



Northern Health
and Social Care Trust

Care • Compassion • Community

Adoption Panel
Annual Activity Report
April 2021 – March 2022

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Panel Chair Summary

The Northern Trust Adoption panel continues to make positive progress. As outlined within this report the number of panels convened has increased, this is as a result of two additional panels being convened to expedite the decision making process for 4 children. This has illustrated that Panel can meet as demand requires, affording flexibility and responsiveness to need.

In October 2021 a new panel Chair took up post, Mr Lee Wilson (Assistant Director of Social Work Governance, Workforce Development and Training). In addition to a new chair, the Trust has also provided the panel with two new professional advisors, Mrs Deirdre Keenan and Mrs Catrina Brown (Principal Practitioners – Corporate Parenting). The Trust Decision Maker is Mrs Julie Patterson (Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting).

The panel chair has enhanced the accountability of panels by establishing an adoption panel learning group. This group meets quarterly and is attended by Heads of Service from Corporate Parenting. The group considers areas of good practice and improvements that arise from monthly panel meetings. Matters that need to be escalated from this group are tabled at the Fostering and Adoption Governance and Improvement Group, chaired by the decision maker, Mrs Julie Patterson.

There has continued to be noted improvements in the quality of reports presented to panel throughout this reporting period. The full use of the CORAM BAAF, Adoption and Fostering Academy assessment reports has now been in practice for a year. The feedback from applicants has been overwhelmingly positive with prospective adopters describing in panel how the questions powerfully bring the role of becoming a carer to life.

The period April 2021- March 2022 has been a busy period for Adoption Panel; panel membership has a strong balance of skill and experience representing a diverse range of disciplines, service users by expert and independent representatives. The Panel displays a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm to the work, and applies an appropriate level of scrutiny to assessments with the focus always being on meeting the needs of children and safeguarding their welfare. The Panel further recognises the responsibility it has in balancing this with a need to ensure that applicants feel welcome and respected by the Adoption Panel, during population lockdowns the panel moved to a virtual platform, however consideration is now being given to a hybrid approach that will facilitate a face to face meeting for all prospective adoptive carers.

The Adoption Panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure, guidance and legislation. To support panel members they will be provided with training and development opportunities, plus panel specific training.

The Adoption Panel Learning Group provides the opportunity to direct feedback on the quality of reports presented, to highlight any issues, concerns, themes and acknowledgments of outstanding practice, which are addressed via the panel chair and trust decision maker.

Matters that have been routinely addressed during the reporting period are, the quality of reports to panel, as well as the robustness of adoption support plans including contact plans; this is in line

with the Trust guidelines that require us to address future support needs of adoptive children in particular.

The quality of reports presented to Adoption panel continues to be strengthened along with the quality assurance role of Team Leaders and Social Work Service managers, prior to the reports being submitted to panel. The Panel's Professional Advisor of which there is now two, previously one, provides panels with the consistent quality assurance and advice that panels require in order to make recommendations. The Panel Chair and panel members all reported significant improvements in the quality of reports being presented to the adoption panel.

The Panel Chair (Mr Lee Wilson) is required to produce an annual performance report. The analysis laid out within this report provides the following assurance.

- Adoption reports are of an increasingly good standard including some that are outstanding
- Trust Decision Maker timescales are being met
- The Trust continues to provide child centred adoption services to children and carers
- There is a good summary and analysis for matching children with adopters
- There are continued improvements in timescales for adoption assessments
- Professional Advisors continue to guide the panel with consistent advice and quality assurance
- A learning group has been established with Heads of Service to address needs and share good practice identified by panel members. This group meets quarterly and the panel chair and professional advisors are invited to this meeting, this is a useful group to drive continued improvements in panel business.

Areas for further development

- Consideration will be given to membership and representation of a young person with care experience sitting on some panels
- Develop further strategies to keep a focus on the child when considering all reports presented to panel
- Move to a hybrid virtual / face to face meeting to facilitate more meaningful engagement with prospective adoptive carers
- Rotation of membership to build experience for Social Work Service Managers and Senior Social Work Practitioners

Overall, the Trust's arrangements for Adoption panel continues to work well and the Corporate Parenting Service is working towards ensuring continuous improvements to the panel and the processes of panel. The following is statistical information detailing the activity of the panel, according to the types of cases that have been presented.



