



Transforming the lives
of children who wait:
**10 years of Adoption
Activity Days**



**be my
family**

bemyfamily.org.uk

A brief history of Adoption Activity Days in England

1976

The first “adoption party” was held in London by the Adoption Resource Exchange (which later became the British Association of Adoption and Fostering).

1982

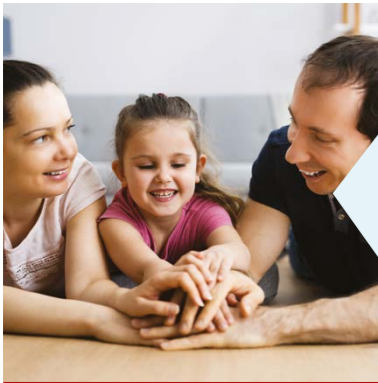
A further 14 Sunday afternoon adoption parties had been held but the idea then “went out of fashion in the 1980s and no one is sure why” (Katherine Runswick-Cole, 2012)

1990s

Adoption Activity Days (AADs) continued to be used in the United States, finding adoptive families for children, with matches found for around 30 per cent of children who attended



160 Adoption Activity Days across Great Britain



2012

Evaluation by Dr Katherine Runswick-Cole at ESRC, led to AADs being used across the country and to DfE including them as a key part of its adoption reform agenda in 2012.

2011

BAAF relaunched AADs in England with four events attended by 170 children, and families found for 29 of them (17%).

2015

Responsibility for delivering AADs moved to Coram in 2015 when BAAF became CoramBAAF and offered AADs as a national matching service, open to all and transcending organisational and geographical boundaries.

6,000 children attending



2017

Finding Me a Family, a documentary following the story of an AAD was screened on Channel 4.

2021

AADs have found families for at least 1400 children so far, 25% of children who attended, and supported adopters and agencies to broaden their ambition for children.

Foreword

In the past ten years Coram has run more than **160 Adoption Activity Days (AADs)**, with more than 6,000 children and 4,500 adopters enjoying the fun they have to offer.

A third of the children had additional complex needs; a third of children were from a black or minority ethnic background; a quarter were part of a sibling group looking for a home together; and 3 out of 4 children were boys.

At least **1,400 children** have been matched with a family they met at an AAD, meaning that they have led to more matches than any single adoption agency in the same period.

If those children were still in care now, it would have cost the state an estimated additional **£250m** to care for them between 2011 and 2021, a hundred times more than the cost of delivering the AADs themselves.

If the children had otherwise stayed in care until their 18th birthday, we estimate the extra cost to the state between 2011 and 2031 would be **£550m**.

AADs also help improve practice by providing social workers with a chance to meet colleagues from other agencies and learn from each other, as well as the guidance we provide on how to produce good profiles and prepare children for adoption.

The day can also lead to adopters changing any fixed views they might have about what sort of child they would adopt, with **40% of those responding to our post-AAD survey saying it had helped** broaden their perspective. Some have fallen in love with a sibling group when previously they had only thought about a single child, while others have adopted older children despite thinking they wanted a baby.

Carol Homden
Dr Carol Homden,
Chief Executive Officer

“H and S had been approved for over two years before being matched with N. I’ll never forget their excitement and certainty when they contacted me on the Monday morning following the Activity Day. I know they are beyond happy they attended the event. Thank you so much for 10 years of bringing families together!”

Social worker

4,500 adopters attending

1,400 children matched

Angela, Sulabh and Leonardo attended an AAD last year during the pandemic and in-between lockdowns.

They had been waiting a while for a link and were referred to our virtual Connections service, so we knew about them and their matching preferences.

Leonardo is of Romanian descent and his adoptive parents say that they would probably have never met if they had relied on a paper profile only.



What is an Adoption Activity Day?



Adoption Activity Days (AADs) are informal events with the emphasis on providing a fun day for children who need adoption, while bringing them together with approved adopters who have not yet found the right child for them.

The underlying aim is serious: finding adoptive families for children, especially children for whom the search for a family has been going on for a while.

It should not be so but sending a child to an AAD is typically a last resort, with

the child's social worker having tried many other different routes at family finding, including the traditional means of profiling children via exchange days and adoption registers.

