

# National Adoption Service

## Annual Report

### 2020/21



**Together**  
we have enabled the  
**National Adoption Service**  
to step into 2021/22 with **RESILIENCE**



Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Cenedlaethol

National  
Adoption  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

**N**o 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



# Foreword

It goes without saying that 2020/21 wasn't the year we'd expected. In early 2020 adoption services in Wales were working hard, and with success, on increasing adopter recruitment, reducing children waiting and improving adoption support in the context of a new partnership agreement which aimed to re-set how NAS operates.

Like all services in March 2020, we needed to adapt quickly whilst absorbing the shock and uncertainty that it created. Operationally, all but the most critical work became virtual, and we needed to re-focus national capacity to support changed service delivery as well as maintaining ongoing strategic work.

There were genuine dilemmas for adoption services:

- Should we continue to move children?
- How can we balance physical safety with long term psychological safety and well-being?
- How can we continue to recruit adopters in a way that is sensitive to the context?

These dilemmas did not stop us, and we continued to deliver adoption services across Wales thanks to the tremendous efforts and adaptability of everyone involved:

- We continued to place children which involved a detailed risk assessment process welcomed by all and widely used.
- Recruiting adopters continued: our wonderful adopter champions generously giving their time and personal stories to refresh our 'Be the parent' campaign.
- We produced a high quality professional bi-lingual Podcast, featuring more of our wonderful Welsh adopters and staff. It focused on the assessment and approval process, and continues to do well in the Apple, Google, and Spotify charts.
- We supported and enabled staff to carry on doing what they do, though in very different ways.
- Working jointly with our health colleagues and partners we created a way to manage GP medicals for adopters – which was no mean feat in a public health crisis.

We recognise with immense admiration and gratitude to all:

- Adopters and foster carers who have gone to extraordinary lengths to make things happen for the children they look after, sharing the risk management with us whilst juggling homeworking, home schooling and their own personal challenges.
- Adopter Champions for their continuing support.
- Staff, whatever their role, for their detailed, skilled work in a highly challenging environment, and their adaptability and ingenuity in doing things differently.

Together we have enabled the National Adoption Service to maintain services and continue improvement alongside having the resilience to step into 2021/22 for what we all hope will be a recovery year.



Councillor Alan Lockyer  
Governance Board Chair



Phil Hodgson  
Independent Chair of  
the Advisory Group



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 co-ordination and leadership provided by a small central team and Director. Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) operating in Wales are key partners in the collaborative, as are other agencies including health and education.

## CENTRAL TEAM



Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Cenedlaethol | National  
Adoption  
Service

National Adoption Service  
– Central Team  
c/o City of Cardiff Council,  
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029 2087 3927  
[contact@adoptcymru.com](mailto:contact@adoptcymru.com)  
[www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com)

## MID & WEST WALES

Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire,  
Pembrokeshire



Mabwysiadu  
Canolfan 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](mailto:adoptionenquiries@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)  
[www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk](http://www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk)

## NORTH WALES

Isle 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](mailto:adoption@wrexham.gov.uk)  
[www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk](http://www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk)

## SOUTH EAST WALES

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen,  
Caerphilly, Newport



South East Wales Adoption Service  
Achieving More Together  
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Ddeddfwyrain Cymru  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Glyddi

South East Wales Adoption Service  
North Wing, 2nd Floor Block B,  
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Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 0HZ  
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## VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF

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



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[adoption@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)  
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## WESTERN BAY