Mr Lee Wilson. BSc Hons. BSW. Pg. Dip
Assistant Director, Social Work Governance, Workforce Development and Training
Children and Young People's Division
Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Adoption Panel Membership

Lee Wilson

Assistant Director for Social Work Governance,
Workforce Development and Training

Chair Person

Mary Doherty

Social Work Service Manager

Social Work Representative

Michael Robinson

Social Work Manager

Social Work Representative

Patricia Barrett

Adoptive Parent

Independent Member

Nichola Cherry

Adoptive Parent

Independent Member

Lynda Graham

Adoptive Parent/Adoption Counsellor

Independent Member

Dr Feline Small/Dr Yvonne Doherty

Associate Specialists in Community Paediatrics

Medical Advisors

Gerard McGivern

Non-executive Trust Board Members

Northern Trust Board Representative

Terry Brady

Solicitor with DLS

Legal Advisor

(non-attending, non-voting)

Deirdre Keenan

Principal Practitioner

Professional Advisor

(non-voting)

Catriona Brown

Principal Practitioner

Professional Advisor

(non-voting)

Collette Campbell

Panel Administrator

Ms Graham and Ms Cherry attend alternate panels. Mrs Brown and Mrs Kennan provide the panel with professional advice by attending alternate panels.

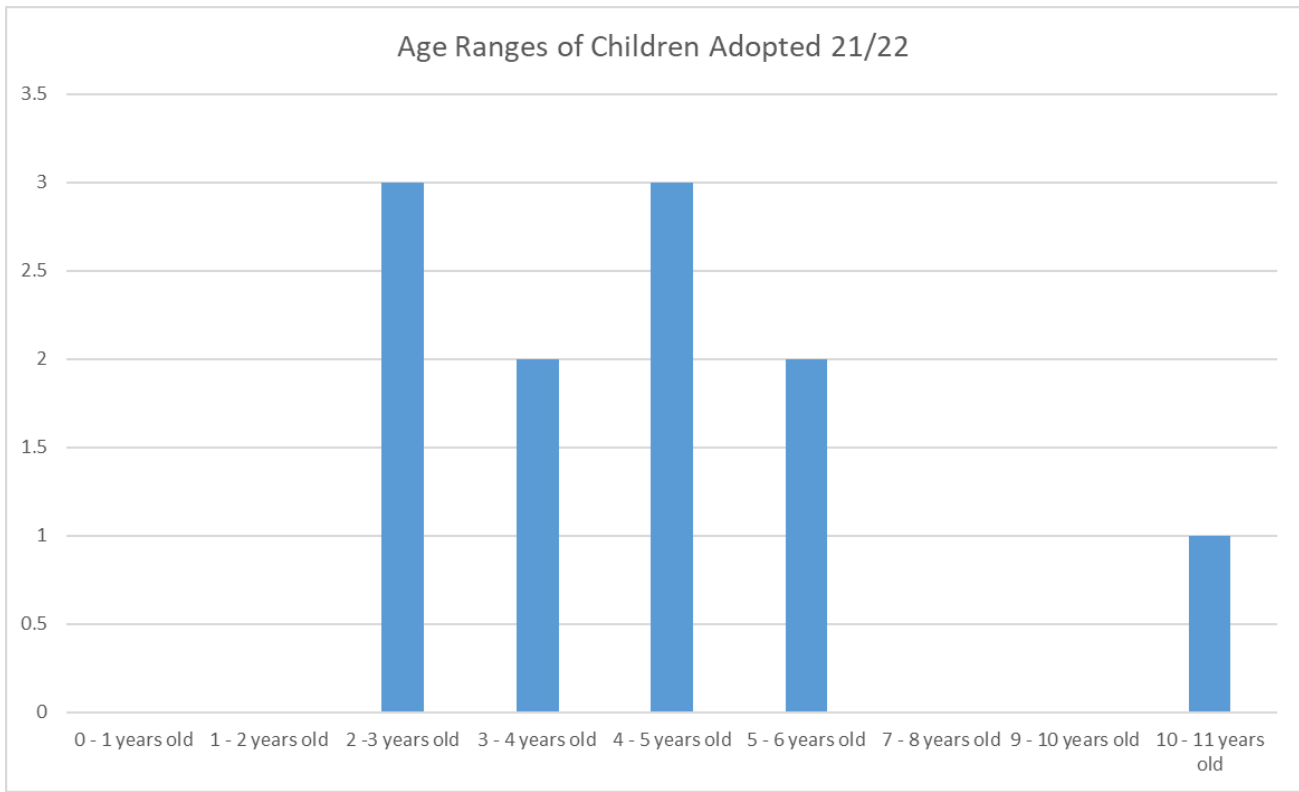
Summary of Panel Activity during 2020-2021

