



**ADOPTION WEEK SCOTLAND  
19-24 NOVEMBER 2018**

**EVALUATION REPORT**



Adoption & Fostering Alliance Scotland

**adoptionuk**  
for every adoptive family  
in Scotland



## INTRODUCTION

AFA Scotland and Adoption UK Scotland were again responsible for organising Adoption Week Scotland running from 9-24 November and were delighted with the success of the programme. The attendance of the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, at the opening conference gave a positive message about the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of adoption and helped ensure a high level of interest throughout the week. Linking to the fact that 2018 was designated the *Year of Young People*, the theme for the week was hearing the voice of adopted young people. A group, supported by Scottish Adoption and St Andrew's Children's Society, set up the Adopted Voices Project and have worked together for 18 months talking about their own experiences and working out how to have their views and ideas heard by parents, professionals and policy makers. Their production of a superb video, organisation of the conference programme and powerful presentations on the day proved to be an excellent way of highlighting both the positives and the challenges of adoption and the clear implications for the way practice and policy should develop.

Two family events and four information events were held in different parts of the country during the week with Maree Todd, Minister for Children and Young people attending the last of these in Musselburgh.

It was particularly encouraging to see the amount of activity organised by other agencies to coincide with the week's main events. AFA Scotland and Adoption UK will be running Adoption Week Scotland again next year, so the evaluation of this year's programme provides a good opportunity to consider how we ensure that AWS 2019 has the maximum impact right across the country.

## OUTCOMES IN RELATION TO SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Scottish Government fully funded Adoption Week Scotland defined the overall purpose and set a number of specific objectives. Outcomes in relation to each of the objectives were as follows:

- ***Develop a programme of events, to ensure that the week of activities targets a wide range of stakeholder groups (e.g. children and young people, professionals, pre and post adoption families)***

An account of the various activities run during the week is provided in **Appendix 1** and summarised on the back cover of this report. The involvement of the young people from the Adopted Voices Project linked well to the theme of the week and helped ensure the message reached the widest possible audience. The conference attracted a mixed group of participants including adoptive parents, practitioners and policy makers. The information events predominantly attracted those who were interested in the possibility of becoming adoptive parents while the two-family events were focussed on adoptive families.

- ***Raise the profile of adoption in Scotland and the support available to prospective adopters, including the role of Scotland's Adoption Register***

There was positive press coverage of the week, including a news item on STV news, two lengthy articles in the Scotsman and a high level of social media interest. The level of coverage was a significant improvement on 2017. The Scotsman articles secured by Robert Swift were powerful pieces of editorial and the STV broadcast piece was very positive about the benefits of adoption and the involvement of young people in arranging this year's conference. The wider activity organised by agencies across the country to coincide with the week helped to raise the profile of adoption through local media coverage. Scotland's Adoption Register was closely involved in the organisation of the week, was represented at all of the information events and produced one of the posters for the poster session at the conference.

- ***Engage with Ministers, local authorities and the third sector***

Nicola Sturgeon's attendance at the conference was undoubtedly one of the reasons why coverage of the week was so positive. Her strongly stated commitment to the importance of adoption as a means of providing permanence and security for children, as well as the time she spent hearing directly from the young people, was a powerful message for the week. Similarly, the attendance by the Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd, at one of the information events was very helpful, reinforcing the government's determination to find the best ways of supporting children and their families and the important part that adoption has to play.

As well as running a number of national events, a key part of planning and preparation for AWS 18 was the provision to local authorities and voluntary agencies of an information pack with resources to help them run their own events. Materials circulated this year included a booklet providing information about the week as well as highlighting a range of current developments in adoption practice - along with a range of fact sheets aimed at all those involved in adoption; adoptive parents, adopted people, birth parents and practitioners. Alongside the programme of nationally organised events, a fringe programme was also produced, highlighting activities that were being organised in different parts of the country to coincide with the week.

- ***Improve access to advice for adoptive parents, adopted children and parents who have had their children adopted***

All the activities during the week provided opportunities to share information about the supports available to those involved in adoption. The fact sheets and other written information was made widely available and reinforced by presentations at the information events referred to above. The posters produced for the conference included information about the adoption support project and on services available from Birthlink. The week also served to remind people of services available locally and their entitlement to seek support from local agencies. The central role taken by the young people in the planning and at the conference also helped to reinforce a message about ensuring that children have the opportunity to have their voice heard.

