action for children

uclan
University of Central Lancashire

'Black' families for 'black' children?: An Evaluation of Action for Children's Practice in Ethnically Matching Black, Asian and Dual Heritage Children for Adoption

Dr Julie Ridley & Dr John Wainwright
with Priya Davda

2010

Contents

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank everyone who has taken part in this study, especially the adopters who took part from Action for Children's Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands; managers and staff of both Adoption Black Families and the Adoption Midlands; Adoption Black Families Adoption Panel members; and members of the Research Steering Group (see membership below). We are indebted to Action for Children adoption services for helping the Team to access research participants and providing access to statistical and case data. We especially appreciate the help of Nazlee Mayhew from Adoption Black Families and Linda Barlow from Adoption Midlands.

Membership of Research Steering Group

Sue Cotton, Action for Children (Chair)
Ken Vickers, Action for Children
Jean Smith, Adoption Black Families
Chriselda Bunu, Adoption Black Families
Emma Scowcroft, Action for Children (later replaced by Hannah Dobbin)
Jyotsna Karsan, Adoption Leeds
Rosemarie Mallett, Adopter

Project Team

The Evaluation was managed and carried out by Dr Julie Ridley, Senior Research Fellow, School of Social Work, and Dr John Wainwright, Senior Lecturer, University of Central Lancashire. Both were involved in study design, data collection, analysis and report writing.

Priya Davda was recruited as Research Assistant and was involved in data collection, reviewing the literature (as presented in Chapter 2), coordinating the collation and analysis of statistical information (as presented in chapter 4), and contributing generally to the analysis of findings.

Interviews were transcribed by Ann Rennie, an independent transcriber.

Administrative support to the team at UCLAN was provided Nick Mathauda.

The final report was proof read by Jane Jeffery, an independent consultant.

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Black and Minority Ethnic: This is used as an inclusive political term to describe individuals and communities of Asian and African/Caribbean heritage. While it clearly has its limitations in terms of representation, it helpfully captures a commonality of ethnic and cultural experience for Asian and African/Caribbean peoples. This experience reflects the positive cultural aspects of these diverse communities and their more brutal experience of racism. This term is often used interchangeably with 'black', which has the same political meaning. However, without 'minority ethnic', 'black' does not articulate the diversity of, in particular, Asian communities' representation and cultures.

Dual Heritage: This term is used to explain an identity and/or relationship that comprises two or more ethnicities. Specifically it is used to describe children whose birth parents come from two or more different ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Bangladeshi and English, or Ghanaian and Jamaican, although it usually refers to children with one white birth parent and the other from a minority ethnic community. Importantly, the term 'mixed heritage' is not used in this report as this implies that 'races' are fixed real entities and that 'mixing' them is a result of two different 'races'. While dual ethnicity is not an ideal solution to the problematic issue of describing and defining 'race' and ethnicity, it is *'under erasure'* (Hall, 1996:1-2), a means of recognising difference but not succumbing to its essentialist elements.

Ethnic Matching: This term refers to the focus on ethnicity as a key factor when placing BME child(ren) for adoption with prospective adopters. The focus is simultaneously on general matching criteria (the child's needs, parenting capacity etc), how the child 'fits' with the adoptive family, and the specifics of the ethnicity, culture and religion of the prospective adopters and child(ren). Critically, the term assumes that the 'fit' will mean a child is placed with adoptive parents of the same or a similar ethnicity. It is preferred to the more common expression of 'same race' as this term, although more widely known, implicitly reifies 'race' as a real currency, in contrast to ethnicity which is a more pliable and negotiated understanding of difference.

Matching: This is the process of identifying an adoptive family that might best be able to meet the needs of a child that is waiting for an adoptive placement (Dance et al, 2010). This involves using assessments by social workers of both child and prospective adopters to inform the decision about whether the child's needs could be met by the prospective adoptive family. The process is confirmed at an Adoption Panel where a family is recommended by the adoption social workers as a match for a specific child or a sibling group.

Transracial Adoption: The placement of a BME and/or dual heritage child(ren) with white adoptive parents.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABSWAP = Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professions

BAAF = British Association Adoption & Fostering

BME = Black & Minority Ethnic

GSCC = General Social Care Council

IVF = In Vitro Fertilisation

NCH = Action for Children, formerly National Children's Home

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Action for Children commissioned the University of Central Lancashire to conduct an evaluation of Action for Children's practice in ethnically matching Black, Asian and dual heritage children for adoption. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of Action for Children's Adoption Black Families in developing, supporting and encouraging adoptive parents (and families) from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds to provide permanent homes for children and young people waiting for adoption. The study was commissioned by Action for Children and took 10 months from September 2009 to June 2010.

Research methods included a literature review; site visits and interviews with Action for Children staff; interviews and focus groups with adopters; an internet survey of referring social workers and managers in local authorities; and analysis of statistical information and published reports. Comparison was made with Action for Children's Adoption Midlands.

KEY FINDINGS

- The rationale and ethos that black, Asian dual heritage and minority ethnic children thrive best when placed with adoptive parents of a similar ethnic origin was shared by both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands.

- Both adoption services similarly aimed to put children at the centre of their work, and to ensure that children of BME and dual heritage were matched with adoptive parents of a similar ethnicity, religion and culture.

- The key difference between the two services was that the recruitment of BME and dual heritage adopters and ethnic matching was the sole focus of Adoption Black Families whereas Adoption Midlands had a wider remit and also placed white children with white adopters.

- With an all BME staff group and central focus on ethnically matched placements, Adoption Black Families had developed specialist expertise and insight into the myriad of ethnicities, cultures and religions of both adoptive parents and children.

Detail of Adopters and Children Placed

- Adoption Black Families had recruited more than four times the number of BME adopters than Adoption Midlands over the same timeframe. Adoption Midlands also recruited white adopters during this time.

- The largest proportion of BME adopters from both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands were of dual heritage (50% and 65% of adopters respectively).

- The majority of adoptive parents were from black and/or black dual heritage ethnicities (63% of Adoption Black Families adopters, 71% of Adoption Midlands adopters). Those from Asian and/or Asian dual heritage background were the second largest group (31% of Adoption Black Families adopters, 29% of Adoption Midlands adopters). Others were couples representing both Asian and black minority ethnicities or 'other' minority ethnicities.

- Both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands recorded comparable numbers of single parent adopters (21% and 18% respectively), with the majority comprising women of African or African/Caribbean heritage.

- The average time for Adoption Black Families to complete the process of enquiry from prospective adopters to approval as adoptive parents, placement and legal adoption of BME children were two, three and five months quicker respectively than the same processes for Adoption Midlands.

- From approval as adopters to placement of a child(ren), Adoption Midlands took one month longer (on average) than Adoption Black Families. This indicates that the throughput of adoptions can be improved when a service has a primary focus of placing BME children with BME adopters.

- Over the past five years (2004-2009) Adoption Black Families had placed 98 BME children with 78 BME adopters in comparison to 26 BME children placed with 17 BME adopters by Adoption Midlands. Over the same time period, Adoption Midlands had placed 95 children in total with 52 families.

- The largest percentage of children placed by Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands were black and/or black dual heritage (65% and 58% respectively). Just over a quarter of children placed by Adoption Black Families, and just over a third placed by Adoption Midlands were from Asian and/or Asian dual heritage ethnicities. The remainder were from 'other' minority ethnic backgrounds.

- The largest proportions of children placed by both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands were from dual heritage backgrounds (41% and 50% respectively).

- Of the children placed for adoption with Adoption Black Families, 45% were recorded as having no religion, 30% as Christian and 13% as Muslim. Adoption Midlands did not make information about the religion of the child placed for adoption available to the Evaluation Team.

- Over half the children placed by Adoption Black Families were under two years of age, as were under a third of Adoption Midlands BME children. The largest numbers of BME children placed by Adoption Midlands were between two and three years old.

- Slightly more boys than girls from BME backgrounds were placed by both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands (54% and 58% respectively).

Recruitment

- Adoption Black Families dealt with a large volume of enquiries from people interested in adopting (342 between October 2008 to October 2009), many of which did not proceed to full application. This is evidence of a significant level of interest in adopting within BME communities, and of the demand for the service Adoption Black Families provides.

- The evaluation findings dispel the common assumption that BME communities are not interested in coming forward to adopt, and show that recruitment practices and processes that are ethnically and culturally sensitive can make a significant difference in stimulating this interest.

- Adopters identified a variety of reasons for choosing Adoption Black Families. The main reason was that the project specialised in finding families for BME children, and that they knew it would offer ethnically sensitive support to prospective adopters.

- An all BME staff group was perceived by both staff and existing adopters to be a critical aspect of what Adoption Black Families provided. However, adopters from Asian heritage expressed the need for a wider understanding of Asian cultures.

- Adoption Black Families had engaged in a variety of generic recruitment activities in approaching BME communities, such as through the black press and other media, as well as community events.

- Having a specialist recruitment and marketing worker ensured that Adoption Black Families developed extensive networks from which to target its recruitment campaigns for prospective BME adopters.

- Neither Adoption Black Families nor Adoption Midlands had engaged in finely targeted recruitment campaigns based on systematic analysis of information about children in the in-care system or geographic populations.

- Almost universally, Adoption Black Families' adopters participating in the Evaluation referred to having had negative experiences of local authority adoption services. Some had contacted several local authorities and received no response, or local authorities had taken an unacceptable length of time to respond. Others felt that local authorities had not shown interest in them as prospective adopters, or had stated that they were unable to support them to find a suitable ethnic match.

- Local authority social workers stated that they referred children to Adoption Black Families primarily because of its reputation for working exclusively with BME families, and perceived it as being successful in matching BME children with BME adopters.

Matching

- From analysis of records, the main elements of a 'good match' were found to be the same as for all children that are 'looked after' and placed for adoption, regardless of ethnicity. This included an appreciation that adoption is about meeting the child's needs, as well as an appreciation of the parenting capacity and characteristics of the adopters.

- The ethnicity and age of the children awaiting adoption were at the centre of matching decisions. Where adopters had expressed a preference for a young child of a specific ethnicity and there were no young children from these backgrounds awaiting adoption, adopters had usually agreed to the placement of an older child of the requisite ethnicity.

- Almost all the prospective adopters in the reports examined and several adopters who were interviewed expressed the view that it was central to their connectedness and matching with a child to have a physical resemblance between themselves and the child(ren). Both staff and adopters identified this as a key element in a successful match taking place.

- Adoption Black Families was able to offer a broad range of adoptive families for BME children awaiting placement because it had a network of resources (including local authorities, adoption consortia, adoption register, adoption publications) nationwide, as well as active local connections with London-based BME community organisations.

- Just over half (51%) of ethnic matches that Adoption Black Families made between BME prospective adopters and BME children were a close or perfect 'fit'. In other words, the ethnicity, culture and religion of these adopters and child were the same.

- However, there were several matches where the ethnicity, culture and/or religion of the adopters and the child were very different. This was understood and rationalised by staff as making the 'best fit' when faced with complex ethnic heritages, particularly with regards to children and/or adopters of dual heritage.

- Of key concern in these complex cases, was that a child would be brought up by their adopters with a clear sense of *identity,* who they are, what their ethnic and cultural background is, and an understanding and appreciation of their birth parents' religion(s).

- Two kinds of ethnic matches were being made by Adoption Black Families. Firstly, *General* ethnic matches based on physical resemblance, black and/or dual heritage, Asian and/or dual heritage. Secondly, *Specific* ethnic matches based on exact region, culture and religion, for instance, a Pakistani Muslim child with Pakistani Muslim adoptive parents.

- The findings suggest that the increasing diversity of dual heritage can present conceptual and practical challenges to achieving an ethnic match between children and adoptive parents.

- Although for many of the children placed through Adoption Black Families religion was not specified and could therefore not be considered in the match, some matches appeared to overlook birth parents' stated preference for their child to be brought up within a particular religion.

- Both projects stated an inclusive approach to the placement of BME and dual heritage children with gay and/or single adopters from BME and dual heritage backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evaluation of Adoption Black Families provides evidence of effectiveness in the recruitment of adopters from a range of BME communities, and of successful matching of BME and dual heritage children with adopters of similar ethnic, cultural and religious heritage. In comparison to the mainstream adoption project, Adoption Black Families recruited more BME adopters and subsequently matched more BME and dual heritage children with these adopters. Over the five year period for which statistics were examined, there appeared to be almost no breakdown in adoptive placements made by Adoption Black Families. Furthermore, the timescales achieved by Adoption Black Families from initial inquiry to granting adoption orders was well within national quality standards.

Recent studies suggest that the challenge of matching BME and dual heritage children with suitable adopters is becoming even more complex with the ever

changing composition of ethnicities in the UK. Adoption Black Families as a specialist service focusing on ethnically matched adoption placements was making adoption placement decisions within this challenging arena.

In contrast with their experience of other adoption agencies, adopters with Adoption Black Families stated that the service was culturally and ethnically sensitive to their needs. Furthermore, they felt that the service promoted good outcomes for BME and dual heritage children. Similarly, referring social workers contacted Adoption Black Families because of its specialist focus and past satisfaction with its matching and placement outcomes for BME and dual heritage children. Evaluation participants closely associated Adoption Black Families' specialist provision with its effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the Evaluation support the following recommendations for future service development:

1. The adoption workforce should be diverse and reflect the ethnicities of adopters and children waiting for adoption.

2. The recruitment of adopters should be based on systematic analysis of the 'market need' (i.e. adopters needed from specific communities to meet the needs of children requiring adoption placement).

3. Consistent ongoing monitoring and information systems are important for effective development and marketing of BME adoption services.

4. The good practice that is evident from this Evaluation needs to be shared more widely across organisations and sectors.

5. The adoption process needs to incorporate trigger points for communication with prospective adopters and this should be made explicit at the outset. A flowchart of processes might be helpful.

6. Theoretical, policy and practice focused discussion regarding the changing nature of BME and dual heritage identities should take place to ensure that the needs of BME and dual heritage children are recognised and met.

7. Future research should be considered into medium and long term outcomes for BME and dual heritage children in ethnically matched adoption placements regarding their identity, self esteem, how they have engaged with society, school and employment, and the durability of the placement with their adoptive parents.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Study Aims & Objectives

The main purpose of this independent evaluative study was to assess the effectiveness of Action for Children's Adoption Black Families in developing, supporting and encouraging adoptive parents (and families) from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds to provide permanent homes for children and young people in need of adoption. Adoption Black Families focuses specifically on recruiting a range of adopters to meet the needs of children from black, Asian and dual heritage backgrounds. The study was carried out by researchers in the School of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

The evaluation was commissioned by Action for Children in 2009 and was intended to build upon the findings of previous research highlighting areas of best practice in meeting the needs of children from black, Asian and dual heritage backgrounds, and examining the barriers that stand in the way of increasing the pool of BME adopters. The findings are intended to enable Action for Children and Adoption Black Families to more effectively plan the development of permanent services for children from BME backgrounds, and to inform and improve practice development in this area.

The main objectives of the Evaluation were to consider:

- The effectiveness of Adoption Black Families in recruiting families from BME and mixed heritage backgrounds;
- The effectiveness of Adoption Black Families in making appropriate matches of children with adopters;
- Experiences of families using the adoption services;
- Reasons adopters choose to come to the project;
- Reasons for social workers choosing to refer to the project;
- Motivations of the staff team within the project;
- Number and reasons for disrupted pre-adoptive placements.

Given the timescale for the study and the young age profile of the majority of children matched with adopters from Adoption Black Families, it was agreed at the outset between commissioners and researchers that original objectives relating to measuring outcomes for children could only meaningfully be addressed by longer term evaluation. This formative Evaluation therefore focuses primarily on the effectiveness of the specialist Adoption Black Families relative to the organisation's mainstream adoption services, and its success in recruiting BME adopters and making appropriate matches between children and adopters.

Evaluation Questions

In addition to the study's aims and objectives, a number of other issues emerged from an early review of the literature and have informed our data collection methods. In summary, the key research questions this evaluation has addressed are:

- What particular strategies has Adoption Black Families used to recruit and support BME adopters?
- What is the 'process of adoption' in Adoption Black Families and how long does it take? Is this different in any way from other adoption services?
- How effective has Adoption Black Families been in ensuring effective matches of BME children with BME adopters?
- How does Adoption Black Families ensure that children are at the heart of the process?
- What motivates individuals/families who choose to apply to become adopters with specialist services such as Adoption Black Families?
- Why do local authority social workers choose to come to Adoption Black Families to find a suitable match for a child(ren)?
- How successful are the adoption matches made from the perspectives of adopters and social workers involved with the children or young people?

Evaluation Design and Methods

The overarching framework for planning the evaluation was adapted from Scriven (2003, cited in Davidson, 2005) Key Evaluation Checklist. This model was used in planning the evaluation and as a guideline for reporting. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect information from a range of stakeholders and sources. Qualitative methods were used to understand different perceptions and experiences.

While the main focus was Adoption Black Families, data was also collected from staff, adopters and referrers to a mainstream Action for Children adoption service (Adoption Midlands) to provide comparison and contrast to the work and outcomes of Adoption Black Families. Adoption Midlands was chosen as the comparator. Action for Children suggested this mainstream adoption service most closely resembled the target population of children and adopters served by Adoption Black Families.

Use was made in the Evaluation of existing data, as well as gathering new formation about: the processes of recruiting, training and supporting adopters from different ethnicities; ethnically matched placements; the outcomes for adoptive parents and children; and the referring social work agencies/local authorities. In summary, the methodology included the following elements:

- Literature review;
- Analysis of statistical information and project reports;
- Individual interviews;
- Focus groups;
- Internet survey of referrers;
- Observations of key meetings;
- Stakeholder/validation event.

Initially it was planned to include children and young people as key stakeholders but this had to be adjusted when it was learnt that the majority of children placed were under 3 years old. Agreement about sampling strategies and the design of research measures/instruments was reached in consultation with the Research Steering Group (see Acknowledgements for membership), and following initial site visits to Adoption Black Families and interviews with senior managers at Action for Children. This ensured that the final Evaluation Plan was tailored to the organisation's needs and users of the report.

Literature review

A targeted literature review built upon previous knowledge of the barriers to recruiting sufficient adopters to ensure ethnically matched adoptive placements, other key issues and known best practice in this area (see Chapter 2). This review was conducted early on in the project and has served to ground the Evaluation and provide a wider context for the discussion of the various stakeholders' experiences and views.

Analysis of statistical information and reports

Placement statistics from April 2004 to September 2009 were sourced from Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands in relation to placements of BME children. Between April 2004 and September 2009, Adoption Black Families placed 98 BME children. As one adoptive placement was disrupted, data was analysed for 97 of these placements. Over the same time period Adoption Midlands placed 26 BME children. Data for the placements of BME children made by both projects was analysed and is presented in Chapter 4.

A snapshot view of enquirers to Adoption Black Families over a one-year period was taken, that is, from October 2008-October 2009. Potentially this included information about 342 enquirers to Adoption Black Families. Just under half of these (161) contained information about the enquiry and/or the enquirers' demographics. These 161 records were analysed providing information about time taken from initial enquiry to a potential adopter's case being closed, why cases were closed, the reasons why enquirers did not proceed with an application to become adopters, the ethnicity of enquirers and their geographical location. The findings from this analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

A sample of matching records for 16 of the total adoptive families (including single parents and couples) were examined in depth to explore the decision-making process for matching. Assessment documents of adoptive parents

and the respective number of documents for one or more child(ren) were analysed. The documents used to record these decisions were not consistent in size and/or format and included the following: Prospective Adopters' Report, Form Fs, Matching Proformas, Child Placement Reports and Adoption Placement Reports. In total at least 32 sets of assessment/decision making documentation have been examined. Throughout the analysis of these documents the rationale for the decision making based on ethnicity was the central factor examined. Criteria identified by Dance et al (2008) in an Adoption Research Initiative briefing paper which highlights core elements of the matching process were used as a framework for this analysis. From 16 families (adoptive parent(s) and children) that were matched, 14 were specifically chosen because the ethnic and religious match was not an exact match.

Written documents (e.g. policy, publicity materials, project and annual reports, evaluation reports) were also collected and scanned for information about how projects promote their services to different audiences, background on the development and history of the projects, and detail of policies and operational procedures.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with both staff and adopters. This included the then Senior Manager (Adoption) within Action for Children and the commissioner of the Evaluation, and the managers of both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands. Managers were asked questions about:

- the overall ethos and values of each project;
- how potential adopters were recruited, assessed, and supported;
- achievements and outcomes of the projects;
- what had worked well and not so well;
- what they considered to be different or unique about the way Adoption Black Families worked compared to other approaches to recruiting BME adopters;
- how each project achieved ethnically matched adoption placements.

All BME adopters at Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands were invited to participate in focus groups and were also given the option of an individual interview either face to face or by telephone. Twelve Adoption Black Families adopters and two from Adoption Midlands opted for interview. Out of the 12 adopters from Adoption Black Families, eight chose to be interviewed by telephone in the evening and four at their home. Two Adoption Midlands adopters chose to be interviewed at home and a further two couples from Adoption Midlands completed postal questionnaires. The 14 adopters interviewed ranged in age from 30 to 50 years, included slightly more men than women, and were couples from single ethnicities or in mixed ethnicity marriages or civil partnerships. Some had adopted one child, others two or more children.

Adopters were asked about:

- their experiences and views of the adoption process with Adoption Black Families or Adoption Midlands including of the recruitment, assessment, and support processes;
- the importance of ethnically matched adoption placements to them;
- their reasons for choosing either Adoption Black Families or Adoption Midlands;
- their experience of the Adoption Panel;
- their experience of being matched with their child(ren);
- post-adoption support;
- how they thought the projects could improve.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full.

Focus groups

All 97 Adoption Black Families adopters were invited to volunteer to participate in one of two focus groups: one with those recently approved to be adopters or who had had a child(ren) placed with them in the past two years, and another with adopters who had been with Adoption Black Families for three or more years. A third focus group was planned with adopters from Adoption Midlands. Adopters were sent a letter and information leaflet about the study. These were sent out on the researchers' behalf by Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands. Few adopters responded and following consultation with the project and commissioners, an email was sent to several Adoption Black Families adopters inviting them to participate in an interview to which four couples responded. In addition, when few adopters from Adoption Midlands responded to the initial letter, a postal questionnaire was sent out with the project newsletter in April. This resulted in two responses from two couples. The focus group topic guide and postal questionnaire both explored the same areas as described above for interviews.

A focus group discussion with six Adoption Black Families adopters took place in December 2009 and was digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants were aged between 40-50 years, were mostly female (4 out of 6), and ranged from single parents to married couples and those in civil partnerships. Mostly they had adopted one child or two siblings and had been adoptive parents for varying lengths of time, from under six months to up to five years. Their ethnicities ranged from Asian, black (Caribbean or African) to white and dual heritage, and the children placed with them were either black or dual heritage.

Separate group interviews were facilitated by two of the researchers with project staff from both projects, and were conducted over one day in each project. All staff were invited to participate including administrative staff. These used a number of participatory techniques such as the 'H form', 'blue sky' thinking, fish bone or 'Ishakewa' diagram to explore with staff the ethos and values of the project, views on how the service is delivered and the focus on ethnically matched adoptive placements. Staff were also asked about their

views on the projects' achievements and how the services might improve. Information from these sessions was recorded on flipchart and digital recorder.

Internet survey of referrers

A short internet survey was designed using *Survey Monkey,* an internet based survey programme, and emailed in March 2010 to social workers and social work managers who the projects identified as having contacted them about placing a child(ren) and for whom email addresses were known. The list included social workers and team managers in family finding, adoption and fostering and other related teams in local authorities. In addition, the contact list was expanded to include managers of adoption and fostering teams for whom Action for Children had a contact email address. The questionnaire was sent to 128 potential respondents. At the first mailing, 42 email addresses were returned as 'undeliverable' or 'failed'. As it was impossible to check and correct email addresses, they were removed from the database.

After three repeat emails, 30 responses were received from 86 relevant potential respondents representing an overall response rate of 35%. The majority of respondents were practitioners (20 out of 30) and most were working in adoption services in local authorities (78%) or in fostering, 'looked after' children's or child protection teams. Just 10 of the respondents were managers or team leaders. Nearly half (14) of respondents were from London boroughs, while others were from Midlands-based local authorities (7 respondents) and eight other areas. The vast majority of respondents were female (90%) and of white ethnicity (73%), although practitioners and managers of Indian, Caribbean and dual heritage responded to the survey.

The survey asked referring social workers and managers about their use of Action for Children adoption services to place children from BME backgrounds, ease of accessing these services, their motivations for choosing these projects and satisfaction with the service received and the outcome. Finally, referrers were asked how they thought the projects could improve to better meet the needs of BME children awaiting adoption.

Observations at key meetings

An Adoption Black Families Adoption Panel was observed by two members of the research team where the process and decisions regarding recommending the approval of prospective adopters for the placement of a child were made. The researchers were subsequently able to interview the panel members regarding the process and outcomes of this and previous panels. Panel members were also invited to explore their own views regarding ethnic matching. This interview was digitally recorded and transcribed.

One of the researchers observed the decision making process around matching children with adopters at one group supervision meeting of Adoption Black Families staff in March 2010. The process was recorded to give the

research a contextual understanding of the decision making process in cases, along with practice examples of the values and ethos that underpin the project.

Stakeholder/validation event

Stakeholders with an interest in the findings of this Evaluation including those involved in the research were invited to a presentation and validation of findings in June 2010. At this event, the findings were discussed along with learning points and potential recommendations. No significant areas of dissent emerged. The content of this discussion and comments from commissioners have been incorporated into subsequent redrafts of this report. The stakeholder event was planned to be the beginning of a process of discussion and dissemination of key learning points that could contribute to the development and improvement of policy and practice in this area.

Summary of Research Samples

For ease of reference, the following table summarises overall research samples of adopters, Action for Children staff and managers, and referring social workers and managers from local authorities who participated in this study.

Table 1.1: Summary of Research Samples

Method	Adoption Black Families			Adoption Midlands			Referrers
	BME Adopters	Staff	Manager	BME Adopters	Staff	Manager	
Interview	12	-	2	2	-	1	-
Focus group	6	8	-	-	6	-	-
Survey	-	-	-	4	-	-	30
TOTAL **(Percent of target pop)**	**18** **(23%)**	**8** **(100%)**	**2** **(100%)**	**6** **(35%)**	**6** **(100%)**	**1** **(50%)**	**30** **(35%)**

Ethical Issues

To protect participants' safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, this study was reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Social Care Ethics Committee at the University of Central Lancashire in September 2009. A number of key ethical issues were highlighted by the team and considered by the Committee.

Voluntary participation

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary, and this was emphasised in all written and verbal information about the study and arrangements for gaining consent. The independence of the researchers from Action for Children was always stressed.

No-one was disadvantaged from participating

Adopters and staff in the projects were invited to participate and should not have been deterred from participating through economic disadvantage or access issues. Interviews and focus groups were in locally accessible venues, at the person's home, or involved the use of telephone interviews. Travel expenses were paid and crèche facilities offered at focus groups. Interpreting services were offered but not requested.

Informed consent

Targeted information sheets explaining the study and the meaning of participation were drafted with the help of the Research Steering Group, and reinforced at meetings and interviews by the evaluators. Written consent was obtained at face to face interviews and focus groups, while during telephone interviews this was obtained verbally. There were opportunities for participants to ask questions about the study before and during interviews and focus groups.

