

# OUTREACH TOOLKIT FOR ADOPTION AGENCIES



#YOU CAN  
ADOPT

# CONTENTS

Background	4
Introduction	4
Overview of this year's campaign	6
Definition of outreach	6
Importance of outreach	8
Cultural and religious festivals	12
Key channels for outreach	14
Key considerations for those delivering effective outreach	15
Techniques and skills required – this can inform the role of an outreach manager	16
Principles for evaluating outreach	18



## BACKGROUND

Outreach is an integral part of the specialist #YouCanAdopt campaign aimed at Black African and Black Caribbean communities, to help break down barriers and motivate people to consider adoption.

Due COVID-19 restrictions we were unable to carry out face-to-face engagement as part of the pilot campaign. We pivoted our approach to focus on remote engagement with faith leaders and community organisations. This approach had some success in terms of achieving an overwhelmingly positive response to the campaign from faith leaders and community organisations that were engaged and reached over 210,000. However, it was challenging to

activate some of the support into meaningful action due to the changing COVID-19 restrictions which impacted their day-to-day operations and priorities.

Moving forward with the easing of restrictions and building on learnings from the pilot, it is recommended that an always on approach is best suited to engaging faith and community organisations to provide a more flexible way of working. Face-to-face engagement in areas with a high Black population is also recommended as this is a more effective way to reach and engage people in community spaces through direct conversations which will be a core feature of this year's campaign.

## INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is for Regional Adoption Agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Local Authorities and other key stakeholders who are keen to devise and implement outreach programmes in their local areas. The toolkit provides helpful information, advice and tips to support recruitment drives.

The information provided in this toolkit is relevant to engaging any underrepresented groups, however, it has been prepared with the lens of the #YouCanAdopt Black adopters campaign.



## OVERVIEW OF THIS YEAR'S CAMPAIGN

Building on the learnings from the pilot campaign we will focus on:

### TRUSTED VOICES

Recruiting case studies - individuals or couples that have adopted children - who can share their experience in an authentic way. We will also work with adoption experts and social workers, who'll be able to explain the process and requirements for adoption as well highlight the support available.

### PR AND MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS

Amplifying adoption stories during key calendar months throughout the year, for example, during the summer months when the street teams have been activated and during October to coincide with National Adoption Week and Black History Month. We will also generate further exposure, by

creating editorial media packages with Black TV, radio and print outlets.

### CULTURALLY RELEVANT PODCASTERS AND SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS

Galvanising communities by working with key podcasters and social platforms that will help to keep the adoption narrative present and relevant to our target communities throughout the year.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Onboarding national community groups, professional networks, women's groups, faith groups (Christian and Muslim) to engage communities at a grassroots level. This will be supported with street team activity in the West Midlands and the North West.

## DEFINITION OF OUTREACH

We define outreach as an active process of engaging a target community around an issue of concern, through personal relationships, credible information, trusted voices and networks.



