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## Adoption Champions initiative launches



Adoptive parents and their children from across Wales gathered in Cardiff in October to meet with adoption professionals and the late Carl Sargeant AM, then Children and Communities Cabinet Secretary.

The event was to launch a new Adoption Champions initiative, coordinated by the National Adoption Service (NAS), to invite existing adoptive families to tell their story to help someone thinking about starting along their own adoption journey.

More than 25 adoptive parents and young people have already committed to help raise awareness, dispel myths and reassure potential adopters about what adoption really means for the young people whose lives can be turned around as a result.

The event was organised as part of the annual National Adoption Week, which this year raised awareness of the need to find adopters for sibling groups.

Suzanne Griffiths, operations director for the NAS, said: "In Wales, 62% of children for whom adoption has been



"I know the idea of adoption is not for everyone but for those who do, it can be a life-changing experience. I know the challenges but I know the rewards. I know the joy of a child and the joy of a family."

identified as their plan to a permanent family are part of a sibling group of 2 or more.

"It has never been more important to recruit adopters able to keep brothers and sisters together.

"Adoption stories are best told by those who have experienced the process, so we are fortunate that so many adopted people and their parents are keen to work with us to tell their story and talk about adoption.

"Adoption Champions are generous individuals who have agreed to share their experiences in a range of settings, including peer group meetings, information days and training courses, as well as in the media and on our website. While some will want to remain anonymous, others will talk openly about their life after adoption.

"During National Adoption Week we celebrate adoption and the positive difference it can make to the lives and life-chances for children who have not had the best start in life. We celebrate those who champion adoption".

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#SupportAdoption

#ChampionAdoption

# Adopter's story

My advice to anyone thinking about adoption is to first spend some time with someone who has adopted. Read about adoption too.

Try to be as well-equipped as you can be.

Adoption was a natural option when IVF appeared unlikely to work.

After a long reflection, we decided what was important was to have children in our family that we could nurture and love, and could see grow up and go out in to the world, **writes Julian, from West Wales**

Once you look at raising kids in this way you think less about the genetic connection that birth children share with you.

Adopting for the first time was an incredible experience. When I first walked into our home with H and closed the door to the outside world, it was one of those few times when life stood still and everything that had gone before seemed very, very small.

I come at this as someone who has experienced having a birth child as well. When you have a newborn, their life story is a blank piece of paper.

When you adopt, a person comes along with several chapters already written. When you take on that complex character, you need to learn fast how to take a central - and reliable - place in their life. Only then will you build a strong relationship. There's no one way to achieve this. Every child is different.

Talking to my kids about their life story is important to me and important to them. All their friends, and all my family and friends, know they are adopted so I need my kids to feel openness and acceptance all around them of that fact. I want them to always feel able to discuss their history with me.

My advice to anyone thinking about adoption is to first spend some time with someone who has adopted. Read about adoption too. Try to be as well-equipped as you can be.

I say that because once you go home with your new son or daughter, you have taken on one of the greatest responsibilities it is possible to shoulder.

## National Adoption Week 2017

#SupportAdoption

#ChampionAdoption

### social media



over 260,000 people and organisations saw our messages on Facebook



and Twitter, excellent engagement

internal comms

newsletters

Adoption Champions initiatives - media, employer engagement, blogs

### website

589 users

703 sessions

2161 pageviews



### events

local information events  
Adoption Celebration event  
Adoption Champions launch

### in the media

coverage in national press Wales on Sunday, Western Mail and BBC online

local and regional radio interviews and advertising

local newspaper advertising

BBC Radio Wales interview with Adrian, Adoption Champion and Suzanne Griffiths

Welsh Government announcement of funding

## Reflections from Suzanne



**I am pleased with the progress we have made so far this year although I acknowledge that there are considerable pressures on services from increased workload.**

Demand for adoption services in Wales continued to increase, as adoption placements with Placement Orders and 'Should be placed' decisions continuing at the higher level that began to re-emerge last year.

Within this context however, there have been in-year improvements in the average timeframes for children placed and in the approval of adopters. There is also improvement in the availability of life journey materials for children, which has met the benchmark of 75% for the first time.

There is, however, a growing gap between the number of adopters being recruited and the number of children becoming available for adoption. To place more children effectively and make a big impact on the number of children who wait, adopter recruitment needs to increase.

