

Family Finding

1. Referral Process

Following the Local Authority Decision Maker (ADM) agreeing a plan of adoption for a child, the Local Authority will make a referral within **3 working days** to Adopt North East using the Adopt North East Family Finding Referral Form. The Local Authority is required to provide accompanying documents that supported the ADM decision, including the Child Permanence Report (CPR).

The Team Manager for Family Finding will review the referral within **2 working days** and then allocate to a Family Finding Social Worker within **1 working day** of the review. A child's adoption case record will be created on LCS by the Agency to record their Family Finding journey.

2. Family Finding – Referral Process

Following referral, the Family Finding Social Worker will discuss the child/ren's needs with the child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker, the child/ren's Foster Carer and all other relevant professionals to understand fully the identified needs of the children to come to an informed professional understanding of the future care needs of the child.

Within **10 working days** a Family Finding Action Plan is then prepared and agreed. This plan will be reviewed by the Family Finding Social Worker in line with the child/ren's Care Plan at their regular Looked After Children's Reviews.

Each week, the Family Finding Team meet to explore the children who have been referred to the Agency and the availability of approved prospective adopters and those in assessment.

3. A Tiered Approach to timely Family Finding

Approved adopters will be asked to be available for children referred to Adopt North East in need of adoption. The Agency prioritises matching of Adopt North East approved adopters with children referred to it from its five partner Local Authorities (Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside). Should a match not be identified within six months of approval, adopters are permitted to seek a match with an external child or children needing adoption.

Adopt North East are committed to seeking suitable adoptive families for children who have a plan of adoption in a timely way. Each week, the Family Finding Team meet to consider the children who have been referred to the Agency and consider links to adopters. The Team also consider any expressions of interest made by adopters and whether a link should be explored.

The Family Finding Team Manager also meets on a monthly basis with each Local Authority to track all of the children who have a plan of adoption. This also gives the opportunity for the Local Authority to highlight children with a potential plan of adoption so that early advice can be offered about Early Permanence and the realistic prospect of achieving a match for the child.

Adopt North East use the Link Maker software package as a tool to assist in making internal matches between children and approved adopters.

Adopters are also given the opportunity to hear more about particular children at regular profiling events run by the Agency. These are held quarterly for adopters currently approved and those in Stage Two of the process.

The Family Finding Social Workers will work closely with assessing Social Workers to identify potential early matches and where appropriate this can lead to targeted assessment of adopters for a particular child.

Should Adopt North East not be successful in securing an internal match with adopters, the Agency will seek inter-agency funding to explore adopters within the North East and Cumbria so that the Agency can, wherever possible, find families within the Region. If this is not possible, the Agency will begin to search nationwide.

The Agency uses a **diversity of approaches in Family Finding** for children, including:

- Activity Days;
- Child Specific Social Media Advertising;
- National Profiling Events;
- Other Profiling approaches such as Coram Connections;
- Professionally produced DVDs.

4. Identifying with Prospective Adopters

When a prospective adopter is identified, their Prospective Adopter Report will be disclosed by the Agency to the Local Authority for the child for consideration and, concurrently, brief information about the child will be shared with the adopters' Social Worker to determine if there is any obvious reason why the prospective adopters should not be considered for the child/ren. These considerations and any outcomes are recorded by the Agency in the Family Finding Journey Form on LCS.

The child/ren's social worker will be given a maximum of three Prospective Adopter Reports to consider at any one point. The Agency requires that the Local Authority make a decision to potential suitability **within 5 working days**. The child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker is required to do so in writing using the Agency's Family Finding Response Form. This form is not shared with the prospective adopters but, feedback will be shared with them by their Social Worker.

Once the Local Authority has decided upon the prospective adopters that they feel is most likely to meet the needs of the child/ren, they will consent to the Child Permanence Report (CPR) and other written information being shared with the prospective adopters for consideration via the adopters' Social Worker. They will be supported to consider the information and decide if they are interested to move into the next stage of the matching process. If they do not wish to proceed, the reasons for this will be shared with the child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker.

Following the visit to prospective adopters, the children's Local Authority Social Worker and the Family Finding Social Worker will reflect in discussion on the strengths and vulnerabilities of a match. A **decision** may be made to proceed at this stage with a match. If this is the case, the prospective adopters will be informed of the decision. However, where there are uncertainties, additional discussions and meetings may be required before a decision is made. This can be a challenging time for the prospective adopters and support will be provided. The Agency will, however, always ensure that the **needs of the child are at the very centre** of the matching process.

If a decision is taken not to proceed to a match, the adopters' Social Worker will feedback sensitively to the adopters and the Agency will ensure that appropriate support and guidance offered.