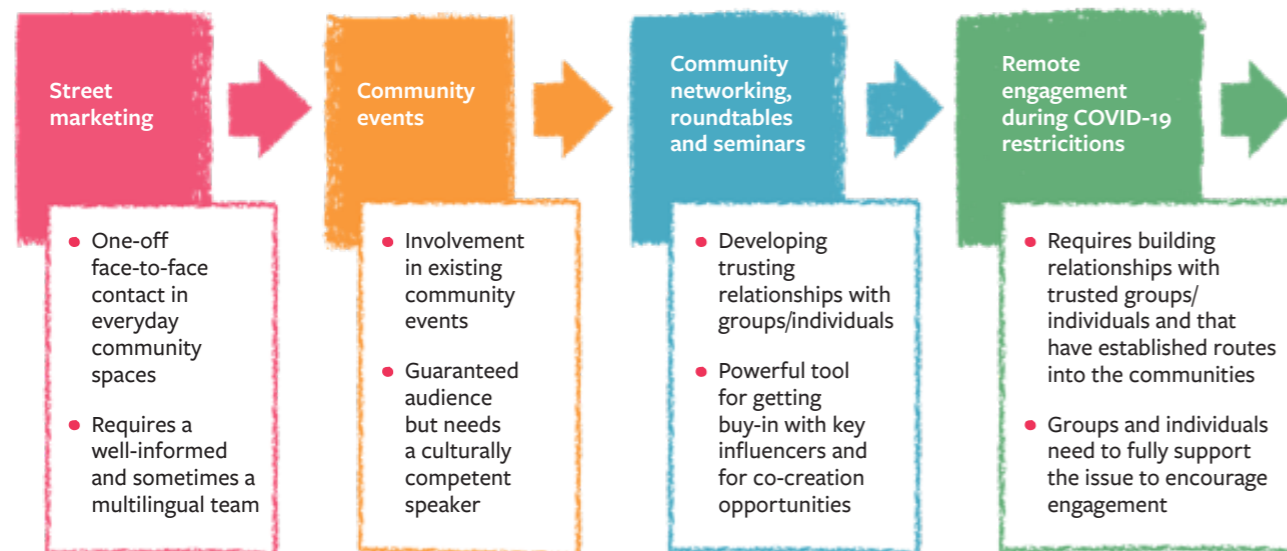
# IMPORTANCE OF OUTREACH

Where other forms of communication typically aim to raise awareness or influence attitudes through frequent and broadcast means, outreach is much more targeted and localised, using powerful personal interaction to create dialogue

to overcome barriers and change minds. Outreach can help form a bridge between communities and the adoption services, addressing myths or wrongly-held perceptions through conversations and first-hand experience.

PURPOSE	TECHNIQUES	AUDIENCES
Often involves communicating a specific message	Proactive, making an effort to seek out members of the target audience rather than waiting for enquiries to come in	Specific audiences usually because of cultural, faith or language barriers
Designed to address under-representation or perceived barriers to conventional channels of communications in relation to minority groups	Tapping into their events and channels rather expecting them to attend your events	Those reluctant to engage with adoption services
Designed to have significant impact on an individual, changing attitudes or behaviour	Involves face-to-face or remote one-to-one contact to create dialogue, better achieved alongside other media	
Designed to build trust	Uses community advocates to build credibility	

There are different approaches that you can deploy as part of outreach, which include:



## STRENGTHS OF OUTREACH APPROACHES

- Reach: outreach allows you to reach audiences that may be excluded from mainstream communications.
- Scope to build a network of advocates in the community through investment in strong relationships. The advocates can then be vocal, credible supporters of the campaign.
- Approaches developed and delivered in collaboration with community and faith organisations are likely to have greater success in engaging your audiences
- It can build trust in the organisation among members of the community and help with 'myth-busting'.
- It can increase empathy – both with the community and adoption services. Contact and relationships help to develop an appreciation of the issues and concerns of both sides. This can help build audience insight so that future communications is made more effective.
- It is a visible, tangible way to addressing specific community needs via targeted materials, visits to community spaces and events that demonstrates commitment to the community and interest in them and their issues.
- Provides an opportunity to discuss the message in more detail, giving target audiences information relevant to them as individuals and answering their questions face to face or remotely.
- Strong impact – provides the platform to change minds through explanation and discussion. Authenticity and credibility of the information is often stronger than in other forms of communication.
- Allows for highly targeted communications with little 'waste', ensuring that outreach teams spend their time with target audiences.



## LIMITATIONS OF OUTREACH APPROACHES

- Often relies on charismatic, multi-skilled individuals and long-term personal relationships. If these people move on, there can be a gap that is difficult to fill.
- Outreach depends on relationships and goodwill; it can be damaged by external events or insensitive treatment of someone in the community by another part of the adoption service.
- Can take a long time to develop trust to the level needed to access the community. For example, some groups may be suspicious of authority or require months of patient work before opening their networks to an outsider. Therefore, an always-on approach is far more effective.
- Can be difficult to set up and maintain without specialist help.
- Can be hard to measure as the impacts are generally localised, long term and qualitative.
- May need messages and propositions to be adjusted to suit outreach to give focus for people doing the engagement.
- Though not necessarily an obstacle, some outreach approaches are not as amenable to tight control as other forms of communications. It is most effective when there is flexibility to tailor further to different audiences.