Confidentiality & anonymity

Participants were assured of confidentiality and care has been taken to ensure that no one is directly identifiable in this or any other report. People's real names have not been used and only type of respondent referred to. Data collected for the study has been kept secure in line with the University of Central Lancashire's policy.

Benefit and protection from harm

While it was made clear that participants would not directly benefit from participation in the evaluation, taking part provided an opportunity for them to influence future development of this service and policy on placing children and young people from BME backgrounds. Risk of harm to individuals through involvement was therefore considered to be minimal. All interviewers were experienced and had recent Enhanced CRB checks and the research team was working to Action for Children safeguarding and complaints procedures.

Values and Approach

The team of researchers working on this evaluation were independent from Action for Children as an organisation. All were experienced social care professionals and/or academics with professional commitment and interest in the area of ethnicity and adoption. This commitment stemmed from personal and professional experience of working with BME children and young people, who have been fostered and adopted. This Evaluation has prioritised the experiences and views of adopters and project staff, and has sought to place the findings within the wider national picture by making reference to relevant professional literature.

CHAPTER 2: ADOPTION AND ETHNICITY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When examining the outcomes of BME children in adoptive placements, two kinds are most commonly described. These are either transracial (the placement of children of African/Caribbean or Asian and/or dual heritage background with white parents), or ethnically matched (the placement of children of African/Caribbean, Asian and/or dual heritage background with parents of a similar ethnicity). Ethnically matched placements are often referred to as 'same race', but, for the purpose of consistency, the former term will be used.

It is interesting to note that most literature and research studies on the placement of BME children in families focus on transracial adoption placements (Bagley and Young, 1979; Gill and Jackson, 1983; Simon and Alstein, 1987, 1996), while only a small number of studies in the UK and USA have been undertaken on ethnically matched adoption placements (Macey, 1995; McRoy et al, 1982; McRoy et al, 1997).

There is also a third type of placement; this is trans-national adoption, which often involves transracial adoption and is becoming more frequent in its use (Dorow. 2007; Huh and Reid, 2000). In order to set the policy and practice context for this evaluative study, this brief review will focus primarily on the literature on ethnically matched adoption placements.

Ethnicity and Adoption in the UK – History, Politics and Policy

By the 1970s, transracial adoption had become an established practice in the UK (Kirton, 2000), which according to Triseliotis et al, (1997), was due to both a lack of minority ethnic adopters and an over representation of BME children in care. There was little recognition that children from BME backgrounds may have had different placement needs to their white majority peers, and even less talk of the related need to recruit BME adopters (Kirton, 2000).

Much of the impetus for change surrounding the transracial adoption debate in the UK was highly influenced by the civil rights and black consciousness movements in the US (Gaber, 1994; Rhodes, 1992). In 1972 the National Association of black Social Workers (NABSW) described transracial adoption as 'cultural genocide', and questioned the motive of transracial adopters, which they argued involved taking away the black community's most valuable resource: its children. The placement of BME children with white families had thus become the centre of heated debate within BME communities and wider society (Graham, 2007:74). In a similar context to the US experience, one of the strongest attacks on transracial adoption also came from a radical black Social Work perspective. In their evidence to the House of Commons Social

Services Committee (in March 1983), the Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professions (ABSWAP) concluded:

> *"Transracial placements as an aspect of current child care policy is in essence a microcosm of the oppression of black people in this society...It is in essence 'internal colonialism' and a new form of the slave trade, but this time only black children are used"*
> (ABSWAP 1983, Appendix 1 in Gaber and Aldridge, 1994).

Influenced by these wider political and ideological movements, by the 1980s, many local authorities adopted a policy of 'racial matching' (Rhodes, 1992: 202), although there was no overarching policy/legislation to stipulate this until the Children Act 1989. Rather, Rhodes (1992) argues that the move towards ethnically matched placements in Britain was due to two new movements: the (aforementioned) criticisms of transracial adoption from black welfare groups and a focus on recruiting black adoptive and foster parents.

One of the first systematic attempts to recruit BME families came from the Soul Kids Campaign (1977). Although the Campaign was not deemed successful in terms of its aim of recruiting BME adopters, it did highlight the importance of a more ethnically diverse professional workforce, and consequently more culturally sensitive assessment procedures and criteria (Barn, 2000). This view was already commonplace amongst anti-racist groups, who contended that white social workers rejected potential adoptive black families who did not meet their Eurocentric notion of the ideal type (Small, 1986).

Despite the recognised need to recruit more BME adopters from the 1980s (Small, 1986), it was not until the 1990s, argues Rhodes (1992: 26), that the onus of the lack of black adopters shifted from BME populations to adoption agencies. It is in this context of anti-racist practice that many writers have argued that earlier failures to recruit BME adopters were a result of institutional racism (Frazer and Selwyn, 2005; Harris, 2006; Sunmonu, 2000).

Policies and Legislation

By the mid-1980s, ethnically matched adoption was endorsed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), local authority policies and government legislation (Rhodes, 1992). According to a BAAF practice note (1987):

> *"We further believe that the placement of choice for a black child is always a black family... It is worth waiting, if need be, to find a black family who will be capable of meeting all the black child's needs."*
> **(**Gaber and Aldridge, 1994, Appendix 3**)**

The Children Act 1989 was the first piece of legislation/policy to acknowledge the presence of 'race', ethnicity and culture in the provision of welfare services

to children and families. The Act states that 'due consideration' must be given to:

> *"The child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background"* Section (22) (5) (c) regarding decisions made about him/her, rendering *"placement with a family of similar ethnic origin and religion ... most likely to meet a child's needs as fully as possible and to safeguard his or her welfare more effectively."*
> (Vol. 3, Para 4.4)

This led to much ambiguity about what terms such as 'due consideration', 'culture' and 'racial origins' meant. Adoption agencies were thus left to decipher the significance of these terms based on their own subjective positions (Banks, 1997) and balance the importance of ethnically matched placements against the practical considerations of a shortage of BME adopters and the time taken in matching such placements. Graham (2007: 76-7) has also highlighted the dangers of perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination based on assumptions of culture as fixed and homogenous.

In 2000, the importance of adoption and the placement of BME children were placed firmly onto the public agenda with the Prime Minister's Adoption Review (2000), which highlighted that BME children remained amongst 'the most difficult to place'. The Government's Public Service Agreement set a target to increase the number of children adopted from care by 40% by 2004-5 (Department of Health, 2003), in order to 'cut out drift and unnecessary delay for children' by setting timescales within which the adoption process should take place.

The status of Special Guardianship was also legalised in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 as an alternative to legal permanence for children for whom adoption is not suitable. This is especially pertinent for BME children, who face delay in waiting for an ethnically matched placement, as BME families are more likely to foster than adopt (Charles et al, 1992; Thoburn et al, 2000).

Without transracial adoption as an adequate option through which to place BME children, and in light of the continued shortage of BME adopters, the numbers of BME children in care has continued to grow significantly. This has led to controversy over whether legislation/policies which focused practice towards ethnically matched placements resulted in more BME children having to wait an undue length of time for placement (Gaber, 1994:7; Rushton and Minnis, 1997).

This was acknowledged by the then Junior Health Minister, Paul Boateng, who reiterated the importance of BME children not being 'left to languish in the care system' (BBC News, 19th November 1998). The debate was no longer (if ever) merely about ethnically matched adoption versus transracial adoption, but about whether BME children's interests are better served in a 'loving white family' than in an institutional environment (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). According to Small (1986), this re-conceptualisation of the debate obscures the point. Rather than positing the problem as between children

trapped in the welfare system versus transracial adoption, Small argues that there are black families willing and capable to adopt, and that the focus should be on the policies and practices that have prevented this development.

To help promote the adoption of BME children, the Department of Health issued advice in its 1993 White Paper, which appeared to undermine the focus on ethnically matched placements:

> *"... in some cases it is clear that those assessing parents may have given [ethnicity and culture] an unjustifiable decisive influence and failed to make a balanced overall judgement of the parents' suitability ... ethnicity and culture are amongst the issues to be considered but they should not necessarily be more influential than any other."*
> (Department of Health White Paper 1993)

The guidance from policy and legislation stipulates that children should be placed in adoptive homes which reflect their ethnic origin, cultural, religious and linguistic background (Children Act 1989; Adoption and Children Act 2002; National Adoption Standards for England 2001; Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2003). However, it is also made clear that children should not wait an undue length of time while such placements are sought (Department of Health 1993; Adoption and Children Act 2002; National Adoption Standards for England 2001; Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2003).

Nevertheless, the importance of sustaining a racial/ethnic identity in BME children 'looked after' who are subsequently adopted remains high on the agenda. More recently, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and National Adoption Minimum Standards 2003 have both reiterated the importance of prioritising race and ethnicity in placement decisions, and have also highlighted the need to recruit more BME adopters.

Racial/Ethnic Identity

> *"For black children growing up in an extremely race conscious society... the concept of a positive identity is paramount."*
> (Barn, 2003: 7).

According to Gaber (1994: 59), having a black identity means being proud of more than one's immediate origins: 'it means actively locating an individual life history within the collective memory of a 'race''. Cross's (1971) Psychological Nigrescence Model specifically considered the process by which a person becomes black; being black in this sense then is defined as a psychological connection with one's racial group rather than mere identification with the colour of one's skin.

Other writers (Banks, 2003; Small, 1986) have also put forward the concept of a 'positive racial identity':

> *"Where children have an unmistakable confidence and belief in self and own ethnic group worth, without being dismissive of other cultural or ethnic groups, and are able to accept and feel good about their own culture and "colour" without denigrating other groups."*
> (Banks, 2003: 18-19).

According to the above definitions, a child's relationship with his/her racial identity is inextricably linked with the child's self-concept, self-esteem and overall mental health (Barn, 2003). It has thus been argued that white adoptive families are unable to provide black children with the survival skills for coping with racism in society (Tizard and Phoenix, 1989: 428), and that only black families can provide black children with the 'psychological armour' needed to cope in an oppressive racist society (Maxime, 1986). This was also recognised by the Department of Health in their overview of adoption research:

> *"The grounds for matching black with black may lie... most notably in the nurturing of a black identity and in defence against racism."*
> (Department of Health, 1999: 10).

In terms of both fostering and adoption, ethnic matching has been regarded as a successful way to place children and provide them with a stable and settled placement. Crucially, it is argued that ethnically matched placements encourage and nurture a positive black identity within BME children, which is seen as central to their well-being (Small, 1982, 2000). However, those in support of transracial adoption maintain that such placements can be as successful and that BME children do not need to develop a black identity in order to develop a healthy self-concept and self-esteem.

In both the US and UK, studies have found no relationship between self-esteem and racial/ethnic identity, and conclude that transracial adoption adoptees do not suffer any more adverse outcomes with regards to racial/ethnic identity than their comparison groups (McRoy et al*,* 1982; Moffatt and Thoburn, 2001; Simon and Alstein, 1987; Tizard and Phoenix, 1993). However, despite the attested success of these studies, differences in ethnic/racial perception between comparison groups have been found to vary. It is the significance attached to these differences that reflect researchers' own theoretical framework (i.e. of assimilation or separatism) and value-laden measures (Barn, 2000).

While earlier studies highlight that white parents of transracially adopted children did not promote a positive sense of children's racial/ethnic identity, with many BME and dual heritage children viewing themselves as white, they nonetheless were concluded as successful, with children who were placed transracially scoring as well, if not better, on various outcome indicators of placement success (Bagley, 1993: 294; Bagley and Young, 1979; Gill and Jackson, 1983:132). Comment has been made about some of the methodological assumptions behind these studies in a hope to understand the biased theoretical frameworks from within them.

From a review of the research on transracial adoption on racial/ethnic identity in the UK and US, Rushton and Minnis (1997: 153) concluded that:

> "*The studies differ in their conclusions and it is not always clear what these conclusions mean. The research does not, therefore, allow firm conclusions on the issue of racial identity*".

This is no less true for the synthesis of developmental outcomes. Many of the studies categorise race and ethnicity in different ways, use different methods of investigation and assess outcomes through various measurements (Butt and Mirza, 1996). In addition to this, sample sizes are often small, and there is a lack of studies with adoptees beyond adolescents (Rhodes, 1992; Rushton and Minnis, 1997).

What appears to be missing from the studies is a contextualisation that occurs in the theory of racial/ethnic identity. That is, BME children in Britain will grow up in a society where race and ethnicity will have profound effects on personality development and psychological growth throughout life and where their childhood will be racialised (Barn, 2003). According to Banks (2003), it is precisely because of this hostility and racism in society that the formation of a positive black identity is likely to need active, specific, targeted intervention.

Despite concluding that transracial adoptees fare no worse in outcomes than children in ethnically matched placements, nearly all of the researchers and writers on this topic tend to recommend that wherever possible, children should be placed with ethnically/racially/culturally similar families (e.g., Banks, 1995; Children Act 1989; Gill and Jackson, 1983; Thoburn et al, 2000; Zeitline, 2003). Although not all involved in the debate would agree with this (Tizard and Phoenix, 1993; Bagley, 1993; Simon and Alstein, 2001), there does seem to be consensus that one of the best ways forward in this field is to recruit more BME adopters (Tizard and Phoenix, 1993; Banks, 1995; Thoburn et al. 2000; Simon and Alstein, 2001; Zeitline, 2003; Patel 2007)

Barriers to Recruiting BME Adopters

A study by McRoy et al (1997) found that agency policies, a lack of sufficient BME and trained staff members and some BME community attitudes were obstacles to successful recruitment of families for older BME children. Further, the BME community felt that as well as institutional/systemic racism, a lack of BME staff members prevented them from accessing these services.

A lack of support and acknowledgement of the possible contributions that BME staff make to ethnic matching has also been identified by many contributors (Rhodes, 1991). These studies point out that the adoption organisations that employ BME staff do not value the contribution that can be made regarding opening up access to potential BME adopters (Graham, 2007; Sunmona, 2000; Small, 1986).

Research findings in the US examining barriers to ethnically matched adoption placements (McRoy et al, 1997) are reflected in the findings of UK based studies that demonstrate it is the agency's commitment to resourcing these placements that is key to achieving them. For instance, studies from Selwyn (2006), Small (1982, 2000), and Thoburn et al (2000), from different perspectives, all highlight the importance of acknowledging the reticence the BME community has towards social work intervention generally, because of institutional racism, and the importance of the adoption agency making them feel welcome and valued.

Various reasons have been put forward for the lack of BME adopters. According to Gaber (1994), it is because black communities were still establishing themselves in Britain, and because they have been put off by the bureaucratic procedures of the British adoption system. Sunmonu (2000: 60) also acknowledges the need for a culturally-sensitive system:

> *"Lack of take-up within the black community goes further than economic and social reasons that may sometimes be overcome. The way that black people are treated within the system is paramount if the recruitment of foster carers and adopters is to improve."*

Both Selwyn et al (2010) and Gaber (1994) highlight the limited promotion of children amongst BME communities, and Selwyn et al (2010) also point to the demographic factors of there being fewer BME adults than white adults, even where minority ethnic people make up a significant minority of the population.

Drawing on demographic analyses undertaken in an earlier study (Selwyn et al*,* 2004), Frazer and Selwyn (2005) report that there is essentially a mis-match between the number of BME children with Adoption Orders and the number of BME adopters. Using data from the Adoption Register for England and Wales (2003), they found that 10% of approved adopters were black, Asian or of dual heritage and 90% were white. They found that while there were slightly more white and Asian adopters compared with the numbers of white and Asian children on the register, this was not the case for mixed parentage and black children; there were 190 adopters of mixed parentage and 'other' ethnicity, compared with 510 waiting children of dual heritage or other ethnicity, and 40 black approved adopters compared with 110 black children waiting.

Frazer and Selwyn (2005) also found that most of the adopters were approved for children under age of two or three, but most children on the register were over two, and had complex needs (i.e. physical/ behavioural difficulties, or sibling groups). This finding is echoed by Thoburn et al (2005), who analysed statistics from the Adoption Register in England and Wales (2004), and concluded that there is an essential mismatch between the numbers of approved BME adopters and children. While most of the children referred to the register had a range of special needs, including age (40% of 'hard to place' group on register were aged six or over), only 28% of adopters on the register were approved to take a child at the age of six or over. Frazer and Selwyn (2005) argued that the emphasis of adoption assessments on

marital status, income and housing are likely to discourage potential adopters whose circumstances do not match this stereotype. They maintain that a eurocentric approach exists in the assessment process which discriminates against black, Asian and dual relationship applicants. Focusing on more structural determinants, Frazer and Selwyn (2005) point to the disadvantaged position of some BME groups in accounting for the low numbers of BME adopters.

Arguably, the mismatch is not because of lack of interest or motivation, as a poll conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of BAAF discovered in 2001 that the BME population were twice as likely to want to adopt children (cited in Fraser and Selwyn, 2005). However, the difficulty of recruiting BME adopters has been known for over 20 years (Black and In Care; 1984; Gaber, 1994). While there have been some positive recruitment initiatives by local authorities to recruit BME adopters, much more work needs to be undertaken to encourage BME adopters to come forward, to provide effective support through the adoption process, and to ensure appropriate placements are made (Dance et al, 2010; Frazer and Selwyn, 2005).

Some BME groups are made up of relatively younger age groups and therefore few adults living in their community have the resources or are prepared enough to adopt. For instance, the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in the UK have family sizes of on average four or five children and therefore may not have the household space or the finances to adopt a child (Modood et al, 1997; Parekh, 2000). In this context, it is important for agencies to understand the demographics of an area so they can identify which group of adopters they will struggle to recruit. It is important that adoption practice has to respond to the prevalence within minority ethnic groups of large family sizes, poverty, poor housing and language barriers (Graham, 2007; Parekh, 2000).

Studies suggest that misinformation concerning adoption is still commonplace in BME communities and this may also be a reason for the reticence of individuals to put themselves forward (Graham, 2007; Selwyn et al, 2004). However, the importance of BME practitioners has been consistently evidenced through better outcomes in the recruitment and support of BME adopters (Selwyn et al, 2004). This provides a strong case for the provision of BME adopters through services with a clear focus on this area of practice. It is important therefore to understand what makes such projects successful and in what ways it is effective, as well as identifying ways in which it and mainstream adoption services could improve.

Good Practice

McRoy et al (1997) found that successful social work practices for ethnically matched placements included increased coordination and communication between agencies, personalised presentations of children, culturally sensitized staff, use of adoption subsidies, inclusion of single parents as

adoptive resources, advocating foster care-adoptive placements, and educating BME communities about adoption.

Furthermore, some key issues and recommendations for practice arising from Selwyn et al's (2004) study which are explored by the Evaluation include:

- Ensuring the recruitment of adopters places children at the centre of the process;
- The importance of Adoption agencies having good information systems that can be easily accessed;
- Agencies need to understand their own communities and the needs of the children waiting for placement. Ethnicity, culture, language and religion should inform the decisions made and services should build a strong relationship within communities;
- Related to the above, it is important that the recruitment process is understood from an adopter's point of view. Also adoption should be promoted through high quality advertising. Assessment should be high quality and there should be good post adoption support – including financial support;
- Social Work matching reports need to be more sophisticated regarding a child's culture and/or heritage to form a positive sense of self;
- Retention of BME adopters is paramount. Recruitment and assessment process requires to be as open, communicative and supportive as possible. This may involve, for instance, holding adopters' support groups as on ongoing process through the assessment.

What Makes a Good Match?

There is still significant debate regarding whether ethnically matched placements produce better outcomes for adopted children in the short term and into adulthood. Some research studies still suggest that transracial adoption is as successful as ethnically matched placements (Hayes, 1993; Thoburn et al, 2000). This argument is particularly promoted if an understanding of positive self esteem in transracial adoption adults is not only based on developing a black identity, but on more general measurements of placement success (Bagley, 1993). However, most recent studies now conclude that alongside a generic matching criteria for all adopted children, for instance, evidence of commitment, flexibility and open communication from adoptive parents (Dance et al, 2010), ethnic matching improves a BME child's resilience against the experience of racism, and the development of a positive identity regarding their ethnicity, religion and culture (Barn, 2003; McRoy et al, 1997). The practice, policy and theoretical implications of ethnic matching will be explored further in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3: ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S ADOPTION SERVICES FOR BME FAMILIES

Introduction

This chapter presents information on the Action for Children Adoption Black Families, which is the central focus of this Evaluation. It explores the background and context to setting up Adoption Black Families, its ethos and values and describes what it is and what it does. The chapter also reflects on the recent reorganisation within Action for Children of its fostering and adoption services and how this has impacted on Adoption Black Families. Adoption Midlands, the mainstream adoption service that has been used in this study as point of reference or comparison for the work of Adoption Black Families, is then described in detail. Comparison between the two projects/services is made at the end of the chapter and the key differences and similarities highlighted.

ADOPTION BLACK FAMILIES PROJECT

Background

Adoption Black Families is one of five dedicated adoption services within Action for Children. Adoption Black Families is based in London while the others are based in Leeds, Bristol, Horsham and Birmingham. The key difference between Adoption Black Families and the other adoption projects is that it provides a dedicated service for the placement of children of black, Asian and Minority ethnic backgrounds whereas the others are generic adoption services.

Adoption Black Families as a project provides a national specialist adoption service and works with children who are referred from local authorities. It also has close links with the South East London Adoption Consortium and the adoption register. The overall aim of the Adoption Black Families Project, which should be considered within the context of Action for Children's strategic aims, was put succinctly by a member of the staff team:

> *"The aim of this Project is to look at providing adoptive parents for black and Minority Ethnic children who are in the care system."*

Action for Children's overall strategic aims are to a) make a positive difference in the lives of children and young people, b) to increase support for the most vulnerable children and young people and c) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Action for Children as an organisation (Action for Children, 2008/10). Its aims are:

- To meet the needs of children through the provision of high quality adoptive families who can offer them a positive experience of family life;

- To improve the life chances of children through adoption and enable them to reach their full potential;
- To address the unmet need for families for children who: are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds; are brothers and sisters; have disabilities; are of school age; have complex backgrounds;
- To provide support services to children, adoptive families and families of origin;
- To offer a service that is inclusive, anti-discriminatory and values diversity. To provide help with access of records and counselling to people previously receiving a service from Action for Children

(Action for Children, 2008/10).

These strategic aims are in the context of Action for Children having a dedicated adoption service for BME adopters. However, throughout this Evaluation the organisation was implementing major organisational change and developing different strategic aims. This change was the result of various pressures upon Action for Children to redesign its service. Specifically, the adoption service had been re-structured to respond to market, financial, and service pressure to balance the family finding needs of children between permanence (adoption and Special Guardianship) and fostering solutions. The key determinants of change in the focus of family finding provision have been financial pressures and the imperative to move to a more flexible service that responds to market conditions while being cost effective. This means that in place of a dedicated adoption service, Action for Children had begun to move towards an integrated fostering and adoption service.

At the time of the Evaluation, fostering and adoption services within Action for Children were in the process of being integrated. The planned strategic direction of the Action for Children's family finding services was to:

- Position family placement services as part of a broader Action for Children offer for children in care;
- Grow fostering services to meet increasing demand for placements;
- Increase the profile of fostering and adoption services to commissioners and potential carers and adopters;
- Deliver services in a consistent and coherent way, in line with regulatory requirements, to achieve excellence both within and across strategic service areas;
- Facilitate a greater degree of integration to realise the benefits of economies of scale;
- Continue to undertake targeted adoption work, to include the expansion of Black Families Adoption, while realising the benefits of integration with our fostering services in England;
- Develop their response to the growing kinship care and guardianship developments as well as responding to opportunities to develop support care;
- Build upon current agile working arrangements and utilise social work staff more flexibly across fostering and adoption.

(Action for Children, January 2009)

Adoption Black Families was created in 2004 in response to the findings of research jointly commissioned by Action for Children (formerly NCH) and Scottish Power and conducted by the Hadley Centre for Adoption in Bristol. This study by Selwyn et al (2004) pointed to the urgent need for dedicated permanency placement services for children of black, Asian and dual heritage in the UK. In particular, the study suggested that there was a misfit between the number of BME adopters and BME or dual heritage children awaiting adoption, with too many 'looked after' BME children not being able to be placed with a permanent BME family. Alongside this key piece of research, Action for Children also provided the professional commitment to design and deliver a project to specifically target the recruitment of BME adopters for BME children. In the first instance, this involved one experienced African/Caribbean social worker setting up the project and convincing others in Action for Children as an organisation and colleagues connected with adoption services, for instance BAAF and the London Adoption consortium, that a specific black families finding adoption project could meet this need. This worker explains the rationale:

> "*They (Action for Children) had research done around what are the needs...and obviously clearly you know the needs in London was to place black and BME children. I felt that rather than doing what a lot of projects do…which is setting up adoption services and then trying to concentrate on black and BME adoption which obviously isn't working…why not actually do a service that actually is only specifically for BME adopters and have that model?"*

It was funded through initial grant funding from an individual who wanted to support a service for BME children who were 'looked after' in London. The Project was initially called London Black Families and it received significant media coverage when it was set up, which provided the impetus for the initial recruitment of prospective adopters.

Staffing and Management

Adoption Black Families had recently undergone re-organisation which had reduced the size of the staff group. There were eight staff including two managers and in addition, the project used agency social workers. There was a Service Manager, a Practice Manager, and four Social Workers (two full-time, one part-time, and one agency Social Worker). All the practitioners and managers were professionally qualified and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). When there is a significant amount of assessment work, the Service Manager employs experienced agency staff for limited time periods. There was also a Publicity and Recruitment Worker employed on an agency basis, and two Administrative Workers, one of whom had management responsibility for administration. The majority of the staff employed were women of African, African/Caribbean and/or of dual heritage. There was only one staff member of Asian heritage working at the project.

