

St David's Children Society

Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2021



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St David's Children Society



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Note from the Editor



Welcome to the Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2021, a summary of the news and developments across St David's over the past twelve months. The past year has seen us move to a new 'normal', where we can see families in person, blending these with online meetings, and starting to make plans for meeting up in groups. We have reflected on what being a family meant during a pandemic; and on the resilience, adaptability and courage families have shown during lockdown and each unique experience that introduced - including home-schooling (to the best of everyone's efforts!)

Over the past year, we've continued to develop our service to families: we've introduced new 'information about adoption' workshops, to give people who're thinking about adoption an overview of the process, but more importantly, the opportunity to hear directly from adopters who've recently adopted. These personal accounts are invaluable and offer the greatest insights into what adoption is like in 2021. We are so grateful to our adoptive families who make time to talk at workshops, 'buddy' up prospective adopters going through the process, or to be a listening ear to those who are going through a challenging time.

National Adoption Week in October saw us celebrate adoption, and we invited families to share their story, which highlight the joys and delights of being a family, along with some of the challenges and realities of adoption today. You'll read some reaffirming accounts in this newsletter, from a single adopter, new and more established adoptive families and a young person talking about becoming a sister through adoption.

We've seen the launch of the new [AFA Cymru website](http://www.afacymru.org.uk) www.afacymru.org.uk with its excellent resources for adoption and fostering. We are committed to continued learning and development, making it as accessible as possible, including making workshops available as webinars and adding new podcasts and audio books in our 'recommended reading/listening'.

This year we have shared some wonderful moments with you, celebrated your adoption journey with you, and supported you when it's been challenging. We've welcomed new staff to St David's, who have brought a wealth of diverse experience to our team and who join a strong team committed to improving the lives of children in Wales as we look ahead to 2022.

Martina McCrossan
Adoption Services Manager



The past year has undoubtedly remained one of challenge as we have all continued to navigate our way through the impact of the pandemic. None have experienced this more than yourselves. Adoption with all its joy also brings with it levels of complexity at whatever stage of the adoption journey you are at, either as newly approved adopters, recently formed families or been parenting for many years without having to navigate a global pandemic. As was the story of last year, over this year you have had to wear multiple hats particularly through the harsh winter lockdown when schools were closed. Juggling the demands of being teacher as well as parent is no mean feat. However, despite all these challenges we can all collectively look back with pride as we have not only survived but continued to thrive.



This is attributable to all the staff including our independent social workers who work so tirelessly to deliver our services, our panel and Trustee members who give their time generously but mostly to you all who continue to be constantly available and accessible to your children so that they can be the best they can be. This requires enormous emotional as well as physical energy so please always remember that we are here for you every step of the way.

So what have we been doing over the last 12 months?

Over the past year (from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 we have grown our family of adopters by 29(compared to 27 last year) and placed 28 children for adoption. We have been delighted both in welcoming new parents to St David's, and also placing children with their forever family. At the start of the pandemic, there was no movement of children into their new families. We were very concerned about significant delays for children but also on the emotional toll for new parents as they waited to welcome their child into the family. Working alongside all our colleagues in the National Adoption Service, a way through these early difficulties was sought and during the subsequent months of 2020 children began to move into their new homes. From the 28 children placed, 5 were placed through the Adopting Together Service established for children with specific needs who may wait longer for a family than other children where adoption is the plan.

We were absolutely delighted when Adopting Together through the partnership of St.David's with Cardiff University recently won a top award in the societal impact category at the best of the best KTP awards. Cardiff University School of Psychology and Business School have continued to be valuable partners to the Society during the past year offering support, expertise and acting as a critical friend when needed. Over the past year we moved many of our support activities online, with monthly coffee meet ups and quarterly support groups with speakers. We also facilitated online training both for those at the very first stage of their adoption journey and post approval training. Everyone has adapted so well to this new way of working and it certainly has reaped unforeseen benefits for those families who live some distance away from the office.



However, we have also been conscious that nothing actually replaces that face-to-face interaction, so we introduced a blended approach to support visits and have recently had a couple of outdoor meet ups that have been very well received. We are tentatively planning more of these smaller events so keep an eye on any announcements that will be being made.

From an innovative perspective in 2020/21 we worked closely with our partner The Family Place to deliver a range of post placement psychological support interventions. This service was offered via a grant received from Welsh Government for Adopting Together The feedback from these interventions has been extremely positive and with additional funding in 2021/22 we have been able to continue with this package of support.

I would like as this juncture to extend thanks to Welsh Government for their support throughout the past year reinforcing their belief in the contribution we make to the adoption and wider permanency sector. We have been very grateful to them for the awarding of grants to the Adopting Together Service and to AFA Cymru. Alongside the benefits of grant monies for Adopting Together, the grant for AFA Cymru enabled the team to continue to deliver specialist interest groups to a professional from across the permanency sector, including medical and legal advisors, IRO's, panel chairs and those working with those families who parent children through Special Guardianship Orders. We have also been able to continue to produce the much-revered legal bulletins for professionals – making sense of how law impacts on practice and maintained our advice and information services for professionals and members of the public. For more information on the work of AFA Cymru go to their recently launched new website www.afacymru.org.uk

Postponed in the earlier months of the pandemic, our work on a marketing strategy has once more gathered momentum and we have been extremely grateful to all those who gave their time so generously to help shape this important piece of work. We hope to be able to externalise this fruits of work over the next twelve months, particularly as 2022 will be our 80th anniversary year!