## THINGS TO BE AWARE OF

- Utilising your existing Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff to engage others in the community is most effective but only if they are willing and it shouldn't just be their responsibility. It's important to integrate diversity and inclusion into everyone's role in order to achieve cultural change within the sector.
- Get to understand cultural nuances – for example, mosques are largely used by men, however, some mosques have a separate section for women. Therefore, care should be taken to match the gender of the predominant audience you'll be engaging in that space.
- Dress modestly, especially in places of worship. In some places, such as mosques women will be required to cover their hair and also the removal of shoes is required too.
- Check the English language proficiency of your audience so you will know if you need interpreters.
- Outreach is much more effective when it's part of a wider visible paid or earned campaign, it creates a strong backdrop that serves a good reference point when engaging communities.



## CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Planning ahead and understanding the right times to connect with Black, Asian and minority ethnic audiences is important. Target audiences need to be in the right mindset and open to information and education. Understanding the role and meaning of key festivals and dates will help assess whether they are appropriate times for messaging, and what types of messaging would be suitable and welcomed.

For example:

- Festival periods such as Christmas, Easter and Eid are good times to simply connect with the community and wish them well.
- The period before these festivals, as respective communities prepare for the festivities, are times when engagement and education using culturally appropriate messaging can work well.
- The summer months see a lot of local community events and festivals which provides strong and effective vehicles for face-to-face engagement and discussion.
- Black History Month coincides with National Adoption Week in October and is a key calendar moment to acknowledge, celebrate the contribution of the Black adopters.



## KEY CHANNELS FOR OUTREACH

Outreach is best used in tandem with a well targeted paid and earned campaign to help raise awareness of the issue in advance of or alongside the outreach work.

### UMBRELLA ORGANISATIONS

There are a number of umbrella organisations that are well placed to coordinate, identify and support local community groups and faith organisations with networks and facilities e.g. venues and events to support outreach within communities. Broadly speaking they are more likely than individual groups to have capacity and resources to manage stakeholder relationships.

### COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES' VS COMMUNITY LEADERS

It's important to note that national and local organisations often have self-appointed leaders with their own specific agendas, and therefore care should be taken in relying exclusively on their views.

**Tip:** Always aim to recruit a wide range of community representatives from different spheres rather than rely on one or two people.

### FAITH LEADERS

Faith leaders (Pastors, Imams etc.) are key influencers for those who are religious. Their support can provide access to their congregations and provide religious interpretation of adoption which can provide effective supplementary messages for your audience.

### COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

There are many organisations that provide advice, information and advocacy for the community and have high levels of trust and contact with the community.

### COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS

There are many community spirited individuals who regularly convene events within the community such as event promoters who are also well placed to provide speaking opportunities at their events or co-creation opportunities.

### LOCAL SPECIALIST MEDIA

Local specialist media tend to be active at a grassroots level. It's always worth approaching them to explore paid and earned opportunities as well community networks they have access to that can be leveraged over and above media activity.

**Tip:** a mapping exercise to identify regional and local organisations, media and individuals is a great starting point. It is important to consider working in partnership with the organisation from the start and not just use them solely as a distribution channel.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THOSE DELIVERING EFFECTIVE OUTREACH

- People involved need to be culturally competent, have cultural awareness and sensitivity based either on a willingness to listen and learn or from their own direct experience.
- Having language skills or access to help in communicating with people who have low levels of proficiency in English.
- Straightforward factual messages i.e. explaining the requirements and process of adoption can be credibly delivered by experts regardless of their background but they need to be culturally competent - have an understanding and appreciation of the cultural barriers. To increase impact, pairing an expert with a case study from the community is a very powerful way to engage.
- Crucially important is the personality and confidence of the team, in terms of having integrity and honesty in how they deal with the community, persistence in forming and developing networks and contacts, and skills to make proactive contact with individuals and groups.





# TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS REQUIRED – THIS CAN INFORM THE ROLE OF AN OUTREACH MANAGER

There are a number of techniques and skills required for the individuals carrying out outreach work. This includes:

- ‘Mapping’ of communities in an area, the needs and issues that affect them
- Language skills or access to support for translation/interpretation
- Cultural and faith understanding
- Listening skills
- Personal contacts list of individuals and groups
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Something to offer, to demonstrate respect for time and effort made
- Professional outlook and objective, to provide a clear rationale for involvement and dispel suspicion about motives
- Contact with umbrella groups – a more stable point of contact than individuals or small community groups
- Senior level trust, support and patience to be able to create breathing space to develop over a period of months or years
- Personality:
  - courage/confidence in talking to large groups
  - persistence and patience to reap the benefits

## EXAMPLE OF HOW TO KICKSTART ENGAGEMENT

It is advised that communications with faith leaders, organisations and individuals is started with email communication to introduce yourself, organisation and campaign. This should be quickly followed up with a phone call to check willingness to engage. If they are willing to engage you should try to get a commitment to have a meeting to discuss in more detail.



## EXAMPLE EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

Keep the language simple but relatively formal if you don't have an existing relationship with the organisation or individual.

Dear xxx,  
I'm getting in touch from xxx.  
We're currently working on the #YouCanAdopt campaign, to raise awareness of adoption and to encourage prospective Black African, Black Caribbean and mixed-heritage adopters to consider adoption and take the next steps on the journey. You may already be aware that Black and mixed-heritage children tend to wait longer to be matched with new adoptive families than their white counterparts and we're keen to address barriers to adoption as we know that Black people have positive and altruistic views towards adoption from a survey done last year in conjunction with The Voice newspaper.  
As you are such an important and influential organisation, we would love to work with you to change perceptions around adoption by breaking down common myths and misconceptions which might be preventing people from adopting. With the hope that together we can empower and inform as many people as possible with the right information to make an informed decision about adoption.  
In the first instance, it would be great to understand whether you would be willing to support this important campaign, and perhaps, as a next step, we could arrange a call to discuss further.  
Many thanks and we'll look forward to hearing from you,  
Yours sincerely,

- Indicate that you aware that they have good in-roads into the Black community (in a specific location, if known)
- Indicate any funding or reward and recognition opportunities as this can be a barrier to engagement
- Can we arrange a suitable time to discuss how we can work together?

## MEETING – key areas to cover

- Provide context of the challenge using national or local statistics
- Personalise by sharing relevant case studies
- Provide an indication of what has been done to date – overview of the #YouCanAdopt national and local campaign
- Provide some ideas of how you can work together, some examples below
- Provide an outline of funding or reward and recognition opportunities, for example, co-branding, media exposure, seed fund, cover expenses for events or co-created assets, boost social posts or other funding opportunities.

### Light engagement

Supporting through their own communication channels, using campaign assets e.g. social posts, posters, a quick reference guide or copy for social media channels, e-newsletter, WhatsApp groups, websites etc.

### Medium engagement

Co-create creative assets for their own communication channels and wider channels.

### High engagement

Co-create and co-brand creative assets, organising events or piggy-backing on existing events (virtual or face-to-face), taking part in media opportunities e.g. providing quotes or acting as a spokesperson for broadcast interviews.

**Tip:** showing creative assets during meetings can really inspire people and encourage engagement.

## PHONE CALL – key areas to cover

- Introduce the campaign and your organisation
- Clearly articulate the reason for your call e.g. we want to work with you to encourage more Black people to consider and come forward for adoption.



## PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATING OUTREACH

- Ensure the objectives are clearly defined at the outset, along with the desired outcomes and any assumptions. Make the ultimate aim explicit and specific – challenging but measurable e.g. to approach x number of organisations/individuals and successfully onboard x to engage in partnership activity that will continue for x months.
- Capture feedback from the people involved in delivering the outreach such as outreach workers, street teams.
- The measures selected should address the activity as a whole, including the amount of activity (number of events and numbers reached) but also perceptions of outputs and data about response. Simply capturing the numbers alone tells you nothing about the quality of those contacts, or the barriers which individuals have to overcome in order for the desired outcome to be achieved.
- Quick poll surveys e.g. zoom poll surveys during online events can give you indication in any attitudinal shifts e.g. increase in understanding the requirements for adoption.
- Keep in mind that data doesn't have to mean numbers. Qualitative data, or loosely-structured feedback from people about their experiences and perceptions provides depth and detail and is no less valuable than percentages from surveys.
- If the outreach work does result in more enquiries it is important these are recorded and tracked to:
  - i) measure the impact of encouraging people to make that first step and;
  - ii) creating a mechanism to track those that do not progress to a ROI and evaluate why this is the case.





The **National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group** is made up of representatives from regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies together with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), Adoption UK and CoramBAAF with representation from Home For Good and My Adoption Family.

#YOU CAN  
ADOPT