



Family Adoption Links Annual Report 2021-22

Table of contents

01

Background

02

Progress

- Marketing and Recruitment
- Data
- Assessment and Training
- Family Finding
- Post Adoption Support
- Engagement with stakeholders

03

Plans for 2022

04

Appendix I

- Regional progress
- Adopter journey
- Child(ren) journey

Background

The regional adoption partnership, Family Adoption Links, was launched in October 2020. This is a report relating to its first full year of operation, April 2021 – end March 2022. This report fulfils the statutory requirement that an annual report be produced and will form part of each partner's Annual Adoption Report.

The government's Education and Adoption Act (2016) set out expectations for adoption services through the establishment of regional adoption agencies (RAA). By the end of 2020 every local authority was expected to become part of a RAA.

Following discussions with East Midlands authorities, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire and Leicester City agreed on an aligned partnership model and this was further strengthened by the formal inclusion of North Lincolnshire Council in early 2020 and Northamptonshire Children's Trust in January 2022.

It was agreed that Lincolnshire County Council would become lead authority for the RAA and the partnership was launched in October 2020 under the banner of "Family Adoption Links".

The RAA oversees a number of key areas of adoption provision including the recruitment of adopters, assessment and training, matching and placement of children along with development and co-ordination of post-adoption support services. The delivery of services to children and adopters remains integrated into broader Children's services within each Authority.

The strategic direction and development of the partnership is invested in the Board which comprises:

- Jane Moore, Director of Children's Services, Leicestershire County Council
- Janice Spencer, Assistant Director, Lincolnshire County Council
- Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director, Leicestershire County Council
- Caroline Tote, Assistant Director, Leicester City Council
- Paul Cowling, Service Lead, North Lincolnshire Council
- Lydia Bennett, Head of Service, Rutland Council
- Cornelia Andreucut, Director, Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Background

The partnership has a strategic vision:

“We’re a dynamic regional partnership
aimed at delivering excellence in every aspect of adoption.

We strive to ensure the best possible match for children and adoptive parents and develop a comprehensive range of support services to ensure a positive adoption journey. We seek to develop the widest pool of professionals who engage in innovative and ground-breaking new adoption practices”

A pooled budget was created within the RAA to fund central hub staffing costs including the RAA Head of Service post, marketing officer, data analyst and business support officer. All of these were in post by April 2021. The provision of the posts was funded by equal contributions from all partnership Authorities. This has augmented the central Government grant allocation and provided firm staffing foundations for the first 3 years of operation. The intention is that the partnership will deliver a range of financial benefits, including better value for money through economies of scale and a decrease in the number of children requiring specialist, intensive and costly placements/services.

The HOS post governs the management and decision-making of those Local Authority budgets in conjunction with the Adoption Managers that hold responsibility for the budgets locally. This ensures consistency in decision-making and assists with regional improvements and identifies areas where practice needs to be aligned and future efficiencies could be identified.

Progress

The partnership has developed the “Family Adoption Links” regional brand. This regional brand reflects the vision, mission, values and strategic outcomes of the Partnership.

The Partnership appointed an interim Regional Head of Service, responsible for the delivery of the RAA. Unfortunately, the post holder left the role and since May 2021, a temporary Head of Service has been in post on a part-time basis. The Regional Head of Service has a single line of accountability to the Management Board and undertakes a range of key functions in conjunction with Service leads across the partnership.

The operational focus for the first full year of operation has been to develop 5 core pillars as the foundations for effective partnership working. The emphasis on these has been successful in developing collaboration in both strategy and operational delivery.

Marketing and Recruitment

Alex McGuire is the Marketing Officer for Family Adoption Links.

Re-brand

The partnership has been successfully re-branded with a stunning new logo, a suite of corporate colours and fonts, imagery that reflects the children we are family finding for and easy to use corporate guidelines to help all members of the partnership produce visually stunning and appealing work.

Each adoption service has been re-named as Family Adoption Links Location creating consistency across the partnership and the fresh new logos ensure instant brand recognition.

Many guides/presentations have been created in the new style, here are a few examples...

Marketing and Recruitment



Make a splash...
How to create
outstanding Link
Maker profiles...



