
Evaluation of development activity undertaken in support of the Adoption England Strategy: Family finding events

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Dr Amy Simpson, Ellie Macey, Kathryn Gallop, Susan Wise, Dr Melanie Henwood, Amy Johnson, Vivien Taylor, Elise Halford, Professor Katy Burch

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1. Executive Summary

Although some improvements have been made in recent years, too many children are still waiting too long to be adopted (Department for Education (DfE), 2021; Coram-i, 2024). At least two thirds of children who wait for 18 months or more have a recognised 'harder to place' characteristic i.e. they are aged over 5 years, are part of a sibling group, have an ethnic minority background or have a disability (Coram-I, 2023). Earlier studies suggest that widening the search for these children, particularly beyond local adoptive parents, is important to avoid delay, as is flexibility and readiness to revise matching requirements (Dance and Farmer, 2010).

The main aim of family finding events is to accelerate family finding for children waiting for adoption. However, important secondary aims include to: (a) improve awareness of prospective adopters of the needs of children who wait, and (b) encourage prospective adopters to reflect on and to appropriately (Selwyn et al., 2013) broaden their perspectives on their initial matching criteria. Family finding events include:

- **'Adoption activity days'¹ (hereafter 'activity days')** and **'pan-regional family finding events'²**. These events provide informal opportunities for prospective adopters and children (often supported by their foster carers and/or social workers) to meet in person and interact in the context of a fun, child-friendly environment including 'party-style' entertainment and a range of age-appropriate activities.
- **Exchange events** are held without the presence of children or their foster carers. Representatives of adoption agencies and prospective adopters meet in person to exchange information about and discuss the profiles and needs of children waiting to be adopted.

As part of a wider programme of practice improvement in 2023-2024, Adoption England has funded five 'host' adoption agencies - including regional adoption agencies (RAAs) and Coram to provide a total of 18 events across different geographical footprints in England. These have included:

- 3 all-England exchange events - hosted by the Coram 'Be My Family' service.
- 8 all-England adoption activity days - hosted by Coram.
- 7 pan-regional family finding events - hosted by four different RAAs but open to other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) in the same region.

The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University has led a mixed methods evaluation of the programme between November 2023 and July 2024 including:

- A rapid research review and theory of change (ToC) development.
- Secondary analysis of administrative data collected by the host organisations.

¹ Adoption Activity Days are trade marked by Coram

² These are events based on the Adoption Activity Days model, adapted to suit local / regional contexts by Regional Adoption Agencies

- Online survey of prospective adopters³ (n=29) and foster carers (n=33) invited to and/or attending these events.
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews with prospective adopters (n=8) and professionals (n=16) with experience of adoption activity days / pan-regional family finding events and/or exchange events.

Key findings relating to **4 questions identified for the evaluation** are outlined below.

Q1: What and who did events typically involve?

Activity days and pan-regional family finding events – all held at weekends

- 320 children and 299 adopter households attended 15 events between May 2023 and March 2024 - an average of 20 adoptive households and 21 children per event.
- Consideration of the right size for events, and the challenge of achieving the right balance of adults and children, were strong themes throughout the evaluation. Historically, events were much larger with up to 50 prospective adopters attending but feedback from attendees suggested this could feel overwhelming.
- Bigger sized events (for up to 40 children) were generally held in larger outdoor, venues with staggered arrival times for prospective adopters.
- A very high rate of prospective adopters (86%) and children (91%) who were invited actually attended an event.
- Many participants travelled a long distance (i.e. over 1 hour) to attend an event.
- Prospective adopters sometimes attended to meet a specific child, based on a link that had already been made.
- Most children attending these events were aged under 5 years.
- However, children with other harder to place characteristics were also over-represented at these events compared with national data about children waiting for adoption – particularly children with a disability.
- There was some evidence that children with harder to place characteristics were more likely to attend all-England or pan-regional compared with regional events.
- On average, prospective adopters from 8 different agencies attended each event. On average, children from 4 RAAs attended each event.

Exchange events – often held mid-week

- 715 children (an average of 238 per event) were profiled at 3 exchange events facilitated by Coram in Manchester, London and the West Midlands.
- 81 prospective adopter households attended in total (average of 27 per event).
- About one half of all prospective adopters invited to an exchange event did not attend – professionals interviewed for the study suggested this may be the result of declining numbers of approved adopters during the evaluation period. However, there may be other factors at play e.g. further to travel to these events, exchange

³ The term 'prospective adopters' is used in this report to refer to all types of adoptive households and includes those who are approved adopters and those who may be in the assessment period, prior to being approved.

events not as popular as activity days or events easier psychologically to decline where children are not present.

- Compared with national data, children with harder to place characteristics were over represented at the exchange day events – particularly children with a disability and children in a sibling group.
- On average, 16 RAAs attended each event and/or sent children's profiles and an average of 11 RAAs or VAAs supported approved adopter households to attend.

Events were generally organised by a core team from one 'host' agency but some pan regional family finding events were supported by a group or committee from a wider range of agencies who were then allocated places at the events. Interviews suggested that preparation for events took significant time and resources e.g. to generate 'profiles', identify appropriate, accessible venues or organise events' entertainment. Medical experts were sometimes also invited to attend - to engage prospective adopters in understanding and 'de-mystifying' complex information about child conditions.

More about the logistics of preparing for events, including tools and supports used to prepare children, prospective adopters and foster carers for events, can be found in **Section 4**.

How were events experienced?

Before events

- Prior to events, prospective adopters and foster carers frequently described experiencing conflicting emotions such as excitement, hopefulness but also apprehension or nervousness and even scepticism (where they had no prior experience of events). About one third of children were reported to have looked forward to activity days / pan-regional family finding events but others may not have understood the purpose or were neither enthusiastic nor unenthusiastic. Some foster carers had 'sold' the event(s) to children as 'just a fun party' to reduce the psychological pressure.
- Prospective adopters were generally positive about the information and support they had received prior to events e.g. general or more child-specific information from event organisers, support from social workers – this helped them to prepare.
- However, over one third of foster carers completing a survey had not felt confident in preparing their child(ren) for an activity day / pan-regional family finding event – suggesting they had not been adequately informed, supported or prepared by the child's agency or their own social worker.

During events

- Most prospective adopters and foster carers rated aspects of the events highly or very highly, including the structure of the day, the convenience of the location, the activities on offer during activity days / pan-regional family finding events, and the number of people at the event. Survey responses suggested attendees also considered events to have been largely well prepared and organised.

- Approximately three quarters of all attendees (children, prospective adopters and foster carers) were reported to have enjoyed the events and to have appreciated the 'happy' and/or 'safe' space.
- However, adult attendees at activity days / pan-regional family finding events also observed that interactions might initially feel awkward or even competitive, foster carers might find activity days very emotionally and practically difficult and, for some children (i.e. those with additional and complex needs), an environment might feel overwhelming. Prospective adopters also sometimes found these events overwhelming.
- Holding activity days / pan-regional family finding events with smaller numbers of attendees and providing 'break out' spaces for prospective adopters were considered to alleviate some of the potential negatives. Prospective adopters also suggested that host organisations should more proactively schedule or facilitate the events to maximise opportunities for interaction e.g. by preventing children from spending too long on certain activities or from becoming over-stimulated. Foster carers wanted more support 'on the day' to help with the dual challenge of concentrating on conversations with adopters and supporting the children after a long journey e.g. allowing an additional supportive adult to attend with them.
- All prospective adopters attending an activity day / pan-regional family finding event and completing a survey had found it useful to spend time with children and speak to foster carers. 79% had found it useful to speak with social workers/family finders. Conversations with medical experts attending the events were also valued or highly valued.

After events

- Only a small proportion (13%) of the children attending an activity day / pan-regional family finding event were reported by their foster carer to have been upset or unsettled immediately after the event, and an even lower proportion (6%) had appeared upset or unsettled over a longer period post-event. Foster carers thought that the tiring nature of events (including travel time, length of the event, and travel home) was a significant contributing factor.
- Where there was a positive connection at an event, host organisations communicated with all relevant parties to make a 'link'.
- To assist with linking, prospective adopters often described receiving social work support and/or more in-depth information about a child or sibling group prior to introductions starting. However, professionals thought more could be done to help prospective adopters attending more than one event without a resulting link.
- Prospective adopters completing a survey were generally positive about the information and support they received from their social workers after the event. However, some felt that responses had been slow or even that they had received no response in relation to an expression of interest (EOI) submitted by them.
- Although it was agreed that timeliness was important post event, professional interviewees described how delays were often caused, including as a result of having to navigate different agency practices, dealing with a high volume of EOIs, or having to share additional information with family finders. Challenges relating to staff turnover and capacity were also noted.

More about how events were experienced can be found in **Section 5** of the report.

Q2: What is the impact or potential impact of events?

Overall usefulness

- Survey respondents were asked to reflect on how useful they thought the events were in helping to find adoptive families for children (on a scale from 1 (not useful at all) to 10 (extremely useful)). Approximately three quarters (74%) identified their usefulness at between 7 and 10 on the scale, with 41% giving the event a maximum score of 10 – this was the mode (most frequent) response. Only 5% gave events a low rating of between 1 and 4.
- Prospective adopters providing more in-depth insights considered the events to be a more useful way of learning about children than traditional methods such as written or online (Link Maker) profiles. They valued the child-centred approach of activity days / pan-regional family finding events and the opportunity, across all types of event, to gather richer and more in-depth insights into children from directly interacting with them and/or speaking to people working with the children i.e. social workers or foster carers.

Impact on opportunities to match children and adopters

- A total of 15 activity days / pan-regional family finding events generated 214 EOIs from prospective adopters i.e. approximately 14 EOIs per event (range 5 to 33 – not associated with event size). Two thirds (64% or 14/22) prospective adopters completing a survey had submitted an EOI during or after the event - and most EOIs had resulted at the very least in further discussions about matching.
- A greater number of EOIs were generated by the all-England exchange events i.e. 179 EOIs over 3 events (approximately 60 per event). All (7) prospective adopters completing a survey about exchange events reported they had submitted an EOI during or after the event.
- Professionals interviewed for this evaluation were clear that all types of event actively promoted opportunities for matching, particularly for children who wait longer or the longest. The events might also promote swifter matching.
- However, a key limitation of this 'snapshot' evaluation is that it has not been able to systematically track the number and proportion of children in relation to whom EOIs and early links made after events progressed, including to panel stage.

Impact on prospective adopter awareness and understanding

- A high proportion i.e. 83% (24/29) prospective adopters responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I have more information about the backgrounds and characteristics of children who are waiting to be adopted'.
- A high proportion i.e. 79% (23/29) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I have a better understanding of the needs of children who are waiting to be adopted'.
- Approximately three quarters (17/22) prospective adopters attending activity days / pan-regional family finding events agreed or strongly agreed that the event had

helped them to feel more prepared to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. The evidence was less clear in relation to exchange events.

- Prospective adopter interviews suggested that activity days / pan-regional family finding events had helped to generate more in-depth, accessible information and understanding because of the physical presence of children and foster carers.
- Other views shared by prospective adopters included that, by increasing their knowledge and understanding alongside actual child interactions at activity days / pan-regional family finding events, they had been helped to build general (parenting) confidence.

Impact on prospective adopter preferences and matching criteria

- Approximately two thirds (18/29) prospective adopters participating in the survey reported that an event had changed their view(s) about the characteristics or needs of children that could be placed with them.
- Over one third (11/29) reported they had changed their documented preferences since the event. Most (10/11) of these had attended an activity day / pan-regional family finding event.
- The biggest changes were in prospective parents' confidence to consider sibling groups but around one quarter of survey respondents also said they had changed their views e.g. to consider adopting children from minority ethnic groups, children aged 5 or older or children with a disability.
- In interviews, professionals emphasised the importance of not encouraging prospective adopters to stretch their preferences too far - thereby risking the viability of prospective matches.

Other unforeseen impacts

Other unforeseen and positive benefits of events described by interviewees included:

- Being able to make adult contacts and networking (this was thought by all interviewees to increase opportunities for matching over the longer term).
- Providing an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet a child they were already in the process of being linked with.
- (For professionals) working more collaboratively to generate a wider range of options to consider when trying to find a match for a child with harder to place characteristics and sharing good practice with one another.

More about event impact can be found in **Section 6** of the report.

Q3: What are unit costs and potential value for money of events?

Unsurprisingly, the costs per child of organising and facilitating activity days / pan-regional family finding events was higher than for exchange events. Although very accurate comparable costings were not available to the evaluation team, the cost of running a national activity day seemed higher compared with regional or pan-regional events.

Costs of activity days / pan-regional family finding events

- Returns to Adoption England by host organisations suggested a range of £2K to £10K approx. per event (higher for all-England events)
- The average cost per child per event based on these figures was between £200 and £600
- However, evaluators (and regional hosts) acknowledged these figures did not represent the true overall costs of running events, with full staffing and overhead costs being relatively 'hidden', particularly for the pan-regional family finding events
- Two more in depth costing case studies for pan-regional rather than national events suggested that a more accurate cost of these events was between £4K and £6K

Costs of (all-England) exchange events

- Returns to Adoption England by the host organisation (Coram) suggested that the unit costs were approximately £6,700 per event
- Based on the number of children profiled at each event, the cost per child per event was calculated at £30

This evaluation has tested the feasibility of expanding the range of events across England with support from Adoption England, and with very positive results.

The evaluation has not been able to very accurately identify the (costed) added value of exchange events and activity days / pan-regional family finding events compared with business as usual. In particular, it has not been possible to compare the match 'rate', including for children with harder to place characteristics, compared with business as usual.

However, there is relatively strong evidence to suggest that, in the face of a reduction in the number of approvals of prospective adopters (literally limiting the number of available adopters), these events have offered very promising results i.e.

- They have generated many opportunities for links and matches – including because a high proportion of all children waiting to be adopted either attended or could be profiled at one or more of these events - and up to one fifth of all prospective adopters also may have attended in the relevant timeline.
- They have generated high rates of EOIs for children who, by and large, had harder to place characteristics.
- They were considered helpful or very helpful by the large majority of professionals and prospective adopters, including specifically for matching.

- They extended prospective adopters views about the kinds of children they could adopt – resulting very probably in greater matching outside of the event itself.
- They did not result in adverse consequences for children or prospective adopters.

It was not possible, through this evaluation, to draw conclusions about the impact of different types of events and their costs e.g. exchange events cost more overall but were less costly per individual child profiled and generated a larger number of EOIs per event. However, although activity days / pan-regional family finding events were understandably more costly per child, they were attended by a greater proportion of invitees and arguably provided greater ‘additional benefits’ – particularly the chance for new prospective adopters to interact with children. Professionals interviewed for this evaluation agreed there was considerable value in having a variety of event options on offer with reference to geographical footprint and style of event – including a greater proportion of collaborative e.g. pan-regional events.

More about event costs and discussion about benefits can be found in **Sections 7-8**.

Recommendations

The relatively low cost per child of all types of event and actual as well as potential impact suggests they are likely to provide good value for money and should be continued. Beyond this initial recommendation, the following should be considered:

1. Events to continue to be developed i.e. with attention to diversity (across a number of events e.g. size and type of event; preparation of invitees; facilitation enabling a variety of interactions; accessibility; availability of medical advice; and support for children, prospective adopters and foster carers to enjoy and get the most from events).
2. Specifically, agencies to consider how to improve practical and emotional support for foster carers attending activity events / pan-regional family finding events with children (e.g. by having an allocated staff member to support them and/or allowing more than one foster carer to accompany children – particularly sibling groups or children with additional needs).
3. Agencies to consider how other nuanced roles or purposes of events can be supported (i.e. for ‘meet before match’ meetings).
4. RAAs to work collaboratively (i.e. pan-regionally) to understand the needs within their region, and the resources available to them, to support the planning of future events.
5. Hosts and all agencies to promote awareness of events and their value (i.e. with social work teams and prospective adopters) to improve interest and take up.
6. Coordination of all events to continue to be undertaken at a national level to avoid duplication and support diversity of provision i.e. to be undertaken by the National Family Finding Lead at Adoption England.
7. Building on BAAF’s ‘Organising an Adoption Activity Day’ (E.E. Fursland, 2015), the development of a comprehensive national guide for all types of events - detailing their purpose, key components, best practice and principles or standards. This will be of particular use for newer event hosts.
8. Ongoing facilitation of best practice and learning e.g. community of practice.