Ethos and Values of Adoption Black Families

The primary purpose of Adoption Black Families was to find BME adoptive parents for BME and dual heritage children. This was underpinned by a value base and principles for the placement of BME children which maintained that children thrive and have the best outcomes when placed for adoption with parents of the same ethnicity. The key rationale for the belief in ethnically matched placements was that black, Asian and dual heritage children are best able to develop resilience against racism and a strong identity when placed with parents with a similar ethnicity (Small, 1991; Thoburn et al, 2000). This ethos was reflected throughout Action for Children:

> "There's a clear value base in terms of the focus of the project and finding families for black children, that's more explicit and so the workers that are applying to the project have got that as a very strong motivator." (Action for Children Senior Manager)

> "Everybody here came to this project because they've got a passion to work with black families, you know to place black children with black families." (Adoption Black Families Staff)

Meaning of 'black'

To many, however, the term 'black' signifies African/Caribbean (Modood, 1994) and this is a significant element of the identity of Adoption Black Families. The staff and managers believed that the strong African/Caribbean emphasis of the project was the cornerstone of its success over the years. Staff members' understanding of culture, ethnicity, language and religion was perceived to add value to the assessment process when working with African and Caribbean prospective adopters. This, they suggested, enabled African/Caribbean applicants to 'know' that they would not experience cultural and/or racist stereotypes when they were going through the assessment process (Sunmonu, 2000). As one manager put it,

> "So I think that probably some of the issues are more about black adopters that might have, you know, come up at either panels or perhaps peoples' concepts or misunderstandings about cultural norms and that which again is why this project works and others don't."
> (Adoption Black Families Manager)

Members of the team also pointed out that there was some expertise concerning African languages which at times was called upon when working with applicants. They had access to Language Line but there was a good level of understanding of African culture and languages within the staff team. Interestingly, it was also explained that the issue of infertility amongst couples, but particularly African/Caribbean men, could also be experienced as an issue of identity and ethnicity:

> "Its acknowledging publicly issues of fertility and also feeling uncomfortable about discussing those with social workers and if the

social worker happens to be white, you know, how are they going to get past that point of being [able] to discuss that… so black women are far more able to come forward now and quite happy to go through the assessment…and you could see that men have been dragged along by women and the good thing is that once they come to somewhere like this and feel...you can see them physically relaxing as we talk about adoption and start actually feeling "oh its not as bad."
(Adoption Black Families Manager)

While Adoption Black Families provided a service for prospective adopters of Asian and/or dual Asian/white heritage, the profile image of the project emphasised African/Caribbean ethnicity and experiences as represented in its staff team. There was just one staff member of Asian heritage and the term 'black' in the project name could be read as to imply a focus on African/Caribbean families and children. This provided contradictions and tensions in the project, yet it was argued by staff that a sizeable minority of its current adopters were of Asian/dual heritage (see Chapter 4):

"A lot of families we take on have been rejected by the local authorities...we have placed many Asian children, we have placed some Chinese children and you know there's more going on, there's Bangladeshi among the Asian group...If you talk to the Asian families they will say "we were turned away by so many local authorities", they are simply told, they are literally rejected. They come to us, yes we do place, but it takes a long time and it's difficult because of the lack of children." (Adoption Black Families Manager)

The contradictions regarding a 'black' project representing and serving Asian adopters were, however, evident to some of the staff team:

"I don't think Asian people always like to consider themselves as 'black', but I do think the younger Asian generation are more familiar."
(Adoption Black Families Manager)

It is clear that representations of the Asian experience (in their many ethnicities, cultures and religions) are multi-faceted and have little, if any, commonality with an identity of being 'black' (Modood, 1994, 2005). From the observations of managers and the staff about recruiting Asian adopters and the needs of children from Asian background requiring adoption, the issue of the 'Asian' experience within Adoption Black Families is something that would merit further consideration in the future.

Overcoming institutional racism

Adoption Black Families was premised on the belief that prospective BME adopters do not come forward to provide permanent homes for children because of reluctance to engage with mainstream children's services. This is because the BME experience has been that of institutional racism and discrimination when engaging with mainstream children's (including adoption and fostering) services (Barn, 2003;, Selwyn et al, 2004). As one manager explains, local authorities had not responded in a positive way to prospective BME adopters:

> "Black people felt that agencies did not understand what they were about, a fear of being rejected and not wanting to (approach) local authorities because of a potential stigma and a lack of understanding of the need of families."

To respond to this specific issue of rejection and lack of sensitivity to BME families' reticence to come forward, the Adoption Black Families service was delivered exclusively by black – African/Caribbean and Asian staff. The Adoption Black Families' rationale for an all black management and staff group was that this is a key determinant for their success in recruiting BME adopters. In other words, prospective BME adopters come forward to provide homes for BME children to this agency because they feel comfortable and at ease when talking and working with staff who understand their experiences and concerns and identify with them as black, Asian and dual heritage people. Chapter 5 explores this issue further from the adopters' perspective.

Importance of ethnically matched placements

Placing BME children with adoptive parents that are an ethnic match is located within the core value of Action for Children to enhance the life of all children to whom they provide a service. One Adoption Black Families worker appositely explained their values and commitment to the project;

> "…positive self esteem, awareness, belonging, acceptance, eat my own food, a child having a loving caring family who they identify with, on average three or four families coming through to panel every month, black families and children being matched, making placements, adopted children, same race placements, a permanent home, to practice on my own, to be blessed, to belong to (a) project that provides a service for black adopters for BME children." (Staff)

The above comment in many ways mirrors Action for Children's strategic commitment to providing a quality service for (adopted) children and also a firm commitment to ethnically matched placements. However, importantly, in terms of defining ethnicity, there is an element of applicants self defining their ethnicity as was explained by the Adoption Black Families Manager:

> "'How does the applicant view themselves?" not what we think, so I might look at an Italian and think "well you are white" but if an Italian

comes and says "I view myself as an ethnic minority" which they are, and they have a different culture to English people, then if we feel that we can offer them something that someone else can't then we can consider them if we feel that there are children in the care system that we can place with them . . . . I'd say "how do they view themselves and why have they come to this service?" if they came to us and said "we want black children", that is a different matter then that is "no"'
(Adoption Black Families Manager)

While the use of the term 'black' in the project title may on the face of it give an impression that the project caters mostly for black Caribbean/African children and families, staff members displayed a more nuanced understanding of the fluidity and diversity of ethnic identity as acknowledged in the literature (Brah, 1996).

Recruitment, Assessment and Support

Adoption Black Families adopted the same overall process of assessment and approval as all Action for Children adoption services. This process is captured in the Action for Children booklet 'Thinking about becoming an adopter?'. The process starts with an information pack being sent to an enquirer, initial discussion with the prospective adopters and interview. The project or service manager is then involved in making the decision along with the social worker allocated to the case regarding progressing to application. The process of application involves routine checks (e.g. Police, Health) and the completion of a thorough application form culminating in application to the service adoption panel. Upon panel's recommendation the decision is passed to the agency's decision maker to ratify and if the application is unsuccessful applicants are advised of the independent review mechanism. After becoming adoptive parents, the social workers look to match with children. There is a 10-week placement before a legal adoption application can be made.

The table below outlines the process for an Adoption Black Families assessment of an adoption application.

Table 3.1 Adoption Black Families – Process of Adoption Applications

1. **Initial Contact** - Individuals contact Adoption Black Families and express an interest in adoption – online or telephone enquiry.
2. **Initial assessment** – consultation on 'phone screening out applicants who are not ready for adoption. Initial interview with applicants by duty social worker in office.
3. **Formal Application** – Allocation of social worker. Home Visit – Undertake application process – Prospective Adopters' Report – Attending Preparation Groups – Home Study.
4. **Application to Panel** – Social Worker presents Prospective Adopters Report and prospective adopters for recommendation for Approval.
5. **Matching Process** – prospective adopters look at possible child(ren) to adopt. Explore possibility of Match with Adoption Black Families and local authority social workers. Matching report/ recommendation is presented to Matching Panel
6. **Placement of child(ren)** – Introductions between child and prospective adopters – Adoption Black Families' social worker present/ Local authority social worker attends – often child(ren) placed with short term foster carers.
7. **Adoption Approved** - Pre-adoption placement undertaken. Child settled. Reports prepared. Court hearing and formal Adoption Order granted.
8. **Post Adoption Support** – Adoption Black Families' social worker visits to support placement. Adoption support groups provided.

Dealing with initial enquiries

The process for recruitment and assessment of BME adopters is key to the success of Adoption Black Families. From the first point of contact with Adoption Black Families from prospective adopters there is an immediate response by a duty officer who collects the relevant initial information from potential applicants and sends out an information pack. One of the managers explained how the process of the initial assessment worked in practice:

> *"We have a duty system so one of our social workers would either telephone or e-mail you and talk through…that's kind of the first initial screening process…assuming that you have gone through all that and it is fine, you'd then be invited in to have what we call an initial interview with a social worker...finding out about what motivates you to adopt and then the basic health check, partnerships, any other children, and getting a feel of what your motivation is to adopt and that you had a realistic view...that adoption was about and it being a life-long commitment and about the children in care and that you didn't have an idealised view."*

The duty social worker subsequently invites applicants to an initial interview where their motivation to adopt is explored in depth. From this interview a report is compiled and is shared with the service manager where a decision is made concerning whether to move to a formal application, with forms sent out

and to commence the main assessment, or to explore the applicant's motivation further through inviting them into a preparation group with other prospective adopters. If a decision is made to proceed with a formal assessment, a home visit is arranged with the applicants as prospective adopters. One adoptive couple described this process in positive terms:

> *"After a month we went in to see the agency just to have a face to face introduction like to them and us and they allocated…and it also gave them a chance to understand what we were looking for, our preferences were at the introduction, what are we looking for – a little baby, a boy, a girl, black, white, what is it we're looking for and at that point thereon they assigned us an assessment social worker and she made contact with us within a week." (Adopters)*

The aim of the project was to move from the point of application to a Panel for approving prospective adopters for the placement of a child within eight months. As the Action for Children Senior Manager explained, a business model was applied to the project in terms of timescales and targets:

> *"There is a very clear programme in terms of preparation, very clear timescales when they go to panel, there has been a lot of work in terms of scrutinising the reports and making sure they are up to standard . . . J and her management team have got a very clear focus on timescales because of the number of assessments that they have got to go through."*

The decision to move to a formal application with the prospective adopters is the start of a rigorous screening and assessment process. This involved having a specific social worker from Adoption Black Families allocated to work with them through the 'journey' of their assessment.

Assessment process

Adoption Black Families' social workers undertake the main assessment process, which involves a variety of checks on the applicants' suitability to adopt and involves criminal (CRB), medical, referee and Local Authority checks. This information is collated on the Prospective Adopters' Report and is the basis on which a decision is made to recommend the applicant to the adoption panel for the placement of a child. As one Adoption Black Families manager put it:

> *"That includes homes visits, so looking at people's, as I call it individual profiles, but their life story from you know, the day they were born to where they are now, for couples we will then talk to them as a couple, talk about people's relationships, their journey to adoption, which includes looking at issues of fertility as well."*
> (Adoption Black Families Manager)

Adoption Black Families staff believed that they undertook this task in a way that was culturally sensitive and inclusive that did not make assumptions

regarding individuals' lifestyle. This is particularly pertinent for an adoption project whose sole purpose is to encourage prospective BME adopters to come forward to provide homes for BME children. One adopter's comments supported this assertion:

> "The fact we had a black social worker I feel that was…especially when you've got to lay your whole life bare and your life experiences for somebody else who is black they will understand…" (Adopter)

One of the positive aspects of the home visit and the collection of information highlighted by one couple was that the agency social worker was very flexible in the times she would visit and fit around their busy work schedules. It was suggested by these adopters that Adoption Black Families staff were "more business hours orientated". Another couple commented on having to meet with the social worker during the day, which was not all that convenient given their job commitments.

Preparation group

As part of the process of approval to become adopters, applicants are expected to attend preparation or training groups. This training for Adoption Black Families takes place on a regular basis, on a bi-monthly cycle and is intended to provide training for prospective adopters on the challenges that they may experience when a BME child that is 'looked after' is placed with them, for instance feelings of loss and separation and their journey to becoming adopters. The preparation groups take place over a period of four days over two weekends, and one of the key strengths of the groups run by Adoption Black Families is that they are culturally and ethnically sensitive, because they are exclusively run by BME social workers for BME prospective adopters:

> "They'll be going through preparation groups with other black families. Everybody is there about the needs of black children. Within other projects most of the training groups are mixed, apart from Leeds which used to have an Asian adopters training group."
> (Adoption Black Families Manager)

It was suggested that preparation groups could be a positive experience for prospective adopters because it enabled them to share experiences with other applicants, and to hear from existing adoptive parents:

> "Getting adopter to come and talk at the preparation training where they talk of their experiences and the support they've received from us, that is always good feedback to get and we vary the people now, we'd ask people if they were willing to do this and people are quite happy to help out and come in and do that." (Adoption Black Families Manager)

This was also appreciated and highlighted by adopters participating in the Evaluation:

> *"I think part of the meeting other potential adopters as well, just sharing stories, backgrounds and things like that, everyone's got different reasons for why they want to adopt but it was just instructive to hear other people going through the same process."* (Adopter)

As well as providing support information for adopters, there is an opportunity for prospective adopters to provide an evaluation on the service that they have received from Adoption Black Families so there is continual feedback. Some adoptive parents were so positive about these courses that they would recommend them for all parents regardless of whether they are going to adopt because they cover useful areas such as how children form attachments. As one adopter reflected, "It opens your eyes". Another alluded to the spin-off of informal networks arising from the preparation groups – "Of the 15-17 people that met up for the prep group, five of us are very close and have remained so".

Adoption panel

Once the preparation groups and Prospective Adopters Reports are completed, the next stage in the process involves a report being presented to an independent Adoption Panel (in line with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005) to make a decision regarding recommending the prospective adopters for approval. A visit, just prior to the panel date, is carried out by the project manager or an experienced social worker, and is written up in report form to become part of the assessment.

The Adoption Black Families Adoption Panel consists of members that are independent of the project and are lay representatives and/or current adopters, social work, health, an agency management representative and legal professionals. It has a diverse ethnic composition with Asian, African and African/Caribbean representatives making up over 50% of the membership. One couple commented positively on the ethnic make-up of the Panel they attended:

> *"The Chair was an Asian guy…it was nice to see an Asian face, that's the thing there was black people, white people all round the table and then there's the Asian face at the head of the table and it was reassuring to see because you felt thought there's somebody who's going to grasp where we're coming from."* (Adopter)

The role of the Panel is to scrutinize the Adoption Black Families social worker report and the suitability of the prospective adopters to have a child(ren) placed for adoption. This process consists of the panel discussing the application in private and then if the prospective adopter(s) wish, meeting the panel along with the Adoption Black Families social worker to discuss their application for approval. Should the adopters wish to adopt more children or children of different characteristics than those for which they were approved, they must apply again and are reconsidered.

The prospective adopters have the option to join their social worker for part of the Panel meeting and they are made aware that it will not negatively influence the process if they decide not to attend. By the time most adopters reached this stage they were quietly confident of a positive outcome, though none said this could be guaranteed. They all felt they had been well prepared by their social worker and had worked through any issues that had come up during the assessment process. Nevertheless, attending Panel could be a daunting and stressful event for many prospective adopters, regardless of how "friendly looking" the Panel were:

> *"Whether or not we were ever to have another child depended on the people sat in that room on that day and I actually found that very stressful because they were making decisions on whether we were suitable parents really which most people don't have to go through if they want to have a child they have one and that's it. Nobody says 'well yes you're good enough to be a parent or you're not'."*
> (Adopter)

The experience could be especially daunting for single parents:

> *"I didn't have anybody to come with me as an advocate and although because of what I do in life people said 'you're fine' I really felt that something I should have done was take somebody along with me because when you're stood in that panel with about 10 people staring at you and your life is on the line plus you know in terms of having a child or not, you just think 'I'm alone' so I that was the only thing I could have done better with…being encouraged actively to bring somebody along with me."* (Adopter)

Although most adopters interviewed were positive about their experience of attending the Panel and the way the meeting was conducted, one couple expressed criticism of the jargon and terminology used by some Panel members:

> *"They've got to remember not everybody studies psychology…or got a degree in sociology or whatever…They need to talk to people…in layman's terms."* (Adopter)

Another couple highlighted an issue with delay in being considered by a Panel. There seemed to have been at least a three month delay in their application being considered by the Panel. The reason for this appeared to have been with staffing issues and changes of social worker due to their social worker going on maternity leave. Although not an issue highlighted by the majority of adopters interviewed, the key issue for one couple was that lack of communication had caused them to feel anxious and to consider withdrawing their application.

Although many of those interviewed had been told that the Panel approved their application on the day they attended, the recommendation has to be referred within seven days to the Decision Maker in Action for Children.

This is the Operational Director who will make the final decision on whether to approve the adopters. This decision is communicated by letter. Although this decision should be communicated to the adopters promptly, one couple reported having to chase Adoption Black Families and still had not heard one way or another two weeks after Panel. If the decision is that an applicant is not suitable to adopt they will be advised of their right to make representation or request that their application be considered by an independent Review Mechanism. Staff report that this has happened only rarely.

Matching process and placement of children

After the prospective adoptive parents are approved, the Adoption Black Families social worker assigned liaises with local authorities and the Adoption Register to ascertain if there are any appropriate matches with any child(ren). This involves supporting the prospective adopters through the process of identifying a child, introductions, placement and adoption of the child. However, while some adopters reported being matched with child(ren) within a short period of time following approval, other adopters felt that the process was less than clear:

> *"It (matching process) was...one of the things that we were surprised at...after the panel, the first panel, when you get cleared as an adopter, we thought that our Social Worker would sit down and say `this is how you go on from here, this how I find the children, this is how you might find children, this is what roughly happens' and she didn't, it never happened."* (Adopter)

To facilitate effective matching with children, Adoption Black Families provide profiles of Action for Children adopters on their website and send information to local authorities on a quarterly basis and through regular email updates. Experience of and views about the matching criteria and process are examined further in Chapter 6 of this report.

Support for adopters

The support provided for the prospective adopters is integral to the quality of service offered through the application process and after the placement of a child with them. The centrality of ethnicity and the service provided by BME practitioners is fundamental to the ethos and rationale for recruiting BME families for children. The Adoption Black Families manager explained:

> *"The feedback from our adopters has been that is the reason that they have come to us because we offer that service, because there were lots of other black... lots of other voluntary agencies or local authorities in their area that they could go to, but they felt that, particularly men felt...more comfortable coming to a service which they knew was run by black people and that social workers knew and understood."*

Throughout the assessment process Adoption Black Families social workers will provide support to prospective adopters and the level that is provided will depend on the applicant themselves, the professional judgement of the social workers and the complexity of the case. Generally, adopters were happy with, and said they "got along well with" the Adoption Black Families social worker, comparing them favourably with local authority social workers. Some of the qualities they described included feeling trust in the person but also:

> *"The fact that she'd listen and not be judgemental or at least not look judgemental. The fact that she could talk to us and tell us about similar stuff in her own life. I that that helped quite a lot because she always told us stuff about herself and that helped us to feel more at ease."* (Adopter)

However, there were instances where adopters, even though they got on well with their Adoption Black Families social worker, said they would have liked more communication from the project, usually about particular stages of an application or the date of Panel. An adopter comments on the impact of a particularly long wait following approval to having children placed with them:

> *"We're not just two human beings that have no emotions and we were going through an absolute roller coaster of emotions to know what's happening…I'd phone up and say 'what's happening?' 'oh we don't know yet'. It was horrible…I'm not going to say who was at fault because that's for the agencies to between themselves to deal with but at the time we were not kept in contact with regularly as adopters…I knew nothing, absolutely completely in the dark.*" (Adopters)

The Adoption Black Families manager emphasised the centrality of personalised and bespoke support in the service Adoption Black Families provided:

> *"I mean from my point of view you know, when adopters make contact we are there to support them, during I mean during the assessment they get to see their social worker quite often to do the assessment and they have an opportunity to talk to me as well. So I have had adopters 'phone because there were difficulties with their assessing social worker, in which case I'll have to meet with them, meet their social worker to see if we can come to a resolution."*

Support is also provided by Adoption Black Families after the placement of a child with the adopters before the Adoption? Order is granted. This is to ensure that pre-placement breakdowns are kept to a minimum and that the child and adoptive parents are secure in the knowledge that there is professional advice and support should it be needed from Adoption Black Families.

The project provides support groups on an ongoing basis involving existing and approved adopters. This is to offer the opportunity for adopters to discuss their experiences and gain support from others in the group. Some

adopters had found support from specialist groups outside Adoption Black Families, such as support groups for gay parents. The networking opportunities with other adoptive parents at Christmas and other social events organised by Adoption Black Families were commented upon positively by adopters and that in recent times these seemed to be happening less frequently.

ADOPTION MIDLANDS

Background

Adoption Midlands is one of Action for Children's five dedicated adoption services. It is based in Sutton Coldfield in the Midlands and the service provides a local adoption service for the Midlands area and works with children who are referred from local authorities. It has been providing an adoption service (at times, with fostering) for approximately 30 years. The service operationalises the organisation's overall strategic aims of making a positive difference in the lives of children and young people, increasing support for the most vulnerable children and young people and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Action for Children.

The ethos, operation and performance of Adoption Midlands as a mainstream Action for Children adoption service was used as a point of comparison with Adoption Black Families. The service manager of Adoption Midlands explained how she had been involved for some time in adoption work at Action for Children:

> "I'm called the service manager, which sounds grand, but you know it's the same job as the project manager. I was around at the time when the original research took place, I understand that there was some original research about whether to set up a London Black Families project, so I've been around long enough to see the history of it coming through and I was also very involved in all the meetings as we've gone through to develop and set up the London Black families and then to look into Midlands Black Families and to move it out to the Midlands if you like.'"

The Service Manager made reference to the Midlands Black Families project that is comprised of one Outreach Worker being located in the Midlands to recruit BME adopters. This social worker was one of two outreach Adoption Black Families members of staff located in a different office from the service's London base, the other being located in Leeds. At the time the outreach workers were line-managed by the Service Manager of Adoption Black Families London. This arrangement had subsequently ceased and the two BME workers in question were managed by local Service Managers in the Midlands and Leeds respectively. As the Service Manager explained:

> *"Once we experienced some success with the London Black families, I mean a lot of success in terms of interest, we had always wanted to do something in the Midlands about driving forward our recruitment to black families, we've always had black families coming through us but they come through us incidentally, they make the contact, we meet and greet them and they come to us. What we were doing was to try and actually target black families, particularly as we knew the needs of black children in for adoption and particularly the needs of mixed race children for adoption."*

It was from this understanding that Adoption Midlands made the next step to establish a Black Families Development Worker who was located in Sutton Coldfield, but line managed by the Adoption Black Families worker in Lambeth:

> *"So the first thing we offer from the day I started really. We offered families... any black families 'if you want to have a black social worker that won't be a problem'... so when we started to focus on recruitment, one of my aims was 'ok so this is the Black Family Project and then you come here and you'll be guaranteed a black social worker and you'll be guaranteed maybe an all black training...preparation training group, maybe the panel would be more representative'. We ended up with the development that we would employ a (BME) worker and he would lead on the Midland Black Families project and be line managed by the manager at Lambeth."*
> (Adoption Black Families Manager)."

This indicates that as a project it was very much inter-linked with Adoption Black Families from the start in terms of both its ethos and focus on ethnically matched adoption placements.

Staff and Management

Adoption Midlands comprised 10 staff: that is, a Service Manager, Practice Manager, four full time and one half time Social Work Practitioners. In addition there was one full time and two part time administrative staff. Adoption Midlands had three BME social workers in the team, two Asian and one of African/Caribbean heritage. All the managers and social workers were social work qualified and registered with the GSCC.

Ethos and Values

From the outset of the Evaluation the Action for Children Senior Manager in adoption stated that all Action for Children adoption projects shared the same value base:

> *"We wouldn't place a black child within a white family because we wouldn't get those placements anyway, so on terms of a business*

> *model it would be pointless doing that . . .I do think the value base is across the projects, I think it's to do with the degree and the focus."*

This was reinforced by the Service Manager at Sutton Coldfield who articulated a commitment to a quality service for children, ensuring placements are ethnically matched and to adoption in general. Regarding her team she explained:

> *"The team is very, very committed to adoption and we're transferring that gradually to fostering, mixed team...really very focused on applicants coming through and very . . . I mean not losing focus on the children that ultimately we're placing, but my staff team are very, very committed, knock themselves out you know, a lot of extra work."*

On ethnically matched placements she asserted:

> *"Recruiting black families for me is the way this organisation should be putting more weight and money behind it."*

It is clear that the same commitment to children and families was held by the whole staff team:

> *"I think that we all go out of our way in the work that we do with our families and that is supporting them and that works because we have flexibility from the organisation in how we work."*
> *(Staff)*

The policy, ethos and underlying value base of the two projects appeared therefore to be very similar; that is, they both emphasised a commitment to providing quality services for BME and dual heritage children and their adoptive parents, and to ethnically matched adoptive placements. However, staff of Adoption Midlands were aware of some limitations in what they were able to offer:

> *"We've had families of different ethnic origins including families that we've employed interpreting services for, and we still do the initial meeting to explain, so the staff are aware enough, for example, if a Chinese couple came through and they wanted to adopt a Chinese baby, then the staff are aware enough straight away to raise that as "well we might not be the right agency for you."*

And while it would be true to say that the project had made significant placements of children from BME backgrounds, it had "struggled to make placements" for dual heritage families that were Asian and white. The evidence from Adoption Midlands suggested that Asian, particularly Indian (Hindu) and white couples were the most difficult to find adoptive placements for. The issue of matching dual heritage children who are light skinned was raised as a professional and conceptual challenge for Adoption Black Families. It was explained by the Adoption Midlands Service Manager that a child's identity and complexion, if very light skinned, had presented as problematic

for some dual heritage (African/Caribbean and white) parents to accept as an appropriate match. This issue is further explored in Chapter 6 when considering the practice of ethnic matching within Adoption Black Families.

The Service Manager and the staff team all expressed reticence to support placements that would be described as transracial adoption, based on the rationale that children have the best outcomes and thrive most when placed with adoptive parents that are close to their own ethnicity. However, staff explained that the precise match was something that the local authority purchasing the adoptive placement may dictate:

> *"I think where race and religion come, it isn't something that we can decide, but it's decided by the local authority. So if they say "we want two Hindu parents" or "we want a Shiite Muslim family" or "we want an African Guyana family", whatever they want, that is what you are working to and it doesn't matter what a wonderful resource we have here and we go and say "well one is Sikh and one is Hindu" if the local authority are saying "we want two Hindu parents" they ain't going to make that placement."* (Staff)

Along with the constraint placed by local authorities concerning ethnic matching, staff also explained the difficulties of placing siblings who were of different ethnic heritage to each other.

> *"The hardest group...and that is always a problem when you keep siblings together, we've got three white British (children) and one white British African Caribbean (child), all siblings."* (Staff)

There were three BME staff members at Adoption Midlands and the Service Manager believed that the project provided a diverse, culturally sensitive service, at times in collaboration with Adoption Black Families. The team worked hard to ensure preferences for a black worker or male worker were met but this sometimes caused delays in service for prospective adopters.

Recruitment, Assessment and Support

All Action for Children adoption projects/services use the same processes of assessment and recruitment. As with Adoption Black Families, once initial screening checks are completed and the social worker is clear about the motivations of the prospective adopters, the process of assessment at Adoption Midlands starts with the completion of the assessment form and various statutory checks, as one staff member put it "all the panoply of paperwork".

The process then moves onto the home study and completing the Prospective Adopters Report. How the home study is carried out will vary between practitioners but will cover the same key areas. Pulling all this information together is a time consuming but an essential part of the process. A process of quality assurance, which is the same as that used within Adoption Black

Families, takes place between the social worker undertaking the Prospective Adopters Report with the prospective adopters and the Service Manager at Adoption Midlands:

> *"She (the manager) checks the reports and she decides if there are any information gaps, anything that needs clarity or cross referencing and speaks to the final visit to say "these are the issues I would like you to address or cover again with the family."* (Staff)

A couple of the adopters participating in the Evaluation referred to delays in the assessment process for them as well as experiencing several changes in social worker at the project:

> "*It was an exceedingly slow process not helped by the fact that we had three social workers in total. We had to make a formal complaint…the complaint was dealt with appropriately and once assigned our final social worker moved things along more positively."* (*Adopter*)

Preparation groups

Alongside the main assessment, prospective adopters will undertake preparation or training group sessions. Prospective adopters were offered the opportunity to attend groups with other BME applicants only or to participate in the general preparation groups attended by all prospective adopters with this service. Adopters could participate in these groups at any point during the process, but not before the home study. Staff identified this as a positive element of the service provided:

> *"I think that the adopters are valued, I think when they come to preparation training they are really looked after and if you have single adopters that come you try to make sure there are other single adopters on the prep training. So they don't feel isolated and you know when they call up they're just treated really well…..They get a good service here, they really do." (*Staff)

In addition to preparation groups, Adoption Midlands organised what the Service Manager called a "friends and family evening". This was where the prospective adopters' 'wider family and friends' network are invited and the process of adoption explained. This is an integral part of support and the development process for the prospective adopters of Adoption Midlands.

