



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Annual Report

2022/23



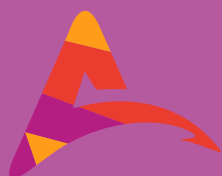
Achieving More Together

No matter how many challenges you have it is just the best thing I've ever done.

It's magical and seeing the world through the eyes of my girl knowing the life she had...I just feel so grateful.

If I could just urge one person to do it. It's brilliant"

Amanda and Martin adopted a girl



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Chairs' Foreword

The National Adoption Service Annual Report 2022/23 provides a clear focus on maintaining excellent performance in adoption services in Wales.

The National Service is appropriately and consistently looking towards the future to ensure adoption services remain relevant and adaptable to necessary change. It also remains ambitious that expertise across Local Government and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies continues to work effectively and efficiently.

The 'Adopt Cymru 2025 and Beyond' plan sets out how the service seeks to do this for the foreseeable future.

A.
The best families for our adopted children

B.
Great adoption support where and when it's needed

C.
Healthier contact through better birth family services

D.
Better adoption records and access to information at any age

Acknowledging and responding to life long implications

The plan is a true representation of the collaboration and coproduction that characterises how NAS works, drawing on extensive engagement with children, young people and families, professionals, and service leaders. This includes the annual engagement event, the 'Big Adoption Conversation' in January 2022 & 2023.

The service works from a position of strength and is aware of the opportunities and challenges ahead. This Annual Report provides evidence how respective partners will continue to work together to deliver the collective ambition of effectively supporting all those involved and affected by adoption.

The leadership of the service will continue to engage with Welsh Ministers and officials, building on the productive relationship that has developed. The service appreciates the additional resources that have been made available by them to support the implementation of the plan.



Phil Hodgson

Phil Hodgson
Independent Chair of the Advisory Group



Jane Tremlett

Councillor Jane Tremlett
Co-chair of the NAS Combined Governance Board

We hope you enjoy the report

About Us



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu | National
Cenedlaethol | Adoption
Service

The National Adoption Service (NAS) is the Wales-wide collaborative for the provision of adoption services. Its role is to improve adoption services for the benefit of all those affected by adoption in Wales.

Through its national/regional/local structure for Local Authority adoption services and its partnership with Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Health, Education and others, NAS has been delivering and improving services since 2014.

CENTRAL TEAM



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu | National
Cenedlaethol | Adoption
Service

**National Adoption Service
– Central Team**
c/o City of Cardiff Council,
Room 475 County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff, CF10 4UW
029 2087 3927
contact@adoptcymru.com
www.adoptcymru.com

MID & WEST WALES

Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire,
Pembrokeshire



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales

Mid & West Wales Adoption
Building 1, St David's Park,
Johnstown, Carmarthenshire,
SA31 3HB
01267 246970

Neuadd Brycheiniog, Cambrian Way,
Brecon, Powys, LD3 7HR
01597 827666
adoptionenquiries@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

NORTH WALES

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy,
Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu | North Wales
Gogledd Cymru | Adoption
Service

North Wales Adoption Service
3rd Floor, Lambpit Street, Wrexham,
LL11 1AR
01978 295311
adoption@wrexham.gov.uk
www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk

SOUTH EAST WALES

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen,
Caerphilly, Newport



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!

South East Wales Adoption Service
North Wing, 2nd Floor Block B,
Mamhilad House,
Mamhilad Park Estate,
Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 0HZ
01495 355766
adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff,
Vale of Glamorgan



Vale, Valleys
and Cardiff
Adoption | **Mabwysiadu**
yn y Fro, y Cymoedd
a Cheraidd

Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption
1st Floor, Dock Office, Subway Road,
Barry, CF63 4RT
0800 0234 064
adoption@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
www.adopt4vvc.org

WESTERN BAY

Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend

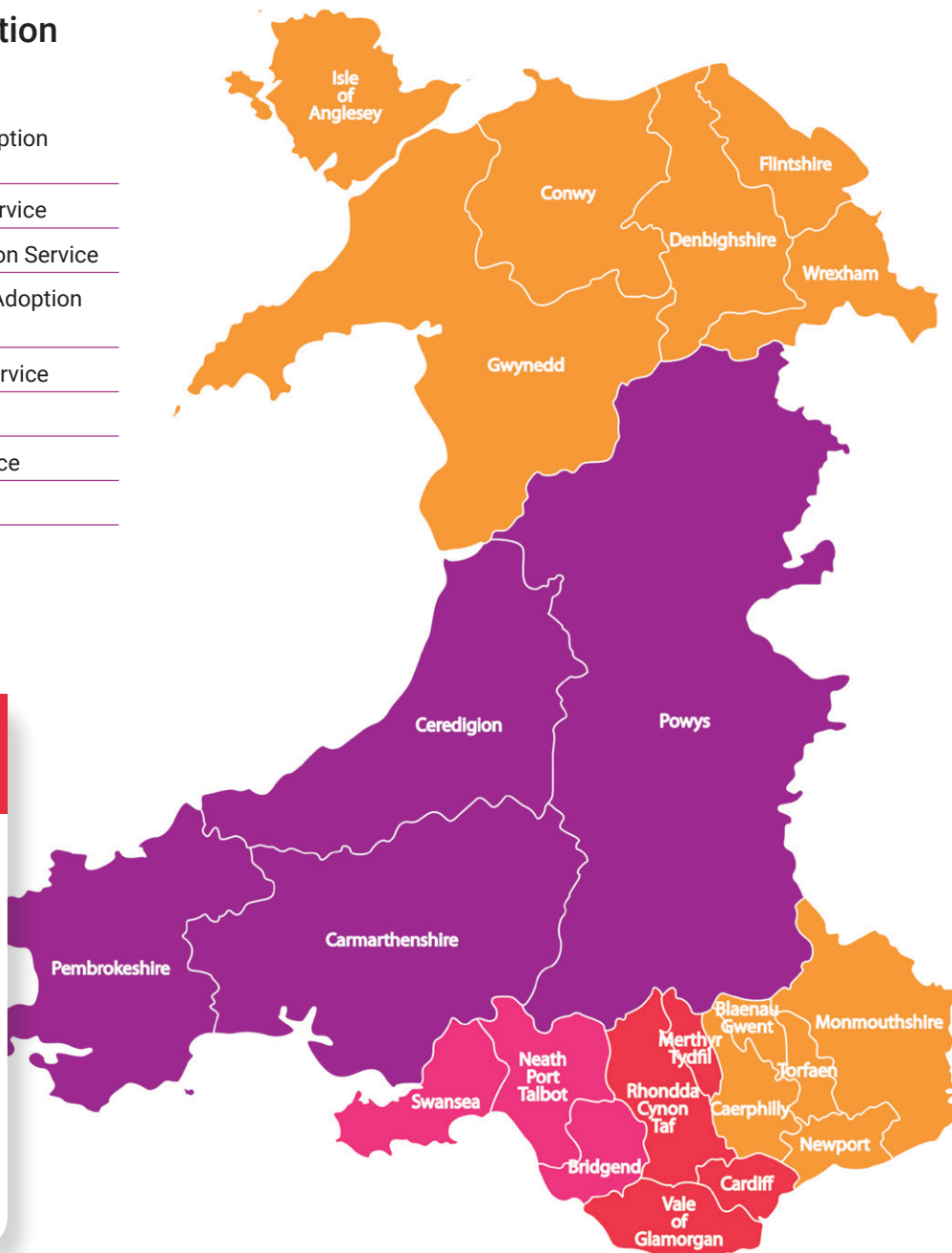


GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE

Western Bay Adoption Service
Tregelles Court,
Neath Abbey Road,
Neath, SA10 7DF
0300 365 2222
enquires@westernbayadoption.org
www.westernbayadoption.org

All Wales Voluntary Adoption Agencies Services

MWWAS	Mid and West Wales Adoption Service
NWAS	North Wales Adoption Service
SEWAS	South East Wales Adoption Service
VVC	Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service
WBAS	Western Bay Adoption Service
Barnardo's	Barnardo's
St David's	St David's Adoption Service
AUK	Adoption UK
LAs	Local Authorities



AFKA Cymru



Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu, Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu
Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption

AFKA Cymru
G14, Ty Antur, Enterprise House,
Navigation Park,
Abercynon, CF45 4SN
029 2076 1155
Info-afa@stdavidscs.org
www.afacymru.org

ADOPTION UK



Teulu gyda'n gilydd
Together we're family

Adoption UK
Penhaved Studios,
Penhaved Street,
Grangetown,
Cardiff, CF11 7LU
029 2023 0319
www.adoptionuk.org

BARNARDO'S CYMRU



Credwch mewn plant
Believe in children

Barnardo's Cymru Adoption and Fostering Services
Britannia House, Van Road,
Caerphilly, CF83 3GG
02920 484316
adoptionandfostering@barnardos.org.uk
www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption

ST DAVID'S ADOPTION SERVICE



St David's Children Society
28 Park Place, Cardiff,
CF10 3BA
029 2066 7007
info@stdavidscs.org
www.adoptionwales.org

Director's Introduction

Suzanne Griffiths



There has been much success and improvement in adoption services across Wales since 2014. This has continued during the last couple of years, despite the challenging environment facing children, young people, families, and professionals during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by difficulties in public finances and the cost of living.



