



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Annual Report

2021/22



Achieving More Together

“The day that we finally drove over for the first day of introductions he was stood at the window beaming and it was just the most personal, but amazing feeling ... it was just mind blowing that feeling”

Ben

Ben and Adam – adopted their son



Foreword

2021/22 has been another busy and successful year for adoption services in Wales. Within an ongoing, fluctuating 'Covid' context, services have continued to recruit adopters, place children, and provide support to ensure these newly created families have the best start and can access support at other times, should they need it.

We are pleased that the Adoption UK Barometer survey states that Wales is comparing well to the other three UK nations.

Here are some of the key elements of our work this year:

1. A principal element of the work of NAS is to ensure adoptive parents and adopted children and young people continue to have a strong voice and clear influence over services and their development. This year we have further enhanced engagement with adopted children and young people with the launch of the new adoption **Youth Councils** and a **website for adopted children and young people**. The National Adoption Service is proud to have supported adopted young people to develop this in Wales:

www.connectcymru.com

*'For adopted young people **by** adopted young people'*

2. The **Adoption Voices** website and annual **Big Adoption Conversation** are now well established, as is the engagement with the AUK Adoption Barometer. www.adoptionvoices.wales
3. The National Adoption Service continues to receive investment from the Welsh Government of £2.3m for adoption support services. This has supported the development of the Youth Councils, the website, and their support services, Connect, for children and young people. The funding is also facilitating the **'NAS Adoption Support Commitment'** to all adoptive families to provide them with consistent and accessible adoption support services.

4. The National Adoption Service participates in a wide range of working groups and activities which enables the improvement of services in a collaborative way involving services and other partners.
5. The National Adoption Service is pleased to report that the number of enquiries and interest in becoming an adoptive parent has increased. The long-term trend in enquiries is upward. The level of adopters approved increased by 6% showing signs of returning to pre-Covid levels.

The positive impact of this and proactive family finding is that the number of children waiting for a placement fell again this year. Linked to the work of NAS, and reduction in placement orders being made this continues the year-on-year improvement made.

This sits within a broader context of adoption being considered for fewer children. The pandemic has resulted in different patterns of court applications and placement orders over the last two years alongside a longer-term, UK-wide trend, of reducing placement orders due to how adoption is being used alongside other ways of achieving permanence for children.

Timewise, this report coincides with the local government elections and the prospect of change in the council members who form part of the Governance Board. The National Adoption Service thank them all for their commitment.

The National Adoption Service particularly wants to extend gratitude and best wishes to Councillor Cllr Alan Lockyer who stepped down as Co-Chair from March 2022. Alan has led the National Adoption Service through another challenging year, and his support and involvement will be missed.



Phil Hodgson

Phil Hodgson

Independent Chair of
the Advisory Group



Suzanne Griffiths

Suzanne Griffiths

Director

Introduction

The National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) is the collaboration for the provision of adoption services across Wales.

Since November 2014, it has brought together all local authority adoption services into five regional collaboratives, with coordination and leadership provided by a small central team and Director. Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) operating in Wales are key partners in the collaboration, as are other agencies including health and education.

CENTRAL TEAM



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

National Adoption Service – Central Team

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MID & WEST WALES

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Pembrokeshire



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Goglewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales

Mid & West Wales Adoption

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adoptionenquiries@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

NORTH WALES

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



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Gogledd Cymru

North Wales
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 Deddf yrain Cymru
Cyflwyni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!

South East Wales Adoption Service

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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 Cymedd
a Charddydd