If a family is not found for a child attending an AAD, the child is likely to remain in care until they turn 18.

The events allow adopters to meet, play and interact with children who are waiting for a family. It is also an opportunity for adopters to meet with the child's family finder, social worker and foster carer all in one place. All of this helps the adopters find out more than could be conveyed on paper, to see the children for who they really are and to find out what support might be available to them.

Given the sensitive nature of the day, with some adopters very nervous and excited about meeting children, it is important that the events are professionally facilitated, with staff there to provide support and encouragement.

AADs provide a unique opportunity for adopters and children to see whether there is chemistry between them. Many adopters are drawn to children they would not have considered just from their written profile, and it is humbling to be present when you see a child and an adopter form that first bond.

Even if an adopter does not meet a child they want to adopt, many leave the day with a broader view of the type of child they could give a home to.

The restrictions imposed under the pandemic have shown us how vital AADs are to finding adoptive families for children who need them. During this period, published data shows that the proportion of children waiting longer kept growing – these are the children that AADs help the most.

In March 2019 before the pandemic when AADs were running twice a month, 41% of children waiting to be adopted had been waiting at least 18 months; in March 2020 this was 48% and in March

2021 – when pandemic restrictions have limited the frequency and scale of AADs – it had risen above 50%.

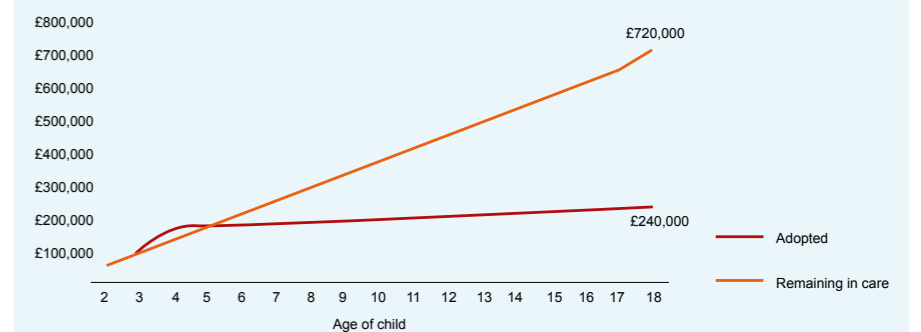
Coram's AADs are organised across the country and are the only ones open to all adopters and to all agencies to refer their children, at a modest contribution to the cost of running them.

To make a referral or work with us to organise an AAD in your region, contact Adoption.ActivityDays@coram.org.uk or see www.bemyfamily.org.uk

A lifetime benefit

Where adoption is appropriate, finding a family for a child increases their life chances considerably – this is what motivates us.

And while adoption does not eliminate the cost to the state it significantly reduces it – an adoptive family will need support from their local authority at various times, at a likely average expenditure of £5,000 per year until a child is 18; the average expenditure on supporting a child in foster care is at least £40,000 per year.



The comparative local authority spend on a child who is adopted at age 4 versus one who remains in care

“While the data speaks for itself, I know that myself and the AAD team have felt very privileged to have been a part of so many newly formed families over the 10 years, meeting so many resilient children has kept us grounded in our work as social workers and inspired us to continue this vital area of family finding.”

Sally Beaumont, Manager, Activity Days team



The team

Adoption Activity Days are provided by Coram, with a dedicated social work team who have almost 60 years of experience in family finding between them. It is part of Coram's national matching service, Be My Family.

- Sally Beaumont
- Kirsty Hammonds
- Stephanie Bentley
- Lillie Haden-Grant
- Kim Randell
- Catherine Hardy
- Kevin Yong



The Children



AADs support children aged 0-10. Most are open to children of any background but there are also specialist AADs for children with disabilities and for children from different ethnicities.



Children referred by their social worker to attend an AAD have typically waited **6 months** before that **25%** chance of a match is offered to them.



There are typically **over 2,000 children in England** waiting to be placed for adoption and more than half of these children have been in care for more than 18 months. While some of these children will already be linked with a family, there are usually several hundred who are still waiting and have been waiting for many months. We believe that all these children should be given the **1 in 4 chance to find a family at an AAD**.