We are doing some exciting things to support regions and agencies to recruit more adopters for our children. We have excellent messaging and materials in the #SeeTheWholeChild campaign, which has recently won an award; we launched our Adoption Champion initiative during National Adoption Week and our voluntary sector partners are developing the 'Adopting Together' scheme for those children who wait the longest.

Regions and agencies are working hard to develop marketing and recruitment plans so that there is active and sustained recruitment activity.

The importance of easily accessible support in this is acknowledged. We continue to work on the significant cultural, strategic and operational changes needed to implement the NAS Adoption Support Framework.

There are good things to report here too. We have been successful in attracting £125k ongoing investment from the Welsh Government to help us make changes, the bigger share of this will be used to improve resources available to ensure that life journey work for adopted children improves.

Our life-journey work project is progressing well. The framework and tools are developed and we are testing parts of the new approach out. We also received a £90k grant from Welsh Government a significant amount of which will be used to improve the training available to adopters including a post approval training package. We continue to work with the people who use adoption services so that our development work is rooted in what they want and need.



Suzanne Griffiths  
Director of Operations

# Wales Adoption Register

The Wales Adoption Register continues to work creatively to support family finding for children who are waiting for adoptive families.

We were delighted to hold our first Wales Adoption Activity Day (AAD) in March 2017. Adoption Activity Days are an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet a range of children who are waiting to be adopted.

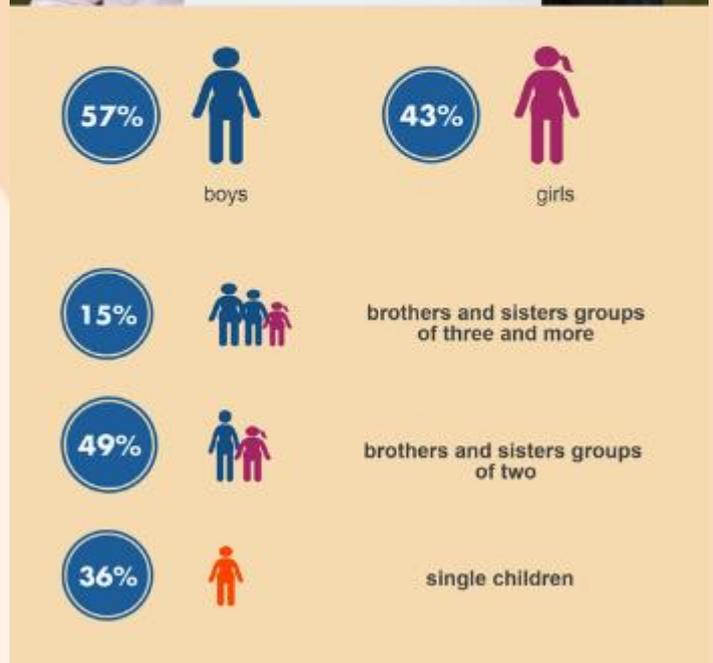
They are used in addition to more traditional ways of family finding, as they allow prospective adopters to interact with the children through fun and enjoyable activities, such as arts and crafts, soft play, sports and games and to establish whether you feel an emotional connection.

Our first Activity Day was an overwhelming success with 30 children and 30 sets of adopters attending the fun-filled activity day. Wales Adoption Register staff and CoramBAAF AAD team, social workers, foster carers and adoption practitioners all attended and helped make the event a relaxed and enjoyable day.

As a result of this day we are delighted to have found families for 6 children. There has been very positive feedback from all who attended - children, foster carers, social workers and adopters. Most adopters felt that it was important to have this opportunity for adopted-led matching, and expressed how much they learnt about the children waiting by participating on the day. Many expressed an interest in children they would not otherwise have considered or been linked with. One little boy who has since been placed has said that he feels he chose his family on the day, and it is very much part of his life journey story!

We are currently planning our next Adoption Activity Day for March 2018. Please contact the Wales Adoption Register for more details.

[www.adoptcymru.com/wales-adoption-register](http://www.adoptcymru.com/wales-adoption-register)



# Adopter events & recruitment

## Silver for #SeeTheWholeChild

We are delighted that our #SeeTheWholeChild campaign, developed by our media and marketing subgroup with Wilkinson PR & Communications in 2016-17, won Silver in the Best Public Sector Campaign category at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) regional PRide awards for Wales. The campaign was also a finalist in two other categories.



Suzanne Griffiths  
with John Wilkinson  
at the CIPR awards 2017



## Profiling Event in Western Bay

In July 2017, Western Bay Adoption hosted an in-house event to help our adopters understand the needs of the children we needed to find homes for. We invited all our approved adopters and adopters in the assessment phase (DBS checked) to view the profiles of children needing adoptive home within our service. Along with the traditional paperwork normally shared with adopters during the matching process, we were also able to share with adopters a short video presentation of each child playing with key figures in the children's lives describing their personalities, difficulties, and the realities of parenting the child.

The feedback from the families has been splendid as they felt it helped them see the whole child and have practice gathering information and asking questions; as result of the event we were able to progress to 5 matches for children whom professionals had difficulty placing. For those adopters who were not matched to any children presented, it gave them a chance to revisit their matching criteria and expand their understanding of the impact of abuse/trauma on a child and the positives a child with this background can bring to their family and the possible positive outcomes for the children in the long term. In the end, the adopters felt they were taken out of theory and could place themselves in the child's shoes and see the whole child.

[www.westernbayadoption.org](http://www.westernbayadoption.org)

## St David's – Adopting Together

St David's Children's Society has developed an exciting new initiative in partnership with NAS and other VAA partners - Adoption UK, After Adoption and Barnardo's Cymru.

The initiative is designed to meet the needs of children who have waited a significant time for a family, including children over four; brothers and sisters; and children with medical uncertainty or other health concerns. All will have experienced a difficult start in life. Often these children are labelled as 'hard to place' but living in a close family environment with lots of love, support and encouragement can help such children thrive.

Working closely with our colleagues in the Regions, Local Authorities, other Voluntary Sector partners as well as support from other specialists, such as clinical psychologists, play and occupational therapists, we are confident that we can find the right family for children referred to the project.

We are also thrilled to be working with Cardiff University who will be evaluating the success of the project through analysing findings from adopters and social workers.

[www.adoptionwales.org](http://www.adoptionwales.org)

### Welsh Government Development Grant

We received £90,000 from the Welsh Government Children and Communities budget, part of which will fund recruitment campaigns that focus on finding families for those who find it harder to find adoptive homes, such as sibling groups and older children awaiting adoption and continue the development of a national support framework for adoptive families.

### The South East Wales Adoption Team is actively recruiting at the moment and welcomes applications to adopt children of all ages.

The team is committed to responding to all enquiries in a timely manner and have processes in place to complete assessments without delay.

Following an initial enquiry prospective adopters will be sent an information pack and invited to an information event which is facilitated bi-monthly. At this point if prospective adopters are interested they will be invited to complete an information form which will generate an initial assessment.

If this is successful applicants will be invited to a preparation for adoption training event, again this is facilitated on a bi-monthly basis. The schedule for this training now includes partnering with our psychology service to deliver specific training in respect of attachment and assisting applicants in understanding the 'internal world' of a child when past experiences consist of abuse and neglect.

Should applicants wish to progress then the model of assessment currently being used by the team is completed within 13 to 15 weeks and includes a programme of work which entails weekly visits and an agreed topic for each session.

All successful applicants who have been matched with children can expect commitment from the service to support the adopted family for life. [adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

## Western Bay Open Evening Event in support of National Adoption Week

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, Western Bay Adoption hosted an in-house event for adopters waiting for approval and/or a link. The session included short presentations from UK Adoption and Adoption Support about support and quick PACE refresher, and time for the adopters to speak to various people who have adopted. The adopters speaking to the eager future adopters had various backgrounds, age range of child adopted and different experiences within the assessment process. It was a chance for adopters to ask questions, clarify information and hear about experiences.

The feedback from the event was that it was helpful to be able to speak to their peers, check in with their support within Western Bay Adoption and have a refresher on PACE. The adopters would like to see this done again. It helped reinforce the culture/community being created within our region and empowered the adopters to speak to each other, learn from each other and get to know the various roles with in the service. [www.westernbayadoption.org](http://www.westernbayadoption.org)

## Barnardo's Cymru sees 'spike' in interest following National Adoption Week 2017

During National Adoption week, two staff members set up a stall in St David's Shopping Centre and we received a lot of interest and support. Many people wanted to know more, to this end we have set up regular information sessions. Since this time we have experienced a 'spike' in adoption enquiries that is very pleasing. [www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption)

## North Wales Adoption Service Fun Day 2017

This year's fun day was a roaring success!

We had over 60 families attending with over 90 children. There were a variety of activities for the children to take part in from 'hook a duck' to the 'gladiator' challenge. Characters from Paw Patrol also put in an appearance! The feedback from the families during the day was very positive and the children appeared to be having lots of fun.