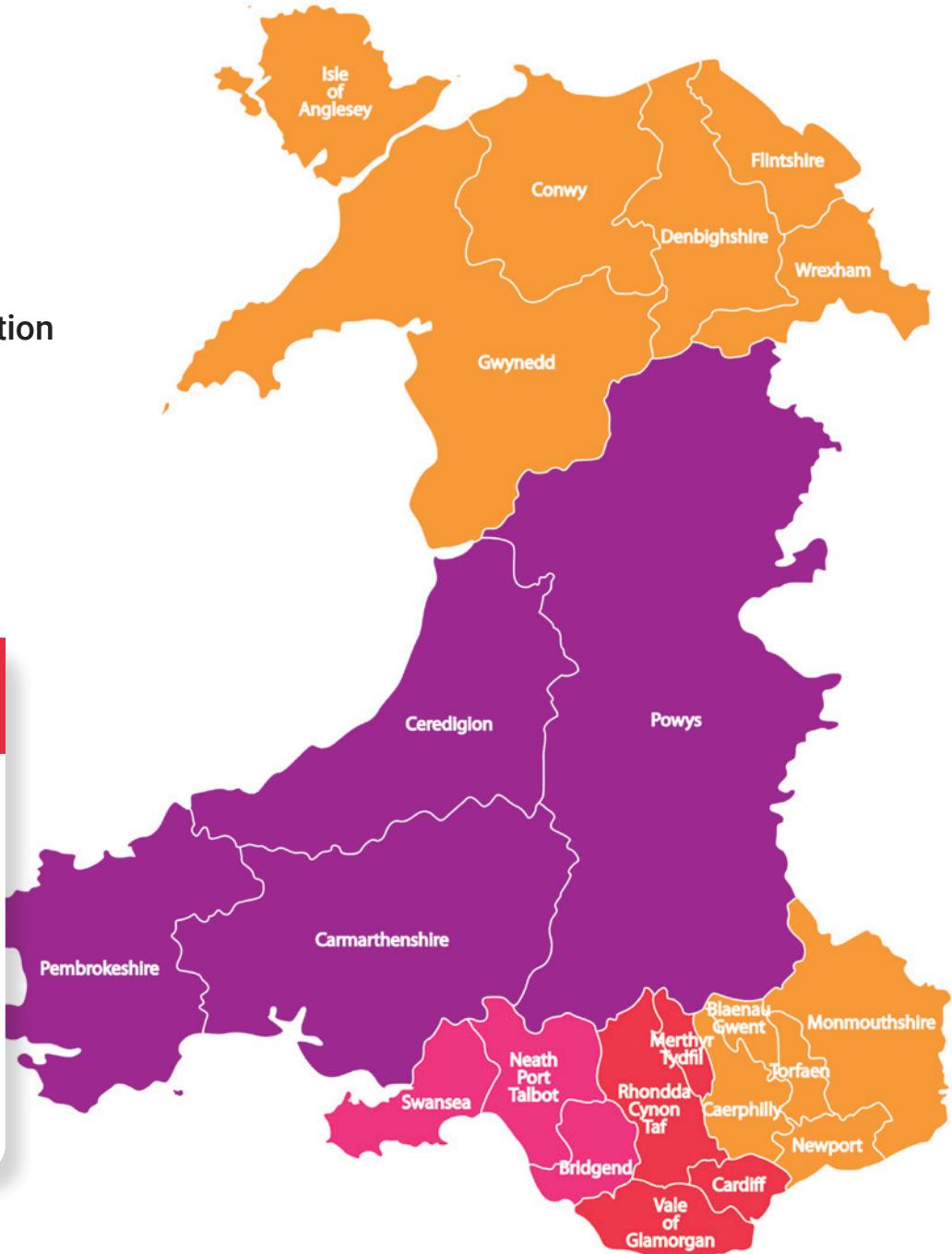
Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend



Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu  
Bae'r Gorllewin  
Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE

Western Bay Adoption Service  
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## All Wales Voluntary Adoption Agencies Services



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Navigation Park,  
Abercynon, CF45 4SN  
029 2076 1155  
Info-afa@stdavidscs.org  
[www.afacymru.org](http://www.afacymru.org)

ADOPTION UK



Adoption UK  
Penhaved Studios,  
Penhaved Street,  
Grangetown,  
Cardiff, CF11 7LU  
029 2023 0319  
[www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)

BARNARDO'S CYMRU



Barnardo's Cymru Adoption  
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Britannia House, Van Road,  
Caerphilly, CF83 3GG  
02920 484316  
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[www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption)

ST DAVID'S CHILDREN SOCIETY



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CF10 3BA  
029 2066 7007  
[info@stdavidscs.org](mailto:info@stdavidscs.org)  
[www.adoptionwales.org](http://www.adoptionwales.org)

# Priorities for 2020/21



“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*

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

## Placing more children

- Increase recruitment of adopters to meet the number and needs of children waiting, including use of 'Adopting Together' for children who wait the longest
- Continue to embed the Adoption Register for Wales

## Continuing to improve adoption support

- Continue to implement the Adoption Support Framework and investment plans
- Continue to raise adoption awareness

## Thinking ahead

- Continue to improve the legal, policy and evidence framework that affects adoption
- Continue to encourage workforce understanding and skills
- Continue to co-produce and use information from engagement

# Placing more children

Increase recruitment of adopters to meet the number and needs of children waiting, including through the Adopting Together Service for children who wait the longest.