The success rate on any particular day varies but there are usually expressions of interest for the majority of children and there has never been an AAD that did not result in at least one match. The **average rate of match is 25%** and this has remained even during lock down with the days provided on a socially distanced basis (the number of matches reported here is the minimum since it reflects only those that have been reported to us by agencies).



Children are supported to attend by their foster carer, who therefore has the opportunity to have an active role in the future of the children they care for.



All children are carefully prepared and participate in activities supported with toys and performance by a magician and the **party atmosphere gives every child a great day to remember** whatever the result.



Some children attend on **more than one occasion** as part of their ongoing family finding and others are never referred before their plan is changed.

Every match is magical – a moment when adopters and children find each other by playing football or making a picture, and love is the result.

3 out of 4 children were boys

More than 1,400 children have been matched over the last 10 years events



“The day made me happy! I liked talking to the people and playing”

A, aged 3

Hayley and Jayden (not their real names) had been in care since the ages of 2 and 5 respectively. Jayden is autistic and suffered from significant neglect as a baby, though this was only identified after he started school. It is suspected that Hayley may also be autistic but she is too young for it to be formally diagnosed. Their local authority secured a placement order soon after they entered care and set about finding an adoptive family for them, looking internally at the adopters they had available and then widening their search to the national pool of adopters.

Their family finding social worker used a variety of approaches: writing a paper profile that was sent directly to other adoption agencies in the country; regularly considering prospective adopters being assessed as well as those already approved by their agency; adding the children’s information to the Adoption Register so that other social workers could see their details when searching that system; and attending Exchange Days run by the Register, where they could meet approved adopters and tell them more about Hayley and Jayden as well as other children waiting in their agency.

This approach did lead to some adopters considering the two children, but Jayden’s age and the uncertainty around Hayley’s needs meant that none progressed to a match: boys aged 5 and over wait longer to be adopted, as do children with diagnosed or suspected complex needs, such as autism. The local authority started to consider whether to look for families who might take one or other of the children, with Hayley, being a young girl, more likely to be adopted. But the two children were very close and the decision to separate them was difficult - would it be better if they stayed in care until they turned 18, and how likely would it be that they would be placed together with foster carers for the duration of their time in care?

Up until this point no prospective adopter had met the children in person - they had only been seen through the lens of the Register and the paper profile that had been circulated. The children’s family finder had not tried an Adoption Activity Day because they had never been to one and so was unsure about how appropriate it was. However, that changed when they saw the Channel 4 Cutting Edge documentary, Finding Mum and Dad. The programme showed them what the Day was like and how it could help find a family for Hayley and Jayden. The decision to search for separate adopters was postponed until after the Activity Day, which was seen as a last resort to find a family for both the children. We are told that this is typical for many children - if a family is not found at an Activity Day it is likely that the pursuit of adoption will be ended.

So, 18 months after their placement order was granted, the children attended an Activity Day. On top of having lots of fun, they met a couple who had seen their profile previously but had thought that they did not want to adopt a child as old as 5. Seeing the children and playing with them quickly changed the couple’s mind, with the chemistry between the four of them evident.

This story has a happy ending, which is in part due to an element of serendipity: what if the couple had not attended that Day? The AAD team work hard to minimise how much is down to chance, by looking at the children attending each Day and having adopters attend who are likely to be drawn to those children, but it’s not an exact science. Children attending have a wonderful day meeting other children and having fun even if they do not find their future adopters on that day.

“I liked the balloons the magician made and I liked playing with the playdough!”

L, aged 6



“I liked the pirate ship and playing ‘Jack in the Box’. I made a friend and we made a giant robot!”

K, aged 5

A third of children had additional complex needs

The Adopters

Adopters who attend an AAD often do so in excitement and trepidation in equal measures. It is a special opportunity to meet children in person and play with them in a safe and informal setting and gives the opportunity to talk to their carers who know them best as well as their social worker.

This can be a day that changes adopters lives forever but – even if they are not matched – 50% of adopters believe that the event positively impacted on their adoption journey giving them the opportunity to understand children’s needs more broadly, to consider older children or sibling groups, and to gain skills for the future.