I would also like to express my thanks to all our partners in the National Adoption Service, (NAS) including colleagues in both the statutory and voluntary sector as well as those colleagues in health, education and legal services. It has never been more critical than in a time of national adversity that we work closely together with all partners for the wider benefits of the children and families who depend on our services. This collaborative working also provides the robust foundation for further partnership working as we all share a collective goal of Wales delivering on the best adoption service - you our families and children deserve nothing less.

Whilst not underestimating the challenges that you continue to face particularly in respect of accessing mental health services or the right education provision for your child, the latest AUK Barometer report published by AUK reported that 80% of respondents (adoptive parents) in Wales were likely to encourage others to adopt and 83% were feeling optimistic about the future so that is a vote of confidence that we are heading in the right direction. Have a look at the link on our website www.adoptionwales.org for the report in full.

Reflections on the Year | Wendy Keidan, CEO



Any account of a year in the life of the Society must give a very genuine and sincere 'thank you' to the trustees, adoption panel members and advisors to the Society who so generously share their expertise, experience and time to support us in so many different ways. The Society is deeply grateful to our volunteers who skilfully scrutinise and inform much of what we do.

I would also like to thank all who have so generously supported the work of the society through covenants, gift aid and donations. St. David's relies on your generosity to help sustain our services and we remain indebted to your help.

These reflections of the year are not complete without mention of changes within St. David's itself.

I am delighted to welcome new members of staff to St David's including Donna, Glenda, Beth, Sue, Caroline, Caryn and Marianne who transferred over from the AFA Cymru team to join the social work team. We said goodbye to Mel, Jodie and Joy and thanked them for their fantastic contribution to the Society over the years and wished them well for the future. We were delighted to make two internal promotions of Martina and Cate to Adoption Service manager and team manager respectively. We have also welcomed Sam, Amy and Emma to the AFA Cymru team.

I do hope after the turbulence of the last 18 months, that you can all find or have found a new normal that will enable you to do enjoy some of the things that make life joyous once more, such as meeting up with family and friends, visits and activities to much loved places, or just being still and enjoying the moment.

As we look ahead to next year we can do so with confidence as St.David's has always been the sum of many parts – its excellent governance through the Board of Trustees, the commitment of a superb and dedicated staff team, all our partner agencies who support our work but mostly our families who through the many peaks and troughs of day to day life steadfastly continue to support us so that we can be a responsible guide for you.

I wish you all a peaceful end to 2021 and a bright year ahead

Wendy Keidan
CEO

Trustees



Katherine Shelton, Chair of the Board.

After a difficult 18 months, and ongoing uncertainty about the winter, it is my fervent hope that you and your families have had the opportunity over the summer to see your friends and loved ones and for those times together to serve as moments for reconnection and laughter. Every meeting these days seems to carry such emotional weight. As I reflect on my own responses to seeing people from whom I was separated during the pandemic, it reminds me with renewed force how important it is for families to feel held and supported by their social and professional networks; for families not to feel isolated or alone. It is deeply reassuring to recognise this sentiment in the work, conversations, and behaviours that are evident throughout St. David's Children Society. St. David's staff remain completely committed to championing the needs of adopters, never shying away from powerful advocacy, campaigning and effective diplomacy.

While many organisations have retreated from normal operations in response, of course, to unprecedented pressures, it is notable that the team at St. David's have not stood still. This year has seen a renewed commitment to support for families, alongside huge leaps forward in the delivery of professional training and development as part of the Adoption and Fostering Association (AFA) Cymru service. Most exciting is the news that the number of adopters at St David's has grown by 29 with 28 children supported to join their new families, 5 of these through Adopting Together. Since 2018, 21 children have now been placed with families as part of the award-winning Adopting Together Service; this Service has demonstrated the power of collaborative and therapeutically informed adopted work. It is positive proof of how we can make a difference to the lives of some of our most vulnerable children.

I encourage everyone involved with the Society to take a moment to look at the Society webpage. There is something for everyone in a variety of formats. It's a testament to a community of professionals who consistently look to maintain their high standards of care and support for families and an organisation that seeks to create and implement sector-leading practice. [Adoption Wales | St. David's Children Society](#)

I'm really looking forward to a time when everyone involved with the Society can meet and celebrate new beginnings and ongoing journeys of development. It will be great to meet some of you in person! In the meantime, thank you to all the families and staff for their ongoing support for the Society and a heartfelt wish for a good end to the year.



Marrienne Palin



I'm Marrienne. I have worked for St Davids Children's Society for five years, formerly as a trainer consultant for the Association of Fostering and Adoption, and latterly as a senior social worker. I have over twenty years of experience in the world of child care, fostering and adoption and have a deep understanding of developmental trauma. When I am not working I can be found walking my dog, tending my garden, and providing a taxi service to my teenage girls!

Donna O'Reilly



Hi I'm Donna. I am really excited to have joined the St David's family as a social worker in April 2021. Everyone has been really kind and generous with their time in helping me to settle into my role and I am looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can. Together with my role as a senior social worker, I am also undertaking transitions work with the Adopting Together Service. I look forward to working alongside all the amazing St David's families, both to hopefully share some of my expertise with you but also to learn from you and to understand what your experience of adoption has been like. Having qualified as a social worker in 2000, I have held a variety of positions both within the Local Authority, NHS and charitable sector, from Child Protection to CAMHS. My most recent post has been as a therapeutic practitioner in a specialist CAMHS team in Bristol.

I am a relative newcomer to Wales, having moved with my family from London just over 6 years ago. I have really enjoyed getting to know the vibrant Welsh culture and all the amazing people and places. My pronunciation needs some work, but I hope with practice to get there. I have really enjoyed getting to know the Wales of my husband's childhood and the places that he used to visit, from sledging down the sand dunes in Merthyr Mawr to climbing Pen y Fan. Together we have four children and a new 6-month-old labradoodle puppy, so there is never a dull moment in our household. In my very limited spare time I like to walk, especially through the woodlands or coastal paths.

Staff Update



Sue Waite

Hi, my name is Sue and having worked for St David's as an Independent Social Worker for the last 7 years and joined them as a permanent member of staff in August 2021. I have been a Social Worker for 28 years, having begun my career as Hospital Social Worker and then working in a variety of roles within Adult Services before making the transition into adoption in 2010. I remember thinking at the time, "my goodness this is complex and so much to learn". I soon came to realise that adoption is an ever-evolving area and one that I am constantly learning from. I have been fortunate during my career to see positive change and developments in adoption that have benefitted both the children awaiting adoptive placements as well as the prospective adopters going through the process to become adoptive parents, which I have welcomed.

I live with two of my three children, the eldest having flown the nest some years ago, so am familiar with some of the joys and challenges of parenthood. We have a menagerie of pets, including a beagle and a basset hound who help to keep me fit and active. I also love reading, gardening, live music and was overjoyed when vinyl became trendy again having accumulated a large collection mainly during the 80s, which I still enjoy playing!

During my career in adoption, I have been fortunate to have met some amazing adoptive families as well as, working with some knowledgeable and forward-thinking professionals who have helped me navigate my own journey through adoption and its many facets. I look forward to bringing my own personal skills and experience to St David's and continuing to support our adopters and their families through their own personal adoption journey.

Caroline O'Shaunessey



Hello I am Caroline. I am fairly new to the St David's team, having joined in March 2021. I have been working in the field of adoption (and fostering) for over 8 years now, having previously worked for another voluntary adoption agency and before that as a Local Authority social worker. I was so pleased to have the opportunity to come to St David's for my own development and to focus on adoption. I really enjoy working with children and families and have been able to realise this personal objective since I started in post.

I live with my husband, our son, a cat, 2 rabbits and 1 very elderly chicken (11 years old), with my older daughter and her family living nearby. As a family we try to spend lots of time together, including going on holidays (now we are able). I enjoy walking and have recently started singing lessons, I promise not to volunteer to sing at any future St David's events until I can hold a note/tune successfully. I look forward to getting to know all the families here at St David's better as well as welcoming new adopters in the future.



Glenda Sloan



Hello everyone, my name is Glenda and I joined the team in November 2020. I will be celebrating my 1st year with you all shortly and what a fabulous year it has been! Joining the team has enabled me to make the most of my skills, knowledge and qualifications in Social Work and Play Therapy.

I have been a Child Care Social Worker for 21 years working predominately in Fostering and was an Assistant Team Manager within a Local Authority Fostering Team for 10 years before leaving to work in the Voluntary Sector. Whilst working in Fostering I decided that I needed to be more involved with the long term outcomes for Children and Young People and for me this meant re-training as a Play Therapist, qualifying in 2012.

I have provided play therapy to children from the age of 3 to 18 years and currently split my working week between St. David's and a voluntary Attachment Trauma Service who specialise in supporting children to recover from early life trauma while continuing to grow and strengthen their attachment relationship with their parent/caregiver. As I said above this has been a fabulous 1st year for me in St. David's as I work with a wonderful team of Social Workers, Administrators, Managers, Adopting Together Service and Dan! I have been able to access training opportunities to enhance my support to Adopters as well as participate in transition work through ATS.

I am looking forward to another exciting year and the opportunity to see more of the Team, as well as meeting you all at various events in the year ahead.

Caryn Edwards



Hi, I'm Caryn.

I am the newest member of the administration team at St David's. I was working in the travel industry up until the start of the pandemic, but moving into the world of adoption has been a much welcomed change which I am thoroughly enjoying. I have been made to feel so welcome by the all of the staff and adopters, even though starting a new job during this period has been a little strange.

I live with my fiancé, my step daughters who are 12 and 7 and our 3 year old daughter, not forgetting our cat Suzie.

I love spending time with our family and friends when not at work, and thoroughly looking forward to travelling again now that we allowed.



Emma Simpson



Hi, I'm Emma, and this month I've joined the lovely AFA team as a Trainer/Consultant. Everyone at AFA and St.David's has been so welcoming. I qualified as a Social Worker from Cardiff University in 2004, and had placements in a Cardiff IFA and a domestic violence refuge in the valleys. I've worked with Children and Families since then, across Child Protection teams, a Local Authority Adoption Team and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies. I worked at Action For Children as an Adoption Team Manager and then CCS Adoption as the Head of Adoption, where I had overall responsibility for the Social Work Service, Therapeutic Service and The Centre. I originally studied Architecture at Cardiff but unfortunately I can't design a house, the extend of my architecture skills now are putting together a flat pack wendy house.

Outside of work I enjoy lots of fun times with my daughter, friends and family, we can usually be found getting lost in a wood (our record is until 9pm this summer, my daughter has mentioned it once or twice since), arts and craft (my favourite programme was Blue Peter as a kid) and generally going to family activities across the South West and South Wales.

I'm excited to have a role where I can support professionals to further their knowledge, passion and curiosity about Permanency in Wales. Looking forward to meeting you all soon.

Sam Frith Jones



Hi, I'm Sam.

I qualified as a social worker in Wales in 2006. I began my employment working with families and children in need of protection and children looked after. Whilst in these teams I realised I had a passion for ensuring best outcomes for those children who were unable to return home to their families. I went on to spend the majority of my career to date working in a Local Authority fostering service. My work has had a particular focus on achieving permanence and stability for children and supporting foster carers and the team around the child to succeed.

