

Supporting Children and Families Through Adoption: The VAA Contribution



CVAA Data Report 2025-26

A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR

Adoption across the UK changes lives. For many children in care, it offers what nothing else can: a permanent, stable and lifelong family that every child deserves.

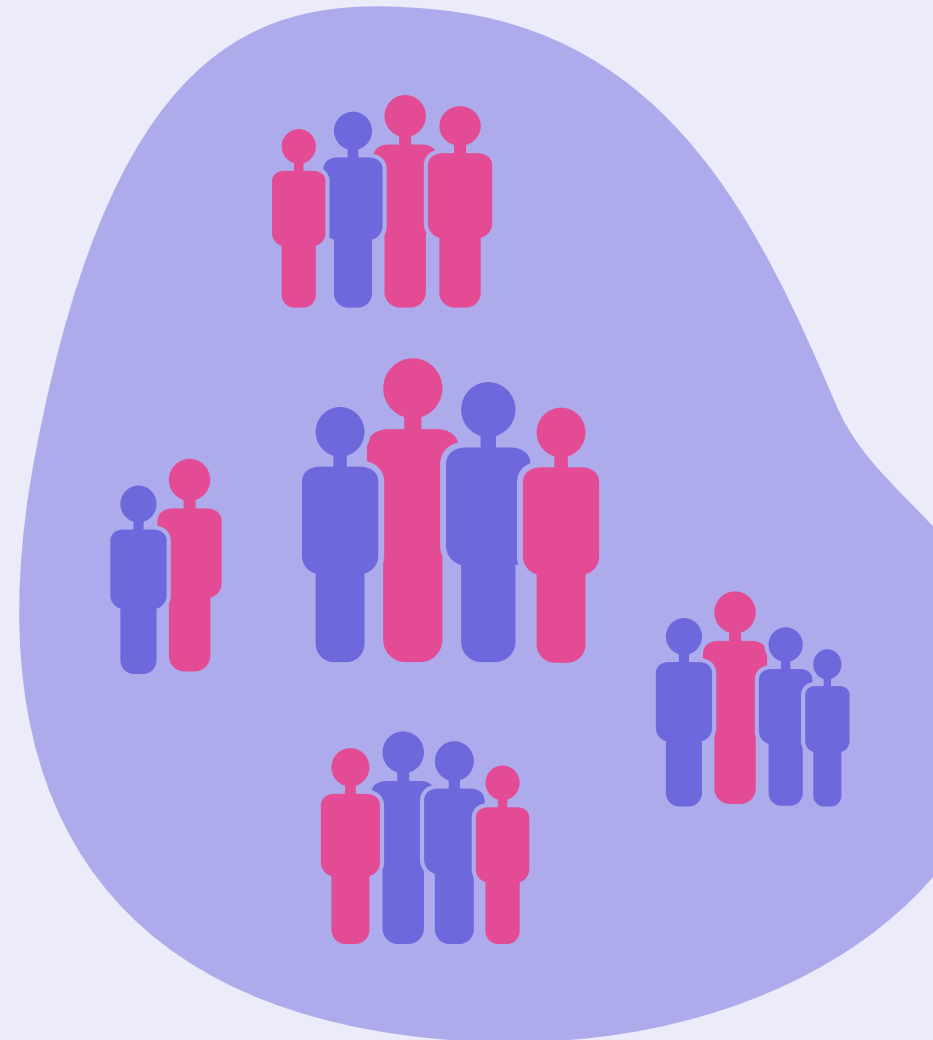
But adoption is facing a national crisis, and the system is failing too many of the children who need it most. Fewer families are coming forward, children are waiting longer, and the children who most need a family — older children, siblings, disabled children and children from Global Majority groups — are being left behind. This report sets out the evidence clearly, and it should concern all of us.

Adoption delivers some of the best outcomes we see anywhere in the care system. But it cannot sustain itself. It needs funding, recognition and active support from governments, the wider care sector, and all of us working within it.

Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) make up around a fifth of the adoption sector and make a significant difference to the whole system. We have specialist expertise in finding families for children from priority groups, and we offer adoptive families tailored, lifelong support that continues long after an adoption order is made. We hope this report adds to the conversation the whole sector needs to have, and that we can work together to build a modern adoption system that serves children and families better.

Andrew Webb

Chair of CVAA UK



VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCIES: OUR CONTRIBUTION



VAA's invest in adoption support



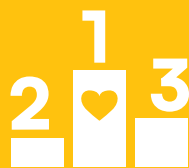
**56,000
HOURS**

of support provided
(13 agencies)



13,341

beneficiaries
(13 agencies)



**TOP 3 AREAS
OF SUPPORT:**

adopter training,
therapy, peer support

VAA's focus on children from priority groups

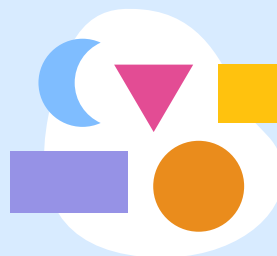


2/3rds

of the children VAA's placed are
children from priority groups

- siblings, older children
and children from Global
Majority communities

VAA's support more diverse families

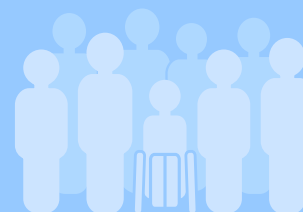


VAA's reach and support more
adopters from **Global Majority**
and **LGBTQ+** communities



**VAA'S SHARE OF THE
ADOPTION SECTOR:
20% IN THE UK**

VAA's: our people



**OVER
420
EMPLOYEES**



**8
MEMBER
AGENCIES
HAVE LESS
THAN 20
EMPLOYEES**

VAA's: our finances



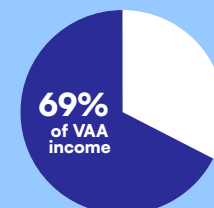
Average income
decreased by

3.0%

in 2025/26
(14 agencies)



**HIGH DEPENDENCE ON
INTERAGENCY FEE
WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR**



69%
of VAA
income

Investing in adoption support

- Over **£4 million** in additional funds was budgeted for adoption support in 2025-2026¹

VAAAs are known for providing tailored support to children and families throughout their adoption journey. The investment they make is additional to what is available through the Interagency Fee or any government support (such as the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) in England). Families' feedback is overwhelmingly positive, and evaluations and inspections confirm this. In response to our survey, member agencies pointed to particular strengths: a wide range of support, dedicated support teams, a genuinely lifelong offer, responsive review of training, and a culture of stepping in where public services fall short. VAAAs' ability to raise their own funds was seen as central to the quality and breadth of this support, in some cases helping adopters reach specialist help that public services and the ASGSF do not provide.

- In Scotland almost **3,000** households received support after adoption in 2024-25, and VAAAs provided **more than a quarter** of it²

¹ The total figure will be much higher as only 10 VAAAs provided this data to CVAA

² Fostering and adoption statistical bulletin 2024-2025, Care Inspectorate, Scotland, May 2026 <https://www.careinspectorate.scot/news-and-media/fostering-and-adoption-statistical-bulletin-2024-2025>

In England, many agencies raised concerns about the changes to the ASGSF made in April 2025, including cuts to the Fair Access Limit (the most the Fund will pay per child) and the lack of a separate budget for specialist assessments. The late announcement of the lower limit meant support was delayed and reduced just as demand was rising. Agencies described the immediate impact on children and families and worried about the longer-term consequences, including whether VAAAs can sustain the same quality of support. They described families "reaching crisis point", with heightened anxiety and safeguarding risks that agencies had to manage. Several agencies said they had to "hold and support" families for long periods because of ASGSF delays and cuts. This came at significant financial cost: some agencies ran emergency fundraising campaigns, drew down their reserves and, in some cases, made redundancies.

