Most importantly, there is a real possibility of an adoptive family being identified for them.

Additionally these Activity days mean that we can invite one of the other Local Authority's, for example, Salford (who have very few children awaiting adoption but surplus adopters) to invite their adopters to meet our children to see if there is a spark or connection.

Please see attached feedback from adopters and foster carers who attended the event in March 2014.



BAAF Adoption Activity Day Feedback.pdf

When is the next activity day planned for?

Lancashire County Council is continuing to work with other Authorities in the North West, and by invitation, our children attend their events. We are currently arranging with BAAF, Manchester and Salford a further Adoption Activity day for 5th October 2014. The venue for this is not confirmed yet but is generally in a school and probably in the Preston Area so that it is central and the children do not have to travel too far. There has been some discussion about the theme for the day although it has not been confirmed at present. It is proposed that Lancashire and the other Local Authorities hold two activity days a year as part of their family finding strategy depending of course on feedback and the evaluation.

How could Elected Members and LINX be involved in the day in a child centred way.

The Adoption Activity days are for children and adopters to play together in the hope that some spark or connection will be formed. It is important that the primary function and the purpose of the day remains as this. The last adoption activity day held in March 2014 was a collaborative day involving a number of local authorities. Lancashire has encountered some criticism from the other Local Authorities involved and the adopters themselves, for the presence of Councillors at these events. They state this has not happened at previous events they have attended and is disconcerting. As other Local Authorities are sharing the cost of these events careful consideration would need to be given to how Councillors involvement could be planned.

The service would like to propose that Councillors and LINX could attend the next activity day in a way that is participative as a volunteer who contributes to the activities and tasks of the day. Each volunteer is allocated a specific task for the day to ensure the day runs smoothly and there is a relaxed and fun atmosphere. If the Corporate Parenting Board can

confirm which Councillor(s) and members of LINX would like to be involved, the staff will ensure they are involved in the day's event.

This briefing contains the information requested by the Corporate Parenting Board. The Local Authority is committed to supporting the Adoption Activity Days as part of its family finding strategy for the children and young people with a care plan for Adoption in Lancashire.

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Children Awaiting Adoption Team

16/07/2014