## Recruitment

Our aim for this year was to build on the increases in adopter approvals seen in 2019/20 and extend the number of children placed.

Despite the significant challenges of the pandemic, progress continued because of the responsiveness and focus of all services.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

We successfully lobbied Welsh Government to relax implementation of the new two-stage process for assessing and approving adopters, arrangements that remain in place at time of writing. This enabled services to continue assessment and approval without disruption.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

New guidance for services was quickly developed and implemented to reflect this.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

A 'Resource Pack' of exercises and reading for prospective adopters to use was created, issued, and placed on the national website.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

An adopter assessment cannot be completed without home visits, but much can be conducted virtually. Our Vale Valleys and Cardiff region developed a process for part online / part in-person assessments which was shared across Wales and implemented.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

After some challenges, we worked with health colleagues and the Welsh Government to agree a process for 'virtual' GP assessments which enabled the medical side of assessments to continue.

### OUR SUCCESSES:

Adjusted to be sensitive to the situation, marketing continued with a re-fresh of 'Be the parent you can be' campaign. We ran a TV recruitment campaign over the summer followed by feature stories on our website from our adopter champions including a family who adopted 3 siblings and single male adopters.

**“Y**ou know you've got those skill sets because you've been through the process and it's been long and it's been detailed and you know that you can meet this child's needs and it takes time”

**Rachel**

*Rachel and her husband adopted 2 children*

#### OUR SUCCESSES:

National Adoption Week 2020 went completely online. #LetsTalkAdoption included a focus on LGBT+ adoption and the launch of our 'Truth Be Told' Podcast.

#### OUR SUCCESSES:

We are extremely proud to have developed and launched this 6-episode Podcast in English and Welsh. Featuring adopters from across Wales, it focuses on becoming an adopter, and has received excellent feedback and ratings in the podcast 'charts'.



## What were the overall results on recruitment of adopters in 2020/21?

- Enquiries to adopt increased significantly by 23%, more than the year-on-year increases that we have seen since 2014 and we were able to commence more assessments.
- There was a 20% increase in adopter assessments. Considering the situation, these increases were unexpected and provide a positive foundation as we emerge from the pandemic.
- We had hoped to improve on the increase of approved adopters seen in 2019/20, but bearing in mind the context, we only had slight decrease of 8%.
- However, we did see a modest increase in timeframes, which remained on average below 7 months from application to approval.

### Initial Enquiries

2020/21  
enquiries to  
adopt  
increased by

Number of enquiries  
2,163



2014/15



Number of enquiries  
1,161

2015/16



Number of enquiries  
1,197

2016/17



Number of enquiries  
1,280

2017/18



Number of enquiries  
1,550

2018/19



Number of enquiries  
1,689

2019/20



Number of enquiries  
1,764

**"Nowadays, adoption does reflect society, it's moved away from that stringent profile that used to exist"**

Tash – a single adopter of 2 children

## Adopter Assessments Starting

**2020/21  
adopter  
assessments  
starting  
increased by**

Number of assessments

345



2016/17

0%

Number of  
assessments

246

2017/18

13%

Number of  
assessments

277

## Adopter Approvals

**2020/21  
adopter  
approvals  
decreased by**

Number of approvals

231

A circular gauge chart with a red and orange gradient. The number '-8%' is displayed in the center in a large, bold, red font.