	2021/22	(2020/21)
• Best Interest for Adoption recommendations:	17	(12)
• Children adopted:	11	(16)
• Freeing Orders granted:	25	(22)
• Matching recommendations made:	7	(7)
• Domestic adoption applications recommended for approval:	14	(11)
• Intercountry adoption applications recommended for approval:	1	(0)
• Approvals to adopt rescinded:	0	(5)
• Best Interest Decisions rescinded	0	(3)
• Best Interest Decision reaffirmed	0	(0)
• Placement Disruption reports	0	(0)
• Adoption reviews:	32	(46)

13 full panel meetings took place, all of which were facilitated via Zoom.

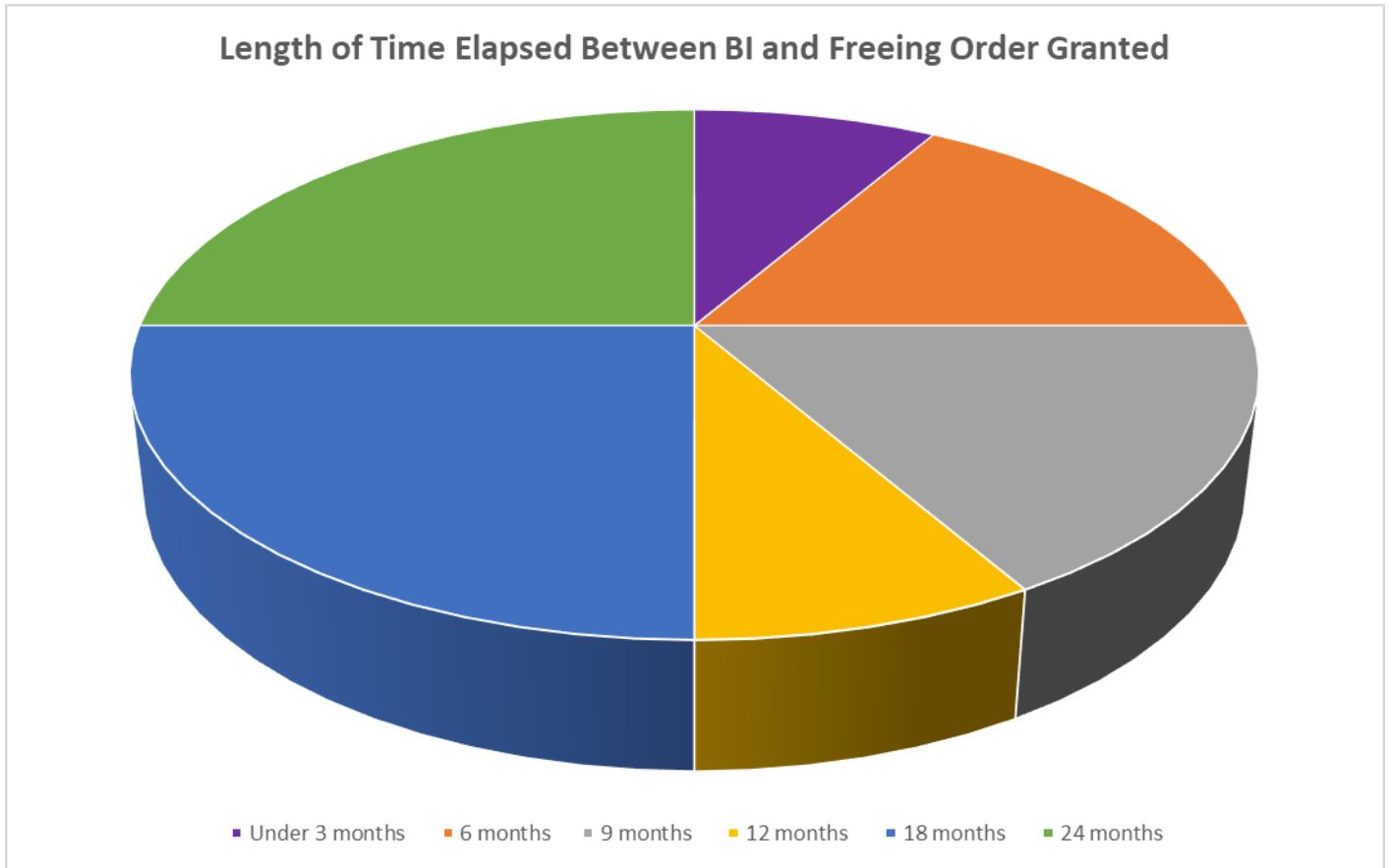
The total number of domestic reviews completed was 32.