4,500 adopters have attended 160 events



1,200 adopters formed their family as a result

We owe our adoption journey’s happy ending to an Adoption Activity Day.

We were a gay couple who had been together for over 11 years. We registered our interest in adopting and 18 months later our family was born, after successfully being matched with our two children, who were 7 and 4 years old.

We attended an Adoption Activity Day in spring with some trepidation and exhausted from an arduous matching process. A few months earlier a previous match had fallen through just before we were due to go to panel, which was devastating. We had been approved as parents in the summer before and had spent a long and lonely winter trawling through reports from the regional and national adoption registers and Be My Parent. After our match fell through, we were very close to throwing in the towel. We decided to book ourselves a holiday, recharge the batteries, and pick things up again on our return. Fate was clearly on our side as we very nearly didn’t go to that AAD – but we met our kids, put the wheels in motion, and so our family was formed.

As we arrived at the venue and saw other prospective parents, we felt nervous and excited; it felt like a strange environment to be in. Even though it was a Sunday, our social worker was kind enough to come along to the event with us. This was a great moral support. We were given a booklet containing profiles and photographs of all the children who would be attending. We were looking to adopt a sibling group, ideally under 4 years of age, so we highlighted the children we wanted to try and meet.

When it was time to make our way into the main room, the children were already playing. There was a soft play area and a crafting table; it was like a giant Fun Day and everybody was dressed up in the Jungle theme. Walking into the room was probably the most daunting part of the day. It took us a while to find our feet and get used to the idea that this was only going to work if we got down at the kids’ level and started to engage and play with them. We had a look around the room to

find the sibling groups that we had identified. We managed to meet three of four sets of children during the afternoon. We played with them and chatted to their foster carers and social workers.

One sibling group, in particular, really stood out to us, not least because they were wearing the cutest matching sheep onesies but, also, because they looked so happy and cheeky, and they really enjoyed playing with us. We felt an instant connection with them and felt ourselves dangerously falling for them. We gravitated back to where they were playing throughout the afternoon and spent time talking to their lovely foster carer.

The children were older than we had considered previously, and I had wrongly discounted them during our initial look through the children’s profiles, but they really did seem like they could be the perfect match.

At the end of the afternoon, we registered our interest in the siblings in the sheep onesies. Three days later, we had a meeting in the diary for their social worker to come and meet us. Ten days after the Adoption Activity Day, we had been identified as the preferred match. We had to wait a while for a matching panel date but, three months after the Activity Day (the longest three months of my life!), we were approved to be their parents. Two weeks after panel, introductions started and 8 days later, they moved in with us.