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

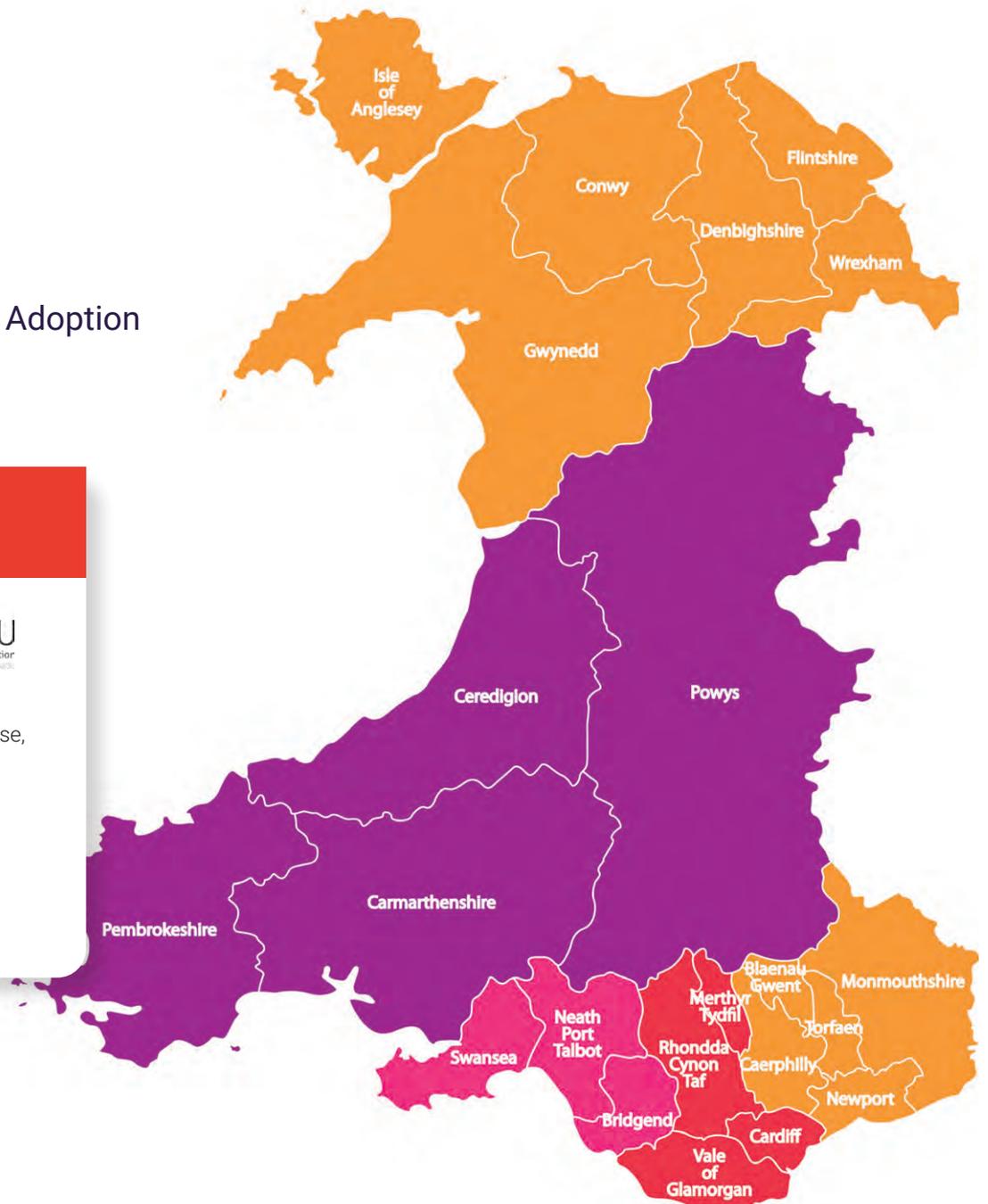


GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE

Western Bay Adoption Service

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0300 365 2222
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www.westernbayadoption.org

All Wales Voluntary Adoption Agencies Services



AFA CYMRU



AFA Cymru

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

ADOPTION UK



Adoption UK

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

BARNARDO'S CYMRU



Barnardo's Cymru Adoption and Fostering Services

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www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption

ST DAVID'S CHILDREN SOCIETY



St David's Children Society

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CF10 3BA
029 2066 7007
info@stdavidscs.org
www.adoptionwales.org

Priorities for 2021/22

This report demonstrates how much has been achieved from our improvement priorities below.

Increase the number of children placed

- Increase recruitment of adopters to meet the number and needs of children waiting
- Optimise matching and placing all children subject to a placement order

Continue to improve adoption support across Wales

- Within the overall framework, agree and promote the NAS Adoption Support Commitment of support for Welsh Adopters
- Manage the £2.3m investment effectively for 2021-22 and plan for future years
- Continue to co-produce and use information from engagement

Thinking ahead

- Influence and improve the legal, policy and evidence framework that affects adoption
- Continue to build a 'one service' ethos and functioning
- Continue to raise adoption awareness amongst professionals and the public

Covid 19 Pandemic

Although restrictions are starting to ease, there is still significant pressure on operational services. Increased demand for adoption support services and staff absences add to workforce pressures already present because of a shortage of social workers. This is beginning to impact adoption work. At the time of writing, services are continuing to operate utilising Covid safe practices demonstrating the ongoing adaptability, flexibility, and commitment that has been present throughout the pandemic and for which the National Adoption Service is grateful.

Increase the number of children placed

Increase recruitment of adopters to meet the number and needs of children waiting

Our successes

- We reached our aim for this year to increase the number of adopters approved.
- The 'Truth Be Told' podcast won an award!

The NAS 'Truth be Told' podcast, produced by Cowshed, the Service's PR and Marketing Company, won a **GOLD** award at the CIPR Pride Cymru awards for 2021.

These prestigious awards, for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, celebrate and recognise great communications.

Congratulations to everyone involved, including the families who participated.



1M

over 1 million views

Choose Family Campaign

The Choose Family campaign reaches the heart of adoption because, in the end, everybody in adoption is searching for families. The core aim is to get people to consider adopting older children, boys, and sibling groups so they find a family sooner.

The campaign was delivered from October 2021 to March 2022 via:

- Media relations
- Social media
- TV, digital, train, and bus advertising
- Stakeholder and influencer engagement
- Video.

This resulted in 23 pieces of campaign coverage including over **one million views** of the video across the UK as well as in Wales creating a spike in interest and enquiries from prospective adopters.

AUK Passport Scheme

Starting in April 2022, Adoption UK launched a new enhanced membership package to be offered to all prospective adopters in Wales. Passport is a comprehensive package of learning resources that have been tailor-made to provide information on relevant and important topics and to support people going through the adoption approval process. It includes peer support, where each member can join a community of adopters from around the UK, as well as full access to the same resources and benefits that other AUK members enjoy. It also includes a programme comprised of 10 modules that takes members on a learning journey about adoption.

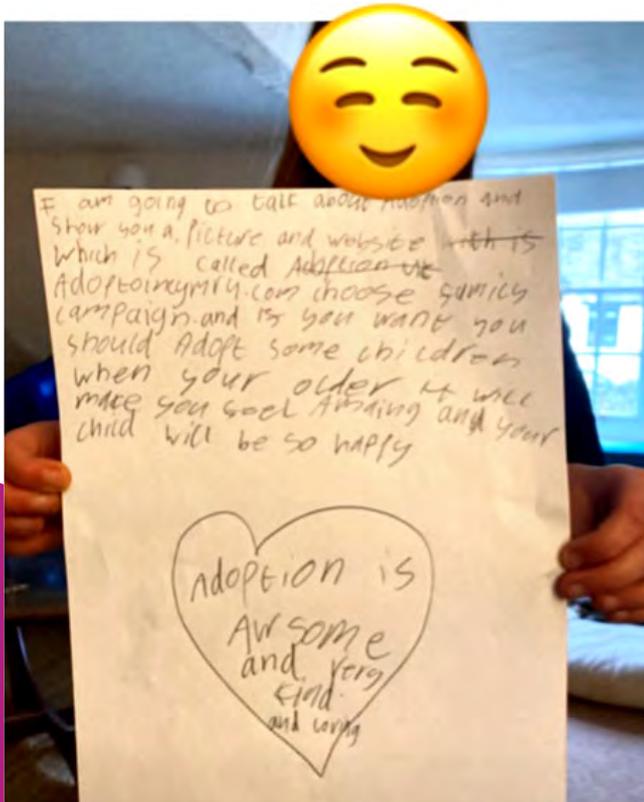


WalesOnline  NEWS - RUGBY FOOTBALL MORE -

The people adopting children across Wales and the touching reasons behind their decision