9. Improvements in standard data collection and outcome measurement across events – with specific reference to more consistent monitoring of the rate of links / links resulting in panel per event e.g. including as part of the ASG dataset - through recording, at point of panel, whether the match was a direct result of attending an event. This should ideally also include child characteristics and whether or not the children and adopters already have a pre-event link.

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2. Introduction

Despite improvements in recent years, there is a consensus that too many children are still waiting too long to become adopted (Department for Education, 2021; Coram-i, 2024).

Adoption activity days, pan-regional family finding events and exchange events are types of 'family finding events', providing opportunities to extend the family finding search - to help identify more timely matches for children who are waiting to be adopted. The events are also thought to provide an opportunity for prospective adopters (and their social workers) to have more direct involvement in the matching process, and to learn more about the children waiting for adoption.

Such events are not new in the UK.

- **Activity days and pan-regional family finding events** are child-centred events - they aim to provide a fun environment and an opportunity for prospective adopters, children, and foster carers, to meet. They have been used in the UK for over ten years. They have even earlier origins and are longer established in the USA. The first 'adoption party' in England was held in London in 1976 by the Adoption Resource Exchange (which later became BAAF – the British Association of Adoption and Fostering). Adoption activity days were then further piloted by BAAF (from 2011) then by Coram, who have since ran more than 160 activity days (2011-2021) (Coram, 2021).
- **Exchange events** are profiling events - adoption agencies attend to share information (with prospective adopters) about children who are waiting to be adopted. They have also formed part of family finding processes in England for some time. Prior to 2019, several exchange events were held each year as part of the government's national Adoption Register service. Since 2019, when the national Adoption Register ceased to exist, exchange events have been run by Coram's national matching service 'Be My Family'.

As part of a wider development programme of practice improvement, in 2023-24, Adoption England funded five agencies (hereafter described as 'host organisations'), and this evaluation, to explore in more depth the potential value of all-England or pan-regional activity days and exchange events provided by different providers in different parts of England. These events have included:

- 3 all-England exchange events - hosted by Coram 'Be My Family' service.
- 8 all-England activity days - hosted by Coram.
- 7 pan-regional family finding events - hosted by four different Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs).

The events also aimed to encourage collaboration between agencies and extend family finding across areas - the all-England activity days and exchange events were open to those from any agency/area in England. Pan-regional family finding events were typically open to those agencies within the same region of England as the host organisation (i.e. other local VAAs, RAAs and allied Local Authorities (LAs)).

This report outlines findings from the evaluation commissioned by Adoption England and conducted by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University. The evaluation focuses on the 'take up' and potential value of the 18 events.

2.1. Context for activity days, pan-regional family finding events and exchange events

Recent data⁴ shows how that there were 2,410 children waiting to be adopted in England in quarter 3 of 2023/24 (children with a Placement Order (PO), but not yet placed). There was an increase of 14% (300 children) from 2022/23. 250 children had been waiting 18 months or longer to be matched (since PO was granted). Again, there has been an increase since 2022/23 (4%, or 10 children) (Coram-i, 2024).

Of those children waiting with a PO, 1460 (61%) were children with a 'harder to place' characteristic - meaning that they fell into at least one of the groups of children who typically wait longer than average for adoption. 200 of those children with 'harder to place' characteristics had waited 18 months or longer (since their PO was granted) (this is 80% of all those children waiting 18 months or longer since their PO was granted). 'Harder to place' children are defined as any child who has any of the following characteristics (Coram-i, 2024):

- They are aged five and over.
- They are part of a sibling group.
- They are from an ethnic minority background.
- They have a disability.

As demonstrated in the agency-level ASG data for quarter 2 of 2023/24, there were variations across regions in England - the number of children waiting 18 months or longer, per region, ranged from 10 to 50. The proportion of those children with a 'harder to place' characteristic within those waiting also ranged across regions from 66.6% to 100% (Coram-i, 2023).

Data from the first half of 2023/24 demonstrated how, overall, approximately three quarters of children were matched and placed with an adoptive family within their own LA (1090/1460 or 74.7%). 6.8% were placed by another LA (including RAAs) and 18.5% were placed by a VAA. Again, there were variations by region (Coram-i, 2023).

The National Adoption Strategy (DfE, 2021) sets out a vision to deliver excellence in adoption services across England, including that all adoptive children are found permanent loving families as quickly as possible, and national policy has endorsed the use of tools such as activity days and exchange events. The most recent statement of adoption policy strategy (DfE, 2021) reiterated the usefulness of "all existing methods and tools" including activity days and exchange days "to secure matches for children without delay" (DfE, 2021, p. 32).

⁴ Every LA, RAA and VAA in England collects and submits quarterly data returns relating to Adoption and Special Guardianship (ASG). Data can be accessed here: <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource-library/area/adoption-and-special-guardianship-leadership-board/>

2.2. Purpose and remit of activity days, pan-regional family finding events and exchange events

The key aims are to:

- Optimise opportunities for matching children who wait longer.
- Improve the awareness of prospective adopters of the needs of children waiting, so that they can be better prepared.
- Encourage prospective adopters to reflect on and/or broaden their perspectives on their initial matching criteria.

Activity days and pan-regional family finding events are informal and child-centred events, provided by specialist staff, and attended by prospective adopters, children and their foster carers, and social workers. The events are often themed and include age-appropriate activities and entertainment for children – designed to encourage positive interaction between those that attend. The emphasis of the events is providing a fun environment and enabling prospective adopters and children to meet. The events have been described as a 'unique way of finding permanence' for children, particularly those who wait the longest (Coram Adoption, no date).

Exchange events are an opportunity for adoption agencies to attend and profile both children and prospective adopters. The events are attended by adoption agencies, prospective adopters and their supporting social workers. In addition to receiving information about children waiting to be adopted, prospective adopters and workers from a number of adoption agencies can meet each other to find out more/have direct conversations about specific children.

More information about the events, and how they work, is shown in section 4.

2.3. Existing evidence relating to experience and impact of events

Whilst there are some useful and positive findings from studies published by Coram and the Scottish Government, the evidence base relating to activity days / pan-regional family finding events and exchange events in the UK is relatively limited. Specifically, there is not much evidence exploring the different including newer types of events on offer in England or their impact over time.

2.3.1. Existing evidence regarding adoption activity days

An unpublished pilot study of the first events provided in the UK (Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2013) captured the experiences of adoption activity day attendees and learning from running they events. The findings have been used to inform the development and approach of activity days, and Coram (2021) considers that the 2012 evaluation has:

“led to activity days being used across the country and to DfE including them as a key part of its adoption reform agenda in 2012.” (Coram, 2021, p. 2)

Coram rolled out activity days from 2015 (with funding for three years through the Big Lottery Fund). Across the three years, 46 activity days took place throughout England. A 2016 evaluation published by Coram’s Impact and Evaluation Team (Yap, 2016) reported the following across the 46 events:

- The events were attended by 1492 prospective adopters.
- They involved 1083 children in need of adoption.
- The events resulted in 1846 ‘expressions of interest’ from prospective adopters.
- 399 matches were achieved (a match rate of 37%).

However, the study was not able to provide data on the number or proportion of these matches that resulted in actual adoptions. The match rate from the Coram activity days for a one-year period 2014/15 to 2015/16 was calculated at 40% and this was compared with an estimated national adoption match rate one-year same period of 34%. However, these findings may in fact under-state the effectiveness of activity days, as they were likely not comparing the same populations i.e. children who attended the activity days did so because they were identified as:

“among the least likely to find a match through standard family finding procedures. This suggests that activity days increased the number of matches for harder-to-place children.” (Yap, 2016, p. 11)

Overall the 2016 evaluation report concluded that activity days were successful family finding activities that had increased the number of matches of harder to place children (Yap, 2016).

In 2021 Coram published a brief document marking 10 years of adoption activity days (Coram, 2021). Between 2011 and 2021 Coram ran more than 160 adoption activity days. The document reports how:

- More than 6,000 children and 4,500 adopters participated.
- One third of the children had additional complex needs.
- One third of the children were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.
- One quarter of the children were part of a sibling group seeking a home together.
- 3 out of 4 children were boys.
- “At least 1400 children” were matched with a family through an activity day.
- The average match rate for activity days was 25%.

Research published by Scottish Government explored not only the match rate but also the process of being part of an activity day. The evaluation of Scotland’s first adoption activity day, which took place in October 2015, reported that feedback indicated it was a worthwhile event (Robinson, 2016). A match rate of 26% was reported, and the author offered some key reflections:

“The activity day had the effect of focusing attention on key aspects of the adoption process in particular the role of foster carers and the importance of preparation for the children.” (Robinson, 2016, p. 23)

2.3.2. Adoption exchange events

There is very little published evidence relating to adoption exchange events. However, this is some learning from an Independent Review in Scotland focusing on their national approaches to family finding, which can be drawn upon.

In 2019, an Independent Review of Scotland’s Adoption Register, which provides a range of family finding support services and events including exchange events, was published (Thomas and Blackmore, 2019). It was found to improve opportunities for identifying matches between children and adopters in Scotland, although the report acknowledged the limitations in determining which service resulted in the matches.

The Review acknowledged a potential barrier to these and other events in that adoption agencies might be reluctant to make inter-agency placements because they were perceived to be more costly. Although, overall, the review found that inter-agency cooperation and resource sharing had increased over time, several challenges (for both practitioners and prospective adopters) were noted including differences in local practices, organisational systems, staff/employment and the availability of other resources, and local differences in the use of language to describe their processes. The report recognised the importance of preparing and supporting prospective adopters to interact with other agencies who might work in different ways to that of their local agency (Thomas and Blackmore, 2019).

The Review also captured the perspectives of prospective adopters about the events they had attended. The findings highlighted the range of emotions involved for adopters attending them, including potential positives and negatives, such as experiencing the events as competitive and/or an extension of the assessment process (Thomas and Blackmore, 2019).

The Review argued for additional training and support in relation to family finding practices and participation for social work practitioners, prospective adopters and foster carers (Thomas and Blackmore, 2019).

2.3.3. Broader family finding and matching evidence to take into consideration

Dance and Farmer (2010) conducted a UK study investigating approaches in family finding and matching including ‘in house profiling events’ and found that a ‘willingness to widen the search’ early was important to avoid delay, as was flexibility and readiness to revise matching requirements when necessary. The authors noted the value of widening the search for children who typically wait the longest.

Another Dance and Farmer (2014) study explored how prospective adopters’ views and perceptions could change during the approval process (particularly about the types of children they felt they could parent). They found that there was often:

‘a good deal of movement for many families... Sometimes this seemed to occur spontaneously in response to people’s understanding of the profile of children needing families and their perception of how ‘desirable’ their family was –or through their exposure to profiles of children who needed a family’ (p 13)

However, research conducted by Bristol University has sounded a note of caution that ‘stretching’ the preferences of adoptive parents to fit around a child may be a factor negatively affecting actual adoption placements (Selwyn et al, 2013).

3. Methodology for this Study

3.1. Evaluation questions

The evaluation sought to explore four key questions in relation to the 18 all-England and pan-regional family finding events:

1. What do these events typically involve?
2. What are the experiences of those involved in providing and/or attending the family finding events? How, and to what extent, are those attending the family finding events prepared and supported before, during and after the events?
3. What are the known impacts of the events on prospective adopters and children waiting to be adopted? Including, over time, and in particular on:
 - Opportunities for matching for waiting children; particularly for children who generally wait the longest.
 - Prospective adopters’ awareness and understanding, including their awareness of the needs of children waiting and on their ability to meet those needs.
 - Prospective adopters’ perspectives on their matching criteria.
4. What are the costs (including unit costs) associated with the events and what might be the potential value for money of the family finding events?

3.2. Evaluation approach

The evaluation was realist in approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and used mixed methods (incorporating both quantitative and qualitative aspects).

Full ethical approval was granted for the study by Oxford Brookes Research Ethics Committee in February 2024.

Prior to the data collection phase of the evaluation (November 2023 - March 2024), researchers conducted a rapid research review, had informal conversations and meetings with Adoption England and the teams providing events, and attended two activity day / pan-regional family finding events - these activities supported the design of data collection tools, and the understanding and interpretation of the data

throughout the evaluation. The evaluation team also drafted a Theory of Change, which helped guide the evaluation approach. See appendix 1.

Between March and July 2024, data was collected from a range of stakeholders and through a range of methods, as outlined below.

3.2.1. Online survey with prospective adopters and foster carers

Two groups were invited to take part in an online survey:

- Prospective adopters invited to and/or who attended one of the family finding events (an activity day, pan-regional family finding event or exchange event).
- Foster carers whose children in their care were invited to and/or who attended one of the activity days or pan-regional family finding events⁵.

The online survey(s) were designed and piloted with a wide range of stakeholders including experts by experience (adopters and foster carers), Adoption England and professionals involved in the delivery of events (i.e. host organisations).

The survey invitation was sent to prospective adopters and foster carers by email via the host agencies. In some cases the host agencies liaised with the relevant family finders and social workers to pass on the survey invitations. The survey invitations and opening page of the survey included an introduction to the evaluation, a detailed information sheet and privacy notice. All participants were encouraged to take the time to read the information, before deciding that they would complete the survey.

Survey invitations were sent to those who were invited to the events, even if they did not attend the event. The rationale for this was to capture possible reasons for not attending events. All respondents were asked to state which of the events they had been invited to (the list of events provided were specific to the host organisation who sent the survey invitation). Respondents were then asked to answer survey questions in relation to the most recent event on the list, including whether or not they attended the event. As shown below, only one survey respondent (foster carer) answered the survey in relation to an event which they were invited to but did not attend.

Survey questions were tailored to the type of the respondent and event. Surveys took about 20 minutes to complete and asked for information relating to participants' views and experiences before, during and after the event. The survey also collected key demographic information from respondents. Survey respondents could complete the survey anonymously, although participants could also provide their email addresses if they wanted to be included in a prize draw for a chance of winning a £50 shopping voucher. Collection of the survey data was supported by a help desk staffed by a

⁵ The surveys were sent to those who were invited to the 18 events that were funded by Adoption England in 2023-24, and also to attendees of 1 Adoption England-funded (pan regional) activity day event that took place in 2024-25. This event was hosted by one of the existing RAA host organisations. The event is not included in the administrative and event data that is reported on in this evaluation.

researcher. Survey respondents had the option of completing the survey via the phone, with a researcher, if they preferred.

Quantitative results of surveys were analysed (producing descriptive statistics) using SPSS, with thematic analysis of the qualitative (free text) data.

3.2.1.1. Survey respondents

In total, there were 62 completed survey responses, with 33 responses from foster carers and 29 responses from prospective adopters. Partial responses were not used.

Some foster carers who responded to the survey had attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event with more than one child (i.e. a sibling group). Foster carer survey respondents were required to answer questions about the child's experience of the event, for each child that they attended with. The survey therefore captured experiences relating to a total of 47 children who had attended one of these events.

It is very difficult to provide an accurate response rate because: third parties distributed survey invitations and prospective adopters or foster carers possibly attended more than one event⁶. If it is assumed that all adoptive households who attended an event (see administrative and event data for details) received a survey invitation, the response rate was 10%⁷ (29/299 adoptive households who attended an event). If it is assumed that foster carers of all children attending an event received an invitation, the response rate was 10%.

- Of the 29 prospective adopters, 22 shared their views and experiences in relation to an activity day or pan-regional family finding event they had attended, and 7 in relation to an exchange event they had attended.
- All foster carers (33 in total) who took part shared their views and experiences in relation to an activity day or pan-regional family finding event to which they had been invited.

Responses were received across different types of activity day or pan-regional family finding event and related to events taking place across the year 2023/24 - providing insight into short to medium term effects (see appendix 3 for more detail). There were fewer responses in relation to exchange events, which was to be expected as there were only 3 of these events.