“ Every single staff member is passionate and committed to our cause of helping children find permanence and receive support... Staff over the last few years understand it is part of their role to understand the finances of the charity, the external picture, and that we will always be in a process of some sort of change, whether small or large. When challenges arise, such as cuts to ASGSF, staff come together to find the best solutions and responses we can. ”

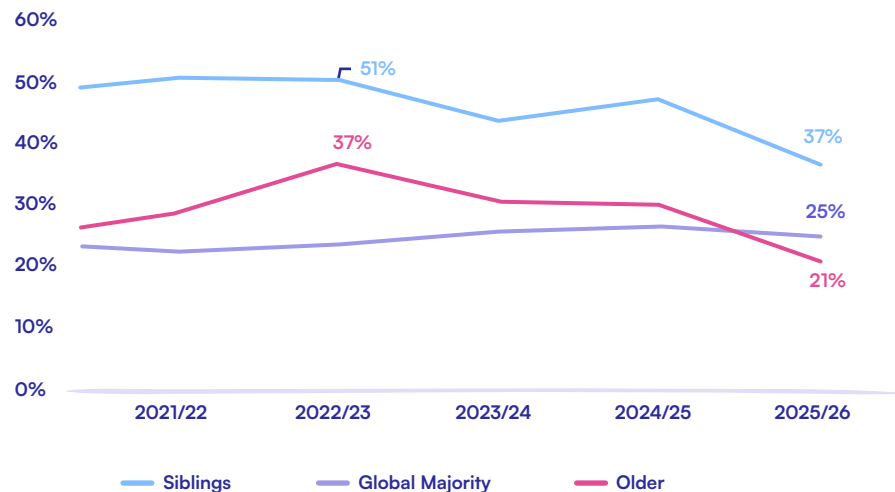
VAA representative

Agencies also raised the long-standing problem of having to access the ASGSF through Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs), which slows timely, effective therapeutic support. Difficulty getting mainstream services, such as children's mental health services (CAMHS) and support for special educational needs (SEND), makes this worse.

Focusing on children from priority groups

VAAAs still find adoptive families for a high proportion of children from priority groups, but this proportion has fallen from 75% in 2024/25 to 66% in 2025/26, its lowest level. Our focus has not changed; the fall reflects the national shortage of adopters. As the graph below shows, placements of siblings and older children with adopters have dropped by 10% since last year. Although more babies and younger children are being placed for adoption, the shortage of adoptive families means many other children are not being placed and remain in care.

Trends in children from priority groups placed by VAAs

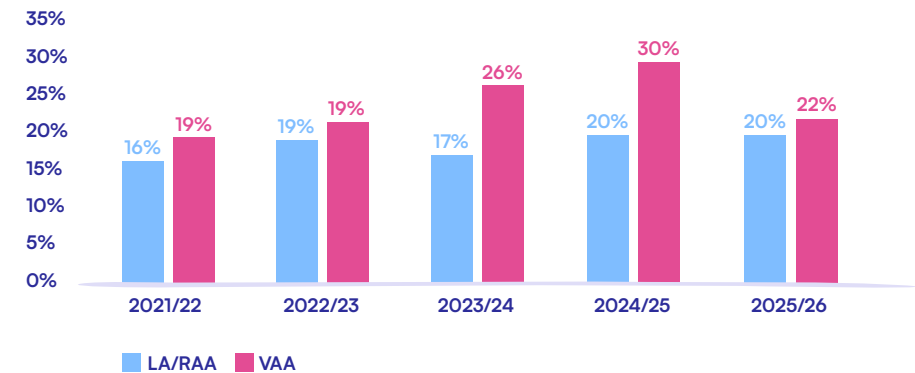


* Children with priority characteristics include older children, siblings, disabled children, and children from Global Majority communities

Supporting more diverse families

VAAAs work hard to recruit and support a diverse range of adoptive families, including people from Global Majority and LGBTQ+ communities.