Like all public services, NAS is challenged by a changing understanding of need with increasing demand in some parts of the service, the availability of a consistent workforce with appropriate skills, and by public and professional views.

For the few, not the many....

Adoption is a service for a relatively small number of children: those who cannot be provided with a safe home within their birth family or community; or, in relatively rare cases nowadays, where a parent chooses to relinquish their child for adoption.

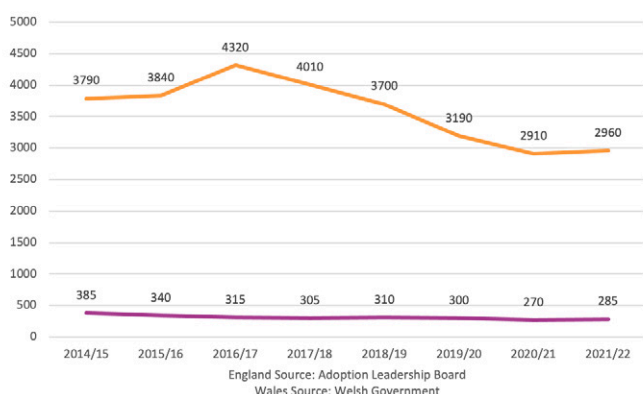
We know that adoption is a hugely positive option for children in both situations; research shows that it continues to provide the best outcomes for these children.

It is important that we continue striving to improve services, ensuring that adoption continues to offer a positive permanence option for children supported by the social welfare system who need it. While there are relinquished children, and others with no recourse to a safe and nurturing family environment, adoption will continue to be an important part of the range of family services.

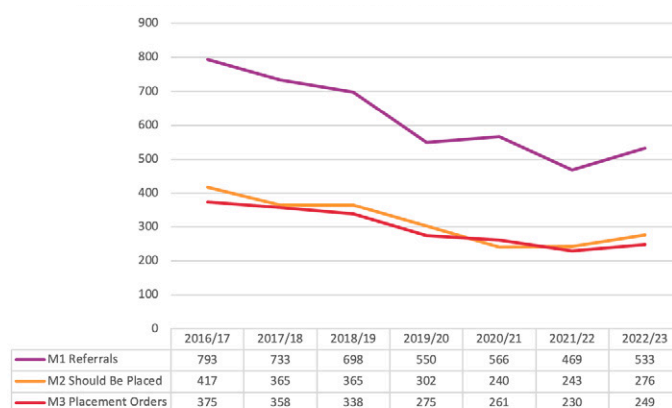
To quote Professor Jim Clifford OBE, following the publication of the recent 'Home for Me' report : "Adoption is for the few, not the many" and "where appropriate to the needs of the child, brings more value than either SGO's or fostering". This report provides a clear overview of why adoption is a positive permanence option for some children both from the perspective of the individual child but also from that of the public purse. It calls on the adoption sector, local authorities and the social work profession, the judiciary, and governments to act on falling adoption numbers for the sake of children and society.

In common with England, Welsh adoption services are seeing a long-term reduction in children referred, placed and adopted. In Wales, the reduction mirrors a more general reduction in applications to the courts. Although there are signs of an upturn in 2022/23, it is likely that use of adoption is settling at a lower level than prior to the pandemic.

Placement Orders made in England and Wales



Referrals, should be Placed Decision & Placement Orders in Wales



Consideration of adoption for children is challenged

It is recognised that, first and foremost, children should be supported to remain within their families and communities of origin. Services should do all that they can to provide the right type and level of support for however long it is needed.

However, the sometimes-vocal anti-adoption lobby and the misleading interpretation of certain legal judgements (Re: B & Re: BS) has made it seem like adoption should only ever be considered as a very last option. Likewise, the ongoing balancing of child welfare legislation and paramountcy with parental / human rights legislation within the courts can result in significant delays for children as proceedings are halted to allow these matters to be heard.

Additional challenges have come in recent years linked to scandals about historical practices: most recently, the treatment of unmarried women reported last year by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. These are indefensible, representing practices that have no place in contemporary services or society.

These are also myths about what adoption means in the modern world. Adoption no longer necessarily means the complete severance of ties with birth families. Likewise, there is greater recognition than ever of the lifelong implications to adoption, which may require support and services to be available when needed through the lifecycle.

Lastly, there are public policy challenges in Wales, which create incentives to consider other options ahead of adoption when planning for children: one example is a more advantageous legal entitlement to support for Special Guardians; and another, the 'no detriment' policy in respect of payments if a fostering arrangement converts to special guardianship.

None of these are wrong when taken in isolation. No one working in adoption services would disagree that it is right that, if there is a possibility for children to remain within their family network, that should happen and be well supported by services.

However, accumulatively they place adoption at a disadvantage, and the often-negative portrayal is unfair and unhelpful when there are many potential positives to well managed adoption in terms of outcomes for children.

Services in Wales and across the UK are working hard to adapt and modernise adoption services. In Wales, we are implementing many changes to practice through a series of Good Practice Guides, including:

- how we support children moving into new adoptive families and how we keep in touch with them;
- how we work with birth parents in a different way;
- and how we create a more 'open' style of adoption where relationships and connections are seen as key to ensuring children develop a much better understanding of their identity and early life experiences.

NAS, primarily through the central team, continues to work closely with the Welsh Government to maintain their support and investment in changed adoption services for Wales. The current focus is to ensure that 'Radical Reform' and the Transformation Programme includes a clear focus on supporting modern adoption in Wales.



Suzanne Griffiths Director

² The Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry: The right to family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949-1976

NAS' Strategic Priorities

A photograph of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a blue denim shirt, smiling warmly at a baby. The baby is wearing a pink knitted hat with a pom-pom and a denim jacket over a white t-shirt. The man is holding the baby's hand. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with trees and a clear sky. The overall mood is warm and affectionate.

'Modern adoption' in Wales will need a sustained focus on the key strategic priorities in the current plan, as well as change in other areas of policy and practice linked to care planning for all children.

NAS' STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The NAS priorities build on the successful work with partners over many years, and will create sustainable services to support children, young people and the families around them to deal with the life-long implications of their adoption. This report provides an update on progress against the priorities.

A sustainable long-term service

How NAS implements the new plan is as important as what it aims to achieve.

There are key operating principles that NAS has put in place over the last eight years, which will continue.

These are:

Engagement, participation, and co-production with the people who use services and the staff that deliver them.

Nationally this is actioned through links with AUK and their Adoption Barometer and Connect service including the Adoption Youth Council, the annual Big Adoption Conversation, our topic-based subgroups that include staff from across Wales, with input from service users at regional level.

Effective partnership working between the statutory and third sector combined with strategic commissioning to support sustainability as well as cross-sector sharing of effective approaches.

In this year, the work on historical adoption and a new Access to Records service, plus the early alerts systems between regions and the VAAs, are key examples of the excellent collaboration that happens amongst agencies that make up the National Adoption Service.

Capacity building through action learning approaches, drawing on internal practice initiatives. These are informed by research, learning from others and co-production, while seeking additional resources where possible.

An example of this is the development of the Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) framework, which involved staff across Wales plus consultation with colleagues in England, and drew upon Coram BAAF's research / good practice guidance plus grant aid from Welsh Government for a project lead.

Influencing and leading the public, professional and government in relation to adoption matters.

This includes persistence; this year we have again been encouraging the Welsh Government to improve entitlement and access in the adoption support regulations, as well as gaining the support of the Ministers and senior officials at our events and in meeting with adoptive families, children and young people.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY A

The Best Families For Our Adopted Children

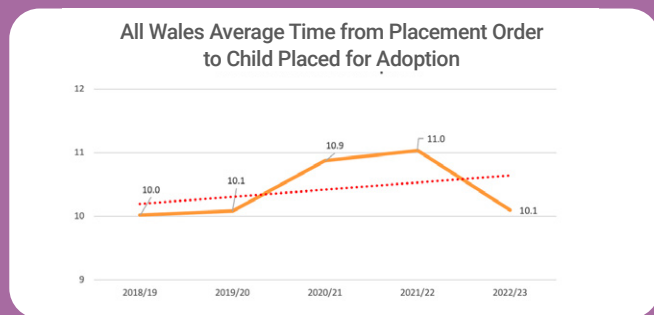
Aim

To continue to improve the recruitment, preparation, and training for adopters to ensure every child is placed in a timely way with adopters who can, with early support, provide them with the best opportunities for family life.

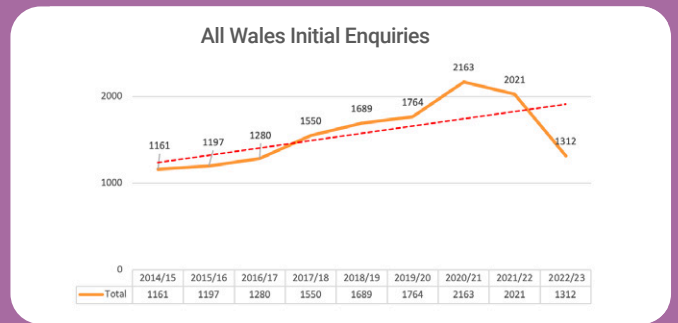
What was achieved during 2022/23?