They include those who cannot have children of their own, or people like Natasha, a single adopter who was determined to provide a home for children who were classed as harder to place.

this is our 8 year olds completely unprompted discussion topic for Friday's show and tell in school. Kinda sums it all up I think!



What were the overall results on recruitment of adopters in 2021/22?

- Enquiries to adopt decreased slightly by 7% from the significantly higher increase in 2020/21 which is believed to be Covid related. However, enquiries continue to show a positive upwards trend.
- The number of adopters approved increased by 6% potentially indicating movement towards pre-Covid levels and ongoing recovery from the lower levels of 2018/19.
- Timeframes for adopter approvals increased a little to 7.4 months, from 6.9 months in the previous year.
- There has also seen an increase in adopters waiting, 27% of which have been waiting for more than 12 months.
- There was however a 23% decrease in adopter assessments starting, mostly due to a significant drop in a small number of services. The potential implications of this are being considered.

Initial Enquiries

2021/22 enquiries to adopt decreased by

Number of enquiries
2,021



Initial enquiries

Year	Number	% increase
2021/22	2,021	-7%
2020/21	2,163	23%
2019/20	1,764	4%
2018/19	1,689	9%
2017/18	1,550	21%
2016/17	1,280	7%
2015/16	1,197	3%
2014/15	1,161	

Adopter Assessments

2021/22 adopter assessments starting decreased by

Number of assessments 265



Adopter Assessments Starting

Year	Number	% increase
2021/22	265	-23%
2020/21	345	20%
2019/20	287	3%
2018/19	278	0%
2017/18	277	13%
2016/17	246	

Adopter Approvals

2021/22 adopter approvals increased by

Number of approvals
243



Adopter Approvals

Year	Number	% increase
2021/22	243	6%
2020/21	230	-8%
2019/20	250	18%
2018/19	212	0%
2017/18	212	-10%
2016/17	236	-11%
2015/16	266	-10%
2014/15	294	

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.

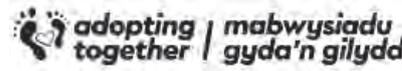
If I could just urge one person to do it. It's brilliant"

Amanda and Martin adopted a girl



Optimise matching and placing all children subject to a placement order

The National Adoption Service manages the Adoption Register for Wales for the Welsh Government and part funds the Adopting Together Service; both support services to increase the number of children placed with families who meet their needs.



Adoption Register for Wales (ARW)

The Adoption Register for Wales (ARW) is a completely bilingual, online family-finding service with managed adopter access. The ARW team works closely with each of the Welsh regions and VAAs to ensure that children and adopters are referred to the Register within the required timescales. Regular monitoring of the Register takes place and assistance is offered to the Regions and VAA to ensure the information held by the Register is accurate and up to date.

Quarterly practitioner meetings are held between the ARW team, the regions, and VAAs. These meetings focus on the planning of family finding events, sharing profiles of children waiting, and discussing any issues around family finding from a Register or region/VAA perspective.

- There has been an increase in the number of children and families matched through the Register this year compared to previous years.
- The Adoption Register also works closely with the Adopting Together Service to assist with children on the register who meet the criteria for the ATS, particularly those children who have waited, or are likely to wait, 9+ months for a placement.
- ARW has held 4 online profiling events this year. Children from across Wales have been featured at these events, many with complex needs and who have been waiting for the longest. The events have proved popular with adopters and professionals due to their virtual nature and accessibility. The events generated many expressions of interest and as a result, a total of 5 successful matches have been made with others still being considered.
- ARW also held an Adoption Activity Day in October 2021. Unfortunately, this event was impacted by Covid-19 restrictions as some children were unable to attend at short notice due to illness. 20 children were profiled with 13 children physically attending the event in Cardiff. A total of 5 children were matched with adopters who attended the event.
- The team continues to work with Welsh Government towards re-commissioning the Register when the current contract ends next year.

Use of 'Adopting Together Service' for children who wait for the longest

St. David's has placed 4 children through the Adopting Together Service and has approved 23 families this year. They reviewed their recruitment strategy to meet the needs of children who wait for an adoptive family. St David's is proud that one-third of approvals and placements have been made with LGBTQ+ families. The Society has continued to invest in enhancing its offer of adoption support both pre- and post-order and as we moved out of the pandemic, arranged outdoor meetups and a family event. They continued to provide a range of direct interventions including one-to-one support, therapeutically led training events, and opportunities for peer-to-peer support.

6 bespoke recruitment campaigns have taken place:

- 2 identifying
- 1 personalised non-identifying
- 3 generic non-identifying.

Market Share Pilot

Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS), St David's Children Society, and Barnardo's successfully piloted an initiative aimed at supporting the early identification of adopters for children with an adoption plan. Following a positive evaluation of the pilot, this has now moved to a new phase with an upfront agreement on the projected number of placements likely to occur between WBAS and the VAAs during the forthcoming financial year. Evaluations are evidencing that changes introduced by the pilot are offering improved opportunities in placement choice and are supporting more children being placed in Wales as well as positively impacting working relationships across the sectors.

What was the overall impact for placing children in 2021/22?

The Service continued to successfully reduce the number of children waiting for an adoption placement.

- Considering children with a strong link, there were just over 80 children waiting for a placement at the end of March 2022.
- The number of children waiting for placement has reduced significantly in recent years.

The number of children matched increased by 3% compared to the previous year. The increases were seen in all but one Region and ranging between 6% to 67%: one Region had significantly fewer matches, linked to fewer children becoming subject to a placement order.

- A total of 288 matches occurred in Wales during 2021/22, a slight increase from 280 of the previous year.
- 80 of these matches were identified via the Register compared to 59 the previous year.
- 279 children were placed, 6% more than the previous year.

The increases demonstrate the Service is moving on from the impact of the pandemic with placing activity moving back towards usual levels. The broader context is that 17% fewer children were referred to services this year alongside a 12% reduction in Placement Orders granted by the courts. This is linked to different patterns in court applications and orders over the last two years but there is also a longer-term, UK-wide trend of reducing placement orders linked to how adoption is being used alongside other ways of achieving permanence for children.

Placed for Adoption

2021/22 placed for adoption increased by



Number of placements

279

Placed for Adoption

Year	Number	% increase
2021/22	279	6%
2020/21	263	-14%
2019/20	306	-2%
2018/19	311	1%
2017/18	307	2%
2016/17	300	-8%
2015/16	326	-16%
2014/15	386	

Continuing to improve adoption support

Within the overall framework, agree and promote the 'NAS Adoption Support Commitment' of support for Welsh adopters

NAS has continued to focus on specific areas to improve the arrangements for the delivery of adoption support.

Our strategy for adoption support has a new name

In 2016, NAS developed its strategic plan for the development of adoption support services in Wales. With its distinctive umbrella symbol, the vision over time was to guarantee a 'Core Offer' of support for all Welsh adopted children and young people and their parents as well as to others affected by adoption. It is now called the 'NAS Adoption Support Commitment.'

The vision is for all adopters in Wales to feel supported at every step of their journey: whether at the start, at the time a child is placed, or later when issues or queries arise. The Service wants adopters to feel confident that when they ask for advice, information, or support it will be available to them when they need it and from professionals with specialist knowledge of adoption and a broad range of children's care needs.

The National Adoption Service has worked with services across Wales to agree on a national offer of support that all can commit to. The NAS Adoption Support Commitment of support will be launched in June 2022 and is based on the following underlying principles:

- **A ONE team approach:** Regional Adoption Services, Local Authority teams, and Voluntary Adoption Agencies working together as a team around the child and family
- **The Adoption Community:** adopters becoming part of a valued, Wales-wide, adoption community with access to peer support as well as specialist professional advice and services
- **Targeted or specialist services:** prompt and equitable access to specialist services if required
- **Communication and involvement:** keeping adopters informed and consulted in developing adoption support services, so that they are responsive to existing and emerging needs.



Work on adoption support service transfers at 3+ years

If a child is placed in another local authority area in Wales, the responsibility for adoption support services transfers from the placing authority to the authority where the child and family live 3 years after the adoption order is granted. Practice guidance was published for services in Wales to ensure the continuation of support for children and families when this happens. This guidance, endorsed and supported by the Welsh Government, reminds staff and organisations of their duties, as well as the steps that need to be taken to plan this transfer of responsibility and avoid any unnecessary delay in ensuring the right support for children continues throughout and after the transfer from one authority to another.



Support in education services

This remains an area of significant focus for most families and adopted children and young people.

'The majority of parents in Wales find that their children experience challenges in education, with 71% of adopted children reported to need more support in school than their peers (compared to 67% in 2018).'

Adoption Barometer report, Adoption UK, 2021

The two sources of information, Evaluation of the Adoption Support Framework in Wales: Institute of Public Care 2021 and the 2021* Adoption Barometer, both involving an extensive evidence base, identify 4 main themes:

1. Variations in the level of knowledge and understanding of the needs of adopted children amongst education professionals.
2. A lack of consistency at various levels – between regions, within regions, between schools, within schools.
3. A lack of coordination of different services accessed by adopted children and their families.
4. Typical patterns of difficulty in the experience of adopted children and their families in education

Adoption UK has worked with 250 schools across Wales through its professional membership scheme. 343 people attended a total of 28 events for teachers to help them think about how they can support adopted learners.

NAS has resumed its liaison meetings with the Welsh Government Education colleagues to continue to advise and support them to make improvements in policy and services. NAS has also discussed these issues with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Care and there is a shared commitment to continue this dialogue and oversight.

* Commissioned by NAS, funded by Welsh Government investment – Evaluation of the Adoption Support Framework in Wales: Institute of Public Care 2021 [Adoption Support in Wales Report](#)

Manage the £2.3m investment effectively for 2021/22 and plan for future years

The 2021/22 financial year marks the third year of this investment from the Welsh Government which is being used primarily to transform the adoption support service across Wales.

Transforming services across Wales

The investment has allowed us to increase capacity in the staff and services of the NAS regional adoption services so that children, young people, and families are more effectively supported. It is also being used creatively to match fund other resources through the development of new and innovative services, many being delivered in partnership with the Welsh Voluntary Adoption Agencies e.g., TESSA, Adopting Together Service, and Connect.

Significantly more and varied types of support are now being provided because of this investment which funds elements of the NAS Adoption Support Framework and enable the Service to confidently publish the 'NAS Adoption Support Commitment'.

This year the investment has supported the following adoption support services:

- At any one time 261 families receive the TESSA service, including 132 new families this year.
- 233 children and young people are involved in the CONNECTED service including 95 new children and young people.
- Regional services have supported more than 450 families with a range of therapeutic interventions.