Age Ranges of Children Adopted In The Timeframe



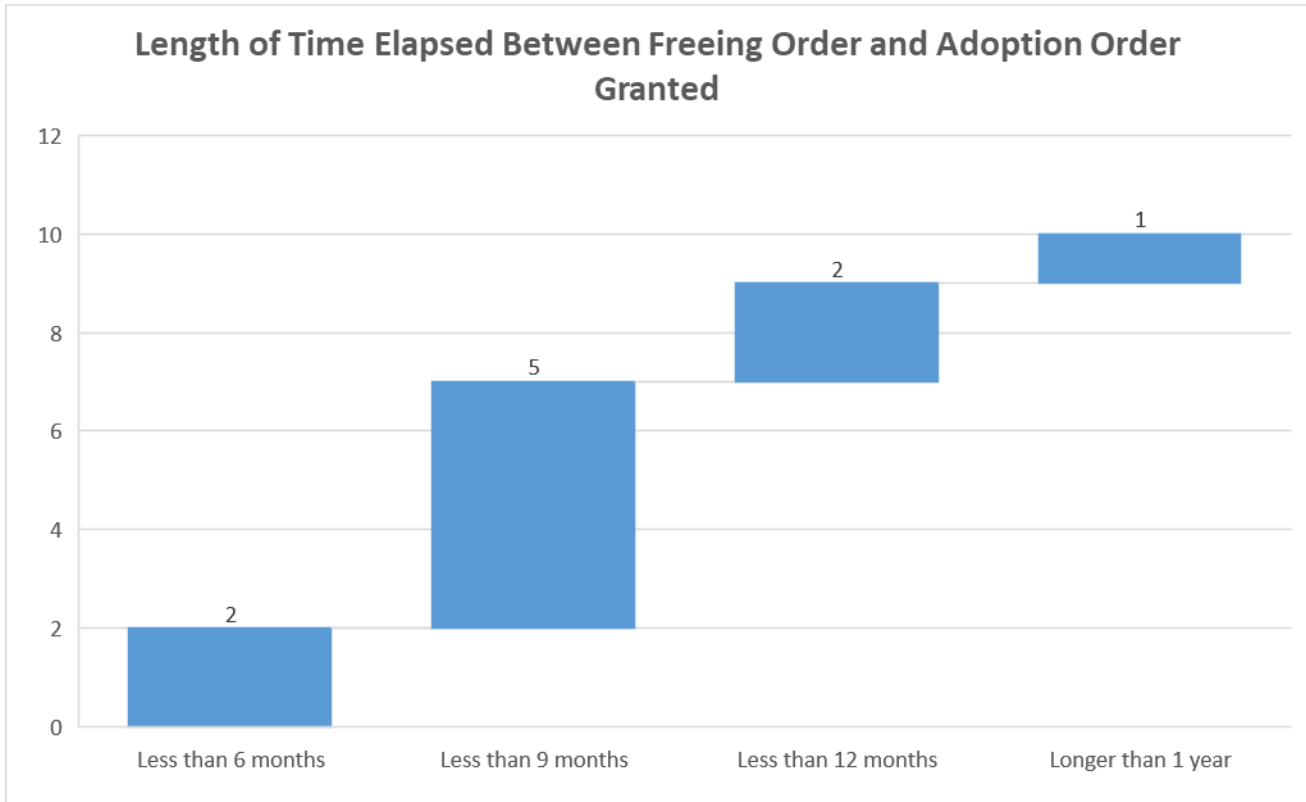
Total Adoption Orders 11

Length of Time Elapsed Between BI and Freeing Order Granted For All Children Adopted In the Timeframe



