

## **Adoption Register in Wales (ARW)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions for Social Workers**

#### **Why should I use the Adoption Register Wales/Link Maker?**

Using the Adoption Register Wales via Link Maker increases placement choice for children awaiting adoption, creating a larger pool of available adopters, and improving the use of data and collaboration between local authorities and independent adoption agencies. It is used by each regional adoption service in Wales, Scotland's Adoption Register along with almost every local authority and voluntary adoption agency in England. Over 1,200 children have been matched since the platform was launched in 2014.

In Wales there is also a requirement that all children with a plan of adoption and/or Placement Order should be on the register within a month period of the Placement Order being granted. The same applies for all adopters who are approved and waiting.

Family finding for children who are harder to place can be a daunting task and every available tool at your disposal should be utilized. Using the ARW can cut down the amount of time it takes to establish a suitable match for a child and it also means that adopters have an opportunity to connect with children they may not otherwise think they are suitable for.

#### **Who provides the service – how do I know it is secure?**

The ARW service is developed and provided by Link Maker Systems, a social enterprise founded by adoptive parents.

Link Maker are able to provide users with the highest levels of independent assurance about how information is kept safe.

#### **When can I legally use the ARW/Link Maker to find an adoptive family for a child?**

You can publish the profile of a child on the ARW/Link Maker either once a Placement Order has been granted, or earlier with prior consent to do so from court.

Without either a Placement Order, or prior consent from court, it is an offence to publish details of a child on the Register that may cause the child to be identified. While you could anonymize child profiles it is your responsibility to ensure that you do so in a way that complies with the law.

As all children with a Placement Order must be added to the Adoption Wales Register via Link Maker you will also add details of children purely for internal use within your agency, for access by staff for the purposes of case tracking. Whatever the intended purpose, you will be required to confirm that your agency has the necessary legal consent to add the details of a child.

#### **What is different about the Adoption Register Wales via Link Maker?**

Link Maker has developed a system which improves the way children find placements, and has a number of unique features:

**Direct access to adopters.** Link Maker is the only system which allows Family-Finders to search for families and express interest to them directly. This proactive searching is shown to be particularly effective in finding matches for harder-to-place children.

**Coverage & performance.** Link Maker provides the largest adoption matching database in the UK, and is responsible for the majority of interagency adoptive placements. Around 40 children are matched per month, and placements have been made across all four UK nations.

**Speed.** Link Maker is the only system giving instant access to potential matches, and instantly alerting other users about new profiles that are likely to be of interest. In half of cases the expression of interest that leads to a match is received within a week of a child's profile being added. There are no delays; family-finders can progress from searching in-house to a consortium and to a national search if needed, in a matter of days.

**Accuracy of information.** Link Maker is the only system which allows individual users to amend their profiles in real time. This saves a great deal of time, effort and money in chasing enquiries that may go nowhere.

**Efficiency.** Link Maker is the only service that allows Family-Finders to create a single profile to use internally, within a consortium, or nationally. The most appropriate families are shown instantly, saving Family Finders from sifting through hundreds of profiles.

**Security.** Link Maker is the only service that comprehensively enables agencies to meet their data-protection obligations in the family-finding process. No personal information is transmitted by insecure email or post. Messages between users are encrypted, and sensitive documents are only made available through the system for as long as they are needed, with the originating agency retaining control over the original file.

**Data.** Link Maker's service ensures that data and activity relating to matching is collected, can be monitored and reported on efficiently, and is based on live information. Data for agencies can be made available on request, allowing accurate performance monitoring.

**Administration & support.** Link Maker provides a fully managed service, not a stand-alone piece of software. Link Maker is responsible for the user-base of the service - increasing usage through marketing and engagement, and verifying the identities of all new users with their agencies. Link Maker's support team help all staff and families to use the system effectively, intervene to ensure users keep their information up-to-date, and ensure that users respond to each other as necessary.

**A complete agency portal.** Along with the unique matching features above, Link Maker provides agencies with a secure portal for a range of agency functions. This allows families to share support in safety, and gives a secure way to keep in touch, share resources, and facilitate support events.

### **How can social workers support their families in finding a match?**

If you are supporting adopters with family-finding, here are some pointers to get you started:

- Discuss with your family how you will use the system together - see the topics in the question 'how much should prospective families do themselves?'
- If your family does not want their own account, create their profile for them using the 'add family profile' button on your homepage
- If your family has registered and added their own profile, connect to their account using the 'connect to your families' button on your homepage
- Help your family to make the most of their profile - remember that you can see other family profiles, while they can't

### **Can Family-Finders control the amount of interest they receive when listing profiles?**

Yes, by carefully making profiles available only to families they may want to consider. This allows practitioners to manage their workloads and respond to interest in a considered way, and helps to preserve a child's privacy as much as possible. However profiles are restricted from searches, Family-Finders can always view all families and express interest in them. Excluding a family from seeing a profile in searches does not rule them out - a quarter of matches made on Link Maker are as a result of interest shown in families in this way.