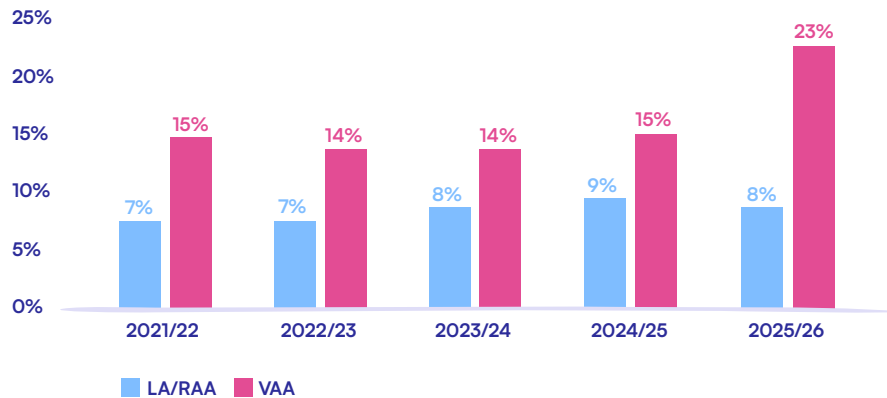
% adoption orders to LGBTQ+ adopters³



Potential adopters from LGBTQ+ communities often choose VAAAs as their adoption agency and they made up 22% of adoption orders in 2025/26. This reflects the long-standing reputation of VAAAs for open, affirming assessment and matching practices. Some individual VAAAs reported much higher numbers of LGBTQ+ adopters than the average, the result of years of active engagement with, and support for, these communities.

³ The data for LA/RAA is from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Data Collection <https://www.coram.org.uk/the-childrens-and-social-care-secretariat/>

% adoption orders to Global Majority adopters⁴



VAA also play a significant role in recruiting adopters from Global Majority communities, who made up 23% of adoption orders in 2025/26. This helps children from these communities to be matched with families who reflect their heritage and identity. VAA that run intercountry adoption services also tell us that almost all their applications now come from prospective adopters from Global Majority communities.

“We’re spreading the word about adoption but most importantly, we’re listening. Because only by listening can we help more Black children grow up in loving families that reflect their heritage.”

VAA representative

⁴ The data for LA/RAA is from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Data Collection <https://www.coram.org.uk/the-childrens-and-social-care-secretariat/>

Facing a system under pressure

The challenges facing adoption today are connected, and each makes the others worse. Fewer adopters, funding cuts for support, outdated laws and slow decisions all feed into one another and it is children waiting for a family who pay the price. This section looks at two of these challenges to show the context VAA are working in.

Finding adoptive families

- VAA received **13,000** enquiries from potential adopters in 2025/26, a **fall of 8%** since last year

The adoption sector is facing a crisis in recruiting adoptive families across all four nations. The gap between the number of children needing adoption and the number of families available is growing.

A report⁵ by Adoption England and Coram highlighted the scale of the crisis in England, reporting a shortfall of around 940 adoptive families, and finding that currently approved families met only 41% of the estimated need.

In Scotland, the latest data from the Care Inspectorate⁶ shows the number of households newly approved for adoption continuing to fall, with the 2024 figure the lowest in the last five years.

VAAAs report several reasons for this growing gap: the cost-of-living crisis of recent years; shrinking funds for adoption support and delays in accessing these funds; and negative media coverage of adoption. People are also more aware of how complex adoption can be, and this can stop them coming forward, lead them to withdraw, or mean they are not approved to adopt.

Waiting too long for a family

● **30%** of children are waiting for **over a year** to be adopted

Despite efforts across the system to reduce waiting times, matching children coming into care with adoptive families is still shockingly slow across the UK.