For reasons outlined earlier, there are fewer children being considered for adoption currently, although there are clear signs of an upturn in demand this year. **There were 223 children placed in their new adoptive families during the year: placements have been at a steady rate of 50+ per quarter since the end of 21/22, which is lower than in previous years when it tended to be 70+ PQ.**

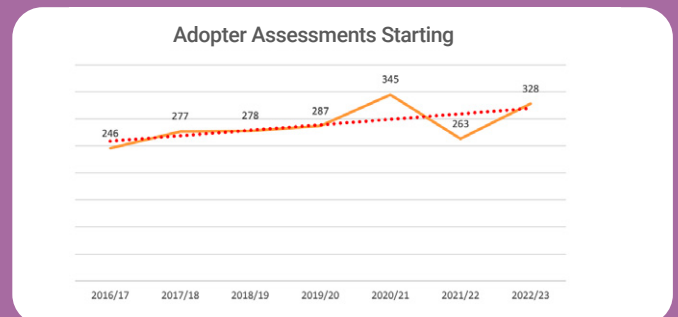
The average time to place children has improved, falling back to pre-Covid levels, at an average of 10.1 months after the placement order is granted.



The number of children waiting for whom we are family finding was 144, a further **fall of 7% compared to the end of last year**. NAS data indicated that circa **227 Adoption Orders** were granted in Wales in 2022/23; 2022/23 was a very different year for adopter recruitment. Initial enquiries reduced by a significant 35% to a level like the initial years of NAS. It is important to note that unprecedented levels of enquiries were received through the pandemic, so this reduction is a result of a return to more usual levels, coupled with a further reduction, believed to be caused by the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

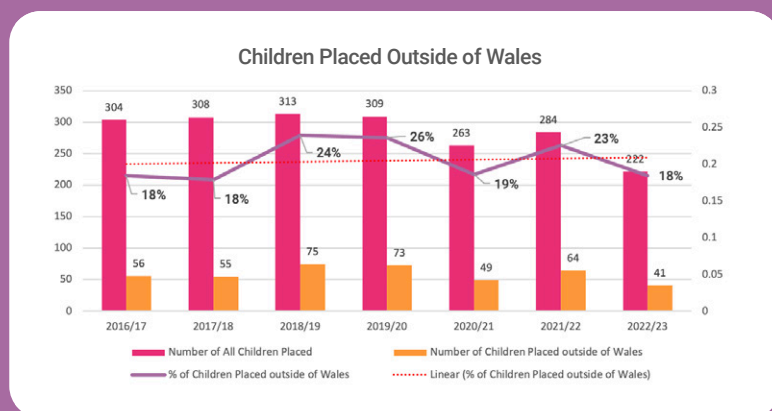
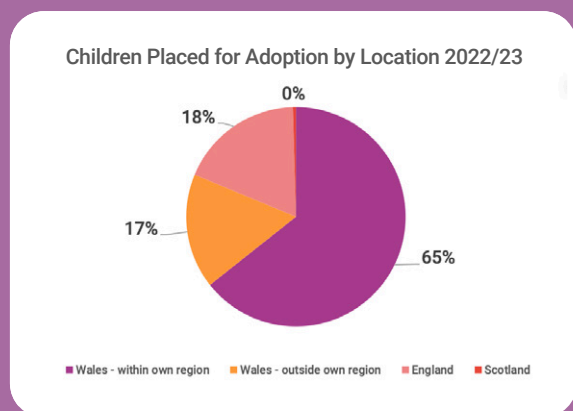


Conversely, the level of **new adopter assessments started rose by 65 – an increase of 25%**. Services are reporting that the success of marketing is leading to enquiries that are more likely to be well-informed about the children likely to be available and able to easily proceed. This may be the first indicator in the data of this.

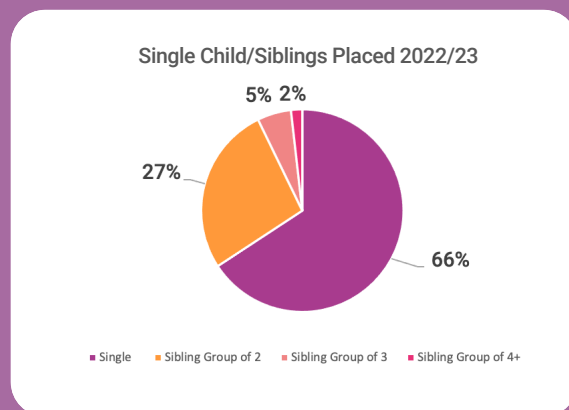
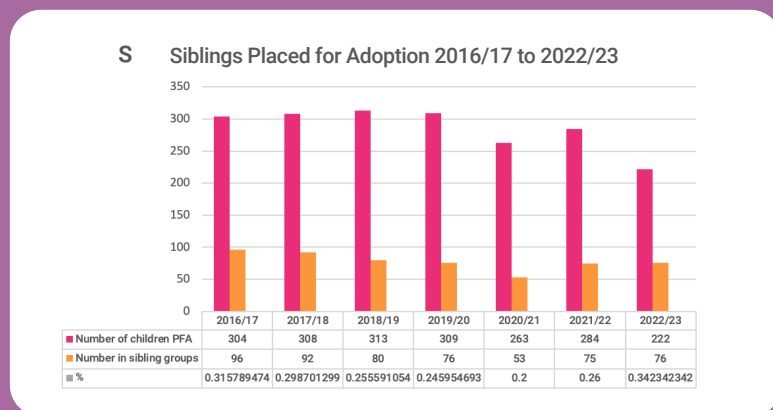


There were **171 adopter approvals, a reduction of 31%**. Average timeframes for Stage Two of the approval process i.e. from the decision to proceed to approval, were good at 4.8 months. Adopters waiting fell to 170 as regions placed more children in-house.

The vast majority of children, 82%, were placed within Wales, with 18% placed outside, the lowest number since this data began to be collected.



34% of children placed were part of a sibling group, some in larger sibling groups. Services are working hard to increase further the placement of sibling groups together.



Developmentally, much other work has been undertaken.

We evaluated previous years' marketing and media activity and undertook a benchmarking exercise through an Omnibus survey. This is assisting us to better understand attitudes to inform the current Recruitment and Marketing Strategy e.g.

- **83% of people in Wales** view adoption positively.
- **18% of people in Wales** have 'thought' about adoption but not acted on this – mainly women aged 16-34.
- **30% understand that children who are adopted** have experience trauma and may have additional needs as a result.

We have seen positive results and progress in marketing and recruitment activities, resulting in an improved perception and awareness of adoption.

We continued to inform and support enquirers and adopters through engaging online and media content plus attendance at key events (National Eisteddfod and Pride). (opposite page >>)

This has been a difficult year due to the UK political and financial landscape. A reported 93% of UK adults have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis, creating uncertainty for families and adults, resulting in a drop in enquiries. NAS will respond to this in the strategic approach to marketing and recruitment in 2023.

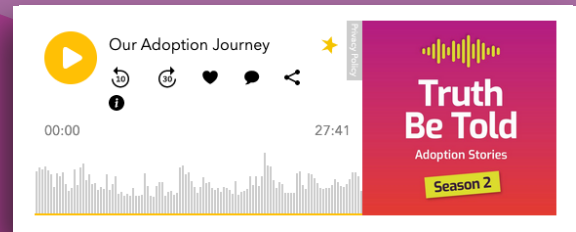
The Choose Family recruitment campaign saw Cowshed (our PR & Marketing Company) and NAS achieve two significant awards this year. The first in August for Inclusive Advertising Campaign of the Year Award from the WalesOnline Diversity and Inclusion Awards, and in October, the Integrated Campaign of the Year Award from the Public Relations & Communications Association (PRCA).

Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories Series 2

A **second podcast series** was produced and launched. **Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories, Series 2** was an expansion of the first series, delving deeper into some of the more difficult topics around adoption such as the needs of older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs, and diversifying into the experiences of new adoption champions.

It also featured a 'takeover episode' in which young people from the Connected groups produced and presented the final episode.

To date there have been **6,651 downloads in English and 177 in Welsh**, which compares well to the first series. The new series is being used as a resource and information tool for young people, prospective adopters, and adopters to learn more about the experiences of adoption from those who have lived it. <https://www.adoptcymru.com/podcast-season2>



- NAS developed **All Wales Good Practice Guidance regarding Foster Carer Applications to Adopt** to ensure clear processes when foster carers make an application to adopt a child in their care and particularly for 'late' applications when another match had already been identified. The guidance will also assist foster carers to gain a better understanding of what they can expect to happen as they go through the adoption process.
- NAS work on **Black Lives Matter** continued with the completion of a research project on diversity in adoption services in Wales by MSc student, Sian Palmer, from Cardiff University. Entitled 'Does race effect the length of time it takes to be adopted or to adopt in Wales', the findings conclude that there is a significant difference in the time racially minoritized children wait for adoptive placements in Wales but that other factors are also at play, including the potential for 'unconscious bias', age of the child, health, religion and birth parents' medical history. NAS is currently considering its recommendations.

OUR SUCCESSES:

During the **2022 Eisteddfod**, we continued to promote and use materials from the **#ChooseFamily** campaign. Our stall was used to raise awareness around modern adoption and challenge visiting families' perceptions around the meaning of family.