2014/15

0%

Number of approvals

294

2015/16

-10%

Number of approvals

266

2018/19

0%

Number of  
assessments

278

2019/20

3%

Number of  
assessments

287

2016/17

-11%

Number of approvals

236

2017/18

-10%

Number of approvals

212

2018/19

0%

Number of approvals

212

2019/20

18%

Number of approvals

250

**“W**e got an audio book that you can record so that when the kids open the page the book it says hello I'm daddy or whatever. We had that, the teddies and a dvd with us mucking around on the beach. We were told to wear the clothes we would when we met them”

Gareth and Clare – adopted 3 siblings



## Placing Children

Moving children, during the pandemic, was particularly challenging.

To enable services to continue, a framework was developed and issued to assist decision making and risk assessment. We held discussions with Welsh Government to clarify that moves into an adoption placement were permissible and ensure their guidance supported it. The framework assisted all regions, local authorities and VAA's, including the Adopting Together service, to continue to make placements.



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

The Adopting Together Service also ran a TV and social media recruitment campaign for three weeks in the autumn, which included three child specific adverts.

This generated 26 enquiries to their service. It adapted its practical and therapeutic support, making it available remotely on a group and 1 to 1 basis, and they placed 5 children within their service.

## Continue to embed the Adoption Register for Wales to speed up matching of children through quicker notification of children and adopters in line with revised regulations

The Adoption Register for Wales (ARW) is a completely bilingual, online family finding service with managed adopter access. The ARW team work closely with each of the Welsh regions and VAA's 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's to ensure the information held by the Register is accurate and up to date.

Quarterly practitioner meetings are held between the ARW team and the regions/VAA's. 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.

The Covid-19 pandemic's public health restrictions have prevented face-to-face family-finding activities, such as Activity Days and Exchange Days, taking place. As a result, the Register developed a virtual way of family-finding with online profiling events.

The first event took place in March 2021 in Mid and West Wales and received positive feedback from adopters and practitioners, leading to five more planned online profiling events in 2021/22. Two face-to-face Adoption Activity Days (one in South Wales and one in North Wales) have also been planned and will be held in accordance with the latest public health guidance.

The Adoption Register continues to work 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. The ARW and the Adopting Together Service meet regularly to track individual children who have either been referred to the service or meet the criteria for referral.



## What was the overall impact for placing children in 2020/21?

- A total of 280 matches have occurred in Wales during 2020/21, a slight decrease from the 285 of the previous year.
- 59 of these matches were identified via the Register compared to 60 the previous year.
- 261 children were placed, just 15% less than the previous year.
- Covid secure practices, including family self-isolation and the detailed risk assessment, understandably increased timeframes, but remained below 11 months from placement order to placement.
- The number of children waiting for placement has been gradually reducing over the last 3 years.
- There were just over 160 children waiting for a placement at the end of March 2021

## Placed for Adoption

2020/21  
placed for  
adoption  
decreased by

Number of placements  
263



**“W**ell, I thought I was going to have a peaceful retirement, but that didn't happen. What's actually happened is something far better. I can't imagine doing anything that could make me feel happier”

Malcolm

Malcolm is an older adopter who adopted a son

# Continuing to improve adoption support

## Continue to implement the Adoption Support Framework and investment plans

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 intended that this 'Core Offer' will

- equip adoptive families at the start and support early days to encourage healthy and confident families.
- provide effective information, advice, and support as and when families need it and in a timely way so any issues that arise are less likely to escalate into more serious issues.
- provide ongoing support or easy re-entry to services when needed.

The £2.3 million investment package in adoption services from the Welsh Government in April 2019 was a real boost and we are using it effectively to create a more consistent offer of support across Wales.

## Overview of adoption support provision in 2020/21

Support to adoptive families was more important than ever in 2020, as was information for professionals working with our families and we did several things to enable this:

- The national website landing page and adoption support pages were adapted to provide clear C-19 information to the public and professionals.
- Likewise regional and VAA websites were updated with useful information.
- In urgent situations and subject to risk assessments visits to families continued to be made.
- Services proactively contacted families and offered additional digital / online advice, support and activities including access to those developed by others. For example, SEWAS psychology service provided some webinars.
- Our newly commissioned support services TESSA and Connected, switched to virtual operating, and increased the numbers of families, children and young people supported over the year.
- We made our series of 'Post Approval' training modules for Adopters available on the website.
- Advice and support were also made available for families as children returned to school. This included a lovely bilingual book 'Sammy the Sloth goes back to school' written by a member of staff in the Mid & West Wales service.
- Webinar discussions were provided by AUK.
- We maintained our internal development work with staff including Adoption Support and Life Journey Work in order to continue to share good practice and work together.
- Our four Good Practice Guides were launched in 2 national conferences in November, followed by 20+ regional implementation events.