- ***Longer term support for parents and children – peer network***

The two family events organised at each end of the week proved popular and served to strengthen networks of support for those who attended. More broadly, advice about how to access supports was a key part of the information shared at all events and as part of the information pack.

## **FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS**

Broadly, feedback about the week has been positive. The high number of agencies that participated directly, or organised parallel events in their own areas, extended the reach and impact of the week. The organisation of activities in different parts of the country was much appreciated and the establishment of a 'fringe programme' to complement the main list of events was helpful.

Evaluation forms were provided to participants at each of the events. The comments about individual events have been collated and summarised in **Appendix 1**. Again, these were broadly positive, with particularly high praise for the conference.

## **FEEDBACK FROM AGENCIES**

A small number of agencies (8) provided additional written comments since the week. Feedback was also provided at the Social Work Scotland Fostering and Adoption group meeting on 5 December and from the AFA Family Placement Forum on 3 December. Broadly, comments were positive both about the week and the opportunity to consider plans for next year at this early stage. The extent to which agencies organised activities in their own area varied widely and the response to the campaigns also varied greatly. Comments in relation to specific aspects of the week included:

## Conference

Positive comments from all those who attended:

- *'I thought the conference was excellent. It was informative, interesting and emotional at points. One of the best conferences I've attended'* (Local Authority social worker)
- *'I felt the conference was excellent, a really inspiring and worthwhile day'* (LA manager)

## Information events

There was a mixed response to these – least positive from those who were linked with the Musselburgh event which had the lowest turnout.

- *'The roadshows seem to have been poorly attended and leads me to question if it's worthwhile continuing to use resources in this way'* (LA manager who attended the Musselburgh event)

Others thought they were generally helpful but made suggestions for possible improvements, including making them later in the evening, and having some sort of feature (e.g. film showing) to draw people to the event. Others thought our energies would be better channeled towards the creation of resources that can be used by all agencies rather than selecting a small number of venues for information roadshows.

## Impact on enquiries from prospective adopters

Again, a wide variation in experience – mostly but not wholly positive:

- *'It was successful – our enquiries took a sharp rise'* (LA Manager)
- *'This year we put a lot of time and effort into planning and preparation and focused more widely to appeal to anyone affected by adoption, rather than just recruitment, but to no avail.'* (LA Manager)
- *We have never had a significant response from enquiries following Adoption Week itself but I think the activity around this week may increase awareness or motivation to take the next step'* (LA Manager)

## General comments/ideas for next year

The agency that had a poor response to their campaign made an interesting point about the need to raise awareness of the role of local authorities in this area of work - which may be a useful focus for next year:

- *As a local authority we are disadvantaged because perhaps the general public don't realise that we are an adoption agency . . . 'I wish the Scottish Government could help in promoting LA's as Adoption Agencies more'* (LA Manager)

In terms of the balance of activities, subject to the comments about the roadshows, there was a general view that this seemed to work well:

- *'The programme overall offered a good breadth of choice across the country'* (LA Manager)

Several people commented that it would be helpful to hear about examples of work undertaken by other agencies – particularly if this can be done well in advance of the 2019 campaign to allow sufficient planning time. There were some examples from this year that generated a high level of interest – including the organisation by one local authority of an adoption conference and the creation by another of a musical adoption week video by that was viewed more than 6,000 times.

- *(the video) allowed our team to engage with groups and individuals from all over the area and really raise the awareness of adoption* (LA Social Worker)

## GOVERNANCE

This was the second year in which the award of the contract to run Adoption Week Scotland was to two agencies working in collaboration. From the point of view of Adoption UK and AFA Scotland, this has again been a positive process, with the two agencies working well together, sharing the responsibilities involved and capitalising on the different membership groups of each organisation to maximise the reach and impact of the week.

## **LEARNING AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE EVENTS**

The award of a two-year contract for running Adoption Week in both 2018 and 2019 provides an excellent opportunity to plan well in advance for the 2019 campaign.