Project staff used the preparation groups as an opportunity to discuss various aspects of adoption with the prospective adopters as a teaching and learning exercise. When working with BME adopters and dual heritage couples, Adoption Midlands staff explored some of the reasons for an over-representation of BME children that were looked after and the imperative to recruit more adopters to meet this need. They also explained that there will be a different service in respect of matching, for example, there will be younger children to match with BME and dual heritage adopters than in respect of placing white children in white families.

Matching process & placement of children

It was evident that project staff had an understanding of the imperative to provide a service that involved ethnically matching BME and dual heritage children with adoptive parent(s) of the same ethnicity. The process of matching in this respect was the same as explained above for Adoption Black Families.

Adoption panel

The consistent theme of, wherever practicable, offering a service that is tailored to meet the needs of prospective BME adopters was evident in the arrangements for the adoption panel. Prospective adopters are offered the choice of being considered by the Adoption Black Families Panel if they feel this would be more suitable for them. Whichever adoption panel they are considered by, the same process takes place with the Panel and the Agency decision maker. Although there were few adopters from Adoption Midlands who participated in the Evaluation, those that did were overwhelmingly positive about the experience of the Adoption Panel:

> *"We did attend the Panel. The Chair and GP met with us beforehand and while it was a formal occasion it was not frightening. Everyone tried to make us feel at ease. It had been described effectively by our social worker and we felt well prepared."*
> (Questionnaire respondent*)*

The panel can make one of three decisions. They can recommend that the couple or individual are approved; they can defer for more information or they can decline the application. The agency decision maker can then ratify, or not, any of the above decisions. If they decline, the adoptive parent(s) have the right to go to the independent review mechanism (IRM), which is a completely separate body. This can be both time-consuming and costly. For both Adoption Midlands and Adoption Black Families social workers it was important that a thorough and balanced assessment of prospective BME adopters was undertaken so that when they were invited to attend the Adoption Panel there was a good probability that they would be recommended for approval. There are two key drivers for a thorough and accurate assessment of prospective BME adopters, the imperative to recruit them as adopters and the business case, to be efficient with resources.

Support for adopters

The support provided to the prospective adopters by Adoption Midlands again follows a similar pattern to that provided by Adoption Black Families social workers. There is an ethos of team support when undertaking assessment and support of prospective adopters:

> *"If one social worker is assessing a family there is another social worker who will do a final visit for them, they will come to prep training*

*and meet another set of social workers, they will come to another
explaining workshop. They get to see all of the social workers on the
project so that any one of us can pick up and assist really."*
(Staff)

However, preparation groups and the features of pre and post support were
said to be the same between the different projects by the Senior Manager for
Adoption. In addition to this support, the Adoption Midlands staff host BAAF
and local adoption consortium events. Continuity and teamwork were the key
themes emphasised by staff:

> *"We say to adopters "if you come back, in the first instance, you'll come
> to the social worker that did your assessment, if not, there is somebody
> else that will have that post adoption support", and we still offer that
> post adoption support, lifelong and I think that is something to be proud
> of really." (*Staff)

As with Adoption Black Families, post adoption support was provided and
available if adopters intended to access these services. As one adoptive
couple remarked:

> *"They didn't just you know 'here's your daughter off you go'. They've
> always been there to support you afterwards and have good
> support...they have two big events annually where we get together with
> our children...so that they grow up knowing that there's this whole
> family of children who are in exactly the same situation."*
> (Adopter)

Summary and Comparison of Projects

The central rationale and ethos of both Adoption Black Families and Adoption
Midlands was that black, Asian dual heritage and minority ethnic children
thrive best when placed with adoptive parents of a similar ethnic origin. Both
projects aimed to put children at the centre of their work and, specifically,
worked to ensure that children of BME and dual heritage were matched with
adoptive parents of a similar ethnicity, religion and culture. Service Managers
of both projects demonstrated a significant amount of experience and
expertise in the field of adoption. They were both committed to ethnically
matched placements and articulated a coherent theoretical, policy and
practice rationale to substantiate this position.

Adoption Black Families is a dedicated project for the recruitment of BME and
dual heritage adoptive parents and this was the key difference with the
comparison project, Adoption Midlands. This difference was manifested in a
sole focus on recruiting BME adopters and matching them with children of
similar ethnicities. Adoption Midlands, in contrast, provided a generic service
for the recruitment of adopters that included BME and dual heritage applicants
but also the recruitment of white families and the placement of white children.

The two projects differed in the composition of their staff groups. Adoption Black Families had specifically recruited only staff of BME and dual heritage and Adoption Midlands had three BME staff that were part of a predominantly white staff team. More specifically however, the staff group at Adoption Black Families constituted women of African/Caribbean heritage and one woman of Asian heritage. The composition of this staff group created a culture and ethos that was entirely focused on recruiting BME adopters and making ethnically matched placements. This focus of an all BME staff group for the project had arguably enabled them to develop and utilise a broader expertise and insight into the myriad of ethnicities, cultures and religions of BME adoptive parents and children.

CHAPTER 4: ADOPTERS AND CHILDREN PLACED BY ADOPTION BLACK FAMILIES AND ADOPTION MIDLANDS

Introduction

This chapter presents statistical information on black, Asian and dual heritage adopters recruited and BME and dual heritage children that have been placed from each of the projects separately over a five year period from April 2004 to September 2009. For each of the projects, we have analysed the statistical information available to present a picture of some key characteristics of adoptive parents such as the number of couples and single parents, and their ethnicity and religion. The number of children placed during this same period, alongside the children's age, sex, ethnicity and religion is also examined. Finally, we draw some key points across the data.

Adoption Black Families Adopters

The figures and charts in this Chapter were derived from data made available to the Evaluation Team from Adoption Black Families for the period 2004-2009. Ethnic categories used in this analysis are as recorded by Adoption Black Families, which included use of the term 'Asian' to encompass Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese etc. Couples from different ethnic backgrounds were classified as dual heritage; couples who shared the same ethnic background were classified as same ethnicity and individuals who had adopted a child on their own were classified as single parent adopters. In order to obtain a more coherent picture of the adoptive parents recruited (as opposed to the number of placements made), the ethnicity of parents who took multiple children have only been counted once in this analysis.

Single adopters

Single adopters (16 individuals) accounted for 21% of the total adopters with Adoption Black Families with 79% being couples in marriages or partnerships. All single adopters were women.

Ethnicity

Most single adopters were from a black Caribbean or black African ethnic background (and therefore constituting a same ethnic background), while one was from a dual heritage background. Of the 78 adopters with whom children had been placed between 2004-2009, exactly half were in dual heritage relationships, where each birth parent was from a different ethnic background. Adopters in same ethnicity relationships accounted for 29% of adoptive couples, and included couples where both individuals were from black Caribbean, black African, black African/Caribbean, Asian or Greek backgrounds. This seems to reflect the main focus of Adoption Black Families to recruit adopters for black, Asian and dual heritage children.

Figure 4.1 below shows a further breakdown of adopters' ethnicities. The largest group are clearly from dual heritage backgrounds, followed by black Caribbean. Others were from an Asian background, black African, and black African/Caribbean background. The remaining 1% of adoptive couples were Greek.

Figure 4.1: Ethnicity of Adopters at Adoption Black Families
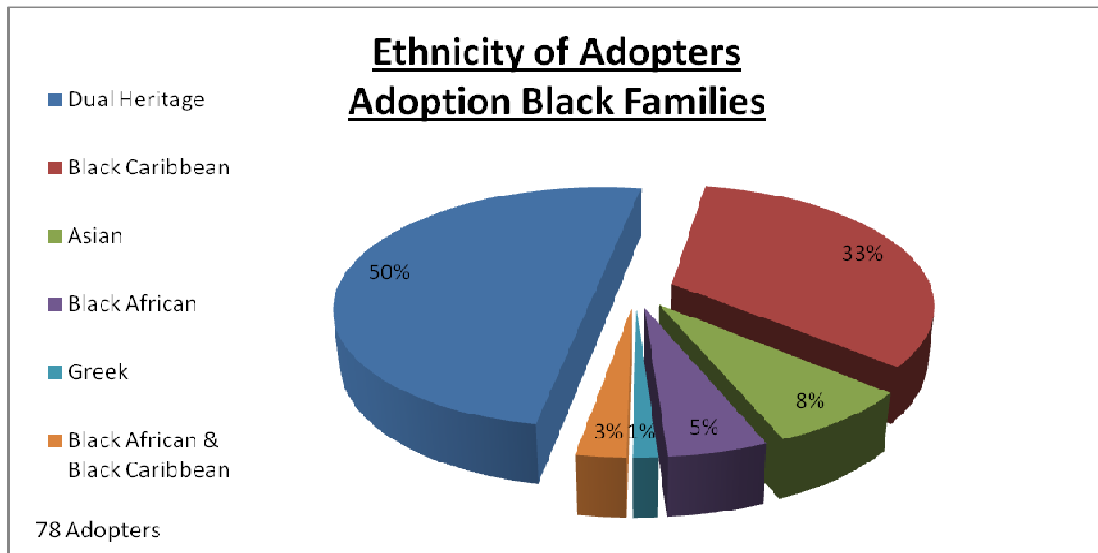
A further breakdown of the ethnic make-up of dual heritage couples (see Figure 4.2 below) shows that these were predominantly where one partner was white and the other of minority ethnicity, the dominant minority ethnic categories being Asian, black Caribbean and black African.

Figure 4.2: Ethnic Make-up of Dual Heritage Couples at Adoption Black Families
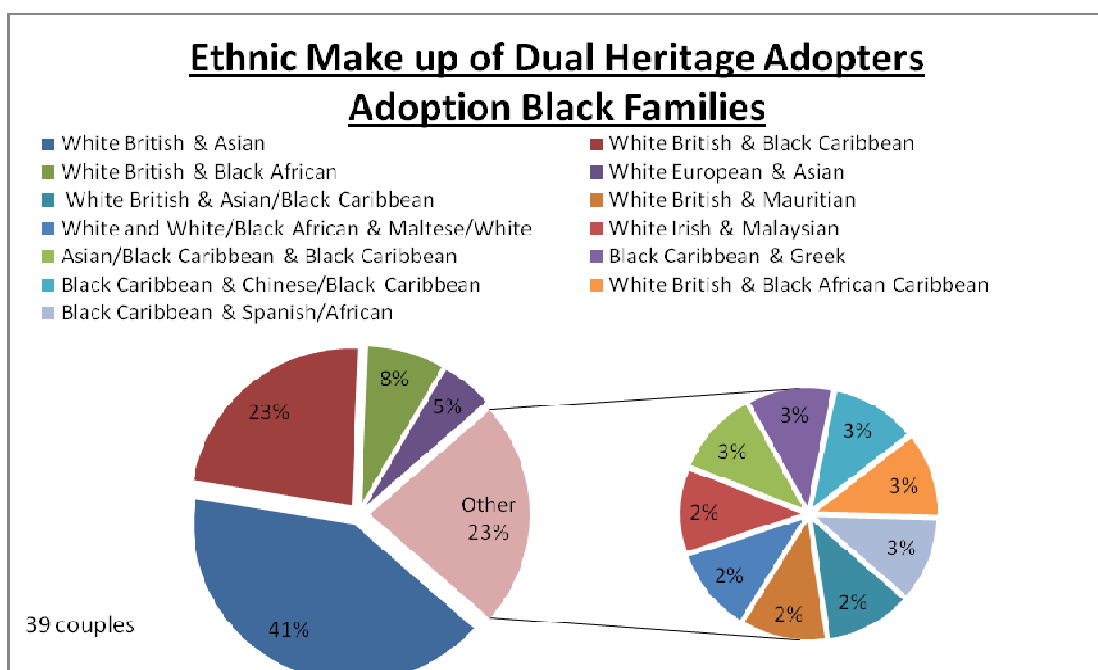
White British & Asian couples are the largest ethnic group in this cohort of adoptive couples, representing 41% of adoptive couples in mixed ethnicity relationships, while white European and Asian couples represent an additional 8% of couples reflecting an Asian ethnicity. This is followed by 23% of white British & black Caribbean couples, and 8% of white British/black African couples.

Couples in the 'other' category (23%) reflected a wide variety of ethnic groups, each representing 2-3% of the total number of adoptive couples in dual heritage relationships. This included relationships where both adopters were from minority ethnic backgrounds and individual adopters from dual heritage backgrounds.

Given Adoption Black Families' focus on recruiting adoptive parents for black, Asian and dual heritage children, re-coding adoptive couples' ethnicity into these groups allowed analsyis of the number of adoptive couples recruited within each of these groups.

Figure 4.3 below shows the category 'black' was the largest group, which represents 63% of all adoptive parents' ethnicity. This included black Caribbean, black African and those categorised by Adoption Black Families as 'black African/Caribbean' adopters, as well as adopters from white and black Caribbean, white and black African and white and black African/Caribbean ethnic backgrounds. Couples from an Asian background were the second largest group, representing 31% of adopters . This group also included couples where one partner was from dual heritage white British and Asian ethnic backgrounds

Couples in relationships representing both Asian and black minority ethnicities constituted 2% of adoptive couples (indicating that they could possibly be a suitable ethnic match for a child of the same, or either ethnicity), and minority ethnic groups represented in the Other ethnic group (4%) included Greek, Mauritian, and Malaysian.

Figure 4.3: Summary: Minority Ethnic Groups represented by Adopters at Adoption Black Families
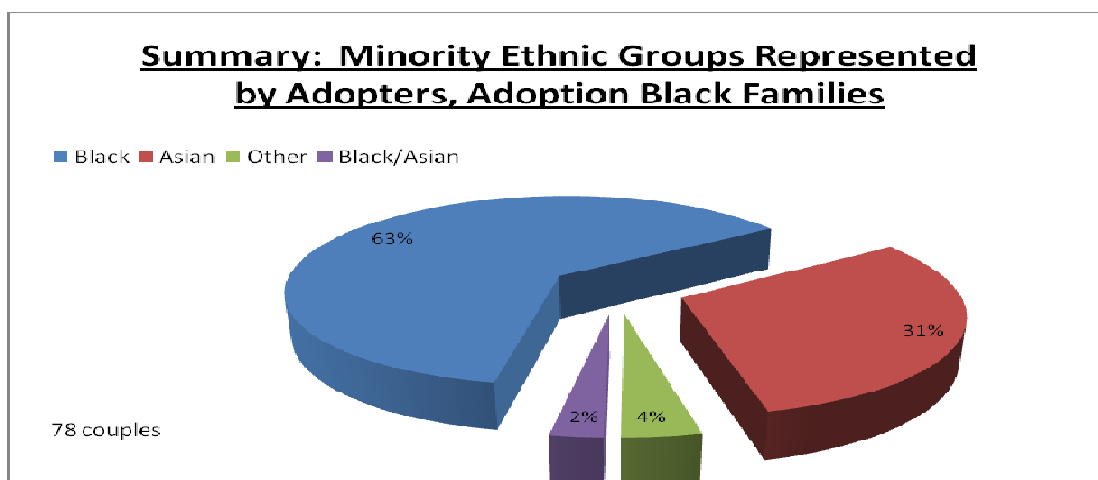
Religion

The majority of adoptive parents were recorded as having stated a religion. Christian adopters (including Baptist, Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Church of England) represented the majority of adopters' religions at 59% of the 78 adoptive couples.

The second largest group was Islam, with 10% of adopters coming from this religion, followed by 8% of Hindu adopters. Six percent of adopters had no religion specified or were agnostic; 4% of adoptive parents described themselves as non-practicing Christians, and 1% of adopters came from a Greek Orthodox religious background. The remaining 11% of adoptive parents came from dual religious backgrounds. This consisted of Christian & Hindu couples (4%), Christian & Muslim couples (4%), Christian & Sikh couples (3%), and a couple from Christian & Zoroastrain (1%) religious backgrounds.

Figure 4.4: Religion of Adoptive Parents at Adoption Black Families


44
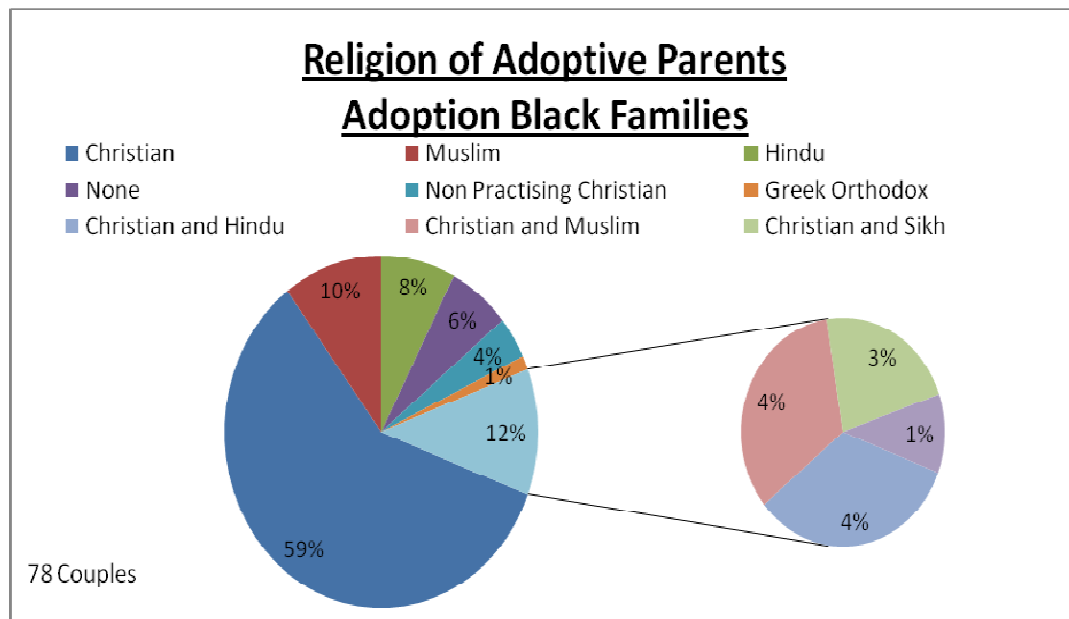
Children Placed by Adoption Black Families

Between April 2004 and September 2009, 98 placements of BME children with adoptive families were made by Adoption Black Families. Of these, one adoptive placement disrupted. The analysis that follows is therefore based upon the records of 97 placements.

In its first year, from April 2004-March 2005, Adoption Black Families made five adoptive placements, which sharply rose to 17 the following year. This declined to 14 placements in the next year (April 2006-March 2007), and rose and remained steady at 23 placements per year from April 2007-March 2009. From April to September 2009 (6 months) a further 14 placements were made, which we have used to project the figure of 28 placements for the whole year.

Figure 4.5: Number of Children Placed by Adoption Black Families between 2004-2009
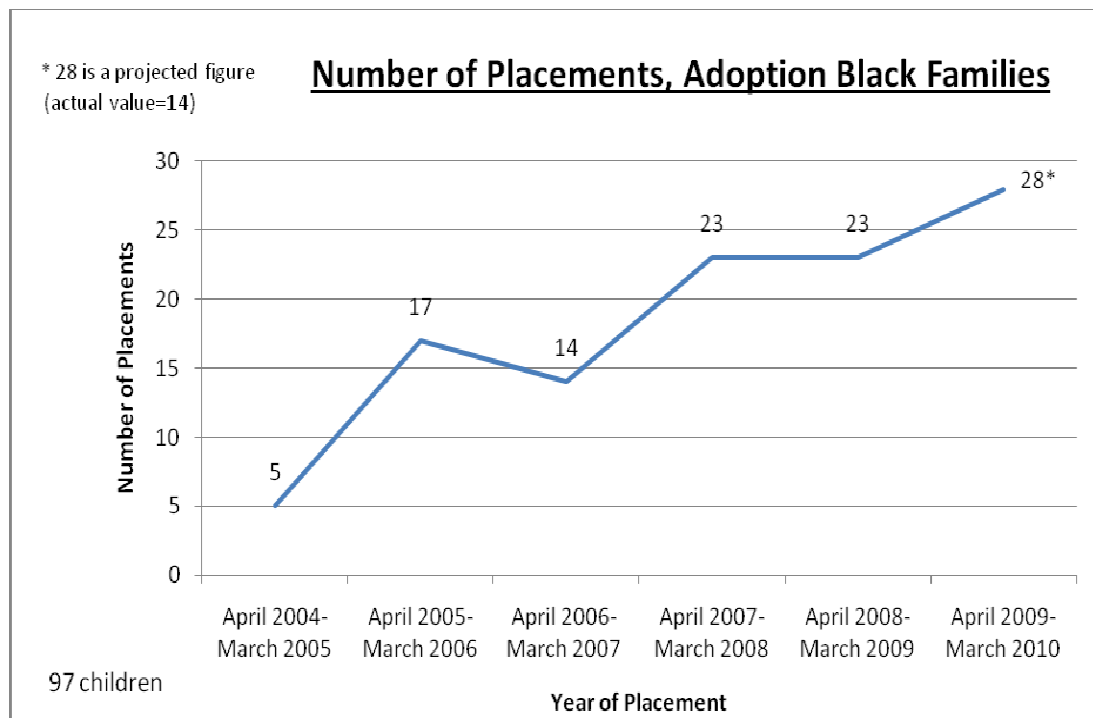
Children's age at placement

Over half the 97 children placed by Adoption Black Families were under two years of age. At placement, 20 children were under 11 months, 33 children were aged between 1-2 years, 24 children were aged between 2-3 years, 10 children were aged between 3-4 years, six children were aged between 4-5 years, and four children were aged 5 years or older. Figure 4.6 below shows the spread of ages of children placed.

Figure 4.6: Age of Children at Placement by Adoption Black Families

Age of Children at Placement
Adoption Black Families
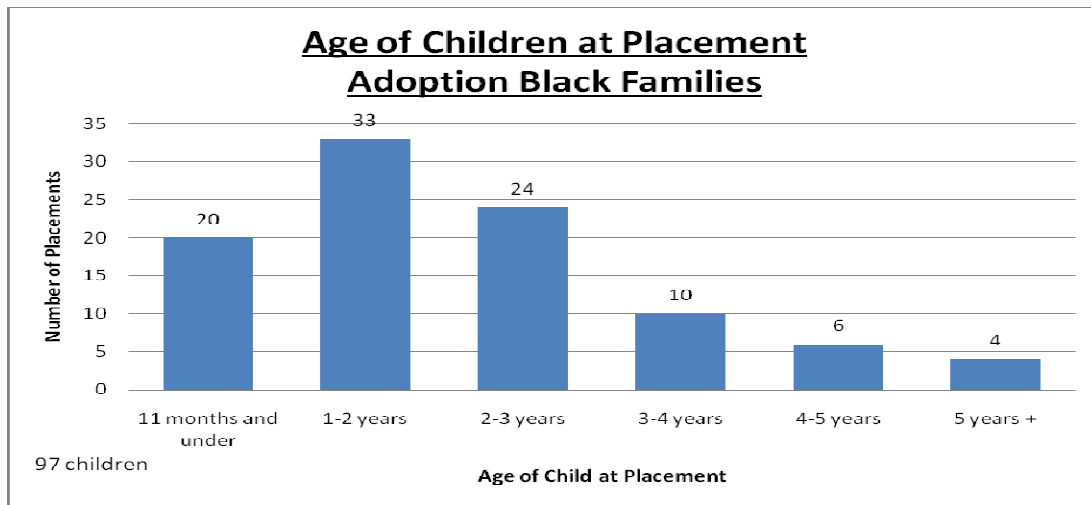
97 children

Sex of children placed

The number of boys (n=52) who have been placed for adoption by Adoption Black Families was 54%, and was slightly higher than the number of girls placed (n=45) at 46%.

Ethnicity of children placed

Of all 98 children placed between April 2004 to September 2009, 58% were from a dual heritage background (i.e. children with birth parents from different ethnic backgrounds). Bblack Caribbean children represented 16% of all children placed, Asian children represented 8%, and black African/Caribbean (term used by Adoption Black Families) children and black African children represented 6% respectively. Of the remaining 6 children placed, 5 came from 'other' ethnic backgrounds including Greek, Mauritian, Moroccan, Chinese and white British. No ethnic background was recorded for one child.

Figure 4.7: Ethnicity of Children Placed by Adoption Black Families

Ethnicity of Children Placed
Adoption Black Families
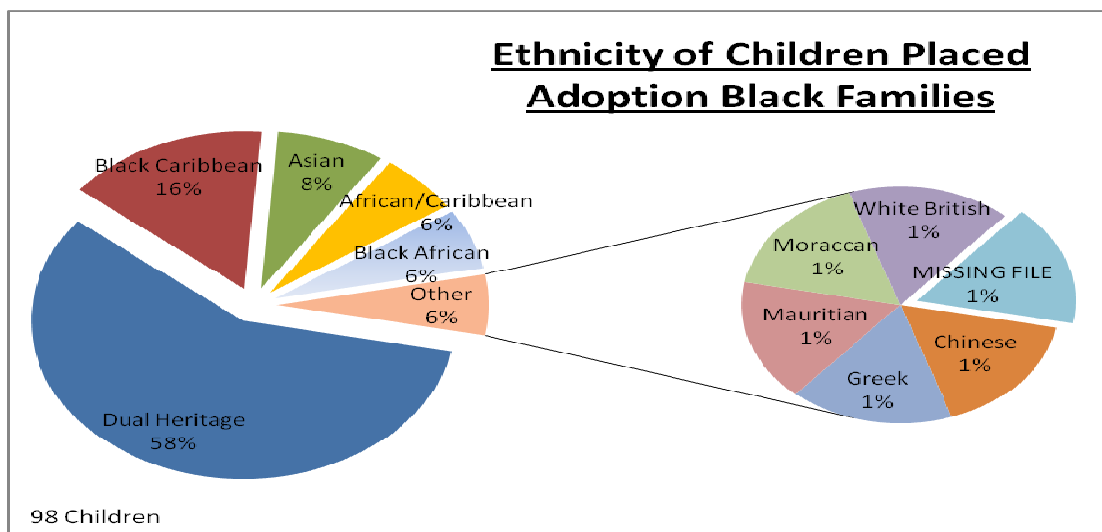
98 Children

Further analysis of the ethnic make-up of the cohort of dual heritage children placed shows that this overarching category encompassed a wide range of minority ethnic groupings and combinations, the majority of which included children from an ethnic background where one birth parent was white British and the other either black Caribbean, black African, or Asian. See Figure 4.8 below for detail. The range of ethnic groupings represented under 'Other' is shown in the smaller pie chart and shows the complexity involved in categorising children's ethnicity for placement needs, some of which cannot easily be categorised for identity or placement purposes.

