



ENDING RACIAL DISPARITY IN ADOPTION

A report from the Adoption and
Special Guardianship Leadership
Board 2022

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The Challenge

The colour of a child's skin should not determine their likelihood of being in care or their chances of being adopted.

This is why the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board has made ending the racial disparity in adoption one of its major priorities. We launched a Task and Finish Group made up of black social workers, adopters, adoptees and experts in the field with one very simple aim: to present constructive proposals to end racial disparity in adoption.

This ambition is in line with the government's own commitments.

In the "Inclusive Britain" report there is a clear ambition to make sure that ethnicity is not a barrier to children finding loving homes.

Action 26 of the report states it is the government's ambition:

"to increase the number of ethnic minority children who are adopted, and to reduce the time they have to wait to be adopted. The DfE, together with regional adoption agencies, will work to launch a new drive to match children with adoptive families. The DfE will work to ensure that potential adopters are not discouraged to apply because of their ethnicity."^[1]

Figures published by the government's Race Disparity Unit^[2] in December 2021 indicate that:

- Black children made up 7% of looked after children, and 2% of those adopted. This is proportionally smaller than their share of the under-18 population (5%).
- The number of black children adopted has fallen from 120 (2.2%) in 2015 to 60 (1.7%) of the total number of children adopted in 2020³
- The percentage of black children who stopped being looked after because they were adopted went down from 4% in 2015 to 2% in 2020
- Black looked-after children were more likely to be aged 16 and over than younger age groups.

The Data

We know from the wider data on children in care that:

- Children whose plan is for adoption but who are not found adoptive parents will stay in the care system until they are 18 years old^[3]. The statistics regarding the outcomes of children who age out of care to no ongoing family connections are poor.^[4]
- Children aged over 5 are less likely to be adopted. In 2021, the average age of a child adopted was 3 years and 3 months and only 18% of all children adopted were aged 5 and over .
- Children with an Ethnic Minorities (excludes White minorities) background wait longer for adoption. ^[5]

Combining this data we can see that black children in the care system face the following disadvantages:

- Black children are overrepresented in the care system.
- Black children wait longer for adoption than white children.^[6]
- Black children are the least likely to achieve the lifetime stability and permanency of a loving family through adoption.

The Research

The **Transatlantic Summit on Racial Disparity in Adoption** between the US and English governments gave us the opportunity to hear from black and mixed ethnicity young adults about their experiences of care and of adoption, as well as from government leaders, experts and adopters in the UK and the US.

Working with **CORAM-I** we also commissioned an in-depth survey on the experiences of black adopters, adoptees and social workers.

We consulted with the **Association of Directors of Children's Services, Regional Adoption Agency leaders and the leaders of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies**.

This **consultation, survey and summit** all focussing on ending racial disparity in adoption have identified some **critical areas for change and innovation**.

We recognise that some of these are incumbent on the sector, and some on government.

We therefore propose a **three-fold strategy to accelerate the adoption of black children** with each priority area identifying an offer and an ask:

The Three-Fold Strategy

- 1. Recruit black adopters and match black children**
- 2. Rebuild trust**
- 3. Resource interracial adoption**



RECRUIT BLACK ADOPTERS

1. RECRUIT BLACK ADOPTERS AND MATCH BLACK CHILDREN

Despite the government's clear passion in encouraging black adopters to step forward, there remain multiple hurdles facing black people considering becoming adopters. These include barriers of perception as well as practical, cultural and personal issues.

Longitudinal studies have shown the benefits of helping children to find families in matching ethnic placements^[7].

Research carried out by SavantaCOMRES^[8] found that black adults who are open to, or are already in the process of, adopting or fostering are more likely than white adults to prefer to adopt (63% vs 50%) a child who has the same ethnic background as them. They also prefer to be assessed to adopt by a social worker with a similar ethnic background to them (60% vs 46%).

The Transatlantic Summit on Racial Disparity in Adoption ratified these findings with Adopt London and US-based Diligent Recruitment's impressive successes of bespoke routes for black adopters.

The Offer from the Sector

In light of the above, we are delighted to see progress through both the national recruitment of black adopters pilot and regional groups like Adopt London. But we also recognise there is a long way to go to find the black adopters we need.

There is a commitment from across the voluntary and regional adoption agencies"

- The sector will invest time and energy into the targeted recruitment of black adopters. The National Adopter Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG) will continue to drive forward on this but so will local VAAs and RAAs.
- The sector will take proactive steps in social media and marketing to be inclusive in photos and messaging.
- The sector will work together nationally providing opportunities to match ethnic minority children with adoptive families. This includes the use of joint activity days.