**"For me, it was a realisation of a childhood wish to make a difference in somebody's life... if anybody out there is thinking about it, go ahead make that first call, write that email because you won't regret it."**

Tash

*Tash – a single adopter of 2 children*

## What was the outcome?

Overall, the level of new requests for a formal adoption support assessment across Wales remained the same at circa 312.

However, this masks significant change at regional level with the two smaller and less urban regions seeing increased demand and two of the larger, more urban regions seeing a reduction.

A further factor may also be that the pattern of services is changing with new services such as TESSA and Connected; improved levels of support linked to transition as well as the placement of children being available according to need and without a formal assessment.

## TESSA outcomes





**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 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 service launched in November 2019, by the end of March 2021 it had provided a service to 185 families. Service level outcome data is being collected and is extremely positive. It is also being academically evaluated by the University of Strathclyde.



**CONNECT** is a range of initiatives for adopted children and young people in Wales. Connected is the group-based support for children and young people and the only specialist resource for

adopted children and young people in Wales (replacing Talk Adoption). The investment has been used to ensure that this service is available in all parts of Wales also through a match funding arrangement. By end March 2021:

- 150 children and young people are being supported by the Connected groups.
- Ten 18-25 years olds were involved in the youth council work.

In addition, in 2021/22 there will be the launch of:

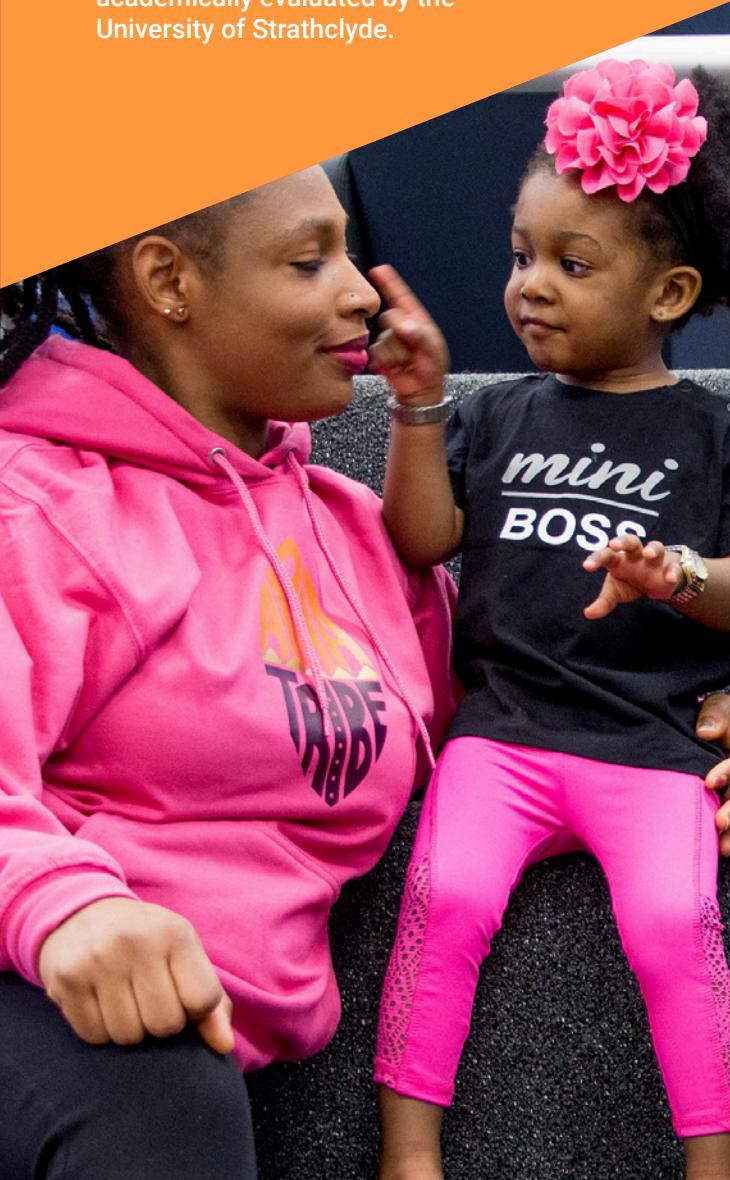
- Two age related Youth Councils
- A young-adopted adult ambassador scheme
- An online advice and Information service for adopted C&YP