Figure 4.8: Ethnic Make-up of Dual Heritage Children Placed by Adoption Black Families
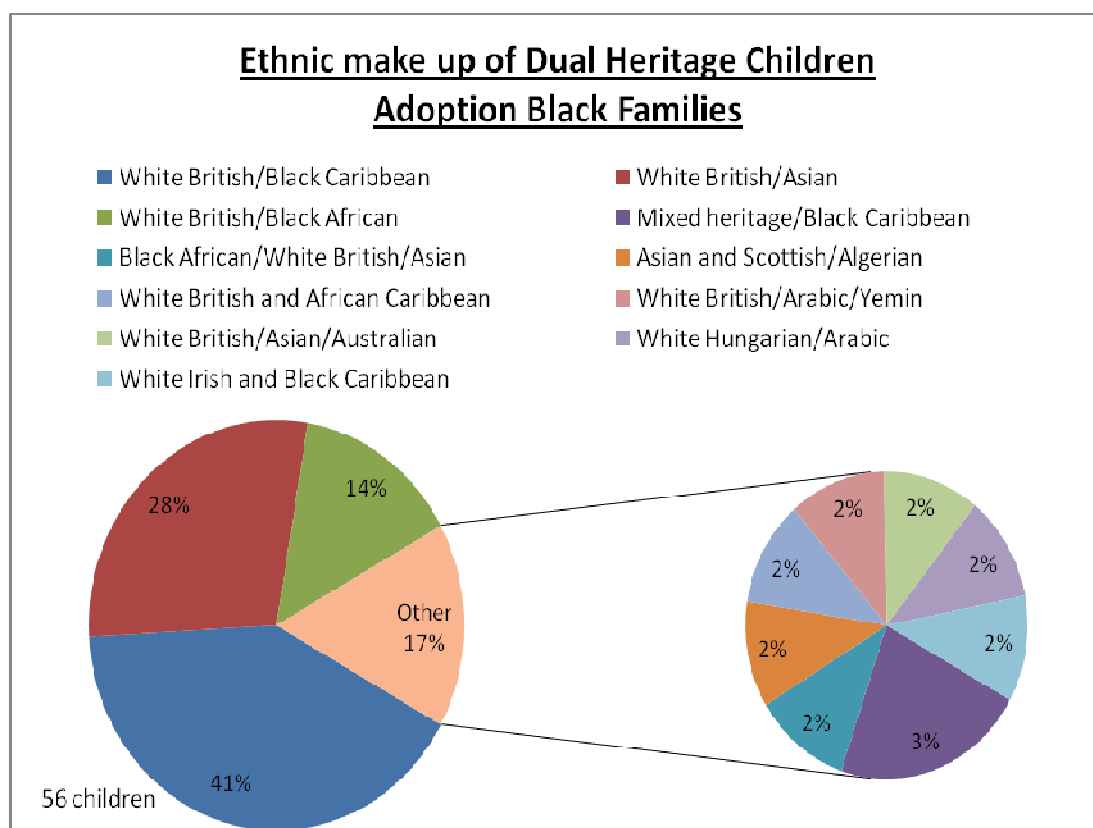
Of this cohort of dual heritage children (n=56), the largest group (41%) were from a white British/black Caribbean background. White British/Asian children were the second largest ethnic group placed through Adoption Black Families, and represented 28% of the total number of dual heritage children placed. White British/black African children account for a further 14% of dual heritage children placed.

The 'Other' category (17%) reflects a range of dual heritages and minority ethnic groups that are not easily categorised. 'Mixed heritage/black Caribbean' (as defined by Adoption Black Families) children (4%) represented the largest of this 'other' cohort, and each of the remaining ethnic groups in this 'other' category represented 2% (n=1) of the 56 children, the diversity of

which gives some indication of the complex ethnic and cultural needs of children seeking adoptive homes.

Summary of minority ethnic groups of children placed

Given the focus of Adoption Black Families on placing children from black, Asian and dual heritage backgrounds, a summary of the minority ethnic categories of the children placed through the Project allows a more coherent (if less detailed and meaningful) picture of these ethnic groups. For children of dual heritages, this involved re-coding their mixed ethnic groups to their minority ethnicity. This analysis is represented in the following Chart.

Figure 4.9: Summary: Minority Ethnic Groups Represented by Children Placed by Adoption Black Families
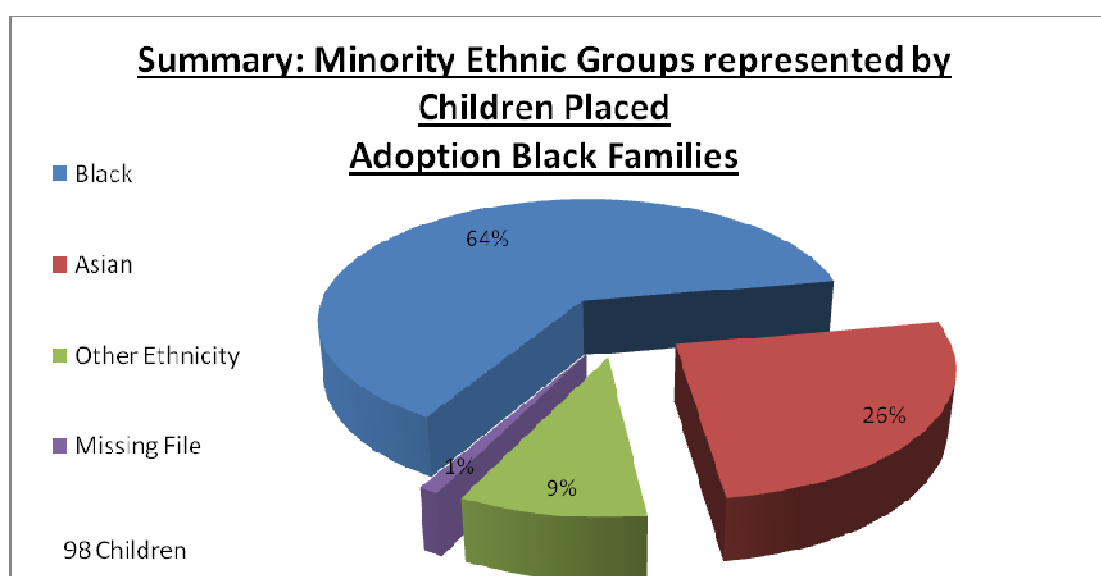
Of the 98 children placed, the largest percentage (64%) of children placed could be categorised as 'black'. This group includes a combination of children where one or both birth parents or grandparents were from black Caribbean and black African backgrounds. Children from an Asian ethnic background represent just over a quarter of the children placed. This includes children of dual heritages, namely children from white British/Asian backgrounds.

Children from ethnic backgrounds other than black and Asian represent around a tenth of the remaining children placed through Adoption Black Families. This includes children with two birth parents from either a Greek, Mauritian, Moroccan, Chinese and white British ethnic background, and a child with one Arabic birth parent. This also includes dual heritage children with more than one minority ethnicity, including black Caribbean/Chinese, Asian/black African, Asian/Algerian and Arabic/Yemin. There was no ethnic cateogory given for one child placed by Adoption Black Families.

Religion of children placed

Of the 98 children placed by Adoption Black Families a high proportion (45%) were recorded as having no religion. Of the children with a recorded religion, 30% were Christian (including Catholic, Church of England, Methodist, Baptist and Anglican), and 13% were Muslim. The remainder of children were Hindu, Sikh, Jehovah's Witness and Greek Orthodox.

The remaining 3% of children came from dual religious backgrounds (with one birth parent of each religion), including Hinduism/Sikhism, Islam/Sikhism and Christianity/Islam. Figure 4.10 below provides a detailed breakdown.

Figure 4.10: Religion of Children Placed by Adoption Black Families
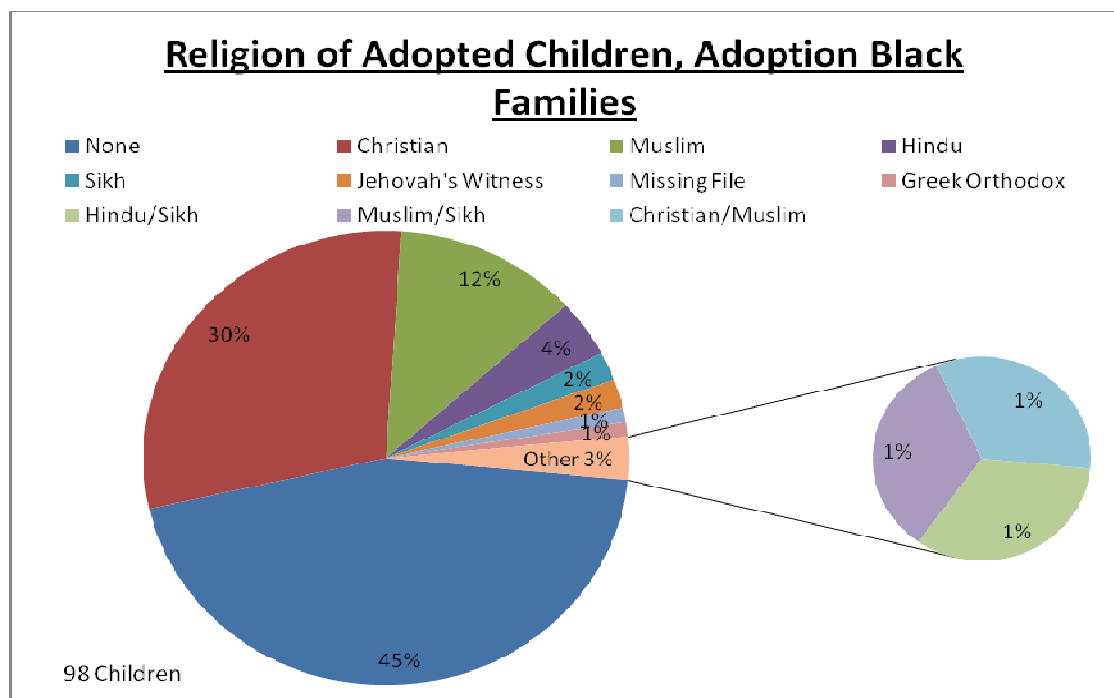
Stages of the Adoption Black Families Adoption Process

From initial enquiry to approval as an adoptive parent, the average time taken was 11 months. In other words, prospective adopters were approved on average within a year of making an enquiry. The shortest time taken to approve prospective adopters was just four months, while the longest time was 26 months (range of 22 months).

Looking at the time taken from approval to placement of a child, that is, how long it took to make a placement once adopters had been approved (rather than any of the other processes involving screening and assessing initial enquirers), the average time taken by Adoption Black Families was eight months.

Taking the process from the start of initial enquiry to legal adoption, the average time was 27 months. The shortest time taken for a couple to legally adopt a child from their initial enquiry was 13 months, and the longest time taken was 53 months. Of the 97 children placed, only 81 records were used for this analysis, as 16 adoptions were in process at the time of analysis.

Table 4.1: Time Taken at Stages of the Adoption Process at Adoption Black Families

	Enquiry- Approval (N=97)	Enquiry-Placement (N=97)	Approval-Placement (N=97)	Enquiry-Adoption (N=81)
Mean	11 months	18 months	8 months	27 months
Mode	7 months	16 months	15 months	29 months
Range	22 months (4-26)	42 months (1 - 43)	29 months (1-30)	40 months (13-53)
Median	10 months	18 months	7 months	27 months

Adoption Midlands Adopters

The figures and charts are derived from data available from Adoption Midlands about adopters and children for the time period 2004 - 2009 and use the categories Adoption Midlands use. Although 26 children had been placed through Adoption Midlands during this five year period, 11 of these were multiple or sibling placements. Thus in order to obtain a more coherent picture of the adoptive parents recruited (as opposed to the number of placements made), the ethnicity of parents who took multiple children have only been counted once in this analysis. Couples who came from different ethnic backgrounds were classified as dual heritage, couples who shared the same ethnic classification have been classified as 'same ethnicity' and individuals who had adopted a child on their own were classified as single parent adopters.

Single adopters

Three single adopters accounted for 18% of the total adopters with Adoption Midlands with the remaining 82% of adopters comprising couples in marriages or partnerships. All three single adopters were women and were classified as African or African/Caribbean.

Ethnicity

Of the 17 adoptive parents, couples in a dual heritage relationship, where each individual came from a different ethnic background, represented 65% of adoptive couples' ethnicity. Of the remaining 35% of 'other' adopters representing adoptive homes of the 'same ethnicity', 17% were in relationships where both adoptive parents had the same ethnicity, and 18% were single adopters (all were African or African/Caribbean).

Figure 4.11: Ethnicity of Adopters at Adoption Midlands
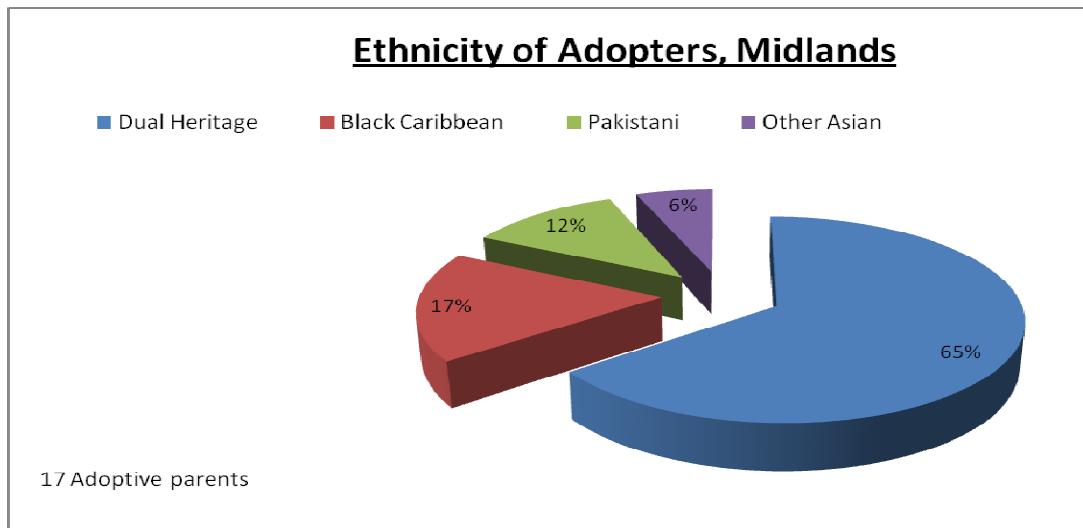
Of the 17 adoptive parents with whom children were placed, 65% were in dual heritage relationships, representing the majority of couples' ethnic groups. Black Caribbean adopters represented the second largest ethnic group, constituting 17% of all adopters, followed by 12% of Pakistani couples and 6% of couples categorised as 'other Asian'.

Figure 4.12: Ethnic make-up of dual heritage couples with Adoption Midlands
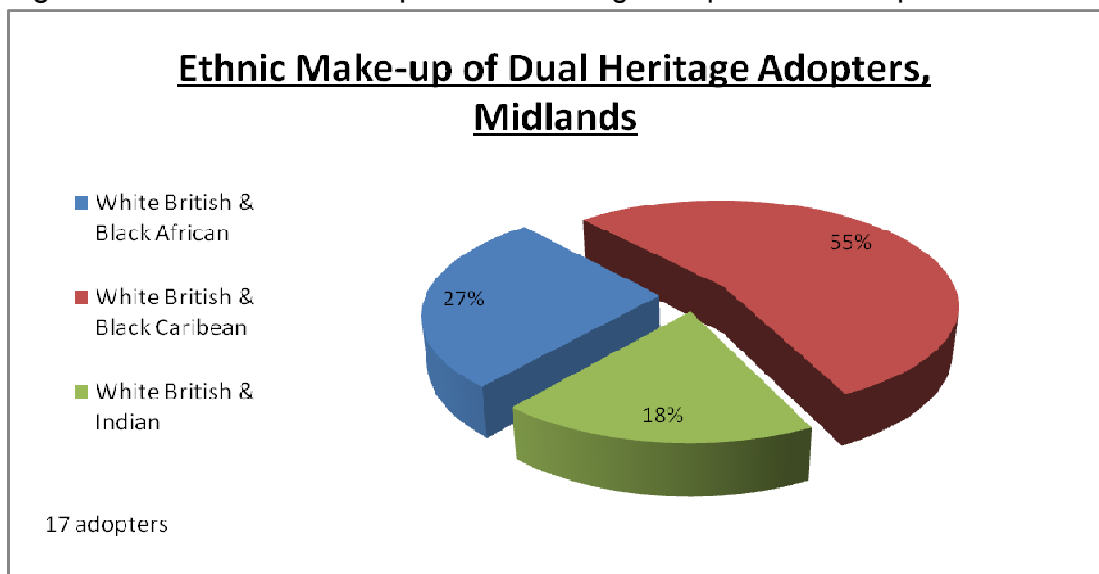
As the above chart shows, of the eleven couples in dual heritage relationships, the most common were those from a white British and black Caribbean background. just over a quarter were from a white British and black African background, and nearly a fifth were from a white British and Indian ethnic background.

Re-coding adopters' ethnicity into groups that more closely resemble Census categories and the groups Action for Children aims to work with shows that most adoptive parents who had children placed with them through Adoption Midlands were 'black', that is, 71% of all BME adopters. This grouping comprises black Caribbean, black African and white British & black Caribbean couples and single parents. Asian couples made up the remaining 29% of adopters, and included couples from Pakistani, white British & Indian and 'Other Asian' ethnic backgrounds. See chart below.

Figure 4.13: Summary: Minority Ethnic Groups Represented by Adopters at Adoption Midlands
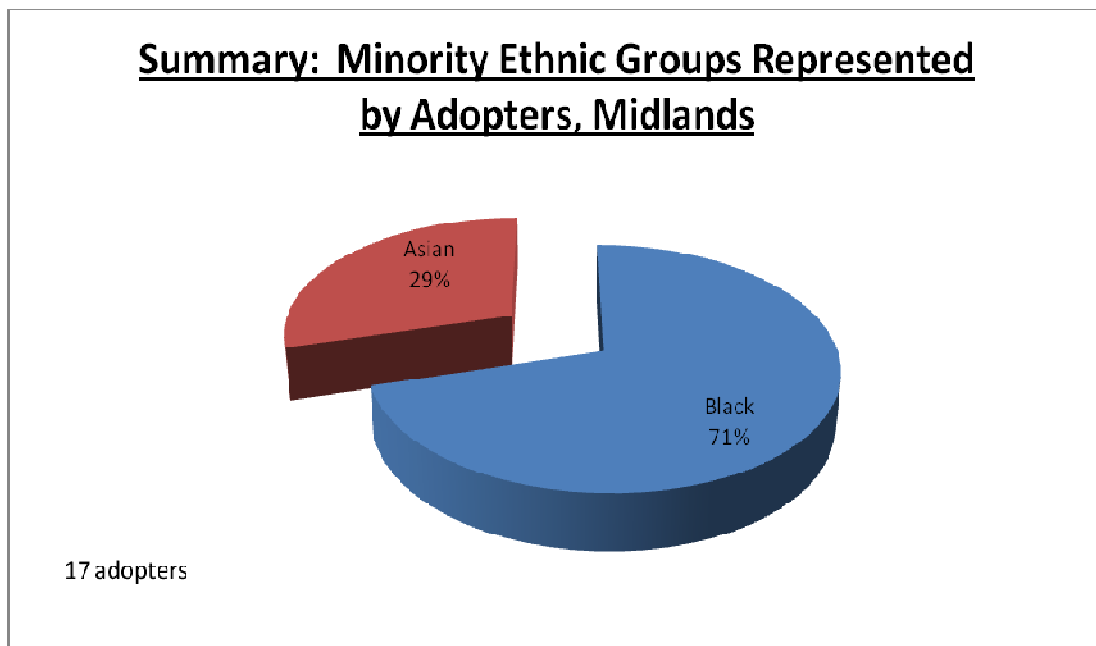
Children Placed by Adoption Midlands

From April 2004- March 2005, no placements of BME children were made by Adoption Midlands. From April 2005 to March 2006 three placements were made, which decreased to two the following year. This number rose sharply to 10 in the next year and decreased to eight placed between April 2008 and March 2009. From April 2009 to September 2009 (six months) three placements of BME children were made, which have been used to project the number of placements for a full year up to March 2010 at six placements. This is shown below in Figure 4.14

Figure 4.14: Number of Children Placed by Adoption Midlands between 2004-2009

Number of Placements: BME Children, Midlands

*6 is a projected figure, (actual number=3)
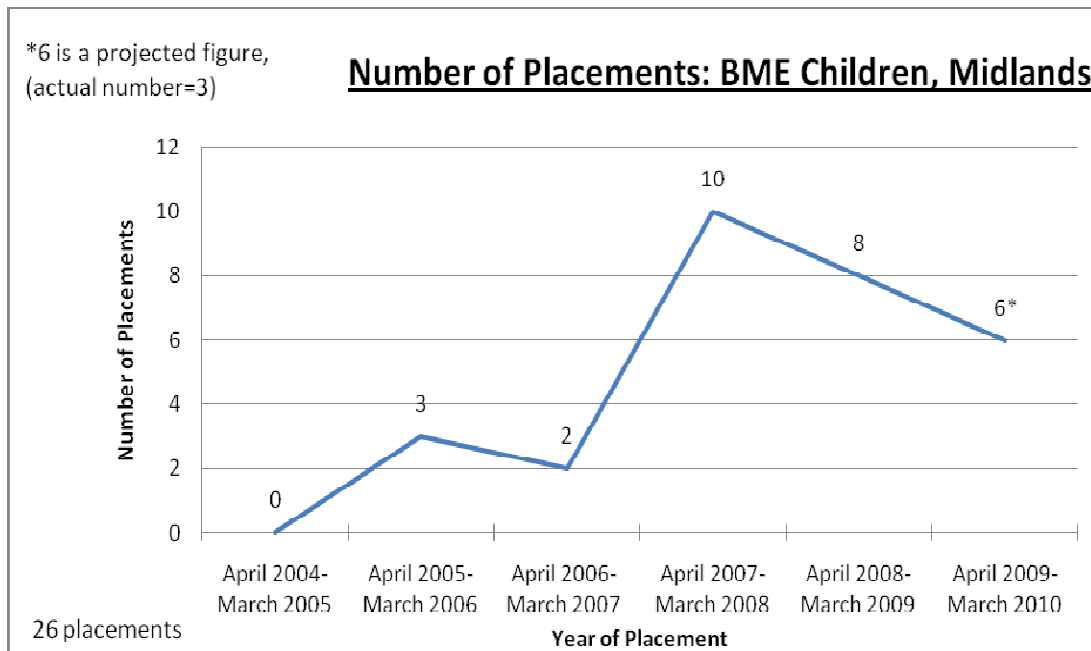
26 placements

Children's age at placement

The largest age group of BME children placed by Adoption Midlands were children aged between two and three years (n=11). Four of the children placed were under 11 months, and four children were aged one to two years. Two children were aged between three to four years, three children were aged between four to five years and two children were aged five years or older.

Figure 4.15: Age of BME children at placement by Adoption Midlands

Age of Children at Placement, Midlands
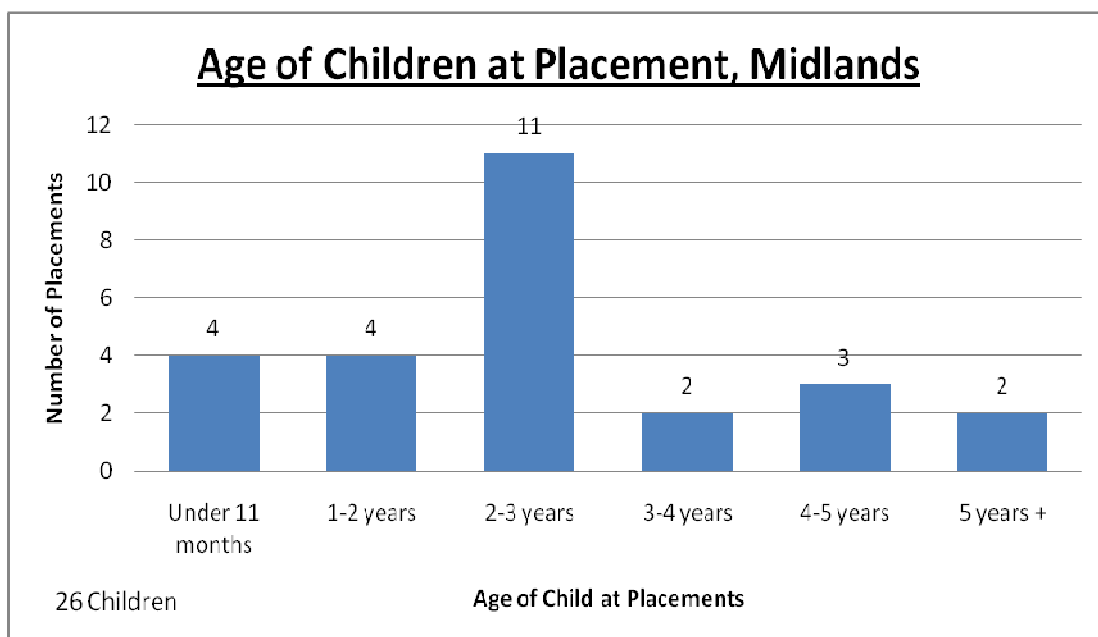
26 Children

Sex of children placed

Between April 2004 - September 2009 Adoption Midlands placed a higher proportion of boys (58%) than girls (42%).

Ethnicity of children placed

As with Adoption Black Families, half of all the BME children placed through Adoption Midlands during this period were of dual heritage. This included 42% recorded as white/black Caribbean dual heritage children, and 8% of 'other mixed' children. Children in the category 'Other Asian' made up the second largest ethnic group, representing 23% of all children placed. Of the remaining children placed, 12% were black Caribbean, 11% Pakistani, and 4% were black African. See Figure 4.16 below.

Figure 4.16: Ethnicity of BME Children Placed by Adoption Midlands
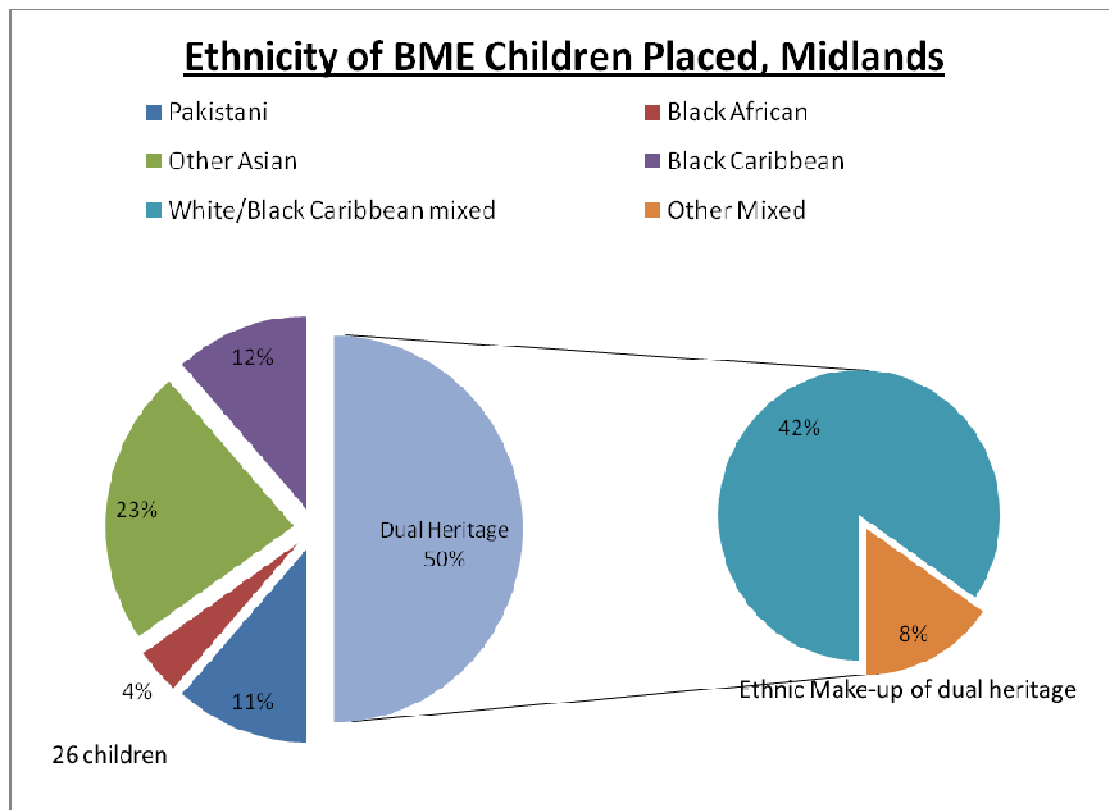
Summary of minority ethnic groups of children placed

Given the focus of Action for Children on placing children from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds, a summary of children's ethnicities into these groups allows a representation of actual numbers of children placed from each of these groups. For children of dual heritage, this has involved re-coding their ethnic groups to their minority ethnicity.