There are many positives from this year's event that can be built on. Proposals for improvements or innovations to be considered include:

- Setting dates for the week at the very start of the year
- Sharing an outline programme with agencies by the end of March 2019
- Building on the link with the Adopted Voices Project to inform the campaign in 2019
- Build on the theme of adoption stories and how these can be told and used to inform practice
- Review information events and consider using the available resources to create a more elaborate pack that can be used by every agency
- Consider the possibility of creating a short video for the week – along with a video presentation that can be available to agencies in lieu of attendance at a roadshow
- Make use of the additional planning time to liaise with agencies about what they need to maximise the impact of the week in their area.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evidence from evaluations is that the week was widely considered to have been successful in raising the profile of adoption, enabling individuals and agencies to share information about practice, and to identify key themes relating to the development of adoption policy. The aim of using the week to 'hear the voice of adopted young people' was successful beyond our expectations, due largely to the powerful testimony of the young people who were willing to share their own stories. The week was once again an opportunity to restate the evidence that adoption is a positive option for many children who require permanent care. The longer-term objectives concern our ability to use the learning from the young people and others to review and develop practice, and to ensure these influence the current policy initiatives relating to children in the care system so that these take proper account of the needs of all of those involved in adoption.

Fiona Aitken, Director Adoption UK Scotland  
Robin Duncan, Director AFA Scotland

December, 2018

## FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS AT AWS18 EVENTS

### 1 ADOPTED VOICES CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

#### Event details

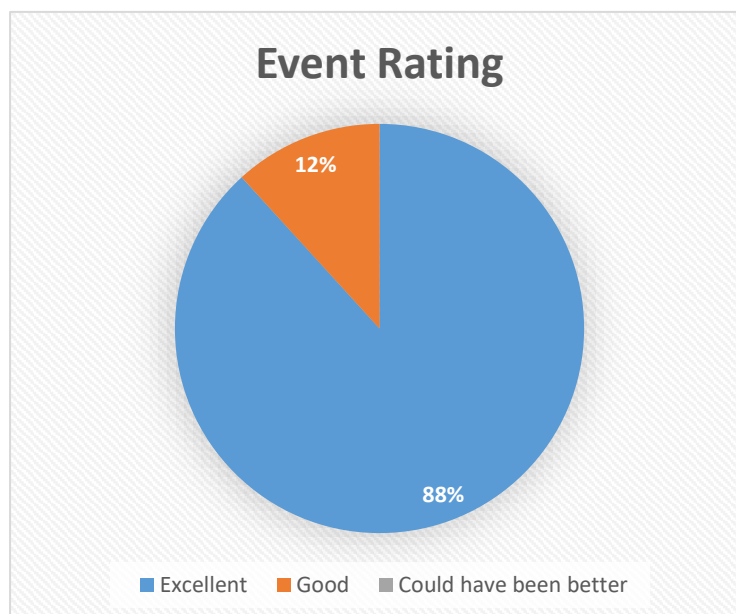
The 'Adopted Voices' conference was planned in conjunction with input from St Andrew's Children's Society and Scottish Adoption. The day was designed and co-facilitated by young people who were meeting as part of our joint 'Voices of Adopted Young People' group. It featured a viewing of a short film created by the young people, as well as guest speaker, First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, who was there to meet with the young people at the end of the day. She closed the day with a pledge to ensure that every care experienced child in Scotland received the support that they require to reach their best outcomes, before thanking our young people for doing such an excellent job throughout the day.

The event had one hundred and forty-five tickets booked, and of those there was attendance of around 130. There was a mixed audience of professionals, adopted individuals, adoptive parents and those invited to attend by the young people who were involved in the design and facilitation of the day.

#### Event evaluation

88% of 34 respondents found the event to be excellent, while 12% thought that the event was good. There were no negative responses.

Overwhelmingly, respondents enjoyed hearing from the perspectives of the young adoptees - around 87% of the comments mentioning this aspect. There were a few mentions about the video being a good inclusion in the event. Some of the respondents mentioned how great it was to connect to colleagues and other adopters. There were also quite a few who found that having the event ran and organised by the young people themselves was a great idea.



There were quite a few a people that would have liked the event to be a little more organised or set up in some other way. Some wanted a different venue, or at least a warmer one, while others would have liked more direction for workshops and scheduling. There were some who would have liked more diversity or research in the workshops to be included. A couple thought that giving the young people more time to talk would have been a good idea. Eight of 31 respondents said that there was nothing that could have made the event better.

#### Learning moments

There were many responses about how much schools can affect a young person who has been adopted. There were also a few comments about learning how impactful birth parents can be on their children. Then there were some comments about opening conversations and hearing things from the perspectives of the children that have been adopted. The majority of the evaluation respondents were parents and they talked about how they would

expand their discussions with the children and try to have more valuable and meaningful conversations. They also specifically mentioned the need for talking about birth families, not just parents but also siblings. There were a few mentions about addressing issues with the schools.

Overwhelmingly the responses discussed seeing changes in schools with both the support that is offered and the knowledge the educators may have. There were also some mentions about better post adoption support for the families, and one mention about support for the birth families as well. Other comments talked about spreading more knowledge.

100% of the responses offered thanks to the young people that spoke and congratulating them on a job well done for not just the organisation and structure of the event, but also the bravery it took for them to stand up and speak. Many of the responses mentioned the hope and insight that their stories gave them and how it would help them in the future.

We asked attendants if they had previously attended an adoption week event, and found that 67% had not, while 33% stated that they had or intend to also attend.

## **2 FAMILY EVENT - EDINBURGH**

### **Event details**

Over 150 booked and 120 parents and children attended our family event that took place at Tumbles, Edinburgh, where we had sole use of the Softplay Centre and café area for adoptive families on the Saturday before Adoption Week Scotland began. Each child who attended received a goody bag which contained a hand-made 'alien ally' knitted or crocheted soft toy, which had been donated.

### **Event evaluation**

Overwhelmingly, 100% out of the attendees responding to our survey evaluation felt it was 'great'.

Most of the adoptive families that attended felt that the softplay venue allowed for a relaxed atmosphere and therefore provided them the opportunity to engage with other adopted families. Some comments which emphasised these positive feelings of the event included:

- *"It was just nice to connect with other adopters and see so many kids that are now with their forever families."*
- *"Nice safe environment, relaxed, easy to talk to other parents. Kids entertained and great for our 6-year-old to meet other adopted children. Thank you!"*
- *"It is a great chance to meet other adoptive families and it is the one time we all book time out of our busy calendars to meet old friends."*

When asked if the event could be improved, the majority, at 73.68%, responded no. However, there were comments of what could have been improved to make the event more successful. These included providing food as well as the drink beverages provided, and that the event could have ran for longer and started later on in the day. Although, it was acknowledged that this may be difficult to arrange as it is dependent on the soft play venue availability.

### **Children's feedback from the event**

Many of the responses were that their child was too young to comment but from observations of their child's interactions most said they really enjoyed it. The children that were old enough responded that:

- *“I love my alien.” “8yr old hasn’t let go of it thank you. Both our children have discussed early years’ experience tonight and life story, being positive about our family and life opportunities.”*
- *Also, “It was great to go and play in Tumbles. We don’t go there any more (too old). I made a new friend.”*

#### **Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?**

There was further positive feedback given surrounding the event with many responding

- *“I have never attended an event before but would love to attend more based on our experience on Saturday.”*
- *“More events like this would be great for kids and parents - everyone benefits.” Additionally, there was feedback surrounding the staff saying that “Staff friendly and relaxed which is welcoming”. Other positive feedback was given surrounding the gift of the toy alien to each child such as “Amazing knitted toys. Such a lovely gift” and “We loved the Alien ally!”*

### **3 INFORMATION ROADSHOWS – INVERNESS, STIRLING, GLASGOW AND MUSSELBURGH**

#### **Event details**

96 professionals and prospective adopters booked to attend the information events taking place across Scotland, beginning in Inverness, then taking place in Stirling, Glasgow and Musselburgh. The events were planned in conjunction with hosting local authorities, who also presented on the day, and involved further presentations about the adoption process and local services from Scotland’s Adoption Register, AFA Scotland and Adoption UK Scotland. The following is the breakdown of attendance numbers as booked online:

- Musselburgh – 1
- Glasgow – 27
- Inverness – 29
- Stirling - 27

Of those who attended the above events, very few offered formal feedback.