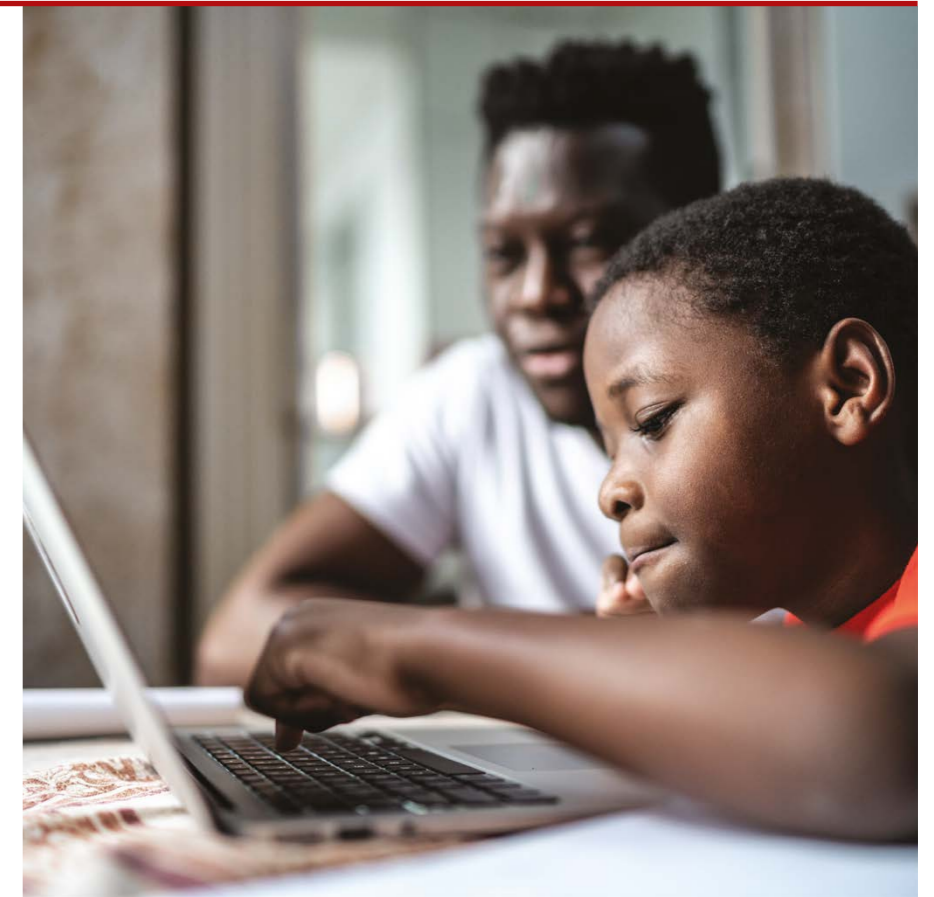
My partner and I are now 100% pro Adoption Activity Days. For us, it was the perfect way to find our match. We are both visual thinkers and had found it really difficult to read paper reports and get beyond that to identify a match. Having the opportunity to meet the children in person changed everything for us. Not only did our gender preferences get thrown out of the window, so did our age preferences. The children we’ve ended up starting our family with are as far removed from what we imagined when registering our interest in adoption, but we couldn’t be happier or feel more content and fulfilled.

We knew after seeing a documentary on TV about Activity Days that this was the way we wanted to find our child. We couldn’t imagine having to choose from a picture on a computer screen with a profile. We wanted to meet them, see them, talk to them and play with them.

Fortunately within a month of passing our local panel there was an Activity Day just a few miles from our home. We will never forget how nervous we were and we obviously looked it because everyone kept asking if we were ok but we had our social worker with us to help and guide us. We had looked at the profiles in the introduction and had an idea of who we thought would be a good match.

We entered the play room with apprehension, it was chaos, and there was lots of excitement! Our boy was the first child we played with, he was awesome, so full of energy, he was sociable and kind and we knew this relationship could work. His foster carer and social workers were very friendly and helpful and we agreed to exchange profiles. Four months later we became a ‘Family of Three’. And the rest, as they say, is history.

50% of adopters believed that the AAD positively impacted on their adoption journey even if they were not matched with a child as a result



I attended an Adoption Activity Day that was specifically for children with disabilities. Even though I found out the day before the event that I may have a match, I still wanted to attend and experience the day. Due to this I knew I would need to be quite guarded at the day and try to not form any strong emotional connections with the children. The event itself was a fantastic day, very fun and lots of enthusiasm from everyone. The staff and volunteers were very helpful and the day had a real child-friendly approach. At the beginning of the day I did feel a little apprehensive and did not know what to expect but these feelings soon disappeared and I had a really good day.

It gave me the chance to meet other adopters, who I have kept in touch with and formed new friendships. If I had not found a match prior to this day I would have been very keen to attend future days and would encourage others to do so. The days

are such a great chance to get to meet the ‘real’ child behind the official reports and for you to think outside the box. They are also a fantastic opportunity for children with disabilities and older children as it really opens up people’s minds and gives these children the chance to find a family and for people to see the children are actually ‘children’! I do think adopters need to keep their guard up a little bit as it can be so easy to fall in love with all the children. You have to be a little logical as well and think carefully about what the right match for your family is and protect yourself until a possible link progresses further.

Overall it was a lovely, lovely day, in a fantastic venue, completely child-centred and it did not feel like an ‘adoption event’, but a really fun party and a very special day. It was an amazing day and I am so glad I had the chance to experience an Adoption Activity Day as part of my adoption journey.