The category 'black' includes black African, black Caribbean and white British/black Caribbean children, and represented 58% of children placed.

Just over a third of the children placed were from an Asian ethnic background, which included Pakistani children and children from 'Other Asian' ethnic backgrounds. The remaining 8% of children in 'Other' ethnic groups included children who were described in the project's records as 'other mixed'.

Figure 4.17: Summary of Minority Ethnic Groups Represented by BME Children Placed by Adoption Midlands
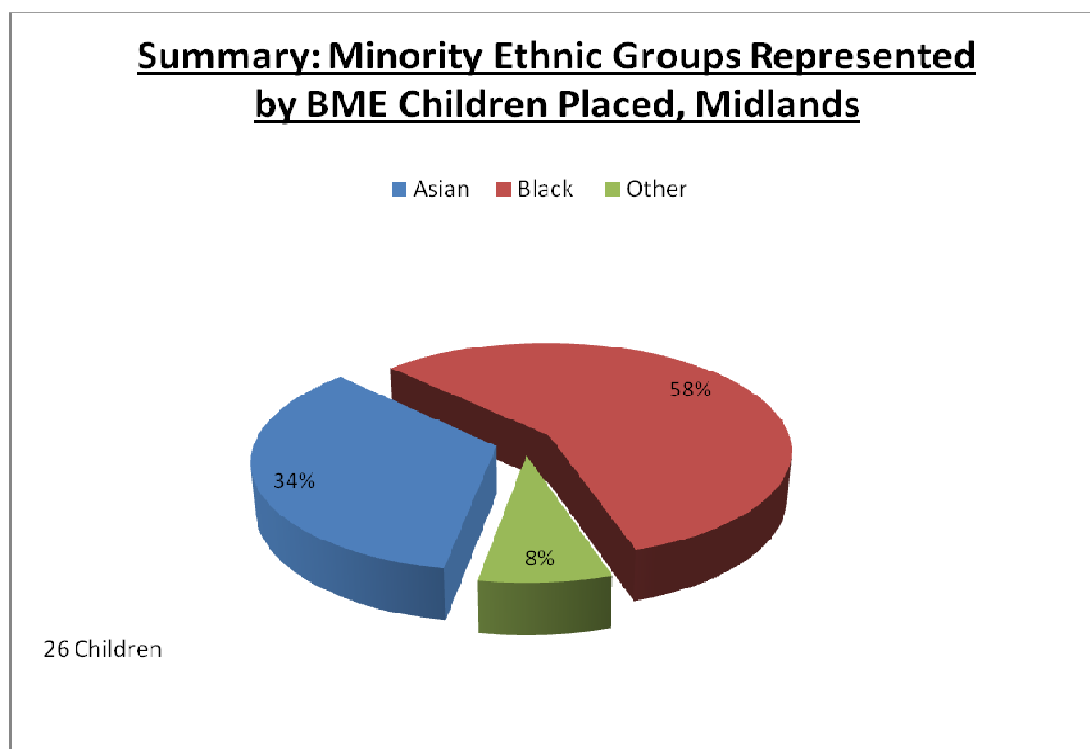
Stages in the Adoption Midlands Adoption Process

From initial enquiry to approval as adoptive parents with Adoption Midlands, the average time taken was 15 months. In other words, prospective adopters were approved, on average, within a year of making an enquiry. The shortest time taken to approve prospective adopters was just one month, while the longest time was 47 months (range of 46 months).

The process from initial enquiry to placement of a child(ren) on average took 23 months with Adoption Midlands. The shortest time taken for a placement to be made was just two months, while the longest time taken was 63 months (range of 61 months).

Looking at time taken from approval to placement, that is, how long it took to make a placement once adopters had been approved (rather than any of the other processes involving screening and assessing initial enquirers) the average time for Adoption Midlands was nine months.

Looking at the overall process from initial enquiry through to legal adoption of a child(ren), the average time with Adoption Midlands was 33 months. This

includes adoptions for 25 children (as one adoption was in process). The shortest time taken for a couple to legally adopt a child from their initial enquiry was 16 months, and the longest time taken was 70 months. Of the 26 children placed, only 25 records were used for this analysis, as one child was still going through the adoption process at the time of analysis. This analysis is summarised in Table 4.2 below. One record was not included in the analysis as it significantly skewed the results (e.g. the time taken from enquiry to approval was 47 months). This case was part of a multiple placement with the same adopters, and so it is assumed that the date of initial enquiry for this case was not updated.

Table 4.2: Time taken at stages of the adoption process at Adoption Midlands

	Enquiry-Approval (N=25)	Enquiry-Placement (N=25)	Approval-Placement (N=26)	Enquiry-Adoption (N=24)
Mean	13 months	21 months	9	32 months
Mode	13 months	22 months and 24 months	7 months and 10 months	31 months and 33 months
Range	24 months (1-25)	34 months (2-36)	16 months (1-17)	32 months (16-48)
Median	13 months	22 months	9 months	31 months

Summary

It is evident from the statistics analysed that Adoption Black Families have recruited more than four times the number of BME adopters than Adoption Midlands over the same timeframe and that this may be a direct consequence of Adoption Black Families being a dedicated service only focusing on BME adoptive placements. However, the figures from Adoption Midlands need to be read within the context of this project providing a generic adoption service for all ethnicities (i.e. both BME and white adopters and children). During the same time period, Adoption Midlands placed a total of 95 children in 52 families.

Given that the stated focus of Action for Children was on placing children from black, Asian and dual heritage backgrounds, it is interesting to note that the majority of both adoptive parents recruited, and children placed for adoption, were from black and/or black dual heritage ethnicities in both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands. The second largest ethnic group for both adopters and children was Asian and/or Asian dual heritage backgrounds, though Adoption Midlands had placed slightly more children of Asian heritage than Adoption Black Families. Smaller numbers of children and adopters were from 'other' minority ethnicities. Analysis of the statistics was limited by the ethnic categories used by Adoption Black Families, for instance use of the broad term 'Asian' to encompass Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (census categories).

While the ethnic profile of adopters was able to be compared between both projects, this was not the case for adopters' religion as this information was not made available to the Evaluation Team by Adoption Midlands. In the case of Adoption Black Families, the majority of adopters' religion was Christian. However, sizeable minorities were represented by Islamic and Hindu faiths. Of the children placed for adoption with Adoption Black Families, 45% were recorded as having no religion, 30% as Christian and 13% as Muslim.

Both projects recorded comparable numbers of single parents as adopters 21% and 18% respectively. The majority of these were women of African or African/Caribbean heritage.

Over half the children placed by Adoption Black Families were under two years of age in contrast to just under a third of BME children placed by Adoption Midlands. The largest proportion of children placed by Adoption Midlands was children aged between two and three years. In terms of the sex of the children, the proportions of boys and girls placed by Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands was broadly similar, with just over half of both cohorts being comprised of boys in each project (54% and 58% respectively).

Notably, the average time for Adoption Black Families to complete the process from enquiry to approval as adopters, placement of children and legal adoption for BME children were two, three and five months quicker at Adoption Black Families than the same processes carried out by Adoption Midlands. From approval to placement, Adoption Midlands took one month longer (on average) than Adoption Black Families. Again, this may indicate that the throughput of adoptions can be improved when a service has the singular focus of placing BME children with BME adopters.

CHAPTER 5: EFFECTIVENESS IN RECRUITING BME ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Introduction

One of the Evaluation study's key objectives was to consider Adoption Black Families' effectiveness in recruiting adoptive parents from BME and dual heritage backgrounds, and to explore the reasons why adopters and referring social workers choose to come to the project. This chapter analyses data from the project's records of enquiries, interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders, and the survey of referring social workers to address the question 'how good or effective is the project at recruiting adoptive parents from BME communities?'.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests that the main problem behind the delay in placing children in suitable families appears to be the shortage of approved BME adopters. However, a poll conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of BAAF in 2001 (cited in Frazer and Selwyn, 2005) showed that black people are twice as likely as their white counterparts to consider adoption, thus challenging this assumption. BAAF and other writers highlight the need for improving recruitment policies and practices to increase the pool of available adopters. In this chapter, we reflect on the adopters' and referring social work professionals' experiences and views of these processes.

BME Adopters Recruited

Over the past five years Adoption Black Families recruited 78 adoptive families (couples and single parents) from BME backgrounds with whom children had been placed. These adopters came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Predominantly they were dual heritage couples (50%), with 29% of couples from the same ethnicity and 21% single parents (see earlier Chapter 4 for more detail). During the same time period, Adoption Midlands placed BME children with 17 adoptive parents, predominantly couples in dual heritage relationships (65%).

Recruitment Strategies

The recruitment activities of both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands, in relation to recruiting BME adopters, could be described as generic. Although their recruitment campaigns were targeted at BME communities in general, neither service appeared to be targeting campaigns at specific BME communities. Nor were their recruitment strategies based upon systematic analysis of demographic and census information, or on the need to recruit often overlooked groups such as low income families or single parent families. Nonetheless, the Evaluation did find evidence that single adopters and couples in gay partnerships were among the approved adopters with Adoption Black Families.

Advertising and recruitment campaigns appear to have been aimed at generating interest from a wide range of BME groups on a global basis. One of the dangers that has been associated with such an approach, rather than a child centred or more targeted approach, is that unsuitable applicants may respond or adopters may not be willing to take particular types of children, which has implications for increasing the workload of teams. However, while not explicitly a child centred recruitment approach, Adoption Black Families believed its core business was meeting the needs of children in the care system, as one Adoption Black Families manager highlights:

> *"We're child focused...We want the adopters obviously because that's our bread and butter, that's what we need but the child is actually the focus of this service even though we don't have statutory responsibility...we as a service want to ensure that black children in care actually do get placed but not only get placed but placed in good quality...first class services, so that the adopters we recruit are suitably prepared and excellent adopters."*
> (Adoption Black Families Manager)

This is further reflected in comments made about the characteristics of potential adopters sought by Adoption Black Families. One of the Adoption Black Families managers expressed a view, one that was not thought to be shared by everyone in the team, that the project would be open to recruiting adopters from a wider range of ethnicities including white European if they perceived themselves as ethnic minorities and there were children in the care system needing to be placed. There was informal sharing of information about the range of ethnicities of children needing placements but no evidence that this was translated into systematic recruitment campaigns.

Up until recently, Adoption Black Families had had a dedicated Recruitment and Marketing post in Action for Children supporting the project, and staff reported this had worked well for them. Despite not having dedicated marketing personnel at Adoption Midlands, staff felt they had "been very fortunate" in being able to recruit black families as adopters without active marketing. Adoption Black Families on the other hand were said to be engaged in ongoing recruitment activities, using "every opportunity" that presented itself to get information about the agency out to BME communities:

> *"Various ways in which we recruit is through newspaper adverts, leaflets. We attend events as I've said community based events, we go and promote what we do and our service and then also I think people do contact us through on-line and looking at our information peg. So that's really the basis of our recruitment so we do open evenings and open mornings to talk...bring people in, talk to them, explain what adoption is about, attend events, we've been to like Brixton Splash or we go to the Mellor or we go to I think like I said Nigerian Expo, so different community events where we just put out a stall, answer questions, offer information. We have done a Roadshow...we went to Milton Keynes, we went to Watford and just stood in the town centre*

handing out leaflets and talking to people as part of our recruitment..."
(Adoption Black Families Manager).

One of the Adoption Black Families adopters had secured a grant from Google to ensure that Adoption Black Families became a sponsored link. Word of mouth was said by the Action for Children Senior Manager to be significant. In the past, Adoption Black Families had links with churches and with mosques.

Analysis of information collated by Action for Children shows a similar pattern of enquiry source for both projects, although the media (newspapers and TV) feature more with Adoption Black Families enquirers. Repeated broadcasts on local TV supported by a staffed telephone service resulted in quadrupling one agency's approvals of black adoptive families (Fenton, 2001), which might suggest that the media could be better exploited by both projects.

Table 5.1: Enquiry source for adopters to Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands

Enquiry Source	Project	
	Adoption Black Families	Adoption Midlands
Internet	96 (28%)	295 (55%)
Other agency	90 (27%)	107 (20%)
Newspaper	46 (14%)	1 (0%)
Other	44 (13%)	33 (6%)
Not recorded	28 (8%)	24 (5%)
Personal recommendation	16 (5%)	14 (3%)
TV	13 (4%)	15 (3%)
Yellow pages	2 (1%)	25 (5%)
BAAF	2 (1%)	17 (3%)
Display Board	0 (0%)	2 (0%)
TOTAL	337 (101%*)	533 (100%)

(Source: Action for Children AMI Stats, 2009)
*Percentages do not sum 100% as rounded to nearest whole percent

Adopters participating in the Evaluation had come to Adoption Black Families via several different routes. Frequently adopters referred to finding out about Adoption Black Families through broad internet searches for adoption agencies and then leaving their details on the Action for Children online enquirers' form. For example, one couple said:

> *"I basically went online and tapped in adoption agencies and they were one that came up, Action for Children came up and then I noticed the London Black Families agency so through Googling really."*
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Another said:

> *"I googled them because I was looking for an independent organisation which had a focus on black heritage or black minority ethnic children and also adopters so I googled them and got two organisations and I wrote to both of them and just the approach from Black Families was much more solid so I went with them."*
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

For another couple, an article in a newspaper had attracted their attention at a time when they were becoming interested in adoption:

> *"We got to a decision point where we were going to go forward with adoption but were just starting the process and this news item appeared so I contacted them...."* (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Another remembered "quite good adverts in *The Voice*". Several Adoption Black Families adopters interviewed had come to the project as a result of a personal recommendation and made initial contact via telephone:

> *"Basically we were looking at adoption and it just so happened that I was talking to a friend of a friend who were also a couple where you know one partner was Asian and one was white and they were going through the adoption process and it was via them that I heard then about London Black Families." (*Adoption Black Families Adopter*)*

In the above and other cases, it was clearly important to the adopters that this was an agency that would understand their ethnicity and cultural needs. It is also interesting that the above adopter was from an Asian background and had been reassured by the experience of another couple of mixed Asian heritage.

There was less information available about how adopters had been recruited by Adoption Midlands as so few adopters participated in the Evaluation. One couple remembered an inspiring talk being given at the local church by an official from NCH (now Action for Children) – "the way he did it was wonderful". Other adopters could not recall how they heard about Adoption Midlands.

Professional respondents to the online survey were more likely to have heard about Adoption Black Families and to have approached them to place BME children than the mainstream Midlands project. In the case of both projects however, local authority social workers said they had either referred a child to the agency in the past or that the project was the recommended agency on an approved providers list. Some said that a colleague had recommended the agency. None of the professional respondents found out about either

Adoption Black Families or Adoption Midlands through internet searches or newspaper articles.

Motivations of BME Adopters

While not the only reason for choosing Adoption Black Families, for the majority of adopters participating in the Evaluation, one reason identified was that the project specialised in finding families for BME children. The following quotations from Adoption Black Families adopters support this assertion:

> *"Basically because of their slant or their emphasis on dual heritage or black families"*

> *"I liked the fact that it was black Caribbean focused and when I spoke to one of the social workers I just got a sense that they knew the culture and the cultural differences and difficulties that both myself and my child may experience."*

> *"Given our [ethnic] backgrounds, we knew it was more likely to find a match."*

> *"I was looking for an independent organisation which had a focus on black heritage or black minority ethnic children and also adopters."*

> *"...so we just thought it was a good idea to contact them because obviously they were more specialised at dealing with finding children for mixed race families."*

> *"It makes more sense to us as a mixed couple to apply to an agency where they look specifically for black and ethnic couples really."*

There were a minority of adopters at Adoption Black Families for whom this was not the main reason however. As one couple commented:

> *"Neither of us would have thought of London [Adoption] Black Families as suiting us because none of us identify as black...We were not born in the UK so we are not used to having black define any ethnic minority..."*

They reported having been "welcomed" by Adoption Black Families who had been positive they would be able to find a suitable match given their dual heritage. In common with several other adopters to this project, this couple commented that they had immediately felt comfortable with the Adoption Black Families social workers. Researchers have pointed to the poor treatment of BME families by bureaucracies and the importance of adoption agencies returning telephone calls, sending out information promptly, and being courteous in explaining difficulties and delays (Amerson, 2000; Selywyn et al, 2004). Adoption Black Families had responded promptly to initial enquiries and was felt by adopters to be "immediately onto the case", an

approach which was greatly appreciated given the courage it had taken some to make this initial contact with an agency. As one couple enthusiastically commented about Adoption Black Families:

> "They literally swept us off our feet and sort of took care of us because it is a really hard phone call to make when you're phoning up a London Borough and you're saying you know 'we're interested in adoption, what do I do?' It's down to the other person to tell us what to do and they (Adoption Black Families) did look after us... and that's why we stuck with them because we felt from day one they built up that relationship with us and showed us that they actually cared about what they were doing and what we were doing."
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Almost universally, Adoption Black Families adopters participating in the Evaluation referred to having had negative experiences of local authority adoption services. Some had contacted several local authorities and received no response, or the local authority took weeks to respond. Others felt the local authority was not interested in them or stated they were unable to support them to find a suitable ethnic match:

> "I'd made a couple of enquiries to other organisations who weren't terribly interested in us. I'd approached our local Borough and they said they basically didn't have children of Asian white mix so they weren't particularly interested in us." (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Their experience of Adoption Black Families was framed in terms of contrasting this with the negative experience of local authorities. One adopter reflected on local authority social workers' lack of cultural sensitivity:

> "I certainly didn't want to go through a local authority because I'd had such a negative experience. The approach of the social workers I found did not have any cultural sensitivity and was trying to make me fit into the mould that they felt would have been right for an adopter and anything about my culture seemed to have to be left outside the room otherwise it was going to cause a problem."
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Another important aspect as to why adopters chose Adoption Black Families was that it would potentially widen adopters' options in that it had access to a bigger pool of children looking for adoption because it was part of a large national organisation. This same aspect was emphasised by adopters from Adoption Midlands in respect of them being part of Action for Children.

Importance of BME Staff

As noted earlier, staff and management of Adoption Black Families were exclusively recruited from black African and Caribbean and Asian backgrounds (see Chapter 3). The key rationale for this was that the make-up

of the staff group was a key determinant of their success in recruiting black, Asian and minority ethnic adopters. The project was founded on the belief that prospective BME adopters came forward to this agency because they were more comfortable and at ease talking and working with staff that understood their experiences and concerns and with whom they could identify, as the lack of such an approach had been identified as a major barrier to recruiting BME adopters in the past. As a manager explained further:

> *"Ethnicity does bring value to the project, not only for the members of staff but for the adopters and the children that we are hoping to place because it brings a lot of added value in terms of understanding and offering their required support."* (Manager, Adoption Black Families)

In this respect, Adoption Black Families had a unique focus compared to the mainstream adoption service in the Midlands, which employed just three of its 10 workers from BME backgrounds. Nevertheless, as the manager of Adoption Midlands pointed out, BME families who approached Adoption Midlands were offered the choice of a BME worker but in practice this sometimes resulted in the assessment process being delayed while a suitable social worker was found. Prospective adopters from a BME background were also guaranteed an all black training preparation group, and an adoption panel at Adoption Midlands that was "quite diverse" or they could opt to be considered by the Adoption Black Families adoption panel. The links between the two projects remained close, with some cases being referred to Adoption Black Families and vice versa. The manager was philosophical about the need for the staff group to represent the ethnicities of potential adopters:

> *"Our potential applications haven't dried up so there's always been a diverse range and I have got white workers that are assessing black families and vice versa you know."* (Manager, Adoption Midlands)

On the other hand, some adopters with Adoption Black Families interviewed for this Evaluation agreed with the emphasis on having BME staff to work with them:

> *"I'm not a racist but a white person wouldn't understand. With a black social worker you can go into depth, you can explain yourself."*
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

Others stated that they expected BME staff, given the name of the project. Some dual heritage couples interviewed for the study, however, did not feel it was essential for the social worker to match their ethnicity. Even so, they highlighted that it was important to them that the social worker understood their cultural and ethnic background, while being professional and having a track record of making successful adoption matches. In this sense, they had assumed that a project or service dealing with more diverse backgrounds would naturally provide this expertise.

The perception of referring social workers and managers from local authorities was that Adoption Black Families performed better in terms of meeting the

needs of BME children: that is, 13 out of 20 of those who responded in relation to Adoption Black Families compared to 5 out of 14 in relation to Adoption Midlands, thought the project either 'good' or 'very good' at meeting the needs of BME children needing adoption placements. More of those responding in relation to Adoption Midlands were unsure or stated 'not applicable', qualifying this with comments such as "do not feel able to say on the basis of one experience" or "as it's some time since placed child, don't feel qualified to say". Furthermore, among the main reasons they highlighted for referring children to Adoption Black Families were the availability of BME adopters, skilled and experienced staff, and also that staff were from BME backgrounds. These reasons were less likely to be selected about the Adoption Midlands, indicating a difference in external stakeholders' perception of the two services.

The team at Adoption Black Families predominantly reflects black African and Caribbean ethnicities, and has just one Asian social worker. While this social worker was considered by the manager to have been "invaluable in her sense of understanding of different Asian cultures and religions", there was a general sense from adopters' comments that there was a gap in the project's understanding of Asian culture. Adopters expressed a preference for an Asian worker stating that "an Asian worker will understand what we're saying", and emphasised the importance of workers having a broad understanding of Asian culture and religions:

> *"An Asian social worker who understands the Asian culture that's the difference...They have no concept of the Asian culture which is a problem we've had...not every family agrees to certain things whether it's because of faith or whether it's morally..."*
> (Adoption Black Families Adopter)

The issue then would appear to be that to be effective in recruiting adopters from the range of ethnicities and cultures needed to place children in care, attention needs to be paid to recruiting staff from a wider range of ethnicities.

Enquiries

The recruitment process begins with an enquiry from a prospective adopter. How an agency responds to this initial contact will have an impact on whether or not the individual or couple proceed with an application. As noted above, the experience of existing adopters to their initial enquiry was overwhelmingly positive, but what of those who enquired and did not proceed with an application? What can an analysis of enquirers' records tell us about the process and about why some people do not proceed to application?

An analysis of 161 cases for whom there was a written record provides information on enquirers between October 2008 to October 2009. During this time there were 342 enquiries from prospective adopters to Adoption Black Families, although for 181 of these there was no information on why the enquiry did not proceed. An opportunity to collect information about

prospective adopters would therefore appear to be being missed by Adoption Black Families.

In the vast majority of cases (around 70%), the enquirers themselves decided not to proceed or withdrew from the process as opposed to being rejected by Adoption Black Families. Reasons why they had chosen to defer or to cease contact with the project included: wanting to finish their education: that they had changed their mind and in only one case, it was because they were unhappy with the service from Adoption Black Families. Another common reason for not going ahead was because the couple fell pregnant or decided to pursue IVF. Around 14% were turned away by Adoption Black Families mainly due to a lack of Asian children of particular religions waiting to be adopted or because of financial or accommodation constraints.

The remaining 30% were referred by Adoption Black Families to a 'more appropriate agency', mainly to their local authority or another adoption agency, or they were asked to consider coming back at a later stage. Reasons for referring to other agencies included a lack of Asian or Jewish children waiting for placement; because the couple enquiring were white, or because the couple wanted to adopt a known child. Those who were asked to apply in the future were in the process of moving home or having work done to their home; because of a lack of Asian children for placement, or other issues such as having to work on existing relationship or emotional issues. Figure 5.1 below provides more detail of reasons for enquirers not proceeding.

Figure 5.1: Reasons for enquirers not proceeding with an application to become adoptive parents with Adoption Black Families
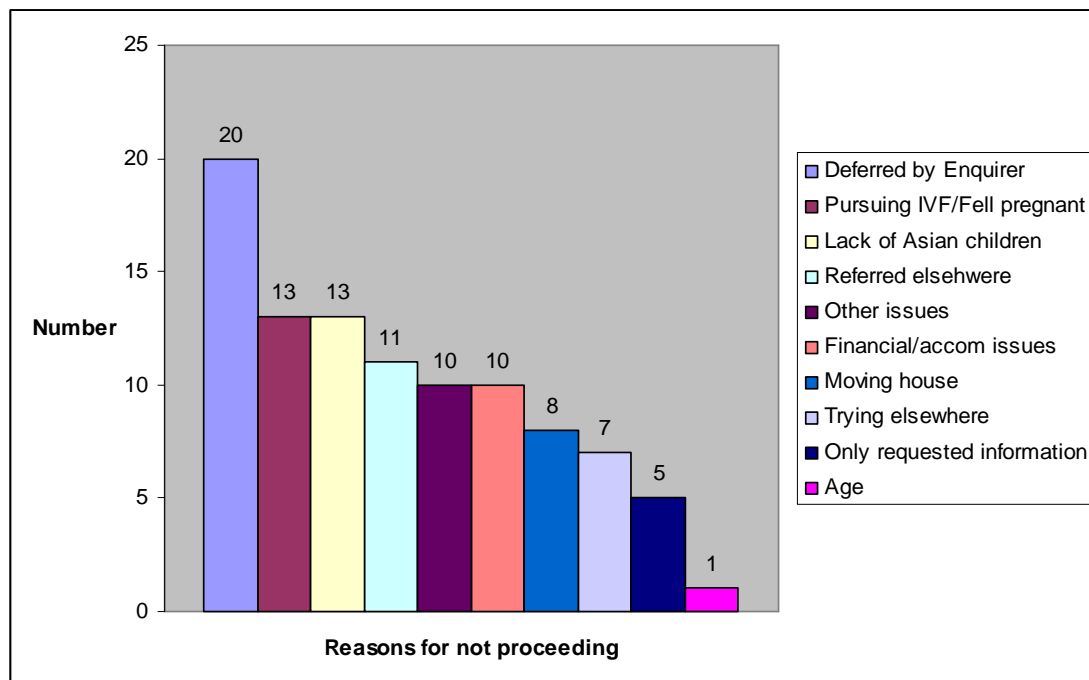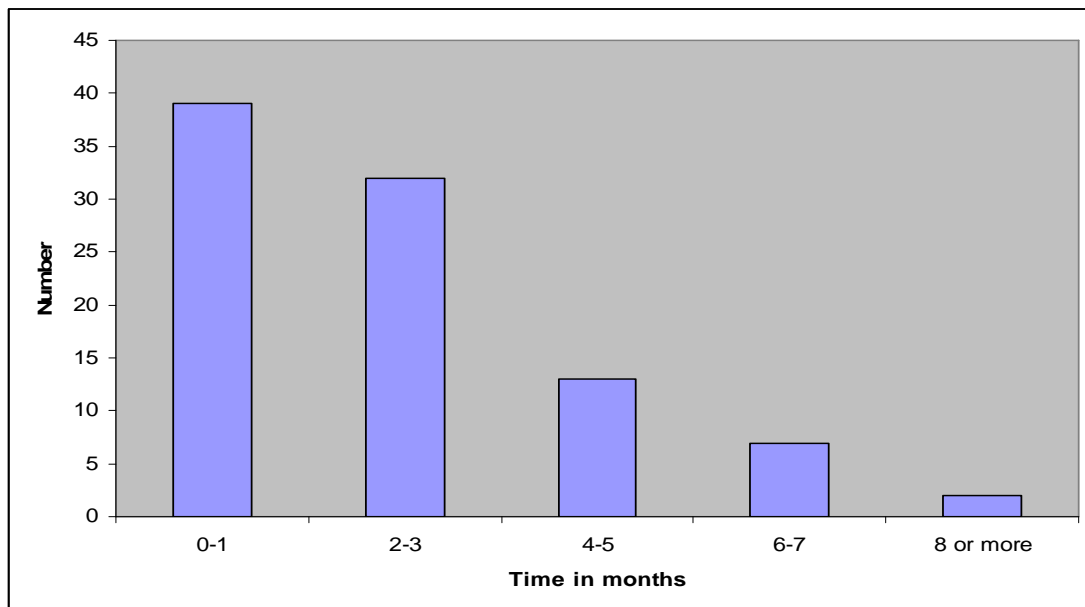

(Based on 93 records during October 2008-October 2009)

While the project recorded that enquirers were pro-actively contacted in most cases, practice was inconsistent as it appeared some were contacted up to five times while others only once before Adoption Black Families closed the case. Closer examination of the cases than was possible during this Evaluation would be needed to explain this fully. It might, however, be indicative of the need for the project to re-examine its policy on following up enquiries, as this may be putting off valuable applicants who may interpret this as lack of interest and thus be lost to the system.