Table 1: A summary of all survey responses by type of respondent and type of event (n=62) (source: online survey)

⁶ Survey respondents were encouraged to complete the survey in relation to the most recent Adoption England-funded event that they were invited to and/or attended. If prospective adopters and foster carers had been invited to events hosted by different organisations, they would have received more than one survey invitation and were encouraged to respond to each survey invitation.

⁷ Percentages reported in the text have been rounded to the nearest 1.0%. Percentages in tables have been rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

	Number of responses from foster carers	Number of responses from prospective adopters	Total responses (number and % of total responses)
Pan-regional family finding events	17	12	29 (46.8%)
All-England activity days	16	10	26 (41.9.%)
All-England exchange events	Not applicable	7	7 (11.3%)
Total responses (number and % of total responses)	33 (53.2%)	29 (46.8%)	62 (100%)

Data was also captured on the demographics of survey respondents and the children who attended the events. There are some key findings to note:

Demographics and characteristics of prospective adopters who responded to the survey (n=29)⁸

- 21/29 were part of a two-person adopter family, 8 were a single adopter family.
- 12/29 were approved by an RAA, 13/29 were approved by a different agency (likely to be a VAA) and 4/29 stated that they were not approved by any agency listed (these may have been prospective adopters not yet approved (i.e. in stage two of their assessment process)).
- Most were female (22/29). 7 were male.
- Most described their ethnicity as White (including 'White British' (20/29) and other White backgrounds (5/29)).
- Most were aged between 30 and 49 (15 were between the ages of 30 and 39, 11 were between the ages of 40 and 49). Only 1 prospective adopter was aged 20-29, 2 were aged 50-59 years old.
- Whilst data on where survey respondents lived was not captured, it was known that over half of all survey respondents reported travelling for more than one hour to get to an event. 13% of all survey respondents travelled for more than two hours.

Demographics and characteristics of foster carers who responded to the survey regarding activity days or pan-regional family finding events (n=33)

- The majority (23/33) had accompanied one child to the event, 5 accompanied two children and 5 accompanied three children. They shared experiences relating to 48 children in total⁹.
- Foster carers reported living in a range of regions within the UK.
- The length of time they had been a foster carer varied: 1 had been a foster carer for under 1 year, 10 between 2 and 5 years, 5 between 6 and 10 years, and 16 had been a foster carer for more than 10 years.
- 24/33 were LA foster carers and 8/33 were with an independent foster agency¹⁰.

Demographics and characteristics of children attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events (as reported by foster carers) (n=48)

- Ages of the children varied and ranged from 1 to 7. 34/48 (71%) were under the age of 5 and 14/48 (29%) were aged 5 or over.
- 36 children were male (75%) and 12 were female (25%).
- 43 of the 48 children were White (90%) (35 of these were 'White British').
- It was reported that 19 (40%) children either had a disability and/or other additional needs.

3.2.2. Interviews with prospective adopters

The online survey was also used as a platform to ask prospective adopters if they would like to receive further information about taking part in a follow up semi structured 1:1 online interview. The evaluation team contacted all those who provided consent with further information about taking part in an interview.

Interviews (8 in total) were conducted online by an experienced interviewer. Informed consent was taken verbally at the start of each interview. Interviews were approximately 1hr in duration.

All prospective adopters who took part in the interviews shared their experiences of one or more type of funded events. Some had broader experiences of family finding events about which they also shared their views.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.2.3. Interviews with professionals

Semi structured, 1:1 or small group online interviews, were conducted with professionals either directly involved in the delivery of family finding events (referred to as 'event delivery' professionals) and/or those with experience of supporting people through the family finding and matching process (referred to as 'wider stakeholder' professionals).

Information about the evaluation and opportunity to take part was shared by key stakeholders within the host agencies and other regional adoption agencies across England. Those interested were asked to contact the evaluation team to arrange a suitable time. 16 professionals participated in an interview.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Table 2: A summary of professionals who took part in evaluation interviews, by role and organisation type (n=16)

Role/Organisation type	VAs	RAAs / LAs	Total
Event delivery	4	5	9
Wider stakeholders (social workers, family finders, service managers)	1	6	7
Total	5	11	16

⁸ Percentages have not been calculated for prospective adopter survey responses as n<30.

⁹ 47 of these attended an activity day.

¹⁰ Foster carers could select more than one (LA and/or an independent foster agency)

3.2.4. Analysis of administrative and event data

In addition to the primary data capture outlined above, the evaluation team also requested and conducted secondary analysis of administrative and event data collected by host agencies (i.e. costings, attendance data, feedback from participants). The data shared with the evaluation team was anonymous – it did not include names, or any other data which might identify a prospective adopter, foster carer or child.

The evaluation team made recommendations to the commissioning team at Adoption England and the host organisations regarding the standardisation of data collection across events going forward.

3.3. Evaluation strengths and limitations

3.3.1. Strengths

- The evaluation took a mixed methods approach, which provided a range of quantitative and qualitative perspectives to help explore the key research questions, and an opportunity to triangulate evidence from different sources.
- A large and varied number of stakeholders took part in the evaluation including prospective adopters, foster carers and professionals. In total 62 individuals responded to the online survey and 24 individuals took part in semi structured interviews. As such the evaluation captured views and experiences relating to the events from a range of different perspectives.

3.3.2. Limitations

- As data collection began for the evaluation, the majority of events had already taken place. Therefore, the evaluation was able only to capture the experiences of attendees retrospectively. Future studies focusing on measuring change over time might consider capturing perceptions at different timepoints including before and after events.
- There was some missing data and/or differences in how data was captured by host organisations in the administrative and event data returns (these forms were designed by the Adoption England commissioning team and completed by host organisations after the events). One key challenge reported and discussed later in this report relates to host organisations' ability and capacity to track the progress of potential links after the event.
- The evaluation team recognised that not all host organisations had business support and therefore they struggled to support the evaluation both in terms of their own data collection and recruitment of survey participants.
- There is likely to have been a degree of self-selection bias, due to the sampling approach used in the evaluation fieldwork. In part, this means that it was not possible to conclude that the survey sample was representative of the population (i.e. all those attending events).

4. Findings - What do we know about the events, including how they worked?

The purpose of this section is to describe, in more detail, the events funded by Adoption England between May 2023 and March 2024, including where they took place, when, who attended, and how they worked.

Section 4.1 and 4.2 below draws predominantly upon the administrative and event data shared by host organisations about their events. Where relevant, additional context has been provided drawing upon informal conversations with Adoption England and host organisations from early stages of the evaluation.

4.1. About activity days and pan-regional family finding events

Administrative and event data returns relating to 15 of these events (8 all-England activity days and 7 pan-regional family finding events) were analysed. The events took place between May 2023 and March 2024 and were hosted by five different agencies:

- Coram - hosting all-England activity days.
- 4 RAAs - hosting pan-regional family finding events.

4.1.1. Locations of activity days and pan-regional family finding events

Events, which were hosted by five different organisations, were held across various regions in England - at least one event was held in every region except in the South West and East of England.

Table 3: A summary of the number of activity days / pan-regional family finding events by host organisation and area (source: administrative and event data)

Host organisation	Areas covered by event	No. days funded by Adoption England (2023-24)
Coram	All-England adoption activity days (held in different locations / regions)	8
One Adoption West Yorkshire (RAA)	Pan-regional family finding events - held in Yorkshire & Humber for One Adoption agencies (West Yorks, South Yorks, Nth & Humber)	2
Adopt Thames Valley (RAA)	Pan-regional family finding events - held in SE England attended by local RAAs	2

Host organisation	Areas covered by event	No. days funded by Adoption England (2023-24)
Adoption Now (RAA)	Pan-regional family finding events - held in NW for local RAAs & voluntary partners	2
Family Adoption Links (RAA)	Pan-regional family finding event - held in East Midlands for local RAAs & voluntary partners	1
All hosts total		15

4.1.2. Timings of activity days and pan-regional family finding events

One third of events took place in the first six months of the financial year, and two thirds took place in the final six months. Although in some months during the year more than one event took place, they did not occur in the same region. During the 12-month period, Adoption England took on an informal coordinator role to ensure that event timings and location do not clash. A breakdown of events, by month held, is shown at appendix 2.

4.1.3. Who attended the activity days and pan-regional family finding events

The table below shows the total number of children and prospective adopter households invited to and/or attending these events (as reported by host organisations in their administrative and event data returns). Similar numbers of children and prospective adopter households attended each event. However, this varied across host organisations and events.

The size of the events, and the challenge of achieving the right balance of adults and children, was a strong theme throughout the evaluation. Informal discussions with host organisations revealed that, historically, events were much larger in size (with up to 50 prospective adopter households and up to 50 children attending). However, in response to feedback from attendees who reported that larger events could be 'overwhelming', events had typically become smaller. As shown in the table below, the average number of prospective households attending per event was 20, and the highest number was 39.

According to the administrative and event data provided by host organisations, the two largest activity days / pan-regional family finding events were hosted by RAAs, with one event having 41 children and 25 prospective adoptive households attending, and the other having 31 children and 39 prospective adoptive households attending. Larger events were facilitated by holding them in larger (predominantly outdoor) venues and/or through offering staggered arrival times of prospective adopters. All-England

activity days were not typically larger in size than pan-regional family finding events. See appendix 2 for more detail.

As shown in the table below, not all those invited took part in the events although the proportions are relatively small i.e. 9% of all children and 14% of prospective adopter households invited to events did not attend. This amounted to, on average, approximately 2 children and 3 adoptive households per event. Some host organisations captured reasons for non-attendance in their administrative and event data, including having links or matches being made immediately before, change of mind, illness, rail strikes/disruption to travel plans, children not meeting prospective adopters' matching criteria and/or prospective adopters feeling like it was too early in their process to attend an event. Informal discussions with host organisations suggested that events tended to be 'over-invited' because of the likelihood that some attendees would be unable to attend.

Table 4: Total and average number of invitees and attendees of activity days and pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data)

Attendees/invitees	Total	Mean per event	Median per event	Range per event
Number of children invited to event	350	23	20	13-43
Number of children attending event	320	21	20	12-41
Number of adoptive households invited to event	349	23	22	8-39
Number of adoptive households attending event	299	20	20	6-39

In their administrative and event data returns, host organisations recorded the agencies who 'sent' both the children and prospective adopter households. This data has been analysed to provide an insight into the extent of collaboration across agencies. The data shows that VAAs were an integral part of the events - sending, on average, more adoptive households to the events than RAAs.

- On average there were 8 different agencies sending prospective adopter households per event (an average of 3 RAAs sending prospective adopters and an average of 5 VAAs sending prospective adopters).
- On average, there were 4 different RAAs sending children per event.
- The average proportion of children attending from within the host organisation ('in-house') was 61% across the pan-regional family finding events, and the proportion of adopters was 39%. This figure varied across events.

Further detail is shown in appendix 2.

Table 5: Average proportions of 'in house' attendees for pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data)

	Mean	Median	Range
Proportion of children attending 'in house' (from host organisation RAA) ¹¹	60.7%	62.1%	39%-77%
Proportion of adopters attending 'in house' (from host organisation RAA) ¹²	38.9%	25%	14%-70.5%

One of the key objectives of all types of family finding events was to increase opportunities for matching, particularly for children who typically wait the longest. The administrative and event data below details the key demographics/characteristics of those children who attended the events. Data reported was aggregated and so it is not possible to determine the proportion of children who fell into at least one of the 'harder to place' categories. However, data shows that on average, approximately one quarter were aged 5 or more, one quarter were from an ethnic minority group, approximately half were part of a sibling group and half had a diagnosis of SEND and/or a health condition. When comparing event attendee data with national data of all children waiting to be adopted (Quarter 3 2023/24 ASG data) (Coram-i, 2023) it showed that the children with 'harder to place' characteristics were over represented at the events - particularly for children with a disability¹³.

Table 6: Characteristics of all children attending the activity days and pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data)

Characteristic		Mean	Median	Range
Age	Under 5	79%	79%	70%- 95%
	5+	21%	21%	5%-30%
Ethnicity	White	76.5%	80.6%	0%-95%
	Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	23.5%	19.4%	5%-100% ¹⁴

¹¹ There is data missing for this variable for 1 of the 7 pan-regional events

¹² There is data missing for this variable for 2 of the 7 pan-regional events

¹³ Although, a difference in definitions used is likely to affect this data. Administrative and event data captured all those with a diagnosis of SEND and/or a health condition.

¹⁴ One of the events was a 'targeted' event specifically for children from Black or Asian ethnic minorities.

Characteristic		Mean	Median	Range
Children diagnosed with SEND or a health condition ¹⁵	No diagnosis	56.5%	66.6%	0%-80%
	Diagnosis	43.5%	33.3%	20%-100%
Sibling group	Child not part of sibling group	44%	46%	3%-80%
	Child part of sibling group	56%	54%	20%-97%

Qualitative data captured in the evaluation supports a hypothesis that the events were predominantly reserved for those children who typically wait the longest. Some events had been specifically 'targeted' to focus on children with certain backgrounds or characteristics.

Host organisations did not typically collect detailed information from prospective adopters regarding their demographics/backgrounds. However, available administrative and event data shows that, on average, 71% prospective adopters who attended the activity days or pan-regional family finding events described their ethnicity as White (including White British and other White groups). It is interesting to compare with the national data which shows that 86% of all prospective adopters (approved for adoption and waiting for child(ren) to be matched with them) described their ethnicity as White (Coram-i, 2022)¹⁶. There appears to be a greater proportion of prospective adopters attending the events who were not from a White ethnic group/category, when compared with all prospective adopters. All data is shown in appendix 2.

Accurate data on numbers of staff and 'additional attendees' was not captured by host organisations in their administrative and event data returns. Qualitative data and survey responses revealed that others also attended the events including partners of prospective adopters (some single adopters chose to bring a family member or friend to support them), and social workers (supporting prospective adopters and/or children at the events). In addition, although children tended to attend events with one foster carer - in exceptional circumstances two foster carers attended. There were often a team of event workers and volunteers supporting the delivery of the event on the day too.

4.2. About the all-England exchange events

Administrative and event data returns relating to 3 all-England exchange events were analysed. Further details are shown below.

¹⁵ This data is missing for 2 of 15 events.

¹⁶ The latest data available is from 2020/21.

4.2.1. Location and timings of exchange events

The events took place in Manchester, London and the West Midlands, and were hosted by the 'Be My Family' service (Coram). Two events took place in 2023, and one early in 2024.

4.2.2. Who attended the exchange events

Administrative and event data in the table below shows the total number (715) and average (238) children profiled per event as well as the total number (81) and average (27) prospective adopter households attending the events. It is important to note that prospective adopter households might include one or two adults. So, the number of individual prospective adopter attendees is likely to be higher than the number of households reported.

Table 7: Total and average (mean) children profiled and prospective adopters attending exchange day events (source: administrative and event data)

Exchange event participant type	Total no.	Mean event per	Range event per
Children profiled	715	238	195-304
Adoptive households invited	166	55	41-82
Adoptive households attending	81	27	22-35

A relatively high proportion (51%) of prospective adopter households who were invited did not attend an exchange day. Reasons for not attending included: last minute personal issues and already being linked. The reason is not known for many because they did not respond to the invitation. This represents a much higher proportion of non-attendees compared to activity days or pan-regional family finding events.

The host organisation also recorded the number of agencies involved in the exchange events. The administrative and event data showed that the mean number of RAAs attending each event and/or sending children's profiles was 16.3. The mean number of RAAs and VAAs (combined) sending (supporting) adoptive families was 11.3. On average, more VAAs sent adoptive families compared to RAAs. Data is summarised in appendix 2.

The administrative and event data below details the key demographics and characteristics of children who were profiled at the exchange events. On average, across all events:

- 24% of children profiled were aged 5 or older.
- 29% were from ethnic minority backgrounds (excluding white minorities).
- 26% had a diagnosis of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), or a health condition.
- 62% were part of a sibling group.

Full data is shown in appendix 2.

Available data showed that on average 61% of prospective adopters attending exchange events described their ethnicity as White (including White British and other White groups).