In Wales, the number of children with adoption plans continues to fall, but more children are still waiting for a match because there are too few adopters. In Scotland, VAAAs reported delays at adoption panels, and local authorities not acting urgently to progress matches. In some cases, the child's social worker, rather than an adoption team, is still responsible for finding a family, and the task is not given priority. In Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Trusts are still reluctant to pay the costs of placing a child with a VAA, and new legislation has been delayed.

⁶ Every Day is Everything, Adoption England and Coram, September 2026
<https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/adopter-recruitment-report/>

⁶ Fostering and adoption statistical bulletin 2024-2025, Care Inspectorate, Scotland, May 2026
<https://www.careinspectorate.scot/news-and-media/fostering-and-adoption-statistical-bulletin-2024-2025>

VAA data shows that the wait between a placement order and matching has grown over the past two years, as the graph below shows. However, children are receiving adoption plans more quickly, so the overall time from entering care to being matched is broadly similar to last year.

Days from Placement Order to Matching in England



As at 31 March 2026, sector-wide data⁷ for England showed that children with a Placement Order (the court order allowing a child to be placed for adoption) who had not yet been placed had waited an average of 646 days since entering care and 309 days since the order was made.

⁷ The Adoption and Special Guardianship Data Collection
<https://www.coram.org.uk/the-childrens-and-social-care-secretariat/>

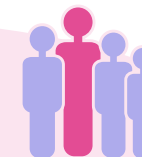
Improving our practice

VAAAs across the UK are listening to feedback, learning from success and setbacks, and improving their ability to reach and support children and families through their adoption journeys.



Helping children thrive

In 2025/26, St David's Children Society in Wales received funding from Children in Need for a dedicated Children and Young People Support Worker. Since starting, the worker has set up Little Legends, a new fortnightly group for children under four that creates opportunities for social connection and early development. The worker has also begun giving tailored one-to-one support to children in their homes, helping them build confidence, resilience and positive relationships.



Meeting different needs

ARC Adoption in North East England, expanded its support in 2026, launching adopter-led hubs, a support group for birth children in adoptive families, and a choir for adoptive parents, family and staff to build relationships and support wellbeing. Its standout addition was an Arts Council-funded theatre project, in which children and young people wrote and staged a production about the reality of adoption and performed it to their families in a professional theatre.



Reaching all communities

In 2025, Yorkshire Adoption Agency launched a new community engagement project to build trust and relationships with local Black African and Caribbean communities, tackling long-standing disparities in adoption recruitment and awareness. The agency's first Community In-Reach Worker leads the project. They are an adopter with lived experience and a professional background in inclusive practice, and they work directly with community organisations to raise awareness of adoption and support prospective adopters through the process.

Influencing adoption policy

VAAAs across the UK work together to influence policy and the law, and to bring about change across the whole system that promotes the rights and wellbeing of children in need of care.

Acting together for change

After the government suddenly announced deep cuts to the ASGSF in April 2025, VAAAs in England joined CVAA to raise the alarm about the devastating impact on adopted and kinship children. Since then, CVAA has worked closely with adopter and adoptee groups and other adoption and social care organisations to shape the public consultation and, more recently, the government's response to the feedback and its plans to reform adoption support, which are due to be announced before the end of 2026.

In late 2025, Barnardo's and representatives of children and young people launched a Children's Manifesto ahead of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) election, urging all political parties to put children and young people at the centre of decision-making.

In spring 2026, CVAA Scotland launched an Adoption Manifesto ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections. It sets out clear next steps to reform and modernise adoption and to deliver on the commitments made in The Promise.

As this report shows, VAAAs are a significant part of the national adoption sector and have much to offer. Together with other partners, we influence policy, bring new ideas and are committed to making the whole adoption system work better for children and families.

VAAAs cannot close this gap alone. We want to work with government, local authorities and partners across the sector to build a system that meets the needs of every child waiting for a family.



October 2026

NOTE: Unless otherwise referenced all the statistics in this report are from data submitted by 15 member agencies. The report also draws on responses from VAAAs to a qualitative survey carried out in early 2026.