Prepare to Adopt Training

Welcome to Day 1



Marketing and Recruitment

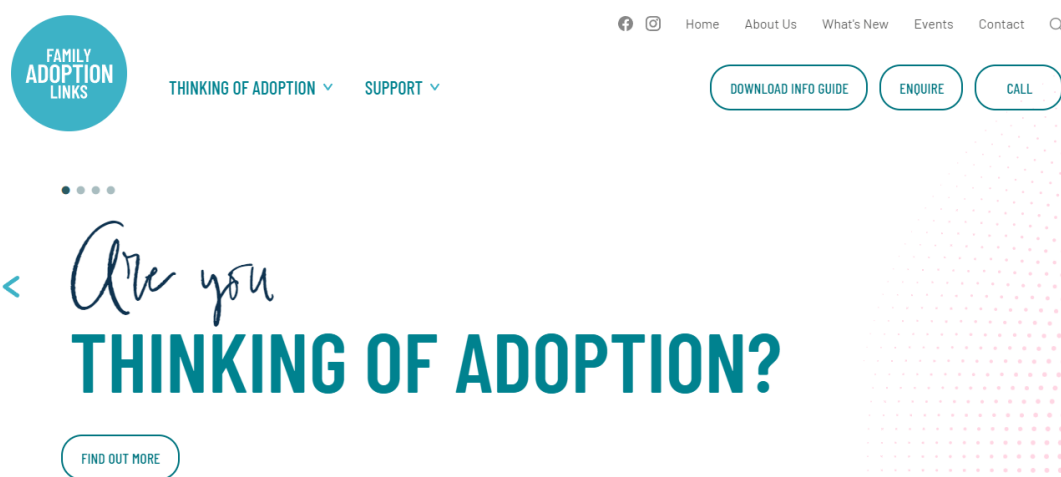
Website

A new website has been created to maximise the recruitment and support activities for the partnership. Reflecting the dynamic and innovative new branding, the new site is designed to be engaging and user-friendly empowering potential adopters and adopters at every stage of their journey.

By including the You Can Adopt Information guides, a You Can Adopt Information video and the ability to book onto our You Can Adoption Information events at any time, we are able to deliver better qualified enquiries, maximise event attendance and reduce administration time.

Featuring full editorial control, the website is 'alive' with information and uses storytelling and testimonials to give potential adopters confidence. The most popular page is the 'The children who need adopting' section receiving 11.58% of the total website traffic over the last 5 months.

The website will also serve as platform for delivering the professional, consistent and outstanding adoption support services we seek to provide as a partnership and become, ultimately, a single point of contact for those seeking post adoption support and training.



Marketing and Recruitment

Social Media

Content and posts from the Family Adoption Links Facebook page was seen by 29,910 people in the last 12 months (1/4/21-1/4/22).

The partner accounts of Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Leicester were re-named to reflect their new identities and work is ongoing to move these accounts and their followers to the central account as soon as possible.

Adoption Information Events

By creating centralised Adoption Information Events hosted on Eventbrite, the partnership has enjoyed incredible economies of scale both in terms of time and money.

The corporate presentation delivered on a rotational basis receives positive feedback from both staff and potential adopters at each event and since the events began in November, we have welcomed 139 potential adopters online.

Here's some of the feedback we have received...

*"The online event was really good, very informative and good having 2 adopters on to chat as well. Denise really seemed very passionate about her role and the team and RAA as a whole."
"We found it very informative and I must say the topics covered were all relevant and exactly what is needed at this stage thank you."*

"It was great with all the information we needed, thank you again."



Marketing and Recruitment

Marketing and Workstreams

Marketing is fully involved in each of the partnership's workstreams from producing stunning new presentations for the Assessment and Training group to creating enticing videos for priority children in the Family Finding workstream. We are committed to digitalising wherever possible to ensure the user journey is as seamless as possible.

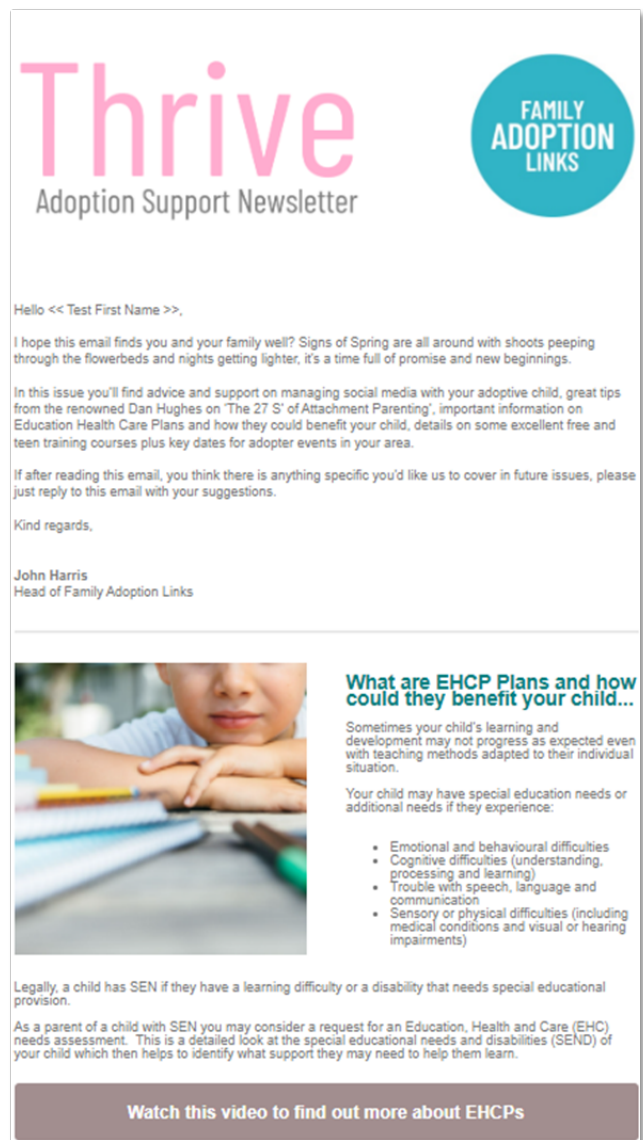
Highlights of this include...