4.3. Understanding how the events work

This section draws predominantly on informal discussions with stakeholders, and interview data (including interviews with prospective adopters and professionals) to provide a description of how the events worked including what typically happens before, during and after an event.

Some of the RAA host organisations reported having experience (prior to the funded pan-regional events) of developing or running similar family finding events albeit on a smaller scale (i.e. in house events). RAA host organisations described basing their model on Coram's adoption activity days and learning from other pilots such as the Activity Days for Fostering (AdFs)¹⁷.

4.3.1. Preparing for an event - what typically happened before events?

Who organised the events and how did agencies work collaboratively?

Interviews with event delivery professionals from the host agencies revealed different practices regarding how pan-regional family finding events were organised. For most there was a consistent core team from one agency (i.e. one or two members of staff) who led on the organisation and delivery of the event. This was often referred to as the 'host' agency. Often however, a wider group of professionals from other agencies in the region (RAAs and VAAs) came together as a group or committee to support the coordination of the event(s), for example by meeting regularly in the run up to an event and/or by taking it in turns to organise an event.

In some cases (i.e. where a committee was involved in coordination), the number of places (for children) available for the pan-regional family finding events would be divided equally across the involved agencies in the region. Where one agency took responsibility for delivery, they described offering places to children from their allied LAs first, before 'opening it up' to neighbouring RAAs. For some organisations who had hosted events previously, it was reported as common practice to have prospective adopters from different agencies attend events, but this was the first time their events had been 'opened up' to children from other areas.

All-England adoption activity days, by contrast, were open to children from across England, as well as prospective adopters from all different agencies.

¹⁷ AdFs are facilitated by Coram - they share similar principles and objectives with activity days, and provide an opportunity for children, young people and foster carers to meet.

I think people do work, everybody's working together to avoid long wait times for children, that's what it's all about. It feels very collaborative. [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

What were the key activities undertaken during the preparation stage?

Preparation for activity days / pan-regional family finding events and exchange events often began weeks (and even months) prior to the event itself.

Preparation activities took significant time and resources, particularly the activity days / pan-regional family finding events - from finding appropriate and good quality venues, to ensuring there was the right equipment, activities and entertainment, catering arrangements, and most importantly that in addition to all the logistics, all those attending the events had the right information.

...an hour's meeting every...couple of months leading up to and then it gets obviously a bit more frequent as [we approach event] [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

One of the key aspects of information provided to prospective adopters at events were the profiles of children. These were prepared ahead of the events. One host organisation described the time spent editing profiles prior to the events as 'a complex process'. There was much discussion, particularly during interviews with prospective adopters and professionals, about the amount and type of information included in profiles.

Some host organisations described only providing brief introductions to the children, leaving out key details such as age. The purpose of this was to give attendees a unique opportunity to think about children that they may not have thought about before.

what we really want our profiles to do is to just provide an introduction to the child, because they're there on the day to then meet the child in person. We don't publish the children's ages on their profiles, cause what we want to avoid is this too old, too young, you know, looking through looking for information like that. [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

How were events promoted, and to whom?

Promoting the events was a key activity during the preparation stage, although how events were promoted appeared to vary slightly across events and host organisations. Some host organisations reported sending the information out to their familiar contacts/networks (in LAs, RAAs and VAAs) with some allocating a specific number of referrals to agencies (within their region for example). Others reported undertaking broader promotional activities (i.e. via Adoption England or their own websites).

Some host organisations described coordinating (or matching) prospective adopters' preferences and characteristics of children broadly before the activity days or pan-regional family finding events. This involved asking prospective adopters to provide information on their preferences and how flexible or open they were to considering children with other backgrounds or characteristics. If there was 'over demand' for an event, prospective adopters were sometimes shortlisted based on this information (i.e. those with the widest criteria).

Informal discussions and interviews with those involved in the organisation of events revealed that it was commonplace for host organisations to reserve a small number of places at events for what can be described as 'meet before match' meetings. In these circumstances, the event was able to provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet the child(ren). The number of prospective adopters and children attending for this specific purpose was not captured in the administrative and event data. However, a relatively high proportion (14/29) prospective adopters who responded to the online survey stated that they were attending the event with the view to meet a specific child.

Interviews revealed that some prospective adopters attended events prior to being formally approved by a panel - they were effectively in Stage 2 of the assessment process. However, administrative and event data did not capture prospective adopters approval status.

What information and support were provided to attendees prior to events?

Specific invitations and information about the events tended to go to attendees via the central organising team (at the host organisation) or via individual family finders and social workers for foster carers. Information went out in stages, with specific activity day or pan-regional family finding event details (such as location) only being released a matter of days before the event (primarily for safeguarding reasons).

Prospective adopters described having discussed the event with their social workers and having received written information via email from the organisers ahead of events (including what to expect on the day, the structure of the day, do's and don'ts for the day). There were also some examples of more detailed preparatory work and briefings for those attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events (prospective adopters, foster carers and social workers) being undertaken virtually - via Zoom/MS teams - prior to events taking place.

Professionals alluded to a range of resources and toolkits in interviews used to support professionals in talking to and preparing attendees, particularly children, for the activity day or pan-regional family finding events which aimed to support professionals and

foster carers in their direct work. Tools and resources mentioned included videos/animations, work books (e.g. Coram's 'Adoption Activity Day Workbook' and Adopt Thames Valley's 'Play Day Booklet for Children'), comic books, and illustrated stories and invitations (e.g. Coram's 'A Fun Day Out' story).

What venues were used, and why?

Having and choosing the right venue for the events was a strong theme in interviews with host organisations - particularly in relation to activity days or pan-regional family finding events. For these events, many hosts used venues that were purpose built for children, which made them fun, safe, and accessible:

I think that our biggest ... asset is our venue...it's a child's heaven [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

I think the location is very important I think... in terms of the building because there are so many adults it needs to be quite a large space, so everybody's not cramped... It had a lovely outdoor space and it happened to be a lovely sunny day like and I came away feeling, well, those children all had a lovely time [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

Considerations for organisers included:

- Having the right size venue - venues that were too large could make it difficult for prospective adopters to find different children they wanted to spend time with. Venues that were too small could feel overcrowded and overwhelming for all involved - particularly if large numbers of adults are attending.
- Having ample indoor and outdoor space - venues that would work in all weathers and provide a variety of activity options for children.
- Having an accessible venue – in terms of being in a convenient location (easy to get to, ample parking available) and suitable for those children with disabilities and complex needs.
- Professionals described the exchange event venues as suitable for conference type events, although it was reported that the venues had changed in the recent past because of a 'drop in numbers'.

4.3.2. The format of events - what typically happened at the activity days or pan-regional family finding events?

What was the typical schedule or order of the event?

Typically, these events took place at a weekend, usually over half a day.

- After staff, the prospective adopters were usually the first to arrive. They typically had some settling in time with staff and/or a briefing when they arrived. At this point, prospective adopters were given the children's profiles to look at. Prospective adopters were also given a room or space at the venue which was just for them -

they could use this space to view children's profiles and speak with staff or professionals.

- Shortly after the prospective adopters arrived and settled, children began to arrive along with their foster carers (and often their social workers).
- Event organisers greeted everyone that arrived, signed them in, and provided them with a colour coded badge or sticker so that they were easily identified as either a prospective adopter, foster carer, social worker or event staff member. At some events, children were provided with a named sticker which they wore on their backs (to help the stickers stay put). The sticker helped others identify who they were and whether or not they were part of a sibling group.
- There was typically a period of approximately two-three hours where children could play/explore the activities, and prospective adopters were invited to interact and play with them. Prospective adopters could also use this time to meet and speak with foster carers and social workers (and sometimes medical experts in attendance).
- There were usually refreshments available for all attendees including teas, coffees and snacks. At some events, and depending on timings, attendees were provided with a light lunch.
- At the end of the activity day / pan-regional family finding event, as children left, they were often given a gift or party bag. Before prospective adopters left, they could choose to express an interest in any of the children or profiles they saw at the event including by completing an Expression of Interest form (EOI) in post box type collection boxes - for host organisations to open after the event.

What activities were available and how was interaction between attendees encouraged?

Activity days / pan-regional family finding events were universally described as aiming to be fun and 'child centred'.

I think what it comes down to is that we're a really child centred service and we provide really child centred events and it's about, you know, making sure the children are happy on the day [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

We have a theme for each event ... to help people to relax and have fun and, we decorate the space for the children....we try and theme some activities around it as well [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

Like a giant children's party [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

A range of activities were set up - there was often a mixture of indoor (i.e. craft activities, reading corners, soft play) and outdoor activities. There was often a quieter area and/or a sensory area at events too - to meet the different needs of children.

Host organisations talked about a large range of activities they had tried at past activity days or pan-regional family finding events, including perceived positives and negatives of different types of activities. The importance of having a range of different types of

activities to draw upon emerged (i.e. for different ages and needs), as well as the importance of having activities which naturally encouraged interaction between children and adults.

We learned in lockdown that actually the outdoor area and not using the soft play enabled us to have a much better [event]...the children just seemed to be more themselves. They were more relaxed. [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

At some events there were entertainers and play specialists whose roles were to help facilitate play and entertain the children (and adults).

We have an entertainer who we've used loads of He'll do a disco for them, and then he'll go around and make balloon sculptures and things like that for them and do little tricks with them [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

Some host organisations described including additional written information alongside the children's profiles at events, including information about future family finding events, and information about children who are waiting to be adopted, but who couldn't attend on the day. In these instances, sometimes the child's social worker would be present to talk to the prospective adopters.

At some activity days or pan-regional family finding events, medical experts were invited to attend (at 5 of 15 events). Their role at events was to 'demystify' complex information about children's conditions or to help explain to prospective adopters what the implications or considerations for everyday life and management of that condition might be.

4.3.3. The format of events - what typically happened at exchange events?

The format of the exchange events was fairly consistent - they took place midweek, rather than at weekends. Events tended to take place from late morning until 3pm, with arrival timings staggered when there were large numbers of prospective adopters attending.

RAA staff attended with profiles of children waiting to be adopted. They typically had a stand at the event which prospective adopters could visit and have discussions about individual children. RAA staffing on the day could vary - with some being represented by a number of staff from the various allied LAs. Others would send a single RAA representative. VAAs also attended exchange events to support prospective adopters.

Before prospective adopters left an exchange event, they could choose to express an interest in any of the children or profiles they saw at the event. This was referred to as 'making a link'.

4.3.4. Post event processes - What typically happened after the events?

Following activity days or pan-regional family finding events, host organisations typically sent emails out to put the relevant people in touch with each other where an expression of interest had been made (i.e. prospective adopters and their social workers, and the child's social worker/family finder). After the introduction, the child's social worker and/or family finder would proceed with any follow up or further information exchange.

Host organisations also reported contacting referrers over time to find out whether it led to a link or match. As discussed elsewhere, this could be quite ad hoc and host organisations were not always party to the most up to date information.

5. Findings - How were events experienced?

This section explores the experiences and views of those involved in the events, including professionals (who were involved in the organisation of the events and/or supporting individuals or families) and attendees of events including prospective adopters, foster carers and children. Experiences and views discussed below also relate to the information and support provided to prospective adopters, foster carers and children, before, during and after the events. This section draws upon evaluation data from multiple sources including data from the online surveys, interviews with prospective adopters, and interviews with professionals.

5.1. Prior to the events

5.1.1. Feelings, emotions and expectations prior to the events

Survey respondents were asked to think about and describe their expectations and feelings prior to attending the event. In the survey, both prospective adopters and foster carers were asked to describe, using three key words, how they felt (or their main feelings) prior to the event. Just over half of the words reported can be categorised as positive feelings or words, and just under half can be categorised as negative or neutral. Similar words were used across the two respondent types (prospective adopters and foster carers) including feelings of excitement, hopefulness, but also apprehension.

Chart 1: Prospective adopters' main feelings before the event (word cloud)
 (source: online survey)



Chart 2: Foster carers' main feelings before activity days or pan-regional family finding events (word cloud)
 (source: online survey)



Attendees were likely to feel a mixture of conflicting emotions prior to an event. Whilst 25 of the 61 (41%) survey respondents who attended the events either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I had reservations about how useful the event would be', many also reported feeling 'hopeful' about the event ahead. Almost all prospective adopters attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events reported within

the survey feeling excited (21/22) as well as nervous (20/22) about meeting children at the event.

We had never attended an activity day before, so we were nervous about attending but also excited at the prospect that we may meet our future child/children. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

If I'm honest, a bit weird like it felt like these children were going to be on show, and you were going to pick which one you wanted. You know, it's just felt a bit uncomfortable.... [we felt] quite a bit of apprehension, I suppose... but also...very excited as well, because we thought we might meet our child today, potentially... Yeah, a bit of both. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

Evaluation participants (prospective adopters, foster carers and professionals) also frequently described having or being aware of other people having preconceived and negative ideas about activity days or pan-regional family finding events - these often shifted once an individual experienced an event first hand.

On first hearing about this sort of event, I was filled with absolute horror. However, it's not about me, but the child up for adoption. Once you see it from their side and realise it's a great thing to do for them, you go along with it and it just makes sense. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

When I first heard about them I did have an ethical dilemma about it. It felt like "selling" kids. My view really changed on this at the first one. I had a match between an adopter and a child which changed everything for me. [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

Foster carers were asked to reflect on how each of the children they cared for felt before the event. Foster carers reported that 17/47 children (36%) who attended 'looked forward to the event'. For a further 15 children, their foster carers neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'the child looked forward to the event'. The results are likely affected by the extent to which the child understood the purpose of the event. For a large proportion of children (57%, 27/47), foster carers felt they did not understand. Full results are shown below.

There may have been several possible reasons for the child not understanding the purpose of the event - including because of their age and/or their needs.

I decided it would be too much pressure for him to attend thinking his 'forever family' might be there.... I told him it was a fun party for children in foster care. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

Table 8: Children's views prior to activity days or pan-regional family finding events (foster carer responses, n=47) (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Not applicable
The child did not understand what was the purpose of the event	n	27	8	1	3	0	0	8
	%	57.4 %	17%	2.1%	6.4%	0%	0%	17%
The child looked forward to the event	n	5	12	15	2	1	2	10
	%	10.6 %	25.3 %	31.9 %	4.3%	2.1%	4.3%	21.3 %

5.1.2. Views on information and support received before events

Survey respondents were generally positive about the information and support they received prior to events - reporting that the information they received from event organisers had been helpful in preparing them for the event, and that they felt supported by social workers and the event organisers in the lead up to the event.

Some prospective adopters (survey respondents and interviewees) reported particular value in the pre-event briefings that were provided by host organisations online - having the information ahead of the event, rather than on arrival at the event, helped prepare them as much as possible.

The agency held an online information event for prospective adopters a couple days before and this was very useful, this was optional but would recommend people attend this if they can as it took away some of the mystery and anxiety [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Evidence from some interviews and survey open text responses, suggested that prospective adopters were made aware and understood that those children who would be attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events were likely to include children who typically wait longer to find their adoptive family.

For safeguarding and other reasons, prospective adopters did not receive advance information (i.e. profiles) about the specific children that would be attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events. However, it was evident from the survey and interview data that, for some attendees, it felt important to have broad information about the characteristics of children that would be at the event - to help them make an informed decision about whether to attend or not (particularly if the event required

significant travel and/or they had to take time off work). There were examples where prospective adopters had been disappointed that no children attending the event matched their preferences and that they felt they had wasted their time in attending.

Results (shown in the table below) suggest up to 41% of foster carers did not feel confident in preparing children for the event (including those who stated ‘neither agree not disagree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to the statement ‘I felt confident in preparing the child(ren) for the event’). Only 21% felt that the child's social worker had helped prepare the child for the event. This demonstrates a potential gap - children's social workers were not playing a role in preparing children, yet foster carers were not always confident to do this work ahead of events.

Table 9: Foster carers' views about the extent to which children were prepared ahead of events (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I felt confident in preparing the child(ren) for the event ¹⁸ (n=32)	n	6	13	7	5	1	0
	%	18.8%	40.6%	21.9%	15.6%	3.1%	0%
The child's social worker helped prepare them for the event ¹⁹ (n=47)	n	4	6	10	7	12	8
	%	8.5%	12.8%	21.3%	14.9%	25.5%	17%

Interviewees acknowledged that the quality of preparation work with children and their foster carers was likely to differ across agencies and individual social workers. It also emerged that currently there is no measure of whether and the extent to which the resources (i.e. those developed by Coram) are used ahead of attendances at the events. Interviewees also suggested that different approaches (and levels of explanation) might be used, depending on the child's individual circumstances. This was often left with foster carers (who knew the children well) to navigate.

*There's only so much influence we can have over LAs really in the preparation.
[Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]*

So I mean, we have guidance for children, social workers and foster carers... our stance is very much of if anybody asks us, we would say we expect you to be open and honest. We expect the child to know why they're attending. Yeah.

¹⁸ Foster carers responding only

¹⁹ Foster carers responding in relation to the child(ren) they attended the event with

However, because we don't have full oversight of everybody and everything... definitely children do attend the days and aren't aware...and that is really unfortunate and that's not the practice that we would advise [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

5.2. During the events

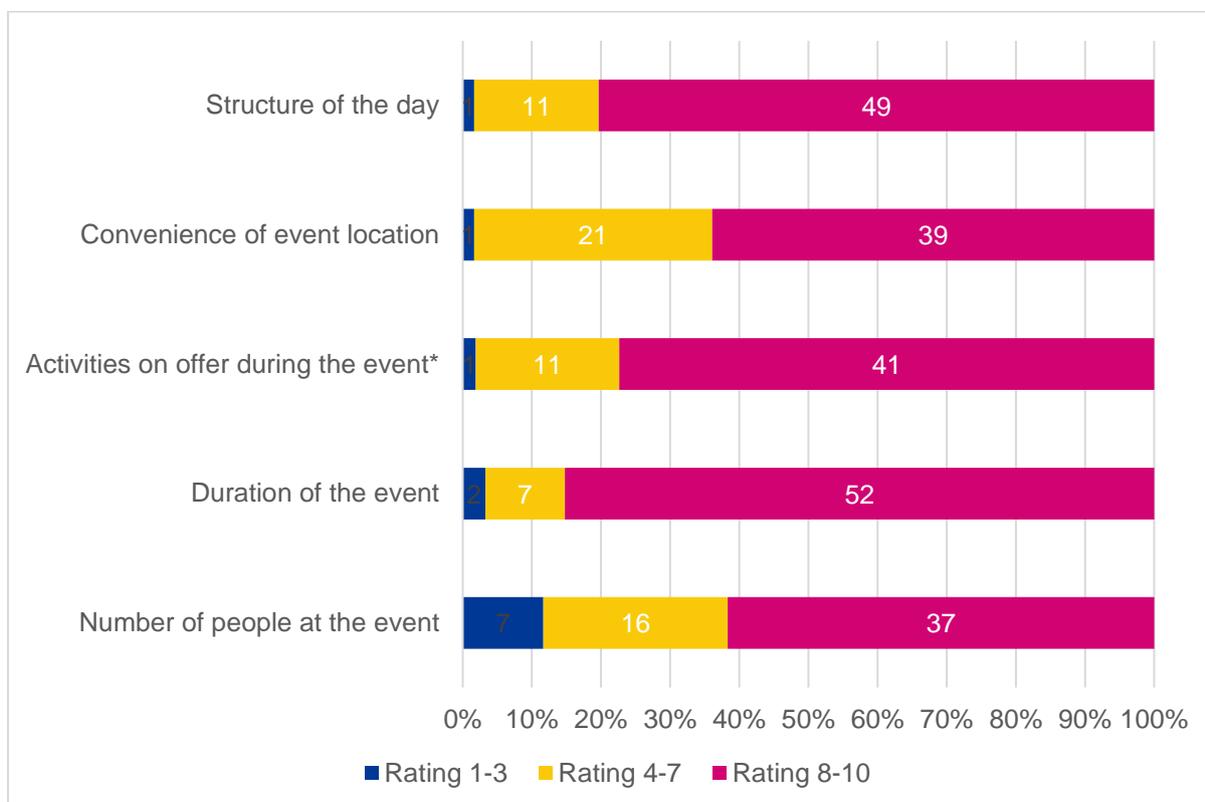
5.2.1. Feelings, emotions and experiences during the events

Survey data indicated that both prospective adopters and foster carers mostly rated aspects of the events highly, including the structure of the day, the convenience of the location, the activities on offer during activity days or pan-regional family finding events, and the number of people at the event. Survey responses suggested attendees also considered that events were well prepared and organised.

I thought it was very well run. It was very well organized. You could tell they'd obviously done them before [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

Full results are shown below.

Chart 3: Levels of satisfaction regarding different elements of the events (with 10 being the most satisfied) (foster carer and prospective adopters responses, n=61) (source: online survey)



*activity days and pan-regional family finding events only

The majority of foster carers and prospective adopters strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I enjoyed the event' (45/61 or 74%) and 'the event met my expectations' (47/61 or 77%). However approximately one quarter 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or disagreed with the statements. Data also suggested that the majority (approximately three quarters) of children did enjoy the event. Data is shown in the table below.

Table 10: The extent to which children enjoyed different elements of the event (foster carer responses, n=47) (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
The child did not enjoy the event	n	0	1	9	11	23	1	2
	%	0%	2.1%	19.1%	23.4%	48.9%	2.1%	4.3%
The child enjoyed meeting prospective adopters	n	5	15	20	2	2	2	1
	%	10.6%	31.9%	42.6%	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	2.1%
The child enjoyed meeting other children waiting for an adoptive family	n	2	13	23	2	3	1	3
	%	4.3%	27.7%	48.9%	4.3%	6.4%	2.1%	6.4%

The word clouds below illustrate how attendees (prospective adopters and foster carers) felt during the activity days or pan-regional family finding events and exchange events. Visually, there is a clear shift in emotions compared to feelings prior to events, with words such as 'happy' and 'excited' featuring heavily.

Chart 4: Foster carers' main feelings during activity days or pan-regional family finding events (word cloud) (source: online survey)



Chart 5: Prospective adopters' main feelings during the event (word cloud) (source: online survey)



It was clear, across all data sources, that the events were often very emotive for all those involved. However, it was recognised that those delivering and supporting events were well aware of the emotions that could be evoked as a result of attending.

I felt very welcomed, well informed, and I noticed we were in a very relaxing and safe space where everyone understood our emotions as adults /future parents. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Many prospective adopters who shared their views (in the survey and interviews) described the initial part of activity days or pan-regional family finding events as particularly challenging, describing the first 10-15 minutes of engaging with children as 'awkward' and 'weird'. This was also reflected in interviews with professionals.

lots of our adopters, even though they've got childcare experience... it is sometimes hard There's certainly an awkwardness, especially in the first half an hour of activity day. [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

Professional interviewees were well aware of the challenges associated with having too many adults at activity days or pan-regional family finding events (including causing feelings of overwhelm for attendees) and achieving the right balance of adults and children. Strategies for managing large numbers, reported by professionals, included:

- Using an appropriate venue (lots of spaces and different areas).
- Staggering arrival times of prospective adopters (i.e. two groups of prospective adopters, each with a time slot for arriving and spending time at the event).
- Limiting the number of other adults able to attend (i.e. only one foster carer per child).
- Having smaller, targeted events.

[it can be] quite an emotional overwhelm for prospective adopters and so... what I encourage our prospective adopters to do initially is to attend... [regional] smaller events held at smaller locations [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

Perhaps more emphasis to prospective adopters that they should not be trying to be in competition with each other for a particular child. It is a very odd situation to be in, and particularly for the children, so prospective adopters should make sure they allow others to spend time with each child. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Whilst survey responses suggested that almost all prospective adopters did get the opportunity to engage with children at activity days or pan-regional family finding events (21/22 prospective adopters), they also reported that managing those interactions was complex - particularly when the activities on offer did not directly support engagement between children and adults, and when there were large numbers of prospective adopters. Some prospective adopters who took part in the interviews described the difficulty of feeling in competition with other prospective

adopters there, and the challenges of managing the amount of time that each prospective adopter spent with each child.

unless you've already made a link with a child, it's quite difficult if they're zooming around on scooters and bikes, to actually start a conversation and interact with them without just chasing them. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee,]

the interaction of it is so complicated... they did say, don't interrupt people who were interacting. And that still happened... you can't control the behaviour of adults. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

A number of evaluation participants acknowledged that the events were 'not for everyone' and the personality of prospective adopters could really impact their ability to engage in, and enjoy, the event. Professional interviewees acknowledged that prospective adopters often reacted and interacted in different ways at events. It was noted that it can be particularly overwhelming for prospective adopters who had not yet been approved.

we do stress all the time that this is not the right family finding method for everybody... And there are certain things that we just cannot change, you know? [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

Professionals also observed that some foster carers found the days very emotionally difficult, especially when their child did not receive attention and/or it felt like a wasted trip. Interviewees also reported that foster carers could also often struggle with the practical arrangements associated with attending events.

Activity days and pan-regional family finding events were in the main described as fun, child-centred days. And whilst survey data suggested that foster carers felt children did enjoy the events, some did acknowledge that it was harder to decipher how some children experienced the events (particularly, for example, older children). It was felt that the environment might not be suitable for all children.

Our main reservation would be how appropriate the event was for a child such as [our child] who because of their significant needs is unable to interact meaningfully with adults who tried to talk to them and found the whole event at times a bit much. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

It was suggested by some prospective adopters that host organisations should provide more scheduling and/or guidance during activity days or pan-regional family finding events, to try and prevent some children from spending too long on certain activities which may overstimulate them or dysregulate them.

5.2.2. Views on information and support received during the events

One host organisation interviewed for the evaluation argued that it was important to provide attendees with information and support prior to events as much as possible (rather than on the day itself). It was reported that on the day, for foster carers, it could be quite hard to concentrate (i.e. whilst caring for children). More support prior to the day might also help prospective adopters who are feeling overwhelmed or anxious at the event.

Feedback about the profiles received at the beginning of the event was mixed. Whilst some understood and appreciated the aim of the event (and why host organisations had limited the information about the children), others reported that it felt dishonest and/or had an impact on their interactions with the child's carers on the day. Professionals reported the importance of writing the profiles in a positive way.

They explained on the day that it was on purpose that the profiles were more simple, with not a lot of details... it's supposed to be focused on the child and... [so] you know, [you] interact with the child with no pre-conceived ideas. And I think that that was good. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

We felt it was strange not being told basic information about the children... It meant that sometimes foster carers had to have awkward conversations with us and other prospective adopters... we felt this should've been in profiles. We get the idea of seeing where connections take you, but some information is genuinely useful and prevents awkwardness / wasting time. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Prospective adopters gathered information at events from their interactions and discussions with foster carers, social workers and other professionals - as well as from direct interactions with children. Prospective adopters responding to the survey, in the main, stated that they found it useful to speak with social workers/family finders at the events (23/29 prospective adopters). Where applicable, they also reported finding it useful to speak with medical and/or education professionals at the event. All prospective adopter survey respondents who attended activity days or pan-regional family finding events (n=22) either strongly agreed or agreed that they found it useful to spend time with children and speak with foster carers at the event.

This was a key strength and benefit of the events - a strong theme which emerged across all data sources and which is expanded on in the impact section.

I think it was invaluable, their social worker and their foster carer both being there as well, because they gave us information about their additional needs [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

It was argued by professional interviewees that having a break out space for prospective adopters was particularly important at events and that this might be more important for those attending on their own or finding the event overwhelming.

we had a room just for us, and they told us that whenever we wanted to withdraw... to take a break... It's like safe and quiet room for us. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

Single prospective adopters revealed the importance of having someone attend an event with them for additional support. One prospective adopter interviewee shared their experience of taking their friend to the event with them - they found it helpful having a second person there to observe and talk to the foster carers. Peer support from other prospective adopters at the events was also valued.

Survey data revealed that in the main, both foster carers and prospective adopters who attended the events were happy with the explanations given to them on the day about what was happening and that they felt supported by staff. A small proportion of attendees did not feel supported on the day (3/61, 5%) and were not happy with the explanations given to them on the day (4/61, 7%).

However, it was acknowledged in some interviews that foster carers often needed additional support on the day. Things that were felt to be particularly helpful included:

- Having the child's social worker or children's family finder there at the event - this professional is likely to have a relationship with the foster carer and can provide them additional support and help on the day (e.g. by greeting them with a friendly face at the entrance to ease nerves).
- Ensuring that staff and volunteers at the event make an effort to make foster carers (particularly those there on their own with young children) a hot drink.
- Making an exception and allowing foster carers to bring someone along to support them (particularly for those who were making long car journeys, sometimes with more than one child).

Don't restrict carer numbers, we need to do this as a team (couple) to hold it all together for everyone on the day and in the days afterwards. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

5.3. After the events

5.3.1. Emotions, feelings and experiences after the events

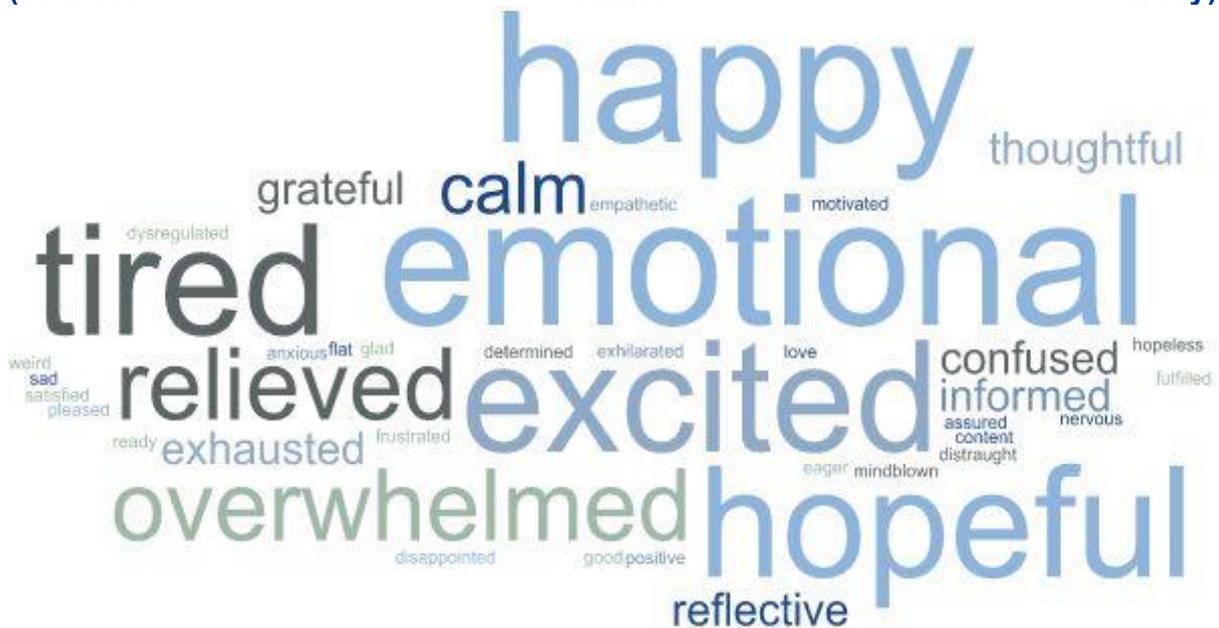
There was still clearly a mixture of feelings and emotions felt, even after events. Feelings of relief, hope, happiness were reported after the events, by both prospective adopters and foster carers. However, there were also feelings of tiredness, overwhelm and some disappointment (particularly from foster carers if no potential match was identified). Some prospective adopters described finding it particularly difficult and sad to have seen large volumes of photos and profiles of children waiting to be adopted

(at exchange events) or finding it difficult to leave the children at the end of activity days or pan-regional family finding events.

Chart 6: Foster carers' main feelings after activity days or pan-regional family finding events (word cloud) (source: online survey)



Chart 7: Prospective adopters' main feelings after the event (word cloud) (source: online survey)



The findings highlighted the importance of appropriate support, throughout the process of the events (not just before and during). One prospective adopter interviewee offered advice to others attending future events:

Make sure you have time to unwind afterwards as the amount of information and excitement can be overwhelming and confusing for the first day or two afterwards! [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Of the 18 prospective adopters who responded to the survey and who were still looking for a child/children to adopt, 13 stated that they would consider attending a similar event in the future. This data demonstrates the largely positive feelings that prospective adopters had towards the events.

5.3.2. Views on information and support received after the events

Prospective adopters responding to the survey were generally positive about the information and support they received from their social workers after the event (see table below). In addition, 20/32 (63%) foster carers responding to the survey said they had received information and support after attending an activity day or pan-regional family finding event - mostly via a social worker. Professionals involved in event delivery also reported that efforts were made by host organisations to collate written messages and positive feedback from prospective adopters at the end of these events - which were then shared with all children who attended.

Table 11: The extent to which prospective adopters who submitted expressions of interest (EOIs) were satisfied with the information and support they received after the events (n=14) (source: online survey)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dis-satisfied	Dis-satisfied	Very dis-satisfied	Not Applicable
The speed of the process	5	2	2	3		2
The support you have received from your social worker	8	3	2	1		
The information you have received from your social worker	8	2	3			1

Further discussions between prospective adopters and their social workers (post event) were likely to be particularly key in helping attendees to process and reflect on

the events, including the backgrounds and characteristics of children they might be open to adopting. Meetings at activity days or pan-regional family finding events were likely to be brief, and it was felt that there needed to be careful and more in-depth information exchange between the relevant parties after the event.

They are a useful tool to introduce prospective adopters and children, but they are not enough on their own... prior to introductions starting. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

It was recognised by professional interviewees that, possibly, more could be done to support those prospective adopters who may attend events frequently but with no match - exploring in more depth with them why the approach may not be working for them.

Prospective adopter survey respondents who submitted an EOI were asked whether they were happy with the speed of the process after the event. As shown in the data above, views were mixed. Some prospective adopters felt that there were slow responses from social workers after an event. Others revealed that they received no response or acknowledgment of their EOI.

We felt like we were constantly waiting for social workers to get back to us throughout the process and would sometimes wait 2 weeks for a reply to a simple question. There are so many delays that are completely unnecessary during the adoption process which could be avoided and children could/should be placed quicker. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Interviewees with professionals revealed a number of reasons why the timeliness may vary across events/individual cases. It may depend on several factors such as:

- A high number of prospective adopters who have expressed an interest.
- Whether the child's social worker and family finder want additional information about the prospective adopters and/or whether there is additional information about the child (i.e. their needs) which needs to be shared and explored.
- Changes of staff/social workers.
- Different practices/ways of working in different organisations (this can be hard to navigate when not 'in house').

However, the importance of timeliness was considered from different perspectives. One professional interviewee (wider stakeholder) noted that efficiency and timeliness was essential to avoid adopters 'going elsewhere'. Timeliness was also viewed as important in managing expectations and uncertainty.

Managing our own hopes and expectations - after the human interactions with social workers, foster carers and children at the event, we're back to emails

bouncing back and forth and a high degree of uncertainty about what will happen next. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

6. Findings - What do we know about the impact of events?

This section explores the short to medium term impact of events including on prospective adopters, children who attend the events, and opportunities for matching. The evidence is drawn and triangulated from survey responses, interview data (including interviews with prospective adopters and professionals) and administrative and event data (collected by host organisations and analysed by the evaluation team).

6.1. Usefulness of events (in finding families for children)

Survey respondents were also asked to reflect on how useful they thought the events were in helping to find adoptive families for children (on a scale from 1 (not useful at all) to 10 (extremely useful)). Responses were very positive overall. Approximately three quarters (74% or 45/61 survey respondents) identified their usefulness at between 7 and 10 on the scale, with 41% giving the event a maximum score of 10 – this was the mode (most frequent) response. Only 5% gave a low rating of between 1 and 4.

Table 12: Usefulness of events for helping find adoptive families for children (prospective adopters and foster carers, n=61) (source: online survey)

How useful do you think...		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
events are for helping find adoptive families for children?	n	2	0	1	0	10	3	7	7	6	25
	%	3.3%	0%	1.6%	0%	16.4%	4.9%	11.4%	11.4%	9.8%	41%

The breakdown of scoring by different types of event was very similar i.e. around three quarters rating the helpfulness at around 7-10. However, the number of prospective adopters providing a survey response in relation to exchange events was quite low (n=7) so a full breakdown by event is not shown here.

When reflecting on the usefulness of the events, compared to other more traditional family finding approaches (such as the use of Link Maker), prospective adopters said they found events a more useful way of learning about children. They valued the child-centred approach of activity days or pan-regional family finding events and the opportunity to gather more rich and in-depth insights into children from directly

interacting with children and/or speaking foster carers or social workers. They felt that they could not get this level of information from online/written profiles.

Children we had already rejected actually really interested us at the event - the event was far more useful than their website pages [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Meeting children and learning about them from the foster carers. It really showed that Link Maker profiles don't tell the whole story. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

6.2. Opportunities for matching

There were different sources of evidence to draw upon in relation to the impact of events on opportunities for matching. First, as stated previously, all host organisations reported on the numbers of EOIs made at or shortly after their events. As far as possible, host organisations of activity days or pan-regional family finding events also tracked the progress or outcome of the EOIs (including numbers of tentative links progressing to linking meetings and numbers which progressed to panel). The limitations and challenges associated with the data is also explored.

Key findings for activity days and pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data):

- Total number of activity days: 15
- Total number of children who attended the activity days: 320
- Total number of adoptive households who attended: 299
- Total number of EOIs submitted as a result of the events: 214
- Total number of links that progressed to panel: 36 (11% of total number of children who attended)

Key findings for exchange events (source: administrative and event data):

- Total number exchange events: 3
- Total number of children profiled at exchange events: 715
- Total number of adoptive households attending exchange events: 81
- Total number of EOIs submitted as a result of exchange events: 179

It is helpful to look at the average figures across individual activity days or pan-regional family finding events as there was some variation. In summary, based on available data, the mean number of EOIs for this type of event was 14 (although there was a range from 5 to 33), and the mean number of these progressing to panel for this type of event was 2 (although there was a range from 0 to 9). When reviewing event specific data, the proportion of children who had a link which progressed to panel

ranged from 0-50%. These figures are likely to underestimate the number of progressions to panel, for reasons detailed below.

Table 13: Outcomes reported by host organisations for activity days and pan-regional family finding events 2023/24 (source: administrative and event data)

Measure	Mean	Median	Range
Number of EOIs made ²⁰	14	12	5-33
Number of tentative links progressing to linking meeting ²¹	4	5	1-9
Number progressing to panel	2	2	0-9

There does not appear to be any clear relationship between data on matches and size of event (i.e. the number of attendees). The most 'successful' events in terms of EOIs ranged in size. When comparing all-England activity days with pan-regional family finding events, there were similar proportions of EOIs per event. However, there was a slightly higher rate of 'progressions to panel' from the all-England activity days (19/114 children who attended, 14%), compared to the pan-regional family finding events (17/180 children who attended, 9%).

Measures of impact were split by time of event. As would be expected, more progressions to panel were reported for earlier events, compared to more recent (the average number of progressions to panel for events which took place in the first six months (April 23-Sept 23) was 3.6 and the average number of progressions to panel for the events which took place in the last six months (Oct 23-Mar 24) was 1.8).

It is important to note some of the specific limitations with the data reported above.

- For some (around half) of the events, notes made next to the impact measures outlined that there were unknown outcomes outstanding, either due to the host organisation being unable to access the information (it was particularly challenging for RAAs to track the progress of potential links that were not made in house) or the process still being ongoing. Measuring the outcomes over a longer period of time (especially for events which took place in 2024 would be helpful).
- Only pan-regional family finding events were able to capture information on 'tentative links leading progressing to linking meeting' (data was missing for the 8 all-England activity days).
- Some EOIs are likely to relate to the same child (for example, 1 child may have received 3 EOIs from different prospective adopters, at the same event). Data on number of children who received at least one EOI at an event was not reported. Therefore, it is not reliable to report the proportion of all children who received an EOI.

²⁰ Some of the EOIs made may relate to the same child

²¹ Currently this data is missing for 8 of 15 events

- The evaluation team have interpreted that each 'progression to panel' reported related to one individual child (not a sibling group).
- It is not known whether any of the outcome data reported related to those individuals who had attended an event as part of a 'meet before match' meeting.

There are limitations in comparing outcomes of events (in terms of EOIs and matches) between different types of events (i.e. in-house, pan-regional and all-England events) because the qualitative data captured in the evaluation suggests that children with different characteristics were likely to attend different events (e.g. with those considered 'harder to place' more likely to attend pan-regional and all-England events).

Despite the limitations in the administrative and event data reported above, the impact data collected from the survey respondents paints a similar picture in terms of proportions of EOIs and progressions to panel. As a reminder, the survey results related to the outcomes of 29 prospective adopters who attended any type of event and the outcomes of 47 children who attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event.

Foster carers survey respondents reported that 4/47 (9%) children had been matched or were in the process of being matched with prospective adopters (related to the event they attended). Unfortunately, less is known about the 37 children who were not yet in the process of being matched.

Table 14: Outcomes reported by foster carer survey respondents, regarding the children attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events (n=47) (source: online survey)

Which of the following has happened since the event?	Number of children	% of children
The child I cared for has been matched/in the process of being matched with prospective adopters (related to the event)	4	8.5%
The child I cared for has been matched/in the process of being matched with different prospective adopters (unrelated to the event)	6	12.8%
Neither of these / Other	37	78.7%

- A high proportion (72% or 21/29) prospective adopters (survey respondents) stated they had completed an EOI at or after the event. This included all (7/7) those who attended an exchange event, and 64% (14/22) those who attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event.
- 8/14 prospective adopters (survey respondents) who attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event and submitted an EOI stated that 'yes, there have been further discussions/developments' since the event. 3 prospective adopters

(survey respondents) reported that, since completing the EOI, a matching panel had been scheduled or had already taken place.

Interviewing prospective adopters matched with a child as a result of an activity day or pan-regional family finding event provided a rich insight into the personal experiences and stories behind the statistics. The quotations below from two separate prospective adopters interviewed capture a description of the moments they met their children at an event:

...it was after seeing how they were interacting with other children, how they interacted with us, we immediately fell in love with them, and after the activity day we went to the car. We looked at each other, and we said, we [had] found our little one. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

we met [a child] there...we didn't interact with any of the other children... as soon as we walked out of the doors... they were playing on a little bike, and I went over to play with them, and like we just, we just instantly had a connection. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

As professionals described, it was these impacts and 'moments' which made the process feel worthwhile:

We see them connections and early connections starting to form... you visibly see in front of your eyes and... it's such a privilege to really be part of that and to see that and that definitely helps our morale and keeps us going. [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

The administrative and event data did not capture the key demographics of those children who received an EOI or who had a match which progressed to panel. Therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions from the quantitative data about the extent to which the events maximised opportunities for matching across different groups. However, professionals interviewed for the evaluation also described how all types of event actively promote opportunities for matching, particularly for children who wait longer or the longest.

It does maximise opportunities [for matching] for the children waiting the longest and [who] have the most complex needs. That one family that may come along. How else would they have the opportunity? [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

An argument was also made by one professional interviewee that, when a potential match came from an event such as an activity day, the whole matching process could be timelier compared to other approaches (such as expressing an interest on Link Maker). It was argued that this was because there was benefit in the local authority

meeting prospective adopters at an event – which could motivate them to follow up and progress a link in a timelier way.

It is worth acknowledging that there are likely to be differences in outcomes (particularly opportunities for matching), across host organisations, across time, and across individual events. One professional interviewee had observed a decline in the number of EOIs they had received at more recent events. They discussed possible reasons for this including: more complex children waiting to be adopted and a reduction in the number of prospective adopters. They reported that it was 'hard to predict why it happens at certain events'.

6.3. Impact on prospective adopters' awareness and understanding, including their awareness of the needs of children waiting and their ability to meet those needs

Data suggested that events (particularly activity days or pan-regional family finding events) had an impact on prospective adopters' awareness and understanding.

Every meeting is a plus and a new way of learning and understanding other situations. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

A high proportion i.e. 83% (24/29) prospective adopters strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I have more information about the backgrounds and characteristics of children who are waiting to be adopted' and 79% (23/29) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I have a better understanding of the needs of children who are waiting to be adopted'.

Table 15: Extent to which prospective adopter survey respondents have more information about children waiting to be adopted, by event type (n=29) (source: online survey)

I have more information about the backgrounds and characteristics of children who are waiting to be adopted	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Total	11	13	3	2	0	0
Activity day/pan-regional family finding event attendees	10	9	1	2	0	0
Exchange day attendees	1	4	2	0	0	0

Table 16: Extent to which prospective adopter survey respondents have a better understanding of the needs of children waiting to be adopted, by event type (n=29) (source: online survey)

I have a better understanding of the needs of children who are waiting to be adopted	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Total	8	15	4	2	0	0
Activity day/pan-regional family finding event attendees	8	10	2	2	0	0
Exchange day attendees	0	5	2	0	0	0

The interview data provided further insight into how and why prospective adopters who attend such events may be affected in this way. First, the events enabled prospective adopters to gather really useful information from the events on the specific needs of individual children, particularly from foster carers who care for them on a day-to-day basis. Second, meeting, interacting and observing children in the event environment provided prospective adopters with a different perspective than they would have gained from a written profile (i.e. via Link Maker).

It was quite nice to see them in real life, you know, versus what's on paper... actually on paper [their health needs] looked like that could have been quite scary. So for that reason it was good to see them in real life... [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

Reading about the needs and experiences of children on paper is a totally [different] experience from interacting with children. It puts the dry/factual experience of reading into perspective, and left us more confident that we can be great parents to a child [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

One prospective adopter interviewee described how the event helped them 'shape a picture' of what their future family might be. They argued that events were particularly beneficial for those at the start of the journey and could be useful in helping to build an understanding of children that one might be open to adopting. It was felt that attending events might be a useful thing to do, before looking at Link Maker and undertaking self-driven searches.

I think it was good that we went, because obviously, we have a better idea of our matching criteria, perhaps, and maybe what we're looking for. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

Approximately three quarters, i.e. 17/22 prospective adopters who attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event either strongly agreed or agreed that it had

helped them to feel more prepared to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. Survey data suggests exchange events had less of an impact.

Table 17: Extent to which prospective adopter survey respondents feel more prepared to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted, by event type (n=29) (source: online survey)

The event helped me to feel more prepared to meet the needs of children who are waiting for adoption	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Total	10	9	6	3	1	0
Activity day/pan-regional family finding event attendees	9	8	3	2	0	0
Exchange day attendees	1	1	3	1	1	0

Both professionals and prospective adopters who took part in interviews reported that the opportunity to observe, meet and interact with children at the events could help build prospective adopters' confidence - including their skills in engaging with children with additional needs.

It really helps them understand who our children are and helps them develop their confidence as well... around engaging [with] the children... for some... it's quite daunting. [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

It does help because you interact with children with special needs ...And obviously, it's just a short period of time, like a couple of hours.... But when you do that, you realise maybe it is possible for me to deal with this you know. Yeah, let's find out. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

At some events, there were play specialists in attendance, who were there to support and facilitate engagement between prospective adopters and children, which one interviewee really valued:

People want to be parents... I think it was great that they could say, I really want to interact with that kid [but] I don't know how to... And somebody would just sort of scoop the child towards a particular activity and... help the parents do it. So that seems really helpful... It was giving opportunities to people to actually learn how to interact with them, which I thought was nice. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

As shown above, approximately one third of prospective adopters who completed the survey did not agree that the event helped them to feel more prepared.

6.4. Impact on prospective adopter perspectives on their matching criteria

The survey data demonstrated that events did have an impact on prospective adopters' perspectives on their matching criteria. All survey respondents were asked whether the event they had attended had changed their views about the characteristics or needs of children that could be placed with their family. Of the 29 prospective adopters, 18 (62%) reported that their views had changed (16 reported that their views had changed a bit, and 2 reported that their views had changed a lot). For 8 prospective adopters, their views had not changed at all.

You need to go to an event or 2 before you go to Link Maker ... cause the events definitely shape your picture of your family far more effectively than ... Link Maker could, or anything you know. [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

When asked whether they had changed their preferences in any way since the event (i.e. whether they had agreed to change their matching criteria with their social workers), 11/29 report that they had (10 that had attended an activity day or pan-regional family finding event and 1 that had attended an exchange event).

Table 18: Whether, and to what extent, the views of prospective adopter survey respondents have changed since the event (n=29) (source: online survey)

Did the event change your views about the characteristics or needs of children that could be placed with you/your family?	Number of Prospective adopters
My views stayed the same	8
My views have changed a bit	16
My views have changed a lot	2
Don't know	3

Prospective adopters were asked to provide more detail in the online survey about whether the event had any impact on their confidence to consider adopting:

- Children from an ethnic minority background.
- Children aged 5 years or older.
- A sibling group.
- Children with a disability.

The biggest change observed was in relation to sibling groups - 14/29 prospective adopters reported feeling more confident to consider adopting a sibling group after the event. Fewer prospective adopters reported feeling more confident in relation to the other groups (including children from an ethnic minority background (7/29), children aged 5 or older (6/29) and children with a disability (9/29)).

Participants of the evaluation (interviewees, including event delivery professionals and prospective adopters) shared examples which demonstrated how and why, in some cases, the preferences of prospective adopters changed:

that one did make me reconsider everything because I had such an immediate connection to them, which I think is what the.... activity days are for [Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

It opened our minds initially to more children that we could adopt and we thought with our heart instead of our head. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

For some prospective adopters, it was helpful to use the event to gather more information about individual children (i.e. first hand from social workers, foster carers and/or through interaction with and observation of the child) - information that would not have been possible to gather from Link Maker, for example. In some instances this additional information helped prospective adopters reconsider how and whether they could meet the child's needs and also helped them to focus on other aspects of the child.

The event did change my perspective on what additional needs I could meet. It also reminded me to try to view the children in terms of their interests and personalities. This can be difficult when dealing with information on paper and why these events are so useful in humanising the children. [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

it's that golden moment to be able to have the family finder, a social worker... as many professions as possible that know that child, obviously with the foster carer, and to ask those questions. [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

There were also instances shared in interviews and survey responses whereby prospective adopters had sought broad information from host organisations prior to the event about the backgrounds/characteristics of children who would be attending. They then used this information to determine whether or not they would attend. There was an example provided of a prospective adopter attending an event and being disappointed that there were no children in attendance who matched their preferences.

I wasn't expecting to change my views and didn't, I have quite clear matching criteria [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

Professionals acknowledged the importance of support when considering and changing preferences in any way, with one interviewee (event delivery professional) stating that it is important not to 'set them up to fail', by stretching their preferences too far. They also acknowledged that assessors in this instance should have a 'good grasp' on what the abilities of the prospective adopters are.

Prospective adopter interviewees talked about their individual circumstances and what they felt they were open to in their adoption journey. For example, some had clear criteria that they felt they were unable to shift on and stated the reasons for this. One interviewee described how, although their preferences had changed as a result of the event, it had also encouraged them to be more specific with their preferences (not broaden them). In summary, the events did appear to support prospective adopters to make more informed decisions about their preferences and matching criteria.

We're still gonna keep our criteria... But I think for our family finding, I think, for us and our social worker... that was positive to know that from that day.
[Prospective Adopter Interviewee]

6.5. Effects on children after event and over time

Foster carers attending activity days or pan-regional family finding events with children were asked in the online survey to reflect on whether the event had affected the child(ren) in any way. The survey explored both short term effects (i.e. in the hours and days after the event) and potential longer-term effects. Reassuringly, in the main, the events were not found to impact children negatively.

87% (41/47) of the children attending an event 'seemed the same as usual' in the hours and days after the event. 13% (6/47) of the children seemed more upset or unsettled than usual in the hours and days after the event. Of those children who seemed more upset or unsettled than usual in the hours and days after the event, 5/6 were under the age of 5, and 2/6 had a disability and/or other additional needs.

No real impact, just had a lovely time and was able to practice their socialising, connected beautifully for the first time with a new person who spent such a long time playing with them [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

However, foster carers completing a survey described how tiring the event was for many children, which may account for some of the immediate effects reported. Events such as this may be particularly challenging (emotionally and physically) for children with additional needs. As one foster carer argued, organisers should understand the 'cost' to the child of attending such events and ensure that the events are focused on the needs of the children as far as possible.

Our child is too young to understand any of this, to them it was an exciting play day, where a few new adults played with him. They were very tired, but we

travelled a long way, so that was understandable [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

It's really important that organisers understand the physical and emotional drain of these days... Many children who attend activity days have...often behavioural or sensory needs or physical disabilities.... As foster parents, there is fall out for days or weeks after these days in the home as they significantly dysregulate children. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

There was also some concern for those children who did not receive much attention during the event. This is likely to perhaps be more of a concern to older children who may understand the purpose of an event.

The child I care for didn't have anyone come forward to talk to them except the entertainer, I was glad I didn't make a big deal about it....the child was more upset the following day and has been more clingy to me. [Survey Respondent, Foster Carer]

94% children attending events 'seemed the same as usual' over the longer term. 6% seemed more upset or unsettled than usual over the longer term.

6.6. Other impacts observed

Many participants of the evaluation made reference to indirect benefits or impacts, that were more challenging to measure. These included making contacts and networking at events. This was thought to increase opportunities over the longer term for matching.

Sometimes I might meet someone at an event which may not be beneficial in that moment but then I am thinking ahead and making links with people I might be able to go back to others in the future. There are outcomes which are not tangible. [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

See this as a networking opportunity and be ready to introduce yourself lots! Be clear about who you are looking for and try to have a more in-depth chat with social workers so they bear you in mind for children outside of the event [Survey Respondent, Prospective Adopter]

As stated earlier in the report, it is evident that the activity days or pan-regional family finding events were sometimes used as an opportunity for a prospective adopter to meet a child they were already in the process of being linked with - meeting in a less formal environment before proceeding.

There was evidence that the events were also useful for professionals, in helping them to get to know and build relationships with the foster carers and child(ren).

I get to see my allocated children in a different environment to their home. This gives for a more natural relationship that benefits them further down the line, and I get to build links with the foster carer [Professional Interviewee, Wider Stakeholder]

6.7. Benefits of collaborative working

There were several benefits related specifically to working collaboratively (across agencies and regions) through the events, reported by professional interviewees.

These included:

- Having a wide range of options, at different levels (involving prospective adopters locally, regionally and nationally), for children waiting to be adopted - professionals described a tiered approach in which a team would go through 'stages' to find a child a family in the timeliest way possible.
- Working in a collaborative way through the events has enabled professionals to network, connect and build professional relationships with others (i.e. other family findings). In turn, it was thought that this potentially maximised opportunities for finding matches in the future.
- Opportunities to share learning across organisations, rather than 'reinventing the wheel'.

I think they [local, regional and all-England events] complement each other in a way because it's still more opportunities for children. [Professional Interviewee, Event Delivery]

7. Costs involved in providing events

This section details and explores the costs of delivering events, drawing upon data shared by the host organisations.

7.1. Total reported cost of events

Each host organisation reported the total cost of each of their events in the administrative and event data returns. Full data is shown in appendix 2.

This data initially suggests that the 15 activity days and pan-regional family finding events cost a total of £112,187 (with a range from approximately £2,000 to £10,000). The average cost, per event, was £7,479 and the average cost per child (based on the number of children attending) was £389.95. The average cost per child (based on the number of children attending) for pan regional family finding events was £167.54 and the average cost per child (based on the number of children attending) for all-England activity days was £584.56.

The returns data also suggested that the 3 exchange events cost a total of £20,000. Or, £6,666.67 per event. The average cost per child (based on children profiled) was calculated as £29.99.

However, it is important to be cautious when interpreting the cost data presented above for two key reasons:

1. It was not clear from the administrative and event data returns what costs had been included/excluded in the reported 'total cost' of event. The evaluation team requested further detail from host organisations and this is discussed below.
2. The evaluation focused on events which were commissioned by Adoption England. Costs associated with commissioned events may not be a true reflection of how events will be funded or costed in the future.

7.2. Further understanding the costs associated with activity days and pan-regional family finding events

Host organisations were asked to provide details on their direct staff costs - including all staff who were employed and who had organised/delivered the events in 2023/24 (including their first-tier line managers). They were also asked to provide details on 'other staff costs' including senior managers and administration staff.

It was evident from this exercise that not all host organisations had charged for or included all their staff costs in the total cost of delivering the event (including staff costs associated with preparing and arranging the day). There were also likely to be other hidden costs for agencies involved in events e.g. referring agencies booking places at all-England events were required to send staff to attend/support on the day.

There were often a wide range of staff involved in the events. They undertook tasks including: providing oversight and attending committee meetings, the preparation of events and materials for events (printing and collating profiles, processing invoices,

setting up and managing bookings, sending out information to attendees), supporting and delivering briefings to attendees prior to events, attending events and supporting others on the day, follow up work after the event (collating and distributing EOs, being a point of contact, collection and analysis of post-event feedback, event reporting). Those involved in the tasks described included:

- Family finders.
- Social workers.
- Managers.
- Adoption advisors.
- Advanced practitioners.
- Marketing officers.
- Administrators and business support.
- RAA strategic roles and leaders.
- Sessional staff and volunteers.

Where RAAs provided pan-regional family finding events, it appears that most staff undertook this work as part of their wider roles. Whilst some appeared to operate with a core small 'in-house' team, others spread the tasks across staff from other agencies (i.e. via a working group or committee).

Host organisations were also asked to provide detail on other direct costs of events (not including staff). Four host organisations provided information on other direct costs. Again the data showed a range of costs across events. The average and range of other direct costs involved are shown in the table below:

Table 19: Average direct costs associated with activity days or pan-regional family finding events²² (not inc. staff costs) (source: additional administrative and event data provided following request from evaluation team)

Description of costs	Average costs ²³	Range of costs
Venue hire	£818.93	£270-£1750
Travel and accommodation	£601	£162-907
Equipment and resources for event (e.g. decorations, play/activity resources, printed information)	£242.86	£49.53-£403.41
Entertainment for event (e.g. externally commissioned services)	£744	£150-£1140
Refreshments	£2075	£2050-£2100

²² Based on activity days provided by four host organisations only.

²³ Calculated based on available data only. If no cost reported, this has not been included in calculations.

Description of costs	Average costs ²³	Range of costs
Experts (e.g. medical advisors)	£450	£150-£600

First time events may appear more costly, due to the initial one-off direct costs (i.e. standard equipment and resources that could be used more than once).

7.2.1. Detailed costs - two pan-regional event case studies

Not all host organisations were able to provide a detailed breakdown of all costs, and the way in which data was reported made direct comparisons between events and host organisations difficult. Therefore, two case studies are shown below to illustrate how pan-regional events were organised and the staffing levels/costs involved. It must be emphasised that these case studies are only used to estimate and illustrate typical costs of pan-regional family finding events - which may be useful for other host organisations and future planning purposes. The case studies are not based on 'first events' and so may not include some initial set up costs. Also, they do not include events where experts have attended.

Table 20: Case studies illustrating total costs of pan-regional family finding events (source: additional administrative and event data provided following request from evaluation team)

	Case study one - total costs	Case study two - total costs
Staff costs (inc. pre and post event tasks. Including assumed 25% overheads.	Pre and post event - £1724.05 + £550.17 = £2,274.22	Pre and post event - £1226
	At event - £1,518.99	At event - £1332
	Total with overheads £4,742	Total with overheads £3,197.50
	*all staff costs include travel time	
Other direct costs including venue, travel and accommodation for staff/volunteers, equipment and resources, and entertainment.	£1,099	£797
Total cost	£5,841	£3,994
Children who attended event	31	20
Cost per child	£188.42	£199.70

8. Discussion and recommendations

8.1. Discussion

Large numbers of 'harder to place' children and prospective adoptive households across England were involved in the events. It is interesting to compare the total numbers of people involved in the events with latest available ASG data. In England there were reported to be 1,460 children (categorised as 'harder to place') waiting to be adopted (with a Placement Order, but not yet placed) (Coram-I, 2024). In total, 320 children attended 15 activity days or pan-regional family finding events, and 715 children were profiled at 3 exchange events. Children with 'harder to place' characteristics were over represented at the events – particularly children with a disability (activity days or pan-regional family finding events) and sibling groups (all types of event). This suggests that a high proportion of the children waiting to be adopted attended or were profiled at these events.

There were reported to be 1,940 approved families (in England) waiting to be matched with children (Coram-I, 2024). In total 299 adoptive households attended the 15 activity days or pan-regional family finding events, and 81 adoptive households attended 3 exchange events. This suggests that up to 20% of adoptive households engaged in the events as part of their matching process. However, this assumes that: 1. all prospective adopters who attended were approved, and 2. they had only attended one of the events. In fact, survey responses suggested that approximately half of prospective adopters had attended similar events in the past. What the data did demonstrate is that such events were a significant part of prospective adopters journeys. Without comparative data it is not possible to know how this may have/may not have changed over time. However, it is likely that with the presence of more events, in more areas of England, this is increasing over time.

The overall reduction in the number of approved prospective adopters featured heavily as a theme in the qualitative interviews with professionals. The findings and recommendations that emerged from the evaluation need to be considered in this context.

However, there is much still to be learned from this evaluation about how best to organise and support events in order that they are experienced in the most positive way.

This evaluation has not been able to very accurately identify the (costed) added value of the different events compared with business as usual. In particular, it has not been possible to compare the match 'rate', including for children with harder to place characteristics, compared with business as usual.

However, there is strong evidence from the evaluation to suggest that, in the face of a reduction in the number of approvals of prospective adopters (literally limiting the number of available adopters), these events:

- Generated many opportunities for links and matches – including because a high proportion of children waiting to be adopted at the time either attended or were

profiled at one or more of these events - and up to one fifth of prospective adopters also attended in the relevant timeline.

- Generated high rates of EOIs for children who, by and large, had harder to place characteristics.
- Were considered helpful or very helpful by professionals and prospective adopters, including specifically for matching.
- Did not result in adverse consequences for children or prospective adopters.

It was not possible, through this evaluation, to draw any conclusions about the impact of different types of events and their costs e.g. exchange events cost more overall but were less costly per individual child profiled and generated a larger number of EOIs per event. However, although activity days or pan-regional family finding events were understandably more costly per child, they were better attended and arguably provided greater additional benefits – particularly the chance for largely inexperienced parents to interact with children.

Professionals interviewed for this evaluation suggested that there is a value in having a variety of options including with reference to geographical footprint and style of event – including a greater proportion of collaborative e.g. pan-regional events.

8.2. Recommendations

The relatively low cost per child of all types of event and actual as well as potential impact suggests they are likely to provide good value for money and should be continued. Beyond this initial recommendation, the following should be considered:

1. Events to continue to be developed i.e. with attention to diversity (across a number of events e.g. size and type of event; preparation of invitees; facilitation enabling a variety of interactions; accessibility; availability of medical advice; and support for children, prospective adopters and foster carers to enjoy and get the most from events).
2. Specifically, agencies to consider how to improve practical and emotional support for foster carers attending activity events / pan-regional family finding events with children (e.g. by having an allocated staff member to support them and/or allowing more than one foster carer to accompany children – particularly sibling groups or children with additional needs).
3. Agencies to consider how other nuanced roles or purposes of events can be supported (i.e. for ‘meet before match’ meetings).
4. RAAs to work collaboratively (i.e. pan-regionally) to understand the needs within their region, and the resources available to them, to support the planning of future events.
5. Hosts and all agencies to promote awareness of events and their value (i.e. with social work teams and prospective adopters) to improve interest and take up.
6. Coordination of all events to continue to be coordinated at a national level to avoid duplication and support diversity of provision i.e. to be undertaken by the National Family Finding Lead at Adoption England.
7. Building on BAAF’s ‘Organising an Adoption Activity Day’ (E.E. Fursland, 2015), the development of a comprehensive national guide for all types of events -

detailing their purpose, key components, best practice and principles or standards. This will be of particular use for newer event hosts.

8. Ongoing facilitation of best practice and learning e.g. community of practice.
9. Improvements in standard data collection and outcome measurement across events – with specific reference to more consistent monitoring of the rate of links / links resulting in panel per event e.g. including as part of the ASG dataset - through recording, at point of panel, whether the match was a direct result of attending an event. This should ideally also include child characteristics and whether or not the children and adopters already have a pre-event link.

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Appendix 1: Family Finding Events Theory of Change

Key challenges	AADs and Exchange Events: Key elements	Short term effects ²⁴	Outcomes
<p>Adopters are not always able or willing to adopt the children waiting for adoption.</p> <p>The average time a child with a Placement Order (PO) waits ranges across regions.</p> <p>Data from 2020 showed that 1,000 children had been waiting for over 18 months to be matched, and these children made up 50% of all those waiting. The proportion waiting has thought to have increased since the pandemic.</p> <p>Children who wait longer than average for adoption include: those aged over five years, sibling groups, children from ethnic minorities, children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, and disabled children.</p> <p>Recent national policy recognises the need to continually improve the matching process, and endorses the use of tools such as Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Days to “secure matches for children without delay”.</p> <p>Evaluation of activity days appear to show that they have a positive effect on matching (largely based on evidence published by BAAF/Coram). However, the evidence base underpinning the events is limited and there are further questions to be explored.</p>	<p>Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Events are used to extend the family finding search (i.e. beyond a local area) – to help identify matches in a timely way, particularly for those children who might typically wait the longest.</p> <p>Five agencies are funded by Adoption England to deliver activity days (15) and exchange events (3). The events are scheduled between May 2023 and March 2024.</p> <p>Activity Days (also ‘fun days’) are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended by prospective adopters and children waiting with a PO (children are accompanied by their foster carers). Social workers may also attend. • Safe, informal and child-centred events - the emphasis is on providing a fun day for children who need adoption. • Professionally facilitated, with staff there to provide support and encouragement. • Pan regional or national – open to children and agencies across different regions. • Some are specialist events (i.e. for children from different ethnicities). <p>Exchange Events (also ‘profiling’ events):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National events open to prospective adopters and agencies (not children) from across England. Prospective adopters may attend with their social workers. • Agencies have a stand at the event to share information about their children and adopters. • Prospective adopters and workers from a number of adoption agencies can meet each other to find out more/have direct conversations about children who may be waiting. • Agencies are typically charged to book a stand. The events are free for adopters. 	<p>Events are well attended (including with representation across regions/RAAs, and by those groups of children who wait the longest (AADs only)).</p> <p>Events are well planned and resourced to meet needs of those attending.</p> <p>Foster carers, social workers/family finders and providers work collaboratively to ensure attendees (including children) are supported and have a positive experience.</p> <p>Potential ethical issues and risks are acknowledged and explored by providers of events (and others).</p> <p>All attendees (including foster carers and children) feel prepared and supported before, during and after the event – including in the matching process and/or if no match has been made.</p> <p>All attendees (inc. agencies, prospective adopters, foster carers, social workers and others) rate the event highly.</p> <p>All attendees enjoy the event.</p> <p>Children attending AADs have an understanding of what the events are about – this information is tailored to meet their individual needs and foster carers are prepared/supported to convey such information.</p> <p>Prospective adopters have an opportunity to engage and interact with children at the event.</p> <p>Adopters gain a greater awareness and understanding of children’s needs more broadly and their ability to meet those needs.</p> <p>Adopters have an opportunity to reflect on their initial matching criteria and, where appropriate, to broaden it (with support from professionals).</p> <p>Adopters develop and/or learn new skills as a result of attending.</p> <p>A significant proportion of adopters find out more/ submit an ‘expression of interest’ in relation to a child/children (at the event or shortly after).</p> <p>Expressions of interests are followed up promptly and, once a potential match is identified, momentum is maintained.</p> <p>Providers collect regular feedback from attendees (including children), which is used to inform and improve future events.</p>	<p>Adopters gain a greater awareness and understanding of children’s needs more broadly and their ability to meet those needs.</p> <p>Adopters have an opportunity to reflect on their initial matching criteria and, where appropriate, to broaden it (with support from professionals).</p> <p>Events lead to more children being found matches, and in a more timely way, including children from groups who wait the longest.</p> <p>Children with a PO are found permanent loving families as quickly as possible where they will be safe and secure.</p> <p>RAAs and others work collaboratively and effectively across organisations/boundaries to achieve outcomes and improve whole system learning.</p>

²⁴ Some of these will be specific to activity days (and not relevant for exchange events)

Appendix 2: Administrative and Event Data Tables

Table: Number of activity days or pan-regional family finding events by region in which they were held (n=15) (source: administrative and event data)

Region of England (where event held)	Number of events
North East	1
North West	3
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
East Midlands	2
West Midlands	2
South East	2
Greater London	3
Total	15

Table: Number of activity days or pan-regional family finding events by month in which they were held (n=15) (source: administrative and event data)

Month event held	Number of events
April-June 2023	2
July-September 2023	3
October-December 2023	5
January-March 2024	5
Total	15

Table: Average number of RAAs and VAAs sending children and adoptive families to activity days or pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data)

	Mean	Median	Range
Number of different ²⁵ RAAs sending children	4	5	2-8
Number of different RAAs sending adoptive families	3	3	1-7
Number of different VAAs sending adoptive families	5	4	1-10
Number of different RAAs and VAAs (combined) sending adoptive families	8	8	2-15

Table: A summary of the characteristics of all prospective adopters who attended the activity days or pan-regional family finding events (source: administrative and event data)

Characteristics		Mean	Median	Range
Prospective adopter ethnicity ²⁶	White	71%	74%	22%-100%
	Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	29%	26%	0%-88%

Table: Average numbers of agencies involved in exchange day events (source: administrative and event data)

	Mean	Median	Range
Number of different ²⁷ RAAs who attended and/or profiled children	16.3	16	15-18
Number of different RAAs sending adoptive families	4.3	6	1-6
Number of different VAAs sending adoptive families	7	7	6-8

²⁵ This table includes host agencies

²⁶ Currently this data is missing for 2 of 15 events

²⁷ This table includes host agencies

	Mean	Median	Range
Number of different RAAs and VAAs (combined) sending adoptive families	11.3	12	9-13

Table: A summary of the characteristics of all prospective adopters who attended the exchange day events (source: administrative and event data)

		Mean	Median	Range
Prospective adopter ethnicity ²⁸	White	28 (61%)	32 (60%)	18-35 (51%-71%)
	Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	18 (39%)	17 (40%)	13-23 (29%-49%)

Table: A summary of the characteristics of all children who were profiled at the exchange day events (source: administrative and event data)

		Mean	Median	Range
Age ²⁹	Under 5	178 (76%)	163 (76%)	147-224 (75%-77%)
	5 or over	56 (24%)	53 (24%)	43-72 (23%-25%)
Ethnicity ³⁰	White	166 (71%)	142 (67%)	139-218 (67%-75%)
	Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	66 (29%)	69 (33%)	55-73 (25%-33%)
Children diagnosed with SEND or a health condition	No diagnosis	175 (74%)	172 (73%)	195-304 (69%-80%)
	Diagnosis	63 (26%)	53 (27%)	44-93

²⁸ Adopter ethnicity might be missing for some adopters attending- unable to calculate how many as do not know makeup of adoptive households number-wise

²⁹ Age was not known for 5 children at one event and for 8 children at another event

³⁰ Ethnicity was not yet obtained for 19 children across all 3 events

		Mean	Median	Range
				(20%-31%)
Sibling group ³¹	Child not part of sibling group	93 (38%)	79 (36%)	71-128 (36%-42%)
	Child part of sibling group	146 (62%)	137 (64%)	124-176 (58%-64%)

Table: Outcomes reported by host organisations for activity days and pan-regional family finding events in 2023/24, by when the event took place (source: administrative and event data)

Timing of the event	Number of expressions of interest (mean)	Number of progressions to panel (mean)
Earlier	17.4	3.6
Later	12.6	1.8

Table: Average costs per child invited/attended (based on data reported by host organisations) (source: administrative and event data)

	Mean	Range
Cost per child (based on no. of children invited)	£366.71	£80.00-£769.23
Cost per child (based on no. of children attending)	£389.95	£100.00-£833.33

³¹ Where listed at sibling group of over 3, assuming 4 children in sibling group

Appendix 3: Online Survey Responses Data Tables

Table: A summary of survey responses from those who attended an event, by month of event and type of survey respondent (n=61) (source: online survey)

Month of event(s) ³²	Number of responses from foster carers ³³	Number of responses from prospective adopters	Total number of survey responses
May 2023	1	3	4
June 2023	2	0	2
July 2023	3	2	5
September 2023	0	4	4
October 2023	2	3	5
November 2023	1	1	2
January 2024	3	4	7
February 2024	1	3	4
March 2024	13	2	15
June 2024 ³⁴	6	7	13
Total	32	29	61

Table: A summary of survey responses by type of survey respondent and how long it took them to get to the event (n=61) (source: online survey)

How long it took to get to event	Foster carers	Prospective adopters	Total Responses
Under 1 hour	13	12	25 (41%)
Between 1 and 2 hours	16	12	28 (45.9%)
Between 2 and 4 hours	2	2	4 (6.6%)

³² In some month, more than one event occurred.

³³ One foster carer who responded to the survey was invited to an event, but did not attend.

³⁴ The online survey was distributed to attendees of a funded pan-regional event which took place in June 2024. This event was hosted by one of the existing RAA providers.

How long it took to get to event	Foster carers	Prospective adopters	Total Responses
More than 4 hours	1	3	4 (6.6%)

Table: A summary of survey responses by survey respondent type and who had attended previous events (n=60) (source: online survey)

Whether they had attended other events in the past	Foster carers	Prospective adopters ³⁵	Total responses
Yes	20	12	32 (53.3%)
No	13	15	28 (46.7%)

Table: Survey responses regarding child understanding of the purpose of activity days and pan-regional family finding events and the extent to which they looked forward to the event(s)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Not applicable
The child did not understand what the purpose of the event was	n	27	8	1	3	0	0	8
	%	57.4%	17%	2.1%	6.4%	0%	0%	17%
The child looked forward to the event	n	5	12	15	2	1	2	10
	%	10.6%	25.3%	31.9%	4.3%	2.1%	4.3%	21.3%

³⁵ 2 out of 29 prospective adopters who responded to the survey stated 'don't know' when asked whether they had attended similar events in the past.

Table: Survey respondents views about the information and support they received prior to events (foster carer and prospective adopters responses) (source: online survey)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
The information I received from the event organisers was helpful in preparing me for the event (n=61)	24	34	1	1	0	0	1
I felt supported by my / our / the children's social worker in the run up to the event (n=61)	22	26	5	5	1	0	2
I felt supported by the event organiser in the run up to the event (n=61)	21	27	7	2	1	1	2
Overall, I felt prepared for the event (n=61)	8	40	8	5	0	0	0

Table: The extent to which children enjoyed different elements of the event (foster carer responses, n=47) (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Not applicable
The child did not enjoy the event	n	0	1	9	11	23	1	2
	%	0%	2.1%	19.1%	23.4%	48.9%	2.1%	4.3%
The child enjoyed meeting prospective adopters	n	5	15	20	2	2	2	1
	%	10.6%	31.9%	42.6%	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	2.1%

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Not applicable
The child enjoyed meeting other children waiting for an adoptive family	n	2	13	23	2	3	1	3
	%	4.3%	27.7%	48.9%	4.3%	6.4%	2.1%	6.4%

Table: How useful prospective adopters found speaking with others during events (n=29) (source: online survey)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Not applicable
I found it useful to speak with social workers/family finders at the event	18	5	1	0	1	1	3
I found it useful to speak with medical and/or education professionals at the event (if they weren't at the event, please select 'Not Applicable')	1	2	2	0	0	2	22

Table: How useful prospective adopters found spending time and speaking with children and foster carers at activity days and pan-regional family finding events (n=22) (source: online survey)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I found it useful to spend time with children at the event	18	4	0	0	0
I found it useful to speak with children's foster carers at the event	19	3	0	0	0

Table: Survey respondents' views on the information and support they received during the events (foster carers and prospective adopters, n=61) (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was happy with the explanations given to me on the day about what was happening	n	25	26	6	2	2
	%	41.0%	42.6%	9.8%	3.3%	3.3%
I did not feel supported by the event staff at the event	n	2	1	2	23	33
	%	3.3%	1.6%	3.3%	37.7%	54.1%

Table: Foster carers' views on the information and support the children received during the activity days or pan-regional family finding events (n=47) (source: online survey)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Not applicable
The information the child received at the event was not tailored to their individual needs	n	4	6	16	6	0	0	15
	%	8.5%	12.8%	34.0%	12.8%	0%	0%	31.9%
The child felt supported by event staff at the event	n	6	19	8	2	2	1	9
	%	12.8%	40.4%	17.0%	4.3%	4.3%	2.1%	19.1%

Table: Whether prospective adopter survey respondents have changed their preferences in any way since the event, by type of event (n=29) (source: online survey)

Since the event, have you changed your preferences in any way?	Number of Prospective adopters
Total	
Yes	11
No	18
Activity day / pan-regional family finding event attendees	
Yes	10
No	12
Exchange event attendees	
Yes	1
No	6

Table: Whether, and to what extent, prospective adopters' confidence levels have change since the event (by whether prospective adopters would have considered children from an ethnic minority background before the event) (n=29) (source: online survey)

AFTER event, impact on confidence to consider adopting: Children from an ethnic minority background	Number of Prospective adopters by whether BEFORE the event they would consider children from an ethnic minority background			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
I feel more confident	6	0	1	7
No change	8	10	3	21
I feel less confident	0	0	0	0
Don't know	0	1	0	1

Table: Whether, and to what extent, prospective adopters' confidence levels have change since the event (by whether prospective adopters would have considered children aged 5 or older before the event) (n=29) (source: online survey)

AFTER event, impact on confidence to consider adopting: Children aged 5 years or older	Number of Prospective adopters by whether BEFORE the event they would consider children aged 5 years or older			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
I feel more confident	3	2	1	6
No change	12	7	3	22
I feel less confident	0	0	1	1
Don't know	0	0	0	0

Table: Whether, and to what extent, prospective adopters' confidence levels have change since the event (by whether prospective adopters would have considered a sibling group before the event) (m=29) (source: online survey)

AFTER event, impact on confidence to consider adopting: A sibling group	Number of Prospective adopters by whether BEFORE the event they would consider a sibling group			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
I feel more confident	7	6	1	14
No change	10	4	0	14
I feel less confident	0	0	0	0
Don't know	1	0	0	1

Table: Whether, and to what extent, prospective adopters' confidence levels have change since the event (by whether prospective adopters would have considered children with a disability before the event) (n=29) (source: online survey)

AFTER event, impact on confidence to consider adopting: Children with a disability	Number of Prospective adopters by whether BEFORE the event they would consider children with a disability			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
I feel more confident	2	4	3	9
No change	3	12	4	19
I feel less confident	0	0	0	0
Don't know	0	1	0	1

Table: Effects on the child in the hours and days after activity days or pan-regional family finding events reported by foster carer survey respondents (n=47) (source: online survey)

How did the event affect the child in the hours and days after the event?	Number children	of % of children
They seemed more happy/positive than usual	0	0%
They seemed the same as usual	41	87.2%
They seemed more upset/unsettled than usual	6	12.8%

Table: Longer term impacts on the child after activity days or pan-regional family finding events, as reported by foster carer survey respondents (n=47) (source: online survey)

Have you noticed any longer term impacts on the child?	Number children	of % of children
They seemed more happy/positive than usual	0	0%
They seemed the same as usual	44	93.6%
They seemed more upset/unsettled than usual	3	6.4%

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