I joined AFA Cymru as the Operational Manager in April 2021 and am proud to be surrounded by colleagues who are also really passionate about sharing good practice across Wales in the permanency sector.



Amy Shepperd



I entered social work as a mature student following working in social care, youth work and education. These early roles gave me the opportunity to meet some truly inspirational children looked after and their families, opportunities which would drive my professional career in the years to come.

I qualified as a Social Worker in 2010 since which time I have worked in Child and Family, Adult Mental Health and Fostering. I've always had a passion for learning and development, and, as my colleagues and peers in youth work, social work and foster care will tell you – I can shoe-horn a bit of learning into any situation!

So whether it's a mind-boggling presentation about hiking socks (yes this did happen), or as far flung as presenting at learning events both nationally and internationally ... you can guarantee I'll take any opportunity to start a conversation and get inspired by learn-

ing together with those around me.

When the opportunity to apply to be a Trainer Consultant at AFA Cymru became available I could see a chance to combine my two workplace passions: being part of the solution in ensuring children can achieve and sustain permanence, and, empowering and championing the shared motivations of those around me to do the same.

All this work requires a good balance of course and so when I'm not at the desk you can find me playing with my young family, riding my mountain bike or relaxing with a bit of yoga. I'm partial to a coffee and consider myself a chocolate connoisseur.

As you can imagine I was absolutely delighted to join the team here at St David's Children's Society and AFA Cymru in March 2021 and continue to be amazed on a daily basis by the dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism I see every day – this energises me and drives me to be my best and I look forward to working with you all now and in the future!



Hello to you all from everyone at AFA Cymru!

What a year it has been. We feel as a team we have come a long way over the past year and we are sure you feel the same too. Like everyone we have had to make changes and adaptations to the way we are living and working and we are really pleased that our services to adopters, foster carers, social workers and teams across Wales has grown and been so well received.

We are really enjoying all the benefits of online learning and although we miss meeting up with you face to face, we are finding new, productive ways to communicate with people via online platforms and finding that most attendees are enjoying the accessibility it offers.

We have had lots of staff changes over the past year too. We have welcomed two new Trainer Consultants, Amy Shepherd and Emma Simpson and we also have a new manager, Samantha Frith-Jones who will be stepping up to the role once our current Service Manager, Sarah Thomas leaves in November. We wish Sarah all the very best in her new role and thank her for all the knowledge and opportunities she has shared with us as a team over the past two years.

The team at AFA Cymru remain as focused as ever in achieving best outcomes for children across Wales and are working on developing and delivering a range of courses designed to support practitioners, adopters and foster carers in how to achieve stability and permanence. We have also been busy designing and developing our newly updated website which has just launched, so if you have time take a look to see what we're working on with our partnership agencies.

Over the past year we have achieved lots of success with our project work too. We were commissioned by the National Adoption Service to develop four Good Practice Guides in four key areas: Contact; Working with Birth Parents; Transitions and early support; and Adoption Support. We are delighted to inform you that these guides have now been launched. They include best practice examples from across Wales and they take into account the most up to date research and evidence available. The guides are already informing and supporting practitioners in what needs to happen at each stage of a child's journey to adoption and post adoption. We are so pleased with the feedback we have received and that our guides are making a positive difference to the lives of our children and families.

AFA Update



AFA Cymru has also been proud to have been involved in the work of the National Fostering Framework since it began in 2016. During this time we have developed various Good Practice Guides in relation to fostering. AFA Cymru was commissioned to project manage the framework by the National Adoption Service, Welsh Local Government Association and All Wales Head Of Children Services. We have project managed the framework throughout its period of transformation to Maethu Cymru/Foster Wales which has united a national network of 22 Welsh Local Authority fostering services.

You may have recently seen adverts across social media and television for Maethu Cymru/Foster Wales. We are really pleased with the positivity surrounding this project and that it is achieving its aim for children in Wales.

We look forward to meeting some of you on our courses or to chatting to you on our dedicated information, advice and guidance line if you ever need us.

Warm regards to you and your family,

From all the staff at AFA Cymru

Adopting Together Service



We've had another busy and successful year at the Adopting Together Service. Since the Service went live in May 2018, we have matched 25 children with their lifelong families, and are supporting another 5 children to move before the end of the financial year. This is transformational for all the children and families involved, particularly as so many of these children were on the cusp of their plan changing to long-term fostering. We have had such positive feedback from the families involved regarding their experience of the 4 components of the Adopting Together Service and the difference it has made in their adoption journey.

Our families have been supported through our psychology-led service throughout their adoption journey once a match has been identified - before their child/ren are placed, during transitions and introductions, followed by psychological consultations once they begin their new family life. We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from those of you who have adopted through the Service.

Psychology groups and wider psychological input

We have benefitted from the continued support from Welsh Government and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales this year. One of the most important offers is our monthly psychologist-facilitated 'pop-in' group. This has been running since September 2019 and is now offered remotely in the evening and has continued to support families.

We have also been able to utilise funding to offer learning and support packages to adopters, from Foundations for Attachment, sensory regulation programmes and individual psychology consultations as well as specialist training for social workers on our therapeutic transition process, and clinical workshops. We are offering adopters training on the teenage brain and strategies to support young people and families, in the new year.

Profiling events

Since January 2021 we have hosted 3 virtual profiling events – in March, June, and November 2021. These give prospective adopters the opportunity to find out about the children waiting in Wales for families, and to understand more about their lived experience. It also helps develop conversations around matching between prospective adopters and their social workers after the session.