The carers, social workers and adoption agencies

We couldn't run the AADs successfully without the support that foster carers and social workers provide to the children who attend: in preparing them ahead of the day, as well as being there on the day itself.

Family finding social workers secure matches for the majority of children with a plan of adoption through their own agencies or national profile-searching. But when children are waiting and no links are forthcoming AADs, and professional Exchange Days, provide a vital further chance to secure the match they need.

Some agencies use these approaches in their region but our national programme enables children from one area to meet adopters from another, broadening their chances to find each other. Almost every adoption agency in Britain has successfully sent a child or adopter to an AAD at some point in the last ten years, with over 600 practitioners attending to support a child or an adopter. The Days also provide the opportunity for social

workers to explore with colleagues what approaches have worked well, as well as meet families who might be suitable for other children not attending the Day.

Above all, the time spent at an AAD gives those social workers supporting a child or their adopters the opportunity to observe their prospective adopters with children or vice versa. This is invaluable in terms of evidence for their assessment and presentation to panel.

Foster carers are provided with preparation materials and a workbook to complete with children ahead of the Day, so that they can help reassure children about the fun day and all that there is to do when they go.

For foster carers, who have often cared for the children for a significant period, attending the AAD helps them to become more involved in the family finding process for the children that they are caring for; and to start preparing for the next stage in the child's life: the transition to a new family.

“I was very impressed with the Activity Day; we all thoroughly enjoyed it. There was lots for the children to do and everyone was really helpful in making us feel comfortable. Everyone was lovely and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting other carers and children. The organisation of the day was very professional. I will look forward to going again if I need to.”

Foster carer

“It reassured me and helped me to hold in mind the new potential family and remember positive details about them, such as activities that they do, the seaside that they live near, it meant that preparation for my child could actually start much earlier than usual. I was less nervous meeting them later.”

Foster carer

“I was very impressed with the way in which the Activity Day was organised. I feel we were supported all the way through the process and everyone there was really nice and helpful.”

Foster carer



Sam's early life experience had been scary and unpredictable and for a long time he struggled to trust and form secure attachments. With a delay in his expressive language Sam found it difficult to verbalise his feelings and communicated through his mood or behaviour. However, with the help of a highly nurturing team of professionals including his amazing foster carers, social worker and school, Sam started to heal.

Once Sam was made subject to a Placement Order, we could start family finding for him. As Sam's family finder I had high aspirations of finding the right family for him but also a lot of apprehension as he was a 7 year old boy with assessed emotional needs: characteristics that usually mean there is less chance we would find a family for him. In real terms, he was a delightful, confident little boy with a big personality: curious and interested in the world and who asks LOTS of questions! Like many 7 year old boys, Sam loved karate, football, climbing frames, dressing up as Spiderman and found girls boring! Surely the family for him was out there...

Sam was profiled at numerous family finding events and featured in our national profile booklet and in Children Who Wait. Sam was also referred to the National Adoption Register and latterly to Adoption Link. During this time we had only received one expression of interest, which didn't proceed further than an initial exchange of information.

On the day of his Activity Day, Sam woke up and shouted, “It's adoption day!” By then he had been in foster care for 2 years and was ready. He had been well prepared and knew he would have lots fun, get to play with other children waiting to be adopted and meet adults who were thinking about adopting a child. Sam knew this was one of the many ways we were trying to find him just the right family.

Sam embraced the day and all that it offered with gusto: the soft play, the physical play, football and the Gruffalo walk, although the absence of the Gruffalo at the end of the walk was something Sam did give constructive feedback about!

In direct work with his Social Worker Sam had expressed a wish for two dads. Sam had always had a tricky time trusting females and so two dads felt safer to him. On the day, Chris and Marcus made an instant connection with Sam and us with them. Coincidentally, the couple had recently seen Sam on Adoption Link and had felt a connection to him but had not felt confident enough at that stage to pursue an enquiry. At the same time I had received their profile and had written Sam's name at the top of it with a question mark. My initial reservations were that, although Sam had expressed a wish to have two dads, how would we help him trust females and sustain positive relationships with females in the future?

What impressed me about Chris and Marcus was that they were not just enjoying the interaction with Sam, but also were starting to think about therapeutically parenting this little boy and what this could mean. They were also insightful about how they could ensure Sam continued to have positive and nurturing relationships with females in the future. Chris and Marcus were a warm, nurturing couple who were very open to developing their skills as parents. They did not have a

set parenting style and were therefore open to parenting in a way that suited Sam.

On reading their Prospective Adopters Report the team around Sam felt strongly that Chris and Marcus were the right family and we quickly proceeded to a Matching Meeting and an Adoption Panel soon followed. Sam went to live with his new family three months after the Adoption Activity Day and is doing well. The early stages of placement were not without their challenges for the family, and Chris and Marcus have used the package of therapeutic support available to them to find strategies for helping Sam feel safe and build attachment. Sam is an affectionate little boy who greets his dads every morning with a beaming smile and has told us his “new family make him happy.”

The Adoption Activity Day had given Chris and Marcus the opportunity to meet Sam, and connect to this excitable, fun-loving, sociable and spontaneous little boy, with so much to offer a family and for us...well without the Adoption Activity Day then maybe we wouldn't have proceeded further than a question mark on top of a profile page!

“I had a very enjoyable day and a good first experience of an Activity Day! I was quite apprehensive initially as I wasn't sure what to expect, but the whole experience was so lovely and all of the children seemed to have a wonderful time.”

Social worker



A community of support

The volunteers

We could not write this report without saying thank to the hundreds of people who have volunteered to help out at an AAD. Volunteers help ensure the Day runs smoothly: setting up and packing up as well as helping with activities during the event itself. As a charity, Coram is fortunate to be able to attract people willing to give up their time to help others.

Volunteers come from all backgrounds, from social work students to Coram's corporate sponsors. Because volunteers also have so much fun they often return to their places of work and use the staff forums to promote Coram and the AAD service. This has led to fundraising and even more willing volunteers.

It is particularly good to welcome back adopters to an AAD: for example Sharon who adopted Lewis via an AAD when he was 6. Sharon now attends the AADs that take place in the Midlands, helping to brief adopters to reassure them and passing on her advice about how best to get the most of the day.



Supporters and Sponsors

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters and sponsors, without whom our event costs would be much higher, from help with toy storage and transport, to gifts for children and discounted venues.

Over the last 10 years AADs have benefitted from support from numerous anonymous individuals and donors, and we are very grateful to all the trusts and foundations who have supported AADs in their area of benefit. In addition we would like to thank the following:

- B&Q
- Charter Patrons
- Department of Education
- Ricochet Productions
- Ted's Light
- Teenage Cancer Trust
- The National Lottery Community Fund

“Thank you to everyone who has helped at an Activity Day!”

We cannot recommend Adoption Activity days highly enough. We would have to say they have been the most rewarding route in the whole adoption journey for us as you get to spend quality time with the children involved and the chance of a magical connection.

The themed days are well run and a real joy to attend. You cannot get the amazing feeling we got when we met our future Son from a profile, a few paragraphs and a photograph and it's great the children get to be involved in a big party. The minute we walked into the playground and saw this little lad's beaming smile asking if we'd play on his football team we knew it was going to be a special day!

We also got to spend time with the social worker and the foster carer, which really helped in knowing we were a good match to support our son's needs. After 3 hours of fun, games and a magic show a fellow adopter said, “You do know he's chosen you, don't you?” We knew straight away we'd found our son, or rather he'd found us.

We completed the expression of interest on the day, and after visits, an appreciation day and a matching panel it was less than four months until he moved in to complete our family and turn our house into a home. We cannot imagine life without our wonderful son, we can't thank the Coram Activity Day team enough for changing all our lives!



“We cannot recommend Adoption Activity days highly enough.”

What's next for Adoption Activity Days?

There is no single family finding approach that will be successful for every child, and so having a suite of approaches is important: Coram's AADs and Exchange Days, are key parts of this suite, as stated in the Government's Adoption Strategy published in July 2021.

Every child who has been waiting more than a few months should be given the chance to find a family at an AAD and we want this entitlement to be part of the Government's proposed national matching service.