The Family Adoption Links Lincolnshire's Adoption Support event. Now the event is:

- Publicised on 'Thrive' the adoption support newsletter
- Advertised on the support section of the website
- Linked to Eventbrite where you can choose your date and book in with all of the required information
- Guests then receive automatic email reminders to reduce no shows and ensure they have relevant information for the event
- After the event, guests receive an email with a link to a feedback form on Microsoft teams for instant feedback

'Thrive' the post adoption support newsletter:

- Created and distributed via Mailchimp
- Great feedback "Thoroughly enjoying the new email newsletters from Family Adoption Links. Great read and great articles."
- Excellent performance statistics



Thrive
Adoption Support Newsletter

FAMILY ADOPTION LINKS

Hello << Test First Name >>.

I hope this email finds you and your family well? Signs of Spring are all around with shoots peeping through the flowerbeds and nights getting lighter, it's a time full of promise and new beginnings.

In this issue you'll find advice and support on managing social media with your adoptive child, great tips from the renowned Dan Hughes on 'The 27 S' of Attachment Parenting', important information on Education Health Care Plans and how they could benefit your child, details on some excellent free and teen training courses plus key dates for adopter events in your area.

If after reading this email, you think there is anything specific you'd like us to cover in future issues, please just reply to this email with your suggestions.

Kind regards,

John Harris
Head of Family Adoption Links

What are EHCP Plans and how could they benefit your child...

Sometimes your child's learning and development may not progress as expected even with teaching methods adapted to their individual situation.

Your child may have special education needs or additional needs if they experience:

- Emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Cognitive difficulties (understanding, processing and learning)
- Trouble with speech, language and communication
- Sensory or physical difficulties (including medical conditions and visual or hearing impairments)

Legally, a child has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or a disability that needs special educational provision.

As a parent of a child with SEN you may consider a request for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment. This is a detailed look at the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) of your child which then helps to identify what support they may need to help them learn.

[Watch this video to find out more about EHCPs](#)

Data

The Data analyst for the region is Benjamin Richardson.

He has worked collaboratively with partnership representatives to deliver an agreed submission to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Board on a quarterly basis. Work is taking place to deliver a regional data set that will support recruitment and family finding activity.



Microsoft Power BI will provide accurate adoption reporting facilities for both individual Local Authorities and the region and provides visuals that will support the presentation of adoption data for any OFSTED inspection. Work is currently taking place to facilitate the sharing of this to all partner authorities.

Data is seen as key to service delivery within the partnership and Benjamin contributes to the development of all work streams. By forging productive working relationship Benjamin has moved the partnership to the point where it is able to deliver the required adopter lead data in a timely fashion for the quarterly ASGLB return.

Coupled with the development of the local data set, the partnership is moving towards a more consistent and timely delivery of key information which supports all adoption activity.

Performance in the first 12 months

Against the backdrop of the Covid 19 pandemic, the recruitment and approval of adoptive parents has continued. Panels have operated virtually and matches have in many ways been enhanced by the advent of Teams!

The court processes have sadly been subject to some delay and as a result, the plans for some children have been delayed. Nevertheless, activity across all partners has remained strong as indicated in some core data in [Appendix I](#).

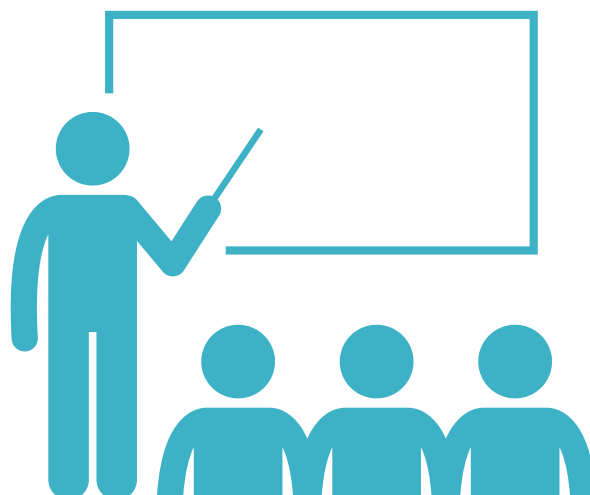
Workstreams

The Partnership has brought together regional operational managers responsible for Adoption from each partner. This group demonstrates a shared purpose to deliver services for families that are locally determined but at the same time have clear links to wider local, regional and national priorities. The group meets monthly and a service lead is allocated to core functions essential to develop a regional approach. The workstreams are Assessment and Training, Family Finding and Post adoption support.

Assessment and Training

The Assessment and Training workstream is led by Georgina Oreffo from Leicester City. An agreed modular approach to both pre and post approval training is in place. The content of the preparation courses has been agreed with the view of joint delivery across the partnership to commence in 2022.

In addition the group has develop an integrated and seamless training plan to support adopters post approval.



The mode of delivery will be enhanced by the development of the website which will act as a hub for on line and face to face training modules. The ambition is for courses to be available to adopters across the partnership which should enable more rapid access and provide staff flexibilities.