Average Time:- 14 months

Length of Time Elapsed Between Freeing Order and Adoption Order Granted For All Children Adopted In the Timeframe



Average Time 10 months

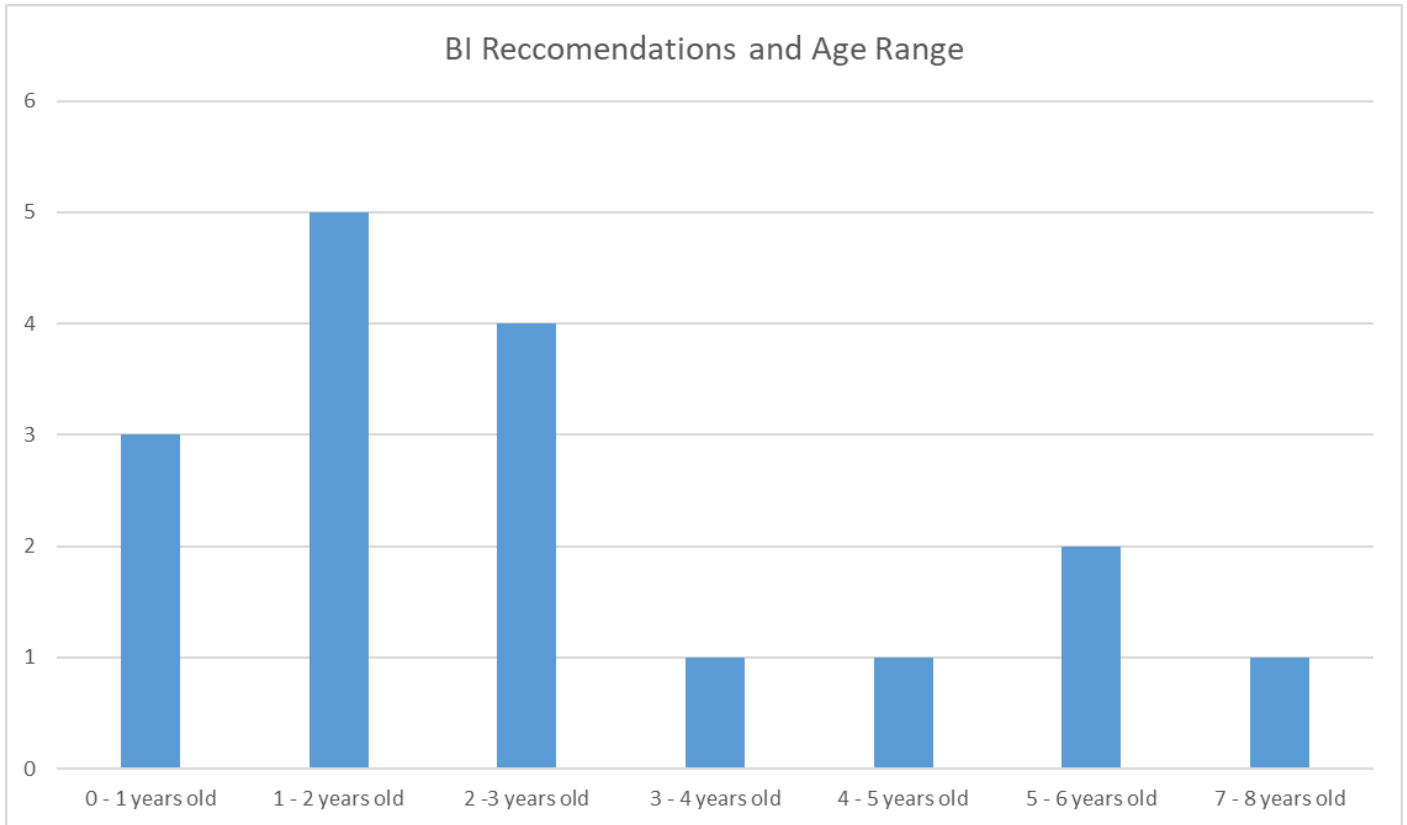
Children Adopted by Their Foster Carers (Child Specific) In Timeframe