We are hoping to secure funding for next year's event.

[www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk/wordpress/en/](http://www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk/wordpress/en/)

"We just wanted to say a HUGE thank you for all of the time, effort and dedication you all put into making yesterday just Brilliant! You all gave your day up to make a very special day for all of us and we are so grateful." adoptive parent



# Adoption Support

## Life Journey Work

Life journey work has been a priority since NAS was established in 2014, with the intention that all children in Wales placed for adoption will have good quality life journey materials.

In 2015 only a quarter of children had life journey materials at their four-month review, increasing to almost half of children in 2016. We knew this quantitative measure did not pick up quality issues. In addition to the low numbers, we knew from talking with adopters and young people who had received life journey materials that sometimes it was great but we also heard lots of 'horror stories'.

We have worked with adopters from across Wales, adopted children and young people from the Talk Adoption Group in South Wales.

Two main themes emerged from what young people felt they 'needed' to be included in a life story book: knowledge and memories. Knowledge included details of their birth, including the hospital they were born in, medical records, and history of family illnesses. Memories including information regarding birth family, photos of birth family, names of birth parents and siblings, information regarding where the birth parents lived, and any letters the young person may have received from them.

Young people gave differing views on the level of information needed, reflecting the unique approach needed for each child: "I personally found it very helpful to know about my family, even though it was quite difficult and sad to take in...it's important to know everything you need to, because it's your story and your family".

However another young person reflects differently "you don't want too much, you don't want to be looking back: you want to look forward."

### A Framework for Life Journey work

Using a development grant from Welsh Government we worked with AUK and AFA Cymru to create a Life Journey Framework which sets the stages of a child's journey and outlines what needs to be achieved, with roles and responsibilities at each stage clearly defined.

This identified the need for life journey work to be started at an earlier stage; that it is not a one-off task solely for childcare social workers, but that foster carers, support workers, birth family, fostering and adoption social workers and others, need to be aware of how they can contribute to the child's story. The framework is supported with practice guidance and a toolkit, both of which will be available on our website members' area in the New Year.

### Implementation

We are at the early implementation stage now, working with AFA Cymru testing this approach with children currently being placed for adoption. The indicators are good from performance with the last quarter showing 78% of children have received life journey materials by their second adoption review. Our aim is that ALL children placed for adoption will have life journey materials

### Training and Support

Adopters told us that they wanted to be involved in creating life journey materials, in the use of language and to have training and support. Life journey work is covered in preparation training, but adoptive parents want access to more in depth training life journey training later in the process. We're currently developing a pre and post approval training framework for adopters, and will follow this with further resources for young people and birth family.

### Welsh Government Support

We have advocated for the need to support this framework and were delighted this autumn when the Welsh Government announced further grant funding for the implementation. Crucially Welsh Government are also investing recurring funding that we will use to increase capacity to embed the changes needed.

## Adoption Support gets Welsh Government Boost

Recurring funding of £125,000 from the Welsh Government Social Services budget will be used to recruit, train and provide materials for "life journey champions" to support children through their adoption and to recruit a national implementation champion who will work to ensure that the new adoption support framework is implemented consistently across the country.



## Adoption UK is supporting adoptive families across Wales

This has been a busy year for Adoption UK in Wales and our team of staff and volunteers has grown enormously thanks to funding from a number of organisations. In October we launched our First 1000 Days project, funded by the Henry Smith Charity and Community Foundation in Wales. The aim of this three-year project is to help and guide new adopters through some of the changes and challenges of the first three years of adoptive family life.

A supportive network of fellow adopters will be able to answer your questions, listen to your concerns, signpost help and services during the tough times as well as celebrating the milestones achieved. If you are a new adopter and would like to be registered on the First 1000 Days project – please contact us on 029 2023 0319 or email us at [wales@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:wales@adoptionuk.org.uk) and ask to be registered for the First 1000 Days project.

School is always high on the list of things all parents think about and even more so for adoptive parents if their children find the social and emotional aspects of school a challenge. Adoption UK is leading for NAS around education and has brought out another booklet in the Getting it Right for Every Child series this year available in Welsh and English on our website.

We are also running free Master Classes around Wales for parents and education professionals. We are encouraging adopters to 'bring a teacher' to the Master Classes as the emphasis is on parents and professionals working in partnership. To book a place on one of the classes in 2018 email us at [wales@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:wales@adoptionuk.org.uk) or call us.

January 17th Cardiff Master Class  
January 24th Llandrindod Master Class  
February 7th Carmarthen Master Class  
March 7th Newport Master Class

[www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)

## VVC extend support group activity

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff have continued to develop their post adoption support groups. We have once again held two very successful Fun Days, with both being very well attended.

We risked the Welsh weather and held our summer Fun Day at the Amelia Trust Farm, and even the Red Arrows joined us with a spectacular fly by. More recently at our Christmas Fun Day we were joined by some astrophysicists, who had equipment that allowed us to listen to black holes colliding! The monthly toddler group continues to be very well attended, and as hoped the members of this group are providing each other with support, and meeting up as smaller groups.

Four of our regular attendees joined NAS at their event in Techniquet celebrating National Adoption Week, and four little people enjoyed themselves immensely! This year we have also held workshops on Life Story Work and another on Sensory Processing Difficulties.

Recognising that Adoption Support is not limited to Adopters, a member of our Adoption Support Team has also set up a support group for birth parents, which launches this December.

[www.adopt4vvc.org](http://www.adopt4vvc.org)

## A Legal Guide for Adopters

The Wales Adoption Cohort Study, undertaken by Cardiff University, found that some adoptive parents had been confused and sometimes anxious about the legal process of adoption.

In response to this study NAS commissioned AFA Cymru, working with Cardiff University, to prepare a guide for adoptive parents. The guide was written by Sarah Coldrick, legal consultant with AFA Cymru and Dr Julie Doughty, lecturer in law at Cardiff University and provides information for prospective adoptive parents on the legal framework for each leg of the journey to becoming an adoptive family.

It is written in such a way that adopters can dip into relevant sections as and when required.

Read guide here:

<http://www.adoptcymru.com/publications>

Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Cenedlaethol

National  
Adoption  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd



The legal framework for adoption  
The Prospective Adoptive Parents Guide  
2017



"I really enjoy coming to the group, it gives me a chance to make new friends and join in the things I love like climbing" Young Person

"These are from the Talk Adoption Group when my son made some seed bombs. He is delighted with himself and I wanted to say a big thank you and He is delighted that his plants are growing better than mine!" Adoptive Parent

## Talk Adoption in Wales

What a year we have had! Throughout 2017 children and young people, aged 7 years to 25 years have enjoyed taking part in activities such as circus skills; indoor climbing; sculpture sessions to name but a few. They have built confidence, self-esteem and friendships supported by our staff in Swansea and Cardiff. They have increased their life skills by taking part in issue based sessions such as healthy eating and gardening. Young people were also asked to take part in a consultation about Life Journey Work where they were able to express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of life journey work and have their views heard by professionals within adoption.

In the New Year we are hoping to develop extra sessions to support young people to explore issues such as identity and belonging; social media use, bullying and healthy relationships.

If you would like further information about any of our group please get in touch with Ruth Letten: 07807 703060 [ruthletten@afteradoption.org.uk](mailto:ruthletten@afteradoption.org.uk)

## A day in the life of a social worker in adoption team in Mid & West Wales

I strongly believe that my role is an important one, and that as social workers, we are all doing our best to protect children and put their welfare first. The role varies from one day to the next, with good days come not so good ones, like every job. We could be helping families who are struggling one day, and organising activity days for adopted children the next. The following day we could be supporting families with children with special needs, or researching a person's adoptive history.

We always try to produce solutions that will best help families, and our main objective is to endeavour to keep a child with its biological parents. We also offer an intermediary service to help people find their history of adoption, so if you are adopted and want to know more about your family, we can offer you the help and support you need.

One of the more pleasant parts of the role is to assess adopters and we will work with families who want and have made the decision to adopt. Usually, this will involve four days of training to ensure the prospective

adopters understand the adoption process and its implications, and ensure they have realistic expectations of the situation.

Normally, an adoption assessment will take up to six months, and we will visit the family approximately once every two weeks. Once the family has been approved as suitable to adopt, it is then that the waiting starts. This can be the frustrating part for many adoptive families, the wait can be from as little as one month to two years, depending on when a match can be found. Once they are matched the child moves in and takes their time to settle and become a family. After three months, the family is able to ask the courts to approve parental responsibility, making the adoption legal.

We would say as an adoptive parent you need to be able to love, understand and empathise with the adopted child. You need what we call stick-ability, even when the going gets tough, you do not go anywhere! You need to provide a routine, consistency, commitment and the ability to make sure the child knows they belong.

[www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk](http://www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk)

Thank you and  
Merry Christmas all