Family Finding

The Family Finding workstream is led jointly by Anne Johnson from Lincolnshire and Michelle Robinson from Leicestershire. The ambition of the partnership is to provide a consistent approach to family finding and ensuring that the partnership can meet the needs of most children requiring adoption.

The adoption of a single approach requires practice to change for some partners and proposals for achieving a whole partnership approach will be made to the Family Adoption Links Board.

Workstreams



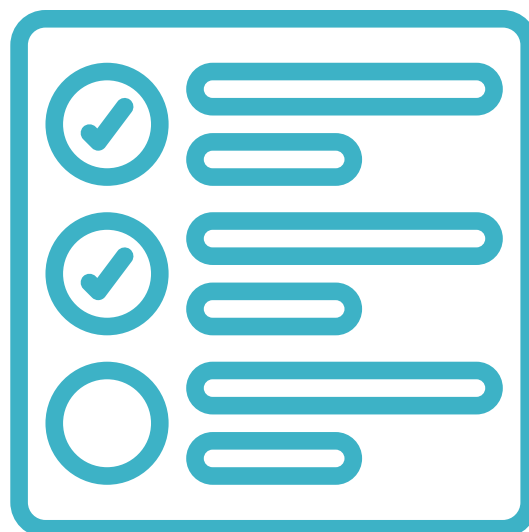
The workstream has effectively developed an agreed process for the partnership and the refreshed approach to family finding will be in place in 2022. This will bring together information of all adopters children matched within partner authorities and identify those who would benefit from a broader range of adoptive homes and importantly offer an integrated and creative opportunity to identify families for children who have additional needs and developmental complexities.

In support of the family finding model Linkmaker have been asked to set up and FAL area on their system, so that there is a 'shared area' where all the FAL children's profiles will appear and all the approved adopters are able to register, search and express interest in the children.

Each of the LA's in the partnership has a representative who will attend the monthly family finding meetings, bringing with them the up to date position of children and adopters in their LA. The meetings will be chaired by Michelle Robinson until the format of the meetings has been well established and reviewed.

In order to make sure the meetings are focused on the children who have been the more difficult to place, and those who have been waiting the longest, Benjamin Richardson has produced a data system which will track all of the children, and which has links to the profiles on Linkmaker which will support the process and ensure that the meetings are effective. T

he meetings started in April 22 and there will be ongoing monitoring of the process and the outcomes.



Workstreams

Adoption Support

Adoption support is the final key workstream and is led by Karen Everatt from North Lincolnshire. It builds on the practice delivered within the aforementioned workstreams.

All partners have a different post adoption support offer and that is likely to remain the case. The ambition is for all adopters at the point of initial contact, to have information about the support available with the website signposting the local details.

The group is developing a core offer which establishes a starting point for both prospective and registered adopters and is informed by shared practice expertise from across the region. As part of this work and in addition, the workgroup has focused on the following areas;

1. Post Adoption Support Directory
2. Therapeutic Suppliers List
3. Adoption Support Fund
4. Quarterly Adopters Newsletter - second edition available
5. Post Placement and Post Order training offer across FAL which includes virtual / face to face training modules and E Learning modules.
6. Training Calendar goes live April 2022

The concentration on a core offer has enabled FAL to create some economies of scale in both the provision of information and training for adopters and developing a partnership directory of therapeutic providers which may support more effective commissioning for all partners.

The provision of the Adoption support fund will continue for the next 3 years and our challenge will be to ensure quality and value for money post adoption provision, balancing what each Authority delivers with what is down from the Government fund.



Workstreams

Areas to develop next in the core offer;

Considering the Core offer has enabled us to identify strengths but consider together with adopters areas that we could develop more consistently for the region. In 22/23 in response to the work commissioned from Adopter Voice , we will consider how we enhance the offer in respect of both education and peer buddying.

Engagement

Family Adoption Links Head of service is continuing to engage key stakeholders within and beyond the council to align services and to identify broader opportunities for transformation and development. This includes representing the region to the Department of Education (DfE), at the National RAA Leaders Group and the Regional Adoption & Special Guardianship Leadership Board. The service has engaged with Adopter voice on a 12 month contract to ensure that the views of adopters is reflected within service delivery. Adopters actively support the delivery of information events and preparatory training. In addition following a meeting of stakeholders involved in the "childs journey" FAL will convene meetings for ADMs and Panel advisors as an opportunity to share good practice, work towards achieving consistency and consider training needs.

Conclusion

The partnership development has taken place against a backdrop of a pandemic and staff changes. Development of the partnership is centred on core areas which when completed will provide the partnership with genuine momentum and provide opportunities to modify adoption practice and create some staffing efficiencies. Progress is very much in line with the expectations of the Revised Government strategy for adoption "Achieving Excellence Everywhere" issued in July 2021.

Plans for 2022



Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Northamptonshire Children's Trust will be formally welcomed into the partnership.



Website

The website will be promoted and the training and development offer for adopters will be delivered from this central hub.



Marketing

Create the You Can Adopt Information video to reduce the need to have to wait for an information event.

Produce innovative videos focussed on adopters who have created families with harder to place children.