Total 1 child

Children Adopted In The Timeframe Who Were Eligible For Adoption Allowance

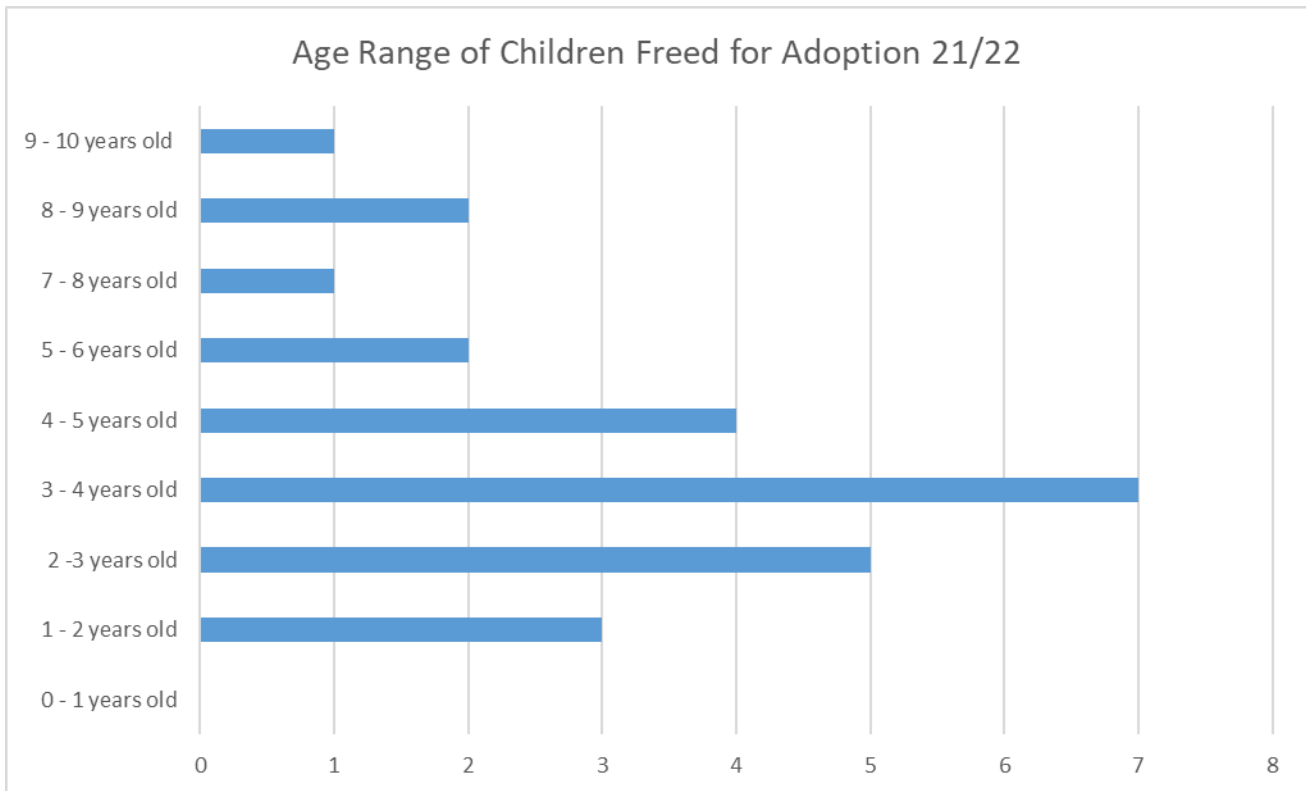
From 11 children adopted – 2 children were recommended for adoption allowance.

