

Finding adoptive families for black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children: agency policy and practice

Executive summary

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the children's charity

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Research funded by Scottish Power and commissioned by NCH

Executive summary

Introduction

Where adoption is the plan, statutory and voluntary agencies involved in finding permanent, substitute placements for children from black, Asian and black mixed-parentage communities have been concerned for some time that these children and young people:

- appear less likely than white children to find a family
- remain longer in the care system

The study

This study, commissioned by NCH and funded by Scottish Power, examines the barriers that stand in the way of black, Asian and mixed-parentage adults and those in mixed relationships coming forward to adopt. It also highlights what is known about best practice.

It confirms the needs of black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children awaiting new permanent homes and reviews what is known about the successful recruitment of adopters.

The study also illustrates:

- how a sample of local authorities view the needs of black, Asian and black-mixed parentage children
- how local authorities strive to match those needs with appropriate placements
- the policies and strategies used by local authorities to recruit the adopters required
- policy in relation to black mixed-parentage children
- examples of good practice
- the barriers adoption agencies may face

Three local authorities with large minority ethnic populations agreed to take part and each provided data on their minority ethnic looked-after children, children adopted and minority ethnic adopters. Social work team managers were interviewed and questionnaires were sent to prospective adopters. A best practice tool for adoption agencies was also developed as a result of the findings.

The main bulk of the work took place during 2003.

'The characteristics of children placed for adoption have changed dramatically since the 1970s. Attitudes and policies relating to birth control, abortion and single parenthood have reduced the number of babies available, typical adopters are no longer childless couples and the children adopted are rarely the babies of young single mothers.'

'In the intervening years, older children, children with disabilities, sibling groups and black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children have formed the majority of the young people waiting for a home.'

Linda Plummer, NCH
Family Placement Adviser

Analysis of data

- There is a shortage of all minority ethnic adopters and in particular, a desperate need for black, black mixed-parentage and mixed-relationship adopters (pp 35–36).¹
- The difficulties in recruiting minority ethnic adopters and possible solutions have been known about for the last 15 years (p 74).
- The impact of racism has affected people's willingness to approach agencies (pp 73, 75).
- Minority ethnic children comprise 18 per cent of all the children looked after in the UK and 22 per cent of children on the national Adoption Register, but only 13 per cent of those adopted. No matter what the age of the child the process, from best interest decision to adoption, took longer (pp 32–33, 35).
- If all the 'potential' and 'viable' links identified by the national register for black, Asian and mixed-parentage children and adopters had converted to placements, the entire pool of adopters would have been absorbed but 150 children would have been unmatched (p 34).
- Some minority ethnic groups have very young age structures. There may be few minority ethnic adults living in the community and thus a very limited pool of potential adopters. As a result it is important for agencies to understand the demographics of their areas, so that they can identify which groups of adopters they will struggle to recruit (pp 24, 74).
- Social work matching reports need to give greater consideration to how adopters would help a child understand their heritage, culture and form a positive sense of self. Neither a black nor a white family is a perfect match for a black mixed-parentage child (p 75).
- Adoption practice has to respond to the prevalence within minority ethnic communities of large family sizes, poverty, poor housing and language barriers (pp 25–28, 76).
- Myths and stereotypes around adoption are still prevalent in minority ethnic communities, despite all the advertising and publicity. Community development approaches to recruitment are needed rather than traditional casework methods (p 76).
- Where agencies had recruited more minority ethnic social work staff, there had been an increase in applicants, but most had difficulty attracting staff (pp 59, 76).

'A lot of myths make people feel they're not suitable to adopt. They wonder if they'll be good enough. It's amazing. They think they need to be white and middleclass, or working and married. Or they think that if you're black and single you can't adopt. But the reality is very different. You can be unemployed and still adopt. Good parenting skills are the main thing, safe parenting and openness.'

Jyotsna Karsan, NCH
Adoption Project Worker
in the North East

¹ The page numbers refer to pages in the full report.

- Adoption agencies need far better information systems that can be easily accessed, so that scarce resources can be more effectively targeted. Agencies need to understand their own communities and the needs of the children waiting for placement. Ethnicity and culture should be clearly described, rather than using 'black' as a blanket term to cover all children from a minority ethnic background (p 74).

Recommendations to statutory and voluntary adoption agencies when recruiting adoptive families for black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children:²

- promote the importance of diversity in adoption across all sectors of the service (p 85)
- understand the demographics of your local community (p 86)
- build a strong reputation within the community (p 86)
- make broad ownership of 'corporate parenting' a reality across the whole local authority (p 86)
- place children at the heart of recruitment activity (p 87)
- understand the recruitment process from an adopter's point of view (p 87)
- promote adoption through high-quality advertising and publicity (p 87)
- know your current recruitment processes and attend to the detail (p 88)
- deliver high-quality assessments (p 89)
- develop good post-adoption support (p 89)

Discussion and conclusion

This report examines the many barriers that stand in the way of people coming forward to adopt. These barriers include reluctance by black and other minority ethnic adults to approach social services departments, the persistence of myths about what kinds of people make suitable adopters and social services' lack of strategic planning in this area.

By highlighting best practice in this area and the lessons to be learned, it is hoped that adoption agencies will collect better information about their local populations, critically review their own practice and develop proactive recruitment strategies. This will enhance future practice and policy development to the benefit of those children who need our care.

'The families I talk to see social work as something negative... people that come and cause problems... but over the years I've found that publicity, word of mouth and putting ourselves out there shows people that we are human and "not out to get you". Families appreciate the personal touch and the best way to find people who could adopt is to go where the people are.'

Steve Mitcham, NCH
Adoption Project Worker
in the Midlands

² For the recommendations in detail, please refer to the best practice guide.

Further information

NCH has been registered as an adoption agency since 1926 and has been working for over a decade to increase the numbers of adopters for black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children. Our adoption services are run in partnership with local authorities and adopters. We aim to involve adopters in all stages of the process and provide services most relevant to their needs and to those of the children placed with them.

www.nch.org.uk/adoption

The Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, based in the School for Policy Studies at Bristol University, was established in October 2000 through the generous funding of the Hadley Trust.

The Hadley Centre aims to promote best practice in the field of adoption, foster care and placement with kin by linking research, practice and training in order to provide these children with stable and predictable family experiences. The intention is to promote scientifically rigorous research and evaluation and to develop ways of disseminating research findings that will be of direct use to practitioners and will influence policy makers.

www.bristol.ac.uk/hadley

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'NCH exists to make a difference to some of the most vulnerable children in society today.'

'We believe that the study and the recommendations in the best practice guide will make a significant contribution to the development of strategies that meet the needs of the black, Asian and black mixed-parentage children waiting for new families.'

Linda Plummer, NCH
Family Placement Adviser