Deliver bespoke events focussed on harder to place children to reduce their waiting time.



Linkmaker

A partnership-based approach in conjunction with Linkmaker will go live. A standardised approach to child profiles will be agreed.

Plans for 2022



Adopter Voice

Adopter Voice will continue to inform our workstreams and an options paper on our post adoption offer will be presented to the Board to determine how it is delivered.



Virtual Heads

The post adoption offer will be better informed and developed by engaging with Virtual Head teachers.



Key stakeholders

Work will be undertaken with all key stakeholders within the adopter approval process to consider whether efficiencies could be achieved by developing more consistent practice surrounding the operations of the Adoption Panels.



Data

We will further develop the partnership approach to data collection and use, ensuring that all partners have access to accurate data that supports their adoption delivery and that ASGLB returns can be administered through a central point.

This report was written by John Harris, Family Adoption Links Head of Service.

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Appendix I

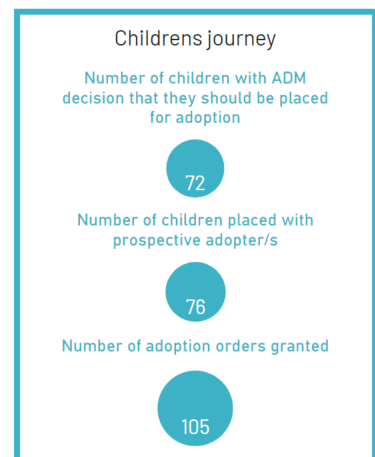
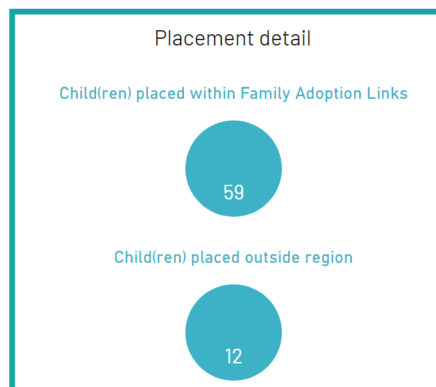
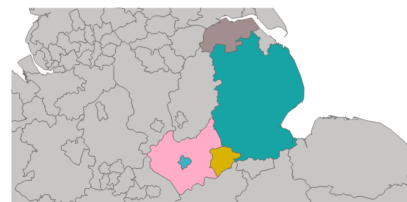
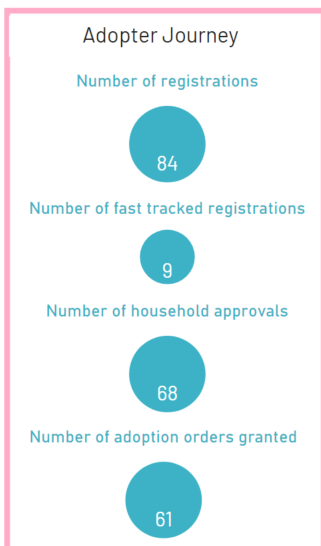
Please see below for the regional overview of the partnership . This view is available on our centralised reporting hub and access for this will be granted soon.