A similar match funding model is being used to ensure widest reach.

In addition, and despite the pandemic, regional services have used additional capacity to implement new approaches to support, helping:

- At least 200 adopted families and their children received enhanced transition support and additional therapeutic interventions, including over 30 additional 'Understanding the Child' days'
- At least 100 families with the new approach to contact as well as improving the current letterbox service
- The new approach to Life Journey Work continues to be implemented with 230 or 82% children receiving Life Journey materials at matching and 151 or 68% children receiving complete Life Journey materials at 2nd adoption review.

This improved pattern of services has enabled us to develop an 'Optimal Model' for adoption support in our regions, and where it applies, the VAA's. The Optimal Model describes what should be in place and services benchmark themselves against it to create an improvement plan. This is forming the basis of an agreed 'core offer' of support for Welsh adopters, available regardless of location, that we aim to develop in 2021/22.



## Independent evaluation of adoption support in Wales

We have recently published an evaluation of Adoption Support in Wales, undertaken independently for us by the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brooks University. The fieldwork, conducted remotely in October and November 2020, involved more than 430 individuals concerned with adoption support in Wales, including 313 adoptive parents.

The report provides:

- A reassuring picture of improvements in the availability of adoption support in Wales
- Evidence of increased positivity amongst adoptive families in asking for and receiving support
- Descriptions of additional and innovative new services
- Significant insight into the current needs of adoptive families
- A highlight to the further work needed to create consistent and sustainable services including the importance of the investment funding from Welsh Government continuing.

National Adoption Service report on Adoption Support in Wales – News ([adoptcymru.com](http://adoptcymru.com))



## Continuing to raise adoption awareness amongst professionals and the public

Our four Good Practice Guides, which are the first steps towards the modernisation of adoption in Wales, were launched through two on-line conferences in November 2020, attended by over 320 professionals.

A series of 20+ implementation workshops across Wales followed these in each region, reaching 500 staff for more detailed training.

AFA Cymru, commissioned by us to develop the guides, delivered these events on:

- Contact
- Transition and Early Support
- Working with Birth Parents
- Adoption Support

**“In those moments of connection it never fails to amaze me. My son said ‘why do you hug me so tightly mummy?’ I said because I love you passionately and I do, I really do.”**

**Despite the difficulties and hardship these poor kids have been through and the difficulties we've had in trying to accommodate their needs, at times we've felt out of our depth, but I wouldn't swap anything. My life is so full now.”**

**Clare**

Gareth and Clare – adopted 3 siblings

# Thinking ahead

- Continue to improve the legal, policy and evidence framework that affects adoption
- Encourage workforce understanding and skills
- Co-produce and use information from engagement



The C-19 pandemic required so many different things! Communication to the public and stakeholders as well as engagement and influence was never more important. Besides what we describe in earlier sections of the report, we also:

- Established a regular e-mail briefing for NAS Board members.
- Set up a new joint operational meeting between the regions and VAA's (weekly initially).
- Prioritised provision of advice to Welsh Government by the central team.
- Developed a NAS 'Framework for the Continuation of Services' to support services to move between more or less restrictive service delivery, as might be needed by the progression of the pandemic, while also incorporating learning.
- Put in place a shortened performance collection.
- Supported the VAA's endeavours to maintain business continuity and cash flow, both directly through prompt grant payments and by advocating with others.
- Commissioned three online learning events for staff to support them in working within the context of Covid, on legislation and guidance, moving children and part online assessment of adopters.