When a decision is made to progress a link to a match, the prospective adopters will meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; the child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child. A life appreciation day will often be arranged depending on the child's age and circumstances to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences.

5. Reviewing Family Finding progress

The Family Finding Social Worker will formally review Family Finding activity at three months from commencement, using the Agency's LCS Family Finding Journey Form. A copy of the record will be provided to the child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker for the Looked After Child record. If by six months there remains no realistic options, the Family Finding Team Manager will Chair a Review and will do so every three months thereafter.

6. Request for Authority for Inter-Agency Family Finding

If an adoptive family is not identified within Adopt North East resources, then it may be appropriate for the Agency to seek permission from the child/ren's Local Authority to family find from other adoption agencies. Any request of a Local Authority requires the review and agreement of the Senior Manager for Adopt North East. The request will outline a history of the family finding efforts and activity, including where Adopt North East prospective adopters have been approached and where the Local

Authority has not wished to progress a match. The Family Finding Social Worker will initiate the request on LCS within the Family Finding Journey Form; this will be agreed with comment by the Family Finding Team Manager and then sent to the Senior Manager for authorisation before being sent to the appropriate Local Authority. Once agreed in writing, the child/ren profiles will be opened up on Linkmaker, firstly on a Regional basis and then, after **five working days**, nationally.

If a potential match is identified external to Adopt North East, then the Child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker and Family Finding Social Worker will visit the adopters with the Social Worker from the prospective adoption agency.

The purpose of the home visit for both internal and external matches is to give the adoptive family the opportunity to understand the child's needs and to evidence how the family can meet those needs.

7. Progressing a Link

Following a positive family finding visit, prospective adopters will be given the opportunity to meet with the foster carers for the child/ren. The purpose of this visit is to share information about the child's needs, care routines and to outline the potential transitional support needed. They will also be given the opportunity to meet with the Local Authorities Medical Advisor.

Following the foster carer visit a Life Appreciation Day will be arranged by the Family Finding Social Worker. In the unusual circumstances of this is not being possible/ appropriate, the adoptive family would be given the opportunity to speak with and visit any relevant professionals within the child/ren's life. This could include the following: school, nursery, previous social worker, previous foster carer, contact supervisors, Guardian, Health Visitor.

Within the family finding process there will often be a 'chemistry/bumping into' meeting. This usually takes place prior to matching panel and gives the opportunity for a meeting between the prospective adopters and child/ren. The foster carer will always be present and the child/rens' social worker may attend too. Each situation is unique and how this arranged will be tailored to the individual needs of the child. This meeting needs to be arranged alongside planning the three stages of introductions as per the Agency's Moving to Adoption Guidance.

Once the adoptive family have received all appropriate information to allow them to make an informed decision, the social workers need to formally confirm that the match is to progress and book a date into panel for matching. For an internal match this will be the responsibility of the Assessing Social Worker and for an external match this will be the responsibility of the Family Finding Social Worker. The Panel date should, where possible, be no longer than **8 weeks** after the initial visit to the prospective adopters.

8. Matching Panel

An Adoption Placement Report (APR) and Adoption Support Plan (ASP) need to be completed for each child for matching panel, as well as the Child Permanence Report (CPR) being updated if it is more than six months from when it was last updated.

The APR must clearly state the reasons for the match. Where there are vulnerabilities, these must be addressed within the Adoption Support Plan. These documents must be co-produced in a timely way to meet paperwork deadlines for the Adoption Panel.

The following documents are to be submitted to the Adopt North East Panel Administrator on the agreed submission date:

- Adoption Placement Report;
- Adoption Support Plan;
- Prospective Adopters Report (PAR);
- Prospective Adopter's Agency Decision for approval;
- Updated Child's Permanence Report (CPR);
- Foster Carer Report;
- Adoption Medical and most recent Health Assessment if relevant;
- PEP (if relevant);
- Any additional reports deemed informative for the Adoption Panel.

The Family Finding Team Manager is responsible for quality assuring the Adoption Placement Report (APR) and Adoption Support Plan (ASP) for matches with any other adoption agency; for Adopt North East matches the Team Manager for the adopters' Social Worker quality assures the APR and ASP.

The child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker and the adopters' social worker are responsible for supporting the prospective adopters in attending Panel.

Following Panel, all relevant paperwork outlining panel's recommendation will be sent to the Local Authority for the child's Agency Decision Maker for a final decision regarding the match between the adoptive family and child/ren.

For matches with Adopt North East adopters, the Family Finding Social Worker will remain involved until the match is agreed and progressing to Panel. For external matches, the Family Finding Social Worker will remain involved until the Adoption Order is granted to undertake the following tasks;

- Attend the first adoption review (subsequent ones if necessary);
- Be the point of contact for Adopt North East;
- Support adoption applications to be logged.