CSR campaigns

The Adopting Together Service has continued to trial innovative child-specific campaigns in the media for children waiting for a family and who are at risk of remaining in long-term foster care. Following risk assessments and partnership with local authorities we have run 4 social media campaigns in this calendar year. We have also had our first approved adopters come from last year's September national recruitment campaign.

Partnership working

Adopting Together works closely with all its partners in the National Adoption Service and part of this partnership working is the ongoing dissemination of the Adopting Together offer to colleagues across the sector. This year we have had meetings and discussions with all the 5 adoptions regions in Wales, CAF/CASS, Independent Reviewing Officers and others through the Adopting Together Stakeholder Group as well as the Adoption Register Wales.

Please do get in touch if you would like any further information about the Adopting Together Service adoptingtogether@stdavidscs.org

Singeta Kalhan-Gregory
Service Manager, Adopting Together Service



'Adopting Together' wins top UK award

KTP crowned for societal impact

www.cardiff.ac.uk

The Adopting Together Service has recently received national recognition for its impact and societal benefit, receiving a national award for best societal impact from Innovate UK for the KTP partnership between St. David's Children Society and Cardiff University. This was despite impressive co-nominees in this category. This is the third award that Adopting Together has received for innovation, societal benefit, and impact.





What I've learned three (and a half) years in

“By trial and error we've got to know each other's personalities, foibles and eccentricities – and it's made us all more secure”

The past three years seems to have passed both as slow as forever and as fast as the blink of an eye. Over the years we have had it all. Love. Laughs. Tantrums. Lack of sleep. Hitting. Biting. You name it, we've had it.

I've learnt that I had never actually done a hard day's work before having children, that it's a constant juggling act, that somewhere between 6-7pm every child turns into a cross between a spinning top and an over-stimulated chimpanzee and that I'm more capable than I give myself credit for.

I really feel we've formed a strong bond with our children,

and that as well as love, there is trust – we really are doing this by trial and error, but we hope we are getting something right.

I remember the unknown of going to the play park with our children in the early days when they struggled to recognise us. For a long time, they'd be looking round, and you could see on their faces the question: “Is that Daddy? I think it's that man over there, he looks tall enough.” Likewise, we would be panicking if we couldn't see them in case they ran off and didn't come back to us. Not to mention having two active toddlers with a fondness for mud, bark and water, running in opposite directions straight towards trouble. Now at the play park, they recognise our voices instantly, they both “check in” with regularity and they occasionally even do what we ask them to. They still run off but are secure in the knowledge that, if they turn around to check, one of us will be there.

We like to think we know what will make them both giggle and when they are frightened or just hungry; and we recognise their cries/shouts of “dad/daddy” amongst all the other cries. Knowing them better helps us empathise with our children (adopted or not) when, through crankiness, they are just trying to control the situation, or genuinely being fearful when they're doing something for the first time.

It has taken time to get to know each other's personalities, foibles and eccentricities. But the knowledge has made us all more secure. I no longer worry if people can spot, I have no idea what I am doing when trying to handle a tantrum in the street, and I now know when their ears get redder and redder they're desperate for sleep. They no longer hold themselves still and quiet at bedtime, instead they press every button they can to get us to let them stay up, just like every other child does.

Like all parents, we've had to learn how to be parents alongside learning about our children.

In adoption, the issues we face are deeply emotionally rooted, stemming from a lack of permanence as a result of multiple sets of carers and poor experiences in early life. These experiences can manifest themselves as poor or even anti-social behaviour. Having a sense of permanence means you know that things and people exist when you can't see, touch or hear them, but without it children fear that they themselves don't exist and need to reassure themselves constantly.

An Adopter Experience



Their whirlwind tantrums, how the simplest and most menial tasks can take hours, I feel, when that moment of peace finally comes, that we got through something huge, and I say, 'If you two were anyone else, that would not have been cool.' I mean it. I would not take that crap from anyone else. In so many ways being an adoptive parent is exactly as joyful, relentless, messy and profound as being any parent.

We don't have a crystal ball. We can't predict the future. There will be many hurdles (their teenage years!), but there will be so much joy. We prepare as best we can, as we continue to learn from each other through a space of understanding, openness, honesty and love. No painting of perfection.

So, were our children going ballistic because they feel unsettled, insecure in their attachment to us and need to draw our attention constantly back to them? Have they been damaged by their early life experience and just cannot master self-control? Was it our fault – are we just awful at this parenting lark and can't manage our own children? Do they just have energetic personalities and is it nature rather than nurture?

Or do they simply need a good sleep?

In adoption nothing is straightforward, but I can say the rewards of getting to know your children – and allowing them the time to get to know themselves – outweigh the difficulties.



Image pexels



Adopting an older child as a single parent

I was 47 when I first started enquiring about adoption. When I discovered that there was no upper age limit, and that I could adopt as a single parent, I allowed myself to believe that perhaps I could still become a mum after all.

Both my age, and the fact that I work full time, led me to the decision to try and adopt an older child, and for me that meant 5+. There was also a part of me that felt far more sympathy for these older children, who are deemed to be 'harder to place'.

I pictured myself adopting a little girl, because (gender stereotype alert!) I assumed that we would have more in common and be able to do more things together.

Fate had other ideas.

My little BOY moved in with me just after he'd turned 6, and I'd turned 49. As it turns out, he and I have plenty of things that we like to do together. We both love animals, art, singing, movies, the beaches and the woods, road trips, shopping, cafes, parks and cake shops.... But, far more than that, I could not have foreseen the close relationship that we would develop.