Alongside this we progressed existing priorities as well as considered new ones as they arose. For example, Black Live Matters.

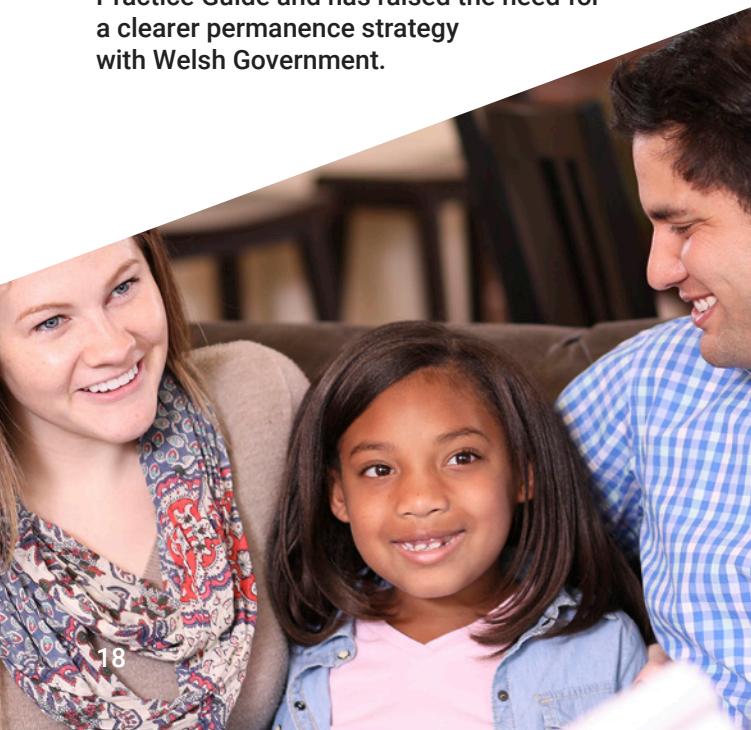
## Review of placement order revocations

Following on from a review of applications undertaken by CAFCASS Cymru, NAS undertook an in-depth review of 46 children where the original plan for adoption returned to court at a later stage and the plan for adoption was changed. This was to look in detail at timeframes for family-finding set, or agreed, by the court; decision making; the characteristics of the children involved; and the implications for permanence that this different plan had for the children involved.

We found that:

- It was unclear why timeframes for family-finding were being used for some children, what they were based on, and whether they were enabling permanence. Data on placement timeframes indicate that 75% of children are placed within 12 months, but much shorter timeframes tend to be set.
- Decisions were being made in appropriate meetings but only circa 25% referred back to the Agency Decision Maker, which is good practice.
- Most of these children had additional complexities and / or were part of a sibling group, but there was no alternative permanence plan for more than 80% who were to remain in foster care.

This raises questions about permanence practice for those children who cannot return to their birth family or community. NAS will be developing a Good Practice Guide and has raised the need for a clearer permanence strategy with Welsh Government.



## Learning the lessons of a significant case

This concerned a relinquished child who had been placed for adoption through concurrent planning arrangements. Subsequently the birth parent changed their mind, and the Family Court became involved; deciding that the child should be returned to the birth family. This was significant both for the emotional impact on the families involved and its rarity in legal and practice terms; it attracted national publicity.

The responsible local authority reviewed the case involving relevant professionals and advisors.

This led to:

- The local authority and the regional service developing operational practices.
- A review of the current good practice guidance 'Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and CAFCASS: Children Relinquished for Adoption' by NAS, CAFCASS and AWHOCS.
- Development of guidance on planning for early permanence for children through a concurrency model called 'Welsh Early Permanence.' This will provide a model for placing children in their adoptive family at first placement until changes can be made to the Foster to Adopt regulations which currently do not offer this.

## Revised partnership agreement for NAS

This was finalised and issued for signature and implementation.

## Black Lives Matter

NAS joined with other organisations across Wales in pledging to tackle racism, signing up to the 'Zero Racism Wales' campaign as well as commissioning training on unconscious bias.

# 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 a plan for adoption 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.

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

*Ben and Adam – adopted their son*



@nas\_cymru



@nationaladoptionservice

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Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd