



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service



# Life Journey Work Newsletter

Issue 3

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# Welcome to the 2023 National Adoption Service Life Journey Work newsletter.

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**Life Journey Work (LJW) in Wales** continues to go from strength to strength, in no small part thanks to the energy, enthusiasm and expertise of the Life Journey Work Co-ordinators for the five Regional Adoption Services, who meet regularly along with colleagues from Barnardos Cymru, Adoption UK Cymru and the National Adoption Service (NAS) Central Team, to share ideas of innovative approaches and best practice. The LJW advisory sub-group has also been reconstituted with wider representation, including Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) representatives.

The teenage years and adolescence can be a turbulent time for young people and their parents/carers. In this issue we focus on approaches to LJW, geared to young people in their teens and beyond and highlight resources that may be of use to adoptive parents, foster carers and professionals working with those young people.

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## **Chris Holmquist**

Adoption Support Development Manager, NAS Central Team.







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# National Updates

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# South East Wales Adoption Service



South East Wales Adoption Service  
Achieving More Together



## Raluca Miklovits

Raluca has continued to deliver training to colleagues in local authority childcare teams and others. This has been very successful and has led to a much greater awareness of the ways in which a range of people involved in the life of Children Looked After (CLA) can contribute to good quality Life Journey materials.

Social workers have said in feedback that the training has helped them to appreciate the value of LJW. Raluca has also seen an increase in requests from experienced adopters who need help to adapt 'old style' Life Journey books to develop a helpful narrative for their children and young people. She is starting to read all the books in draft and final versions so that she can adjust her training to better meet the specific needs for advice and support of those producing LJ materials.

# Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption



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



## Tina James and Sara Jones

Tina and Sara have been busy attending team meetings across VVC's partner local authorities to get to know the social workers and offer support and tips for best practice around LJW. In November they delivered a workshop to families across Wales who are accessing support via [PATHways](#) (previously known as TESSA). They report that it was a real privilege to engage with adopters from other regions.



During the workshop, Sara interviewed Tina about some of the challenges and triumphs of undertaking life story work in her capacity as an adoptive parent of a teenager. Sara and Tina enjoyed travelling to Birmingham to attend the national Therapeutic Life Story Work symposium where they heard about some innovative practice and projects from across the UK. They came away with lots of ideas and enthusiasm and this year will be rolling out regular workshops for adopters and launching toolkits that practitioners and adopters can draw on to support life journey work. They remain committed to developing the service and improving the quality of both life journey work practice and materials for VVC children.



# Mid and West Wales Adoption



**Mabwysiadu**  
Canolbarth a Gogledd Cymru  
**Adoption**  
Mid & West Wales



## Sian Gibbon

Sian has developed a system for monitoring the support needs of adoptive families in relation to using LJW materials. This involves contacting adoptive parents directly following the granting of the adoption order to see if they are happy with the materials they have for their child and whether they need help and support in using them. She plans to get back in touch in line with key developmental

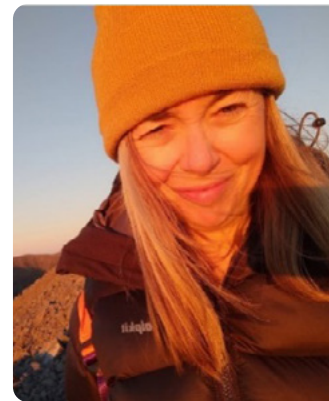
milestones, such as starting pre-school/nursery provision, starting junior school, transition from primary to secondary etc. If Sian is unable to speak to parents directly, she will send them a simple questionnaire to complete.

Sian continues to deliver training for adopters and has been providing Life Story Books workshops for colleagues in Local Authority childcare teams. These workshops have been successful in raising awareness of the importance of collecting and collating information once the child becomes looked after and the benefits of collaborative working in order to provide good quality of Life Journey Materials for adopted children.

# North Wales Adoption Service



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**Adoption  
Service**



## Sarah Ryan

Sarah has been working with Wrexham local authority to develop a Life Journey work policy. Its key themes are to collate life journey materials as soon as a child or young person is known by the local authority, so that all workers play a part in collecting this material and that the life journey material is child focussed and is good quality. As part of the policy the local authority recording system

WCCIS has been adapted to include child centred recording which is collated on a centralised Life Journey module. Face to face and online training module is being developed for foster carers and social workers.

The All About Me part of the Richard Rose model has also been included in the policy for children and young people who are living in their home whether in foster care, on Special Guardianship Orders or Kinship Care. Sarah has also produced a Life Story book resource for social workers to support them with writing good quality Life Story books.

# Western Bay Adoption



## Sarah Vaughan

WBAS are delighted to have the opportunity to form a Life Journey Team this year to support staff and adoptive families in helping children understand their journeys to adoption. It is within the Adoption Support Team and consists of Social Workers and Practice Support Workers who will be providing various workshops, one-to-one support, advice on resources and general

guidance on Life Journey Work from the very start of the adoption journey for children and for adopters.



WBAS are also very pleased to have held another successful Life Journey Awards event. Staff members across the region, foster carers, adopters and birth family were celebrated for their meaningful contributions to adopted children's Life Journey Work. They are very proud that one of their very own Adoption Support Social Workers, Megan Sampson, has been recognised for the outstanding work she has undertaken in this area. Here she is being presented with her award by the service mascot Tedi Teulu.

# Adoption UK Cymru



Adoption UK provide a range of training for adoptive parents and professionals, including training in connection with Life Journey Work. Some of this training is specifically for adoptive parents in their first 3 years of adoption and some training is for anybody.

[Here is a link](#) to the details of Adoption UK Cymru's training courses.





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# Young People's Views

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# Young people's views

Young people who are part of the [Connect](#) Voices Youth Council have asked for contact with the LJW coordinators group and this is planned for later this year. As part of the development work for the NAS Life Journey Work Framework a consultation event with young adopted people was carried out to get their views on Life Journey Work in 2017. It was organised by Ruth Letten (now Manager & Lead Youth Worker, Connected) and Mandy Squires (Therapist and Social Worker), who undertook meticulous research and planning in advance. Young people were actively involved in the planning and delivery of the event to promote a sense of ownership and empowerment. The consultation identified 2 main themes, in terms of what the participants felt 'needed' to be included in a life story book; knowledge and memories:

- 'Knowledge' was constituted as the necessities of being a human being; details of their birth, including the hospital one was born in, medical records, and a history of family illnesses. 'Memories' was constituted as information regarding the birth family; photos of birth family, names of birth parents and siblings, information regarding where the birth parents lived, and any letters the young person may have received from the birth family.
- One young person felt it important to have an abundance of information about their birth family included in the life story book, commenting:

*"I personally found it very helpful to know about my family, even though it was quite difficult and sad to take in... It's important to know everything you need to, because it's your story and your family."*

- However, another young person reflected on the life story book, disagreed with the above quote. This young person commented that they didn't feel the need for too much information to be included as:

*"You don't want too much put in it because you don't want to be looking back; you want to look forward."*

National Adoption Service for Wales, Life Journey Report (2017)

***"I personally found it very helpful to know about my family, even though it was quite difficult and sad to take in... It's important to know everything you need to, because it's your story and your family."***





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# Young people's views

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When asked how Life Journey work could be improved the young people identified a range of practical and emotional improvements, including more photos and objects with a narrative to explain their significance. One participant said that, 'having objects but no idea where or who they came from ... in her words *"led to more questions than answers"*.

## **The Key Outcomes identified from the consultation were:**

- Young people expressed the need for therapeutic support to help them understand 'their story'
- Young people expressed the need for a life story book even if they have not had one whilst growing up
- Young people expressed wanting to have contact with birth siblings and if this is not possible to understand why it is not possible.



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# The Teenage Brain and Life Journey Work

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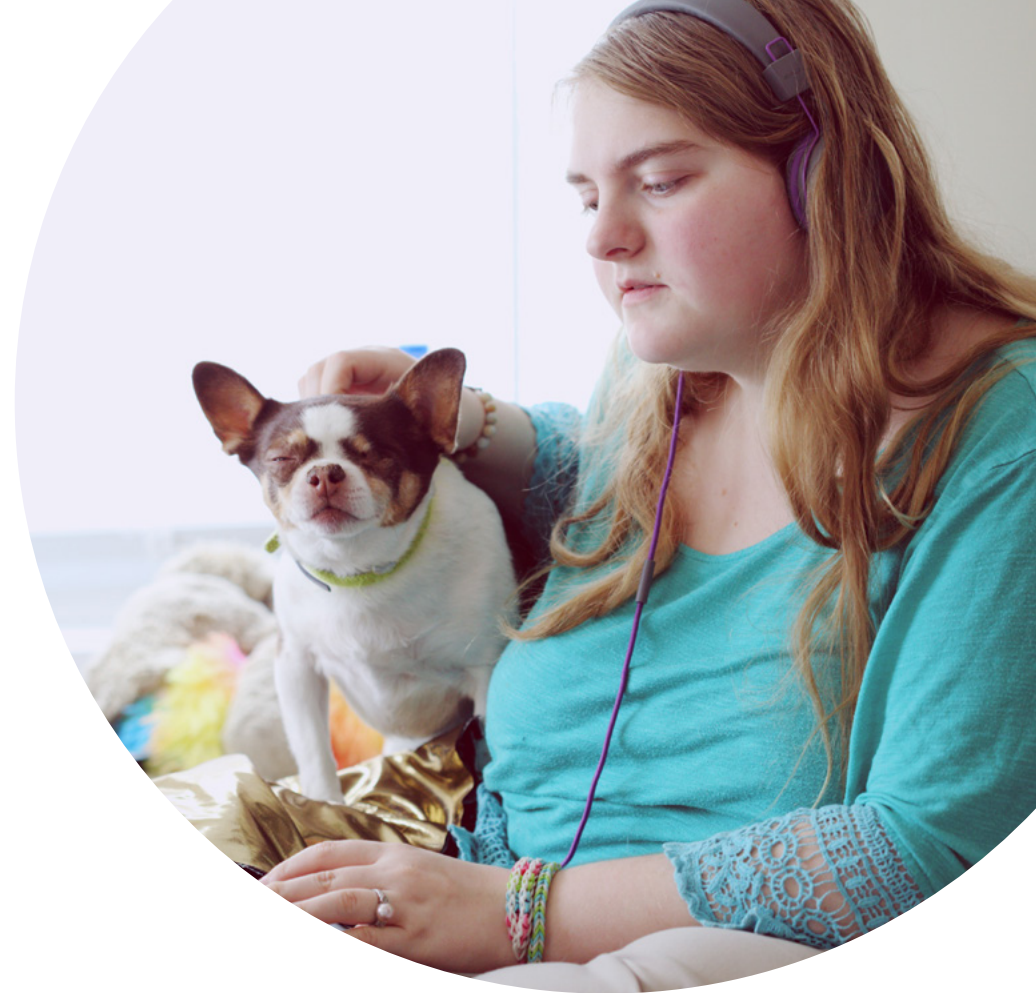
To put this in context, we will start by giving an overview of how the brain develops and changes in adolescence.

When talking about adolescence, we are referring to the transition from childhood to adulthood. While this typically starts around age 10, the changes associated with it do not magically stop on someone's 18th birthday! According to the World Health Organisation:

*Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health.*

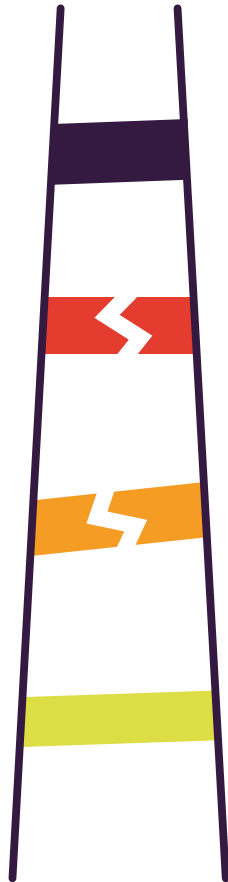
*Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth. This affects how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them.*

Dr Dan Siegel, talking about the ideas in his book *'Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain'*, says that this phase of development and the behaviours associated with it, goes on into the mid-20s. He points out that adolescence is not only an essential phase of development, but that there are many positive aspects to it.





# The Life Journey Work Ladder



Adapted for teenagers

## IMPORTANT

Every child's age and development is different. This is a broad guide.

N.B. Some of this information in this section is taken from 'Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain' by Dan Siegel' - see resource list in the next section.'

## Pruning Old Pathways and Growing New Ones

It's not the hormones I'm brain building! During adolescence from 12 years to 25 years, there is a period of growth and maturation of the brain to prepare the young person for adulthood. There are fundamental changes to the 'circuitry' of the brain 'pruning' existing pathways, making many new ones and creation of much faster nerve fibres through myelination. Teenagers need a lot of sleep to support all this building work.

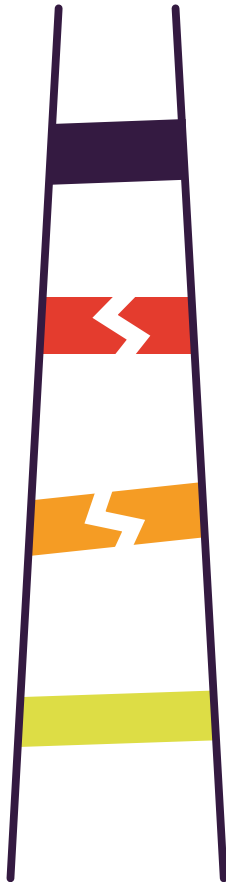
There are many sources of stress during the teenage years. The fundamental purpose of this stage of development is to prepare for independence, which is intrinsically scary. In addition, there are external stresses such as exams, managing peer relationships, physical/sexual development, and romantic relationships. In the wider environment there are the complexities and challenges of navigating social media and the internet.

## Novelty Seeking and Risk

During the teenage years the amygdala (the 'early warning system') in the mid brain, is more easily activated than at any other developmental stage. So, teenagers have a more immediate emotional response that isn't filtered by 'cortical reasoning', much like a younger child. The cortex and in particular the pre-frontal cortex (immediately behind the forehead) which integrates information from all the other parts of the brain and helps to modify emotional responses, isn't fully developed yet. It is necessary for balancing emotions/having insight and empathy, so a teenager's behaviour can more easily overwhelmed by intense emotions and peer pressure driven by the dopamine reward system.

This can affect teenagers in 3 ways. They are more likely to move from feeling/impulse to action without pausing to reflect, they can also be more susceptible to addictive behaviours and in the way they think there is a tendency to place more weight on potential positive outcomes than negative ones, thus minimising perception of risk. This positive bias is more likely to be activated when they are in a group of peers.

# The Life Journey Work Ladder



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## Identity

Our sense of identity is profoundly shaped by how we see the world around us and our expectations of other people. Our experiences during infancy are especially influential in terms of how the brain develops, how we learn to calm our emotions, how we understand ourselves, and how we relate to others and the larger world. The relationships we have with our parents and other people who care for us when we are very young directly shape who we become.

The adolescent's emerging ability for conceptual and abstract reasoning, leads them to question the world around them. They are moving away from their parents and developing their own values. This searching for the meaning of life can create a crisis of identity, vulnerability to peer pressure and a lack of direction and purpose.

## Life Journey Work and Connection

It is vital for adults to keep working on connecting with young people. The parent – child relationship is the key to navigating these teenage years. A good understanding of age-appropriate therapeutic parenting will help to keep the communication flowing. Informal life journey conversations need to be open and ongoing as the young person will still be making sense of their story.

An adopted teenager should already be aware of their story through conversations at home, the Life Story book and Memory box. Therapeutic Life Story work, photo albums, contact whether indirect or direct and keeping in touch with your child's foster carers will also help.

An adoptive parent should make themselves familiar with the child's later life letter. If a child asks any questions the parent can answer these in an age-appropriate way, so by the time the child reads their later life letter NOTHING should come as a surprise for them as the adoptive parent/s will have answered questions and talked about some of the difficult themes within the book.





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# Resources & Links

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# Suggested reading

## A selection of resources to support teenagers

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### Lived experience

#### [\*My Name Is Why\* - Lemn Sissay](#)

The author recounts his life story. He reflects on a childhood in care, self-expression and Britishness, and in doing so explores the institutional care system, race, family and the meaning of home.

### Brain development and attachment

#### [\*Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain\* – Dan Siegel](#)

An account of how brain development affects teenagers' behaviour and relationships. Drawing on important new research in the field of interpersonal neurobiology, it explores exciting ways in which understanding how the teenage brain functions can help parents make what is in fact an incredibly positive period of growth, change and experimentation in their children's lives less lonely and distressing on both sides of the generational divide.

#### [\*The Teenage Brain\* - Frances E Jensen](#)

A journey through the new discoveries that show us exactly what happens to the brain in this crucial period, how it dictates teenagers' behaviour, and how the experiences of our teenage years are what shape our attitudes, and often our happiness in later life.

#### [\*Blame My Brain – The Amazing Teenage Brain Revealed\* - Nicola Morgan](#)

A guide to the biological mysteries that lie behind teenage behaviour.





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### **[Parenting Matters: Parenting a Child Affected by Parental Substance Misuse](#)**

A guide to general issues around substance misuse and children entering care, as well as the impact on children of exposure to substances during pregnancy, and possible effects on children at different ages and stages of development.

### **[Building the Bonds of Attachment - Daniel Hughes](#)**

A resource for students and professionals as well as parents, which presents a composite case study of one child's developmental course following years of abuse and neglect.

### **[Attachment Handbook for Foster Care & Adoption](#)**

#### **[- Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek](#)**

An accessible account of core attachment concepts and the Secure Base model. It traces the pathways of secure and insecure patterns from birth to adulthood, exploring the impact of past experiences of abuse, neglect and separation on children's behaviour in foster and adoptive families.

### **Therapeutic approaches and strategies and tools for parents**

#### **[Courageous Parents – Haim Omer](#)**

A general and practical presentation of NVR (non-violent resistance) for parents. It is a step-by-step manual on how parents can develop a “new authority”, based on presence, self-control, support and persistence, instead of the authority based on distance, intimidation and force.

#### **[The Unofficial guide to Therapeutic Parenting \(The Teenage Years\)](#)**

##### **[- Sally Donovan](#)**

An honest insight into the rollercoaster reality of therapeutically parenting teenagers.

#### **[Parenting Adopted Teenagers - Rachel Staff](#)**

This guide will help parents to understand the impact of early trauma on a child's development and the specific nature of the changes that occur during adolescence.



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### **[A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting - Sarah Naish](#)**

A guide to therapeutic parenting, with an A-Z of applied advice for 60 common issues.

### **[Adoption at the Movies - Addison Cooper](#)**

A film for each week of the year, new and old, for family-friendly viewing. The movies included will help families to comfortably talk about important adoption-related topics.

### **[Bubble Wrapped Children - Helen Oakwater](#)**

How social networking is transforming the face of 21st century adoption

## **Information and resources for practitioners undertaking Life Journey Work**

### **[Life Story Therapy with traumatized children - Richard Rose](#)**

Life Story Therapy is an approach designed to enable children to explore, question and understand the past events of their lives. It aims to secure their future through strengthening attachment with their carers and providing the opportunity to develop a healthy sense of self and a feeling of wellbeing.