We didn't have an easy start. The first very humbling lesson I learned is that I wasn't 'rescuing' him from a horrible life, at least not in his mind. He loved his foster family very deeply, having lived with them for two and a half years, and he called them his mum and dad, and his four foster sisters were his sisters. Our four weeks of 'Introductions' (these were longer for us because he was older) were very difficult, and – although we did have some fun days out together – there were days where he was clearly rejecting me, screaming at me, telling me he didn't want me, to go away, hitting me.

At the age he was, he'd already experienced multiple moves and care-givers, and by now he was just old enough to understand what was happening to him, but not quite old enough to understand why, which was very hard to navigate. I was staying in a hotel, away from my own home, and it was a very lonely, scary time. Could he ever trust or love me like he did his foster mum? Or worse, might he actually come to HATE me, for taking him away from the only happy life he knew? ... What was I doing??

With the help of some comforting chats with St David's, and because I was never going to give up on him, I stuck with it. The reality was that, as much as they loved him, this little boy couldn't stay with this foster family and so he probably would have had to move anyway – just, to a different foster home, and maybe another one after that, and so on.

An Adopter Experience



The day he moved in with me went much better than expected, but our first few months at home together were the hardest time of my entire life. He demanded constant attention, his anxiety meant that he followed me around the house, and he had unending hyperactivity. For the first few weeks he wasn't yet ready for his new school, and I wasn't yet allowed to leave him with anyone else, and so I had absolutely no respite from this. As a single parent, I wasn't able to pop out for five minutes. I could barely even leave him alone long enough to make us food or have a shower.

Also, we were still strangers, only just starting to get to know each other... I don't know how I got through this time, except through supportive social workers (they made a crucial decision to allow his foster mum to start visiting him, which changed everything) and sheer determination just to make it through each day. The Adopting Together scheme afforded me regular online sessions with child psychologist Viv Norris, who gave me the reassurance I needed that everything I was experiencing was 'normal'.

Two years on, I can look back at this time and really appreciate the enormous leaps we've made.

Being a single parent is never easy. However, there is an argument for saying that he has benefitted from having me all to himself, and getting all that one-to-one attention.

I admit I'm not very good at asking for help from family and friends if it isn't being offered. But the support system that I had planned as a single adopter ended up being taken away from me anyway by Covid. The first lockdown happened just six months after his placement with me, and I don't think I've ever recovered the energy that this took, let alone everything that's happened since.

Hard as it was, though, being forced to be alone together for much of 2020 may well have helped me and him to bond. Luckily, I was still on Adoption Leave during that first lockdown – thanks to a pre-agreed adoption allowance – which meant that I was able to focus on him and me, without any pressures of work. In fact, we very soon gave up on the school work as well, and just enjoyed what we could of the situation – the walks with our dog, the time in our garden, looking after our chickens, growing things, painting, baking, and the trampoline and paddling pool.

Unfortunately – and not helped by the disruptions - his biggest challenges since coming to live with me have turned out to be at school. These difficulties are ongoing and currently my biggest worry. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he has a suspected attachment disorder, and he has almost certain trauma-based sensory issues. He tries very hard to contain himself, but struggles at school to stay regulated. He's behind with his reading and writing and this impacts his already damaged self-esteem. He has triggers which lead him into flight AND fight mode, and sometimes his school – even though they are excellent and he has his own LSA – struggle to cope with him. I can't go through a day without constantly checking my phone. So, this can't go on long-term and we are now getting further help, through a provision in his Post Adoption Support Plan. I hang on to signs of progress at school, however small, and pray it will get easier.

An Adopter Experience



It's sometimes said that adopting an older child means you can have a better idea of 'what you're getting'. Although I had anticipated him finding learning difficult, I hadn't anticipated him finding the school environment such a challenge. But apart from that, he is indeed very much as he was described on his adoption profile (he is 'quirky', and lively!). But, our relationship with each other is far better than I ever imagined it would be, and my doubts about whether or not he could ever learn to trust or love me have been firmly put to rest. He's now very settled and happy at home, and we have a deep bond. He is incredibly insightful for an 8 year old, and surprisingly self-aware, which is amazing, though it did break my heart once to hear him say, 'I wish I wasn't like this'.

It took a year before he decided he was going to call me Mum, and having the legal adoption finally go through in spring this year has definitely cemented the relationship we already had. We still see his foster family regularly, and he seems to have gained closure on that part of his life, without having to break ties with it completely.

I'm constantly making picture books to document our lives together, and I'm trying my best to help him make sense of his complex past. But, despite all the pain and loss he's experienced, he is still so loving, and still so open to being loved. At his core, he is incredibly kind, and popular - and great fun, and colourful, and funny - and I feel so proud to call him my son. The last two years have been so hard, but absolutely worth it.



The First 1000 Days



Our Adoption Journey – By Hope aged 9.

When I was six years old my Mum and Dad talked about adopting a little girl or boy. I thought it was a great idea so did my brother too. I think you should as well. A few months later Mum and Dad went on a course about adoption and me and my brother had to stay with my Nan and Granny for a day or two whilst they were on a course. They found a perfect social worker for us. Her name was Cate, she was brilliant. She asked us some questions like “do you want a brother or sister?” “what do you like to do?” “how do you feel?” – those types of questions.

After six months Mum and Dad went to find out if we could adopt someone. THEY SAID YES!!!! It was so exciting, since that day we had all been getting ready. Woohoo. Cate’s job was to find the most perfect little boy or girl. After a few weeks she said she found a beautiful little girl. Mum and Dad met her first. Two days later me and my brother went to visit her. Then five days later we bought her to our house, it was so fun! It felt very exciting but different. I love her and I like how much me, my brother and our sister all get on so well.