Regional overview

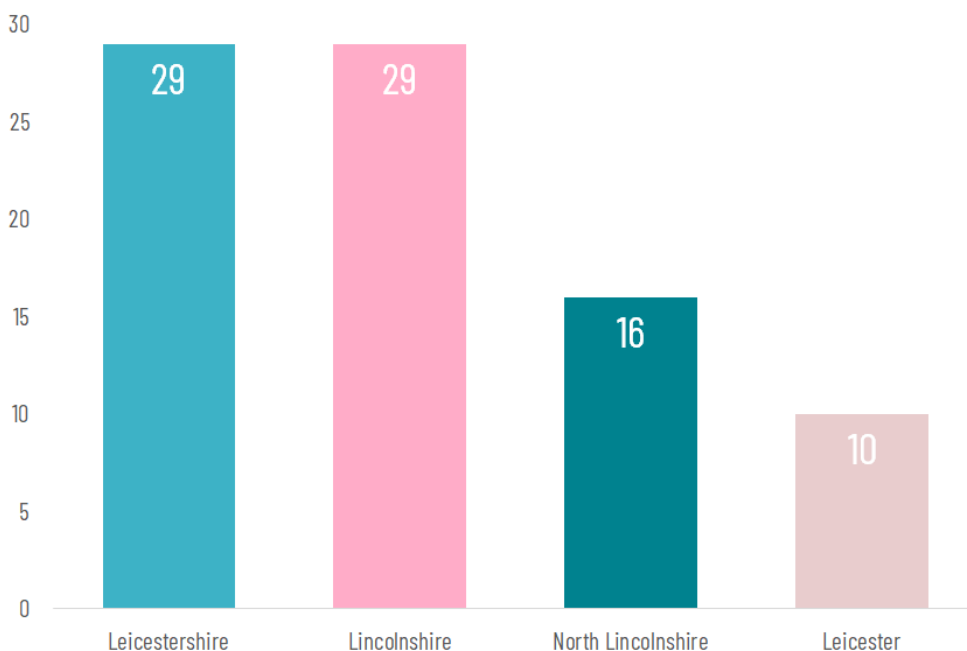
Date range queried

18/10/2020 30/09/2021

-Family Adoption Links-
Progress since the partnership commenced

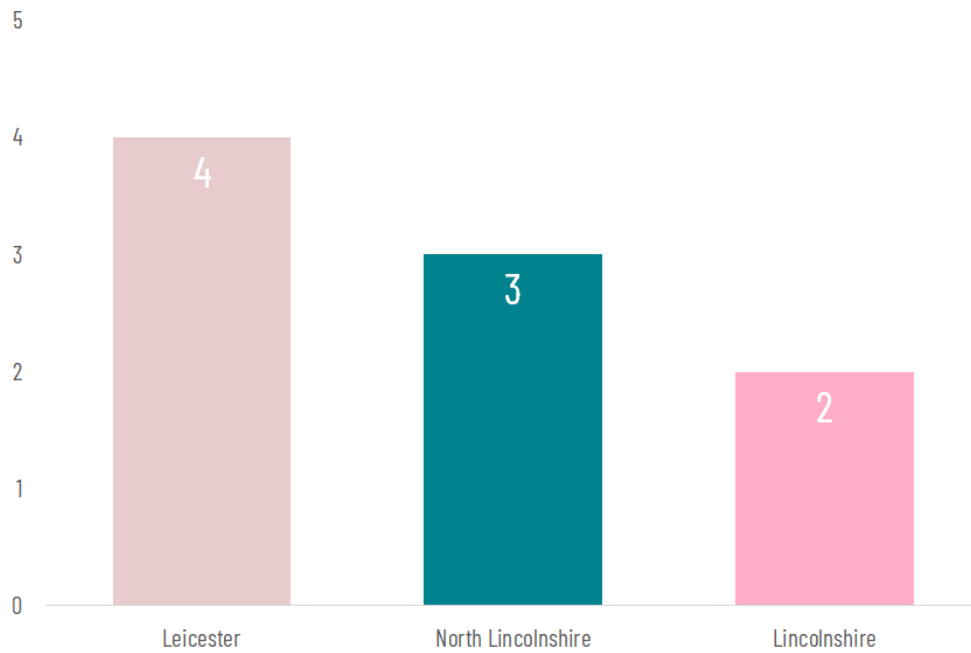


Adopter journey - Number of registrations

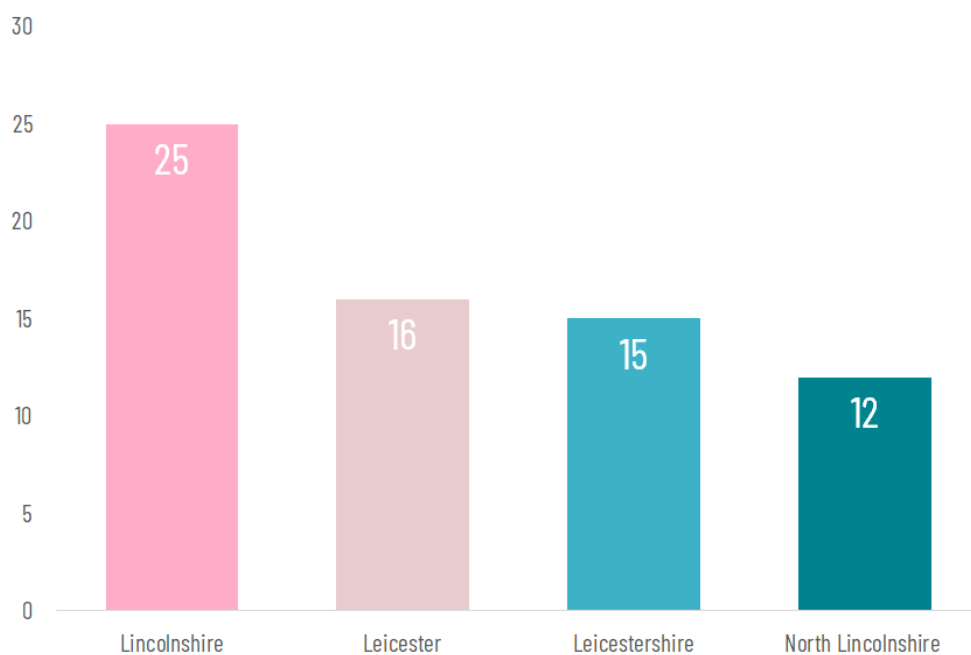


Appendix I

Adopter journey - Number of fast tracked registrations

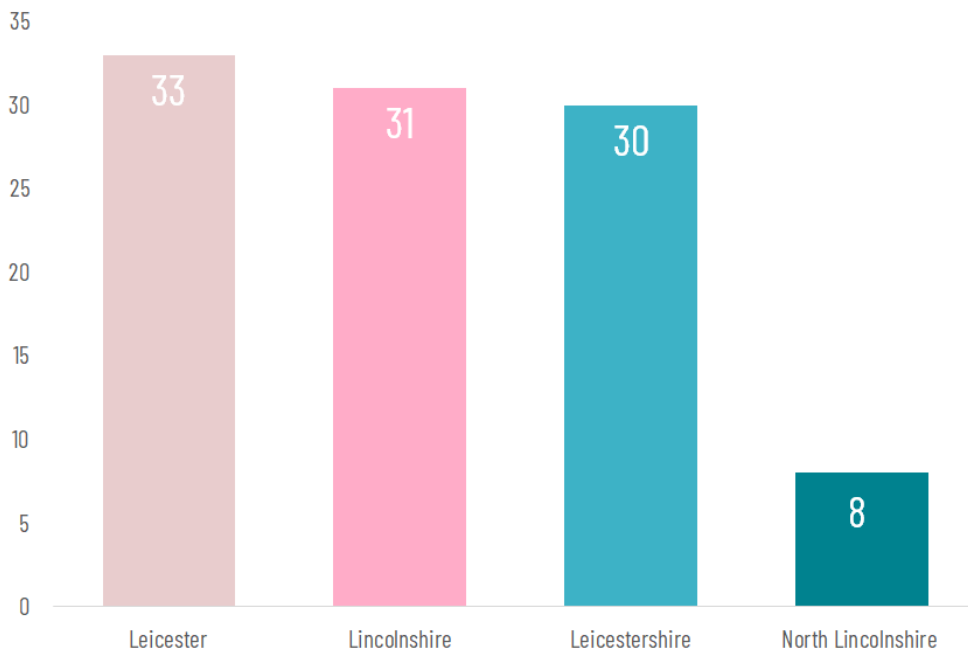


Adopter journey - Number of adopter approvals

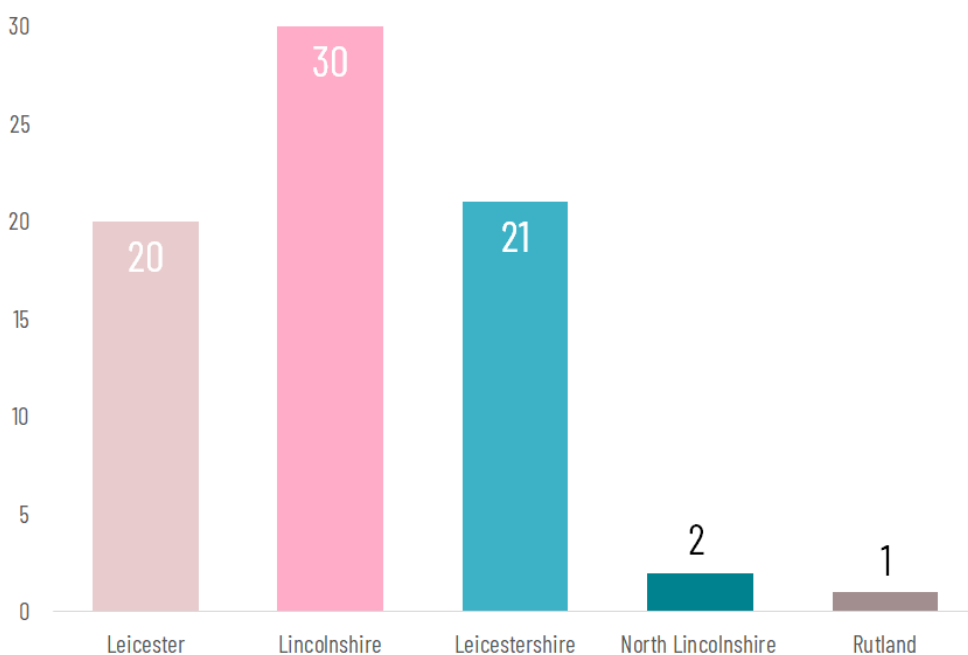


Appendix I

Adopter journey - Number of adoption orders granted

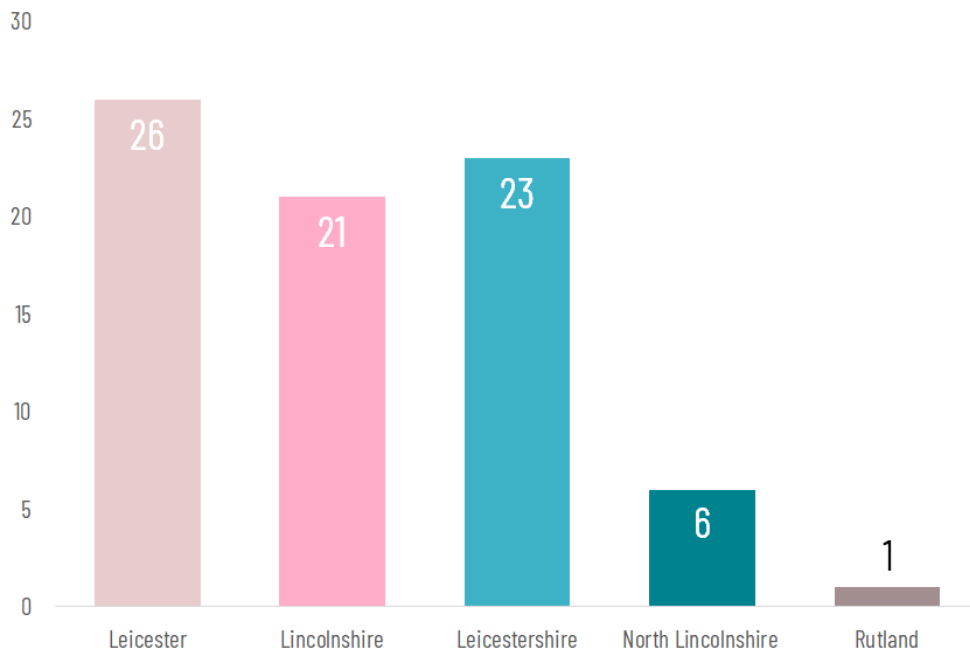


Child(ren) journey - Number of children with ADM decision to be placed for adoption

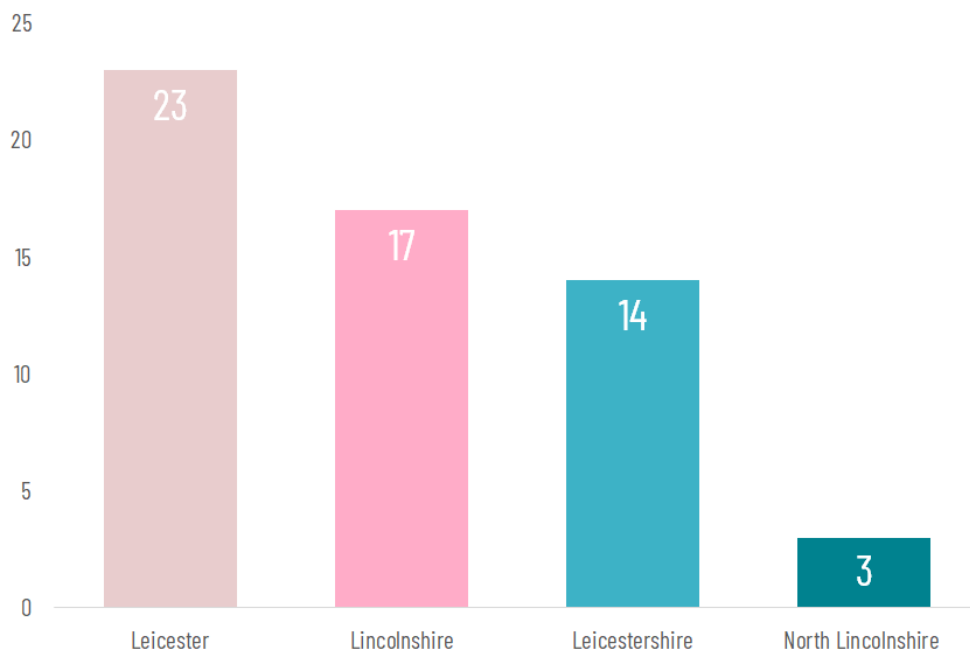


Appendix I

Child(ren) journey - Number of children matched



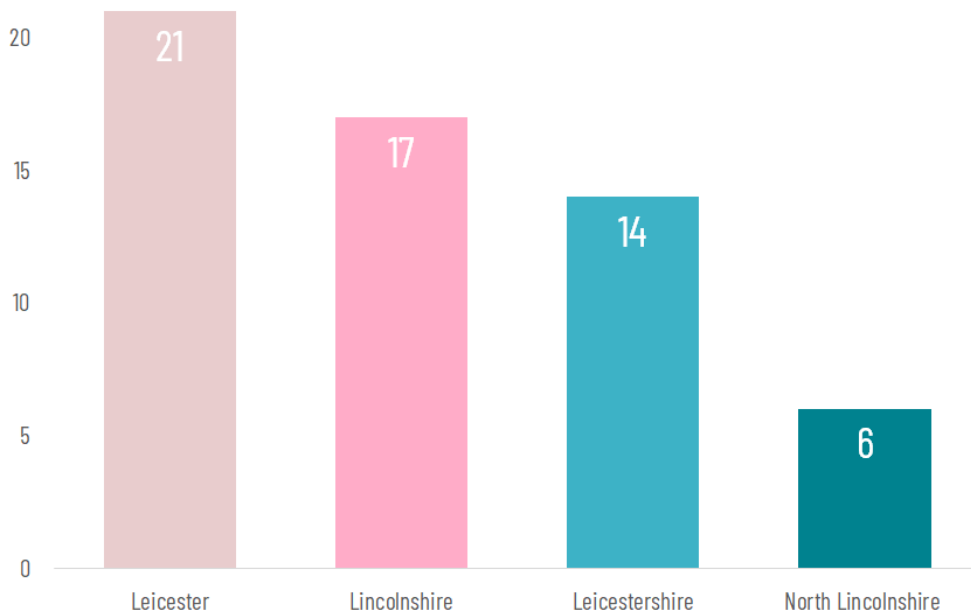
Child(ren) journey - Number of children not in sibling group placed



As an RAA we have placed 17 children in a sibling group of 2 and 1 child in a sibling group of 3.

Appendix I

Child(ren) journey - Number of children placed within FAL



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