Such a commitment is needed because at the moment the majority of children waiting are not given this opportunity by their agencies: current demand means we only run one AAD a month, which up to 30 children can attend; yet at any given time there are over 300 children who have been waiting more than 6 months and are not linked with a family. This is not good enough for our children.

To find families for 150 children a year, two AADs are required per calendar month. This secures a 16-fold return, with £6m per year being saved due to

those children not remaining in care. This level can be restored to give children waiting the best chance of finding an adoptive family, and we call on the sector to make that investment by referring all their waiting children to AADs and Exchange Days, thereby ensuring the sustainability of this vital and unique sector-based national service.

Elsewhere, we are now piloting the use of Activity Days to find long term foster families for children and young people who will remain in care. These events give young people the chance to have a say in who will care for them until they are 18, increasing the chance of finding them a long term home. Amazingly, most young people in care have no involvement in deciding who they live with.

Activity Days and Exchange Days are part of Coram's Be My Family service. Exchange Days are events where adopters can meet social workers from variety of different adoption agencies and find out more about the children who are waiting to be adopted. Be My Family also offers advice, guidance and help on adoption, from people just thinking about adoption to adoptive parents. We do this via our website (bemyfamily.org.uk), as well as running webinars and events. We also provide opportunities for potential adopters to build their understanding of the needs of children – from volunteering at Activity Days to being a Coram Beanstalk Volunteer reading helper. To find out more, contact us at Enquiries@bemyfamily.org.uk

“My only hope is that in future these events are more accepted and considered as one of the mainstream methods of family finding. If we, as adults, cannot overcome our fears in taking part in days like this then we really cannot show our future child empathy in all that they have encountered in their early lives. It is important to stand back when in a room with these amazing children and realise that all we feel and fear is only a small portion of what they have experienced in their very short lives.”
Adopters

“Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Days where larger numbers of children and adopters who are waiting can find each other has a strong record in securing matches across boundaries. Some RAAs have embraced the approach regionally but the opportunity to attend an Adoption Activity Day or a national Exchange Day needs to be extended to all who could benefit.”

DfE Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere, July 2021

Channel 4's Finding Me a Family: behind the scenes at Coram's Activity Days

The work of Coram's Adoption Activity Days team and those supporting children waiting for the security of a permanent home was the focus of Finding Me a Family, a two part series on Channel 4 in December 2017.

Cameras followed a group of children as they attended an AAD organised by Coram. Produced by Ricochet Productions, the programme sensitively captured the moments when children and adopters meet and interact for the first time, explored the process and chemistry of matching, and saw foster carers and social workers express their hopes for the children they look after.

Children and adopters were supported throughout the process with the help of a safeguarding consultant. For children who are old enough, the focus of an AAD is that it is an event where there is the possibility of meeting a new parent, but, primarily, it is a day to have fun. They were reassured that if a match didn't occur, the team would keep on trying.

The programme was widely featured in the press, inspired discussions on Mumsnet and encouraged many people to come forward to find out more adoption.

Dozens posted on Twitter to say how they had cried tears of joy when it was revealed that one of the boys, six-year-old Lewis, had found a 'new mum and dad', Chris and Sharon, at the event - and moved in with the couple just in time for Christmas.

Six-year-old Lewis had been placed in care, along with his two younger siblings, but for his benefit was separated from them after they struggled to find any adopters able to take all three.

Speaking on the programme, Sharon said: "What we've got to offer is love, lots of love. Everyone wants babies and toddlers and the older ones don't seem to get that chance."



Sharon and Chris
Featured in the CH4 Documentary Finding Me a Family shown in December 2017.

Their son Lewis attended a featured AAD in the series and was subsequently matched in time to move in for Christmas that year.

Lewis was 6 when he was placed and originally part of a sibling group of 3. The AAD was a last chance at family finding for him. He is now 10, in year 6 at school and loving life.



“When our social worker told us that there was an Adoption Activity Day event, we immediately said ‘Yes’ to attending. On the day, we were given enough time to play with all the children; and it was during this event that we found our little one. We felt an immediate connection with him; he was such a sweet and cheerful little sunshine. It was a wonderful and life changing experience; and we will never forget how we met our little sunshine!”

Adopters

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