We both like playing with the guinea pigs and rabbits together and we love going on the trampoline with each other. I love sharing a bedroom with her it is lovely she is the best.

Our Adoption Story

Hi I’m Tara. My partner Andrew and I have been very fortunate to adopt our beautiful little old girl. She has been with us for 10 weeks now and is settling in amazingly well. It’s our first child and we are both in our 40’s, so it has been a little bit of a shock to the system. Despite the steep learning curve, we could not be happier with the changes in our life and are overjoyed at how well she has connected with us and our families.

We are an active family and love to get out and about with our daughter as much as we can. It has also been so much fun finally watching her play with the toys and activities that have been in the house for months! Fortunately, we have also still found time to engage in a variety of our own personal hobbies and I have been writing a children’s book called ‘The Little Black Cat’, which is currently with a publishing company to be published early next year.

The adoption journey has been a long one but the reward is everything we dreamed of. We welcome people to ask us questions about any part of our adventure. We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from St David’s and other adopters. It would be a joy to be able to provide this to others at any stage of the adoption process.



Support Groups -

In the past year we have held Zoom coffee mornings and support groups. We are now moving to holding small outdoor 'meet-ups'. We'd a lovely summer picnic in the park for new families and we are now hoping to hold further regular outdoor meet-ups. The first one took place in October half term, with further dates to follow on weekends and school holidays in 2022.

Our guest speaker support groups will remain online for now. Our last group meeting welcomed [FASD Cymru](#) provided a lot of information and resources on FASD, for further information email info@stdavidscs.org

We have made plans for a Christmas gathering, and will be in touch with further details about this in the coming week.



Our 'closed' [not public] Facebook group remains active. It is used as a peer-to-peer support space where relevant resources, services and advice is shared between adopters. It enables adopters to seek support at the time it is needed, with adopters actively engaging to respond to the given need. To join this group please contact info@stdavidscs.org .



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The First
1000 Days

Starting or extending your family through adoption is an exciting and potentially overwhelming time. Spending time with other adopters is a great way to find advice, support and friendship in the early years of family life.

[The First 1000 Days](#) project offers a listening ear and a helping hand from a thriving community of experienced adopters, for families in their first three years of adoption. By enrolling in the project, you can access fully funded training courses, a helpline, and special community groups to help you on your journey – all run by experienced adopters. Adopters can also access 1 to 1 sessions on a range of topics, providing valuable parenting tips and advice.



Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, the First 1000 Days project is available across all parts of Wales, providing activities local to you. There are family events planned for spring 2022, which will be a great opportunity to meet other families in your area.

The training course programme is tailored for adopters in the early stages of family life, with a range of useful subjects including Life Journey Work, Contact with birth family, and Education. All courses are delivered online and are free to access, with daytime and evening sessions available.

Enrolling in the project is easy. Simply visit the following address on the Adoption UK website and complete a short form. www.adoptionuk.org/first-1000-days

We look forward to welcoming you to the project.

The First 1000 Days project is run by Adoption UK Cymru and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Useful Books



Useful books

Sarah Naish: The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting

Sarah Naish: Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell

B Bryan Post: The Great Behaviour Breakdown

J Baylin and D Hughes: The Neurobiology of Attachment-Focussed Therapy

Bessel Van de Kolk: The Body Keeps the Score

How to Teach Kids About the Brain: Laying Strong Foundations for Emotional Intelligence (by Dr Hazel Harrison)

Resources that can help show children how to self-regulate

The Scared Gang series was written by Éadaoin Bhreathnach for children who have suffered trauma and abuse. Each book is an introduction to a Scared Gang character, their survival patterns and ways they can self-regulate using play and food.



The Scared Gang books show children how to self-regulate when they experience states of: hyper-vigilance, fear, flight, fight, freeze, dissociation or shutdown. Scared Gang | ebsaic (sensoryattachmentintervention.com)

- ◆ Wary Wanda
- ◆ Frighted Fred
- ◆ Run-Away Ronnie
- ◆ Busy Beatrice
- ◆ Fired-Up Freda
- ◆ Frozen Frank
- ◆ Frozen Florence
- ◆ Day-Dreamy Derek
- ◆ Sleepy Sue

Useful Therapeutic Stories with children

No Matter What by Deb Glori

Paper Dolls by Julia Donaldson

Not Again, Little Owl by Vivien Norris

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst (author) and Joanne Vriethoff (illustrator)

Good Days Bad Days by Catherine and Lawrence Anholt

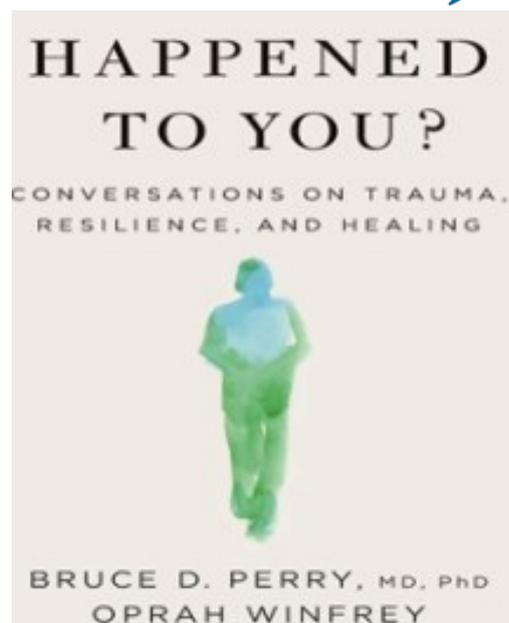


What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing Hardcover – April 27, 2021

by Oprah Winfrey (Author), Bruce D. Perry (Author)

This audio book comes recommended by Marrienne. It's conversation style is easy to follow, and it gives a wonderful insight into the impact of trauma on brain development, and reframes the question from 'what's wrong with you' to 'what happened to you?'

