

Guidance on Link Maker

1. Introduction

Link Maker is a safe and secure online platform commissioned by Adopt North East to support Family Finding. Link Maker is used by over one hundred agencies throughout the United Kingdom.

Link Maker enables an Adopt North East to:

- Profile a child in need of a forever family
- Profile prospective adopters
- Allow prospective adopters to review profiles of children and identify to the Agency possible matches

All activity on Link Maker should be recorded on the LCS Record for the child and/or the adopters.

2. Profile of a Child

- a) When should a profile be added?

If no likely match has been identified for the child **one month before the planned date that the Placement Order is likely to be granted** (this may be the date of the Issues Resolution Hearing (IRH) if it is anticipated a Placement Order will be granted or the Final Hearing date) a child's profile must be added to Link Maker by their Family Finding Social Worker.

If a likely and realistic match has been identified prior to one month before the planned date that the Placement Order is likely to be granted, then a profile need not be added. Should the match not then proceed, within **one working day** of match not progressing, a profile should be added.

- b) Adopt North East only access to profile

The profile of the child must be **restricted to ANE** prospective adopters only unless inter-agency funding has been agreed in writing by the Local Authority responsible for the child.

- c) Regional Access to profile

If inter-agency funding has been agreed in writing by the child's Local Authority, the child's profile should be made available to ANE prospective adopters and adopters within the North East and Cumbria Regional **Consortium**.

This Consortium of Adoption Agencies has been established with the aim of enabling North East and Cumbrian children who require an adoptive family to be placed within the region wherever possible.

The Regional Consortium consists of:

- Adoption Tees Valley
- Adopt North East
- Coast to Coast
- Arc Adoption NE
- Adoption Matters
- Barnados

d) National Access to Profile

If no matches are forthcoming from the profile of the child being released to the Consortium **within one week** (seven days), their profile will be made **available nationally**.

e) Updating LCS on Link Maker Use

The Family Finding Social Worker is responsible for ensuring that activity on Link Maker is **accurately recorded on the child's case record on LCS**. There is a specific section within the Child's Family Finding Journey Form to record this work.

f) Maintaining and Updating the Link Maker Profile for the Child

The **Family Finding Social Worker is responsible** for developing, uploading, reviewing and updating the child's profile. Their responsibility includes:

- **Updates** to Link Maker following a significant change in information available, particularly to reflect changes in child development and information from carers
- The regular **review** and update of the profile every three months
- **Removal** of the profile once a match has been approved by panel

All this activity on Link Maker should be recorded on the LCS Record for the child.

3. Profile of Prospective Adopter(s)

Adopt North East will actively encourage **adopter-led matching** through the use of Link Maker because adopter-led matching is in the **best interests of children** requiring permanency through adoption. Research supports this approach. The DfE note:

'We believe that a great deal more pragmatism in matching and a greater role for adopters in initiating matches would not endanger placements. That is not to argue that the suitability of a child for adoption can be established only by the adopters themselves. But we need to trust adopters more to start the process.' (DfE, 2013).

And the adoption expert Julie Selwyn observed in her research that *'adopters often have – even though they might hide it – a gut reaction to children'*. (Selwyn, *Beyond the Adoption Order*, 2014)

Accordingly, Link Maker can be a powerful tool in the matching process and Social Workers should be **open to exploring** expressions of interest by prospective adopters.

a) Registering on Link Maker

Prospective adopter(s) will be asked and encouraged to register on Link Maker by their Adopt North East Assessment Social Worker at the **successful conclusion of Stage 1** of the adopter process and (if not concurrent) the receipt and resolution of their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check by the Agency.

Adopter(s) must **agree to add their profile** to Link Maker unless there are exceptional circumstances not to do so and the agreement of the Assessment Team Manager not to do so.

b) Creating an Adopter Profile

Adopt North East will encourage adopters to **write their own profile** in their own voice. The Agency will provide support and advice to do so effectively so that Adopters are maximising the effectiveness of their profile.

If an Adopter does not wish to write their profile, the Assessing Social Worker must do this on their behalf.

c) Showing Interest in a Child

An adopter can **indicate an interest in a child's profile at any time**. Adopt North East will treat all expressions of interest as potential matches and will explore with possibility of a successful match with the prospective adopters.

d) Showing an Interest in Adopters

Family Finding Social Workers will be able to **express an interest in adopters** via Link Maker.

e) Restrictions on Adopter Profile

Adopt North East will require prospective adopter(s) to **restrict their profile** to children referred to Adopt North East for **six months from the date of their approval** by the Agency as adopters. In exceptional circumstances, the Senior Manager for the Agency may agree to waive this requirement.

Once a link is being explored between the Agency and Adopter(s) (the Adopter(s) have been provided with a copy of a child's CPR), the adopter(s) must be requested to **cease viewing** other children's profiles until it is determined if a match is to progress. No other Expressions of Interest will be accepted by the Agency whilst there is active consideration of a possible match.

If adopter(s) have not been matched **within 6 months of their approval**, they will be permitted to give **national access to their profile** with the agreement of the Family Finding Team Manager. The Family Finding Team will continue to explore internal matches so it is essential that an update is provided should an external match be pursued.

f) Removal of Profile

When a match is established, the Assessing Social Worker needs to **update Link Maker** with the matching information they require and ensure that the adopter(s) profile is **removed** from Link Maker.

4. Social Worker Registration on Link Maker

All Family Finding and Assessment Social Worker staff **must be registered on Link Maker** and linked to the children and/or adopters for whom they are responsible in order to manage the communication that takes place within the system.

5. Further information

For Social Workers

- https://www.linkmaker.co.uk/static/user_guide_for_agency_staff_involved_in_adoption.pdf

For Adopters

- https://www.linkmaker.co.uk/static/user_guide_for_adopters.pdf