On the final page of creating a child profile, Family-Finders are presented with the guidance and options below:

*“Please choose carefully the most appropriate way to share this profile initially. Once made available, profiles cannot be hidden for 48 hours. You can widen your search at any time with Agency agreement, and progressive use of the options below will help you to manage the most appropriate expressions of interest and deal with them more effectively”.*

Below this, practitioners are asked to choose one of the following 5 options:

**Keep profile hidden** Keep control by expressing interest to a range of families you would like to hear from. This can reduce the amount of time taken exploring inappropriate profiles, and allows family finding to begin before consent is given to advertise a profile widely.

**Advertise in-house** Invite interest from approximately xx compatible families within your LA/agency for a short period, before widening your search.

**Advertise to consortium** Invite interest from approximately xx compatible families within your consortium for a short period before widening your search.

**Advertise within area** Invite interest from families within a selected area, which can be quickly expanded as required. Choose this option and define an area to see the number of compatible families.

**Advertise to all UK families** Advertise to approximately xx compatible families only after briefly trying other options above. Whilst this may be helpful after other avenues have been explored bear in mind that it may result in a large amount of interest and unhelpful competition, and could present as a significant loss of privacy for a child.

Practitioners are additionally able to include or exclude families that do not meet the preferences stated on a child's profile. For each option, practitioners are shown the approximate number of families on the system that are compatible (and who may show an interest).

The system is able to predict when a selected option may result in a large amount of interest, and displays the following warning in an orange banner, just above the 'save & finish' button:

*“Do you have sufficient time over the next few days to respond to interest shown? This profile may create a lot of interest, and you may want to consider changing the options above before continuing”.*

### **How are 'harder to place' children helped to find matches?**

As a prospective family there is a difference between seeing a child profile in a list, and being approached by a Social Worker for that child because the Social Worker or Family Finder feel you could be a good match. 'Exchange Days' are also a valuable opportunity to gain further information about a child or children too.

Around a quarter of matches made through the Adoption Register Wales/Link Maker are identified by Social Workers showing interest in families in this way, and this strategy finds

matches for proportionally more children who might typically wait longer. A Family-Finder simply arranges their search page for compatibility with a specific child or sibling group, which will bring to the top of the list those families who have stated that they are best able to meet the identified needs, and whose own matching criteria appears to be a good fit. The first few pages of results should include the families of most interest, and interest can be shown in dozens of families if appropriate. There are no limits - a Family-Finder could approach numerous prospective families if this is what it takes to find a suitable match, and they have the tools to make this a practical option.

Before opening the search to a wider pool of adopters it is wise to ensure that you have considered internal resource issues, for example ensuring the funding you have requested, is available, when making the child's profile available outside of your area.

### **How much should prospective families do themselves?**

Prospective adopters should be provided with opportunities to discuss this with their Social Worker prior to developing their profiles and again once the profile is on the register. Make sure you understand each other's expectations, to avoid any frustration and misunderstanding. As well as general points (such as how often you will meet together), we suggest the following topics in relation to family-finding via the Adoption Register Wales/Link Maker:

**The adopters' profile.** Review the profile together with the adopters so that they can confirm it is a good representation of them and their strengths/skills. You have the advantage of seeing other families' profiles, and can help make sure the profiles covers all of their strengths. This is a process of co-production between the adopter and their Social Worker to ensure profiles are of the best quality they can be.

**Showing interest.** Most agency's preference is for prospective adopters to have a discussion with their Social Worker before they express an interest. This will help to ensure that expressions of interest are reasonable and appropriate as adopters will experience disappointment if they are expressing an interest in multiple children when it is unlikely they will be matched with them. Explain to adopters that if they express an interest in children that doesn't lead to a match they can continue to identify and express an interest in others.

**Contacting children's social workers.** Explain to your adopters that it is for the agency to initiate discussions with the children's Social Workers in the first instance. Again, this is to ensure that contact is only made where there is a realistic chance of the link being pursued, thus avoiding disappointment.

**Chasing for updates.** Once a discussion is underway, weeks or even months can go by before prospective adopters receive an update. There can be a lot of complex issues holding things up such as medical assessments, legal processes, and ongoing discussions with other families. It is reasonable that prospective adopters should be kept informed, and Social Workers should advise their adopters on how soon and how often to ask for an update, and whether you or they should do this.

**What Status should I use.** Once a profile has been completed it must be translated into both English and Welsh before it can go live. Whilst waiting for this a Social Worker can place the status as "Hidden Waiting Translation". Once translation completed the case can go live but restricted to the Agency and then later restrictions used for ARW and then UK. Once a link/match has been decided, the status can be changed to "Hidden Pursuing a link/match". It could be that the plans for children subject to Placement Orders are being reconsidered and the status used should be "Hidden plan being reconsidered". Other Status will be used "Hidden considering current carers", for example if enquiries are being made with foster carers.

**Deleting a Profile and Deleting a case.** A profile is different to a case. A profile should be deleted following Matching Panel and the ADM Decision. When a **profile** is deleted the Social Worker has the option to include a reason, e.g. “child matched at Panel”. When the child is **placed**, the case will need to become Inactive. A **Case** can only be deleted when the Adoption Order has been granted or when the plan for the child has changed and the Placement Order has been discharged.