REBUILD TRUST

2. REBUILD TRUST

The "Inclusive Britain" report which was a response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic states clearly that there are known issues with racial disparity in children's social care with racial disparity:

"Too many have, in the past, been put off by a system that can be too judgmental if you are not the right ethnicity, do not have a big house, are too old, or practise the wrong faith. Some local authorities and adoption agencies have not done enough to tackle prejudice and to deliver excellent support for all children in the adoption system. We committed to changing that." ^[9]

A key aspect to making that change is rebuilding trust between black communities and the social work sector.

A survey by Home for Good and SAVANTACOMRES in 2019 found that adults from black and ethnic minority groups are twice as likely to have considered, or be considering, adoption when compared to white adults (21% vs 10%). Half of black UK adults say they would consider adopting or fostering. 60% of black adults would want to be assessed to foster or adopt by a social worker with a similar ethnic background to them (60% vs 46% of white respondents.) The survey found that black adopters were more concerned about being assessed by a government body than white people.

The Offer from the Sector

- VAAs will increase the number of black chairs of adoption panels.
- VAAs and RAAs are making concrete steps towards never having an all- white adoption panel involving black or mixed ethnicity children or adopters – this should be possible thanks to greater use of online panels, "flying" panel members and hybrid meetings.
- RAA leaders can report back annually on their progress in increasing the diversity of their panels.
- RAAs have commissioned a cultural awareness training for managers and staff
- National mystery shopping of VAA and RAA's care for potential black adopters
- Quality assurance and monitoring by VAAs and RAAs regarding the care provided for potential and approved adopters.

- Social Work England are working on changes to initial qualifying social work education to make even more explicit what social work students must have covered on their pre-qualifying courses to enable them to practise safely and well, including anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice.
- They have demonstrated their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion by publishing an action plan at the end of last year, as well working with the Principal Social Worker networks for Adults and Children and Families, Black and Asian Leadership Initiative Network and the Association for Directors of Children's Services workforce planning group to increase diversity in social worker leadership and to facilitate improved diversity across the workforce more generally.
- The Staff College has developed a programme offer for leaders and managers of services that are responsible for the care planning and care placement commissioning for children focussed on racial disparity, the impact for black children and families and how service responses can be developed to address issues relating to these. This programme will be developed in consultation with the sector including with the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board Racial Disparity Task Group and the ADCS Workforce Development Sub Committee

The Ask of Government:

There appears to be an under-representation of black social workers in adoption teams, and as the research shows (60% of black adults would want to be assessed to foster or adopt by a social worker with a similar ethnic background to them^[10]) greater diversity should help facilitate the recruitment of more black adopters. Therefore we ask the government to make the following commitments:

Invest in Continuous Personal Development (CPD) and Leadership Programmes

- Use the levers of department-funded programmes, including CPD and leadership programmes for child and family social workers, to encourage contractors to focus on and remove disadvantage in their programme application and recruitment processes, to ensure positive experiences for people of different ethnic backgrounds throughout the programmes, and to ensure inclusion and diversity training is included in the content of the programme.
- Invest in a Positive Action Pathway which provides additional, targeted support for under-represented ethnic minorities in social work leadership roles in children's social care, and for those aspiring to those roles. This programme would support development of skills and experience required to progress to higher leadership levels and provide coaching, mentoring and support during the programme and on appointment to a higher-level role.
- Ensure suppliers of department-funded programmes, particularly leadership and CPD programmes, include components that support the embedding of inclusive working environments and practice. This should include content on fair and inclusive development opportunities and recruitment practices that encourages diversity across and at all levels of the workforce, social work practice that ensures families and children from minority ethnic backgrounds are provided with support that is sensitive and responsive to their culture, and content that enables programme participants to recognise, empathise and respond effectively to the experiences and barriers faced by the black and ethnic minority workforce.

The Ask of Government (continued):

Invest in collection of ethnic monitoring workforce data

- Social Work England outlined their commitment to understanding the diversity of the social work profession in their equality, diversity and inclusion action plan. They launched their data collection activity in June 2021 to enable them to build a clearer picture of the make-up of the register. This data will also enable them to analyse, understand and, if necessary, revise rules, systems, and policies to identify any trends or differences in outcomes for people with protected characteristics. They are actively reviewing the ways in which they seek diversity data from social workers on their register to improve the response rate.
- Social Work England are committed to sharing their learning with other policy makers to assist them in making informed decisions on the fairness and inclusivity of their processes
- The existing WRES pilot should be extended nationally and Government should ensure local authorities are supported in the effective collection of data.



RESOURCE INTERACIAL ADOPTION

3. RESOURCE INTERRACIAL ADOPTION

The Transatlantic Summit witnessed many interracially adopted people expressing their gratitude to their adoptive parents, however they also recognised that their parents were generally ill-equipped to deal with racism or xenophobia and therefore many felt doubly isolated from both the white community and the black community.

We recognise that children should not have to wait or miss out on adoption because of the colour of their skin, and therefore that interracial adoption should continue, however we must better equip both adopters and adoptees in cultural and racial literacy.

The Offer from the Sector:

The VAAs and RAAS are committed to:

- promoting support materials for our mixed ethnicity and interracial adopters
- building into adopter training more information and advice on inter-heritage/ cultural adoption
- building into the *#Youcanadopt* website specific material on adopting a child of a different ethnicity
- equipping adopters with the practical on-going support they need to care for a child of a different ethnicity

The Ask of Government:

- to recognise the need to continue providing support and help for interracial adopters and adopted persons.
- to include interracial adoption in all adoption research, with interracial adoptive families to be considered in the sampling methodology during the feasibility stage.
- to understand how and if it is possible for this sample to be included in the longitudinal study just started on the outcomes for adopted and special guardianship children.

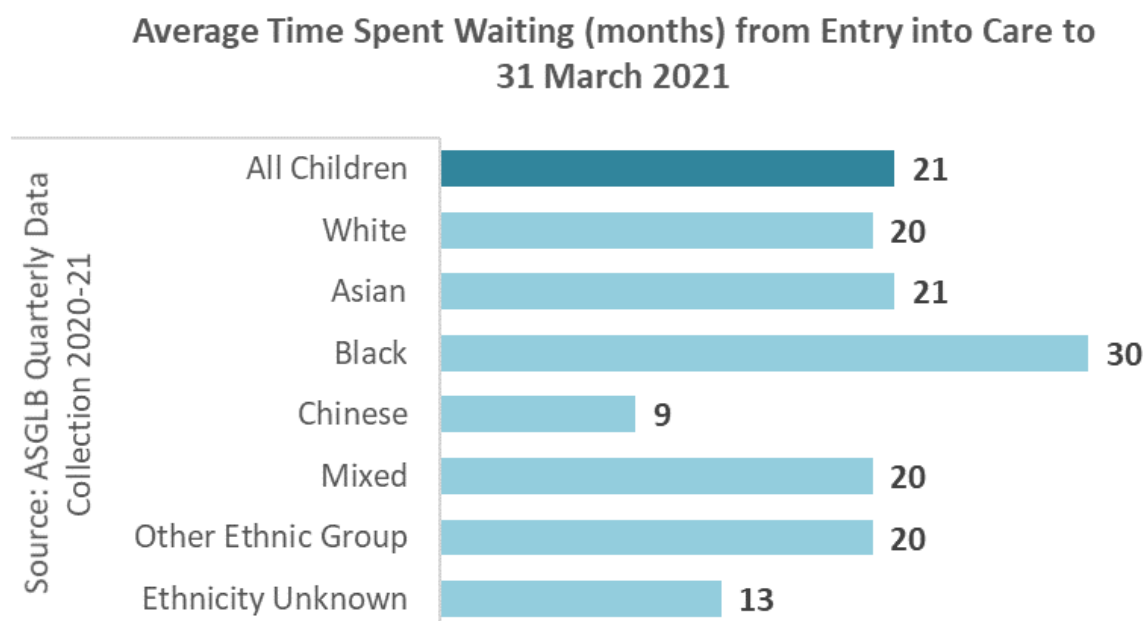
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[1] Inclusive Britain: the government’s response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities,” p.64, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1061421/Inclusive-Britain-government-response-to-the-Commission-on-Race-and-Ethnic-Disparities.pdf

[2] <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/social-care/adopted-and-looked-after-children/latest>

[3] The excellent Staying Put programme does allow some young people to stay in their foster placements for longer. <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/practice-information/staying-put>

[4] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/26/pandemic-no-pandemic-young-people-should-not-age-out-care>



[5] Source: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22336/documents/165152/default/>

[6] On averaged black Children have been waiting 30 months from entry into care, compared to 20 months for white children

[7] Feast, F., Grant, M., Rushton, A., John Simmonds J., Carolyn Sampeys C., (2013), Adversity, adoption and afterwards, A mid-life follow-up study of women adopted from Hong Kong, BAAF

[8] <https://comresglobal.com/polls/home-for-good-adoption-poll-nov-2020/>

[9] “Inclusive Britain: the government’s response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities,” p.63, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1061421/Inclusive-Britain-government-response-to-the-Commission-on-Race-and-Ethnic-Disparities.pdf

[10] <https://comresglobal.com/polls/home-for-good-adoption-poll-nov-2020/>