The volume of work involved for the Adoption Black Families team in following through with enquiries is clear from these statistics. Figure 5.2 below shows that from the point of initial enquiry to closing the case can potentially take up to a year. The majority however, were closed within three months of contact.

Figure 5.2: Length of time taken (in months) by Adoption Black Families from prospective adopters' initial enquiries to decisions not to proceed with application

(Based on 93 cases during October 2008-October 2009)

The ethnicities of enquirers were recorded in just 127 cases (couples and single enquirers). Categories were recorded as free text and self-ascribed ethnicities, which differs from how adopters' and staff ethnicities are categorised by the project, so comparison of necessity is limited. Grouping together categories for ease of comparison, enquirers from black (Caribbean/African) background represented 39% of all enquirers while another 39% were in dual heritage relationships. A further 16% were Asian, white British/European enquirers represented 3% of all enquirers (including a Jewish and a Muslim single parent inquirer), and couples from Afghanistan and Afrikaans English ethnicities each made up 1% of the total respectively. One was categorised as 'Other'.

This picture broadly reflects the composition of ethnicities in the existing adopters' population at Adoption Black Families (see Chapter 4), except that there are a higher proportion of Asian enquirers than existing adopters, which would suggest a gap in supporting potential adopters from this ethnic group. It is known from the records that Hindu/Sikh couples and/or individuals have been turned down due to a shortage of Hindu/Sikh children waiting to be placed. The Action for Children Annual Business Report (2009) states that the organisation put a hold on Asian adopters, and as will be discussed in the chapter on matching (Chapter 6), couples with one partner of Asian and Hindu/Sikh background have experienced long delays in finding a suitable match with a child(ren).

Although the majority of those who enquired but did not proceed (55%) were based in London, 33% were based in the South East of England, 6% in East Anglia, 4% in South Yorkshire/Yorkshire & Humberside, 1% in Scotland and 1% of enquirers lived in the East Midlands. This may be indicative of the limited capacity of Adoption Black Families to support the recruitment of BME adopters outside the London area.

Summary

In terms of recruiting BME adopters, Adoption Black Families had been more successful in terms of the number of BME adopters it had recruited compared to the mainstream adoption service. The volume of enquiries made to Adoption Black Families from potential BME adopters, coupled with the large number that do not proceed after further involvement from Adoption Black Families staff, provides evidence of the work involved for staff in responding to interest from BME communities, and further dispels the myth that BME communities are not interested in coming forward to adopt. Re-visiting policy and improving the consistency of recording and response to enquirers during the initial stages may result in Adoption Black Families holding onto some potential applicants who might have been put off by lack of contact from the project.

Other research has shown that three key factors contribute to successful recruitment of BME adopters: staffing and staff awareness; communication with the black community, and developing a responsive and sensitive service to applicants (Kaniuk, 1991). In relation to staffing and staff awareness of ethnicity and culture, Adoption Black Families was clearly well placed. An all BME staff group was felt by both staff and existing adopters to be an important aspect of what was provided. There was a gap, however, in terms of the staff group representing the wider range of ethnicities of prospective adopters. Some adopters from Asian heritage felt that Adoption Black Families did not understand Asian culture as well as it could. In comparison, Adoption Midlands was more restricted in its capacity to offer social workers from a BME background, preparation groups with all BME prospective adopters and an Adoption Panel that reflected diverse ethnicities. There were indications that when a request had been made by some prospective

adopters to work with a BME social worker, for instance, this had resulted in delays in the assessment process.

Adoption Black Families had engaged in a variety of recruitment activities involving communication with black communities generally including advertising in the black press, and as a result of having a dedicated marketing post was more pro-active than Adoption Midlands in its work to recruit BME adopters. The Service Manager at Adoption Midlands stated that they did not struggle to recruit BME families, albeit they had a much smaller volume than Adoption Black Families.

Neither project appeared to be engaging in targeted recruitment campaigns based on systematic analysis of information about children or geographic populations. This is not to say that there was not a detailed understanding of the population of children in care waiting for adoption, but that this knowledge remained at an informal or tacit level. It could be argued that future recruitment campaigns should be more finely tuned to recruit adopters from specific BME communities so as to further improve Adoption Black Families' capacity to meet the needs of the children in the care system.

The reasons why existing adopters chose to approach Adoption Black Families was both a comment on the reported poor treatment of BME adoptive applicants by local authorities and evidence of the need for such specialised adoption projects as Adoption Black Families that are better able to provide sympathetic and culturally appropriate support to prospective and successful BME adopters. In support of this, local authority social workers had chosen to refer children from BME backgrounds to Adoption Black Families because it had a reputation for working exclusively with BME families and, importantly, for being highly successful in making ethnically matched adoption placements. This issue of ethnically matched placements will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: A GOOD MATCH? DISCUSSION OF MATCHING DECISIONS

Introduction

This chapter will examine the decision making processes and outcomes for matching prospective BME adopters with children of BME and dual heritage. The chapter draws upon the analysis of matching decisions of 97 placements made by Adoption Black Families to understand the overall picture, and the detailed examination of a sample of 16 placements to explore these decisions in more depth. It also draws on data from interviews with Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands staff and adopters. Their responses have been examined to explore the rationale for the decisions made. The responses from the project staff and the adopters, along with responses to a survey of local authority social workers and managers who referred BME children to either/or Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands, will be drawn upon. Finally, reference will be made to recent studies on matching to set the findings of this study in the national context.

Matching on Ethnicity and Religion

An analysis of case records of the ethnic and religious matches between all the children and adoptive parents at Adoption Black Families demonstrated that many were a clear match or fit. The records also demonstrated that where there were differences in the ethnic match, these appeared to be where the adoptive parents and/or the child were of dual heritage. The increasing diversity and complexity of dual heritage children presents theoretical and pragmatic challenges for Adoption Black Families (and other adoption agencies) in recruiting suitable prospective adopters (Selwyn et al, 2010).

The key criteria to be examined in this analysis centres on the decision making regarding the ethnicity of the prospective adopters and child(ren). However, the process of matching involves several central elements that make the composition of a good placement. These have been identified by Dance et al (2008, 2010) as the factors that are considered by local authorities and adoption agencies when making placements and are used in this evaluation as the benchmark for analysis of a good match. These criteria are listed below and will be considered in turn:

   a. Adopters' characteristics, parenting skills, support network, impact of their own children;
   b. Adopters' attitudes and understanding of the parenting task; understanding child's history, realistic expectations of adoption, being comfortable with contact plans;
   c. Child's emotional, behavioural, attachment and health needs, versus suitability of adopters' parenting style;
   d. Compatibility, 'chemistry and emotional connectedness' with a child – understanding the child's view on the proposed placement;

e. Ethnic and religious heritage.

Adopters' characteristics

An important element of deciding on a good match of the characters of prospective adopters was evidence of a wide network of friends and family support. In all the prospective adopters' documentation, evidence of sociability and the capacity to build durable friendships was a characteristic commonly highlighted. The support of these friends and of the adopter(s)' immediate and/or extended family was recorded and seen as significant to the selection of adopters. The statement below from a social worker from Adoption Black Families is indicative of the comments made on Prospective Adopters Reports or F1s and other adoption assessment documents:

> *"They have a support network (that) entails extensive emotional and practical support from their closest family members and friends who live in the locality."*

Most of the adopters were reported to have a wide range of friends with 'varied cultural backgrounds'. Where the prospective adopters were a couple, the strength of their relationship was assessed within the reports with a critical view to their capacity to have child(ren) placed with them. The following observation was typical of the recordings made by social workers on prospective adopters' assessment documents:

> *"They are a close married couple with a strong, stable relationship based on mutual respect, love, trust, honesty and support for each other."*

The prospective adopters' motivation to adopt was explored in depth with several of the assessment forms articulating that several prospective adopters endured the emotionally painful experience of finding that they were unable to have children. Some of the prospective adopters had tried to have a child through IVF treatment and had talked about the difficulty of this process not being successful which were articulated through the feelings of loss.

All the reports evidenced that the prospective adopters had experience and a love of caring for children. The adopters had talked about looking after children such as their nephews and nieces, through fostering, as 'God children', and friends' children. Where the adopters had their own children, they had explored in depth with the assessing social worker how they were prepared to involve their birth child in welcoming and adjusting to an adopted child in the family.

Adopters' attitude and understanding of the parenting task

All the prospective adopters had been encouraged to explore the profound change that an adopted child would have on their lives and to understand that adoption was a lifelong commitment. They had also been asked whether they were prepared for a child coming into their home that may have experienced trauma and abuse, and who might be experiencing issues of separation and loss as a consequence of leaving their natural and/or foster parents. The following comment from a Prospective Adopters' Report was typical:

> *"Discussions with this family (friend) have enlightened her further in understanding the impact of a child's traumatic past on their future development and needs as well as the need to be patient and understanding when faced with challenges."*

Another recorded a couple as expressing the realisation that an adopted child had different strengths to their own child(ren) – "They understand that genetics plays an important role in one's identity."

In most cases (that is, 14 out of 16 cases), the prospective adopters understood and were willing to facilitate indirect 'letter box' contact with the birth parents. In a small number (three cases) they were accepting of direct annual contact with siblings. However, none of the adopters were reported as being comfortable with regular direct contact with the birth parents.

Child's emotional, behavioural, attachment and health needs, vs suitability of adopters' parenting style

All the Prospective Adopters' Reports and matching proformas outlined the current health and developmental needs of the child(ren) to be adopted. While some of the medical reports of the child presented as 'normal' or within the acceptable percentile range, where there was evidence of trauma/ abuse that the child(ren) may have experienced, or mental health difficulties with the birth parents, the assessing social worker had discussed such issues with the prospective adopters. In some cases, where the prospective adopters were aware that the child(ren) that were to be placed with them would have such issues, they had researched into the potential impact of a specific trauma, loss or mental health difficulties of their birth parents on children.

However, there was wide variation in the prospective adoptive parents' preparedness to accept a child that had experienced environmental, physical and/or emotional difficulties. For instance, they were less prepared to accept a child whose birth parents had a history of mental health difficulties, severe disability or the level of (particularly sexual) abuse that some children may have experienced. This comment by the social worker was recorded on one of the prospective adopter's assessment forms:

> *"Could not consider a child with significant health needs or with high levels of dependency, but would consider some minor health issues."*

Importantly, prospective adopters were asked to consider the level of trauma, abuse and disability that was known about a child or their birth parents that they would have to work with, before a match was sought. Often adopters would state if they were prepared to accept a specific disability, for instance, a mild learning disability. Some adoptive parents stated in their assessment that they did not mind if little was known about the adopted child's birth parent(s).

The child's emotional behavioural and health needs were matched in the reports with the prospective adopters' parental style and skills. These were explained as encouraging the child to grow and develop as their own person, to respect the child as an individual and to ensure that there is compatibility. Adopters were also asked about their understanding of a child's developing sexuality.

Compatibility, 'chemistry and emotional connectedness' with a child – understanding child's view on the proposed placement

This criteria was central to the matching process as all the prospective adopters wanted to bond through identifying a familial resemblance with the child(ren) placed with them. This is an example of the home that adopters were hoped to give a child:

> "A safe, stable, secure, warm, loving home environment where all of the (child's) needs will be met at all times."

Further, along with ethnic matching, physical resemblance was identified by most prospective adopters as an important characteristic for bonding with the child(ren). As well as feeling a bond when the prospective adopters first met their child(ren), adopters had talked in the matching proformas about how they felt there was a resemblance in behaviour or appearance that enabled a connection to take place. This quote from an adoption form is one example,

> "The applicant was also able to tell her daughter how she reminded the applicant of herself when she was a little girl."

The importance of matching with a child that has some resemblance in ethnicity, identity and physical characteristics was articulated as important in all sixteen of the matches that were analysed.

Ethnic and religious heritage

The majority of the 16 cases specifically chosen for further analysis were selected on the basis of not being an exact or perfect ethnic and/or religious 'fit'. Only two had an exact ethnic and religious match between prospective adopters and child(ren), for instance, a parent and child both of Jamaican heritage and from Church of England religious background. The remaining 14 cases either had a match that was at variance because of the adopter and child's ethnic heritage and/or because of differences in their religious background. However, the purpose of examining them was to explore the

rationale for the match and consequently to explore what makes a 'good match'.

One example was of a child of dual heritage whose birth father was Iraqi/Kurdish Muslim and birth mother was white British Romany. The adopters matched with this child were South Asian and white British, and while they celebrated Hindu and Christian festivals, they did not view themselves as religious. Importantly, it was recorded on the Prospective Adopters' Report that they were prepared to support the child to follow her religion (accorded by her birth parents) when she was older, and to take her to visit her birth father's country of origin. On the assessment form, the adoptive parents expressed a commitment to diversity in culture and an appreciation of the value of different religions. Just as importantly, a match was seen as acceptable because both adopters and child were of dual heritage which made it possible for an assumption regarding ethnic compatibility to be genuine. In other words, although the adoptive parent and child did not have exactly the same ethnic heritage, both could be described as dual heritage Asian and white.

Another assessment report identified a child of dual heritage being white Hungarian/Arabic (from Dubai). The child could have either British or Hungarian nationality (by virtue of the birth mother's nationality.) The adopted child's birth religion could be either Catholic or Muslim to reflect that of her birth mother and father respectively. Physical appearance was again central to the match being described as:

> " … skin stone and feature reflect dual heritage race/ethnicity. Dark brown hair which is starting to curl at the ends, large brown eyes, and very long eyelashes"

The adoptive father for this child was of Ugandan Indian heritage and was brought up in the UK, and was a practicing Hindu who was able to speak Gujarati. It was recorded of him that he "has black hair". The adoptive mother was described as white Scottish and Catholic, who spoke English, but was learning Gujarati. She was described as having "light brown hair".

In this assessment, the prospective adopters stated that they had educated themselves about different groups and had good knowledge of cultures, customs, religions and linguistic needs. The evidence from this assessment form suggests that a way of prospective adopters preparing for the placement of a child who was not an exact match, was by them ensuring they were familiar with the ethnicity, culture and religion of the proposed adopted child.

Again, where there was no evidence of an exact ethnic and religious 'fit', physical resemblance between adoptive parents and the child was seen as important. Likewise, the prospective adopters' appreciation and understanding of cultural and religious diversity enabled the couple to be more considerate about the child's identity and belonging.

For some prospective adopters, religious beliefs were central to a match with a child. These comments from the matching proformas were an example of this:

> "As practicing Muslims they feel children of same religious and racial background could be integrated into their community . . . but could also consider children of Pakistani or Indian heritage."

The cases that have been used to examine the rationale for a match were identified on the basis of there being no clear ethnic and/or religious fit or match between adoptive parents and child. However, the rationale from this matching proforma explains a contextual cultural understanding of the placement:

> "Whilst adopters don't offer an exact match in terms of their race, culture and heritage, it is felt that they are a diverse couple who have established links to a multi-cultural and mixed community. They also plan to visit countries of origin of birth parents overseas."

The Process of Matching

Adoption Black Families

Staff at both services were encouraged to explore their understanding and rationale of the matching process. The process for the prospective adopters was explained by staff once they had been approved to adopt. As the Action for Children Senior Manager stated:

> "The team is looking at matching within team meetings, looking at the children that are waiting, looking at the resources that they've got and what might be a potential match and following it up with social workers."

However, the Adoption Black Families Service Manager confirmed that it is post approval that the process begins in earnest:

> "Following that, we're in the phase that we'd call family finding, which is where the social worker would send out profile booklets to local authorities and looking at children who are sent in, because obviously on a daily basis we get sent children, usually by e-mail…. if for instance a child is identified, the prospective adopters' report is sent to the local authority and the child's permanence report is sent to us and we share with our adopters and then the local authority would want to come and visit our adopters with one of our team, bring the child alive, show DVDs whatever of the child, and if they are chosen, because they normally see about three families…. if this particular family is chosen as a positive match, they are then taken to the local authority's matching panel along with our social worker and if the local authority's

matching panel agree the match they start what is called "introduction planning" so there is an inter-agency meeting with us."

The search for a possible match involved a variety of avenues to access children. This included liaising with local authorities regarding children that are 'looked after', accessing Adoption Black Families' pools of children waiting to be adopted (such as through the adoption register and Be My Parent), and using networks such as local adoption consortiums. Importantly, Adoption Black Families accessed networks nationwide, which enhanced the chances of prospective adopters to gain a placement and children to gain the best possible match. One of the adopters explained that the process was quite quick once they had been approved:

> *"There is an annual event that happened, an adoption exchange, an event where agencies from across the UK all come down to a certain location and as approved adopters we were able to go down, and they'd have all these profiles of children they were looking to place"*

Wherever possible, Adoption Black Families strived to place the child within a 12-month duration, and as explained above, they had established processes in place once an adopter is approved. However, one of the prospective adopters stated that from their experience there appeared to them to be no clear structure to the process of matching:

> *"The whole matching process and placement process, it kind of just evolved . . . it would have been nice to have been . . . lovely to have a booklet to say that this is the procedure that should follow."*

Adoption Black Families was an important resource for local authorities nationwide, as a project that had a reputation for delivering on ethnically matched placements for BME children. As their manager stated:

> *"We have a lot of social workers either just sending us their profiles or calling in to find out if we have families and where people have placed with children. You find that local authorities come back to us, especially when they have black children they know they can't place anywhere else.'* (Adoption Black Families Manager)

This was supported by the findings of the referrers' survey of local authority social workers and managers undertaken as part of this Evaluation. This showed 100% of respondents identified their primary reason for referring to Adoption Black Families was because they had an accessible pool of BME adopters.

Adoption Midlands

Adoption Midlands aimed to place a child(ren) with prospective adopters between 10-12 months from the a prospective adopters' application point onwards. This was reflected in the adopter's experiences:

> *"Matching happened quite quickly. We went to Panel at the end of March and found our child in May. We had been sent many matches."* (Adopter)

However, the Senior Manager explained that the process was partly dependent on the local authority, and on a holistic understanding of the matching process:

> *"One of the problems is that we are at the mercy of the local authority when it comes to matching. If I was to say what I thought was right about matching then I think it's about having a really good assessment of a child's needs including their long term needs and then seeing whether a family can meet those needs and there would be some compromises."* (Action for Children Senior Manager)

As with Adoption Black Families, they made maximum use of adoption resources for children nationwide:

> *"The adoption register has really helped us with that because we can literally and quite legitimately evidence with families, we've got a Hindu family now that's just waiting to be assessed and...you know, two years ago, I would have thought there's no chance we can take them on, we're not going to match them, and yet if you 'phone the adoption register, there were three potential children."*

The survey of local authority social workers carried out for the Evaluation found that 50% of respondents had referred children for adoption specifically to Adoption Midlands because they were confident that they would be able to provide prospective BME adopters.

Criteria for Matching

Adoption Black Families

The Adoption Black Families staff explained that while they would not encourage a transracial placement because of issues that have been highlighted by the literature review regarding identity, they were not rigid within the context of ethnically matched placements. This was echoed in the Action for Children Senior Manager's perspective, who identified the age and type of children seeking adoption placement as other key criteria considered in the matching decision:

> *"It's more of an age than the "why not them?", that is the issue really, we can get adopters coming forward across a broad range of ethnicities, in terms of where there is children referred you know we do focus well, we know the needs of the children."*

The goal was to achieve an holistic matching rather than a match based solely on ethnicity. This was explained by an Adoption Black Families manager:

> "I think it is looking at the needs of the children and obviously the culture and heritage that takes part in that. We have placed children where they don't closely match in terms of culture and heritage, but then in doing so it is looking at what resources the adopters have to ensure that the child's culture and heritage will be promoted. We also look at, there's a matching consideration because that goes in detail when doing the assessment, in terms of what the adopters feel they are able to cope with to care for a child with certain conditions, or parental history…We make sure that people (adopters) are not just attracted by the picture and forget all the underlying issues that come with the child."

This flexible and holistic approach to achieving a 'good match', which involved considering all the criteria as outlined above in the various matching proformas, was also evidenced by some of the adopters' responses. As this Adoption Black Families Adopter explained:

> "What I found with Action for Children was actually they allow the boundaries to leak much in terms of identities and ethnicities than I know the local authorities. My daughter is black African and I'm not, I'm black Caribbean and I know that would have been a difficulty, she is the right child for me, but that would have been a difficulty because on her form it said her birth mother want a black African parent. So that automatically would have crossed me out, but I found they actually allowed that fluidity."

This experience of ethnic matching was explained positively by the adoptive parent because he/she felt the similarities, the 'same raceness' if you like, outweighed any cultural variance. However, other adopters, who had had a similar experience in terms of not having an exact ethnic match, viewed this in a more ambivalent way:

> "When it actually came to matching us with a child, there were few, if any, children of Hindu religion or ethnicity and all the Asian/white children that actually came up mostly seemed to come from Muslim families, and we weren't particularly worried about that if we didn't have to bring them up as Muslims...I suppose we felt rather pressurised into a little bit having to compromise on what our ideals and expectations had been.'" (Adopter)

However, this difficulty in finding the exact, or perfect ethnic match was put into context by one of the managers of Adoption Black Families. Some adoptive parents' ethnicities and/or religions were more difficult to find an exact match for because the needs of the children requiring adoption did not match perfectly. In the same way, some children from specific ethnicities

were difficult to find a match for because adopters of this ethnicity had not come forward. For example:

> *"We don't have a great pool of Chinese adopters, but saying that I don't think we've seen a lot of profiles of children…At the moment we have a restriction on Asian, or Asian and white, who are of Sikh or Hindu religion, simply because of the limited number of children... Although we have been able to place some, we have some adopters who have waited a long time, whereas there seems to be a greater number [of children] of Pakistani or Muslim religion, so those families are not hard to match."* (Adoption Black Families Manager)

The potential for ethnic matching was as much about the needs of the children requiring adoption at any one time as it was about the desire to achieve a perfect match. Further, other criteria were just as central to the process as ethnicity, for instance the child's health needs and/or disability, whether the child had been neglected or abused, and aspects of the birth parents' history such as whether they had been abusing drugs or alcohol.

Where there were significant numbers of children in need of a placement, there was far greater flexibility and availability for adopters. This was particularly the case for children of black African/Caribbean and dual heritage African/Caribbean and white children:

> *"There is a fair amount of freedom that really the key thing was you showed you could meet the needs of the child, your ethnic needs and identity needs in a sense that therefore wasn't restricted to you know . . African/English mix." (*Adopter*)*

Prospective adopters often referred to how the Adoption Black Families staff encouraged them to think as flexibly as possible, to shape their expectations around their own needs, but most importantly, around the needs of the child. This applied to the more general matching criteria, for example, health issues, but also to the criteria for ethnic matching.

Some adopters referred to Adoption Black Families' and local authorities' ambiguity concerning the identity of one or both of the child's birth parents. This also had a significant impact on the matching process, because there was no certainty regarding the ethnicity of a child(ren), which therefore hampered decision making about the suitability of prospective adopters. One adopter recalled their experience:

> *"A lot of the time they don't know and I had loads of forms where they'd say, 'well the mother is this because we know about her, that doesn't mean to say she necessarily knows what her ethnicity is, but we have no idea...you know, the father has vanished', whether he's Caribbean, whether he is African…"*

This comment was made within the context of adopters not having fixed ideas regarding the ethnicity of a child that they were prepared to accept as a match.

It was described as one of the strengths of Adoption Black Families, that the staff encouraged prospective adopters to view identity and religion as a part of the matching picture. Finding the 'most appropriate' match was the priority:

> *"I do understand why they try to fit . . . it's for the sake of the children, why they try and fit the ethnicity, but they couldn't with us, and it changed, first of all it was 'half black Caribbean', then it became 'a quarter black African but we are not sure which country in Africa'. So they have been fluid with us and I think for them the most important thing was we would recognise their ethnicity as they are growing up."* (Adopter)

This last quote captures the essence of Adoption Black Families' matching philosophy and is reflected in the staff's observations in contributions above. When placing children with adoptive parents, wherever possible, Adoption Black Families' staff endeavoured to make an ethnic and religious match or 'fit'. However, where this was not possible, the most important criteria of the ethnic and religious matching was identity. In other words, that the prospective adopters had the ethnic, religious and cultural sensitivity to bring their adopted child(ren) up to appreciate, understand and value that their own birth ethnicity and religion was the critical issue.

The majority (70%) of social workers and managers referring to Adoption Black Families who responded to the Evaluation survey were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with Adoption Black Families' matching and placing of BME children. Further, the same proportion of survey respondents stated that Adoption Black Families were successful at matching BME children's needs with suitable adopters, and 40% of these felt they were 'very successful'.

Adoption Midlands

The Service Manager of Adoption Midlands highlighted a key factor in the argument for ethnically matched placements. While a perfect 'fit' or match was desirable, the rationale was to provide a warm, safe home for a child that enabled them to develop a positive sense of self and resilience against discrimination they may experience because of their ethnicity:

> *"'If you look at a child, a mixed race African/Caribbean-white child or Asian-white child and you place them in another broadly speaking black family, they are going to experience less racism in my view than they would if they were placed elsewhere."*

Therefore, ethnic matching was centrally about ensuring that the child would be secure in being able to deal with racism that they might experience. The manager went on to say:

> *"It's about does that family meet...match the ethnic origin of the child, that would be the only way to do it...For instance, if it is an Asian child and we're placing...and the birth family were Hindus and you're placing them with an Asian white family, the other way round, the father, the*

mother the other way round and they are Muslim or but not practicing etc, so what is the issue here, I think if you looked in terms of my understanding, if you looked at it literally, it is still transracial, but it isn't in terms of society and in terms of how they are going to be perceived. The reason I still use the term mixed race is because I think racism is the issue."