We also saw some welcome visitors to our stand there and at **Pride 2022**.



The Best Families For Our Adopted Children

Good Practice Guide for Transition and Early Support³

Each region and VAA has been implementing elements of the Good Practice Guide for Transition and Early Support, including approaches to support the movement of children into their adoptive home, such as the 'Understanding the Child' days (UTC) and the development of 'Trauma Nurture Timelines' (TNT).

- **MWWAS** - now has **6 lead foster carers** in the region who offer support to other foster carers moving children on to their adoptive homes. This has developed working relationships between the service and fostering teams in the region and a Trauma Nurture Timeline and an Understanding the Child Day has been completed for every child that has been placed for adoption in the region. Feedback from adopters regarding these initiatives has been very positive.
- In **NWAS**, the Life Journey Work co-ordinator arranged a conference which was attended by staff from across Wales and involved Professor Richard Rose. A further training package will be implemented for foster carers and support staff. Early in the year NWAS saw many adopters come forward for sibling groups; the region's transitions service continues to receive very positive feedback.
- **SEWAS** pioneered the **Understanding the Child Days** and **Trauma Nurture Timelines** which are used routinely with the most complex children. Adoption staff also attended a psychology workshop to refresh on attachment-based parenting and the impact of early developmental trauma. The Psychology Service continues to provide individual case-related consultation to staff and carers.
- Over the last 12 months **WBAS** staff have provided **workshops to childcare social workers** across the region on direct work with children. In addition, monthly workshops to improve the quality of the information in respect of children who have a plan of adoption have been provided. A therapeutic parenting course was provided for adopters within their first 12 months of placement with nine families attending a ten-week course.
- The '**Transitions**' worker in **VVC** has supported 24 children during the year offering direct transitions work and support after placement. A further 15 children have been supported by staff offering guidance and support. Placement and early support advice in line with the Good Practice Guides was provided during the matching process for all children matched during the year (63 in total).
- All regions and VAAs have signed up to AUK's 'Passport' scheme with 63 new families becoming members this year. Take-up is being promoted alongside raising awareness of the 'First 1000 days in adoption' support service.

The **Adoption UK Annual Adoption Barometer** indicates continued satisfaction with recruitment practice in Wales from newly approved adopters.

³ https://www.adoptcymru.com/home.php?_dds=true&fileID=467&inline=true

⁴ Professor Richard Rose, Director of Therapeutic Life Story Work International (TLWi).

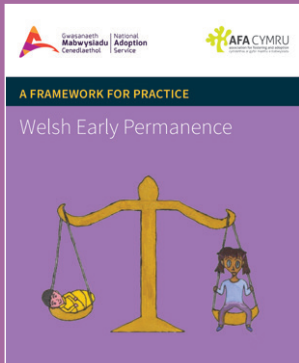
⁵ AUK Passport is the complete package of support for Prospective Adopters.

⁶ The First 1000 Days project offers a helping hand and a listening ear from a thriving community of fellow adopters.

Welsh Early Permanence: A Framework For Practice



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu **Cymru**
Adoption Register **Wales**



Early permanence is the practice of placing children with approved adopters, who are approved as foster carers initially and will go on to become the child's adopter if adoption becomes the plan for the child. This means they will either care for a child

until it is deemed safe for the child to return to their birth family, or they will become the child's adoptive parent if reunification is not possible.

This is much less traumatic for a child as they will only have one move from their birth family to a new home, rather than endure multiple foster placements, new faces and unfamiliar environments.

Through the continued support of AFKA Cymru, who NAS commission to support practice development, the framework is available on the NAS website **National Adoption Service - Welsh Early Permanence Framework (adoptcymru.com)** and contains all the information needed when considering a plan of early permanence for a child.

AFKA Cymru have rolled out the training for staff across Wales, and a series of e-modules are available. Training for prospective WEP adopters is also underway with positive feedback being received.

“The course is very informative...it has really helped us to make an informed choice on whether WEP is right for us”.

Laura Betts, joined the NAS Central Team in January 2023 as the **WEP Project Coordinator** and has been making positive links with the regions and VAAs to offer support, answer questions and generally assist them to consider early permanence for those children who may benefit.

The **ADOPTION REGISTER FOR WALES (ARW)** is a bilingual, online family-finding service with managed adopter access. Sponsored by the Welsh Government, NAS manages this service to support matching where initial 'in service' arrangements do not identify a potential match.

The ARW team, **Hannah Jones**, and **Jenny Morgan**, work closely with practitioners to ensure children and adopters are referred to the register in a timely manner and that the register is accurate and up to date.

During 2022/23:

- **208 children and 160 adoptive families** were referred to the register;
- **Three online profiling events were held featuring children from across Wales**, many with complex needs and waiting longer periods. A total of **43 children were featured across the events** which generated 62 expressions of interest;
- **Two Adoption Activity Days** were held featuring 29 children. **43 expressions of interest were made** leading to 4 successful matches;
- **28% child matches** were through the register;
- **Refresher training** on using the register was offered to staff and managers across Wales;
- **Practitioner & Manager Forum meetings were held quarterly** between the ARW team and the regions/VAAs. These focus on the planning of family finding events and discussing any issues around family finding from a register or region/VAA perspective.

The Adoption Register team work closely with the **Adopting Together Service (ATS)** to assist with children on the register who meet their criteria, particularly those children who have waited or are likely to wait longer for a placement.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY B

Great Adoption Support – When And Where It’s Needed

Aim

Alongside the provision of universal and family support services, we aim to continue the development of adoption support services across Wales, shifting perception about the support needs of children and young people with a long-term focus on the impact of early childhood experiences and early trauma.

What was achieved during 2022/23?

The pattern of adoption support services available is changing. The investment from the Welsh Government has helped us make some services accessible directly and without a statutory adoption support assessment, e.g. PATHWAY (TESSA) and Connected.

There are more people in Wales accessing adoption support services than in the past, and the results of the AUK Adoption Barometer show that Wales compares well to other parts of the UK.

adoption and children’s care needs. **National Adoption Service - Adoption Support (adoptcymru.com)**
<https://www.adoptcymru.com/adoption-support>

The new practices we are developing, such as the Good Practice Guide for Transitions and Early Support mean that there is a more proactive approach to early support. 100% of children placed for adoption this year have the new transition plan in place. Additionally, a system for periodic voluntary ‘check-ins’ for families who are not in receipt of ongoing support after the Adoption Order is granted, is being put in place.

Requests for formal adoption support assessments have fluctuated over time: there was an overall reduction of 12% during 2022/23 to a level like 2016-18. This is unlikely to be the true picture as unfortunately there are still waiting lists for these assessments in three regions. It is not in line with the ‘feel factor’ reported which is characterised by high demand and complex situations.

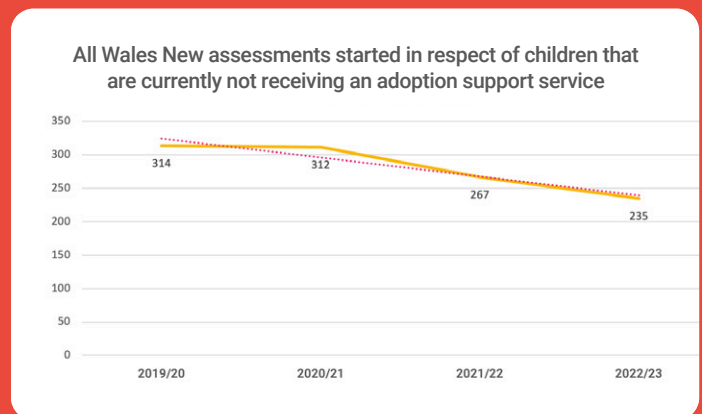


The Wales ‘Adoption Support Commitment’ was launched in June, outlining the support that all adoptive families can expect to be able to access at each stage of their adoption journey.

This event, held at the Norwegian Church in Cardiff Bay and supported by AUK and the Deputy Minister for Health & Social

Services, was a ‘big thank you’ to adopters across Wales, including our Adoption Champions.

The Commitment is the first document of its kind in the UK, aiming to ensure adoptive families in Wales feel confident that information and support is available when needed from professionals with specialist knowledge of



There is continued work by the network of Life Journey Work (LJW) coordinators to embed, develop and promote the NAS LJW framework and resources e.g. SEWAS developed three podcast episodes on Life Journey Work and more than 40 training events were held across Wales. All regions monitor LJW challenging where it is not happening, and all contribute to an annual newsletter National Adoption Service - Life Journey (adoptcymru.com).

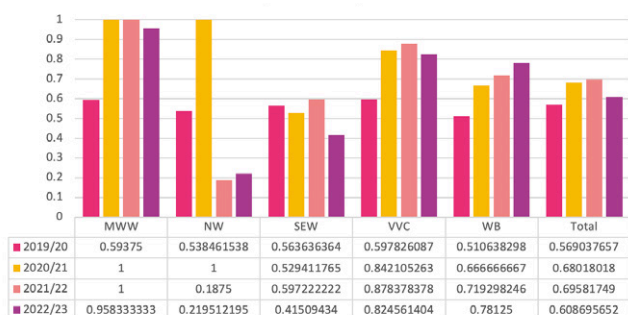
There was a small improvement to 78% of all children placed having their Life Journey materials in place at matching. **Two regions achieved 100%.**

Proportion of children who had their life journey materials at matching panel



61% of all children placed had their final Life Journey materials in place at the Second Adoption Review; two regions achieved 80+%.