### **[Life Story Work for Children Who Are Fostered or Adopted - Katie Wrench and Lesley Naylor](#)**

This accessible book is full of tried and tested activities and creative ideas for professionals, parents and carers who may have little time and few resources, but who need to carry out life story work that works for children.





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# Useful online resources

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[National Adoption Service - Life Journey Work resources](#) – link to the Life Journey Work section, including the Life Journey Work toolkit.

[Connect Cymru](#) – a website for adopted young people by adopted young people

[Truth Be Told: Episode 6, the Takeover](#) - In this special episode of the NAS podcasts series 2, we hear from adopted young people themselves.

[‘Why I am rude’](#) - a poem by Sarah Dillon performed by children and young people to help adults and children to understand the ‘why’ behind behaviours which may be seen or described as rude.

[A Letter From Your Teenager](#) - the letter that a teenager may wish she could write to her parent.

[Resources from Beacon House](#) – a website with a wide range of free resources about attachment and trauma

[The Repair of Early Trauma: A Bottom Up Approach](#) – Beacon House resource for professionals – an animation voiced by children about using the ‘Neuro-Sequential Model of Therapeutics’ to address developmental trauma.

[About us | Safe Hands Thinking Minds](#) - Dr Karen Treisman, clinical psychologist and trauma specialist website.





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[Good relationships are the key to healing trauma](#) – Dr Karen Treisman, clinical psychologist and trauma specialist TEDx talk 2018

[Therapeutic Life Story Work - Sharing Lives/Sharing Stories](#) - Richard Rose, Director of Child Trauma Intervention Services, presents on Therapeutic Life Story Work at the Adoption Week Scotland 2019 Practitioner Workshop

[Oprah Winfrey & Dr Bruce Perry in conversation](#) - Oprah Winfrey and leading child psychiatrist and neuroscientist Bruce Perry, MD, PhD explore the impact of childhood trauma on who we become, the decisions we make, and how healing must start with one question ‘what happened to you?’

[How the brain adapts to adversity](#) - Professor Eamon McCrory explains what scientists have learned from studying the brain about the impact of abuse and neglect. For professionals and carers working with children.

[The Adolescent Brain](#) – animation narrated by Dan Siegel, neuroscientist and psychiatrist, describing aspects of brain development during adolescence.

[Like the Lap Bar on a Roller Coaster, Teens Will Test You to See if You Will Hold](#) - a very short video analogy to explain why teenagers push against their parents’ boundaries and how this does not represent a rejection, but expresses their need for stability and reliability.

[Social Networking in Real Life – a social experiment](#) – this video vividly illustrates the dangers of social media in a light-hearted way, which will bring them home to teenagers, without preaching at them.

[‘Think You Know’](#) - resources concerned with online dangers for parents/carers and those working with young people and children/young people themselves, can be accessed on this section of the CEOP website.



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# Useful Contacts

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Below is a list of the Life Journey Work co-ordinators who are in post across Wales currently. It would be useful to know who to contact in your area if you need guidance, advice or have access to any training opportunities.

## **Mid and West Wales Adoption Service**

Sian E Gibbon | [SEGibbon@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:SEGibbon@cardiff.gov.uk)

## **North Wales Adoption Service**

Sarah Ryan | [Sarah.Ryan@wrexham.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.Ryan@wrexham.gov.uk)

## **South East Wales Adoption Service**

Raluca Miklovits | [Raluca.Miklovits@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:Raluca.Miklovits@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

## **Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service**

Tina James | [tjames@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:tjames@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

Sara Jones | [sarajones@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:sarajones@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

## **Western Bay Adoption Service**

Sarah Vaughan | [s.vaughan1@westernbayadoption.org](mailto:s.vaughan1@westernbayadoption.org)

If you have developed anything new to help with good practice or know of any information on delivering life journey work please contact your adoption service representative above or the National Adoption Service Central Team on [contact@adoptcymru.com](mailto:contact@adoptcymru.com)





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Need more help?  
**No problem.**

**Get in touch with NAS Central Team**

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