Therefore, the issue of flexibility in matching was prefaced with an understanding that the primary importance was to secure a placement with prospective adopters that simultaneously developed a positive sense of ethnic identity in the adopted child, while developing the necessary coping mechanisms and resilience to cope with racism (Small, 2000).

A staff member from Adoption Midlands expressed the importance of physical resemblance between prospective adopters and the child(ren):

> *"On a very simple level, the children do have to look like the family in order to fit with that family, because if they are very different in looks then you know that is an added dimension to it all."*

Just 25% of local authority survey respondents stated that they were satisfied with the matching of BME children in Adoption Midlands, which partly reflects their perception of Adoption Midlands as a generic service and Adoption Black Families as having dedicated resources to focus solely on the provision of ethnic matches for adoption.

What Made a 'Good Match'?

It has been strongly argued that ethnically matched placements encourage and nurture a positive sense of ethnic identity within BME children, which is seen as central to their well-being (Small, 2000; Thoburn et al, 2000). Having reported that a positive racial/ethnic identity has no association with levels of self-esteem and self-concept, researchers nonetheless seem to view such an identity as in BME and dual heritage children's best interests. The most recent research on permanence for BME children suggested that evidence regarding what constitutes a good match remains patchy (Selwyn et al, 2010). Nonetheless, they argue:

> "A *consistent research finding that virtually all minority ethnic children are subject to racism and for many children a placement based on ethnicity will be in their best interests."* (Selwyn et al, 2010: 227)

Yet they also caution that because UK society is becoming increasingly diverse, the variety and complexity of dual heritage relationships make it increasingly difficult to find an exact 'fit' or match for a dual heritage child. The points below highlight some practice and theoretical observations made regarding the matching process and criteria for Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands.

Summary

The main elements of a good match as identified by both projects were found to be the same as for all children that are 'looked after' and placed for adoption regardless of ethnicity. As the various matching forms indicated, the prospective adopters' preparedness for parenthood, their flexibility, the strength of their relationship (if they are a couple), the network of support from family and friends, their flexibility and understanding regarding possible health conditions the children may be experiencing and an understanding of the impact that loss, separation, neglect and abuse will have on the child, were of key importance to consider in matching BME children with BME adoptive parents. Most importantly, prospective adopters were required to appreciate that adoption was about meeting the child's needs, as well as their own (Dance et al, 2010).

The ethnicity, age of and religion of the children needing adoption placements at any given time were central considerations in making a match between children and adoptive parents. If a child of a specific ethnicity was not available at a young age, adopters had been willing to have an older child placed with them of the requisite ethnicity.

To an extent the age of the child being placed for adoption was a key factor taken into account when matching on the basis of birth parents' religion and culture with prospective adoptive parents. If the child was old enough to understand and recognise their ethnicity, culture and religion, then this was a central element of any match with an adopter. However, if the child was of a very young age, while still important in finding a match, the flexibility applied by both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands was appropriate in finding a broad match for the child.

Various data sources conclude that adopters' connectedness and matching with a child is strongly associated with the child's physical resemblance with themselves. Both staff and prospective adopters identified this as a key element to a successful match taking place. There was only one exception to this viewpoint, and this was from a manager who argued that an adoption should be about meeting a child's needs, not a substitute birth child that physically resembled the adoptive parents.

Adoption Black Families staff were able to facilitate good matches because they had developed a network of resources (local authorities, adoption consortia, adoption register, adoption publication) nationwide. To complement this they also had strong local connections with BME community organisations in London. All of these networks know that if they have a BME and/or dual heritage child that they need a placement for, it is likely that Adoption Black Families will have prospective adoptive parents to match with the child's ethnicity.

Many of the ethnic matches that Adoption Black Families make between BME prospective adopters and BME children were a perfect 'fit,' or at least clearly

compatible. In other words, the ethnicity, culture and religion of the adopters and child were the same. Nevertheless, there were several examples of this not being the case and where the ethnicity, culture and/or religion of the adopters and child were very different.

The rationale for such flexibility was that it sometimes became a priority to ensure that a child would be brought up by their adoptive parents with a clear sense of *identity,* who they are, what their ethnic background is and an understanding and appreciation of their birth parents' religion(s) when an exact match was not possible. In this way, adoptive parent(s) with broadly the same heritage, for example dual heritage white English/ African, would be viewed as a possible match for a child of dual heritage, white English/ Caribbean, with the same religion; or an Asian couple of Indian Hindu heritage would be viewed as a possible match for a Pakistani child of Muslim heritage.

On many human, political and theoretical levels this is a laudable stance because the matches focus on the commonalities between ethnicities, not the differences. However, this flexibility could be viewed as contrary to the philosophy and ethos of ethnically matched placements, as the match is based on ethnic generality, phenotype and/or geography. Thus, two kinds of ethnic matches were made through Adoption Black Families:

1) *General* ethnic matches, based on physical resemblance and broad categories such as black and/or dual heritage, Asian and/or dual heritage;

2*) Specific* ethnic matches, based on region, culture and religion, for instance a Pakistani child and Pakistani adoptive parents or Jamaican child and Jamaican adoptive parent(s).

Conversely, some matches between adopters and child(ren) appeared to have taken place for pragmatic reasons, for example a dual heritage Asian child being placed with parents of dual heritage Mauritian/ English adopters. Here, the nuances of ethnicity could be seen to be lost under the guise of flexibility. This point is acknowledged by Selwyn et al (2010:19) who reflected that the ever increasing diversity of dual heritage birth parents provides adoption agencies with 'formidable' conceptual and practical difficulties when trying to establish an exact match for children with adoptive parents.

On the face of it, some of the matches appeared to overlook birth parents' preference for their child to be brought up within their own religion. There is clearly a debate that can take place regarding the relative importance of religion being a factor in a match between a child and an adoptive parent(s), or whether it is appropriate for a child to be 'born into' or inherit a religion at birth. However, as the Adoption and Children Act 2002 specifies that religion should be used when considering suitable adoption placements, perhaps there should be more explicit discussion of the rationale for the matching of the religion of children and adoptive parents.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Managers and Staff

Managers and staff of Adoption Black Families had a clear political, ideological and professional commitment to the principle and practice of ethnically matched adoption placements. Managers and staff demonstrated a high level of expertise and professional experience while working with prospective BME adopters. This commitment was often articulated by Adoption Black Families practitioners as providing ethnically and culturally sensitive services and 'going the extra mile', undertaking many of their professional duties outside normal working hours at evenings and weekends. The managers and staff at Adoption Midlands demonstrated similar commitment to the principle of ethnically matched adoption placements, which was evidenced by the number of adoption placements between BME children and adopters they had made.

However, the difference, or added value, of a team focusing solely on recruiting, assessing and supporting BME adopters, as at Adoption Black Families, was endorsed by its staff and adopters. Staff explained this as a combination of their professional experience with a political commitment to working within BME communities to locate ethnically matched placements for BME children. Adopters valued this support and an approach that was ethnically and culturally sensitive, often comparing the service received from Adoption Black Families favourably against their experience with local authority adoption services. Referring local authority social workers recognised the relevance of an adoption project with a specialised focus and looked more frequently to place children through a project that dealt exclusively with BME families than one providing generic adoption services. There was understandably a degree of concern expressed by Adoption Black Families' staff at the downsizing of the staff team as well as plans to integrate fostering and adoption services.

A key motivation for approaching Adoption Black Families for the majority of adopters participating in the research was that it provided a service that met their own ethnic and cultural needs. However, the emphasis on an African/Caribbean identity of being 'black' did not fully reflect the diverse ethnic identities of people from dual heritage and Asian backgrounds that did and could potentially use the service in the future. This should not detract from acknowledging that many prospective adopters felt that the African/Caribbean social workers in the team provided a service that was expert and professional.

> **Recommendation**: To appropriately respond to the needs of the ever changing and diverse BME and dual heritage communities, the adoption workforce should be diverse and reflect the ethnicities of adopters and children waiting for adoption.

Recruitment of BME Adopters

In terms of recruiting BME adopters, Adoption Black Families had been more successful than its comparator, Adoption Midlands. As discussed in Chapter 5 of this report this could be attributed to several factors, such as active recruitment campaigns with the black community; a staff team from BME communities who understand the importance of ethnically matched placements and of working with couples and individuals from diverse backgrounds; and staff who because of their ethnic backgrounds offer an ethnically sensitive service to BME adoptive applicants. More targeted campaigns to recruit adopters from specific ethnic backgrounds may be needed in future to ensure supply (adopters from specific ethnic backgrounds) is in tune with demand (BME children requiring adoption placement).

The project is approached by many more BME prospective adopters than go on to be successfully approved. Improving the consistency of response to enquirers during the initial stages of the recruitment process might therefore enable Adoption Black Families to retain good potential applicants who might have otherwise been put off by any lack of contact since their initial enquiry. Furthermore, within the context of ever changing (dual) ethnicities, there is an opportunity for staff to be even more creative and to explore within the team how they might access adopters from more diverse backgrounds as well as from specific ethnic communities to meet the needs of children requiring adoptive placements. Here, there is an argument for Adoption Black Families to examine whether the name of the project is helping or hindering its efforts to be representative and inclusive and to reflect the diversity of ethnicities and dual heritage.

> **Recommendation**: The recruitment of adopters should be based on systematic analysis of the 'market need '(i.e. adopters needed from specific communities to meet the needs of children requiring adoption placement).

> **Recommendation**: Consistent ongoing monitoring and information systems should be implemented as these are important to effective development and marketing of BME adoption services. In particular, services should ensure consistent recording of ethnicity and religion at all stages from enquiry through to matching.

The Process of Adoption

The comparison between Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands demonstrated that for the most part the processes of assessment and support were similar. There was a commitment in both projects to put the child at the centre of the process and to ensure that adoptive applicants and prospective adopters received the best possible service. The average time for Adoption Black Families to complete the process of enquiry to approval, placement and adoption for BME children were two, three and five months quicker respectively than the same processes for Adoption Midlands. From approval

to placement, Adoption Midlands took one month longer (on average) than Adoption Black Families (nine months and eight months respectively). Again, this is indicative that the throughput of adoptions can be improved when a service has as its primary focus the recruitment of BME adopters and placing of BME children.

The ethnic composition of the Adoption Black Families staff group had enabled a high level of expertise to develop regarding adoption in relation to ethnicity, culture and religion. This was also reflected in the composition of the Adoption Black Families' Adoption Panel, which enabled ethnicity, along with more generic criteria for adoption, to be considered rigorously and fairly during the assessment and approval process. This was an approach which was on the whole experienced positively by adopters.

The process of adoption was the same in both the specialist Action for Children project and mainstream adoption project and met good practice standards for adoption services in the UK.

> **Recommendation**: The good practice that is evident from this Evaluation should be shared widely across organisations and sectors. This could include increasing marketing of the benefits of Action for Children's specialist BME adoption service to local authorities and other adoption agencies in the UK.

Experience of Adopters

The evidence from adopters, with and without placements, who were interviewed from both Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands, was generally positive. The adopters with Adoption Black Families stated that its social workers were professional, and developed trusting and supportive relationships with them. The Adoption Panel experience was a trying time for many prospective adopters but had been eased by good levels of professional support from social workers at Adoption Black Families and Adoption Midlands. The assessment and preparation process had been a difficult one for some adopters, but overall it was felt by adopters to have been an opportunity for growth and reflection in the preparation. Some adopters stated that the ethnic composition of the Adoption Black Families team had been a key contributing factor for them applying to become adopters.

However, a common theme from the majority of adopters that had contact with or had received a service from Adoption Black Families was that communication with them was not always consistent. Adopters stated that they felt at times they were left to drift through the process, and they were not always kept informed regarding the progress of their application. Others would have appreciated more information, for instance about the series of checks (Police, Medical etc) that were a routine part of completing the Prospective Adopters' Report. Given the importance of open recruitment and assessment processes that are as communicative and supportive as possible so that services retain BME adopters (Selwyn et al, 2004), this is a practice

issue that should be prioritised. It is also one that can easily be addressed by building in time-lines or trigger points of contact with prospective adopters, and providing timely updates on progress with their application or placement.

> **Recommendation**: The adoption process needs to incorporate time-line trigger points for communication with prospective adopters and this should be made explicit from the outset. A flowchart of processes might be helpful.

Matching

Overall, Adoption Black Families demonstrated a strong track record in ethnically matched adoption placements of BME and dual heritage children with BME and dual heritage adoptive parents. The social workers at Adoption Black Families ensured that they met generic adoption criteria identified by Dance et al (2008, 2010) for instance, taking into account the health and developmental needs of the child, the prospective adopter(s)' capacity to parent, flexibility, and the ability to connect with the child. They also worked within the project's practice ethos of ethnically matching children and adopters. In the many instances where both adoptive parents and child(ren) were of a similar ethnicity, matches were straightforward and not at all contentious. Complications in ethnic matching were experienced when placements were made between prospective adoptive parents of a different ethnic heritage (i.e. dual heritage) and the child proposed for adoption was also of dual heritage, especially when the ethnic heritage of one or more of the birth parents was uncertain (Selwyn et al, 2010; Thoburn et al, 2005). Such circumstances were experienced by Adoption Black Families with increasing regularity.

Some of the matches had been made on more pragmatic and flexible grounds because Adoption Black Families did not have the supply of relevant adoptive parents to achieve a perfect 'fit' between the ethnicity of the child and adopters. However, it is possible that recruitment for specific dual ethnicities of some adopters has not been effective enough and could be improved. Whatever the reason for these pragmatic matches, they were made within a flexible framework that aimed to safeguard the child's *identity* by ensuring that there was a broad ethnic 'fit'. The intention of the Adoption Black Families social workers was to ensure the child was placed in a family that would encourage and develop their birth identity in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Further, these more flexible matches, along with the more straightforward ethnic 'fits', were made within the context of ensuring the adopted BME child was placed within a BME family that would enable it to develop a resilience against racism (Barn, 2003; Thoburn et al, 2000).

In light of an ever increasing and complex myriad of dual ethnicities emerging (Barn and Harman, 2006:1310; Hall, 1992; Modood, 1994), the policy and practice implications of flexible matches need to be re-considered. This is in part a consequence of the UK being a large, diverse multi-cultural country, but also because ethnicities and their communities are merging and mixing to create different dual ethnicities and cultures. There needs to be further

dialogue and debate regarding how services respond to these ever changing new (dual) ethnicities (Hall, 1992).

In particular, this has implications for the name 'Adoption Black Families' and whether this needs to change to reflect the nuanced representation of these ethnicities, and how they can increase recruitment to ensure there is an opportunity to match the more complex representation of dual heritage children. Also, it is important for Adoption Black Families to conceptually critique and understand what this means for ethnic matching. Are the values of the project concerned with the nuances of identity, culture and ethnicity, or are they about ensuring children are resilient against racism with a broad ethnic identity, or both?

While some matches based on child's and adopters' religion were straightforward, there were some that again appeared to be more the result of pragmatism. Clearly, birth parent's wishes are a significant factor in matching an adoptive child's religion with adoptive parents. However, in some instances, there appeared to be no clear rationale for the match in respect of religion. Again, while it is necessary to give due consideration to religion in adoptive matches (Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002), there needs to be greater discussion within the Adoption Black Families team and Action for Children generally regarding the rationale for a good 'fit' or a flexible match on the grounds of religion.

> **Recommendation:** Theoretical, policy and practice focused discussion regarding the changing nature of BME and dual heritage identities should take place to ensure that the needs of BME and dual heritage children are recognised and met. This could include a discussion of the appropriateness of the name 'Black Families' for Action for Children's specialist BME adoption service.

> **Recommendation**: Future research should be considered into medium and long term outcomes for BME and dual heritage children in ethnically matched adoption placements regarding their ethnic identity, self esteem, how they have engaged with society, school and employment, and the durability of the placement with their adoptive parents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evaluation of Adoption Black Families provides evidence of effectiveness in the recruitment of adopters from a range of BME communities, and of successful matching of BME and dual heritage children with adopters of similar ethnic, cultural and religious heritage. In comparison to the mainstream adoption project, Adoption Black Families recruited more BME adopters and subsequently matched more BME and dual heritage children with these adopters. Over the five year period for which statistics were examined, there appeared to be almost no breakdown in adoptive placements made by Adoption Black Families. Furthermore, the timescales achieved by

Adoption Black Families from initial inquiry to granting adoption orders was well within national quality standards.

Recent studies suggest that the challenge of matching BME and dual heritage children with suitable adopters is becoming even more complex with the ever changing composition of ethnicities in the UK. Adoption Black Families as a specialist service focusing on ethnically matched adoption placements was making adoption placement decisions within this challenging arena.

In contrast with their experience of other adoption agencies, adopters with Adoption Black Families stated that the service was culturally and ethnically sensitive to their needs. Furthermore, they felt that the service promoted good outcomes for BME and dual heritage children. Similarly, referring social workers contacted Adoption Black Families because of its specialist focus and past satisfaction with its matching and placement outcomes for BME and dual heritage children. Adoption Black Families specialist provision for BME adopters and children was closely associated by evaluation participants with its effectiveness.

REFERENCES

Adoption Agency Regulations (2005)
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20050389.htm [accessed 12 May 2010].

Action for Children, 2008-10. *Adoption Black Families Business Plan,* 2008/9 – 2009/10.

Action for Children, 2009. *Annual Monitoring Information*, April 2008-March 2009.

Action for Children, 2009. *Statement of Purpose – Adoption Black Families*, May 2009.

Adoption and Children Act 2002. London: HMSO.

Amerson, R. 2000. 'How to find and keep families for African-American children'. *Adoptalk,* Spring. North American Council on Adoptable Children www.nacac.org.

Bagley, C., 1993. 'Transracial adoption in Britain: a follow-up study with policy considerations', *Child Welfare* Vol 72, No 3, pp285–99.

Bagley, C. and Young, L., 1979. The identity, adjustment and achievement of transracially adopted children: A review and empirical report. In: G.K. Verma, and C. Bagley, eds., *Race, education and identity,* London: MacMillan.

Banks, N., 1995. 'Children of black mixed parentage and their placement needs'. *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 19, No 2, pp.9-24.

Banks, N., 1997. Social workers' perceptions of racial difference. *Social Services Research,* No 1, pp.26-32.

Banks, N., 2003. 'Direct identity work'. In R. Barn, *Working with Black Children and Adolescents in Need.* London: BAAF.

Barn, R., 2000. 'Race, Ethnicity and Transracial Adoption', In A. Treacher and I. Katz, *The Dynamics of Adoption: Social and Personal Perspectives.* Ch 8. London: Jessica Knightly.

Barn, R., ed. 2003. *Working with Black Children and Adolescents in Need*. London: BAAF.

Barn, R. and Harman V., 2006, A Contested Identity: An Exploration of the Competing Social and Political Discourse Concerning the Identification and Positioning of Young People of Inter-Racial Parentage, *British Journal of Social Work,* Vol 36, No 8, pp.1309-1324.

BBC News, 1998. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/160106.stm, [accessed on 4 November 2009].

Black and In Care, 1984. *Black and in Care: Conference report.* London: Blackrose Press.

Brah, A., 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities.* London: Routledge.

Butt, J. and Mirza, K., 1996. *Social Care and Black Communities: A Review of Recent Research Studies.* London: Racial Equality Unit.

Charles, M.; Rashid, S, and Thoburn, J, 1992. 'The placement of black children with permanent new families'. *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 16, pp.13-19.

Children Act 1989. London: The Stationery Office.

Cross, W.E. Jr., 1971. 'The negro to black conversion experience: Toward a psychology of black liberation'. *Black World*, Vol 20, No 9, pp.13–27.

Dance, C.; Ouwejan, D.; Beecham, J. and Farmer, E., 2008. *Linking and Matching: A survey of adoption agency practice in England and Wales- Stage 1 of Investigation.* London: BAAF.

Dance, C.; Ouwejan, D.; Beecham, J. and Farmer, E., 2010. *Linking and Matching: A survey of adoption agency practice in England and Wales.* London: BAAF.

Davidson, J. E. 2005. *Evaluation Methodology Basics. The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation.* California, USA: Sage Publications.

Department of Health (1993) *Adoption: The Future*, White Paper, London: HMSO, CM 2288

Department of Health, 1999. *Adoption Now: Messages from Research,* London: HMSO.

Department of Health (2001) *National Adoption Standards for England*, London: Department of Health

Department of Health, 2003. *Adoption, National Minimum Standards.* England and Wales Regulations. London.

Dorow, S., 2007. *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship.* New York: New York University Press.

Fenton, R., 2001. 'Initial Responses to black prospective adopters: results of a small scale study.' *Adoption and Fostering*, Vol 25, No 1, pp.13-23.

Frazer, L and Selwyn, J., 2005. 'Why are we waiting? The demography of adoption for children of black, Asian and black mixed parentage in England.' *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol 10, pp.135-147.

Gaber, I., 1994. Transracial placements in Britain: A history. In I. Gaber and & J. Aldridge, eds. *In the best interests of the child: Culture, Identity and Transracial Adoption.* London: Free Association Books.

Gaber, I. and Aldridge, J., eds. 1994. *In the best interests of the child: Culture, Identity and Transracial Adoption.* London: Free Association Books.
.
Gill, O. and Jackson, B., 1983. *Adoption and Race: Black, Asian and Mixed Race Children in White Families.* London: BAAF.

Graham, M., 2007, *Black issues in social work and social care.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Hall, S., 1992. 'New Ethnicities' Chapter 11 pp252-259. In   J. Donald and A. Rattansi, eds. *'Race', Culture and Difference'.* London: Sage.

Hall, S 1996. 'Introduction: who needs identity?'. In S. Hall and P.du Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity.* London: Sage pp.1-17.

Harris, P., 2006, ed. *In Search of Belonging: Reflections by Transracially Adopted People.* London: BAAF.

Hayes, P 1993. 'Transracial adoption; Politics and ideology. In: *Child Welfare,* Vol 52, No 3, pp.301-310.

Huh, N. S. and Reid, W. J., 2000. 'Intercountry, transracial adoption and ethnic identity: a Korean example'. *International Social Work,* Vol 43, No 1, pp.75-88.

Kaniuk, J., 1991. 'Strategies in recruiting black adopters', *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 15, No 1, pp. 38-42.

Kirton, D., 2000. *'Race', Ethnicity and Adoption.'* Buckingham: Open University.

Macey, M., 1995. 'Same race' adoption policy: anti-racism or racism? .*Journal of Social Policy*, Vol 24, No 4, pp.473-491.

Maxime, J., 1986. Some Psychological Models of Black Self-Concept. In S. Ahmed, J. Cheetham, and J.Small, eds. *Social work with Black Children and their Families.* London: Batsford.

McRoy, R.; Zurcher, L.; Landerdale, M. and Anderson, R., 1982. 'Self-esteem and racial identity in transracial and inracial adoptees.' *Social Work,* Vol 27, No 6, Nov pp. 522-526.

McRoy, R., Oglesby Z., and Grape, H., 1997. Achieving same-race adoptive placements for African American children: Culturally sensitive practice approaches. *Child Welfare,* Vol 76, Issue:1, pp. 85-104.

Modood, T., 1994. 'Political Blackness and British Asians'. *Journal of British Sociological Association.* Vol 4, pp.859-876.

Modood, T., Berthoud R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith P., Virdee, S. and Beishon, S., 1997. *The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities: Ethnic Minorities in Britain Discrimination and Disadvantage.* London: Policy Studies Institute.

Modood, T., 2005. *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain.* Edinburgh University Press.

Moffatt, P. and Thoburn, J., 2001. 'Outcomes of permanent family placement for children of minority ethnic origin', *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol 6, pp. 13-21.

Parekh, B., 2000. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.* London: Profile Books.

Patel, T., 2007. 'Theorising the racial identity development of transracial adoptees: A symbolic interactionist perspective, *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 31, No 2, pp. 32-43.

Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000. *Prime Minister's Review of Adoption.* London: Department of Health.

Rhodes, P., 1991. 'The assessment of black foster parents; The relevance of cultural skills – comparative views of social workers and applicants.' *Critical Social Policy,* Vol 11, No 32, pp. 31-51.

Rhodes, P. 1992. *Racial Marching in Fostering - The Challenge to Social Work Practice.* Aldershot: Avebury

Rushton, A. and Minnis, H., 1997. 'Annotation: Transracial family placements'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol 38, pp. 147–159.

Selwyn, J., Frazer, L. and Fitzgerald, A., 2004. *Finding adoptive families for black, Asian and black mixed parentage children: agency policy and practice.* NCH/Hadley Centre: University of Bristol.

Selwyn, J., 2006. 'Understanding pathways to permanence: adoption and minority ethnic children'*. Childright*, No 223, pp. 14-17.

Selwyn, J., Quinton, D., Harris, P., Wijedasa, S., and Wood, M., 2010. *Pathways to Permanence for Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnicity Children.* London: BAAF ARI.

Simon, R. and Alstein, R. 1987. *Transracial adoptees and their families: A study of identity and commitmen*t. New York: Praeger.

Simon, R., and Alstein, H., 1996. The case for transracial adoption, *Children and Youth Services Review,* Vol 18, No 1-2, pp. 5-22.

Simon, R., and Alstein, H. 2001. *Adoption, Race, & Identity: From Infancy To Young Adulthood.* New York: Transaction.

Small, J., 1982. New Black Families, *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 6, No 3, pp. 35-9.

Small, J., 1986. 'Transracial Placements: conflicts and contradictions'. In S. Ahmed,J. Cheetham, and J. Small, 1986. *Social Work and Black Children and their Families.* London: Batsford/BAAF.

Small, J., 1991. Ethnic and racial identity in adoption within the UK. *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 15, No 4, pp. 61-9.

Small, J., 2000. 'Ethnicity and Placement', *Adoption and Fostering,* Vol 24, No 1, pp. 9-13.

Sunmonu, Y., 2000. Why Black Carers are deterred from Adoption. *Adoption and Fostering*. Vol 24, No1, pp. 59-60.

Thoburn, J., Norford, L., and Rashid, S., 2000. *Permanent Family Placement for Children of Minority Ethnic Origin*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Thoburn, J., Chand, A. and Procter, J., 2005. *Child welfare services for minority ethnic families: the research reviewed.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Tizard, B. and Phoenix, A., 1989. Black identity and transracial adoption. *New Community,* 15, pp. 427-437.

Tizard, B.and Phoenix, A., 1993. *Black, White or Mixed race.* London: Routledge.

Tizard, B. and Phoenix, A., 2002 *Black, White or Mixed race,* 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Trisiolotis, J., Shireman, J. and Hundleby, M., 1997. *Adoption. Theory, policy and practice.* Cassell: London.
.
Zeitlin, H., 2003. 'Adoption of Children from Minority Groups', In K. Dwivedi and V. Varma, eds. *Meeting the needs of ethnic minority children: a*

Handbook for Professionals. Ch 11. London: Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.