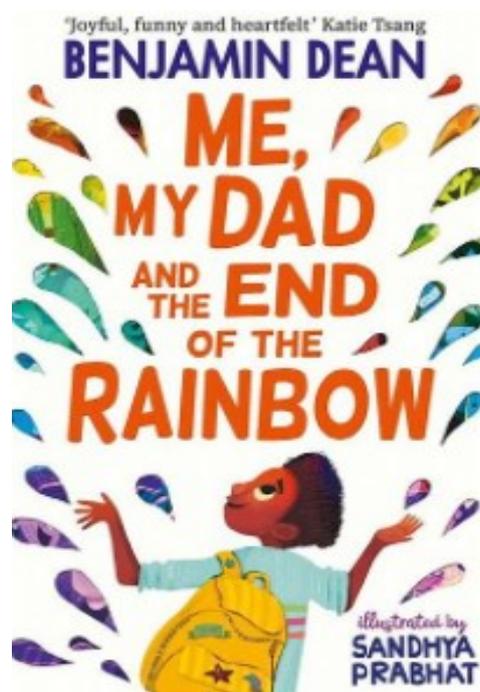
Marrienne



Me, My Dad and the end of the Rainbow, by Benjamin Dean

When book shops opened up again, I came across this book when looking one that explains divorce to older children. It's a wonderful, warm, funny book that tells the story of Archie who's parents are getting divorced, and as the story and the secret's his parents have been holding unfold, he learns his father is gay. It's good to see diversity in children's literature, and exploring sexuality, how families are made. The age rating is for 9 year olds, though some slightly younger readers may also enjoy this.

Martina



Recommended Podcasts



[Truth Be Told Podcast Series](#). Created by the National Adoption Service, this podcast contains six episodes that cover different stages of the adoption journey, talking with adopters about their experiences.

Episode One— Meet the Adopters

Episode Two— The Assessment

Episode Three—The Matching Process

Episode Four—My Child’s First Week at Home

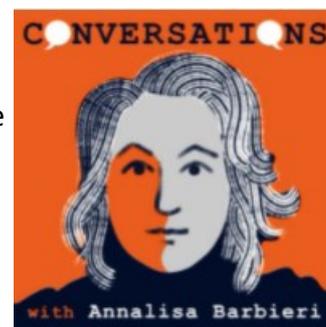
Episode Five—Creating a Connection with my child

Episode Six— Post Adoption Support



[The Wonder of the Teenage Brain with adolescent psychotherapist Rachel Melville-Thomas](#)

This very easy listened to podcast is a series of conversations between journalist Annalisa Barbieri and various specialist covering a range of relatable subjects, including my favourite: The wonder of the teenage brain- I'd recommend it to any parent of teenager . As described by Annalisa "The teenage brain goes through incredible changes during adolescence. This not only explains their behaviour but, knowing what these changes are means you can help support them or - if you are the teenager - might help you understand yourself better. Rachel and I chat about what those neurological changes are and how they manifest. I also spoke to some teenagers who give invaluable insights into how to get the best out of them, what they find challenging about adult behaviour and why they always like to start up difficult conversations when you're already busy doing something else."



Martina





Jokes!

Which birds stick together?

Vel-crows

Why didn't the skeleton jump off the cliff?

Because he didn't have any guts!

What is the most common owl?

Tea towel

What is the most royal vegetable in the garden?

A pump-king

What do you call a that is sleeping? A dino-snore!

What do you call a group of disorganized cats? A cat-tastrophe.!



Fundraising



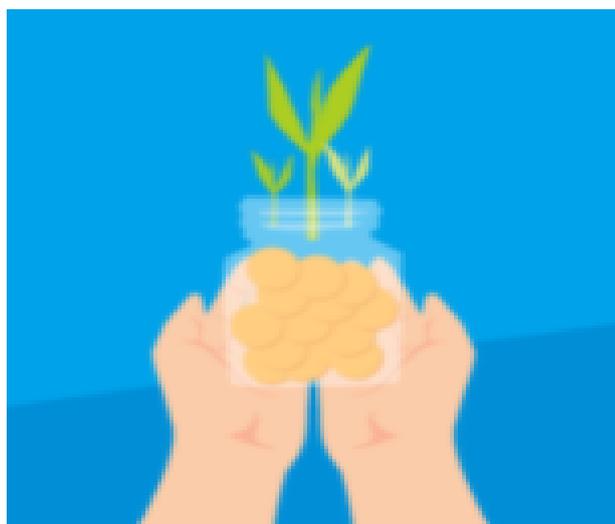
Supporting Our Work

As you all know St David's is a registered charity and we try to raise additional funds to help us sustain and develop our adoption support services for you as parents, should you need support now or in the future.

We make a promise to be beside you every step of your journey, and we want to always be certain that we can provide a range of support, from group activities and family events, to individual one to one support.

Fundraising for Post Adoption Support allows us to make sure we have the resources available to us so that we can provide our time, expertise, and support, however large or small, whenever you need us.

From regular or one off donations, to offering support through your own fundraising events, you can find out more about ways of supporting St David's on our website <https://www.adoptionwales.org/support-our-work/> or by containing fundraisingsupport@stdavidscs.org.



St David's Children Society

Email: info@stdavidscs.org

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If you would like to write an article for next year,
please contact us on
info@stdavidscs.org

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