#### **Event evaluation**

From the four events, the majority (60%) responded that the event was ‘very useful’ and 40% responded that it was ‘quite useful’. However, this survey is perhaps limited as only 5 in total responded across the 4 locations.

When asked what they found useful from the event, the responses were mainly surrounding it providing an opportunity to meet others and to learn through the presentations and the agency stalls. Some responses which highlight this include:

- *“The chance to talk to others that have been through the process. Understanding what different services different organisations offer was also really helpful.” (East Lothian)*
- *“Meeting people on different stalls and learning what support is available.” (Inverness)*
- *“Face to face opportunity to talk, presentations were helpful.” (Inverness)*
- *“Meeting other agencies” (Glasgow)*

#### **Could we have done anything to make the event more useful?**

When asked if anything could be done to improve the event, 100% in Glasgow responded ‘no’. The other 3 locations responded with comments regarding the possible need for more



advertising, changing the time of the event and the potential to include more agencies and adoptive parents' first-hand experiences. Some responses which show this include:

- *"Hearing from an adoptive parent some joys and challenges would have been useful."* (Inverness)
- *"Made the time more suitable for carers/potential carers."* (Stirling)
- *"Maybe more advertising of the event as attendance was low."* (East Lothian)

When asked about the stage of the adoption process most seemed to be at the beginning of the process such as *"waiting to start prep days"* (East Lothian) and *"trying to find an agency who will accept us in view of our age"* (Inverness). Also, there was one response which was from an agency.

#### 4 FAMILY EVENT – GLASGOW

##### **Event details**

At the Glasgow family event, 42 booked to attend the final event of the week, allowing adoptive families in the West of Scotland to join together for a free family 'slime' event.

##### **Event evaluation**

Attendees were asked to rate the event great/good/could have been better/not for us, and all felt it was great or good for their family.

There were only five families who responded to our evaluation, and of these 60% enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and the activities whilst 40% liked being about to connect with other adoptive parents.

All five respondents stated that no, there could have been no improvement and stated that they had enjoyed the event.



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## Adoption Week Scotland 2018 impact report

### Social media engagement:

#### Facebook

Over 15,000 reached via posts about Adoption Week.

#### Twitter activity

#AdoptionweekScotland #Ourchildren

Likes and Retweets from: **ThirdForce News, First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, Maree Todd, CELCIS, Home Start, The Care Review, Parents Across Scotland**

Val McDermid (author), John Buujtlens (author/BMX brand ambassador), Shona White (AUK ambassador and actress), Jamie Baulch (AUK ambassador and Olympian Agencies – local authorities and voluntary agencies



Media activity STV News, Third Force News, the Scotsman, Scottish Government Education blog

### Events

**4 information roadshows: Stirling, Glasgow, Inverness and East Lothian, 90 attendees**

**1 conference 140 booked attendees**

Our 'Adopted Voices' conference was planned in conjunction with AFA Scotland and with input from St Andrew's Children's Society and Scottish Adoption, the day was designed and co-facilitated by young people who were meeting as part of our joint 'Voices of Adopted Young People' group and featured guest speaker First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, who was there to meet with the young people. She closed the day with a pledge to ensure that every care experienced child in Scotland received the support that they require to reach their best outcomes, before thanking our young people for doing such an excellent job throughout the day.

**2 family events with over 120 attendees, and attending children receiving 'alien allies' as take home gifts.**

"My daughter loved playing with old and new friends. I enjoyed chatting to other adopters."

#### Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister:

"I want Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up and having a loving and secure environment plays a huge part in achieving this. Last year Scotland saw an increase in the number of looked after children who went on to be adopted and I hope by raising awareness of adoption through Adoption Week Scotland events, we will continue to see these numbers rise.

"I'm pleased to be part of the third annual Adoption Week Scotland and it's fantastic young people have played such an important role in organising this year's conference as part of the Year of Young People to ensure their voices are heard in the adoption process."