- Circa 200 children and families received life journey materials and more than 200 professionals received refresher days.
- 6 very complex children have been placed through the Adopting Together Service, plus ongoing recruitment of adopters including 6 bespoke recruitment campaigns.
- A significant amount of training has been provided on the four good practice events with more than 900 professionals working in a range of teams and services.
- AFA Cymru has recorded e-modules for practitioners, panel members, and parents on Wales Early Permanence and will be available by Autumn 2022.
- The funding has also supported further development work on Trauma Informed Practice and developed a 'Wales Early Permanence Framework,' launched in May 2022.



TESSA

TESSA (Therapy, Education & Support Services in Adoption), a UK-wide Lottery funded service by Adoption UK utilises match funding from the investment in each region to provide a wider reach in Wales. Based on delivery through paid parent-partners (experienced and trained adopters) it incorporates:

- An expert psychology assessment
- A 6-week reflective parenting course
- Plus, access to other recommended support services

The feedback received from families receiving the TESSA service and from the professionals that refer them is very good. There is also academic research being undertaken

The TESSA Pilot Study by Strathclyde University came out in June 2021 available [here](#). The summary states:

High levels of satisfaction were expressed by adopters with all pillars of TESSA.

- 85% of adopters reported that as a result of the clinical consultation they had a better understanding of their child's needs and felt better able to explain these needs to professionals.
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the report from the clinical consultation was a helpful resource.
- All adopters who attended the reflective parenting group agreed or strongly agreed that the groups were well organised, with relevant content and that group facilitators were respectful, non-judgemental, and sensitive to participants' needs.

- 85% of adopters matched to a Parent Partner felt they had benefitted from this support and 90% felt their Parent Partner understood them and their situation. On a practical level most felt that it was easy to stay in touch with their Parent Partner (90%).
- Adopters who had received TESSA support for around six months reported positive impacts of TESSA on their parenting experience such as:
 - increased confidence in dealing with challenges (95%)
 - an improved ability to anticipate stressful triggers (85%)
 - more optimism about the family's ability to cope (95%)

A key outcome of the clinical consultation was the development of a coherent comprehensive explanation of a child's strengths and needs captured in a single report that could be shared across settings such as school, nursery, childcare, etc.

The support of Parent Partners was highly valued by adopters who used this relationship to grow into their role of therapeutic parent. Adopters reported feeling less psychologically isolated, more confident in their parenting abilities, better connected to resources, and that children were calmer and family life more settled.

Strong supportive relationships also developed between adopters attending the reflective parenting group and some of these were maintained after the group meetings ended providing adopters with an enduring informal support network.

NAS is keen to ensure that the programme can continue in Wales when the current Lottery funding ceases.



Connected

The CONNECTED groups which are one part of the CONNECT service provide support to over 230 adopted children and young people across Wales. They are age-related, one is for 7–10-year-olds, one for 11+ and a small older group for 18 – 30-year-olds.

The groups have run mostly online this year with monthly sessions using zoom, although where restrictions allowed, some face-to-face sessions occurred. The aim is to provide support to children and young people as well as ensure the voices of adopted young people are heard and influence the services they access.

Youth Council

The Adoption Youth Councils (CONNECT Voices) held an exclusive event in Cardiff on Monday 4th April, at Techniquet. The young people from AUK's two CONNECT Voices groups introduced their Youth Councils. Connected families and adoption staff heard about the work of the youth councils and celebrated the launch of their brand-new website designed by, for, and about adopted young people across Wales. Deputy Minister, Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services was the Keynote speaker.

Speakers spoke about how this work is both ground-breaking and revolutionary. It is the start of a new phase of hearing the voice of adopted children and young people loudly, clearly, and consistently.

Website

The group is also involved in developing information for adopted children and young people. For example, the CONNECT website, newsletters, and link to the Youth Councils. <https://www.connectcymru.com/voices/youth-council> The groups are facilitated by staff from NAS regions and Adoption UK.

- *"My son has grown to know and trust the youth workers. Their approach is spot on. They understand the impact of adverse early childhood experiences and adoption. They are empathic, good listeners, creative, fun, supportive, and caring. My child enjoys the sessions, especially face-to-face. They support me as a parent. I don't feel judged."*
- *"My daughter often joins the sessions feeling a bit grumpy but within a few minutes the staff has her laughing and chatting away!"*
- *"...the group leader has been exceptional throughout lockdown and prior to this with supporting my children within the group and at home when they haven't been able to manage it. [She] has also continued to support and include my youngest daughter in activities even though she has moved into a residential home. The service has also supported the girls to have contact with each other during some of the activities. It has allowed my girls to be themselves and they have been supported to be themselves. It has made a huge difference to them. The leader has been a constant in their life for a number of years which has been really important when other professionals have come and gone. The service also allows and encourages the girls to have fun and participate as much or as little as they can manage. There is no pressure to be the same as others which you often find in social activity groups."*

CONNECT Adoption partners Connected groups Information for Young People voices and views
cymru.org

Youth Council

CONNECT Voices is a group for adopted young people to meet with other adopted young people and to share their adoption experiences



Together we aim to ensure the voices of adopted young people are heard and influence the services they access. Every month, we meet via Zoom to discuss and set practical aims. We also provide training to members so that they can feel more confident in their abilities

[Find out more](#)

What are the age groups?
There are two CONNECT Voices groups, one for 11+ and one for 18-30 year olds. These groups run as an online monthly sessions using Zoom. You can join with video or just audio, it's completely up to you.

Who are the workers?
The facilitators are Fran and Talitha – Lead Youth Workers who also run Connected groups across Wales for all ages.

Interested in joining? Click the button below to visit the Connected page on the Adoption UK Cymru website

[CONNECT Voices](#)

Life Journey

There is a widespread desire amongst those involved in adoption in Wales to deliver Life Journey work to a high standard and a willingness to develop practice to allow this. NAS continues to coordinate and develop the delivery of its approach to Life Journey work through regional coordinators.

More than 150 members of staff from across Wales, including childcare social workers, attended Life Journey workshops this year. The workshops:

- *Explored best practice in Life Journey Work in the context of the NAS Life Journey Work framework*
- *Helped staff to become more familiar with the framework and the associated good practice guide*
- *Gave greater appreciation of the importance of Life Journey work as a tool to help adopted and looked after children to make sense of their history and build a positive identity*
- *Helped staff to be clear about what constitutes good quality LJW and give them and their organisation additional tools and resources to achieve this*

While sustaining the progress made, the challenge is to ensure that direct work and information gathering start as soon as a child is accommodated, resulting in Life Journey Materials that are of the highest quality and reflective of the child's individuality.

- *"This is fantastic. It is exactly what I was talking about yesterday. Had we received a life story in this format it would have exceeded our expectations, even if it had still not been received in the timescales..."*
- *"I think some of the information is a bit overwhelming for our children at this point in their emotional development, but if we can do our storybook alongside this for the now and have this for the near future it will be succinct for the 'ladder approach' so that there are no surprises in the later life letters, which is what we should all be striving for."*
- *"I am so happy to have received this, but also really sad that it is not already standard practice across authorities. It really takes the leg work out for Social Workers and will produce exactly what adopters want and need to support their children. Let me reiterate that – it is easier and less time-consuming to use these templates for Social Workers and will produce high-quality Life Story Books."*

“**N**owadays, adoption does reflect society, its moved away from that stringent profile that used to exist”

Tash – a single adopter of 2 children



Continue to co-produce and use information from engagement

A focus on the voice and influence of adopters and adopted children and young people

Actively seeking feedback from users of the service is a key priority and forms the basis of all that is done in the National Adoption Service for Wales. There are now established robust arrangements to facilitate this.

AUK Barometer

The Wales report, which NAS commissions from AUK was published at the end of September. Entitled 'Celebrating Success, Inspiring Innovation,' this report provides a useful focus on the Wales-only data from the 2021 UK-wide Barometer:

[NAS – AUK Barometer report for Wales – News](#)

Key findings for Wales were a picture of improved satisfaction indicating that what NAS is doing is working and showing a clear link between investment and improvement. It shows:

- High levels of positivity about adoption: 80% would encourage others to consider adoption and 83% were optimistic about their family's future
- Welsh adopters were the most likely of the 4 nations to say that they were doing well as a family in 2020 (difficult Covid year)
- Improved adoption support linked to the investment
- Highlights that there is more to do e.g., adolescents & Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder.

The Big Adoption Conversation

This annual event took place on 27th January 2022, chaired by the NAS Director, and attended by 99 adoptive parents and grandparents, adopted young people, and professionals.

It was a virtual event, free to attendees, to consider in more detail the latest Adoption UK's Adoption Barometer report and other relevant information to inform NAS' work, including the emerging Adopt Cymru 2025 plan.

The event included 4 smaller workshop discussions which considered the following in more detail:

- Teenage years and transitions to adulthood
- Education
- Contact with birth family
- Becoming an adoptive family

It was an extremely positive event with good engagement from participants both in the main discussion room with all participants and in the workshops. Several important overall themes emerged from the discussions, including a reminder of the lifelong implications of adoption from the small number of adoptive parents in attendance who are now grandparents and who still provide very significant levels of support to their adult children who are parents themselves.

Overall themes:

- Adoption has lifelong implications
- There are 'lost' generations of adopted children and adults, some of whom may/will need support due to previously unrecognised/unmet needs for support and information
- The importance of hearing the voices of all those affected by adoption as well as being able to identify them and provide information including about new/different services where relevant
- Support and services are rarely 'once and for all,' so opportunities for keeping in touch, obtaining advice and information, and/or reviews of active support are needed
- There are very good new and innovative services that are improving outcomes and family life for newer families

While highlighting issues that were already known, the event was significant in enabling NAS to consider how they could be addressed in service development plans.

Members of the emerging **AUK Youth Council** took part in the Adoption Barometer launch and the Big Adoption Conversation. They also coordinated a Hustings event for candidates in the 2021 Senedd elections which was attended by representatives of all parties who responded to a range of questions posed by adopted young people.

In January 2022, there was a session where they interviewed the Director of NAS and engaged with Health and Education as they worked on a National Lottery Bid over the autumn. The first two newsletters were also produced.

This was all ahead of the formal launch of the Youth Councils!

The new **Connected website** and the **Youth Councils** were launched on 4th April 2022 (see previous section).

One of the young people, Anna, shares her experience:

"I contacted Connected and I got invited to the 18+ group and then got involved in the social and the website group which became the Youth Council. I took part in the hustings... really enjoyed that and my Youth council involvement. I worked with youth workers trialling a focus group to gain young people's opinions on what Adoption UK should aim to offer young people back in February and then worked with them to make it more young people friendly before they did their research in Wales, Scotland, and England. The support around the Connected and Youth Council groups given by the youth workers is the reason I keep coming back- if I didn't feel supported, I wouldn't have bothered. They understand and make it safe – it makes us able to speak about our pasts. It's really difficult when you feel like you haven't got a voice but with this group, I feel like I have got a voice. I can use my experiences to help the next generation. I hope to see a lot of change in the future, the aim is to use my voice and my experiences to help the younger ones"



Thinking ahead

Influence and improve the legal, policy, and evidence framework that affects adoption

A considerable proportion of the Director and Central Team's role is to influence and improve the legal, policy, and evidence framework and to maintain the public profile of adoption. As such they participate in many working groups and initiatives.

Research

There is an extensive range of current research activities that include adoption. Many of the studies have a broader scope which includes current and former children looked after in a range of placements as well as adopted children.

'Pre-order meetings between children and their prospective adoptive families: their role in the formation of newly adoptive families.' This Ph.D. research being undertaken within Cardiff University School of Psychology is already revealing the potential value that a good practice guide in Wales could play.

Diversity in adoption in Wales – NAS has commissioned this as part of its Black Lives Matter response. It is being undertaken by an MSc student at Cardiff University with the oversight of CASCADE.

Adoption Breakdowns in Wales – commissioned by AUK Cymru from CASCADE and linked to an AUK project exploring possible interventions for 12-25 years old adoptees with high-level needs.

Re-think project – A multi-disciplinary research programme (psychology, social work, and social policy) led by Professor Lisa Holmes (University of Sussex) with Dr Rachel Hiller (University College London), Professor Katherine Shelton (Cardiff University), and Professor Julie Selwyn (Rees Centre, Oxford University). This is a four-year study, funded by the Medical Research Council to study 600 care-experienced children (currently and formerly CLA incl. adopted children), circa 200 from Wales. Aims include:

- Profiling children's mental health and well-being at key transition stages (move from primary school to secondary and from secondary education into college/work)
- Establishing what works, and what does not work, in supporting these children, young people, and their families.

NAS Officers have been involved in the following workstreams:

- The **Welsh Government Corporate Parenting** workstream is looking to extend and enhance these arrangements in Wales by developing a charter.
- **Public Law Working Group (PLWG) 'Modernising Adoption.'** The work has commenced, and the work streams include international adoptions; relinquished children; legal consequences of adoption/access to records; process and procedures in court; contact; and human rights.
- Link into meetings developing the **Welsh Government strategy for the education of looked after** and formerly looked after children and the implementation of the **Additional Learning Needs Act**.
- Developing a potential **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder** model of services for Wales and meetings with WG to appraise them of the work.
- Work has been initiated to consider no longer changing the **NHS number** of children when they are adopted. This is a matter that has been considered previously but has come back on the agenda due to decisions made by the DfE and NHS in England to progress it, albeit without apparent consultation with Wales.
- **Historical Adoption Records** – the Welsh Government archive service is participating in a UK Government research project to gauge a sense of whether adoption records, which under current legislation can be destroyed after 100 years (in 2026) should be kept or destroyed. NAS has been asked to be involved in this project.
- **Welsh Government Programme for Government (P4G) Oversight Board** is independently chaired by Anthony Douglas (former chair of CAFCASS and the English Adoption Leadership Board). The stated ambition for the board is to:

'Oversee delivery of relevant Programme for Government commitments for children's services and to support a new vision and ambition for children's social care, based on more consistent strengths-based practice, less risk adversity and more restorative approaches to children's care.'

NAS is keen to emphasise the links to the adoption of a number of the commitments as well as where NAS can support the delivery of Welsh Governments ambitions including:

- the proposed radical reform of current services for looked-after children and care leavers
- Strengthening public bodies in their role as 'corporate parent'
- The role of advocacy in supporting parents whose children are at risk of coming into care
- The role of specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care

Together 4 Children and Young People (T4CYP) NEST: Lead consultant Liz Gregory provided a consultation session for regional managers and VAAs on the proposals that have emerged to meet the recommendations of the 'Mind over Matter' report. Conceptually the model fits well with NAS' Adoption Support Framework.



Continuing to build a 'one service' ethos and functioning

One of the reasons behind the creation of NAS was to put an end to the 'postcode lottery' that existed from the response to initial enquiries about adoption, placing children, and provision of adoption support to adopters. As such the 'one service' ethos underpins how services are developed.

NAS is a collaborative made up of Local Authorities, working nationally, regionally, and locally, alongside Voluntary Adoption Agencies, health services, education services, and many other stakeholders. The ambition to continue to operate consistently remains as strong as ever but the realities and practicalities of working together toward the same aim, at the same pace, remains challenging. NAS has continued to implement the changes to its governance below to create the best context for this.

Partnership Agreement

All 22 local authorities in Wales signed the new Partnership Agreement in the first half of the year. This agreement sets out the framework for NAS to operate consistently to an agreed optimal model of excellence and as a single service through:

- Increased ownership and accountability throughout the service for improvement against nationally agreed objectives, policies, and priorities
- Streamlined links between national and regional governance as well as service delivery and strategy
- More working together across regions and centrally to share best practice, improvement, and where appropriate, resources
- A business focus that maximises the contribution of all sector partners.



Joint Committee

Alongside the above, a national Joint Committee is being put in place on behalf of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities to enable them to exercise their powers for the provision of the National Adoption Service for Wales and Foster Wales (FW). It provides an improved mechanism for political oversight to complement the NAS Governance Board and its new Partnership Agreement and puts in place an equivalent arrangement for Foster Wales. It will also provide an improved basis for the hosting arrangement with Cardiff Council. The process of each local authority formally agreeing to this is underway.

Additional resourcing

Adoption UK Cymru was successful in attracting short-term grant aid for service development through the Third Sector Resilience Funding. This is for one year and will fund the development of pilot 'products' for support and counselling for adopted young people and adults aged 13 – 30 in the future.

As a result of discussions about resources, NAS was successful in their £200,000 bid to meet additional Covid pressures in adoption services. The areas funded included:

- Additional demand for access to birth records, counselling, and intermediary service
- Additional adoption support services
- Additional adopter assessments
- Additional adopter panel costs
- Support for agile working with young people

The central team has worked with AUK to support the 'Minding your Futures' bid to the Big Lottery Community Fund. This was for resources to further develop the engagement of adopted children and young people through Connect and the Youth Councils. Unfortunately, the bid was not successful but may well be re-worked for a future Big Lottery fund.

Joint Working

The Central Team, Regions, and VAA's meet monthly, continuing a meeting that was established to respond to Covid but now provides a valuable whole sector operational group.

The NAS lead local authorities and the central team continue to meet regularly as the 'LA Business Planning' group and in the regional Adoption Managers meeting while the Director meets regularly with the VAA's in their network, the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (SVAP).

Subgroups

The membership of all the NAS subgroups and task & finish groups, which undertake the NAS improvement work 'on the ground,' is a cross-section of all the stakeholders in NAS:

- Adoption Support contributed to developing and improving the NAS Adoption Support Commitment to all adopters
- Performance has developed and contributed to expanding the data collection which will inform future developments
- Policy and Practice contributed to the development of the All-Wales Policy and Procedures work as well as the Welsh Early Permanence Framework
- Recruitment and Marketing contributed to and supported the very successful Choose Family campaign.



Continue to raise adoption awareness amongst professionals and the public

Adoption remains a small and discrete service within the whole Children's Services agenda. NAS works hard nationally and regionally to maintain awareness amongst fellow professionals and the public and to undertake development work as needed.

NAS Officers are involved in the following workstreams:

- The **Parenting Expert Action Group** which looked at the implications of the Abolition of Reasonable Punishment Act
- Annual meeting with the **Children's Commissioner for Wales**. There was a varied agenda including NAS performance through the pandemic, the Position Paper, and adoption-related casework by her office
- Member of the **Children in Wales Policy Council**
- Link to **Social Care Wales**, meeting with the Director of Improvement and Development Sarah McCarty regularly
- The Director spoke at both the **ADSS Cymru** Spring Festival and the Annual Conference
- The **Welsh Medical Group** to discuss various aspects of practice of mutual interest
- Member of the national stakeholder group for the **Nuffield Family Justice Observatory**

There has been interest from other parts of the UK in the work NAS is doing to improve adoption services

- The Co-chair of the Governance Board spoke at the **UK Council for Voluntary Adoption Agencies** conference in November.
- The Director met with the newly appointed **National Adoption Strategic Lead for England** in early January and there is an ongoing liaison in terms of areas of development work in common e.g., family finding practice and adoption support as well as the Adoption Register as England considers its position without one.

NAS has also continued to progress key pieces of development work

- **Black Lives Matter** – the additional 'Unconscious Bias' training has continued to be rolled out to staff groups across Wales. The Director and Head of Policy, Practice, & Communication met with Diverse Cymru to consider whether their Cultural Competency Toolkit was suitable for use across Wales. Although an excellent initiative, it is not suitable for the needs of a collaborative organisation such as NAS. Cardiff University School of Social Care was approached, and a MSc student is currently undertaking a research project as part of her dissertation to provide an overview of practice in this area across Wales. Additionally, the NAS data set for children and adopters is being amended to include ethnic information
- Continuing work to change practice concerning **Placement Order Revocations** by developing good practice guidance – a first draft is almost complete for consultation with all stakeholders including the judiciary.

“I've realised how diverse a group we are and each of our journeys to adoption are different”

Ben and Adam – adopted their son

Potential new relationships for Adoption Services in Wales

- The Director, co-chairs, and various members of staff from across Wales attended the **AUK annual conference** on 9th October 2021. It was an excellent online event, '**An equal chance for adopted people,**' using innovative conferencing software (Remo) with a very relevant programme. This included several opportunities to hear the experiences of adoptive parents and adopted people and included a recorded address by the Deputy Minister for Wales alongside ministers from the other UK administrations.
- NAS met with **The Family Place** to discuss their work in Wales. The Family Place is one of the few registered independent Adoption Support Agencies in Wales and offers very specialist therapeutic interventions mainly to children in foster care, kinship care, and adoptive placements. As a result of this meeting, consideration is being given as to whether this organisation should join the third sector SVAP in Wales and they will be providing some information to NAS about the commissioning of their service. This will enable NAS to consider, with relevant partners, whether a different commissioning arrangement may be beneficial for Welsh adoption services.
- NAS met with **Home for Good**, a faith-based organisation that works with adoption and fostering services to raise awareness within faith communities/churches of the need for more foster carers, adopters, and supported lodgings providers or help individuals who may want to apply. There is current consideration of whether NAS can work with them.

Complaints

NAS does not experience a high level of complaints, but these are some of the themes.

Adopters

Sometimes there are delays in the process, for example, waiting for a placement, waiting for the application to adopt, or a delay in accessing other services.

Birth Parents

Contact is very important for both birth parents and their children and sometimes delays occur in receiving contact letters.

Positive Feedback

It is always heart-warming for staff to receive compliments.

From an adopter

"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. The preparation training was informative and enjoyable. It was nice to meet other people who are interested in adoption. A has fantastic people skills and she created a safe space to help me reflect on my life journey so far and how this can impact on my way of parenting. We had many conversations that prepared me for all kinds of bumps along the way. A also made sure that I had a great team around me. I am grateful for the consultation I had with S. The consultation helped me to make sense out of B's experiences so far and what strategies might help him moving forward.

'A' advocated for Theraplay for 'B' and I and I am delighted that the LA were happy to fund this. Having the Theraplay early on in our journey supported us growing together and build up a strong bond. And most importantly, 'A' found the most amazing little boy who is the perfect match. We are having so much fun together. Thank you for the support during such an anxious, emotional and exciting time in B's and my life."

From an adult adoptee

"I wanted to drop a line to express my gratitude to N for the help he has given me in the last few weeks. I was adopted by Welsh parents in 1957 but was born to an Irish nurse. I have been trying for many years now to locate the court order for my adoption. It was the last document, of countless documents that I needed, ... Yes, it's complicated! N helped me obtain the last part and I'm grateful for his help, promptness, and professionalism."

From a prospective adopter

"I just wanted to pass on to you the comments from prospective adopters today. They stated they have felt extremely well supported by P and the Social Work team during the planning of the introductions and throughout the transition. They also praised K and her partner for the preparation work that they did with X prior to the move. It is early days, but this was an extremely positive first review. Thank you to everyone involved."

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 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

Some currently directly provide adoption support services, whereas in others this remains with their local authorities.

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



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

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd



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