Life Journey at 2nd Adoption Review



The overall averages are affected by lower performance in two regions.

The positive impact from the services funded through the current Welsh Government £2.3m investment in adoption support services continues to be seen.

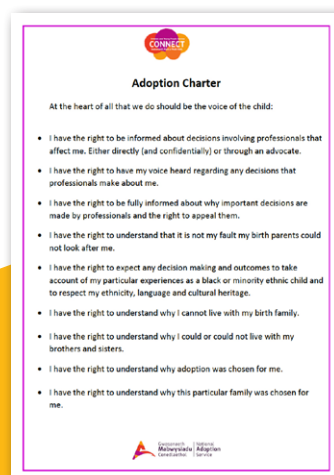
LLWYBRAU : PATHWAY (formerly known as TESSA):

- A service to **263 families**, including **123 new families** during 2022/23
- **100% of families** referred were accepted and matched with a parent partner
- **60% of new families** accepted a reflective parenting course
- **100% of families** show a positive movement on the outcome scale

CONNECT SERVICE

325 adopted children and young people across Wales now attend one of 18 regular monthly connected groups which take place all over Wales.

- The Connect Website and Youth Council was launched on 4th April 2022 with the Deputy Minister for Social services Julie Morgan in attendance.
- An 'Adoption Charter' has been produced, plus a workplan for the Youth Councils
- The Youth Council met with the Deputy Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language in October to discuss the issues they face and their plans to work with professionals
- An initial session with the NAS Governance Board was held in March 2023 to propose more active engagement with the Board



Life journey work

The investment also funds all regions to deliver Life Journey Work (see above) through regional coordinators and, in one region, staff in local authorities to support the work with children and families.

Targeted/specialist support

Improving the range of targeted / specialist therapeutic support available through health, social care, and education (MWAS, NWAS, SEWAS & WBAS)

- Mid & West Wales provides a regional service and provided therapeutic support for 75 children
- North Wales also funds a regional support service and assessed 23 new children/families during the year
- South East Wales provided additional training to 27 childcare social workers on trauma nurture timelines / understanding the child days, and to 15 adoption panel members on trauma informed practice and understanding the child days. 23 additional families were supported through direct work, group work and consultation sessions
- Western Bay provided DDP2 training for four new staff members and the whole service received BUSS (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems) training with 16 staff members receiving additional skills training

Adopter post approval training/development (MWW & NWAS only)

- 100% of newly approved adopters in Mid & West Wales were provided with post approval training. In total 111 adoptive families received training across the year with 98% commenting positively:

“The training on Teen Years was a really informative and practical course that is supportive and reassuring. It must be helpful to realise that lots of young people experience what your child is going through. The trainer is a font of all knowledge.”

- North Wales have recruited and trained 28 buddies
- North Wales provided 22 parenting webinars covering a range of topics to meet adoptive family needs

Consistent delivery of high-quality adoption services (MWAS only)

Continued training has been provided for schools on topics such as: ACES & resilience; understanding attachment; developmental trauma & neuroscience; practical skills for relation & repair; and protect, relate, regulate & reflect.

- Two schools in Mid & West Wales completed the self-evaluation for the Attachment Aware Schools Award.
- Training in attachment awareness was provided in 22 other schools in the region.

Practice development

The Welsh Government investment enables NAS to commission AFKA Cymru in supporting practice development and specialist training. Over time, this has included support to many NAS initiatives, most notably the Life Journey Work Framework and the NAS Good Practice Guides. Over the last year, the focus has been on Wales Early Permanence alongside early scoping on how we might develop adopter assessments into a different model.

Additionally, two regions are supported with **regional marketing capacity** and there is funding for the **Adopting Together Service** managed by St Davids and Barnardos Cymru.



Other support services and development

- **AUK** continues to provide a range of services including Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) training; demand has increased, possibly linked to the ongoing implications of the pandemic on the mental health of families.
- **WBAS** has developed an Adoption Support Hub through which families are supported by the region's approach to embedding of the Adoption Support Good Practice Guide.

Virtual support hubs run fortnightly to provide adoptive parents an opportunity to meet with a therapeutic social worker and a therapist, allowing them to talk through any difficulties they may have. The team are able to offer support / assess adoption support needs and refer parents into the appropriate resource. Outcomes for those who attended included signposting to a wide range of other agencies and services including those provided by the VAAs and the region itself.

Family and friends training runs quarterly; family members from 26 prospective or newly approved adopters attended throughout the year. A support group for waiting adopters has been held bi-monthly, attended by approximately 17 adoptive families, and a therapeutic parenting programme has run twice during the year for children who are two-years and above. Training for schools has been undertaken with nine schools attending an online workshop and three others receiving on-site training.

Adopters provided the following comments:

“ I feel listened to and not on my own.”

“ It feels like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders. I have been able to speak to people who get it.”

- **MWWAS** regularly undertakes 1:1 sessions with adopters, childcare workers, and other agencies to develop Adoption Support Plans and review in line with the Good Practice Guides. In October 2022, one of the region's support workers, Rachel Cook published her second book '**The Perfectly Imperfect Pumpkin** ', which celebrates children's differences. It was launched in National Adoption Week to children in schools and libraries in the region. Towards the end of 2022, the service started collaborating with Adoption UK, Trauma Informed Schools UK and education colleagues to plan a conference for schools to raise awareness of adoption and what support is available to schools to ensure their approaches are trauma informed.
- **NWAS** continues to make good use of the PATHWAYS and CONNECT services alongside their own interventions.
- **SEWAS** has a well-developed adoption support service which includes a partnership with their health board for a direct access psychology service. The region automatically transfers all families with an Adoption Support Plan to an adoption support social worker at the point of the adoption order for continuation of support.
- **VVC** returned to facilitating more face-to-face support and activities and held two successful family fundays attended by over 80 families. A family hub has also been developed which offers adopters and children an opportunity to play, connect, gain support, and socialise with one another. The region's Birth Parent Adviser has also developed a birth parent support group.
- Following a successful pilot scheme in **VVC** the NAS Adoption Support Development Manager Chris Holmquist oversaw development of an all-Wales Welsh Language support group for adoptive parents. The group, led by facilitators from MWWAS and NWAS, held an introductory session on 2nd March. 17 parents attended a very positive first session, which will continue on a monthly basis.

⁷ 'The Perfectly Imperfect Pumpkin' - Adoption Mid and West Wales (adoptionmwwales.org.uk)

Thinking ahead for future services

Funded through voluntary sector resources, **AUK Cymru** undertook a small pilot for a counselling service to eight adopted people aged between 13 and 30 years. The **13:30 LLWYBR PATH** offered counselling at no cost following a consultation with over 100 people to shape what would be offered.

Face-to-face sessions were preferred, although some participants felt that online could work, particularly if there were geographical considerations. The outcome of the pilot is currently being evaluated but initial findings are that all recipients felt supported, found their therapist easy to talk to, and would recommend such a service.

A report, commissioned by AUK was published in August 2022 by colleagues at Cardiff University. It looked at the numbers and profiles of children who had been adopted returning to the care system, finding that:

- The number of adopted young people returning to care was relatively stable with a slight increase over time;
- Most adopted young people returning to care were teenagers, more boys than girls;

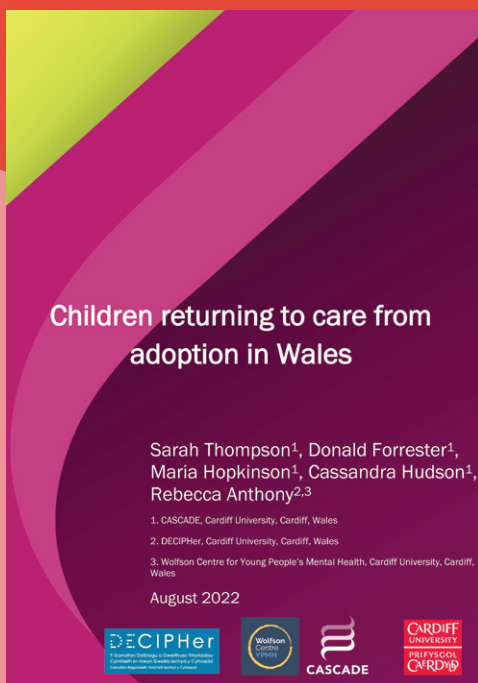
These adopted young people often had complex mental health needs and often required specialist placements, such as therapeutic, residential and secure placements.

The factors contributing to an adopted child returning to 'care' were found to be in line with previous literature, namely young people's difficult behaviours, and additional needs including mental health problems and neurodevelopmental or learning difficulties.

Another key theme was the importance of providing support to adoptive families before situations reach crisis point. The support should be geographically-inclusive and accessible to all adoptive parents.

The implications of these findings are that support services, of the kind more recently developed through the NAS Adoption Support Framework, should continue and are likely to assist current and future families. They are likely to meet needs at an earlier stage to prevent escalation to the stage where remaining at home is not viable.

NAS is now part of the **Advisory Group for the Well-being In Schools & Colleges (WISC)** research being undertaken by **CASCADE** and focusing on the wellbeing of care-experienced children in schools. Focus groups with adopters and staff across the regions have taken place and the researchers are hoping to report their findings later in 2023.



The '**Children returning to care from adoption in Wales report**' – Thompson et al, CASCADE, DeCIPHer, et al, Wales.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY C

Healthier contact through better birth family services

Aim

To develop a realistic approach to contact across Wales that will ensure all adopted children are able to have contact with their birth families post adoption which flexes to meet their needs throughout their childhood.

What was achieved during 2022/23?

All regions and VAAs are working towards increasing birth parent and adopter meetings. 82 meetings⁸ took place between birth parents and adopters across Wales (a third of placements made), and:

- **100% of adopters were involved in agreeing contact plans for new placements;**
- **100% of birth parents referred were offered support in line with new guidance.**

An audit to scope current approaches and practice in contact across Wales was carried out. Overall, the audit provided clear evidence that:

Contact is seen as extremely important by all those working with adopted children and their families. There is progress in developing practice for indirect and direct contact, including initial meetings between birth parents and adopters, and the review of contact arrangements. Contact needs to be appropriately supported.

“In the meeting, if I couldn't say something, she'd help me keep on track and my opinion was just as important as theirs.”

⁸ Often referred to as 'one-off' meetings, an outdated term that does not reflect the ambition to move towards more open adoption. The term is being replaced by initial meetings.

Many positive initiatives are happening in each region and VAAs, some funded by the investment.

- **MWAS:** Arrangements are in place with Reflect services to support birth mothers both pre and post adoption. The region has supported 113 birth parents and other birth relatives, receiving positive feedback.
- **NWAS:** NWAS is in touch with five Reflect services that operate and is re-establishing the birth parent counselling service.
- **SEWAS:** A contact worker oversees the implementation of the Good Practice Guide, including a 'fast track' arrangement for all new sibling contact referrals. The birth parent worker works with the Family Finding team to promote meetings with adoptive parents. All adoptive families are now offered a 'check in/review' of support needs a year after the adoption order. Within the last 12 months, reviews were offered to 60 families. The region has developed a 'positive ending' process for birth parents, by which they are left with information and a visual calendar to help them manage contact arrangements in the future when the worker is not involved.

Feedback from a birth mother on support for a meeting with adopters include:

“The word I'd use to describe meeting with adopters is 'reassuring'. Yeah, it was one of the most anxious days of my life but it put my mind at rest. I honestly feel like I could really tell how they will treat my kids, even just from one meeting.”

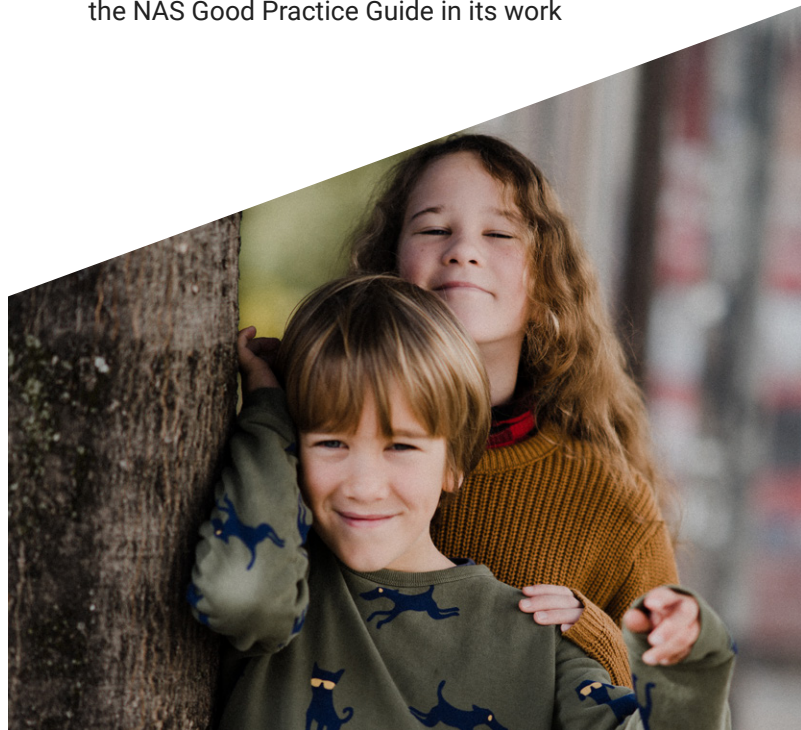
- **VVC:** A new Social Care Officer post has been created to support post adoption contact arrangements. A risk assessment tool has been developed to assist childcare social workers in promoting meetings between birth parents and adoptive parents. Family finding staff undertake birth parent counselling, post adoption support is offered to birth parents via the letterbox service, and the Birth Parent Adviser, funded by the investment. The latter has supported 124 birth parents. Links are established with the two Reflect services that operate.
- **WBAS:** The region has small teams focusing on contact and birth parent work using grant funding and existing regional resources, which has been recognised as a good practice example. The service supported 43 birth parents and established birth parent support groups and ‘drop in’ opportunities. Birth Parent and Adopter meetings are being promoted, and other options are considered if face-to-face is not possible, while links with Reflect services are being developed. Of the 35 children placed this year, 23 birth parents were offered meetings with the adopters and 12 attended. These were seen as hugely positive and beneficial to those involved. ‘Check-ins’ were pioneered in WBAS and have been a key priority. 42 adopters and 43 birth parents fully engaged with a check-in either at 12 months or 3 years post adoption order. The results of these provide quality feedback into future developments.
- **Barnardo’s:** Barnardo’s has developed specific prompts within the recruitment processes to provide information and enquire about attitudes to different types of contact. All adopters are now expected to commit to a form of contact with birth relatives etc.
- **St David’s:** Initial enquiries and adopter preparation courses now include specific focus on direct contact in order to change attitudes.

Other development work

- New adoption support performance measures have been developed for implementation in 2023/24.
- NAS has initiated further discussions with the Welsh Government to secure changes to the adoption support legislation in Wales. This builds on advice provided by NAS in 2016 and in 2018, but specifically responds to the issues raised during meetings with the Deputy Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language by adopted children and young people, and with the Deputy Minister for Social Services by an adoptive parent.

There is inequity in the entitlement for, and availability of, adoption support services for adopted children and young people and adults in respect of:

- The availability and quality of therapeutic and counselling services;
- Entitlement to adoption support services in contrast to that available to children leaving care under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Officials are exploring when and how changes can be made.
- NAS has been engaged in UK-wide work as part of the Adoption Public Law Working Group (PLWG), which includes a focus on contact and has used the NAS Good Practice Guide in its work



STRATEGIC PRIORITY D

Better adoption records and access to information at any age

Aim

To develop an access to records service and materials that recognise the importance of the keeping and sharing of quality information, which also ensures that adults of all ages have support when accessing their records and that information is provided for them in a timely way.

What has been achieved during 2022/23?

This is a service for adults as this is only available to adopted people over the age of 18, parents, siblings, and other specified persons.

The services are:

- Access to birth records
- Intermediary services (tracing and supporting contact)
- Requests from birth siblings
- Requests from other relatives or specified persons.

Sadly, this work has traditionally not been afforded a high priority within the overall demand and is poorly resourced; applicants often wait long periods for a service. There can be considerable difficulties or delays in obtaining archived records and occasions when records cannot be found. These were exacerbated during the pandemic. There is also considerable variation in the availability of social workers with the specialist knowledge and experience in this work.

During 2022/23, services received the following new requests; the levels were lower than usually received.

- 222 for access to birth records
- 77 for intermediary services
- 85 from birth siblings
- 11 from other relatives / specified persons

NAS is seeking to make improvements to this service. The plan has been adapted this year in the light of the 'Joint Human Rights Committee into the adoption of the children of unmarried mothers 1949 to 1976'⁹

NAS considered the report and engaged with the Welsh Government as it considered how to respond to the issues created by these historical practices, as well as how current services should respond.

NAS has worked with the Deputy Minister for Social Services and the Welsh Government to provide advice about their response to the report. The Deputy Minister chose the NAS / AUK Big Adoption Conversation to make a personal apology to the victims; this has subsequently been followed by an apology from the Welsh Government in the Senedd.

At Welsh Government's request, NAS has developed a proposal for an access to records and support service for people affected during the time the report covers, working with St David's Adoption Service and Adoption UK as providers of any future service.

Adoption UK consulted with adopted people about their needs, which is informing the co-production part of the service - the first of its kind in the UK. A separate consultation event was held by Adoption UK and NAS with mothers affected by the report.

NAS has created a formal subgroup to support the developmental work in this area. A workplan has been developed focussing on other elements of the Adopt Cymru 2025 plan, including the development of materials to improve understanding and awareness of the importance of birth records and pathways to accessing services for members of the public, as well as relevant professionals.

NAS has been engaged in UK-wide work as part of the Adoption Public Law Working Group (PLWG) which includes a focus on access to records.

⁹The violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976 (parliament.uk)

STRATEGIC PRIORITY E

Maintaining the infrastructure necessary to deliver NAS and maintain sound governance across NAS and Foster Wales

Aim

To continue the successful delivery of the National Adoption Service and Foster Wales.

What has been achieved during 2022/23?

An expanded central team structure is in place, with staff having specific focus on adoption or fostering, with the Director and business support working on both.

All local authorities across Wales have been signing up to the new Joint Committee agreement in readiness to provide a mechanism for all 22 authorities to oversee both services.

Work has been completed on a revised hosting arrangement with Cardiff Council, including agreeing a revised schedule of costs.

Discussions with the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have been successful. The Welsh Government have awarded additional short-term funding and WLGA is to review the national funding for both services for the longer term.



Listening to our service users

Independent evaluation of adoption support in Wales

NAS supports and welcomes the annual Adoption UK Barometer report, which in 2023 published its fifth annual stocktake of the adoption landscape across the UK. Based on survey responses from thousands of prospective adopters, adoptive parents and adopted adults, it represents the most comprehensive snapshot available of the way adoption policy and legislation plays out in people's lives.

For the fifth year, the 2023 report showed that adoption services in Wales are in a good place on their improvement journey with positive levels of satisfaction being expressed. Wales therefore maintained its position as generally rated 'as good as' or better than the other nations in several areas.

The main messages for Wales this year include:

- 138 respondents, which although smaller than previous years, was in proportion to the population and slightly better than other UK nations;
- Respondents from Wales were more likely to:
 - Have accessed core support (e.g. training, support groups) during 2022 and more likely to agree that the support was of a good quality (75%) and had made a positive difference to their family (82%);
 - Agree that the person who dealt with their request was knowledgeable and understood their situation (80%);
 - Be told the support they needed was available (76%) or that there would not be a long wait (70%).
- Waiting times for adoption support continue to improve:
 - 71% received support within three months of asking, up from 64% in 2021;
 - 40% received support within one month;
 - However, 15% said they had waited more than six months for support, with some reporting a long wait for an allocated social worker, lack of local therapeutic services, and delays caused by staff absence or turnover.
- Improvements in Life Journey Materials mean 79% of Welsh respondents reported that their materials were 'good' or 'adequate' compared to a UK average of 68%;
- Indications of improvements in support in education. 74 respondents had a child of compulsory school age in 2022, 50% of which had one or more children with a recognised additional learning need:
 - 97% informed their child's school that their child was adopted;
 - 46% knew their child's school had undertaken training on the effects of early trauma.

Supporting improvement of our services

NAS has been developing the All Wales Adoption Policy and Procedures which will be launched and implemented in 2023 and beyond. This will be the culmination of a significant piece of development work for NAS; many thanks go to Corienne Strange for leading and contributing so much to this work, to Virginia Harper who undertook the development and writing, Sarah Coldrick of AFKA for her legal expertise, as well as to Regional & VAA managers and staff for contributing material and undertaking much valued proof reading.

NAS has been considering how to provide awareness raising and training to social work students and newly qualified social workers. A pilot seminar on adoption and permanence was developed by our Adoption Support Development Manager Chris Holmquist and delivered at a university that offers the social work qualification training. This was well-received and is being developed by AFKA Cymru into one of two modules to be offered to help raise awareness of adoption.

NAS has developed links with the English National Adoption Strategic Team and the UK Government Adoption Strategy through the Director and the Head of Policy, Practice and Communications. This is proving to be a fruitful link which has included a focus on contact, access to records, Adoption Registers etc.,

NAS has developed links with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), including supporting their annual conference, which was held in Cardiff in January, opened by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Care, and attended by Albert Heaney, the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales (CSCO).

Agencies from across all four nations shared presentations, with NAS services heavily featured, including examples of positive birth parent work and developments in contact. The Director gave a speech on the first morning focusing on improvements in adoption in Wales since 2014.

NAS continues to work with the Welsh Government in several areas. Alongside general advice, NAS seeks to ensure the inclusion in policies of care-experienced children who have been adopted.

This includes:

- The Transformation Delivery Group which ensures there is a focus on adopted children in its work;
- Mainly with a focus on Foster Wales, the Director has also joined the Eliminate Profit Board and two of the workstreams;
- Corporate Parenting, including the development of the recently published Corporate Parenting Charter for Wales which is inclusive of all care-experienced young people, including those who have been adopted;
- Retaining the NHS number for adopted children, which has been explored in tandem with England;
- Historical Adoption Records, which is seeking to ensure that historical records that reach the 100-year-limit are retained;
- Considering what action may be needed in Wales following the publication of the 'A Home for Me' research and report. A very positive meeting was held with senior officials and colleagues from CVAA which is being followed up.

COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS

NAS regional services received many compliments during 2022/23, on average eight per service.

A selection of these is below

For social workers

"I wanted to provide some feedback and a big thank you and compliment for the hard work that your team has put in for my family. I had a very positive experience right from the start. I had a great team around me [and] ... am grateful for the consultation, which helped me to make sense out of [my child's] experiences so far and what strategies might help him moving."

From Adopters

"It was nice to have the opportunity to meet and speak with other [adoptive] parents in a relaxed atmosphere. A and B loved the whole thing. It was a lot of fun and the fact they got to try lots of different things was great." [describing pre-approval training]

From schools

"It has been helpful thinking about why he is doing what he does not getting stuck in the behaviour. Sometimes I wish in the moment I could ring you and say right this did work, this didn't, let's have a think. But I'm starting to be able to do it myself now and with colleagues."

From birth parents meeting adopters

"I wanted to feedback that it was such a beautiful meeting, moving and emotional but so valuable. X was amazing; she really showed how she wants the boys to be loved and cared for and put them above her. Relationships are so important for valuable work. It was truly emotional; something I like they will think about for the foreseeable future."

From young people

In a card: "Thank you for all the walks, chats and picking me up from school and talking about the hard stuff with a hot chocolate, I really appreciate you, thank you."



Therapeutic parenting course

“I’ve loved the course. It’s really been life changing. Thanks so much.”

Birth parent group

Birth mother: “Just wanted to say thank you for inviting me yesterday, I really enjoyed. I will definitely be coming to the next big event.”



Social worker

“It has been an amazing experience to be part of this day. The organisation, structure, clarity has been brilliant. We would never have gained this level of understanding about the children without this day. Absolutely fantastic.”

Prospective adopter

“Having been given a more comprehensive and detailed brief of the children’s early years, I am much more confident I understand where they have come from.”

Understanding the Child Days

Foster carer: “I knew, or thought I knew what he had gone through, but after today I have much more understanding.”

A small number of complaints, one or two per service, were received during 2022/23 and included the following:

- Delay in adopter going back to panel;
- Length of time to access birth records;
- Communication;
- Concerns on advice received;
- Letterbox contact;
- Waiting list for partner of parent adoption assessments.

A LAST WORD FROM OUR REGIONS AND VAAs

What's gone well for them

MID & WEST WALES



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales

The region has had a very busy year and achieved many successes, particularly in respect of Life Journey Work, where credit goes to our dedicated Life Story practitioner, who is very active supporting everyone to achieve excellent work.

We also took the opportunity of receiving some extra short-term funding from the Welsh Government to strengthen the service to people who request access to their birth records. This funded a further support worker and lowered the time people were waiting.

The region is very proud of working in partnership with the NAS Central Team and NWS to set up a Welsh Language Support Group. We have been pleased to be part of the facilitation of the group given that we have a high proportion of Welsh speakers in the region.

SOUTH EAST WALES



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!

The region returned to face-to-face information events for prospective adopters and part of the adoption preparation training. We commenced two Welsh Early Permanence assessments and have implemented an Early Alert System with the Welsh VAAs to identify children who may require placements outside of our own provision.

Children and families have continued to benefit from our enhanced transition support package of therapeutic direct work with children, their foster carers and new adopters. It also includes training for staff, e.g. trauma informed adoption training for newly qualified social workers which sparked lots of interest and commitment to the NAS Good Practice Guide.

Circle of security groups are now being facilitated for adoptive parents by the adoption support team. In January, an adopter commented:

"I would advise anyone considering attending to do so in a heartbeat. I think it is a key course with valuable information every parent should be aware of. The course coordinators do a brilliant job of bringing the course to life with valuable real-life examples."

The tool 'My Story so Far' is used, Life Journey Work materials contain valuable contributions from professionals and family members, and new training 'Life Journey Work - Putting the Puzzle Together' has been delivered to social workers. There's been positive feedback to all.

Birth parent groups have focused on wellbeing sessions and self-care skills, therapeutic arts and crafts, alongside fun activities such as pumpkin carving and a Christmas party.

WESTERN BAY



WBAS has benefitted greatly from recruiting adoption support staff from generated income. They have made a huge impact in embedding areas of the good practice guides.

The region continues to develop its training for adopters as they progress through their journey. We have established support groups for adopters at various stages of their journey with a particular focus on those adopters waiting to be matched, which they have found very useful.

Our virtual support hub referred to earlier in the report is having really good results.

NORTH WALES



Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu
Gogledd Cymru | North Wales
Adoption
Service

The North Wales region has experienced some management changes this year which has resulted in the development of an improvement action plan to further enhance adoption services in the region.

Regional resources are in place to support adoption work, including supporting children's transition to placement, with the region's transitions service continuing to receive very positive feedback. NWS staff offer advice and consultation on the good practice guides to childcare staff. The Life Journey Work co-ordinator was responsible for arranging a conference which was attended by staff from across Wales.

Early in the year we saw many adopters come forward for sibling groups. A regional support service is in place to provide therapeutic support and this year, we assessed 23 new children/families. We recruited and trained 28 buddies and provided 22 parenting webinars covering a range of topics to meet adoptive family needs. NWS is in touch with 5 Reflect services that operate and is re-establishing the birth parent counselling service.

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF



The region has continued to place many children for adoption, including a number of sibling groups: over 70% of children have been placed with VVC adopters; and almost a quarter of the remainder have been placed in Wales.

VVC made the first placement in Wales under the Welsh Early Permanence Framework and has taken a lead role in supporting the WEP project by filming video materials capturing the carers' experience which will be used as training materials for future applicants.

VVC has continued to raise the profile of the region. Three VVC adopters featured in the second series of the Truth Be Told podcast, and the Recruitment & Assessment Manager participated in BBC Radio Wales Anna Ryder Richardson's 'Advice Hour' phone-in programme. A VVC adopter and birth mother participated in Adoption UK's Big Conversation and the UK CVAAs conference to discuss their experience of direct post adoption contact.

During the year, VVC welcomed the appointment of three social care officers who have enhanced the range of support services we offer to adoptive families and birth families.

AFKA Cymru



Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu,
Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiad
Association for Fostering,
Kinship and Adoption

AFKA Cymru has had a productive and exciting year. Our service celebrated a name change in March 2023

when AFA Cymru officially became AFKA Cymru. We wanted to make sure that our name was fully reflective of the support we offer to all areas of permanency, and we have been pleased with the positive feedback we have received.

2022/23 has seen us work in partnership with NAS to create the framework for Welsh Early Permanence (WEP). The webinars and events which we have facilitated have been well attended and well received. We are grateful to all the professionals who have supported us with the co-creation of the framework and are pleased to see adopters wanting to consider becoming WEP carers: "Training was very useful and made us 100% sure to be WEP carers."

As part of the framework, we have also developed a bilingual eLearning module available to the judiciary in Wales, as well as modules for practitioners, adoption and fostering panel members, family and friends of WEP carers, and a short video for birth parents to assist with their understanding if their child is placed with a WEP carer. We have also started the development of two webinars to raise awareness of adoption – these will be available for social work students and post-qualifying social workers later in 2023.

AFKA Cymru are very much looking forward to the year ahead where we will be delivering training on 'Modern Adoption as a Positive Permanence Option for Children'. We hope to support practitioners to make informed decisions for children within their care planning.

ST DAVID'S ADOPTION SERVICE



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiad
Dewi Sant

St David's
Adoption
Service

The year commenced with a survey to all our families, staff, trustees and key stakeholders on

their views and key priorities for next three years, including the AUK Connected Group, who gave their time and thoughts so generously to considering our objectives. This consultation is the foundation for the St David's strategic plan for 2023/26. Integral to the plan is a set of five key values which are fundamental to the way we deliver our services and our commitment to those who use them.

2022 saw us celebrate 80 years as an adoption agency; two events in West and South Wales welcomed families and friends alongside guests including Julie Morgan, the Deputy Minister for Social Services and Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, who joined us for tea and birthday cake!

We used our 80-year anniversary to launch the rebranding of St David's Adoption Service; we are thrilled with our new logo, mission and vision statement representing a modern adoption agency connecting families and partnerships with colleagues in the National Adoption Service. These links have enabled us to work closely with the regions to identify placements for children in the core adoption service and the Adopting Together Service.

We have continued to evolve our offer of adoption support: from support groups for families who were approved during the pandemic; to working alongside the Family Place to offer psychology-led support for families who adopt through the Adopting Together Service. We also had a very lively Christmas party with Father Christmas making his much-anticipated appearance!

ADOPTION UK



Teulu gyda'n gilydd
Together we're family

The Connect Youth Service - With a high staff-to-child ratio and a good understanding about the insecurities that some adopted young people may experience, these groups are often the only

youth group that the young people can attend.

An amazing 122 group sessions were delivered across the year to more than 300 children and young people, including 'hands-on' sessions with birds of prey, water games with sponges and water bombs, making clay pinch pot monsters, and everything in between.

Ruth Letten, manager of the Connect service, was a finalist in the Youth Work Excellence Awards in the Excellence in Partnerships category. The Adoption Youth Council worked closely with Adoption UK staff to put in a large application to the National Lottery Community Fund and were successful in securing four years of funding for a brand new project based in North Wales and focused on education.

BARNARDO'S CYMRU



Credwch
mewn plant
Believe in
children

Barnardo's
Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru Adoption & Fostering Service has supported a wide range of children to find their forever homes. This has been achieved by collaboration and partnership, working with NAS regional Family Finding staff and Child Care Social workers within Wales and beyond.

The service has increased its family finding capacity by recruiting a second family finder, which has enabled us to work more responsively with partner agencies. In addition to this, we have continued to focus on our post adoption support package.

In April, we introduced a new training and participation calendar which includes training, workshops, and support groups, as well as several social family events. We have also been able to offer bespoke 1:1 work and training with adopters pre and post placement; this has been well attended and received very positive feedback. We have partnered with Adoption UK to offer access to the Adoption UK Passport Membership and signpost approved adopters to relevant support groups and training.

We have introduced bespoke Friends and Family Training, which is offered to prospective adopters in assessment, at the point of linking/matching and into post adoption support where it is even more important. We have also updated our adoption children's guide.



About us

The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales. The National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales, launched in November 2014, is an innovative collaborative for the provision of adoption services.

It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure which includes partnerships at all levels with Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in Wales, Health, and Education Services, as well as others.

At local authority level, all 22 Welsh councils continue to provide services to all looked after children whilst identifying and working with those children for whom an adoption plan is appropriate.

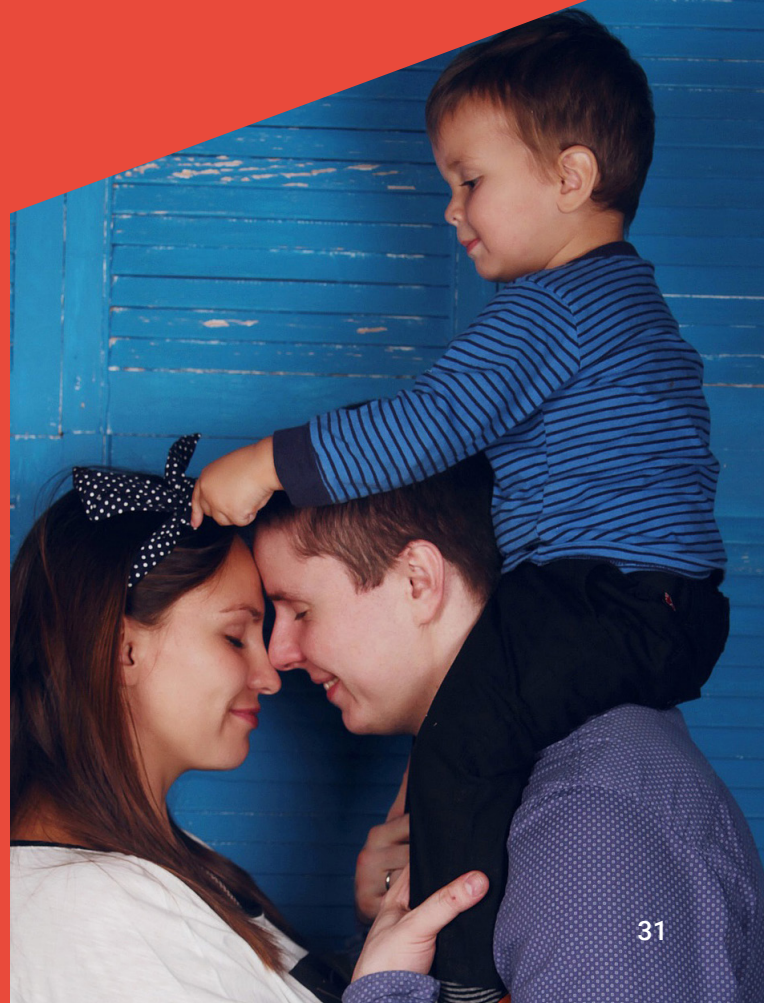
Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Health, and Education.

“The Adoption Groups have been invaluable for us and lots of fun. Meeting other families who have come together through adoption is so special. Everyone understands each other and are there to support and cheer you on, no matter what stage of the journey you are at. It’s been lovely seeing my children meeting others who have adoption in common and realising all families come together in different ways but have love in common.” Adopter, Cardiff

The services provided differ in each collaborative, but all:

- Provide the adoption agency functions for children;
- Recruit and assess adopters;
- Offer counselling to birth parents;
- Offer advice to adopted adults;
- Adoption support services, in some this is shared with local authorities.

Nationally, the Director and small central team provide leadership, co-ordination, strategic support and enabling.





Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu | National
Cenedlaethol | **Adoption**
Service

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