Children Who Had BI Decisions Recommended In This Time Frame & Age At Time Of BI



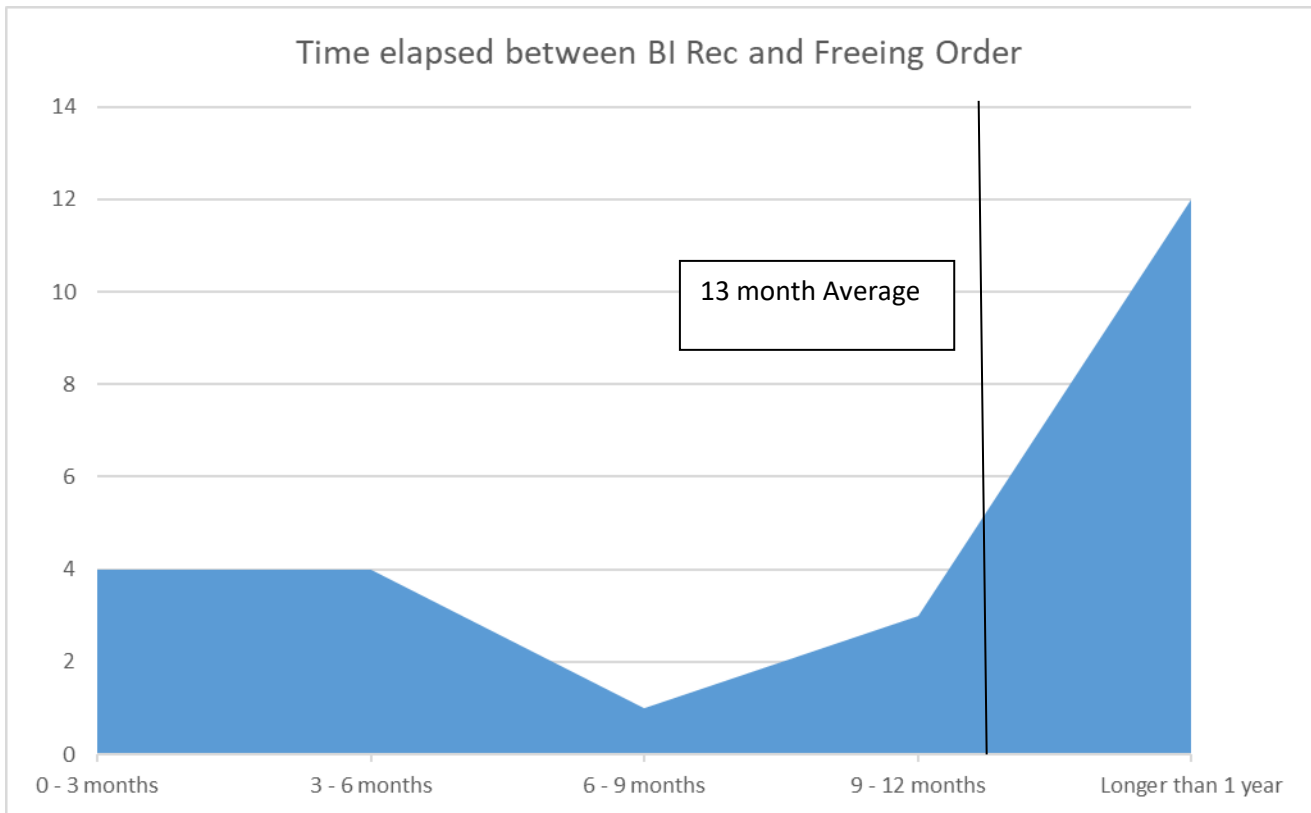
Total 17 children

Names and Ages Of Children Freed For Adoption In The Time Frame



Total 25

Length of Time Between BI Recommendation and Freeing Order Being Granted



* Timeframe dependent on judiciary processes.

Number of Children Formally Matched with their Carers in the Time Frame

Number of children formally matched at panel in time frame = 22

Number of Applications (Assessments) Recommended For Approval By Panel in Time Frame

Total:- 1 Intercountry Application Approved

Total:- 14 Domestic Applications Approved

Breakdown of these 14:-

- 4 Applications were child specific (of these 4 one application single carer & one application the 3rd for the carers)
- 7 Applications from couples (one application 2nd time for carers)
- 3 Applications from single carers (two applications were 2nd time for the carer)

Number of Applications Not Approved at Panel:- None

Assessments Completed in Timeframe Broken Down By Team

Of the 14 Assessments completed breakdown by Team as follows:-

3 – Magherafelt Team

4 – B'mena Team

4 – Carrick Team

2 – B'money Team

1 – Completed by Independent SW

Number of De-registrations:- 2

Number of Reviews Completed by Adoption Panel:- Domestic 32 I/C 0

Number of Review Panel's convened:- 0

Notes

Number of Adoption Panels in timeframe = 14 All via ZOOM

Number of BI Decisions Rescinded – 0

Number of BI Decisions Reaffirmed – 0

Number of Placement Disruption Reports to panel – 0

Our Vision

**We provide compassionate care
with our community, in our community.**

If you would like to give feedback on
any of our services please contact:

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

Telephone: 028 9442 4655



Northern Health and Social Care Trust



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